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CHAPTER 6

“You Don’t Know Me, But Here I Am”: Candidate Perceptions of Party Strength

In the previous two chapters, candidates made scant reference to partisanship or to their role as the standard bearer for a political party. Especially for candidates with as low a profile as many congressional challengers, however, it is inevitable that a substantial percentage of voters will know little about the candidates other than their party affiliation. Despite the fact that we live in an age of decreasing partisanship and increasing split-ticket voting, the candidates still argued that their party label was a major determinant of their success. The popularity of fellow partisans higher up on the ballot, such as presidential candidates Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, as well as gubernatorial and senatorial candidates in these states, was a frequent theme in the candidates’ comments. The role that party organizations played, from the township level to the national level, was also a major source of both frustration and encouragement. Political parties, in short, are a much more important factor in the campaigns of nonincumbents than they are in the campaigns of sitting members of Congress.

All of the candidates’ claims about voters’ partisan cues, however, may say more about partisanship than about party. It is certainly possible that for many candidates, vote share is based more on candidates’ party label than on anything they did in their campaigns. Given the evidence in chapter 3 that there is substantial polarization between competing candidates regardless of the competitiveness of the race (and given my allowance for party “sorting” in the alternatives in chapter 2), it is important to address whether candidate polarization is due to sorting by the candidates or due to pressure from the parties. In the previous chapters, I sought to build a case for viewing congressional campaigns as vehicles for candidate expression in cases where the challenger does not have a realistic chance of vic-
tory. It is equally valid, however, to view these campaigns as vehicles for political parties to express themselves. The possibility exists that parties can do so through a variety of means—through the primary process, through strongly worded advice to candidates, or through financial support. In this chapter I contend that while there may be theoretical reasons to wish this to be the case, it generally is not—and where it is, party expression and party pressure are not regarded favorably by the candidates themselves.

These claims open a can of worms regarding the manner in which parties can be identified. Because there is no monolithic, easily identified ideological entity called the Democratic Party or the Republican Party in the United States, the differences between candidate expression and party expression cannot be assessed without first gaining an understanding of what these candidates conceive their parties to be. While this may appear to be a straightforward proposition, different definitions of political parties abound. At times, we consider parties as aggregations of voters, while at other times we refer to parties as organizations of activists who slate candidates and recruit volunteers. At still other times, we refer to parties as teams of elected officeholders. It is tempting to begin and end a study of parties in congressional elections with a consideration of the national party campaign committees, but as Schwartz (1990) convincingly argues in her case study of the Illinois Republican Party, parties are perhaps best conceived of as networks that include organizations, officeholders, and activists. As I seek to show in this chapter, this is, at least, how candidates view parties.

Thus, the definition of a “strong” party—or a party able to help or hinder its candidates—is dependent upon the definition of party being used. In this chapter I shall distinguish between organizationally strong parties, which are successful in maximizing votes or election victories for their candidates across a number of elections, and ideologically strong parties, which are successful in presenting a clear, unambiguous set of policy proposals to the voters, regardless of the electoral consequences of espousing those views. Clearly, the view discussed above of party expression draws upon this second conception of party strength.

The states in which I conducted interviews provide a convenient contrast between these two party types. In Ohio and Illinois, states where the two major parties have traditionally been strong in the organizational sense, candidates reported little pressure from their party to adhere to any preordained set of issue positions; if anything, the parties pressured their more viable candidates to take moderate positions that were most likely to result in victory or to maximize vote share. In Minnesota and Wisconsin, states where the two parties have traditionally been more ideological and
have a less effective organization, candidates indicated that the two parties often sought to pull candidates away from the political center, even where this may have cost the candidates votes. In the majority of cases, this ideological pressure came from local or state party activists and leaders who sought to influence the candidates’ issue positions through recruitment and endorsements before the candidates were nominated. After candidates had been nominated, the two parties, at all levels, were seen by the candidates as a resource, either in terms of money or in terms of political capital. As one might predict, candidates in organizationally strong areas reported more frequently that, after they had been nominated, their party was helpful than did candidates in organizationally weak areas.

Candidates in organizationally strong areas also differed from their counterparts in organizationally weak, ideologically strong areas in their views on party membership and on the nature of their relationship with their party. The two candidate types shared similar views about the role of the national campaign organizations, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) in their races, with the differences in the level of assistance from national organizations resulting from the candidates’ competitiveness. Somewhat less intuitively, the candidates’ level of party identification was stronger in organizationally strong areas than it was in organizationally weak (and ideologically strong) areas. This finding indicates that allegiance to one’s party is a function not of ideology but of organizational strength—these candidates equated their fortunes with their party to the degree that their party could and had helped them.

As I have with the previous two interview chapters, I begin this chapter by briefly recapitulating the main points of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature. I then return to the Time/Congressional Quarterly survey data in order to provide a general assessment of the relationship between party organization and candidate convergence or divergence on policy. Finally, I present the major themes of the interviews, some illustrative case studies, and some concluding thoughts on the import of these discussions for the study of party behavior.

Party Strength: Organization or Ideology?

In bringing parties into this analysis, it is necessary to ask two questions. First, do parties have the capacity to influence any actions of their candidates? And second, if so, what sort of influence can they have on candidates’ issues positions? That is, do they exert pressure upon candidates to
adopt centrist positions, or do they seek to pull candidates away from their district’s political center?

