Party Integration and Party Organizational Strength

Robert J. Huckshorn
Florida Atlantic University

James L. Gibson
University of Houston

Cornelius P. Cotter
John F. Bibby
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

In this article, we consider the relationship of party organizational strength and state-national party integration. Specifically, we examine the thesis that national party organizations have made an important contribution to the strengthening of state party organizations. We test the hypothesis that state party organizational strength is a function of national party organization building efforts. Finally, we conclude by speculating on the implications of different developmental patterns for the performance of traditional party functions and the maintenance of the existing party system.

The thesis of party decay in the United States has been commonly accepted by political scientists. Yet it has some telling flaws. One such flaw is the underlying assumption that the various dimensions of party—commonly distinguished as party-in-the-electorate, party-in-government, and party organizations—are changing in the same direction and at the same rate. Hence, perceptions of declining partisanship in the electorate have led to inferences of equivalent change in parties as organizations. Perhaps most unsettling for the thesis is the persistence and growth of

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strong party organizations at the national (see Cotter and Bibby, 1980; and Kayden and Mahe, 1985), state (see Gibson et al., 1983) and local (see Gibson et al., 1985) levels.

That party organizations would flourish in an era of electoral departisanship seems paradoxical. But there are many reasons for expecting party organizations to move against the tide of popular support. For instance, perceptions of declining public support and apprehension over a party-threatening realignment may stimulate parties to enhance their organizational strength (Cotter et al., 1984, ch. 8). And stronger national parties might logically attempt to achieve closer relations with their state affiliates with the objective of exerting party-strengthening influence.

In recent years, scholars have recognized just such a pattern of national-state party relations and have written about the process of party nationalization. For the Democrats, the continuing national convention delegate reforms, the efforts to open the party to greater grass-roots participation, and the substantial structural changes that attended the adoption of the 1974 Charter are commonly cited as evidence of nationalization. The Republican emphasis, in contrast, has been upon programs to strengthen state party organizations, and direct intervention in recruitment, funding, and provision of campaign services to candidates. Thus it is reasonable to hypothesize that the national parties have had some impact on the strength of their state party organizations.

The varied nationalizing emphases of the two parties imply much greater levels of integration of national and state parties than is typically assumed. As the national party organizations have become an increasingly active force in state party politics, the description of political parties as "stratarchies" (Eldersveld, 1964, 1982, p. 99) has become less appropriate. To the extent that party organizations have gotten stronger and better integrated, a major countervailing force to party dealignment and a major new actor in realigning processes may have emerged on the American political scene.

In this article, we consider the relationships of party organizational strength and state-national party integration. Specifically, we examine the thesis that national party organizations have made an important contribution to the strengthening of state party organizations. We test the hypothesis that state party organizational strength is a function of national party organization building efforts. Finally, we conclude by speculating on the implications of different developmental patterns for the performance of traditional party functions and the maintenance of the existing party system. We begin this investigation by explicating our measures of organizational strength and state-national party integration.
National Party-State Party Integration

Integration involves a two-way pattern of interaction between the national and state party organizations. Integration implies interdependence in the sense that neither level of party is necessarily subordinate to the other. Thus, conceptually, integration must be measured both in terms of state party involvement in national party affairs and national party involvement in state party affairs.

While national committee members certainly play a role in communications between the two levels of party (and under the rules of some state parties are ex officio state officers), the state party chair is the principal link between the state and national parties. Therefore, in measuring the level of state party involvement in national committee affairs, we have developed indicators based upon the chairs' reports on the level and nature of their interactions with the national committees.1

The degree of involvement in national committee affairs (membership or leadership roles on major committees are the most frequent activity references) and the frequency and range of chairs' dealings with the

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1 The data reported in this article are drawn from a larger study of party transformation (see Cotter et al., 1984). The project involved the collection of information on three levels of party organization for varying time periods. At the national level, data were gathered for the 1979-1980 period for both parties. The research design at the state level was more complex. For a sample of 54 state parties (27 states), data for the late 1970s were gathered by means of interviews with major party leaders. The 27 sample states are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Interviews were conducted with the state chairs of 53 of the 54 state parties; the executive directors of all 49 of the state parties employing an executive director (and “surrogates” in four of the five remaining states); two governors and a principal representative of the governor in 20 other states; and one national committee member each for 50 of these parties. A variety of data was also collected during site visits to party headquarters and from other archival sources.

