

The state of state parties—and how strengthening them can improve our politics

By Raymond J. La Raja and Jonathan Rauch

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

A mountain-state Republican Party official wants to send out mailers encouraging voters to go to the polls and vote for Republican candidates. But this traditional get-out-the-vote effort is not so simple. He reminds himself that the party has federal candidates on the ballot, which triggers a requirement to use tightly restricted federal money, which he doesn't have enough of. So he resorts to a workaround: he removes from mailers any information that tells people when or where to vote. "You drop 'Vote November 8,'" he says, explaining his less-than-ideal solution. "You just say, 'Vote for this candidate.' It is affecting our ability to effectively deliver our message and our product."

In the same state, a Democratic Party official has a different problem. Merely suggesting that people vote for particular candidates can count as a contribution to those candidates, triggering tight restrictions on supporting candidates even when volunteers are doing the campaign work. Her workaround: doing get-out-the-vote campaigns without naming candidates. "I feel I should be allowed to give our candidates as much help and support as possible. How awesome it would be if I could use the candidates' names—and how silly it is that I can't do that!"

Historically, and still today, state parties act as a counterforce against highly motivated, ideologically extreme minorities of the sort that are polarizing and fragmenting American politics.

The rules state parties labor under may or may not be silly, depending on your point of view; but they are increasingly costly in an age when burgeoning outside groups face no such restrictions.



Raymond J. La Raja is an associate professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.



Jonathan Rauch is a senior fellow with Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

Samuel VanSant Stoddard, a Ph.D. candidate in political science at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, provided research assistance for this paper

Historically, and still today, state parties act as a counterforce against highly motivated, ideologically extreme minorities of the sort that are polarizing and fragmenting American politics. Today, however, state party organizations are falling behind, partly because the nature of politics has changed but partly, also, because of disadvantages imposed on them by well-meaning laws and policies.

With an eye toward understanding how to strengthen the Democratic and Republican state parties, we surveyed all 100 of them, receiving responses from 56. (Complete survey results are in the appendix.) We compared those results to two earlier surveys of state parties, one from 2000 (by one of the authors) and the other from 1999. We also conducted detailed interviews with 15 state-party leaders (mostly executive directors, plus a few chairs; eight Republicans and seven Democrats). Our questions: how are state parties doing; what are they doing; what are their prospects; and what is their potential? Our findings include:

- To paraphrase Mark Twain, rumors of the death of state parties are greatly exaggerated. Embattled as never before, state parties are struggling to remain relevant amid growing political competition, yet they are putting up a spirited defense and adapting intelligently by focusing on areas of comparative advantage such as grassroots mobilization and voter data.
- The state parties' problem is less a decline in *absolute* resources and standing than a decline in *relative* resources and standing. Keeping pace with the rapid inflow of money and messaging from outside groups and other non-traditional actors is a severe challenge.
- State parties provide important benefits to the political system as a whole, and they retain untapped potential to reduce long-term polarization and extremism by balancing the influence of purist groups.
- Restrictions intended to constrain state parties' activities and fundraising do exactly that—with the perverse effect of weakening the parties and strengthening unaccountable outside groups. Our findings suggest that outside groups have less influence in states where the party committees have more freedom to raise money.
- Much can be done to bolster the state parties by removing rules that unnecessarily and counterproductively tilt the playing field against them. We recommend raising or eliminating limits on contributions to state parties, eliminating restrictions on state parties' ability to coordinate activities with candidates, narrowing overbroad federal regulation, and pruning other rules. Making contributions to state parties tax-deductible also deserves consideration.

POLITICAL PUBLIC GOODS: WHY STATE PARTIES MATTER

Upon learning of our research, a political scholar recently asked: Do state parties actually do anything on their own? It's a fair question. One longtime national-level Democratic Party observer told us, "I observe state parties as vassal states usefully acquired by political actors when they need them."¹ In recent years, some political scientists have argued that parties today are best thought of not as formal, bounded organizations, but as far-flung networks of politicians, activists, and influencers.²

There is some truth in both of those views. The lines that once demarcated formal parties have blurred; politics now centers not on party organizations, but on candidates. Nonetheless, if one point comes through clearly in our

¹ To encourage candor, we conducted our interviews with state and national party officials on a not-for-attribution basis, and we report only aggregate survey results.

² See, for example, Kathleen Bawn, Martin Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel, and John Zaller, "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 10:3 (2012): 571-97.

survey and interviews, it is that state parties remain distinctive nodes in American politics, with their own priorities, infrastructures, and mindsets. They have neither dissolved into activist swarms nor been acquired by campaigns.

State party officials perceive themselves as playing a different role than either campaigns or outsiders: often cooperative, sometimes competitive, occasionally subservient, but in any case, distinct. “We carry the brand,” one Democratic state party official told us. “We are the stewards of the brand, regardless of what progressive organizations out there may be doing. We’re the ones that exist forever.” State party officials stress that campaigns and outside groups come and go, but state parties are repeat players. “The super PACs might not always be around, but state parties will,” a southern Republican said. Another Republican said, “A lot of these third-party groups are just a bank account with a few people controlling it. A party has a history. It’s an identity that you’re part of.” The imperative of winning and holding power over the long term leads state parties to resist bridge-burning tactics and extremism. One Republican state party leader complained that outside conservative groups attack and sometimes defeat incumbent Republicans in primaries—only to walk away in the subsequent general election, leaving the party scrambling to defend a weak contender. The party can’t afford that kind of solipsistic behavior.

...[O]utside conservative groups attack and sometimes defeat incumbent Republicans in primaries—only to walk away in the subsequent general election, leaving the party scrambling to defend a weak contender.

Most state parties today are very reluctant to choose sides in the nomination process; they believe that the political blowback from playing favorites, or from being accused of playing favorites, outweighs any gains. In our survey, 83 percent said they never or rarely favor candidates in competitive primary elections, and only 6 percent said they often do so. This inability or reluctance—whichever it may be—to act as gatekeepers has weakened today’s state parties relative to the state party establishments of yore, which often effectively vetted nominees. That said, state parties are not out of the business of shaping the candidate field. Acting more like gardeners than gatekeepers, they recruit and advise in ways that gently encourage and assist electable candidates while steering away from losing battles and embarrassments. “We don’t twist arms,” said one Democratic executive director. “But we might say, ‘This is a really tough primary. You’re a great candidate; would you consider running for this other slot?’”³

In our survey, state parties almost universally said they “sometimes” or “often” recruit candidates for state legislatures; 67 percent said they do it often. Recruiting for other offices, from gubernatorial and congressional down to local, is also quite common, although less so than for the state legislature, which is the farm system for higher office. Building a bench of talent pays off over long time-horizons, something state parties pay attention to, whereas outside groups, if they recruit at all, will often shop for quick payoffs and agenda-driven candidates. The bench-building role is particularly important in states where the party is in distinct minority, with little short-term hope of gaining a majority: minority status tends to put off outside groups or other funders.

³ This approach is a distant echo of the post-Civil War period until the 1890s, when state party leaders, at their discretion, rotated candidates for the party nomination from office to office to avoid internecine conflict between county-level parties. See David Brady, Kara Buckley, and Douglas Rivers, “The Roots of Careerism in the U. S. House of Representatives,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 24:4 (1999): 489-510.

...[S]tate parties are far more transparent and accountable than interest groups, both because they are heavily regulated and because they face reputational accountability to voters.

