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# 527 Committees and the Political Party Network

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## Abstract

We investigate the links between 527s and other political organizations through the employment histories of 527 staff. We find that 527s are highly central to modern political party networks and are in positions to facilitate coordination within a party and to employ key party personnel. Furthermore, we find important differences between the networks charted out by the two major parties. The Republican Party, the majority party during the period under study, had a more hierarchical network than the Democratic Party did.

## Keywords

political networks, 527s, campaigns, parties, campaign finance

The political organizations known as 527s<sup>1</sup> have grown in number, size, and importance in the past several election cycles. While formed as a campaigning tool, allowing candidate supporters some leniency in fundraising and campaign expenditures, they now figure prominently within political parties, facilitating coordination across different branches of the parties and providing employment for key party actors.

Key questions remain, however. Just how central are these 527s to the parties? What do they enable parties to do? And do the parties use these 527s

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similarly? This article begins to examine 527s' place in the modern political party network using an innovative data set: the employment records of the most active 527s between 2004 and 2006. Those employees' other organizational ties are probed, revealing a vast network tying partisan actors together via the 527s. We argue that party ties to these important electoral groups help illustrate the central role 527s have in party operations today. We place this development in the context of party adaptation and argue that parties have adapted to the changing electoral environment by incorporating 527s into their overall campaign activities.

## **Party Adaptations and 527s**

Political parties have always been fluid entities, resisting easy identification and classification. Through their history, we have seen different parties rise and fall leading to several different party systems; the groups of voters that have made up the party's coalitions have changed over time through realignments; and the parties have seen great organizational change as well. In particular, in the wake of various reforms and court decisions that killed off strong party machines like that of Richard Daley in Chicago and limited direct contributions by parties to candidates, the role of parties in directly affecting campaigns and their organizational structures changed substantially in the late 20th century. It is our contention that the advent of 527 committees represents another evolutionary shift in the life of party organizations. Specifically, we argue that 527s now function as extensions of the formal political parties. We demonstrate this through the ties that employees of these groups have to the party organizations and other aspects of the political party network.

As we noted, political party organizations have evolved dramatically over time. These evolutionary shifts often occur in response to changes in the institutional rules governing campaigns and elections. As the system of campaigning in the U.S. began to move away from the party-centered system of the "golden age" of parties that was in place until the late 1800s, thanks to reforms of the Progressive Movement, parties found that they had lost a great deal of their power with respect to individual candidates' campaigns. The most important of these reforms was the move to the direct primary, which, by most accounts, took the power of candidate recruitment away from the party machine (also see Ware, 2002). This period led to "[a]n extended period over which the role of parties changed and diminished" (Dwyer, 2010, p. 80). Moreover, parties began to lose even more of a grip on electoral authority as technological advancements such as radio and then television burst onto the scene. Now, candidates were no longer dependent upon the formal parties for

publicity; with enough money, they could run their own advertising efforts. Furthermore, during the early 1970s, campaign finance reforms (the Federal Election Campaign Act [FECA] and its subsequent amendments) further limited the parties' power by limiting how much parties could contribute to their candidates' campaigns and by encouraging candidates to raise money from other sources (particularly political action committees). Reforms adopted by the parties with regard to presidential nominations in the early 1970s led to additional declines in party power as presidential candidates could develop their own fundraising networks without relying upon party elites (Cohen, Karol, Noel, & Zaller, 2008; Patterson, 1994).

The direct role of parties in campaigns reached its nadir during the mid- to late 1970s. The decline in party power was noticed by journalists and scholars alike as influential works such as *American Political Parties in Decline* (Crotty, 1984), *The Decline of American Political Parties* (Wattenberg, 1998), and *The Party's Over* (Broder, 1972) appeared and became the conventional wisdom. Parties were not dead, however. In fact, a resurgence in party power began not long after their reported demise. The changes undertaken by the parties in response to the reforms that had taken power away from them have been clearly identified as adaptations made to regain some authority (Aldrich, 1995; Gibson & Römmele, 2001; Herrnson, 1988).

Specifically, the parties responded to the new system by focusing on raising their own pools of funds, which allowed them to build new headquarters in Washington, D.C., hire more staff, and offer services that their candidates were demanding, such as help with polling, direct mail, and television advertising; (Aldrich, 1995; Herrnson, 1988). Party leaders began coordinating efforts to pick a preferred set of candidates well in advance of primaries and to use their endorsing and spending power to reassert their control over nominations (Cohen et al., 2008). Moreover, the parties interpreted FECA in a way that allowed them to spend "soft money" to help their candidates. These resources, funded by unlimited contributions from donors, were used to run issue ads, which were not subject to the limits of FECA. Finally, the parties began to use "coordinated expenditures" to pay some of the services their candidates would have purchased from their consultants anyway, including television, radio, or mail advertisements (Kolodny & Dulio, 2003). These various changes made the parties more directly relevant to campaigns and more determinative of their outcomes.

The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA) threw another reform the parties' way, as it prohibited parties from raising or spending soft money. The organizations known as 527s, however, were not forbidden from dealing in soft money. Such funds that might have gone through the parties

could now be channeled to 527s. These large amounts of soft money allowed 527s such as MoveOn.org and the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth to play significant roles in the 2004 presidential campaign. It is our contention that 527s represent yet another example of party adaptation brought about by changing electoral circumstances. In particular, we argue that 527s have become an integral part of the party network and that this can be seen by the connections different 527s have to each other and to other actors also part of this network.

