

The Development of State Legislative Campaign Committees: A Second Look

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One of the most important recent developments in state politics has been the rapid emergence of legislative campaign committees (LCCs), now found in 40 states. A persistent theme in the literature is that the growth of these new organizations has been directly linked to party decline. More specifically, as traditional party organizations failed to respond to changing environmental conditions, LCCs were created. The analysis presented here rejects the functionalist perspective and argues that their development has occurred independent of party dynamics, and perhaps as a response to *strengthening* state party committees. Legislative professionalization is found to be the most telling exogenous variable, suggesting a good deal about LCC activities and goals. Contrary to expectations, these powerful organizations may not be interested in or capable of performing many of the functions historically undertaken by traditional party organizations.

Introduction

Over the past decade, a new generation of party scholars has resurrected the structural approach and, if not directly challenged the party decline perspective, certainly complicated the debate. Evidence of growth and adjustment appears straightforward; party *organizations* have more and are doing more. At nearly every level, budgets are larger, staffing is up and party clients (candidates) are receiving greater assistance.

An important piece of many organizational studies has been the rapid emergence of national and state legislative campaign committees (LCCs). At the national level these units, often referred to as the "Hill Committees," blossomed during the early 1980s and are now seen as integral parts of the national party committees (Herrnson 1993, 1988, 1986; Jacobson 1987; Adamany 1984). Paul Herrnson, the foremost student of the national LCCs, suggests that new environmental constraints have shifted party organization activities from direct candidate assistance to a "brokerage" role—a function now provided, at least for House and Senate candidates, by the Hill Committees.

Prior to the late 1970s few *state* legislative caucuses (or legislative leaders) had established centralized campaign units; notable exceptions

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occurring in Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, California and New York. During the past decade they have flourished, and today are found in 40 states (Simon-Rosenthal 1993). In addition to financial help, state-level LCCs furnish extensive high-tech campaign services—such as polling, computer data-base facilities, direct mail services and electronic media production. Many state-level LCCs provide incumbent, challenger, and open seat candidates with assistance far greater than that received from traditional party units or political action committees. In several states they have become the dominant player in state legislative elections (Dwyer and Stonecash 1993; Shea 1993; Gierzynski 1992; Redfield and Van Der Slik 1992; Salmore and Salmore 1989; Jewell and Olson 1988; Johnson 1987; Giles and Pritchard 1985; Loftus 1985).

Perhaps eager to find renewal, most students of parties conceive of LCCs as "adaptations" by the traditional party organizations (e.g., the national and state committees). Party organizations, the resilient creatures of our democratic political culture, are credited once again as responding to a new political environment. A related view is that LCCs were created to fill a "void" left by the parties, but have now merged with them.

This paper examines the "adaptation assumption" at the state-level. Are state LCCs simply a reaction to waning traditional parties, or have other forces been at work? What are these variables and what do they say about the role of LCCs in contemporary politics?

State LCCs are conceivably the most significant—yet least understood—innovation in state politics during the last decade. By carefully examining their development we might better gauge their interaction with, and impact on, traditional party organizations. Do LCC activities complement, supplement, or transform traditional party functions? Are they "party-like," as suggested by most scholars, or are they more akin to PACs and independent campaign consulting firms? To answer these and other questions it seems necessary to understand why they were created in the first place.

The analysis proceeds in three steps. A critique of the adaptation (functionalist) perspective is first provided. This is followed by a discussion of several non-party variables that may better explain their development. Finally, each of these variables are introduced into multivariate logistic and OLS regressions.

Findings suggest that the rise of state-level LCCs has not been a response to party dynamics. In fact, their growth seems to have occurred independent of traditional party changes, and perhaps as a response to *expanding* state party organizations. Rather than being an element of party adjustment, it is argued that state LCCs are best conceptualized as a product of the legislative professionalization movement during the last decade. They

are a new external resource of caucus leadership—another means of solidifying the new powers of the state legislature. Legislative campaign committees would have developed (and are developing) quite independent of party fluctuations. Implications of this perspective are discussed.

A Critique of the Party Adaptation Perspective

Precise explanations for the emergence of new political organizations, such as legislative campaign committees, are often unclear. Several general perspectives are frequently used. The sociological view centers on the *functions* desired by politicians, business leaders, or formal governmental institutions. When there exists a gap between the functions performed by an existing organization and the needs of its members, the unit will innovate or new structures may be created to supplement or replace the inadequate organization (Merton 1945). The economic approach holds that political organizations, similar to business firms, appear when conditions are favorable. They then are used to win power and disburse benefits. Urban party machines represent a case in point. Along the same lines, Weber (1958) would integrate the economic perspective with the political entrepreneurs who, on their own account and risk, create and maintain a political organization as a tool of power. The formal rules and regulations found in these structures serve to legitimize its authority. The urban party "boss" typifies such political capitalists. Finally, Lipset and Rokkan (1967), Mayhew (1986), and others focus on the historical antecedents and patterns of political, economic, and cultural traditions. Certain sub-cultures are more agreeable to political organizations than others. To understand why political organizations prosper in one area and not another, they argue that a broader cultural perspective is needed.