As their leaders are quick to point out, state parties are far more transparent and accountable than interest groups, both because they are heavily regulated and because they face reputational accountability to voters. Unlike candidates and outside groups, they are integrative in function, organizing multiple constituencies and mobilizing voters for state, local, and federal elections simultaneously. During the campaign season, state parties provide candidates with core services such as training campaign staff and volunteers, conducting opposition

research, and analyzing voter data. Some state parties serve as hubs for coordinated campaign activities, often physically combining staffs from candidate campaigns, legislative caucuses and committees, and the state party in the same offices. Parties may even make agreements with candidates to place campaign staff on the state party payroll. The permutations of such coordination arrangements are many and vary from campaign to campaign and place to place, but collectively they demonstrate that the state parties are able to deploy resources and contest races across the ballot more efficiently than candidates can do on their own. Our survey revealed that coordination both up and down the party hierarchy is common: 82 percent of state parties said they sometimes or often coordinate fundraising and campaigning with the national party; 80 percent coordinate with county parties.

Parties also spend in support of multiple candidacies, from governors' races to county elections: the share saying they sometimes or often contribute to campaigns ranged from 88 percent (for state legislative candidates) to 43 percent (for local candidates). By contrast, most other players—candidates, activists, and interest groups—have highly targeted goals aiming at a particular office or policy agenda. Strong candidates at the top of a ticket who get nonparty support may have coattails, but that is not the same as building durable infrastructure. “We like to say we have overfed jockeys with an underfed horse,” a Democrat told us. “We need to build out the infrastructure to feed that horse.” She went on to describe a new initiative to increase turnout in safely gerrymandered congressional districts. Asked why the party bothers chasing “surplus” voters in safe districts, the official reminded us that running up Democratic turnout helps statewide office-seekers. This kind of three-dimensional thinking is a distraction for most candidates and groups, but imperative for building a state party.

Given their interest in sustainable success and their integrative function, one might expect state party organizations to exert a moderating influence on politics. Evidence suggests that they do. Ray La Raja and Brian F. Schaffner, in their new book *Campaign Finance and Political Polarization: When Purists Prevail*, show that parties' influence is centripetal, tugging politicians away from extremist agendas and toward the center. In states where more funding flows through parties, the authors find, legislatures tend to be less polarized.⁴

Our data are consistent with that finding. When asked whether they generally prefer a hypothetical gubernatorial nominee whose views are to the left of “a typical voter from your party,” to the right of the typical party voter, or similar to the typical party voter, the vast majority of state party leaders, 70 percent, preferred a more centrist

⁴ Raymond J. La Raja and Brian F. Schaffner, *Campaign Finance and Political Polarization: When Purists Prevail* (University of Michigan Press, 2015).

candidate.⁵ By contrast, ideological factions within the party and activist groups outside of it frequently seek to drive politics toward ideological extremes. We heard further confirmation of the parties' depolarizing tendency in our interviews: state party directors see their jobs as winning and sustaining majorities, not just scoring ideological points. A state party director who had previously worked for a conservative outside group provided a telling example. In his current role, he said, he is a Republican first and a conservative second—a reversal of his previous priorities. "It is not the party's role to get rid of moderate Republicans," he told us. In his new role, he has found himself asking his former colleagues, "Do you really need to whack so-and-so?"

...[P]arties' influence is centripetal, tugging politicians away from extremist agendas and toward the center.

Finally, state parties provide a cumulating base of voter data, expertise, volunteer networks, and other forms of transferable political capital: assets that can be passed along from campaign to campaign and banked over time. In contrast, individual candidates and agenda-driven interest groups are not reliably motivated or able to build lasting political infrastructure.

For all those reasons, we believe that state parties are distinct from other actors in the political universe; that they can and often do represent a counterforce against tendencies toward political fragmentation, polarization, and extremism; and that writing them off as irrelevant or as interchangeable with other political actors is a mistake. Straddling, as they do, the worlds of formal and informal politics, and touching, as they do, the entire range of political actors, and integrating, as they do, both short-term priorities and longer-term goals, state parties are important nodes of the political equivalent of civil society: the tissue of civic and cultural organizations that creates social capital by building connections, trust, and cooperation across diverse individuals and groups.

That is not to say that state parties are any kind of magic bullet; as political realists, we do not believe in magic bullets. It is to say that state parties provide some positive social externalities—indirect benefits to society—and that their deterioration is reason for concern.

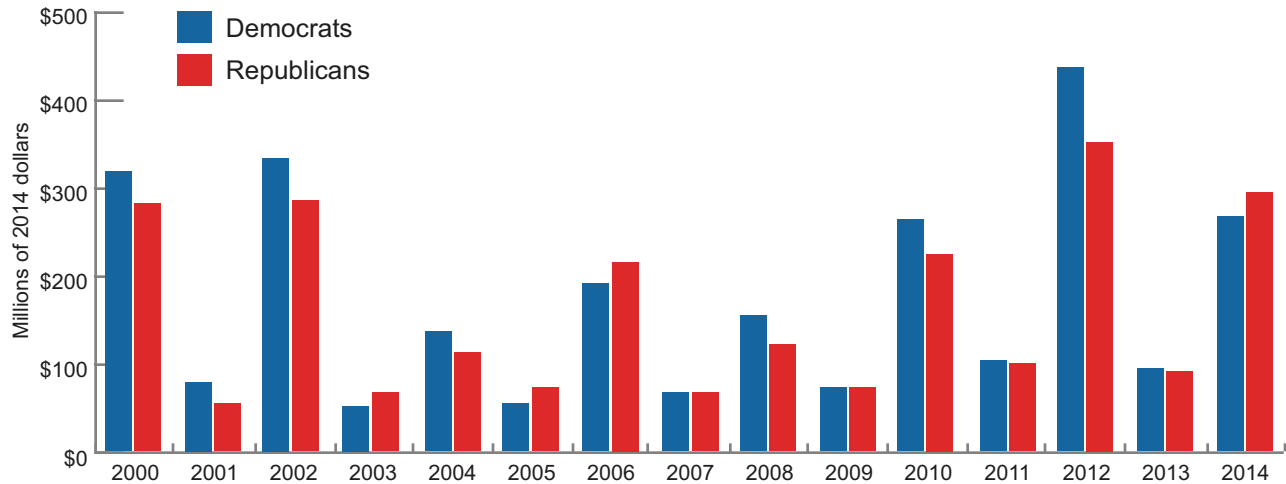
SURVIVING BUT FALLING BEHIND: HOW THEY ARE FARING

What, then, is the current state of state parties? Our survey, our interviews, and available financial data allow us to view that question from several angles, all of which return the same answer: in absolute terms, state parties are holding their own, but in relative terms—that is, compared with the political competition—they are losing ground.

State party officials generally regard the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (commonly known as McCain-Feingold) as a serious blow. McCain-Feingold blocked national parties from raising large-dollar contributions and sending them to the states, and it also imposed complex federal restrictions on state parties' fundraising and electioneering activities.

⁵ The preference for mainstream candidates was especially pronounced—80 percent—among Republican state parties. One in four Democratic party leaders preferred candidates who are somewhat more *conservative* than the typical party voter, presumably to improve electability in relatively conservative states.