## The Party Network

Political parties today can best be understood not only as a series of committees with offices on Capitol Hill but also as webs of relationships between political actors. Two partisan networks, one Democratic and one Republican, assist candidates, plot campaign strategies, and coordinate governing tasks. While the notion of parties as more hierarchical and formal organizations in the style of Tammany Hall or Mayor Daley's Chicago may have made sense in an earlier age, the network concept helps explain much political activity in the modern era (Bedlington & Malbin, 2003; Bernstein & Dominguez, 2003; Bernstein, 1999, 2000, 2004; Bimes & Dominguez, 2004; Cohen et al., 2008; Doherty, 2003, 2005, 2006; Dominguez, 2003, 2005a; Heberlig & Larson, 2005, 2007; Kolodny, 1998; Kolodny & Dulio, 2001, 2003; Kolodny & Logan, 1998; Masket, 2009; Schlesinger, 1985, Schwartz, 1990; Skinner, 2004, 2005, 2007). Recently, Herrnson (2009) advances this argument, although in different terms, when he argues that parties are best described as "enduring multilayered coalitions of individuals and groups that possess mutual goals and share interlocking relationships" (p. 1209). These party networks or multilayered coalitions include the party-connected committees, federal political action committees (PACs), 501(c) organizations, and 527 committees (Herrnson, 2009). Key to our argument is that some of these entities, 527s included, "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" (Herrnson, 2009, p. 1209). In other words, the ascendance of 527s is yet another adaptation by the parties to the changing electoral landscape they confront every election cycle.

We ground our argument in Harmel and Janda's (1994) theory of party change, which argues parties change (or adapt) in response to external events or shocks and internal party characteristics. In addition, they argue that change is most likely to occur when parties see that important goals are not

attainable. The external event that we believe has led to 527s becoming a key part of the party network is the prohibition of soft money in the 2002 BCRA. Parties lost an important electoral asset when this law went into effect as they could no longer court unlimited donations or spend those funds to help their candidates by running issue ads or engaging in other activities they paid for with soft money. This made it more difficult for parties to achieve their goal of winning elections and therefore control of government. We maintain that parties turned to 527s as vehicles to spend resources that were no longer available to them in hopes of continuing to have an impact on federal campaigns.

Scholars know relatively little about 527s or how they fit into the political party network.<sup>2</sup> This is for at least two reasons. First, 527s have been important players in elections only since 2004, and second, following from the first, data are limited on 527s because of their limited reporting requirements. Some work, however, has been done. For instance, Corrado (2006) finds that gap left by BCRA's ban on soft money and therefore issue advocacy (and other activities paid for with soft money) that was undertaken by the parties has somewhat been filled by 527s. In addition, Weissman and Hassan (2006) find that party leaders had an important role in creating some of the most active 527s. Schrager and Witwer (2010) find evidence that a group of 527s became central to the Colorado Democratic Party in the wake of BCRA and a similar state-level reform starting in 2004. These studies tell us that 527s helped fill the soft-money void left after BCRA and that party leaders were important in their development.

While both parties have availed themselves of 527s, we would not necessarily expect them to use these entities in quite the same way. Indeed, numerous observational and experimental studies have demonstrated that the parties do many things differently from each other. On the individual level, Republicans appear to be more comfortable than Democrats in leaving important party decisions up to party leaders, while Democrats seem to prefer aspects of internal democracy. Freeman (1986) found important behavior and attitudinal differences between Democrats and Republicans. Perhaps relatedly, Republican Party organizations tend to be more hierarchical than Democratic ones (Maskin, Heaney, Miller, & Strolovitch, 2009). As Freeman (1986) stated, the Democratic Party

has multiple power centers that compete for membership support in order to make demands on, as well as determine, the leaders. The Republicans have a unitary party in which great deference is paid to the leadership, activists are expected to be "good soldiers," and competing loyalties are frowned upon. (p. 329)

Democrats feel comfortable engaging in formal recognition of diversity; Republicans avoid it when they can. Democrats demand open discussion and representativeness; Republicans prefer top-down leadership and demonstrations of unity. Democratic conventions have seen numerous fights over credentials and legitimacy, while the Republicans usually rally around their nominee (Freeman, 1986). Shafer (1986) notes differences between the parties' delegates, with Democrats more given to flamboyant displays of individualism, while Republicans prefer deference to authority and reliance on formal channels of communication. Klinkner (1995) additionally finds that the Democratic and Republican national committees differ systematically in their responses to electoral defeat, with Democrats often considering substantial changes to procedures and policies but Republicans preferring "nuts-and-bolts" organizational retooling. It is reasonable to expect that the parties will employ the aid of 527s in manners consistent with their historic organizational tendencies.

## Testing the Network Model

In this section, we examine the links between 527s and the formal party structure by analyzing the employees of the most active 527s committees during 2004 and 2006. We advance three testable claims about the role of 527s:

1. 527s will have close personnel ties to the major formal party organizations. Through these ties, the major party organizations will be able to use the 527s to help advance party goals, mainly the strategic allotment of vital campaign resources to candidates.
2. The network defined by a party's affiliated 527s will take on the properties of the party with which it is associated. Historically, for example, the Republican Party has earned a reputation as being the more hierarchically organized of the two major parties, while the Democratic Party is more of a coalition of groups that compete for power. Thus the Republican 527 personnel network should appear more hierarchical than the Democratic one.
3. 527s will facilitate coordination between disparate groups within the party network.

To test these hypotheses, we began by identifying a sample of 527 organizations. For this initial analysis, we identified the top 100 527 committees from the 2004 and 2006 elections in terms of spending. These were taken from lists provided by both the Campaign Finance Institute (CFI) and the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP).<sup>3</sup> The list of 527s included in this

analysis consists of 18 Republican-oriented groups and 67 Democratic-oriented groups; party affiliation could not be determined for the remainder.

Once a sample of 527s was identified, the data used to test the above hypotheses were collected through several stages. First, because we were interested in the connections individuals associated with 527 organizations have to the wider party network, we needed to identify a data source that provided consistent and reliable information on those individuals responsible for starting, the daily operation of, and strategic direction of each 527 organization. We could have done a simple Google search to try and identify key players in each 527, but that would have been too unreliable, as we could not know for sure if we had collected all the key individuals at each organization. As each is organized differently (for instance, some are more decentralized than others; some are more hierarchical than others; some have larger staff structures than others, etc.), we could not be confident that a simple search through an Internet search engine would be exhaustive.