Mailed questionnaires were used to collect similar information on the 46 non-sample state parties and on all state parties for the period 1960 to 1978. After extended effort, a list of addresses of over 560 former state chairs was compiled and questionnaires were mailed. A response rate exceeding 61% was achieved through mail and telephone follow-ups. Of the 46 contemporary state chairs surveyed by mail, usable replies have been received from 18, for a rate of 39%.

In a portion of the analysis that follows, change in party organizational attributes is considered by referring to the responses of the former state chairs. Instead of treating the responses as indicative of the condition of the party at a specific point in time, we have classified each chair and party in half-decade time periods. On the basis of the last year the respondent served as chair, four time periods were constructed: 1960-1964; 1965-1969; 1970-1974; and 1975-1980. More than one response from a particular state party may be included in any given time period, and the contemporary sample and nonsample state chairs are included in the 1975-1980 period.
national committee on state party matters were ranked on a trichotomous scale (see table 1). A majority of state parties (60%) ranked “low” on this

2 The indicator was constructed from the state chairs’ responses to the following three questions:

Q15. . . As a member of the National Committee, what are the principal activities that you get involved in?
Q16. On what types of state party matters do you deal with the National Committee? (Probe for activity, frequency.)
Q17. Are there programs or activities within your state that have been implemented because of National Committee recommendations or financial support?

The measure of state party involvement in national party affairs was constructed from a subjective evaluation of the totality of the responses to these three questions. Cotter and Bibby coded the variable and reached agreement in every instance on appropriate coding of each state party. By way of a reliability check, a separate variable was separately coded that indicates frequency of attendance at national committee meeting. Of those rated as highly involved in national party affairs, 100% reported attending most national committee meetings. The comparable attendance figures for those scored as having medium and low involvement in national committee affairs are 89% and 68%, respectively. Thus, the gamma between involvement and attendance is -.82, providing some confidence in the reliability of the coding. The scoring of the individual state parties is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Involvement in National Party Affairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RI-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA-D</td>
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<tr>
<td>MS-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WV-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WY-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA-D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OR-D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data are unavailable for IL-D and KS-D.

Some additional evidence on the reliability of this measure can be provided by examining the responses of the former state chairs. That is, our research design involved intensive interviews with party leaders in 54 state parties. Beyond these party leaders, we surveyed by mail all individuals who served as chair of a state party between 1960 and 1980. Though there are certain perils involved in trying to use the responses of the former state chairs to validate the responses of the current state chairs, the evidence, with qualifications, is elucidating.
measure, while nearly one-fourth were scored as highly involved. Party
differences in levels of involvement are minimal.

The obverse to state chair involvement in national committee affairs
is the national party’s efforts to influence the organization and processes
of the state parties. While there are many subtle forms of such influence,
the national committees have the greatest opportunity for influence
through the provision of services to the state parties. As shown in table
2, the state party leaders reported receiving six types of service from the
national committees, and the Democrats cited a seventh—rule
enforcement.

For 25 of the current state chairs, questionnaire responses were received from an individual
who served as state chair within the preceding four years. The current state chair responses
were thus paired with the responses of a previous chair serving within four years prior to
the current state chair. The former state chair responses can provide some evidence of levels
of state-national integration at time $t-1$.

However, we did not explore in depth state-national relations in the former state chair
questionnaire, instead asking only a limited number of questions. One question asked the
chairs to report the frequency of dealings with the National Committee on various matters.
The following table reports the frequency of interaction reported by the former state chair
in relation to the degree of state party involvement in national party affairs, as reported
by the current state chair. To be clear, we do not expect that the relationship between the
reports of the current and former state chairs will be too strong because of the differing
format of the question and due to the time lag involved. Nonetheless, the data are instructive.