Figure 1. Contributions to state parties

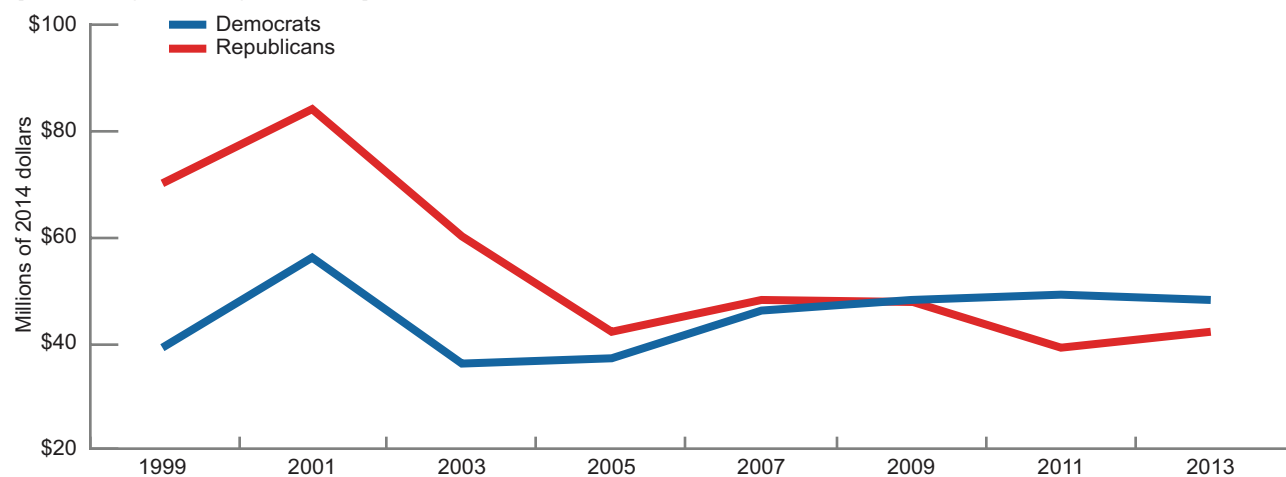


Source: National Institute on Money in State Politics

As Figure 1 shows, inflation-adjusted contributions to the state parties contracted sharply in the mid-2000s, after McCain-Feingold; they then gradually recovered to their previous levels (which, in off-years, was relatively low to begin with). However, state parties' off-year operating expenditures, shown in Figure 2, may be a better gauge of the parties' underlying organizational strength. By this measure (again using constant dollars), Republicans show a severe post-2002 hit and no subsequent recovery. In 2001, the year before McCain-Feingold was passed, the combined 50 Republican state parties' operating budgets summed to \$84 million; the total in 2013 was half that amount.⁶ The 50 Democratic parties, whose off-year operating spending did not approach Republican levels prior to McCain-Feingold, have recovered to their 2001 peak, and now hold steady at about \$48 million.

⁶ These financial data come from "Reports of Receipts and Disbursements" (Federal Election Commission Form 3), line 21 (operating expenditures for the year-end filing).

Figure 2. State party operating expenditures, 1999-2013 (off-cycle years)



Source: Federal Election Commission

Table 1. State party infrastructure and activities

	La Raja 2000	Aldrich 1999	La Raja, Rauch, Stoddard 2015
INFRASTRUCTURE			
Party headquarters permanent	98%	98%	96%
State party chair salaried	23%	25%	20%
Party employs full-time executive director	-	91%	87%
Party employs communications director	-	51%	73%
Operating expenditures (2014 dollars)*	\$140M	-	\$90M
Typical nonelection year staff (FTE)	7.3	7.5	6.7
POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES**			
Conduct opposition research	91%	-	82%
Conduct public opinion polls	36%	-	59%
Organize campaign events	95%	-	91%
Train campaign professionals	87%	-	87%
Conduct voter registration drives	-	60%	72%
Participate in get-out-the-vote drives	-	60%	91%
Advertise on TV and radio	-	-	51%
Send mass direct mailers	-	98%	87%
Disseminate messages online (social media)	-	-	89%
POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**			
Party contributes to governor	-	89%	84%
Party contributes to congressional	-	85%	77%
Party contributes to state leg.	-	92%	88%
Party contributes to local	-	70%	41%
COORDINATION**			
National party	82%	-	82%
Local parties	-	-	80%
Interest groups	-	-	27%
Share data	-	-	68%
RECRUITING AND NOMINATIONS**			
Recruit candidates for governor	-	52%	67%
Recruit candidates for U.S. House	-	55%	65%
Recruit candidates for state legislature	-	78%	96%
Recruit candidates for local offices	-	26%	70%
Provide primary support to favored candidates	17%	-	17%
Number of Observations	94	65	56

*Figures (in millions of dollars) from Federal Election Commission, year-end reports for 2001 and 2013

**Choices are *never*, *rarely*, *sometimes*, *often*; the column provides percentages for *sometimes* plus *often*.

Sources: John H. Aldrich, "Southern Parties in State and Nation," *Journal of Politics* 62:3 (2000), p. 643; Raymond J. La Raja, *Small Change: Money, Political Parties, and Campaign Finance Reform* (University of Michigan Press, 2008).

As important as how state parties are doing financially is *what* they are doing operationally. Table 1 compares our survey results with those of two previous surveys, one by La Raja in 2000 and the other by the political scientist John Aldrich in 1999.⁷ (The two earlier surveys, of course, predate McCain-Feingold.) Where comparable questions were asked, the story is mostly one of stability, with change around the edges. More state parties today employ communications or public relations directors than did so at the turn of the century (a finding consistent with what several party directors told us, which is that the round-the-clock news cycle requires them to raise their media game). State parties' monetary contributions to local candidates are down, but their involvement in recruiting for local races is up; as in the past, the state parties recruit for all offices but pay special attention to state legislative slots.

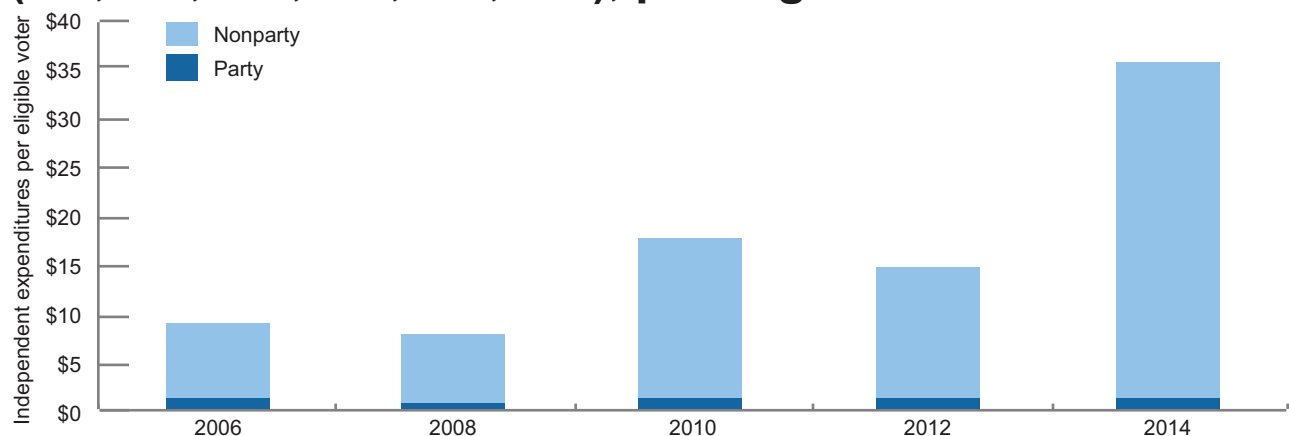
Party infrastructure has changed little. Staff sizes and operating expenditures (in constant dollars) are about the same, perhaps down a bit. Almost all state parties have permanent headquarters and full-time executive directors. The large majority, now as in 2000, do not pay their state party chairs, instead relying on volunteer leaders (a practice we suspect is archaic). As the table shows, there has not been much change in patterns of contributions to candidates or in the prevalence of activities involving research, campaign events, training, and recruitment.