The functionalist perspective certainly has dominated explanations of both national and state-level LCC development to date. Herrnson, commenting on the growing significance of the Hill Committees, suggests they "provide some preliminary support for the hypothesis that parties are capable of adapting to the changing political environment" (1986, 594). Writing over a decade ago on state party dynamics, Robert Huckshorn noted that state-level LCCs exist only in cases of "weakened party structures" (Dwyer and Stonecash 1992, 328, citing Huckshorn 1980, 101). Salmore and Salmore concur: "Observers of legislative caucuses' activities often note the extent to which they have taken over the electoral functions of what was conventionally thought of as 'party organization.' This usually occurs because of the weakness of those organizations" (1988, 197). More recently, Anthony Gierzynski has argued that "the widespread existence of legislative party

campaign committees . . . is undoubtedly a result of the need to fill a void [left by the state party committees]" (1992, 12).

Nearly all interpretations of LCC development follow a similar logic: (1) the cost and technical component of presidential and gubernatorial elections has spilled over into congressional and state legislative campaigns; (2) in order to respond to these changing conditions, candidates sought to band together in a larger organization with greater resources and expertise; (3) traditional party units lack these resources; and (4) legislative campaign committees were created to fill the void.

From this perspective, advocates of strong parties welcome these new units. Legislative campaign committees are seen as a check on the shift toward candidate-centered campaigns. Rather than conceiving the growth of LCCs as distinct from, and perhaps in competition with, traditional party organizations, most party scholars tie them neatly together in a functionalist bundle.

Nevertheless, three broad criticisms can be raised regarding this perspective: (1) unexplained variance between states with similar party organizations; (2) a mistaken assumption regarding the historic role of parties in state legislative campaigns; and (3) the surprising weakness of minority party LCCs. Each will be discussed below.

LCC Growth and Weak Parties

Viewing LCCs as a response to weak parties does not explain variations in LCC development. For example, some of the earliest, most active LCCs were found in New York and California. These states have very different party traditions. Mayhew's exhaustive study of state party organizations finds California to be "the last place anybody would look to find traditional party organizations, and in fact none turns up in records of the last half century" (1986, 185). New York, on the other hand, is noted as one of only seven strong party organization states (Mayhew 1986, 196). Legislative campaign committees in California were not created to bolster party organizations, but to substitute for the party organizations that never were (Sorauf 1984, 69, 80). In New York, LCCs coexist with some of the most viable party structures in the nation (Jewell and Olson 1988, 66).

Table 1 notes the correlation between party organization strength and LCC resources. Party vitality is assessed with five measures. The first is extracted from Mayhew's (1986) work; the level of analysis is the state and the scale ranges from "1" (a weak party organization state) to "5" (a strong party organization state).¹ The next four measures are from Cotter, et al. (1984). They rank order party organization strength at both the state and

Table 1. Correlation Between Party Organization Strength and Legislative Campaign Committee Strength

| LCC Strength (contributions in \$) | Party Organization Measures | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| | Mayhew's Scale | Cotter's Measures | |
| | | Local Dems | State Dems |
| Dem House LCCs | .02 | .03 | .19 |
| Dem Senate LCCs | .59* | .71* | -.27 |
| | | Local Reps | State Reps |
| Rep House LCCs | .16 | .44 | -.20 |
| Rep Senate LCCs | .55* | .65* | -.11 |

N = 18

*Significant at < .05 level.

Party organization strength is measured with two scales; 1) Mayhew's (1986) five-part measure, where 1 notes a weak party state and 5 implies a strong party state; 2) Cotter et al.'s (1984) party organization index. It is compiled for both parties at the state and local level.

LCC strength is assessed with Gierzynski's (1992) data on expenditures in 1982, 1984, and 1986. This variable is measured in dollars.

local level, for both Democratic and Republican organizations (1984, 28-29 and 52-53, respectively).² Unfortunately, a similar state-by-state breakdown of LCC strength has not been conducted. For our purposes, Gierzynski's (1992) data are used. He aggregates the amount of funds contributed by LCCs to state legislative candidates in selected states.³

There certainly have been a number of forces that have transformed state legislative elections—several will be discussed below. From the functionalist perspective we would expect that in an era of dealignment and competitive/costly elections, states with weak central party committees would develop LCCs first, and at a faster pace. Simon-Rosenthal is rather explicit about this: "In the absence of a state party apparatus raising money and providing campaign assistance to legislative candidates, legislative leaders stepped in to fill the void" (1993, 5). The converse thus also would appear

to hold true; that is, strong party states will have less significant LCCs, if any at all.