During 2004, 527s did not have to report any of their activity to the Federal Election Commission. Since their inception, however, 527s have been required to file paperwork with the Internal Revenue Service, including Form 8871 (“Political Organization Notice of Section 527 Status”), Form 8872 (“Political Organization Report of Contributions and Expenditures”), and Form 990 (“Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax”). Two of these forms—8871 and 990—require the 527 to submit names of “officers, directors, trustees, and key employees,” in addition to other form-specific information. We used the individuals listed on these forms as a means of compiling a list of individuals associated with each 527 committee in the sample. Getting to a final list of individuals was also a multistep process.

One hurdle in identifying individuals associated with each particular 527 was the similarity of the names of many 527 committees. For instance, in the case of labor unions, a search for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) turned up both state-focused organizations and local unions; the same was true for the Club for Growth and many other committees. Any group filing an 8871 form notifying the IRS that it is claiming 527 status is issued a unique Employer Identification Number (EIN). To avoid any overcounting or undercounting of individuals, once the main committee was identified, we searched for forms filed under the group’s EIN; this allowed us to be confident that we were only identifying forms associated with the particular group in which we were interested.

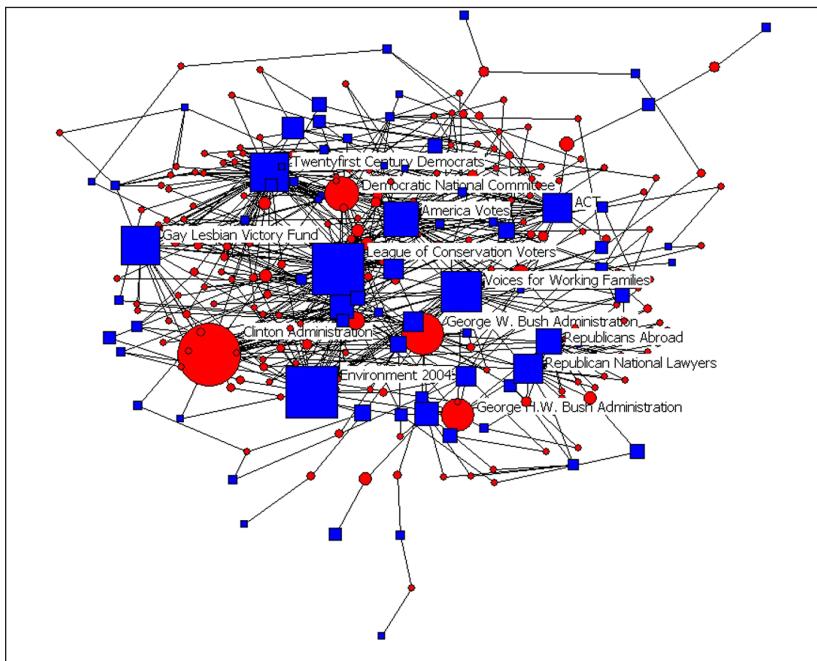
Moreover, each group filed multiple forms with the IRS at many different intervals. For instance, the Democratic group Voices for Working Families filed four separate 8871 forms and one 990 form that covered the 2004 election cycle, while the Club for Growth filed three 8871s along with their 990. The

8871, again, is the form a group must file to notify the IRS that they are requesting 527 status; any change to a group, be it an address change, or more importantly for our purposes, a change in the officers or key staff, must be accompanied by an amended 8871; thus there is the need for multiple filings.

In order to come to a final list of “officers, directors, trustees, and key employees,” we examined each of the forms filed by a particular 527 during the 2004 election cycle (defined as January 2003 through December 2004) or the 2006 cycle (defined as January 2005 through December 2006). Any individual appearing on any form filed with the IRS covering these time frames was included as someone associated with the 527. In the vast majority of cases, only a few changes in staff structure took place during each election cycle (even though there is considerable turnover across cycles). For the 527 committees included here, the number of officers and/or key staff ranged from one (The November Fund) to 39 (League of Conservation Voters).

Connections to the party network were determined by researching the employment and/or association history of each of the “officers, directors, trustees, and key employees” for each committee in the analysis. This was done through general Internet searching, although a few sources were more fruitful than others. These included a search of newspapers and publications in the Washington, D.C. area (*Washington Post*, *The Hill*, *Roll Call*, *Campaigns & Elections* magazine, for instance), a particular website called SourceWatch,<sup>4</sup> and general web searches that turned up individuals’ biographies and/or employment histories on websites where they were currently or formerly employed or had an affiliation. For the 527s active in 2004, any related connection to the party network that an individual had during 2004 or before was included in the data set, and for the 2006 cycle any related connection to the party network that an individual had during 2004 or before was included.

The resulting data set is, in a way, incomplete. While we know the links between each 527 and its affiliated groups, we are less certain about the links from one affiliated group to another. For example, the 527 EMILY’s List is tied to the Human Rights Campaign and the Gore 2000 presidential campaign through personnel. It is certainly possible that HRC and the Gore campaign had personnel in common, as well. However, this data set does not contain such information. It is also incomplete in the sense that it does not directly track the ties between formal party elites or major party donors, who are obviously important to the broader party networks. Yet by following employees, our data set nonetheless reveals important information about the 527s in their relations with the parties and in their expenditure of finite campaign resources. How 527s make those hiring decisions is revealing about their purpose and place in the modern party system.



**Figure 1.** 527s and associated groups

Note: Figure created by NetDraw 2.084. Squares indicate 527 organizations; circles are associated groups. Node sizes are weighted by betweenness centrality. Isolates have been omitted for clarity.