Yet, when asked directly how their party is doing, or how state parties generally are doing, party officials resoundingly say: We're in trouble! Typical responses:

- “We believe we are fighting for our lives in the current legal and judicial framework, and the super PACs and c(4)s [outside groups] really present a direct threat to the state parties’ existence” (southern Republican)
- “I think the state parties will continue to decline because of all the legal restraints we have unless people really concentrate on how to strengthen them” (southern Democrat)
- “The internal conversation we’ve been having is, how do we keep state parties alive? Campaign-finance reform has hurt us to the point where we’re almost disabled in many states” (mountain Democrat)

⁷ See John H. Aldrich, “Southern Parties in State and Nation,” *Journal of Politics* 62:3 (2000): 643; Raymond J. La Raja, *Small Change: Money, Political Parties, and Campaign Finance Reform* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

Figure 3. Independent spending in six states (AK, CA, MA, ME, OH, WA), per eligible voter



Source: National Institute on Money in State Politics

Note: Data include all independent spending targeting state and local elections. Parties include all state party committees and state legislative caucuses.

- “Especially since McCain-Feingold, the state parties have decreased in their ability to accomplish their mission. You have super PACs that have filled the vacuum” (mountain Republican)

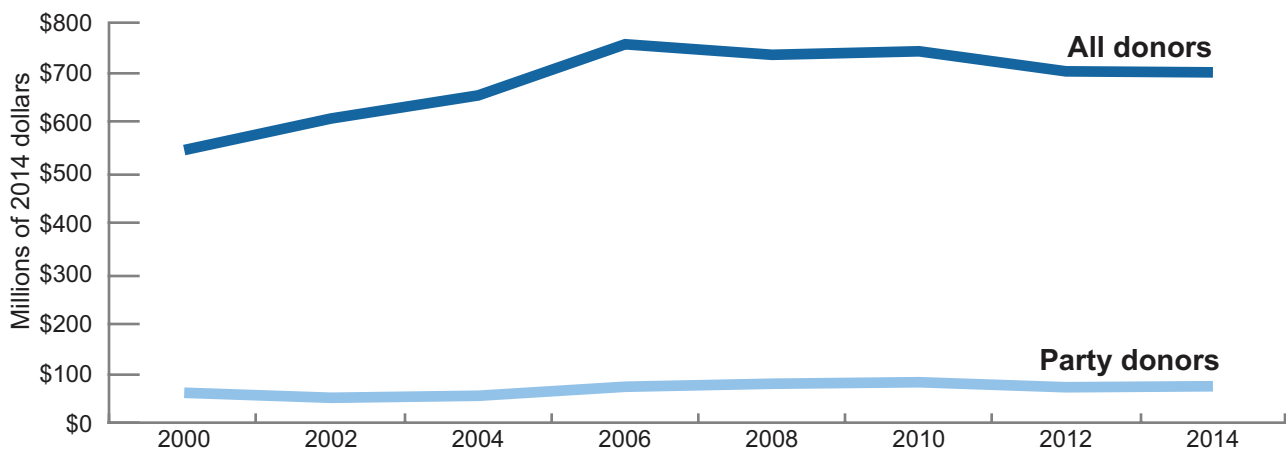
Super PACs and other independent-expenditure groups have indeed filled a vacuum. Using data collected in six states by the National Institute on Money in State Politics, Figure 3 shows that party organizations account for a very small portion of independent expenditures in statewide races. The vast majority of independent spending comes from non-party groups, whose expenditures are growing rapidly and which are often not based in the states where they spend.

Outside money is not only more plentiful than party money, it tends to be qualitatively different, too. Most outside money is spent on political advertising and is narrow in focus. Most of it targets particular races; outside donors often seek to influence specific policies and have little incentive to build durable party infrastructure that benefits all candidates. And outside money is much less heavily regulated; unlike the parties, outside groups have faced few constraints on how much they can raise from donors since the *SpeechNow.org v. FEC* decision in 2010.

To protect themselves from the onslaught of independent expenditures, candidates have intensified their fundraising efforts. For example, Figure 4 demonstrates that legislative candidates are relying more than ever on non-party sources of financing and reveals the gap between contributions given by non-party and party organizations. In the modern era, candidate-centered politics and campaign-finance laws encourage candidates to seek donations from individuals and interest groups rather than rely directly on the party for support. Consequently, candidates have long garnered most of their funds from outside the party; non-party donors give approximately ten times as much to legislative candidates as the parties give. Furthermore, the gap between what parties gave to candidates and the amount they received from other donors widened significantly between 2000 and 2006. Recent work by La Raja and Schaffner indicates that non-party giving tends to come from highly ideological individual donors who want to support like-minded candidates; in contrast, candidates supported by the parties tend to be more moderate.⁸

⁸ *Campaign Finance and Political Polarization: When Purists Prevail*, op. cit.

Figure 4. Contributions to state house candidates



Source: National Institute on Money in State Politics

Note: Data include all contributions to candidates for state house or state assembly. Parties include all state party committees and state legislative caucuses.

A TILTED PLAYING FIELD: EFFECTS OF REGULATION

Many exogenous changes in the political landscape have affected the fortunes of parties. But law and public policy have played their part, too, by placing state parties at a disadvantage—in a variety of ways.

Our survey results confirm that federal and state election laws distort the political marketplace to the detriment of the state parties and to the benefit of outside groups.

All state parties are subject to federal regulation, and most also are regulated by their states. As a result, the state parties must maintain separate accounts for state and federal moneys, which must be raised under different rules. The activities they can perform with each kind of money are also frequently circumscribed by Byzantine rules. Under McCain-Feingold's broad definition of "federal election activity," most voter mobilization and registration activities—core state party functions—are swept under

tight federal regulation. The effects of all these rules are often bewilderingly complicated, as was vividly depicted by Byron Tau in *Politico*:

Under the rules, for example, state-party-run phone banks for federal candidates had to be staffed only by volunteers. They could make calls only for presidential elections—not congressional races. Mail, campaign literature and get-out-the-vote operations around federal races were regulated by similarly strict rules, conditions and requirements regulating volunteer time, coordination with the national party and what kind of funds could be spent.⁹

Moreover, state parties face a variety of federal and often state reporting requirements, while outside groups operate largely in the dark. One expert in election law observed that "state parties are the most regulated entities in campaign finance."

Our survey results show that the rules significantly affect the activities of the state parties. Among our respondents, about 60 percent said that federal campaign-finance laws sometimes or often hinder their ability to support state and local candidates; 40 percent said the same of state laws, which are less restrictive than federal laws in many states. One mountain-state Republican called federal laws "incredibly cumbersome to operate." A northeastern Democrat said, "We usually have to hire an entire team just to manage the federal laws." The costs of compliance are high; among our survey respondents, 64 percent reported employing more than one person to deal with legal compliance; 24 percent had three or more. "I have to pay for two lawyers every month on retainer because there are so many questions and so many ways to get into trouble," a southern Democrat told us.

Compliance not only absorbs resources, it also leads to workarounds, contortions, and political opportunities forgone. "I have to think it through like a lawyer, not what's most effective for the overall effort," a midwestern Republican complained. The stories we mentioned at the beginning of this paper were not unusual. Other examples:

- A Republican state party we spoke with was forced by federal restrictions to curtail its voter-registration efforts.