The contrast between viewing a “strong” party as an organization which gets its preferred candidates elected or as an organization with a clear ideological position is nearly as old as the study of political parties itself. In chapters 1 and 2, I sought to draw a distinction between positive and normative theories of candidate and party positioning. When we address party strength, however, it is the normative and positive theorists who are on the same side, with empirical analysts of American politics frequently on the other side. Frequently, in formal theories a strong party is one that can establish an agenda during campaigns and implement it while in office. The fact that the optimal spatial location of parties differs, as I noted, when one moves from the rather normative 1950 APSA Report to positive theories of party activities such as those of Downs, Riker, and others, is less important in this context than is the fact that both begin from the premise that parties can establish ideological positions.

There are few empirical studies of American politics that seek to use this measurement of party strength as a starting point (although I do discuss some of these studies later in this chapter), yet we should not entirely rule out the role of ideology in political parties. It may well be poor strategy for parties themselves to seek to establish distinct ideological positions, but we might still expect some efforts to do so within the parties. Even if parties do wish to establish positions, however, the question remains as to whether they have the capacity to do so.

Contemporary empirical literature in American politics often emphasizes what David Mayhew (1986, 20) defines as “material,” rather than “purposive” benefits that parties provide to candidates. That is, empirical political scientists looking at American parties tend to see party strength as an organizational, not an ideological trait. When political scientists write about parties, it is almost obligatory to begin with V.O. Key’s (1958, 180–82) tripartite division of parties: the party in government, the party in the electorate, and the party organization. In looking at congressional elections, it has traditionally been the party organization—and more specifically, the national party organization, in the form of the DCCC and the NRCC—that has been singled out as the lone influential actor (see Herrnson 2000, 88). In interviews with directors of the parties’ national congressional campaign committees, Herrnson (2000, 92) found that the party’s national organizational wing has little interest in an ideological “litmus test,” and instead provides assistance to candidates based on their chances of winning. Assistance to candidates is apportioned according to fulfillment by the candidates of nonpolicy criteria, such as individual
fundraising prowess and favorable polling numbers. The parties may provide research on the popularity among voters of different issue approaches, yet in doing so they are appealing to candidates’ instrumental self-interest, not trying to secure commitments to their own ideological positions.

If we are to evaluate strength by using such measures, however, we must begin with the observation that both parties, at the national level, have very limited resources with which to assist and influence candidates. In any given election cycle, the two major national party organizations must decide which of the hundreds of House candidates to support. They can either concentrate their resources, choosing a handful of candidates to give full support, or they can diffuse their resources more broadly among a larger number of candidates. Overwhelmingly, the national party organizations have chosen the former option. This tendency, however, ensures that while local and state level party organizations face similar considerations, one might ask whether these types of organizations have any role whatsoever to play in helping those candidates left out of the national organizations’ decision making. Party organizations at all levels are more generous in their provision of volunteers, position papers, information, strategic assistance, and linkage with other candidates than they are with money. Such assistance is harder to track than is money, yet it comprised an important part of the candidates’ evaluations of party assistance (see Kolodny 1998, 124–54; Herrnson 2000, 100–11). Certainly, financial support may be the best tool for national party organizations to use to try to influence candidates, and the fact that they provide such support to only a few candidates indicates that if parties at any level influence the positions of any but the most competitive candidates, it is not the national parties that do so. State and local parties, on the other hand, may be able to influence less competitive candidates, although they cannot do so through financial support (Schwartz 1990, 218–24).

The Maisel, Huckshorn and Spencer, Kingdon, Hershey, and Leuthold studies have all documented the opinions of congressional candidates regarding party assistance. Hershey concludes her analysis of financial support from party organizations by noting that “the candidates most likely to win are least likely to need the party’s help in doing so. . . . Party help may be most keenly appreciated, and most influential, in campaigns with the slimmest chances of success” (Hershey 1974, 136). My findings corroborate this point. I also agree with Hershey that local party groups, individual party officeholders, and district-level organizations tend to be far more variable in their level of organization and in their interest in House candidates than are the official national party organizations.
This quest to look at the nonfinancial side of party assistance to candidates brings together Key's party divisions somewhat. While the national party organizations have traditionally been loath to become involved in backing candidates in primaries (although this was the case in some 2000 races, as the next chapter shows), they have at times assisted in candidate recruitment. Candidate recruitment, and various less formal means of encouraging candidates—for instance, soothing ruffled feathers from primary competition, providing technical assistance and advice, and providing issue information—have traditionally been the province of local party leaders, prominent members of the party rank-and-file in the electorate, and party leaders within government. Again, of particular concern here are the lower-profile House campaigns. Which party organizations take an interest in such campaigns? How (aside from the obvious financial differences) is party attention different in these campaigns from those of potential winners? Because there is no party organization that takes specific responsibility for the less fortunate congressional candidates, it is important to understand how the candidates view their parties, where they perceive any party pressure to be coming from, what they expect from their parties, and what types of interactions candidates have with their parties as they conceive of them. As the comments in this chapter suggest, most national party attention has little to do with coercion on issues, but state-level and local-level party actors do seek to exert ideological influence upon candidates, and they tend to follow predictable patterns in doing so.

A Brief Return to the Candidate Survey Data

To get a sense of what these patterns are, a brief detour back to the Time/Congressional Quarterly survey data is in order to put the candidates' comments in perspective. As I noted above, the states in which I conducted interviews provide a contrast between party organization types. The distinction between the more traditional, patronage-based party politics of Ohio and Illinois and the more ideological, issue-oriented politics of Minnesota is not my own; quantitative studies (Mayhew 1986, 66–77; Paddock 1998) and more impressionistic studies (Elazar 1972, 84–126; Fenton 1966, 117–54, 194–218) all agree on this distinction. Erikson and Wright (1989) show that these state distinctions matter in the positions of congressional candidates.