## Results

Our data were collected in the form of a grid, with 527s as columns and the associations to which the 527 employees belonged (henceforth “affiliated groups”) as rows. This data set was then analyzed as a two-mode matrix using UCINET 6.214, NetDraw 2.084, Pajek 1.02, and igraph 0.5.2. Where necessary for the purposes of analysis, the two-mode matrix was converted to a bipartite matrix, with both 527s and affiliated groups appearing in both the rows and columns. The two-mode analysis allows us to see the relationships between the 527s and the other organizations with which they are affiliated. Our data recorded the number of employees that 527s shared with affiliated groups, and the networks were therefore analyzed as valued data sets.

We can visually track the links between 527s and organization in Figure 1, which charts out the entire 527 network. For the sake of clarity, isolates (nodes with zero connections) were omitted from this diagram.

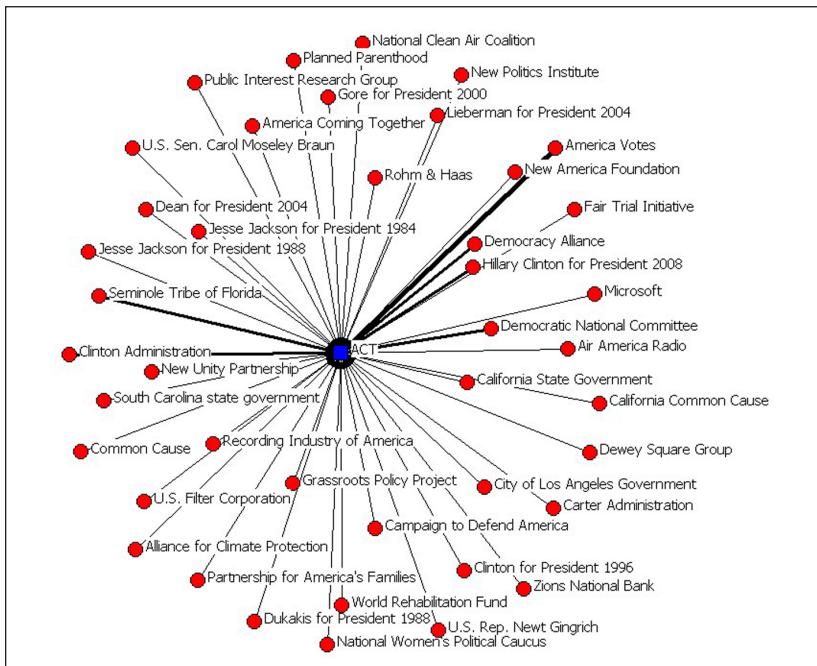
This image and others were created using NetDraw's "spring-embedding" algorithm, with nodes repositioned slightly to improve readability. The node sizes are weighted by the nodes' "betweenness" centrality, a measure of connectedness. Nodes with high betweenness scores in a network are generally interpreted to be acting as "brokers"—they have great influence as conduits in the network (see Hanneman & Riddle, 2005). 527s are indicated by blue squares. The affiliated groups are marked by red circles. The most central nodes (those with the highest betweenness centrality scores) are labeled.

One of the more obvious and interesting characteristics of this network is that it is totally dominated by Democratic-leaning organizations. The 527s with the highest betweenness scores are the left-leaning America Votes, America Coming Together (ACT), the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, Twenty-first Century Democrats, Environment 2004, and the League of Conservation Voters (LCV). Two right-leaning 527s—Republicans Abroad and Republican National Lawyers—are labeled in the figure but have much lower centrality scores, each connected to just a few other nodes. In addition, most of the more connected organizations in this network have a Democratic cant to them, including the DNC and the Clinton administration. The Democratic dominance of this network is no doubt due to the fact that there are many more Democratic 527s than Republican ones. Indeed, as mentioned previously, of the 100 largest 527s we examined, 67 were affiliated with the Democrats, 18 with the Republicans.

Another somewhat surprising feature of the network is that it does not appear to be partitioned into liberal and conservative factions. A number of Republican-leaning 527s are linked, via an association, to Democratic-leaning 527s. The conservative Republicans Abroad, for example, is linked to the liberal League of Conservation Voters by having members who have served in the media and on Capitol Hill. In another example, the left-leaning 527 Voices for Working Families is connected to College Republicans. The link there is a woman named Patricia Friend, who not only at one point ran the Association of Flight Attendants but also served on a post-9/11 safety advisory panel for the Bush Administration. The Bush Administration link creates a path between the leftwing and rightwing 527s. There are enough such individual cases to connect any Republican-leaning 527 to a Democratic-leaning one in just two steps.

Despite the bipartisanship of this network, the structure itself provides insight into the nature of a modern political party. Consistent with the view that a modern party is best thought of as an expanded network of political actors, rather than just a hierarchy within a formal organization, the 527 image shows that interest groups are vital players.

An "egonet" image for one 527, Americans Coming Together, is displayed in Figure 2 and shows just how connected this 527 is. ACT has direct

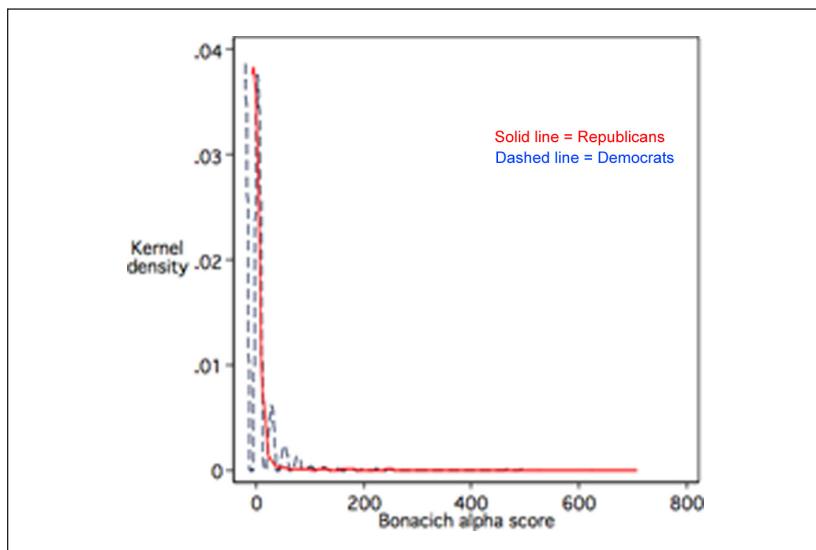


**Figure 2.** Egonet for America Coming Together

Note: Lines connecting nodes are weighted by number of shared employees.