⁹ Byron Tau, "Last Call for State Parties?" *Politico*, February 16, 2014.

- “Most of the time we can’t do a statewide mailer,” because only hard federal dollars can be used if the mailer increases turnout, a northeastern Democrat told us.
- A Democrat said the state party has given up asking its federal politicians (such as the U.S. senator) to help fundraise for state legislative elections. “It becomes a [regulatory] nightmare, so we just don’t do it anymore.”

Getting voters to the polls, reaching statewide audiences with party messages, and harmonizing the electioneering efforts of state and federal candidates are exactly what healthy parties ought to be doing. State and federal laws should be designed to promote such activities, not suppress them.

Our survey results confirm that federal and state election laws distort the political marketplace to the detriment of the state parties and to the benefit of outside groups. We compared states in two categories: those that limit individual donations to state parties, and those that allow state parties to raise state funds without restriction. We found that the less restrictive rules are associated with stronger state parties and weaker outside groups in two ways. One is more-robust staffing. State parties that can accept unlimited donations have larger staffs: 7.9 on average, compared with 4.9 in restrictive states.

Perhaps more interesting is that permissive rules seem to weaken the influence of outside groups. As Table 2 shows, Independent expenditures are less prevalent in states where more money can flow to the parties. In unlimited states, 26 percent of party leaders said that outside spending is “rarely” or “never” an important factor in races for governor, compared to only 5 percent in restrictive states. In unlimited states, only 23 percent said that “almost half” or “more than half” of ads are sponsored by independent groups; in the restrictive states, 65 percent said outside ads played such a big role. Similarly, party leaders in restrictive states are more likely to say that independent spending is “somewhat harmful” or “very harmful” (19 percent) than are their counterparts in unlimited states (6 percent).

We acknowledge that circumscribing state parties’ behavior is what money rules are designed to do, and that some such rules may well be justified. But those who favor such rules should, by the same token, acknowledge the costs: constraints on party activities tilt the playing field toward private actors. Crimping the flow of money to state parties

Table 2. Independent spending in states with and without limits on individual contributions to parties

	Limited %	Not limited %
Portion of paid political advertising sponsored by independent groups		
Almost none	10	19
Less than half	25	58
More than half	60	19
Almost all	5	4
Whether outside independent spending is helpful or harmful		
Very helpful	5	13
Somewhat helpful	62	71
Neither helpful nor harmful	14	10
Somewhat harmful	14	6
Very harmful	5	0
How often independent spending is important factor in gubernatorial elections		
Never	0	3
Rarely	5	23
Sometimes	30	40
Often	65	33
<i>N</i>	20	31

does not reduce private influence in the political system; at best it merely moves private influence elsewhere, and at worst it substantially increases private influence by moving it to less accountable, less regulated channels.

Some, while acknowledging the cost of today's rules, may nonetheless believe that weakening parties relative to private groups is a price worth paying for steering large-dollar contributions away from the formal political system. They may view private money *inside* the political system as creating more danger of corruption, or of the appearance of corruption, than does private money *outside* the political system. We disagree, for several reasons.

First, parties are inherently the least corruptible of our political institutions. Unlike candidates or special interests, they think multi-dimensionally rather than about specific races or interests; they collect money from many sources and disperse it among many constituencies; they take a relatively long view of politics and are accountable for stewardship of the brand. They are thus, so to speak, relatively hard to “buy.” If money is going to go anywhere—and it must go somewhere—parties offer the best home for it.

Second, if the goal is to persuade the public that the political system is not corrupt, then crafting rules that encourage billionaires and special interests to create their own shadowy political networks is an odd way to accomplish it.

Third, corruption (or its appearance) is not the only thing that matters. Governing matters as much, probably more. Much of what healthy parties do—taking a longer view of politics, harmonizing the interests of office-seekers, creating financial and political ties between office-holders, prioritizing sustainable victories over protest politics—encourages moderation and makes governing easier. Systematically favoring outside groups and activists that have purist worldviews and parochial agendas has the opposite effect.

FRENEMIES: STATE PARTIES AND OUTSIDE GROUPS

Are outside groups competitors and adversaries to traditional party organizations? Or supporters and auxiliaries? Well, it's complicated.

Our survey and interviews found that state party leaders' attitudes toward outside groups are nuanced and conflicted. On the one hand, party officials regard the groups as competitors for resources and political oxygen. On the other hand, they recognize that, in a world where their own hands are tied, outside groups often provide important assistance.

Among our survey respondents, 52 percent say outside-group spending is often a key factor in congressional races, and 45 percent say the same about gubernatorial races. Even for state legislative races, 30 percent told us that independent spending by outside groups frequently plays a major role.

Is this outside activity helpful, harmful, or neither? A majority of respondents, 77 percent, rated the efforts of independent groups as “somewhat helpful” or “very helpful”; only 12 percent said such groups were harmful.

At the same time, state parties rarely coordinate their activities with those of outside groups, and our interviews found state party leaders speaking of even sympathetic outside groups as undependable and often problematic allies. One source of friction, previously mentioned, is the groups' parochialism and short attention spans; our interview subjects also mentioned several others:

Messaging. “They attack Republicans with stupid issues,” one southern Democratic state party director told us, speaking of left-leaning super PACs and other outside groups. “In 2014, Democratic messaging was very inconsistent because they aren’t trying to have a positive party-related message; they’re more candidate-specific.” It’s a frequent concern. One mountain-state Republican told us: “I would say the major effect of our state campaign-finance laws is that the 527s [a type of outside group] do messaging for candidates. Candidates can’t rely on these 527s, but they almost have to. The candidates themselves would rather be controlling their own message.” Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz stated the problem concisely when he said of the various outside groups backing his 2016 presidential campaign, “I’m left to just hope that what they say bears some resemblance to what I actually believe.”¹⁰

Brain drain. State parties and outside groups often draw upon the same reservoirs of political talent. While that can help them stay on the same page, it also poses a recruitment challenge. In one swing state where Americans for Prosperity has built a large field organization, a Republican state party director told us: “Those are the same people that we might have hired, or who might otherwise have been a volunteer for our side. So recruiting for our efforts becomes more difficult, because they absorb more of the talent in our state.”

Waste and duplication. Up to a point, parties and outside groups can loosely harmonize their efforts, but they generally cannot formally coordinate campaign activities. A mountain-state Republican recounted how the state party and a sympathetic outside group sent similar mailings to the same list, while voters on other lists received nothing. “Had that money come to the state party, we would have been able to send it to the entire universe of people we want to send it to.”

Reputational damage. Voters may blame a “stupid attack” by an outside group on a candidate or party. Moreover, as outside groups move into shoe-leather roles like voter mobilization and data collection, they can cause confusion and anger among the rank and file. A Democratic state party director told us she had just spoken with a local volunteer who was “very angry” about an outside organizer whom the volunteer had mistakenly assumed was connected to the state party.

Fundraising. Last but certainly not least, there is competition for money. Precisely because parties’ integrative mission spans multiple campaigns and constituencies, donors tend to see giving directly to either candidates or pressure groups as more efficient ways to influence outcomes. As one Republican told us, “A lot of donors are hesitant to give to the party because they don’t know which candidate will receive the benefit. They say, ‘You have to help every Republican and I don’t like some of them.’”

State parties therefore start at a natural disadvantage in the fundraising sweepstakes. The multiplicity of outside groups further fragments the marketplace. “A lot of these outside PACs are competitive with us,” said a Republican state party director. “The baby is now being split into ten parts.” A western Republican spoke of “too many cooks in the kitchen.” A southern Democrat said, “It’s like if you go shopping and there are more kinds of milk: you’re splitting up the money more.”