Although several of the correlations found in Table 1 suggest a relationship between LCC development and party strength, they are generally in the *opposite* direction. Those states with the most viable party committees also have the most extensive LCCs; the relationship is generally positive, *not* negative. This appears to be particularly true with regard to senate LCCs; over one-half of the coefficients are statistically significant and positive. The only moderately negative relationship is for state-level Republicans. These coefficients are, nevertheless, modest. Overall, Table 1 provides little support for the "party decline leading to LCC growth" view of LCC development.

A parallel argument regarding the relationship between party vitality and LCC growth posits that the greater the variance between state party organizations in a given state, the more likely the weaker organization will develop strong LCCs. Gierzynski writes:

The best developed caucus committees within each state tend to be Democratic committees—such as those in Wisconsin, Maine, Minnesota, and Indiana. This may have something to do with the fact that the Democratic state party organizations in those states tend to be weaker than the Republican state party organizations (1992, 13).

While this may appear straightforward, it is difficult to support empirically. Again using Cotter et al.'s rankings and Gierzynski's data, the correlation between Democratic state committees (in states where they are weaker than the Republicans) and Democratic LCCs is .30. This figure was not found to be statistically significant at the .95 level, due perhaps to the rather small sample ($n=18$). A comparable analysis cannot be conducted for Republican organizations, as nearly every Republican LCC in Gierzynski's sample is found in a state with a strong Republican party organization. Thus, the modest finding for Democratic organizations and the exclusion of Republican units does little to buttress this "adaptation through need" perspective. At the very least, we might be hard pressed to explain why this dynamic applies to Democratic organizations but is secondary, if not irrelevant, to Republican LCCs.

Another criticism can be made by comparing house and senate LCCs in each state. If LCCs are simply a response to waning state party strength, we would expect house and senate units to develop at roughly the same pace. There is little evidence that this occurs. House Democrats in New Jersey established an aggressive campaign unit several years before the senate Democrats did the same. The California House Democrats, under the leadership of Jesse Unruh, formed a legislative campaign organization some

ten years before the senate Democrats joined the act. The Maine Republicans now have a Senate LCC, but no similar organization in the House. The same can be said for the Missouri Democrats. Moreover, while the Republicans in the Illinois Senate raised nearly one-quarter of a million dollars in 1981-1982, their colleagues in the house collected less than one-fifth that amount during the same period.

There is no evidence that house or senate candidates historically have received the lion's share of state committee assistance directed at state legislative races. Nor is there any indication that candidates running for either office have been (are) needier; they both face the same political environment. Therefore, if party decline was the only explanation, or even the foremost explanation, the variance found in both the emergence and strength of LCCs within many states would appear contradictory.

The Assumption of Filling a "Void"

A second broad critique of the functionalist view is that it assumes a much larger role performed by parties than has been historically accurate. We are led to believe these units were created by *legislators* to perform services once provided by traditional parties. Yet, it is debatable whether state and local party committees ever were extensive players in state legislative campaigns. Although Cotter and his colleagues (1984) found state legislative campaigns to be an important piece of state and local party activity, and Frenreis and Gitelson have demonstrated similar findings (1993), it is much different to suggest that party committees were principal players in these campaigns. The aid of even the most aggressive party committees generally makes up only a fraction of overall campaign efforts. While party money may comprise the largest single source of money in state legislative races, it very rarely amounts to more than one-fifth of the overall budget (Jones 1984; Sorauf 1988). In fact, during the 1960s—the period immediately prior to the germination of many LCCs—roughly one-half of the state party committees made no contribution to state legislative races whatsoever (Cotter et al. 1984, 23). Jewell and Olson apparently were correct in noting that in the past "legislative candidates, whether incumbents or challengers, [were] on their own during a campaign, building their own organization, raising their own funds, and developing issues" (1988, 217).

It also is not clear that these organizations were created by rank-and-file legislators to complement their electoral resources. A number of studies have argued that these new units, for all practical purposes, act as extensions of the caucus leadership (Redfield and Van Der Slik 1992; Gierzynski 1992, Shea 1993). Fully 29 out of 31 LCC officials interviewed by

Gierzynski said legislative leaders, not caucus members, control LCC activities. To be sure, caucus members often must plead with caucus leadership to receive any assistance and in some instances incumbents get no help at all (Dwyer and Stonecash 1990, 26). In this light it is difficult to see how LCCs simply represent "a centralized source of campaign funds that candidates in need can go to for assistance" (Gierzynski 1992, 12).

Minority versus Majority Differences

Finally, Theodore Lowi's critique of functionalism (1963) holds that adaptation by parties is primarily a tendency of minority parties. He writes: "A stunning defeat at the polls is more likely to derange structure, prevailing interests and prevailing ideology" (1963, 582). The reorganization of the Democratic Caucus in the House following Reagan's early budgetary success, and the creation of the Democratic Leadership Council in the mid-1980s are perhaps fitting illustrations.

Again, there is little evidence to suggest that minority parties created LCCs first or that these units are in a more advanced stage of development. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case. The earliest to develop and the most affluent units have nearly universally been in the majority.