The task in this chapter, then, is to explore whether, if differences in party strength or party organization are reflected in candidates' positions,
these differences are a consequence of party pressure or merely an accident of candidates’ choices. To illustrate the connection between party organization and congressional candidates’ positions, let us consider how two of

\[\text{Table 6.1. Candidate Ideology and Polarization by Party Organization and Party Culture}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party Organization Level (TPO)</th>
<th>Elazar Party Culture Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moralistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean LQD</td>
<td>.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Vote Pct. Difference</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(18.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Democratic LQ</td>
<td>.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Republican LQ</td>
<td>.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (Districts)</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview States</th>
<th>ME, WI</th>
<th>OH</th>
<th>IL</th>
<th>MN, WI</th>
<th>IL, OH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean LQD</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td>.499</td>
<td>.664</td>
<td>.628</td>
<td>.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.143)</td>
<td>(.179)</td>
<td>(.160)</td>
<td>(.143)</td>
<td>(.187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Vote Pct. Difference</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(17.6)</td>
<td>(19.1)</td>
<td>(20.1)</td>
<td>(17.6)</td>
<td>(19.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Democratic LQ</td>
<td>.849</td>
<td>.726</td>
<td>.868</td>
<td>.849</td>
<td>.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.123)</td>
<td>(.173)</td>
<td>(.128)</td>
<td>(.123)</td>
<td>(.166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Republican LQ</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.163)</td>
<td>(.169)</td>
<td>(.144)</td>
<td>(.163)</td>
<td>(.160)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (Districts)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* The sole state with a TPO of 3 is Louisiana, which elects representatives through a jungle primary, followed by a runoff between the top two vote-getters. There is only one district where a Democrat faced a Republican in the runoff (therefore, only one LQD measure), although there are four Democrats and five Republicans with LQ scores. Missing cases for LQD = 70 (16.1%).

F-test for H0: No difference in LQD by TPO for all candidates: F = 3.82; p < .01.
F-test for H0: No difference in LQ by TPO for all Republicans: F = 5.20; p < .01.
F-test for H0: No difference in LQ by TPO for all Democrats: F = 1.02.
F-test for H0: No difference in LQD by Elazar category for all candidates: F = 9.13; p < .01.
F-test for H0: No difference in LQ by Elazar category for all Republicans: F = 21.3; p < .01.
F-test for H0: No difference in LQ by Elazar category for all Democrats: F = 15.3; p < .01.
the more comprehensive analyses of party organization by state map onto candidates’ positions.

David Mayhew (1986) has developed a five-point measure of “total party organization” (TPO) by state, which sums individual binary measures of party autonomy, durability, hierarchy, ability to confer nomination on preferred candidates, and control of material incentives for party members. When we compare the LQD scores with TPO measures (see table 6.1), it is evident that Mayhew’s party organization measures do tap differences in the degree of polarization between competing House candidates. Candidates are less polarized, and less consistently polarized (see the slight increase in the standard deviation as one moves across the table), where the states’ parties are more organized. Organizationally stronger parties produce, on average, more centrist candidates, particularly in more competitive districts, but they neglect many candidates entirely.

It might be tempting to claim that these differences are a function of the behavior of only one party—that is, for instance, that the Republican Party in one part of the country (Mayhew’s categories correlate somewhat with regions of the country) may differ sharply from the Republican Party in another region of the country. Or, in applied terms, we may merely be seeing the differences between Northern Democrats and Southern Democrats, or between New England Republicans and the remainder of the Republican Party. To test this, I have broken down the average liberalism quotients for candidates by level of party organization and party. The party LQ scores in table 6.1 show that although Republicans appear to be doing most of the moderating, these differences cannot solely be attributed to one party. Although the ideologies of candidates vary, the parties still move toward each other as party organization increases.

Elazar (1972) distinguishes states by the dominant political culture, arguing that there are three distinct types: individualistic (in which politics is aimed at efficiency, not ideology, and party regularity is prized), moralistic (in which ideology is more important than partisanship or party allegiance), and traditionalistic (in which deference and hierarchy are prized, and party competition is muted or absent altogether). Political culture, for Elazar (1972, 90), encompasses a set of perceptions about what is expected from government, differences in the types of people who become active in politics, and ways in which governing is conducted. The second set of columns in table 6.1 shows that candidate LQ scores also diverge in states where the political culture is more ideological. Although Elazar’s categories are only weakly correlated with Mayhew’s categories, they also demonstrate a potential party influence on candidates.

It is important to note, however, that it is more difficult to make
causal arguments based on Elazar’s descriptions than on Mayhew’s. Because, for Elazar, different types of political culture breed different types of candidates, it is not the influence of parties that matters but simply the fact that different types of individuals are prompted to run for office. Thus, an exploration of the scaled data may suggest that parties wield influence, but we certainly have no proof that parties, under whatever definition we choose to employ, are applying ideological pressure to candidates.

We are, then, compelled to return to candidates’ interview comments to assess the role of parties. The bottom half of table 6.1 compares the candidates from the four interview states to each other and to candidates nationwide. Differences by state in LQD scores here are not quite as pronounced as for the rest of the nation, primarily due to high levels of divergence in Illinois, the strongest party state in Mayhew’s rankings. The high variation in the competitiveness of Illinois races may be one reason for this. Another reason may be Schwartz’s (1990, xiii) contention that Illinois actually contains two party types—a more machine-oriented politics in the north and a more traditionalistic, Southern type of politics in the south. As I noted in chapter 3, other studies have agreed upon the distinctions between party organization and political culture types in these four states; this chapter serves in part to reinforce those distinctions.