This is not to say that outside groups and state (or, for that matter, national) parties play a zero-sum game. Party and independent fundraising can be complements, not substitutes, and state party leaders understand that competition is

¹⁰ Nick Corasaniti and Matt Flegenheimer, “As TV Ad Rates Soar, ‘Super PACs’ Pivot to Core Campaign Work,” *New York Times*, December 22, 2015.

a fact of life and can add value. “There is competition for dollars, but competition helps me work harder and makes me justify to donors that we’re a good investment of their dollars,” one southern Republican told us.

THE “LANE” STRATEGY: HOW STATE PARTIES ARE COPING

How are state parties meeting their legal and political challenges? No two are alike, but a general pattern is discernible. A term that came up more than once in our interviews was “lanes”: a loose, tacitly recognized form of specialization.

On both sides of the aisle, state parties told us they have ceded the airwaves to candidates and, especially, private groups. Airtime is simply too expensive for state parties to use scarce regulated dollars on. “TV isn’t our most effective lane to be in,” a southern Democrat told us. “The TV waves are generally flooded by the super PACs. We’d be wiping out our entire budget on a week of TV.” In our survey, only half the party respondents said they “often” or “sometimes” advertise on TV or radio. State party leaders rue their ebbing influence over messaging, but they seem resigned to it.

On the other hand, mobilization, always a party preoccupation, has grown more central. “State parties are focused more and more on field efforts because super PACs dominate airwaves,” a Democrat told us. “It’s all about turnout,” one mountain state Republican said. Outside groups have recently moved into the mobilization game, in some cases setting up multi-state field operations.¹¹ Parties, however, can still do “GOTV” (get out the vote) relatively efficiently because they can mobilize for entire slates of candidates, collaborate with candidate campaigns and legislative caucuses, and draw upon established volunteer and social networks.

A more recently acquired lane—though a contested one, especially on the Republican side—is the gathering, analysis, and distribution of voter data. When a Democratic campaign lawyer told us that “data is the currency of the American political system right now,” he spoke for a multitude of officials in both parties. “Unlike PACs, a party has an army of volunteers,” a western Republican said. “Ideally every single one of them is out talking to voters. It’s one of the few things we have as a party that’s very valuable to have.” In a southern state, a Republican said the state party is “the sole and de facto keeper of all voter data. That has become one of our core missions, is just data.” Understanding as much, many states employ full-time data professionals. Gatekeeping policies vary. Some state parties provide data to all candidates running in party primaries; others set (usually low) viability thresholds. Some charge campaigns for access, while others provide it gratis. One state chair said that access is entirely within her discretion, though, she said, “I’ve been very generous in my policy.”

Private competitors, in the form of both interest groups and for-profit companies, are moving in on this turf, with potentially significant implications if data collection or access becomes fragmented. To judge by our interviews, Democrats see data fragmentation as a problem still on the horizon, because the party’s data capability remains well ahead of its outside competitors’. On the Republican side, however, state party leaders—insisting on confidentiality—spoke with concern about the rise of private players, notably the Koch network’s private data arm, i360 (whose website describes the organization as “the leading data and technology resource for the free market political advocacy community”). As of now, such outside groups and companies are generally sharing their data with the party, but “I’m not convinced that they’re always our friend,” one state party leader told us. State parties tend to view their data as a political public good. “We give away our system for free, and not just to nominees,” one Republican state director said. “If you’re a candidate for office, we provide you with the data for your district and we provide it

¹¹ See, e.g., Corasaniti and Flegenheimer, *op. cit.*

equally for all candidates. If i360 became the platform of choice, then maybe one candidate can afford to buy i360 data and another can't." A southern Republican complained that, despite data-sharing arrangements with the Koch network, he had seen no data come in. "If we were all working off the same data we'd be a lot stronger," he said.¹²

A third comparative advantage is more defensible from private competition—and surprisingly important: the United States Postal Service. The sample ballots and big glossy postcards we all receive during campaign season remain an electioneering staple. Under federal law, parties (national and state) qualify to send mail at the non-profit rate, a significant discount. As a result, the state parties dominate the direct mail "lane." Even in today's age of digital communications, this mundane function turns out to matter. We heard many comments like these: "That is gold for state parties." "One of the greatest advantages you have over outside groups or campaigns." "It's a huge, huge asset to us." Describing how he capitalizes on this advantage, one mountain-state executive director explained that he can pull together a group of ten targeted races and do a "massive buy from mail vendors, with five or six staggered pieces," covering ten districts at lower cost and with higher efficiency than any campaign could manage. "That's very much a way the state party stays relevant," he said.

The lane strategy does not imply that state parties are becoming narrow specialists and that mail, mobilization, and data are all that they do. Far from it. The parties continue to perform multiple other functions: recruiting, training, social-media messaging, research, and so on. Rather, the lane strategy is a hybrid of specialization and conglomeration. By carving out niches in what a state director called "the mechanics of politics," the parties aim to preserve market share without giving up the parties' traditional integrative function.

Whether this hybrid business model is sustainable is a question we can't answer. We can say, though, that offering multiple political services to all comers, while also maintaining an edge in several competitive specialties, is likely to be a challenge.

REACHABLE FRUIT: RECOMMENDATIONS

Fortunately, much can be done to strengthen the state parties, and much of which is not very hard. State parties are among the most accessible of political reform targets, and they are eager for help. Some suggestions follow, but first a few words about the premises on which our recommendations are based.

Premise one is, as we have argued, that state parties provide political public goods; yet, like many providers of positive externalities, they cannot readily capture all the value they create and so tend to be under-resourced relative to candidates and outside groups.

¹² In 2015, tension between the Republican National Committee and the Koch organization flared into public view when an RNC official was quoted as saying, "It's very dangerous and wrong to allow a group of very strong, well-financed individuals who have no accountability to anyone to have control over who gets access to the data when, why, and how." A subsequent data-sharing agreement patched up the dispute. See Jon Ward, "The Koch Brothers and the Republican Party Go to War—with Each Other," *Yahoo! Politics*, June 11, 2015; Matea Gold, "Koch Network Strikes New Deal to Share Voter Data with RNC-Aligned Firm," *Washington Post*, July 29, 2015.

Under federal law, parties (national and state) qualify to send mail at the non-profit rate, a significant discount. As a result, the state parties dominate the direct mail "lane."

Premise two, also as argued already, is that state parties, although not on the critically endangered list, are falling behind political competitors that face significantly fewer political and legal disadvantages. The playing field is not level, and the tilt is growing.

...[L]imits on contributions to state parties should be greatly raised or eliminated altogether.

Premise three may be more controversial: Given the lack of political consensus about campaign-finance law, the Supreme Court's rejection of limits on independent political advocacy, and the realities of political hydraulics (money will always flow into the system somehow), we believe that super PACs, "dark money" nonprofits, and other powerful outside groups are here to stay and will

remain less regulated than parties or candidates. If so, there is no longer any point handcuffing the state parties. Tightly restricting their fundraising and activities just pushes money into darker channels.

Accordingly, we suggest change in four overlapping departments: contribution limits, coordination rules, tax treatment, and other regulatory reforms.¹³

First, federal and (where they exist) state limits on contributions to state parties should be greatly raised or eliminated altogether. This change—what La Raja and Schaffner have called building canals, not dams—would divert some significant flow of money away from outside groups and into state parties. The result would not be to eliminate outside groups, by any stretch. But, as one national party official put it, "I think a lot more money would move back into the party system," and something closer to a natural equilibrium between state parties and their outside competitors could be restored.