Despite the small number of cases, there is clear evidence of a relationship between the
indicators of state involvement in national party affairs at the two points in time. In every
instance, the state parties scored as having a high degree of integration at time $t$ interacted
the most frequently with the national committee at $t-1$. The relationships are not always
strong but they do provide at least some support for the reliability of the measure of state
involvement in national party affairs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Interacting “Regularly” on</th>
<th>State Party Involvement in National Party Affairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal appointments &amp; patronage</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate assistance</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National convention activities</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing National Committee Programs</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, a certain amount of measurement error is introduced through reliance on the state
party leaders as informants on state party-national party interactions. In that we are trying
to characterize each state party on the degree to which it is integrated with the national
party, there are few alternatives to this approach. It should also be noted that the analysis
which follows is based upon the responses of the state chairs in the 54 sample state parties,
not the universe of 100 state parties.
TABLE 1
STATE PARTY INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL COMMITTEE AFFAIRS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>REPUBLICANS</th>
<th></th>
<th>DEMOCRATS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The service most frequently received by Republican state party organizations was assistance with campaign seminars, an RNC program that has been offered for over twenty-five years. The Democrats are most likely to relate to the national committee on matters of rule enforcement. Generally, the RNC is much more active than the DNC in supporting its state parties. For instance, the RNC was reported to have provided staff—reflecting a quite high level of integration—to nearly two-thirds of the state party organizations, while only a single Democratic organization reported receiving such support. Moreover, distinctive patterns of support are observed, with the RNC emphasizing service relations and the DNC emphasizing rule enforcement.

TABLE 2
NATIONAL COMMITTEES' SERVICES TO STATE PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVICE</th>
<th>PERCENT RECEIVING SERVICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>REPUBLICANS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polls &amp; Research</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter Identification</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Seminars</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule Enforcement</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash Transfers</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Difference between parties is statistically significant at p < .05.
These modes of interaction have been combined in a summary index of national party involvement in state party affairs. Because staff, money, and rule enforcement reflect greater interaction between the national and state parties, these items have been weighted twice as heavily as the other forms of interaction. Not surprisingly, Republican state party organizations score substantially higher on the index, with an average of 4.1 services (of the 6) being received, compared to the Democratic average of 2.2.

Distinct party differences are observed in the relationship between the indicators of these two aspects of integration—state involvement in national party affairs and national party involvement in state party affairs. For Republican organizations, the relationship is effectively zero (r = .11; N = 27), suggesting that participation in national committee affairs is not a prerequisite to receipt of national party services. For Democratic organizations, a moderate, positive relationship exists (r = .38; N = 26); greater state involvement in national party affairs is associated with greater national party involvement in state party affairs. We will have more to say about these party differences below. These two indicators of integration are the major independent variables in the following analysis.

**Party Organizational Strength**

The strength of the state party organizations can be indicated by the concept "party organizational strength." We define strong parties as those which have an enduring headquarters operation and which engage in a

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3 This decision to assign additional weight to these two variables in constructing the measure of national party involvement in state party affairs reflects our judgment that these activities represent a markedly higher level of national party involvement than the other indicators. Providing staff involves a direct and on-the-scene contact between the national party and state party. It also involves a substantial financial commitment by the national party, whether the staff is national party personnel or paid by the national party while serving on state party staff. Cash transfers involve substantial expenditures to the states and require a major commitment by the national party. Cash transfers thus promote interdependence. Finally, rule enforcement creates greater interdependence through rule implementation and compliance activities. On the other hand, polls and research, voter identification, campaign seminars, and technical assistance represent more limited state-national party involvement due to the fact that they tend to be sporadic and isolated events, limited in duration (e.g., the holding of a campaign seminar) and having less of an enduring effect on the organization.

Of course, unequal weights for the items in a scale are extremely common, even if they are rarely acknowledged. For instance, factor score coefficients weight the components of factor scores, and do so often without receiving appropriate substantive attention. Nonetheless, the correlation between the index with unequal weights and an equivalent index weighting each variable equally is .96. Thus, it makes virtually no difference to our analysis which of the measures is used.
variety of activities related to electoral goals. "Strong" parties require both organizational complexity and programmatic capacity. As a minimum, organizational complexity demands the existence of a party headquarters, but beyond that it requires adequate resources in budget and staff to provide for operations of the headquarters. A higher level of complexity implies bureaucratization with clearly defined responsibilities and with tasks assigned to meet them. Over time these assigned duties and positions develop predictable, stable interactions that tend to formalize the structure.

A second component of strong organizations, however, is also required. That is the necessity of developing programmatic capacity that will enable the party to build a constituency, create support, and resist disintegrative forces such as factionalism. Therefore, party organizational strength can be assessed in terms of organizational complexity and programmatic capacity. Because we have explicated this concept and its measures elsewhere (Gibson et al., 1983; and Cotter et al., 1984), we present here only a summary of the indicators.