personnel connections to nearly three dozen leading Democratic associations, including presidential campaigns, interest groups, and formal party organizations. This is a group that is clearly pivotal within the party. Rather than a fringe group with only loose ties to partisan actors, it is in a position to broker communications between various groups within the party.

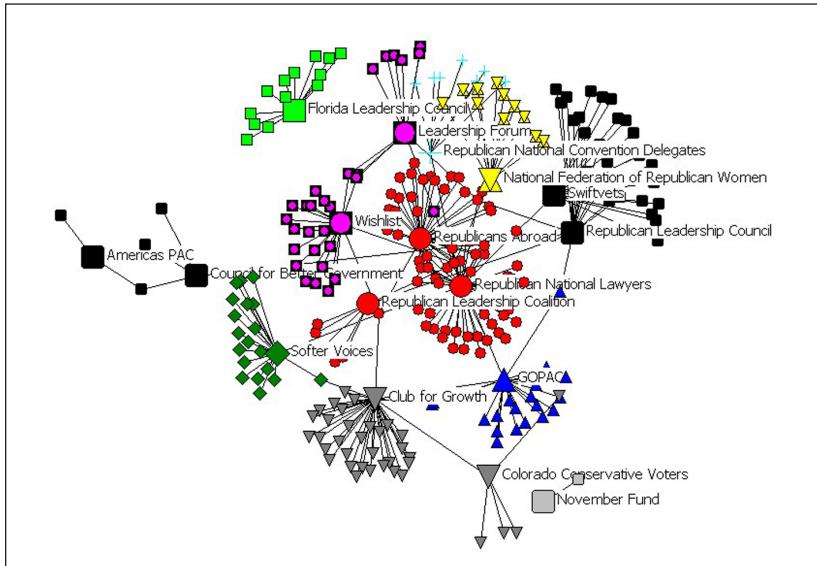
To further examine the network structure of the parties, it is helpful to separate out the networks charted by Republican and Democratic 527s. Direct comparisons between different networks are somewhat challenging, particularly when the networks are of different sizes (Anderson, Carter, & Carley, 1999). There exist a number of graph-level indices (GLIs) that could help in comparisons, but common GLIs like density (the number of existing connections divided by the number of possible connections) are easily influenced by the total number of nodes in a network. Nonetheless, researchers have developed various ways to compare networks either by controlling for size (Bonacich, Oliver, & Snijders, 1998) or by using measures that are resistant to changes in  $N$  (Faust, 2006; Faust & Skvoretz, 2002; Snijders, 1981; Snijders & Baerveldt, 2003). We largely pursue the latter approach.



**Figure 3.** Kernel density plot of normalized Bonacich alpha scores, two-mode networks

Our first method involves calculating normalized Bonacich alpha power scores for all the nodes in the networks and then testing to see if those scores are distributed differently across parties (Bonacich, 1987). Bonacich power scores essentially determine the influence of each node with respect to its surrounding nodes. The distribution of these scores among the two networks can be seen in Figure 3, a kernel density plot in which each party's scores have been adjusted to have the same mean.

As the figure shows, the Republican network has a somewhat broader range of alpha power scores, while the Democratic nodes are more concentrated around zero. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test reveals that the Republican Party network's power score distribution is significantly different from that of the Democrats' ( $p = .000$ ). In addition, an  $F$  test confirms that the Republican network's power scores have a higher standard deviation (36.23) than do the Democrats' (31.70), a difference that is highly statistically significant ( $p \leq .001$ ).<sup>5</sup> What this suggests is that there is a wider range of power status in the Republican Party and somewhat greater equality of nodes within the Democratic Party, suggesting that the GOP is the more hierarchical of the two.

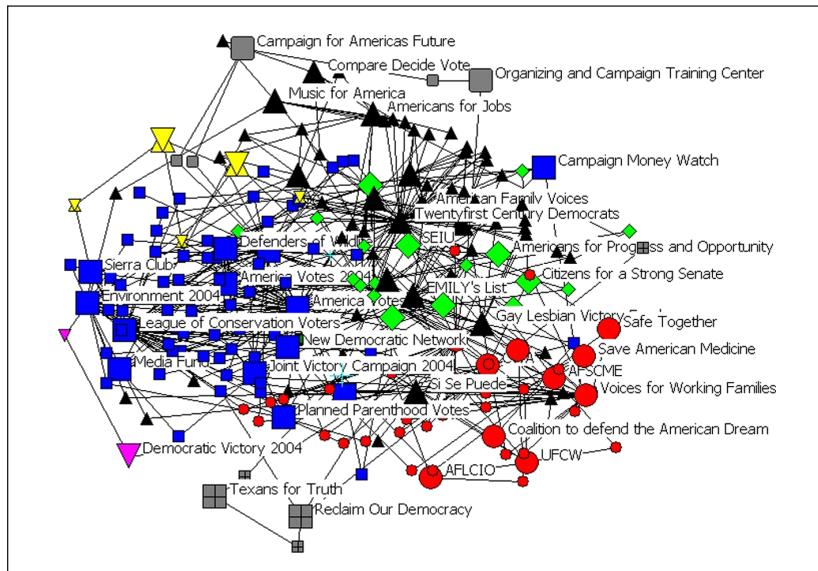


**Figure 4.** Network of Republican-affiliated 527s

Note: Image created by NetDraw. Squares are 527 organizations, circles are affiliated organizations. 527s are labeled and are shape- and shade-coded by communities, as detected by the Girvan-Newman algorithm. Isolates have been eliminated for ease of viewing.