There is, we acknowledge, a lot of daylight between raising limits on contributions to state parties and eliminating limits altogether. One can make a case for either approach. Eliminating limits would give state parties something close to real parity with their competitors. It would also turn them into collectors and clearinghouses for campaign money, moving them to the center of the political system and bringing more "dark money" toward accountability and transparency. On the other hand, a no-limits system might make the state parties reliant on six-figure checks, creating an appearance of corruption and marginalizing small-dollar donors. Among state party officials we talked to, all favored raising today's pointlessly punitive contribution limits, but they split on the advisability of eliminating limits altogether. We lean toward eliminating limits but believe either approach would greatly improve upon the status quo.

To those who see residual purpose in tight contribution limits, we might reply: Not for long. Struggling to cope with outside groups, state parties have hit on the strategy of establishing their own super PACs to receive and spend large quantities of unregulated money. Colorado Republicans are currently in court defending such an organization, the Colorado Republican Independent Expenditure Committee. State party leaders across the country, and from both parties, are closely watching the outcome.

Asked whether state-party-associated super PACs are the wave of the future, party officials we talked to said, in effect: Maybe, but if so, it's a pity. "It's unfortunate that that's what we're reduced to," one Republican official told us. "It's somewhere else for activity to take place other than in the party committee itself. It's only enhancing the

¹³ For purposes of the present paper, we confine our recommendations to state parties. Similar arguments could be applied to national parties, but those raise questions outside our present remit.

problem of a divide between where the money is going and the volunteers and the candidates.” Echoing that view, a Democratic official said, “That’s just a workaround. It just makes them [state parties] more about being vessels and less about being effective organizations. We need a bigger fix than that.”

Second, for similar reasons, today’s restrictions on state parties’ freedom to coordinate their own activities with those of candidates and outside groups make no sense and should be removed. Coordinating the efforts of candidates, activists, and party strategists, across multiple ballot lines, is exactly what state parties should be doing. Depriving them of this integrative role reduces the influence, their fundraising capacity, and their ability to broker political truces and compromises.

The standard objection to raising contribution limits and ending coordination bans is that Donor Smith could then write a big-dollar check to a state party with the understanding that her money would be spent on the campaign of Senator Jones, thereby circumventing limits on contributions to candidates and turning the parties into passive conduits for earmarked funds. In our view, putting state parties in this middleman or clearinghouse role, thereby incentivizing big-dollar donors to deal with them, is not a bug but a feature. It would enhance the party committees’ centrality to the political process, increase their leverage with candidates and donors, and provide a relatively accountable place for money to go—all of which add stability and transparency to our political system. By contrast, pushing that money into off-books, narrowly parochial, and frequently extreme private groups provides no such public benefits.¹⁴

If taxpayers can deduct contributions to universities, foundations, and interest groups, why not allow a deduction for contributions to state parties?

A third suggestion ventures into tax treatment, which is uncharted but intriguing territory. If state parties are already treated like nonprofits for mailing purposes, why not for tax purposes as well? If taxpayers can deduct contributions to universities, foundations, and interest groups, why not allow a deduction for contributions to state parties? Supporting the state parties, after all, provides at least as much social benefit as, say, giving to Yale (which, although an admirable institution, is not an underfunded public good).

To our knowledge, deductibility of state-party donations is a new idea; we foresee objections. Like other tax deductions, this one is regressive, favoring those in higher tax brackets. It would also breach the traditional prohibition on electioneering and other overt political activity by tax-favored nonprofits, leading to possible slippery-slope effects if other political organizations demand deductibility.

Still, the potential upside makes the idea worth considering and debating. Tax-deductibility is easy to administer and well understood. Precisely because it is worth more to those in higher tax brackets, it would help nudge big-dollar donors away from unaccountable outside groups. And we know from the nonprofit mail rate how far a modest pecuniary advantage can go in preserving the viability of state parties.

¹⁴ Allowing more money to flow through state parties may also attract donors who have an interest in party building rather than solely in supporting particular candidates. They would give to party knowing that there is a party “tax” in which a portion of funds goes to party infrastructure and down-ballot races.

...[T]here is no shortage of regulatory adjustments that could improve the flow of oxygen to state parties without challenging existing campaign-finance paradigms at all.

Finally, we recommend regulatory changes. We concur with Ian Vandewalker and Daniel I. Weiner, who, in a report for the progressive-leaning Brennan Center for Justice, argue for rolling back the “federalization” (i.e., federal regulation) of state and local party activities: for example, by narrowing the definition of federal election activity that must be paid for with federally compliant funds. “Such targeted deregulation of state and local parties could help them to play a greater role in mobilizing

ordinary citizens, without significantly exacerbating corruption and misalignment concerns,” the authors conclude.¹⁵

Many other needlessly complex and restrictive rules could likewise be pruned or junked. In 2013, the Association of State Democratic Chairs proposed a list of regulatory changes that draws support from state parties on both sides: indexing state-party contribution limits for inflation, revoking bans on national party officials’ raising money for state parties, allowing quarterly rather than monthly reporting, and so forth.¹⁶ Even if one is unprepared to reconsider campaign-finance mainstays like contribution limits and coordination bans, there is no shortage of regulatory adjustments that could improve the flow of oxygen to state parties without challenging existing campaign-finance paradigms at all.

No reform is easy or uncontroversial, and, as we re-emphasize, none is a cure-all. One experienced Democratic Party observer, while sympathetic to strengthening parties in general and state parties in particular, argued that their relative weakness is fundamentally a political phenomenon and that policies disadvantaging them are more an effect than a cause of their decline. “At the end of the day,” he said, “parties are strong or weak for reasons unrelated to legislative or policy efforts to strengthen or weaken them.” His caveat has merit, but it argues for having realistic expectations of policy change, not for preserving the skewed status quo. Making the policy environment more party-friendly should produce more of the public goods that we think parties provide. Even if we are proven wrong, and if empowering state parties is hopeless, the changes we suggest would, at a minimum, provide more transparency and accountability than the status quo.

At a time when state parties face so many challenges in the political marketplace, disadvantaging them in the policy realm makes no sense. In the search for sensible, bipartisan, and doable political reforms, state parties offer low-hanging fruit—especially compared with notional constitutional amendments and elaborate public-financing schemes. Strengthening state parties, or at the very least relieving them of some of the pointless burdens with which they are now saddled, is a realistic path toward a better balanced, more effective, and more accountable political system.

¹⁵ Ian Vandewalker and Daniel I. Weiner, *Stronger Parties, Stronger Democracy: Rethinking Reform* (Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, 2015).