All this is not to suggest that the sociological view is completely misguided; traditional parties may have been slow to respond to changing campaign technologies. Still, suggesting that these units were created to bolster outdated party units may be an oversimplification. Rather than take the functionalist argument at face value, a systematic analysis is in order. As Lowi writes: "Political scientists are not new to functionalism, but it seldom plays a sufficient part in their analysis. It is in the vocabulary but seldom in use" (1963, 582).

Other Factors Contributing to LCC Growth

If party dynamics do not explain LCC development, what does? Several factors which may have led to LCC development and maturation are examined below. The first portion of the review looks at these changes more generally, and the second views them in relation to each other using multivariate techniques.

The Mushrooming Cost of Elections and A New Competitive Environment

One decisive variable in the growth of state LCCs surely may have been the sky-rocketing cost of state legislative campaigns during the last

decade. Ruth Jones has noted that "the cost of [state] legislative campaigns seems to have increased more rapidly and more sharply than most other campaigns" (1984, 175). A few illustrations may be helpful. The average contested lower house campaign in Oregon in 1980 was slightly under \$50,000; in 1988 it was nearly \$105,000. An average senate race in Washington State cost roughly \$80,000 in 1980; in 1988 it was over \$225,000. During this same period the cost of state legislative races in Idaho grew by 87 percent, and in Florida by 123 percent (Redfield and Van Der Slik 1992; Moncrief 1992; Gierzynski and Breaux 1991). These numbers are staggering even when inflation is accounted for, and portray a pervasive trend.

Several explanations may account for this. An increase in split-ticket voting over the last two decades has been well documented (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979; Crotty 1984; Jacobson 1987; Wattenberg 1988). Voters increasingly cast ballots based on candidate evaluations and/or specific issue preferences instead of partisan loyalties. "Personalized incumbencies" and "particularized benefits" help ensure incumbent reelection in this environment, particularly at the state legislature level where less information on opposing candidates is available. In order for challengers to overcome this advantage, extensive campaigns are required. Challenger expenditures are effective in this environment—that is, the effects of expenditures are found to be greater for challengers than incumbents (Giles and Pritchard 1985, 72). Incumbents respond accordingly, thereby pushing up the cost for both.

Similarly, declining party loyalties suggest volatile electorates. Although studies pointing to a declining number of marginal state legislative elections may be telling (Weber, Tucker and Brace 1991), incumbents are perhaps no safer today than in the past. This paradox is discussed at the congressional level by Jacobson (1987) and supported at the state level by Garand (1991). Jacobson notes that "[v]ote margins could increase without making incumbents any safer because electorates have become more volatile and idiosyncratic across districts." In brief, partisan dealignment has increased the competitiveness of most open seats and altered the definition of marginal districts. Seats once considered "safe" or "solidly Republican/Democratic" are increasingly open to challenge. Campaigns that are targeted for a heavy infusion of resources are able to overcome what in the past may have been an overwhelming partisan disadvantage.⁴

It may also be that state legislative candidates—both incumbents and challengers—find it increasingly difficult to run effective grassroots, low cost campaigns. For one thing, sociological changes over the last few decades, such as the decline in civic group membership and less discretionary time for non-family activities, make old-style campaigning difficult. Candidates are driven to media-centered campaigns to communicate with

voters. The days of neighborhood networks and word-of-mouth campaigns are disappearing, even at the state house level.

It is not clear whether the rising cost of campaigns contributed to the growth of state-level PACs, or whether heavy PAC contributions during the 1970s increased the cost of elections (in other words, which came first—chicken or egg). In any event, the role of PAC money at the state level is another important, perhaps telling development. In many states, incumbents now receive over 50 percent of their campaign budgets from PACs. Political action committee money in Maryland, for example, doubled during the 1980s (Alexander 1992, 124, citing Common Cause 1990). This trend does not appear limited to geography, demography, or political leanings (Alexander 1992, 124).

Legislative campaign committees have joined the act. These new units have become major vehicles for PACs, as well as for individuals, to gain influence with legislative leaders. In New York, 40 percent of all special interest money used in legislative elections in 1992 was contributed to the legislative campaign committees (Sack 3 December 1992). In tandem with special interest monies, an interesting "role reversal" has developed between state legislative leaders and members of Congress. Anxious to avoid redistricting problems, a tide of money has drifted from Washington to state capitols. House members, particularly those from states with shrinking state congressional delegations, contributed heavily to state LCCs during the last two elections (Gruson 31 May 1992).

Finally, the frequency of state legislative elections (many states hold both house and senate elections every two years) may compound the financial pressures of state legislative campaigns. Legislative campaign committees may have been developed to offset this omnipresent strain.