The Candidates’ Perspectives on Their Parties

In looking at candidates’ comments about their parties, I seek here to draw out the state differences to see how they apply to candidates’ interactions with their parties. There are three purposes here. First, in analyzing the candidates’ interview comments I seek to provide evidence that (for the most part) it is the expressive voice of candidates, not parties, that comes through in the ideological positions and campaign strategies of those candidates who are unlikely to win election. This may be a function of an inability for (some) political parties to impose positions upon their candidates or of a lack of interest on the part of parties in doing so. Second, given what we know about the concentration of the national party organizations—here, the DCCC and the NRCC—on competitive races, I seek to show what the national parties do for candidates of different levels of competitiveness and how candidates can demonstrate their ability to compete to the national party organizations. And third, given the built-in contrast between state and local party organizations in Ohio and Illinois, on the one hand, and Wisconsin and Minnesota, on the other, I document the ways in which level of party organization can lead to, respectively, an
emphasis by organizationally strong parties on encouraging potentially competitive candidates to take election-seeking positions and an emphasis by ideologically strong parties on encouraging candidates to take expressive positions that can at times be detrimental to candidates’ competitiveness.

The reader will note, however, that (taking my cue from the evidence in table 6.1) I make few references here to differences between the Democratic and Republican parties. Some differences are to be expected—the main difference (aside from ideology) being that the Republican Party, defending its majority status for the first time in four decades, concentrated less upon aiding challengers than did the Democratic Party. Besides this difference, the converse of which has been documented by Sorauf (1992, 113–16) during the time the Democratic Party held the congressional majority, there are few differences between party activities that are relevant to questions regarding party strength, party assistance to candidates, or ideological pressure by the parties.

**Party Identification**

Contemporary arguments about the decline of parties have focused primarily upon voters. Fewer voters identify with the two major political parties than at any time since the advent of survey research—in the 2000 National Election Study, a full 40 percent of respondents classified themselves as independents (Sapiro, Rosenstone, and the National Election Studies 2001). Accordingly, we might expect that candidates share the voters’ skepticism about party labels. This would also make sense from a rational choice perspective; a party label may be a relatively inexpensive means for candidates to convey information to those voters who do still exhibit strong partisanship, to send a signal about that candidates’ policy positions. Such an instrumental use of the party label would, then, belie any sort of deeper faith or belief in the party’s traditional goals for their own sake. On the other hand, one might argue that candidates, as individuals who are more deeply involved in politics than is the average citizen, should have a stronger sense of party identification than does the average voter. According to this line of reasoning, we might expect that candidates exhibit strong ties to their parties and assert strong opinions about what their party stands for.

The first section of table 6.2 shows clear patterns in party experience and party identification across candidate types. To begin with, Gary Jacobson’s (1997a, 46–48) candidate quality work is supported by these interviews; of the long-shot candidates, none had previously held political
office, although 53 percent had either held a position within their party, served on a congressional staff, or had run before. The balance shifts with the somewhat competitive candidates; 38 percent of them had previously held political office, generally as a state legislator, mayor, or county elected official. An additional 43 percent had previously held an appointed position in their party or had previously been the party’s nominee, and only four had no political background. Seventy-nine percent of the very competitive candidates had political background, one had served on a congres-
sional staff, and only two had no previous political experience. Both of these two had previously been television news personalities, so these two did have significant visibility in their districts which allowed them to overcome their lack of political experience.

Political background tells us little, however, about the relationship between candidates and their party. Surely candidates with prior political experience would be better known within their party, making them more viable candidates in a primary or for a party endorsement. But do these candidates make overtly partisan appeals? Do they identify strongly with their party? Although I did not ask the candidates directly how strongly they identified with their party, it is fairly easy to assess their relationship with their party from their comments. Candidates break down along roughly the same lines as they did on the political experience question: 47 percent of the long-shot candidates identified strongly with their party, 71 percent of the somewhat competitive candidates did, as did twelve, or 85 percent, of the very competitive candidates—the same twelve who had some political background. The candidates who did not indicate a strong relationship with their party, however, differ dramatically among themselves. Among the long-shot candidates, there is much talk of merely adopting the party label; for instance, I coded each of the three quotes below as evidence of weak party identification:

I ran as a Democrat, but God knows, my policies are not Democratic policies. It was only because I ran as a Democrat that I achieved the kind of audience that we were able to achieve in a district that has been a Republican bastion for years. (Illinois)

I told the party chairman I was going to talk about the issues I wanted to talk about in the election. My approach on issues was simply that a candidate is instructed by the informed, deliberative consensus of the voters. If you’re in one of these districts that’s designed to be Republican or Democrat and you’re running as the candidate of the other party, the way around that is to say that my party is irrelevant. (Ohio)

The way I look at things maybe is a bit broader because I have more of a people perception rather than the Democratic theory or the Republican theory. I would look at it more in terms of how it’s going to affect people. Whether that’s Democrat or Republican, I don’t know. I think that’s where we need to be. More so like the Democratic Party, I guess. (Ohio)

Among more competitive candidates, as well as some of the long-shot
candidates, disaffection with the party was based more upon party factionalism; candidates often spoke of being “on the outs” with their party, of trying to encourage the party to move in a particular direction via their candidacy. For weak party identifiers, this was often a direction not favored by the party establishment:

Even though I lost, I was able to address the issues that I wanted to, and I think I came out of it respected by the political insiders. I want to either force the Republican Party back to the center, or to help the Reform Party move either party back to the center.2 (Minnesota)