We have factor-analyzed twelve indicators of the organizational attributes of the state parties for the purpose of creating a summary indicator of the concept. The initial factor analysis revealed three interpretable factors, but, because the factors were themselves so strongly interrelated, a second-order factor analysis was conducted. Figure 1 shows the results of this analysis. The final product is an overall indicator of the strength of state party organizations.4

There have been substantial increases in the strength of state party organizations since 1960, although the Democratic state organizations are considerably weaker than their Republican counterparts. The disparity in Republican and Democratic strength does not vary by region; the Republican dominance is uniform throughout the regions. Within each party there are, however, differences in organizational strength among the regions.

The organizational strength of the state parties has not declined over the period from 1960 to 1980, despite the fact that other dimensions of party (e.g., the party-in-the-electorate) may have deteriorated. Perhaps it is the national party organizations that have been instrumental in strengthening their state counterparts, even in the face of diminishing local party support. Using these measures of party organizational strength and national-state party integration, that hypothesis can be tested.

4 The measure of organizational strength which is employed is the average (across all responses) for the state party for the period 1975-1980. Thus, the score is not usually based solely on the response of the state chair who provided information about the degree of integration with the national party.
FIGURE 1
INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF STATE PARTY
ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH INDICATORS AND FACTORS

Academic Paper Reference:
HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Our central hypothesis is that state party organizational strength is in part a function of levels of state party integration with the national party. The hypothesis reflects two assumptions. The first is that state party organizations will be responsive to national party leadership. The second is that it is difficult for party organizations to acquire strength in the absence of resources. While the initiative for strengthening the party organization may derive from the national committee, the state party, interest groups, or from officeholders, it is rare that weak parties can acquire strength without the intervention or assistance of nonindigenous forces. Thus, a positive correlation between strength and the two dimensions of integration is expected.

A modest correlation is observed when current state party organizational strength is associated with current levels of state-national integration. For Democrats and Republicans there is some tendency for stronger state parties to be more integrated with the national party. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the correlation is a function of only one of the two components of the integration index: greater state party involvement in national party affairs is associated with greater Democratic ($r = .28$) and Republican ($r = .28$) strength, but national party involvement in state party affairs—as reflected in the provision of services—displays no relationship to state party strength within either party.

A more rigorous test of this hypothesis is one that correlates integration with change in strength. The process we envisage suggests that integration at time $t$ should be associated with increases in strength from $t$ to $t+1$. This longitudinal analysis should also aid in unraveling the complex problem of the direction of causality. But even a further qualification is necessary because it should not be expected that integration would have a proportional impact on weak and strong parties alike: rather it is less difficult to make weak parties stronger than it is to make strong parties stronger. Thus, a control for prior levels of strength is advantageous from several perspectives.

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5 We must acknowledge at the beginning that the longitudinal, causal hypothesis is not easily tested. The hypothesis requires data over time in that it asserts that change in organizational strength is a function of state-national integration. We report longitudinal analysis, but the difficulty of collecting such data retrospectively has limited the number of cases upon which the analysis is based. Without complete longitudinal data, it is difficult to unravel the direction of causality. That is, a cross-sectional correlation between strength and integration may reflect the fact that it is strong parties that interact with the national committees, or it may reflect the strengthening effects of national party activity. We make an effort to disentangle the causal model, but ultimately our data are inadequate to establish definitively the direction of causality.
FIGURE 2
STATE PARTY STRENGTH AND INTEGRATION WITH THE NATIONAL PARTY

**DEMOCRATS**

State Party Organizational Strength (t-1) → National-State Party Integration (t) → State Party Organizational Strength (t)

- \( .56/.56 \) (12)
- \( .13/.05 \) (12)

**REPUBLICANS**

State Party Organizational Strength (t-1) → National-State Party Integration (t) → State Party Organizational Strength (t)

- \( .36/.36 \) (16)
- \( .88/.85 \) (16)

NOTE: Integration is indicated by the degree of state party involvement in national party affairs. Entries are Pearson correlation coefficients, except those in italics, which are (standardized) path coefficients.
However, in considering change, controls for other variables that might be responsible for the change are necessary. The hypothesis might be recast to assert that national party integration is associated with increases in state party strength beyond that which would be expected on the basis of so-called "secular" trends alone (i.e., ceteris paribus). Thus, the hypothesis may be simple, but testing it is complex.