Another useful way to compare the two parties' networks is through visual illustration. The network charted by the 18 Republican-affiliated 527s in our data set appears in Figure 4. The 527s are depicted as square nodes and are labeled. The affiliated groups are depicted as circles. This is a relatively thin network (partially due to its small size). For this network, we conducted the community detection algorithm designed by Girvan and Newman (2002) and made available within NetDraw (Porter, Onnela, & Mucha, 2009). The shapes and shades of the nodes vary with their affiliations with communities. The Girvan-Newman algorithm detected 10 communities (with a  $Q$  value of .744). There appears to be a dominant community in this network, consisting of Republicans Abroad, Republican National Lawyers, and the Republican Leadership Coalition. Communities consisting of the National Federation of Republican Women, Swiftvets, and the Republican Leadership Council appear closely tied to the dominant community.

Figure 5 shows the network charted by the Democratic-leaning 527s. The community detection process identified 10 different communities within the Democratic network (with a  $Q$  value of .442). There appear to be three main



**Figure 5.** Network of Democratic-affiliated 527s

Note: Image created by NetDraw. Squares are 527 organizations, circles are affiliated organizations. 527s are labeled and are shape- and shade-coded by communities, as detected by the Girvan-Newman algorithm. Pendants and isolates have been eliminated for ease of viewing.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Two-Mode Partisan 527 Networks

	Republican network	Democratic network
Average degree	2.24 (5.20)	2.81 (8.15)
Degree-degree correlation	-.110	-.117
Average clustering coefficient	.005	.040

communities within this network, one (squares) consisting largely of environmental causes, a second one (circles) consisting largely of labor unions, and a third (triangles) consisting of general interest liberal groups. A few other communities address particular interests within the coalition. There is no obviously dominant community within the Democratic network, unlike within its Republican counterpart. Again this lends support for the notion that the Republican Party has the more hierarchical organization.

Table 1 provides a set of descriptive statistics for each of the two parties' networks, as calculated by igraph. These statistics are highly informative about the hierarchical nature of each network. They can be defined as follows:

- Degree—The average measure of degree centrality (the number of direct connections with other nodes) for all nodes in the network, with standard deviations in parentheses.
- Degree-degree correlation—The Pearson correlation of the degree centrality for each ego and its alter.<sup>6</sup> If the correlation is highly positive, then nodes tend to be connected to other nodes that are as connected as they are. If the correlation is negative, it suggests a more hierarchical network in which highly connected nodes are linked to relatively isolated nodes.
- Average clustering coefficient—The clustering coefficient measures how closely each node and its immediate neighbors constitute a complete graph (or a “small world”).

The statistics portrayed in this table suggest some similarities and differences across the two networks. The nodes in the Democratic network, interestingly, have a somewhat higher degree centrality than those in the Republican network, although that difference is much smaller than the standard deviation for either network.

The degree-degree correlations for both networks are negative but essentially identical to each other. The clustering coefficients, meanwhile, are small for both parties, suggesting that very few nodes and their immediate neighbors constitute a “small world” in these networks. However, the figure is higher for the Democratic network, indicating a somewhat less hierarchical world. These measures tend toward a conclusion that the Republican Party is the more hierarchical of the two.

Table 2 and Table 3 list the 10 most central 527s in the Republican and Democratic networks, respectively. They are listed in declining order of degree centrality (number of connections). However, two other measures of centrality are listed here, as well: betweenness and Eigenvector. In both tables, the highest score in one measure corresponds to the highest in the other two, giving us greater confidence that we have identified the truly important 527s in each party. These appear to be Republican National Lawyers in the GOP and Environment 2004 among the Democrats, although those groups have close rivals.

A final bit of analysis involves collapsing the two-mode data sets into one-mode data sets, focusing on the affiliated organizations within each party. This is done to address the question of what 527s allow a party to do. Projecting a one-mode matrix from a two-mode one does have its drawbacks. The main drawback is that such projection tends to exaggerate clustering (Latapy, Magnie, & Del Vecchio, 2008; Nyhan, 2009). Thus we do not examine these networks for community structures. Nonetheless, these projections are useful

**Table 2.** Ten Most Central Republican 527s

Name of 527	Degree	Betweenness	Eigenvector
Republican National Lawyers	50	12841.21	0.156
Republicans Abroad	43	10868.34	0.133
Club for Growth	36	8990.43	0.01
Wishlist	24	6365.40	0.015
GOPAC	22	6290.88	0.008
Softer Voices	20	4885.22	0.007
College Republicans	18	5681.62	0.007
Swiftvets	17	4106.24	0.006
Save American Medicine	16	3794.67	0.006
Republican Leadership Council	15	3695.66	0.006

Note: 527s are listed in declining order of degree centrality.