It is debatable whether LCCs are simply a response to the rising cost of campaigns, or are in fact a major part of this development. It might be argued, however, that increased reliance on non-traditional, expensive modes of campaigning—such as media-centered campaigns, extensive public opinion polling, and high-powered strategic counseling—was antecedent to the establishment of LCCs at the state level. Perhaps these changes compelled legislative leaders to create units capable of taking advantage of them. Centralized units help cut costs. Moreover, the growing volatility of state legislative electorates may have led legislators to seek refuge with one another. This line of reasoning parallels Schlesinger's notion of merging of candidate nuclei during competitive periods (1991, 1985).

Because state legislative elections now are exceedingly expensive and because legislators no longer can count on partisan electorates, it makes sense that LCCs have been the byproduct. This might help explain why

these new units have been created in both strong and weak party states. It also would explain why they are least pronounced in the South—the region where legislative competition has been low until quite recently.

Fragile Majorities

Another general trend that may have contributed to the growth of LCCs is the importance, yet growing uncertainty, of majority party control. Conceivably due to declining party loyalties among the electorate, there has been a sharp decline in the margin of seats held by majority parties in state legislatures (Gierzynski 1992, 11). This change has been dramatic in three of the four regions and is noticeable in the South. Many of the resources and perquisites now available to state legislators are most pronounced for the majority caucus—not to mention the ability to control committees and the flow of legislation. The growth of LCCs thus might be seen as a response to fragile majorities, or as a mechanism to attain this important position.

A negative relationship emerges when the spread of seats between party caucuses (in each house) is correlated with LCC resources. This is particularly true during the mid-1980s, the precise time when many LCCs were developing. In 1986, for example, the correlation between the variation in senate caucuses and LCC resources was $-.21$. This suggests LCC resources are more extensive in states where the split between the majority and minority is slim, and is consistent with Simon-Rosenthal's (1993) finding of a very high correlation between partisan competition within legislatures and the mere existence of LCCs in that state.

A cursory review of 1992 also provides support for this conjecture. Legislative campaign committees from states with narrow majorities appear to have had disproportionately large war chests. In Ohio, for example, the House is controlled by only five seats. The Democratic House Campaign Committee—the majority unit—raised nearly \$5 million in 1992. In the senate, where the spread between the parties is much larger, the majority LCC (the Republicans) raised only \$2 million during the same period. We also might compare the war chest of the Ohio House Democrats to that of the New York State Assembly Democrats, who also comprise the majority, but by a very large margin (nearly 40 seats). In 1992 they raised less than one-half as much as their Ohio counterparts.

While it is difficult to infer causation, it is at least logical to expect contributors to perceive the implications of majority party turnover. Simply put, these new units may have been created and are maturing because of frail legislative majorities.

Aggressive Leaders

The role of legislative leaders, such as Michael Madigan in Illinois, Willie Brown in California, Tom Loftus in Wisconsin, Warren Anderson in New York, and Vern Riffe in Ohio should not be dismissed. The exact role these and other leaders played in the creation of their respective LCCs is a bit unclear. We might suggest that the ability to merge favorable environmental conditions to create viable organizations requires aggressive leadership. This effort may be aided in states with strong party-in-government structures; the perceived ability of the caucus leadership to control the flow of legislation certainly might help to finance these new units. Former congressman Tony Coelho often has been credited with transforming and augmenting the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee during the early 1980s (Herrnson and Menefee-Libey 1990). The role of state legislative leaders certainly has meant no less to their organizations.

Perhaps Weber's (1958) discussion of political entrepreneurs or the economic perspective is more to the point. The mushrooming cost of legislative campaigns coincided with, or was fueled by, the rapid increase of political action committees following the Federal Elections Campaign Act of 1974. From what we know about the strategies of PACs—their eagerness to secure access to decision making structures—caucus leadership might have been the target of a flood of special interest monies. In Pennsylvania, for example, "a large number of PACs contribute disproportionately to the campaign committees of party leaders" (Jewell 1986, 12). Clever legislative leaders simply found the opportunity to turn PAC monies into leadership resources. This would help to explain the variance between minority and majority party LCCs, the unexpected relationship between strong party states and LCC strength, and differences between houses within the same state. Willie Brown of California may have hinted at the true impetus behind his LCC when he noted: "I don't use [LCC resources] based on party participation or party loyalty; I use it based on speaker loyalty" (Salmore and Salmore 1988, 197).

Legislative Professionalism

A final general trend has been the professionalization of state legislatures during the 1970s, which may have heightened the appeal of state legislative office (Rosenthal 1990; Chubb 1988; Fowler and McClure 1990). Over the last few decades there has been renewed interest in state and local institutions, including such phenomena as Reagan's "New Federalism" and the decentralization, neighborhood movement beginning in the late 1960s.

State legislatures responded to their increased responsibility by lengthening sessions, expanding office and staff resources, and increasing their own salaries. States holding annual legislative sessions grew from 19 in 1962 to 43 in 1986; legislative salaries in ten states reached the median family income by 1979 (Chubb 1988). Notions of a "citizen-legislature" are rapidly vanishing from state government.