Figure 2 reports the relationships between integration and organizational strength, controlling for prior levels of strength. The direction of causality between integration, and organizational strength, is not depicted because, when measured at the same point in time, integration may cause strength (the preferred hypothesis), strength may cause integration, or there may be reciprocal causation. And though the stability of the analysis is limited by the small number of cases, some suggestive patterns emerge. For Democratic organizations, current levels of strength reflect to some degree state party involvement in national party affairs \((r = .28, p = .32)\), which, in turn, is strongly associated with prior strength (the strongest parties of the early 1970s interacting most with the national party in the late 1970s). But current levels of strength are largely independent of prior levels of strength \((r = .13, p = -.05)\). Levels of service interaction—the second indicator of integration—bear no relationship to either current or previous levels of organizational strength (data not shown).

For Republican organizations the pattern is somewhat different. Contemporary strength is strongly associated with earlier levels of strength \((r = .88, p = .85)\), suggesting a much more systematic pattern of change for Republican as compared to Democratic organizations. Current strength is only modestly related to levels of involvement in the national party \((r = .28, p = .08)\), which are in turn only weakly related to prior levels of strength. National committee services seem to have no impact on current strength. Change in levels of strength is unrelated to the degree of integration with the national party \((r = -.06)\).

These data provide some clues to the processes that are occurring. For the Republican organizations, involvement in, receipt of services from, and integration with the national party have no direct impact on current state party organizational strength, despite a fairly high level of activity on the part of the RNC. The great majority of these Republican organizations were already quite strong by the end of the 1970s when this study was conducted,\(^6\) and consequently RNC assistance did not result in significant increases in state party strength. Perhaps this is due to the earlier success of RNC efforts in the 1960s, although we cannot say with

\(^6\) Indeed, the mean organizational strength scores (and the number of cases on which the means are based) for the parties across the four periods are: 1960-1964, -.47 (17); 1965-1969, +.19 (30); 1970-1974, +.33 (14); and 1975-1980, +.41 (77).
any certainty. The strong correlation between earlier and later strength is evidence of the success of these party organizations in maintaining organizational continuity (but, of course, the correlation does not imply stasis). Current RNC activity may contribute to organizational maintenance rather than to organization building, and may be directed toward weaker and stronger parties alike. It may also contribute to variegation of the elements comprising such strength, without necessarily affecting a summary strength measure.

The proportional increments in strength experienced by a state party due to national party efforts will be smaller for strong than for weak parties. Hence, we would expect that fairly substantial national party efforts might have only a small impact on the measure of state party strength when the affected party is already relatively strong. This is the case with the Republicans. On the other hand, there is large scope for measurable impact on Democratic state party organizational strength due to the relative weakness of the Democrats. Though Democratic organizations have gained strength over the past two decades, only a few state parties have approached the level of the Republican state parties.\(^7\)

Cotter and Bibby have independently suggested (1980) that the RNC approach to integrative relationships with the state party organizations has been to emphasize service, while the DNC approach has been to emphasize rulemaking, adjudication, and hierarchical relations. These patterns are confirmed by the data reported here. The conventional wisdom is that a service emphasis strengthens and that a rules/reform emphasis weakens party organizations. The present analysis does not confirm that expectation. The weaker of the two national party organizations—the DNC—has a measurably greater impact upon the strength of state parties than does the service-oriented and stronger RNC. This counterintuitive finding may simply reflect the tendency for any type of interaction with the national party organization to have a magnified impact upon relatively weak state parties. It may also suggest that the increased level of interaction of Democratic state chairs, under the aegis of the DNC, leads to exchanges of information and diffusion of organizational norms and techniques, leading to strengthened state parties. It may well be that the DNC approach of defining national standards and enforcing them upon the state parties brings in its wake inevitable increases in levels of interaction among state party leaders and forces heightened attention to organizational attributes of party.

On the other hand, the state Republican parties may be so comparatively strong that national party impact can be absorbed without palpable change in organizational strength. For instance, while we have

\(^7\) The mean organizational strength scores by periods are: 1960-1964, \(-.87\) (15); 1965-1969, \(+.00\) (21); 1970-1974, \(-.06\) (24); and 1975-1980, \(-.48\) (60).
a measure of national party cash transfers to state party organizations, we are unable to take into account national party contributions to candidates within the states. Conceivably, the massive RNC contributions to candidates in the 1978-1980 period would have had a significant indirect impact on the strength of the state organizations.