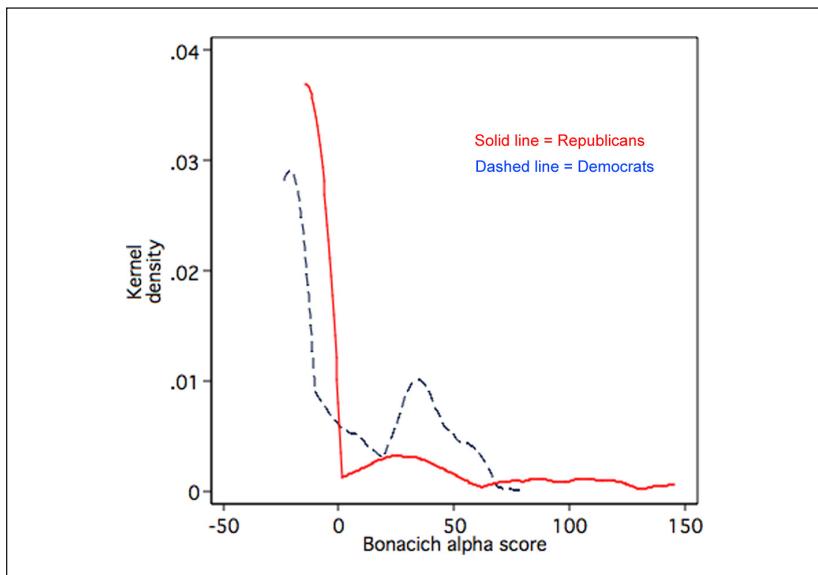
**Table 3.** Ten Most Central Democratic 527s

Name of 527	Degree	Betweenness	Eigenvector
Environment 2004	107	51316.78	0.101
Twenty-first Century Democrats	87	41521.34	0.042
League of Conservation Voters	84	40313.37	0.068
Gay Lesbian Victory Fund	77	39648.27	0.029
Voices for Working Families	76	38544.97	0.027
America Votes	68	32123.60	0.064
Grassroots Democrats	46	19610.33	0.027
ACT	42	15976.33	0.032
Sierra Club	40	19893.82	0.007
Planned Parenthood Votes	33	14377.09	0.013

Note: 527s are listed in declining order of degree centrality.

for identifying the critical organizations within each party, understanding how they interact with the aid of 527s, and examining differences between the parties.

As with the two-mode network, we calculated normalized Bonacich alpha power scores and examined their distributions, which can be seen in Figure 6. Again, the Republican nodes seem to have a broader distribution of power. An *F* test confirms that the Republican power scores have the higher standard deviation (33.61 compared with the Democrats' 27.97), a difference that is statistically significant ( $p \leq .001$ ).

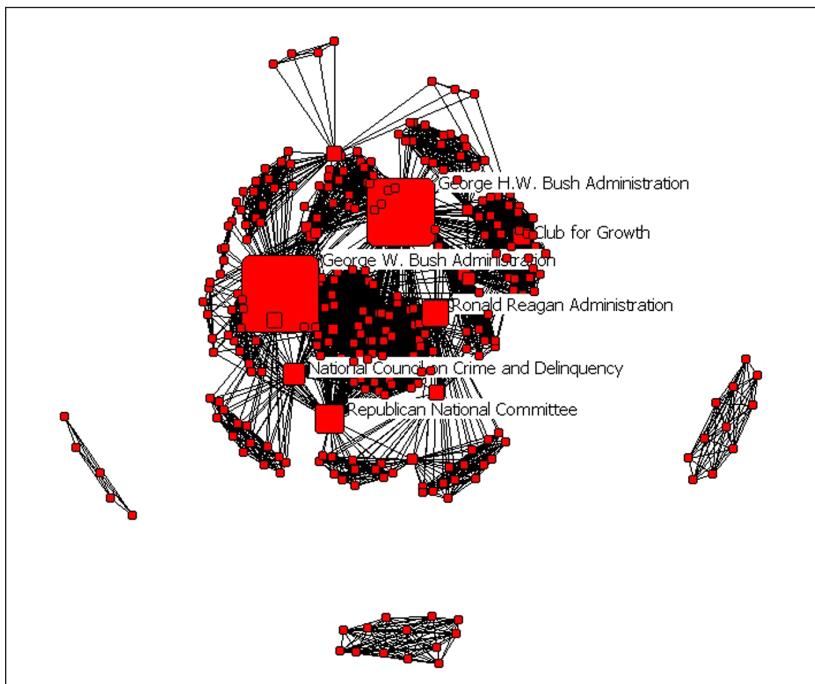


**Figure 6.** Kernel density plot of normalized Bonacich alpha scores, one-mode networks

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics for One-Mode Networks

	Republican network	Democratic network
Average degree	30.21 (21.25)	68.05 (54.60)
Degree-degree correlation	.270	.045
Average clustering coefficient	.958	.916

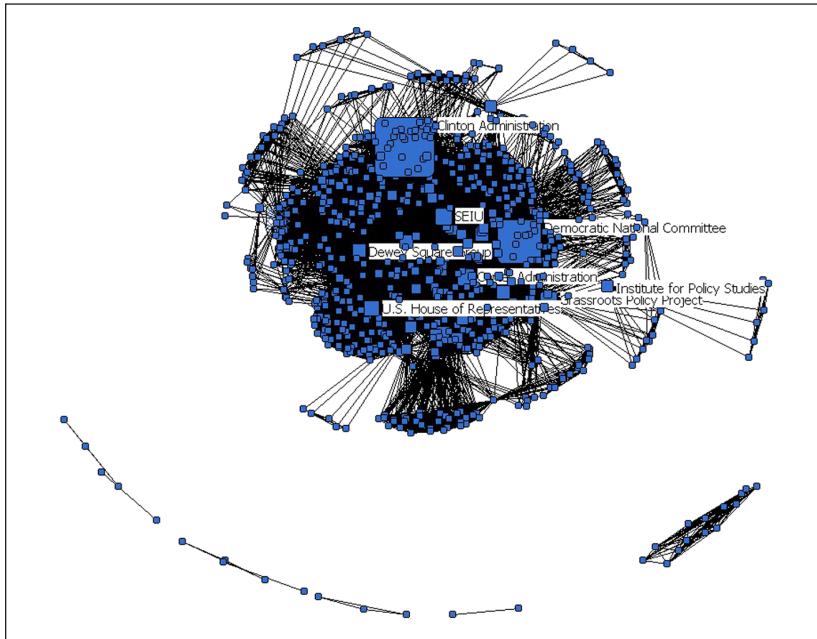
Table 4 shows the same set of statistics that we saw in Table 1, only for one-mode networks that are collapsed around the affiliated groups. Of note is that the degree centrality of nodes is much higher in the Democratic one-mode network than in the Republican one. Interestingly, the degree-degree correlation is higher for Republicans (.270 compared with .045), suggesting that well-connected nodes are more likely to be connected to similarly connected nodes within the Republican network. Similarly, while the clustering coefficients are high in both networks, it is somewhat higher among Republicans, suggesting that “small worlds” are more common within the Republican network. These findings are somewhat mixed as to which party’s network has the more hierarchical structure.