I was on the outs—I have been from day one—with the leadership in this district. These people didn’t want me to run. We came to a shouting match when they put together a search committee. The search committee was put together for one reason, and that was to find someone other than me to run. (Minnesota)

The thing I learned about politics is this: You’ve got two types of politicians. You’ve got the people who are in the political arena because they’re idea people. They have great visions for America, they understand history, and that’s what they want to go to Washington for. I fall into that category. The other candidates are business politicians. They’re trying to figure out how to spend money to best influence their friends, their supporters. Unfortunately, in this state, a majority of Republicans and Democrats are business politicians. Idea politicians scare them. I was an idea guy, and I scared the Republicans. There’s not a lot of crying in this state to think that I won’t run again. (Illinois)

Just because somebody has values, that they try to make an impact in society, that gives people something to get behind. Unfortunately, politicians are basing the things they do on public opinion. I think that the Republican Party is actually going to be the governing party. What philosophy is going to be guiding it, that’s the question. I think most of the Republicans in office are closet liberals, and I wanted to break through that facade. (Wisconsin)

There may be an element of sour grapes to some of these comments, yet the last three of the above four quotes are from Republican candidates who fared quite well in their campaigns, garnering about 40 percent of the vote each in a fairly Democratic year. Their comments bespeak candidacies that were initiated not out of party loyalty, but out of a desire to move
their party in a particular direction—in the final quote, to the right; in the others, to the center.

Among the most competitive candidates, there is little indication of dissatisfaction with the party. This may be in part because these candidates received resources that were denied to other candidates, but it also indicates that their candidacies were not aimed at changing the party’s direction and that they expected and received full party support. The only candidates among these who did not have a strong background in the party still voiced views similar to those of candidates who did have some background. This indicates that personal coalitions were more valuable than party support, as shown by one strong candidate whom I coded as a weak party identifier: “The successful state reps have their own organization, and that’s what happens at the congressional level. You need to work with the party, but you really need to build your own organization” (Illinois).

Among candidates with strong ties to their parties, the answers were somewhat more uniform. Many of the long-shot candidates ran out of a sense of duty to their party, out of a desire either to ensure that the party was represented or to help others on the ticket. Among candidates who spoke of being recruited by party leaders, this sentiment ran particularly strong. One of the most underfinanced candidates with whom I spoke simply stated: “We needed a candidate, and I said I would be the loyal opposition.” Other strong party identifiers made similar, though more nuanced, points.

The party has made it known that the fact that I ran helped the other candidates. That was the result. I kept [my opponent] busy, so he wasn’t able to help the other candidates because he was worried about his race. (Ohio)

I created a perceived concern on the part of a lot of Republicans throughout the district, and they demanded [the incumbent’s] presence more than they ever had in the past. But also, the fact that he was here and not somewhere else campaigning for other people was one of the key goals of many of my national contributors. He’s a renowned money earner for the party. (Ohio)

Several of these candidates claimed credit for turning out at least a handful of extra voters for their party in the presidential race, in local races, or in the Senate campaign in their state. All told, thirteen candidates claimed to have been recruited; seven of these thirteen were running in
long-shot campaigns, while only one of these candidates ran a very competitive race. Perceptions of being recruited are somewhat subjective, since many candidates who said they had been recruited also admitted that they had made their interest in running known prior to being contacted by party leaders. Most of these candidates had been recruited merely to ensure that their party had a candidate; in three cases, however, candidates who reported being recruited said that they had been encouraged to run to save their party from embarrassment. In each of these cases, the party leadership was dissatisfied with the announced candidate or candidates on ideological grounds. To quote one candidate who went on to put together a rather last-minute, long-shot campaign, “There was a young man who was already running, he’d been running for two years and he started out with an extremely left-of-center position. That made some Democrats nervous, so behind closed doors I was asked to run. You gotta understand, these are very conservative Republican areas, so you got people who said, ‘If he wins it, fine. But challenge him, and make him earn it’” (Ohio).

Views that I cast as strong party support among the more competitive candidates are somewhat harder to capture in interview quotes. Because many of these candidates had held previous office, they had a record of activity within their party, so their identification with their party often was reflected in references to their activities as state legislators, or in their close ties to national party leaders (an issue I will return to in my discussion of party assistance). Finally, six of the candidates reported having switched parties within the past decade. Four of these candidates were somewhat competitive, and three had held elected office in another party. With two exceptions, these candidates all came from areas in which their current parties have historically been relatively weak. Their switching may either be a sign of changes in party ideology, party strength, or, perhaps, opportunism.

**Perceptions of Party Activities**

Before dissecting the campaign activities of the candidates’ parties at various levels, I first simply asked candidates, “Were you satisfied with your party’s efforts on your behalf?” While some candidates diligently listed the activities of the national campaign organizations, the national coordinated campaign, the state parties, and the county-level or even township party organizations, most candidates gave a fairly inclusive, straightforward answer—no. This is surely to be expected, as the parties provide a convenient scapegoat for many candidates. Even many of those who said that they
were satisfied quickly added that they had expected little help to begin with. To quote one second-time, somewhat competitive candidate: “You have to understand, I’m coming from a different place than everyone else. I didn’t expect any money from anybody. So any help I got, I was happy about” (Ohio). In fact, this candidate was not coming from a different place than anybody else. Sixty-four percent of the very competitive candidates—including all but one of the victorious candidates—reported that they were satisfied with what their party had done for them, while only 19 percent of the somewhat competitive candidates and 29 percent of the long-shot candidates reported satisfaction with the party’s efforts. Those who did not receive money, yet were satisfied, all noted that they were satisfied because they had low expectations.