This analysis may also reveal unexpected aspects of the process through which integration with the national party facilitates greater state party strength. It is, perhaps, not the direct provision of resources, so much as the process of socializing state party leaders, that accounts for the relationship between integration and the strengthening of state parties. In a period of rapid technological and organizational innovation, the task of alerting party leaders to innovations becomes much more important. There are two facets to the socialization process. The state chairs are coopted to national party organizational values as they deal by phone and mail with national party officers and staff, and as they meet with them at national committee meetings. But also, the state chairs socialize each other in formal seminar arrangements and informal interactions, under the aegis of the national committee meetings. Thus, the national parties may perform an important function in the diffusion of innovations, especially in that this period was one of such rapid technological change.

A seeming paradox emerges from this analysis: the weaker Democratic national party organization seems to have had greater success than the stronger RNC at strengthening its state party organizations. The paradox is resolvable, however, because (1) the resources the DNC provides its generally weak state parties are more likely to be incentives and information, rather than materials, (2) the RNC, despite its considerable levels of material support, cannot easily strengthen what are already strong state party organizations, and (3) national party rule enforcement may be consistent with heightened levels of state-national party organization.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this article we have considered the integration of state and national party organizations. We have examined the consequences of integration for the strength of the state party organizations. In general, we conclude that state-national party integration does seem to strengthen Democratic state party organizations and, while not having such an effect today, may well have done so for the Republican state party organizations in the past. It remains then to consider the broader significance of these findings, especially their consequences for party system change.

Perhaps the most significant such implication is that as the state and national parties become more closely integrated, party resources can be diverted toward organization maintenance in areas of the country in which the electoral fortunes of the party are dragging. The parties have become
more nationalized, in two senses of that term. First, to a much greater extent than earlier, the state parties are constituent units of a national party, influenced by national party performance norms, and capable of coordinated effort to influence the party’s electoral standing, both in targeted areas of the country and at specific office levels. Second, the regional disparities in the condition of the state party organizations and in the electoral competitiveness for such offices as governor and the two houses of the U.S. Congress have been decreasing (Sabato, 1981; David, 1972 et seqq.). In this sense, parties have become nationalized, and state party organizations have become less dependent upon short-term perturbations in local electoral systems. There is now no reason to believe that state party organizational strength, which in the 1960s was on the rise in the face of diminished electoral support for the parties, is determined by the level of party success at the polls or by the level of subjective support for the party in the electorate.

Nor should the role of the national parties as agents of technological and organizational innovation be discounted. The diffusion of innovation, a process greatly facilitated through the activities of the national parties, renders politics less locally oriented.

If party organizational strength is not directly dependent upon the strength of the party in the electorate, then parties may be effective counter-dealigning agents. That is, so long as party organizations are not crippled by the departisanization of the electorate, they can be a significant force in counteracting antiparty trends. This is especially true within the area of public policy. For instance, strong party organizations may be successful at lobbying for supportive public policy, such as subsidies, regulations, and restrictions on potential competitors (e.g., minor-party movements). Were party organizations dependent upon the strength of the party in the electorate, or were their strength determined by the same factors which determine the strength of the electoral party, they would not be able to perform such a function, and the systemic consequences of departisanization would be much more substantial.

Finally, the importance of strong party organizations as independent actors in the electoral area should not be discounted. Much has been written on the changing organizational environment of American electoral politics. The separation of the candidate campaign function from the party organization and the rise of political action committees competitive with parties are rooted in the history of the midcentury, though they were given statutory sanction in the 1970s. The PACs now finance candidate access to the myriad forms of campaign-related services available from highly specialized “commercial politicians.” But despite facile generalizations concerning the weakening impact of such developments upon party organizations, increasing evidence suggests the evolution of overlapping
networks which include party organizations at the national and state levels; campaign specialists whose backgrounds frequently include party organizational staff work and whose clients tend to come principally from a single party; and PACs that look to the party organizations for intelligence and a degree of coordination. To the extent that state and national parties are strong and integrated, they may well have the potential for success in claiming a central directing role in the waging of electoral campaigns, while continuing to maintain their control over the formal symbols associated with nomination and assured ballot position in the general state elections. Thus, we conclude that national-state party interactions have potential for system-level consequences.

REFERENCES