**Figure 7.** Organizations tied by Republican 527s

We next turn to graphical depictions of these projected one-mode networks. Figure 7 shows the organizations tied to each other through Republican 527s. The nodes are weighted by betweenness centrality, again emphasizing those with key positions to facilitate information and personnel transfers throughout the party network. While there are a great many relatively minor groups, both from the political and business communities, the more central ones are easily identified. The RNC occupies a central role in the network, as do the three most recent Republican presidential administrations. Two private groups, the Club for Growth and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, seem to act as a pivots between several other groups. These are all obviously important Republican organizations, and the 527s allow them to coordinate.

The Democratic one-mode network, shown in Figure 8, is also similar to what we might expect to see. The key hiring places within the party network are the DNC and the most recent presidential administrations prior to 2009 (Clinton and Carter). The Dewey Square Group (a prominent political



**Figure 8.** Organizations tied by Democratic 527s

consulting firm) also occupies a key place in the party network, as does the AFL-CIO. The combination of government offices, consultants, and unions is the source of electioneering labor in the Democratic Party and is a fair representation of the party's leadership today.

## Discussion

This analysis has demonstrated that 527s are important and central to the broader party networks in the American political system. Through their personnel connections, 527s are far from being fringe groups; they are in a position to facilitate collective action among virtually all key party actors. Parties, after all, are not just a collection of activists, donors, and formal party groups; they are all these actors *coordinating efforts*. It appears from this study that 527s do much to enable this coordination.

This analysis was also able to determine the community structure of the party networks, suggesting that the networks carved out by 527 mirror the architecture of the parties with which they are affiliated. While both parties

maintain some degree of hierarchy, the preponderance of visual and quantitative evidence supports a conclusion that the Republican 527 network is the more hierarchical of the two. This is actually consistent with much of the literature on the two parties' organizational styles, including Freeman's (1986) seminal work. It is certainly possible that our finding is a function of a particular time period during which the Democratic Party controlled neither the Congress nor the White House and relied extensively upon 527s to aid in party coordination. However, we might expect the Democrats to be the more hierarchical party under such circumstances; it is somewhat surprising to find these historical party traits holding even at a time when hierarchy would have been so advantageous for the Democrats.

By collapsing the two-mode matrices into one-mode ones, we were able to identify the key actors in each party network and to demonstrate how 527s enable collaboration between them. The resulting images were a stark confirmation of the common images of the two parties, with both dominated by presidential administrations and the formal party groups, but the Republicans also reserving a key place for conservative advocacy groups and the Democrats dominated by labor unions. This supported our hypothesis that 527s would facilitate coordination between disparate groups in the broader party network.

The reader may legitimately object that this last hypothesis is difficult to falsify. Yet it is worth reflecting on the extent to which 527s have become essential party tools in just a few election cycles. Restrictions on party expenditures on candidates, both at the federal level and in many states, make it virtually impossible for parties to perform one of their primary tasks—channeling vast financial resources to a select group of candidates in key races. 527s are now the primary tool for parties to accomplish this goal. Given the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* case, which allowed unrestrained spending by groups like 527s but retained limits on direct donations to candidates, the importance of 527s to the major parties is only likely to increase over the next few cycles.

Perhaps, given that those in charge of 527s are highly partisan and political actors, they were eventually going to have some ties to the formal party structures. However, there was nothing inevitable about the parties and 527s being so closely intertwined through their personnel. This appears to have been a strategic choice made by actors who wanted to accomplish the tasks that parties had always accomplished. Today it is difficult to imagine the parties functioning without the 527s as one of the primary weapons in their arsenals.

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## **Notes**

1. So-called “527s” derive their name from section 527 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, which determines the taxation status of political organizations. 527s are considered tax exempt. Moreover, as they do not expressly advocate for or against a candidate, 527s do not fall under the limits on donations and expenditures enforced by the Federal Election Commission.
2. For an exception, see Skinner (2004).
3. Lists of these committees can be found at the CFI and CRP websites, [www.cfinst.org](http://www.cfinst.org) and [www.opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), respectfully.
4. According to the SourceWatch site, “SourceWatch is a collaborative project of the Center for Media and Democracy to produce a directory of the people, organizations and issues shaping the public agenda. A primary purpose of SourceWatch is documenting the PR and propaganda activities of public relations firms and public relations professionals engaged in managing and manipulating public perception, opinion and policy. SourceWatch also includes profiles on think tanks, industry-funded organizations and industry-friendly experts that work to influence public opinion and public policy on behalf of corporations, governments and special interests. Over time, SourceWatch has broadened to include others involved in public debates including media outlets, journalists and government agencies. Unlike some other wikis, SourceWatch has a policy of strict referencing, and is overseen by a paid editor. SourceWatch has 37,220 articles” ([www.sourcwatch.org](http://www.sourcwatch.org)). We believe the last two sentences are key to having confidence in the information on this site, as opposed to a page such as Wikipedia.
5. This result holds even when outliers are excluded.

6. See Podolny (2005) and Burt (1992) for interpretations of the relationships between egos and alters.

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