The pace of professionalization, termed "congressionalization" by some (Alexander 1992), did not slow in the 1980s. In New York, legislative salaries during that decade climbed to \$57,500. Extra remuneration for leadership posts and per-diem allocation provide upwards of an additional \$45,000. Allocation for staff resources, both in state capitals and in district offices, have seen a similar increase. The average number of staff members per legislator in New York is only slightly lower than in the U.S. House of Representatives (Fowler and McClure 1990).

In their study of why people decide to run for Congress, Linda Fowler and Robert McClure find the growing financial benefits and personal prestige of state legislative office as a new force behind the declining number of state legislators willing to run for Congress. The amount of exposure given to state legislators, due both to the increased workload and promotion resources (franking, etc.), make these positions prized for young, ambitious pols. The growing tenure (declining turnover) of state legislators may bear testimony to this perspective (Niemi and Winsky 1987).

Rather than focusing on changes in the electorate or in the political environment, Alan Ehrenhalt (1992) suggests that the type of person willing to run for public office has changed. The modern pressures and strains of campaigning filter out certain would-be politicians and leave others—ones who actually enjoy the rigors. These young, aggressive people are more likely to see their job as a life-long profession, rather than a brief stepping-stone to other career goals.

We might speculate, then, that LCCs were created as a means of protecting not only jobs, but professions. This may increase employment opportunities for campaign professionals who relentlessly market their services to individuals—thereby yielding a perpetuating cycle. It is telling to note that *every* state with what might be termed a "professional legislature"⁵ now has legislative campaign committees; only 50 percent of the states with "part-time" legislatures have these units.

A Multi-Variate Analysis

The relative import of each of the aforementioned changes in the development and vitality of state LCCs is difficult to assess—each has certainly

played a role. Many of these new environmental conditions are tied to one another, such as the cost and competitiveness of elections. One attempt to sort out these nuances is to operationalize each dimension, and to include them in a multivariate analysis.

The time-frame used here is the mid-1980s. This is done for two reasons. First, we are interested in the conditions which led to the creation or development of LCCs, and most LCCs were formed during this period. Second, by selecting 1984-1986 as the period of analysis, we are able to combine two sets of data on LCC resources, yielding a larger sample than if a more recent period was selected. (There have been few comprehensive studies of LCCs' resources.)

The Variables

Two dependent variables are used. The first is whether or not the state hosts an LCC (Jewell 1986 identifies thirty LCC states). Since this is a dichotomous measure, a logistic analysis is used. The second dependent variable is a measure of LCC vitality. While similar states may host LCCs, the resources and activities of these new units may be significantly greater in one state than in another, depending on a number of variables. In order to operationalize this dimension, Gierzynski's (1992) data on LCC budgets during the 1984 election cycle is combined with Jewell and Olson's (1986) survey of LCC resources, also from 1984. The total sample is 17, roughly one-half the LCC states.

Several independent variables are introduced. "Party Strength" is a measure of the state party committee vitality in each state. This is extracted from Cotter et al.'s analysis (1984, 28-29).⁶

A measure of state-level partisan competition is Austin Ranney's often used index. Here the average of three indicators of Democratic strength are tallied from 1981 to 1988: the percentage of popular vote for gubernatorial candidates, the percentage of seats held by the Democrats in the legislature, and the percentage of time the Democrats held both the governorship and a majority in the state legislature (see Beck and Sorauf 1992, 38-40). The range of scores on this scale are from 1.00 (complete Democratic success) through .50 (truly competitive), to .00 (complete Republican success). Thus, the closer the score to .50, the more competitive that state. In order to make the interpretation of the regression coefficients clearer, however, this scale is converted to suggest the *higher* the ranking, the more competitive the state. Delaware, New York, Nevada, Michigan and New Jersey are at the top, and nearly all the southern state are at the bottom.

"Marginal Seats" is the number of marginal state legislative districts. Weber, Tucker and Brace (1991) examine election returns in 20 lower state houses from 1950 and 1986 and determine the average number of competitive districts. This figure is divided by the total number of lower house seats to create a measure of the relative marginality.

A measure of legislative professionalization is also included. Kurtz's (1992) three-part scale—based on length of session, staffing levels, and member pay—is used. States at the bottom of the scale are the least professional, "part-time" bodies, and those at the top are believed to be the most professional.

Unfortunately, a reliable measure of the relative cost of state legislative elections is difficult to operationalize. While there have been studies of a small set of states (the largest being 10, conducted by Breaux and Gierzynski in 1992), comprehensive works on state campaign finance, particularly for this time period, are scant. Thankfully, a team of scholars are now in the process of collecting this information in 25 states.⁷

The reader will note modest variation in the time-frame used to operationalize the measures. For example, Marginal Seats is calculated from 1950 to 1986, and Professionalization is based on data from the late 1980s. I would argue, however, that the concepts measured by these variables are fairly rigid. That is, states that had professional legislatures in 1988 are likely to be the very states foremost in that direction during the early 1980s. The same can be said about partisan competition. Moreover, the marginality of lower house seats is a good, albeit imperfect, indicator of the marginality of state senate seats.