Of the candidates who were dissatisfied with the party’s efforts, most directed the brunt of their criticism at their national congressional campaign organizations. The second section of table 6.2 documents trends in national party assistance to candidates according to those candidates’ competitiveness. Eighty-six percent of the very competitive candidates reported receiving financial assistance from the DCCC or NRCC, while only 33 percent of the somewhat competitive candidates and only one of the long-shot candidates reported receiving money. Those candidates who did receive money from the congressional campaign organizations often had little actual need for it—the median very competitive candidate raised $569,610. Despite the fundraising in these elections, though, the candidates still reported that money was the most important contribution of the party to their campaigns: “I’ll say this: the money was the most helpful thing. We didn’t want much more than that, because then they get into your campaign and they start running campaigns that are not geared toward the district. I wanted their money and I wanted to run, I didn’t want a lot of advice that came with that that I would have to follow” (Wisconsin).

Many of those dissatisfied with lack of party support made general claims about how much more they could have done with even a small campaign contribution, but many of these candidates identified a less tangible sense of support which they found lacking:

The DCCC is far too much numbers-driven, they don’t have any awareness of districts. They don’t even make an attempt to get to know the district. We kept saying this is a viable district, they kept saying no, it’s not. . . . We kept them informed, though we didn’t expect anything from them. The only time I ever asked them for anything was there is a moment in time when they cut off candidates. They announce to the world
that they’re dead. I called six weeks before the election, and I said, “Do
not cut us off. I never asked you for anything, you just can’t do this to
me. I haven’t asked you for anything, all I’m asking you is not to do
that.” (Illinois)

The NRCC had the polling numbers, and they blurted out that they had
the results and I was behind. There was fairly sensational news story
where a representative of the national campaign team said, “Yeah, he’s
behind, we’ll have to do something about that.” It was not helpful. (Wis-
consin)

Among the most bitter candidates were those who narrowly missed
being targeted. These included many Republicans who did well in 1994
and were running for a second time in 1996. The three tiers I have set up
here map fairly well onto national party services. All candidates reported
receiving some amount of issue information and training from the national
organizations—Democrats all referred to the DCCC’s daily faxes and the
opportunity to travel to Washington for a training session and meeting
with President Clinton, while Republicans reported that they had also
been offered campaign training and had received extensive information
about their opponent’s record and about the Republican Party’s achieve-
ments in the 104th Congress from right-leaning, quasi-party interest
groups such as GOPAC. Most of these candidates seconded the above
quotes, claiming that it was not the lack of money that hurt them, but that
the party’s lack of concern for their race made it difficult for them to in-
terest others in their campaign.

Most of the long-shot candidates were appreciative of the baseline as-
sistance that the DCCC and NRCC provided—65 percent reported mak-
ing use of the daily faxes and other strategy and issue information.
Forty-seven percent attended candidate-training sessions in Washington;
many of the attendees, not being party insiders, were quite thrilled with
the opportunity to meet their party’s political leaders. Twenty-nine percent
of the candidates reported no assistance at all from their party, a response
that may either be the result of not knowing what the national organiza-
tions had available or refusing assistance out of principle. Two of the long-
shot candidates indicated that they had discussed the various “hurdles”
the parties set up for candidates to receive further assistance—the ability
to demonstrate fundraising prowess and to provide favorable poll results
conducted by a pollster acceptable to the party.

This theme is much more prevalent among the somewhat competitive
candidates. Forty-seven percent of these candidates made reference to ex-
pectations the party had of them. These candidates spoke of the need to poll early in order to gain party support and the need to raise $100,000 before the end of June of election year. In the words of one somewhat competitive candidate, “We went out there at the end of July, and they said, ‘You’re great, [your opponent] stinks. But it’s a bad district. Go home, young man, and get media attention, and then we’ll talk.’ So between July and the election, we talked every week, but they wanted to see polling results. Obviously, they thought it was a hopeless cause. They finally came forward at the end and maxed out for us, based on polls” (Illinois).

These candidates were in many cases the losers in the battle for the targeted support of the DCCC and the NRCC. Several of them spoke of competing with the targeted candidates for funds; the high-priority races for both parties were spread evenly among the four states, such that many candidates felt that proximity to a more hotly contested race affected their ability to gain national party resources. While DCCC and NRCC directors deny that they limit their efforts within each state, some candidates argued that party efforts were indirectly affected in this manner; the most heated races received the most media attention and were at times priorities for the state party and party leaders within the state, thus deflecting attention from their races. To quote two somewhat competitive Ohio candidates,

I think what you really compete with is whatever the other forty or fifty competitive races are nationally. That’s more the sense. I don’t think I competed with other Ohio candidates. There were a few other Ohio races that were higher in the pecking order than mine, but they were always going to be higher than mine, based on the Democratic performance of the district as much as anything else. That was the biggest uphill battle that you had to fight, that this was a tough district. (Ohio)

Frankly, the Democratic Party does not have the money that the Republican Party does. I think they put all of their eggs in one or two baskets here in Ohio. They were successful in those particular races, but I think with my record of performance on behalf of working people, they could have been kinder to me early on. We would have been able to use our own resources to develop our story. (Ohio)

Some candidates in other states were more pointed about competition with their neighbors, however:

There is a whole continuum that we were on. Supposedly they were going
to eventually get behind two of us. Gephardt had said that he had to win two seats here in order to become Speaker, so there was all this speculation about who would get assistance. Ultimately, four seats would be more accurate than two of them, is what we thought. Initially we were real hopeful that we would be one of them, but it became more and more apparent that open seats were a high priority for them. In some ways we should have figured that out earlier on. Unless we had a poll that showed us even or closer to even, then the open seats and the races against the first-term Republicans would be a higher priority for them. (Wisconsin)

Many of those who did receive financial support received it late in the campaign and found that they were unable to spend it. The somewhat competitive candidates also, however, made use of the party’s baseline resources—24 percent attended training sessions in Washington, 71 percent made use of the daily campaign updates, 29 percent reported assistance from the national party in soliciting PAC contributions, and 19 percent reported receiving polling data from the DCCC or NRCC.