¹⁶ Association of State Democratic Chairs, “Resolution in Support of Reasonable Campaign Finance Regulation of State and Local Party Committees” (2014). Available at <http://www.azdem.org/sites/azdems/files/PDFs/StateCommittee/Resolutions/2014-04%20In%20Support%20of%20Reasonable%20Campaign%20FinanceRegulation.pdf>. See also: Prepared joint testimony of Neil Reiff and Donald McGahn before the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, April 30, 2014, “Dollars and Sense: How Undisclosed Money and Post-McCutcheon Campaign Finance Will Affect the 2014 Election and Beyond.” Available at http://www.rules.senate.gov/public/?a=Files.Serve&File_id=2d880938-1bb3-4375-8e0d-9b133ce6b95d

APPENDIX. 2015 SURVEY RESPONSES

Note: Responses are given as percentages unless otherwise indicated

INFRASTRUCTURE & STAFF		N	No	Yes			
Does your state party organization have a permanent headquarters?		56	4	96			
Dem		34	6	94			
Rep		22	0	100			
Does your organization employ an executive director?		56	13	87			
Dem		34	12	88			
Rep		22	14	86			
Does your organization employ a communications or public relations director?		56	27	73			
Dem		34	15	85			
Rep		22	45	55			
		N	Unpaid Volunteer	Receives regular stipend	Receives full-time salary		
Which best describes the compensation of your organization's Party Chair?		56	73	7	20		
Dem		34	71	9	21		
Rep		22	77	5	18		
		N	Average staff #				
Approximately how many staff members does your organization employ during a non-presidential election year?		55	6.8				
Dem		33	7.8				
Rep		22	5.1				
How many staff and/or consultants do you have who assist with campaign compliance and reporting?		55	2				
Dem		33	2.2				
Rep		22	1.8				

ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES	N	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often
Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Conduct opposition research	47	2	6	57	34
Dem	28	0	7	54	39
Rep	19	5	5	63	26
Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Conduct public opinion polls	47	17	47	28	9
Dem	28	18	43	29	11
Rep	19	16	53	26	5
Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Organize campaign events	46	0	4	30	65
Dem	28	0	7	25	68
Rep	18	0	0	39	61
Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Train campaign professionals who work for individual candidates	47	6	6	26	62
Dem	28	7	0	25	68
Rep	19	5	16	26	53
Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Conduct voter registration drives	47	9	19	45	28
Rep Rep	28	11	21	39	29
Rep	19	5	16	53	26
Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Participate in Get Out The Vote efforts	46	0	0	9	91
Dem	27	0	0	7	93
Rep	19	0	0	11	89
Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Advertise on television or radio	47	13	36	32	19
Dem	28	18	32	36	14
Rep	19	5	42	26	26

Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Send mass direct mailers	47	0	13	17	70
Dem	28	0	21	18	61
Rep	19	0	0	16	84
Please estimate how often officials or staff employed at your organization do the following . . . Disseminate messages online, such as through email or social media	47	0	0	11	89
Dem	28	0	0	11	89
Rep	19	0	0	11	89
RECRUITMENT AND NOMINATIONS					
	N	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often
How often does your organization recruit candidates for the following offices? Local or county	49	2	29	29	41
Dem	29	3	28	28	41
Rep	20	0	30	30	40
How often does your organization recruit candidates for the following offices? State legislature	49	0	4	29	67
Dem	29	0	7	21	72
Rep	20	0	0	40	60
How often does your organization recruit candidates for the following offices? Governor	49	14	18	22	45
Dem	29	7	10	21	67
Rep	20	25	30	25	20
How often does your organization recruit candidates for the following offices? Congress	49	12	22	24	41
Dem	29	3	17	24	55
Rep	20	25	30	25	20
How often does your organization support favored candidates in competitive primary elections?	54	57	26	11	6
Dem	32	47	34	13	6
Rep	22	73	14	9	5

	N	Somewhat more conservative	Typical party voter	Somewhat more liberal
In a hypothetical primary election for governor, which of the following candidates would you prefer to see win your party's nomination?	49	20	69	10
Dem	28	25	61	14
Rep	21	14	81	5

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS	N	Never	Rarely	Some- times	Often
-------------------------	---	-------	--------	----------------	-------

How often does your organization contribute to, or spend independently to support, candidates in the following races? Local and county	49	16	43	31	10
Dem	28	7	46	32	14
Rep	21	29	38	29	5

How often does your organization contribute to, or spend independently to support, candidates in the following races? State legislature	49	6	6	29	59
Dem	28	4	7	32	57
Rep	21	10	5	24	62

How often does your organization contribute to, or spend independently to support, candidates in the following races? Governor	49	4	12	20	63
Dem	28	4	11	25	61
Rep	21	5	14	14	67

How often does your organization contribute to, or spend independently to support, candidates in the following races? Congress	49	6	16	35	43
Dem	28	7	14	32	46
Rep	21	5	19	38	38

COORDINATION WITH OTHER COMMITTEES	N	Never	Rarely	Some- times	Often
------------------------------------	---	-------	--------	----------------	-------

How often does your organization coordinate with the following groups on fundraising, campaigns, events or other efforts? The national party	50	4	14	42	40
Dem	28	7	14	36	43
Rep	22	0	14	50	36

How often does your organization coordinate with the following groups on fundraising, campaigns, events or other efforts? County party organizations	50	0	20	30	50
Dem	28	0	18	36	45
Rep	22	0	23	23	55
How often does your organization coordinate with the following groups on fundraising, campaigns, events or other efforts? Independent outside groups	49	37	37	16	10
Dem	27	33	33	15	19
Rep	22	41	41	18	0
How often does your organization share mailing lists, email lists or other voter databases with candidates, other party committees or interest groups?	54	4	28	41	28
Dem	32	0	28	34	38
Rep	22	9	27	50	14
How often does your party caucus in the state legislature help to run candidate campaigns?	55	7	7	27	58
Dem	33	6	6	21	67
Rep	22	9	9	36	45
IMPACT OF CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS					
	N	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often
How often do federal campaign finance laws hinder your abilities to support state and local candidates or conduct party activities?	54	9	31	33	26
Dem	32	6	28	34	31
Rep	22	14	36	32	18
How often do your state's campaign finance laws hinder your abilities to support state and local candidates or conduct party activities?	55	27	36	16	24
Dem	33	24	33	18	24
Rep	22	23	41	14	23
INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES					
	N	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often
In your state, how often is independent spending by outside groups an important factor in the following races? Local and county	50	30	42	26	2
Dem	29	31	34	34	0
Rep	21	29	52	14	5

In your state, how often is independent spending by outside groups an important factor in the following races? State legislature	50	2	22	46	30	
Dem	29	0	14	52	34	
Rep	21	5	33	38	24	
In your state, how often is independent spending by outside groups an important factor in the following races? Governor	50	2	16	36	46	
Dem	29	4	14	38	45	
Rep	21	0	19	33	48	
In your state, how often is independent spending by outside groups an important factor in the following races? Congress	50	2	10	36	52	
Dem	29	3	7	28	62	
Rep	21	0	14	48	38	
	N	Almost none	Less than half	Almost half	More than half	
During the most recent statewide election campaign, approximately what portion of all paid political advertising was sponsored by independent outside groups?	51	16	45	35	4	
Dem	29	24	31	41	3	
Rep	22	5	64	27	5	
	N	Very helpful	Some-what helpful	Neither helpful nor harmful	Some-what harmful	Very harmful
Do you believe independent spending by outside groups intended to aid your party's candidates tends to be helpful or harmful?	52	10	67	12	10	2
Dem	31	10	65	13	10	3
Rep	21	10	71	10	10	0

GOVERNANCE STUDIES

The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202.797.6090
Fax: 202.797.6144
brookings.edu/governance

EDITING

Elizabeth Sablich

PRODUCTION & LAYOUT

Nick McClellan

EMAIL YOUR COMMENTS TO GSCOMMENTS@BROOKINGS.EDU

This paper is distributed in the expectation that it may elicit useful comments and is subject to subsequent revision. The views expressed in this piece are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the staff, officers or trustees of the Brookings Institution.

The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit organization devoted to independent research and policy solutions. Its mission is to conduct high-quality, independent research and, based on that research, to provide innovative, practical recommendations for policymakers and the public. The conclusions and recommendations of any Brookings publication are solely those of its author(s), and do not reflect the views of the Institution, its management, or its other scholars.