Findings

Results of the logistic regression, using whether or not the state hosted a LCC in 1984 as the dependent variable, are found in Table 2. Although the levels of statistical significance are somewhat disappointing, legislative professionalization clearly emerges as the variable most likely to change the odds of a state hosting one of these new units. Conversely, the strength of the state party organization appears to make little difference. The overall model predicts a modest 77 percent of the cases.

Table 3 notes the results of an OLS regression, using LCC resources as the dependent variable. By examining the standardized coefficients we again can see that legislative professionalization is the strongest variable in the model. In fact, it is the only variable statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence interval—although with such a small sample this may be an overly rigorous criteria.

Table 2. Logistic Regression of Factors Leading to the Creation of State Legislative Campaign Committees

| Variable | Coefficient | Significance |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Professionalization | 11.3 | .16 |
| Marginal Seats | 1.9 | .52 |
| Ranney Scale | .2 | .45 |
| St. Party Strength | .1 | .49 |
| Constant | -22.8 | .16 |
| Goodness of Fit | 15.57 | |
| Percent Predicted | 77.78% | |

Dependent Variable: The state did not host an LCC in 1986 (0); the state did host an LCC in 1986 (1).

N = All 50 States

Table 3. OLS Regression of Factors Contributing to the Strength of State LCCs

| Variable | Slope | S.E. | Beta | T-Ratio |
|---------------------|---------|--------|------|---------|
| Professionalization | 723.4 | 296.3 | .46 | 2.44 |
| Ranney Scale | 55.1 | 28.5 | .36 | 1.93 |
| St. Party Strength | 1.5 | 1.1 | .32 | 1.44 |
| Marginal Seats | -1456.5 | 1178.0 | -.27 | -1.24 |
| Constant | -3167.8 | 1188.7 | | -2.67 |

R-Square = .51

Dependent Variable = Total LCC resources in 1984-1986 election cycle, measured in dollars (in thousands).

N = 17

Several other interesting findings emerge from this regression. The extent of state-wide partisan competition (Ranney Scale) seems to play an important, positive role. Recall that the scale is inverted, suggesting that as levels of competition increase, LCC resources also expands. The inverse can be said of the number of marginal state legislative seats.⁸ As the number of marginal seats decline, so too, apparently, do LCC resources.

It should be noted it is possible that the causal arrow presented here is reversed. That is, perhaps growing legislative resources leads to marginal

seats. Yet because both the marginal seat measure and the state-wide partisan competition variable seem to have roughly the same influence on the dependent variable, and it would be a stretch to reverse the causal arrow for the latter (Ranney Scale is basically a measure of state-wide election returns), we can be confident in the current model specification.

Once again, the strength of state party committees seems to have little bearing on LCCs. In fact, where we might expect a negative coefficient (again, party atrophy leading to LCC strength), the slope is positive.

For both the logistic and OLS regression a number of additional controls were introduced, including minority and majority differences, population, and local party strength. None of these measures had any significant bearing.

Discussion

The functionalist view of LCC development posits a direct link between these new units and traditional party organization decay; as the latter failed to respond to the new political environment, LCCs were created. This analysis suggests that a complex mix of variables—many of them distinct from party activity—have led to LCC development. The *positive* correlation between party organization strength and LCC resources is especially revealing. It simply is not clear that these new units are linked to traditional party decline.

Perhaps because many scholars have been quick to label LCCs as party adaptations, there also is a general notion that they undertake "party-like" activities and hold similar goals. Gierzynski writes: "[LCCs] appear to be very similar to the typical political party organization" (1992, 58). Although findings presented here do not *directly* speak to the similarity between traditional party committees and LCCs, some light is shed on the issue. That is, the forces which have led to their development may say a good deal about LCC activities and objectives.

Legislative professionalization appears to be the most important exogenous variable. This may be rather telling. As legislative service becomes full-time, lucrative and prestigious, members view these posts as professions and careers. Keeping their job becomes an intensified concern, particularly in competitive districts. There is also an added emphasis on attaining/retaining majority party control. Conceivably, as noted above, LCCs are simply tools of the caucus leadership—whose foremost goal is to augment the size of the caucus.

Another important piece of this development concerns the new balance between governors and state legislatures. Throughout much of this century,

state government and politics were dominated by the executive. The legislature was little more than a rubber stamp or token opposition, and the state party committee was used as the governor's political strong-arm. Internally, legislative professionalization has given caucus leaders independence and power, particularly with regard to budgetary matters. State party organizations, nevertheless, have remained under the command of the governor or gubernatorial candidate. It appears that legislative leaders have seen fit to create their own *external* power sources. With LCCs, they now control significant campaign resources. Among other things, this affords the opportunity to distance members from unpopular candidates on the party ticket—including the gubernatorial candidate.

Finally, with the expansion of legislative duties and resources comes the growth of professional staff. These people are not granted their jobs as patronage, as in the past, but are hired for their skills. They are paid very well and often hold their posts at the discretion of caucus leadership. Not only are their paychecks tied to the success of the caucus, but there are few material or ideological links with the traditional party. These are often the very people who conduct LCC activities (Shea 1994).

It stands to reason, then, that because legislators increasingly value their jobs and caucus leaders covet majority control, the scope of LCC activities will be narrowly fixed—geared only to reelection and augmenting the caucus. Accordingly, it is difficult to see how LCCs (particularly in professional, competitive states) would be interested in many of the functions geographic parties historically have undertaken. Foremost among these roles, and perhaps the most immediately apparent, is forging united action in a complex, diffuse political system—that is, overcoming what V.O. Key (1964) termed "constitutional obstruction." As myopic, election-driven units, it is doubtful that LCCs will choose to fulfill any unifying role. Would a House LCC be willing to aid a state senate or gubernatorial candidate? Does it really matter to LCC operatives or the caucus elite that the government is divided, as long as they are in the majority? The same might be said about the articulation and support of a set of policy alternatives, e.g., a party platform.

It has fallen exclusively upon party organizations to offer alternatives in non-competitive areas and in districts with entrenched incumbents. It is very doubtful that LCCs would expend resources in such races for the sole purpose of providing voters a choice, however basic to democracy and notions of accountability such a choice may be. Moreover, it is doubtful that LCCs would be anxious to spend money on general party-building activities, such as voter registration drives, in non-competitive districts. While not

uncharacteristic for party organizations, what would be the incentives for LCCs to do so?

In brief, the very reasons why LCCs were created suggest that their goals and range of activities are conceivably more limited than those historically undertaken by party organizations. It is difficult to define precisely what "party-like" implies, and we may continue to label these units as such. At a minimum, however, our conceptualization of this term may need some fine-tuning.

Once we theoretically detach party nuances from LCC dynamics, we also can better assess the relationships between the two. It seems misguided, or at the very least naive, to combine traditional state party committee resources with LCC assets in an over-arching assessment of "party vitality," as is often done (see, for example, Dwyer and Stonecash 1993; Breaux and Gierzynski 1992). It even may be that the two actually compete for resources and influence. Rather than being a mere adjustment, LCCs may be *the* new competitors. At the very least, the rapid pace with which these new units have become dominant players in state legislative elections may signify a retrenchment of state and local parties' activities, objectives and functions.

Much of the elation and relief over party organizational resurgence during the past decade has been linked to the notion that these units will conduct traditional party functions. State LCCs have been coupled closely to the resurgence perspective, if for no other reason than because their emergence coincided with state party adjustments. The functionalist model was accepted at face value, and, without looking at precisely why they were created, LCCs were ordained adaptations and party-like.

This analysis, however, suggests a different, less auspicious account. The next step is to examine closely what these units do, what they seek to accomplish, and how they interact with traditional party units. We may find that legislative campaign committees are no more party-like than PACs, single interest groups, or independent consulting firms.

NOTES

¹Mayhew's comprehensive study is based upon academic and journalistic writings of the local and state party organization in each state. Although much of his information refers to the party system prior to the 1980s, I would argue it provides a rather good account of each state's party system immediately prior to LCC development, and that this is precisely what we are interested in. That is, what were the conditions leading to LCC evolution.

²Their analysis is based upon two dimensions; institutional support mechanisms and candidate directed services. It should be kept in mind that these scales refer to party organization strength and not level of party competition. The latter is frequently used to reflect the closeness of elections or partisan divisions in the legislature. Such measures are somewhat spurious to our discussion since

a weak party organization state may also have very close legislative and gubernatorial elections. Again, we are concerned here with the level of support the party committee provides to candidates.

³This figure gives us a neat measure of the relative strength of the LCCs in his study, but unfortunately says little about in-kind expenditures and nothing about the remaining 24 LCC states not part of his analysis. Also, data is similar, but certainly not identical, to LCC operating budgets. It does not include, for instance, in-house expenditures or staffing allotments.

⁴In New York, the Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee was able to defeat three Republican incumbents in 1990 by saturating their campaigns with unprecedented resources. Each of the districts had an overwhelming Republican enrollment advantage, and may have been considered "safe" in years prior. Another timely illustration in that same election was the surprisingly strong challenge against New York State Senate Majority Leader Ralph Marino. Marino, a key player in the Nassau County Republican machine, was barely able to hold on to his seat of twenty years.

⁵Although there are several ways one might operationalize this dimension, for our purposes Kurtz's 1992 scale is used. He combines three measures (legislative pay, length of sessions, and staffing) into one scale.

⁶The states with strong and weak state party organizations are virtually the same as those cited in Mayhew (1986).

⁷This group of scholars includes David Breaux, Anthony Gierzynski, Bill Cassie, Keith Hamm, Malcolm Jewell, Gary Moncrief, and Joel Thompson.

⁸The two variables have a .61 correlation.

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