The most competitive candidates received all of the above, though their discussions often centered on money. Both of the two very competitive candidates who did not receive financial contributions from their national party believed they were deemed to be comfortably ahead of their opponents and not in need of money. One victorious candidate was quoted in district newspapers disputing this perception and expressing some bitterness about not receiving more support from the party, but after the election a spokesperson sought to mend fences: “I think his feeling was that this was one of the most targeted races. There were still issues where he needed help, and he felt he should have been able to reach out publicly and get help from the party. Obviously they were right, and we didn’t need the help, but you never know” (Illinois).

The most high-profile candidates reported a whole array of national party efforts—training, money, PAC assistance, consultants, field directors, strategic advice, independent advertisements, and get-out-the-vote efforts. Most of these candidates had a fairly clear understanding of their privileged status: “The central function of the national party is the channeling of money to the most effective challengers and candidates and the most vulnerable incumbents. That was their primary importance. They also did a significant amount of opposition research, which we collated with some research other previous candidates had given us. Those were the two most significant tangible things the party did for us” (Ohio).

Few of the candidates reported assistance from their state parties; exceptions to this rule were Illinois Republicans and Wisconsin Democrats.
Wisconsin candidates reported that the Wisconsin Democratic Party worked fairly closely with the Clinton campaign and sought to coordinate the House races with state races and the presidential race as much as possible. Illinois Republicans were the only group that reported financial assistance from their party. Most candidates recognized that the state parties were more concerned with state legislative races.

One might suppose, then, that those candidates who were not targeted by the national party were wards of their local parties. In many cases, this is true. Canon (1990, 10) has argued that local parties play a large role in long-shot races, and long-shot races only, and Fowler and McClure (1989, 227) have downplayed the role of local parties in heated elections. Schwartz (1990, 218) argues in her study of the Illinois Republican Party that local parties do devote resources to long-shot candidates out of fear that their own organizations will wither if they do not actively support the full slate of candidates in their areas. In my interviews, I found few patterns in the degree of local party support. Urban Democrats often reported strong support from their local parties, yet so did many rural Republican candidates. In many cases, the reasons for strong local parties are quite specific to their areas, and these parties are often dependent on one or two individuals. One rural Republican remarked that

I think what happened was that first of all we got very different responses from different levels of party organization. This, particularly as a rural district, has very strong local Republican organizations. The geography is that this district is larger than some states, so local parties, particularly because they tend to be rural and older communities, have more of a stable leadership. The same people have led some of those party operations for many years. We had strong support from them and a lot of help from them. At the congressional district level the Republican party was also quite helpful. They gave us the maximum amount, and we shared an office with them. (Minnesota)

Another rural candidate made a similar, but qualified argument: “With seventeen counties [in the district], you’ve got varying degrees of strength in the local parties. I would say they were all very committed to us, although you don’t win a district like this with party strength. You win it with volunteers” (Wisconsin).

Local parties seem to play a prominent role early in the campaign; they often recruit candidates where no challenger at all, or no strong challenger, emerges. All but one of the candidates who reported being recruited said that they were recruited by local party officials. Divisive primaries can
also be minimized with intervention from local party leaders, as the case studies below demonstrate.

By far the most frequently mentioned sources of assistance for candidates at all levels were incumbent members of their state’s delegation. Even the longest of long shots reported some contact with one or two prominent members of their state’s delegation. In Ohio, where the Democratic Party held only five seats in the 104th Congress, down from eleven four years previous, virtually every Democratic candidate reported extensive help from two members of the state’s delegation, Marcy Kaptur and Sherrod Brown. Illinois Republicans reported similar assistance from Reps. Tom Ewing and Dennis Hastert, and most Wisconsin and Minnesota Democrats and Republicans reported help from the more secure members of their states’ delegations. I asked one Ohio candidate who had been particularly frank about his long-shot status why he felt any of the sitting House members would help his campaign. His response was that

Sometimes they will do this because they aspire to run for another office. They want to make contacts. You help these little guys working down here, and they’ll be out there working for you. If Marcy wants to run for state office, or Sherrod Brown wants to run for governor, I’m going to remember that these people were with me. They knew my chances of winning were pretty slim, but they contacted me, and I’m willing to go to work for them. You want to keep members of the party happy because they can help you one day. (Ohio)

This type of assistance is not as spontaneous as it appears in the above quote; other candidates mentioned that the members whose names were frequently brought up had taken or been appointed to the position of leader of the state delegation, or as liaison between the DCCC or NRCC and their state’s nonincumbent candidates. Even so, one candidate remarked that these members played a greater role in generating enthusiasm and providing moral support than did any of the official party organizations:

[Brown] has done a great job of consolidating his seat, and now he wants to move up in the party hierarchy. As a challenger, my sense was the old barons, the old established people, were much less willing to do anything to get the majority back than were they younger guys. When we went to the Democratic Caucus for a big meeting and to the DCCC for a meeting, you didn’t see the John Dingells of the world show up, which was odd when you think about it, because who benefits the most from getting the majority back? I didn’t get the sense that Dingell was out there shaking the tree
trying to get money for challengers, but here's a young comer like Sherrod who really appreciates what it's like to have the majority. Also, Sherrod had been a statewide candidate, he might have statewide ambitions somewhere down the road. He was helpful. If he needs my help, I'll be there. If it came down to Sherrod versus other statewide figures, well, Sherrod did more for me in my race than anybody else, so who would I be inclined to endorse? I'd help Sherrod. So it's smart politics all the way around. (Ohio)

Several candidates running against representatives who had traditionally taken on the role of delegation leader saw their role as being enough of a threat to keep their opponent from playing a role in other races, as providing enough competition to ensure that their opponent stayed home and campaigned in his own race. The two earlier quotes from Ohio candidates about “keeping the incumbent busy” are examples of this. While neighboring political figures are often held by the candidates to be pivotal influences in their campaigns, however, they seldom leave behind strengthened party organizations in their own districts when they leave office. Nine of the districts in which I conducted interviews were districts which had traditionally been held by Democrats but had gone Republican in 1994. Another four seats were open. Few of the candidates in these districts found a local organization in place that had been nurtured by the previous incumbent. One Democrat running in one of these districts answered my question about local party organization by saying, “It’s been pretty loose, again because [the Democratic incumbent prior to 1994] was so popular for so long that we didn’t have to do anything. He always won, and the Democrats would just try to get their local people elected. They weren’t real successful, and so we don’t have a real strong party organization in this district” (Minnesota).

Another candidate shared a similar, though less complimentary story about the district’s former representative: “He is in many ways a brilliant politician, but he has never been a party politician. He formed his own organization. He didn’t share things. He always did his own thing” (Wisconsin).

And another put matters even more bluntly: “Politics is a very selfish game. You learn that everybody’s with you as long as there’s something to be gained. The local people, [the previous representative], they didn’t think it was very likely to happen” (Ohio).

**Ideology, Primaries, and Party Strength**

The above discussion sheds some light on what makes for a successful campaign. Attention from the national congressional campaign organizations is
crucial, yet this is often predicated on the past performance of the district. A Democrat running in an overwhelmingly Republican district is unlikely to raise the funds or generate the polling numbers to gain support of the national campaign organizations; the large gap between the haves and the have-nots in this regard appears to leave little room for the strength of parties at the local level. State parties play a relatively small role in House campaigns. The effect of state parties varies according to the parties’ priorities and finances. In Ohio and Wisconsin, where there were no statewide races occurring, the state parties appear to have taken a greater interest in House races. Many Ohio candidates also pointed to the large role their state parties were playing in the presidential campaign, in light of Ohio’s bellwether status in presidential races.

The candidates’ perspectives on the relative strength of the parties in their districts, however, highlight several important points. First, party strength is not based on an ideological agenda; instead, for these candidates it encapsulates success at limiting ideological conflict, regardless of the disparity in issue preferences of party members or the party’s would-be Congress members. Second, party strength paradoxically has little to do with the party’s performance in any of the national-level races; districts that had been represented for years by Democrats prior to 1994 often had disorganized local parties, as did many Republican districts. Many districts that have reliably voted for one party at the presidential level likewise could not translate voting habits into organizational strength for other races. Third, party strength translates, according to many of these candidates, into ensuring that there is a deep talent pool of candidates and that the talent pool is winnowed and a nomination is made with a minimum of divisiveness, friction, or hard feelings.

A relatively small number of candidates reported any direct pressure on issues from their party at any level. Among those that did, however, the differences are striking. Virtually all of the candidates who did report some pressure reported that it was a result of the primary, that they were forced to run in one direction in the primary, and then another in the general election. This occurrence has become a staple of literature on presidential primaries—that the Democratic nominee, for instance, must run to the left in the primary, and then run to the center in the general election (see Bartels 1988, 7–9). Candidates who reported fairly strong district or local party organizations insisted that this was not necessary: “I ran against [the incumbent] in the primary. The other candidates saw me as the front-runner, so they campaigned against me. But I stayed against [the incumbent] all of the time. I just presented myself as the one who had the best chance of beating him, and that’s what the party leadership did, too” (Illinois).
Another candidate, who ran as an underdog in the primary, told a similar story:

All three of us were concentrating on [the incumbent]. I was not fearful of making that my focus, because we were all three focusing on that. So I figured that whoever would win the primary would come out with a boost. I think that's what happened. The primary helped us a great deal, because attention was focused on the primary throughout the summer. Where the primary hurt us was with money raising. We were only able to raise $30,000, and that was like pulling teeth. But after the primary ended, we did it in style, all coming together. We had a unity dinner three days after the election, well attended throughout the district. People came together, and we raised almost $190,000 in the next month. (Wisconsin)

The effect of primaries should not be overstated—while primaries may at times exert an ideological pull of their own, the majority of House primaries are simply too low-profile and too dependent simply on name recognition and resources to make ideology a dominant factor. In addition, the candidates we might expect to place the highest premium on divergence—the least competitive candidates—are less likely either to have primary opposition or (when they do have opposition) to run in primaries that make enough of an impression on voters that these candidates are “tied” to primary positions.

The final section of table 6.2 compares the experiences of the different types of candidates in primary elections. Twenty-four candidates—79 percent of the competitive candidates, 38 percent of the somewhat competitive candidates, and 29 percent of the long-shot candidates—faced primary opponents. Some of these primaries were not considered to be particularly competitive by the candidates; six of the twenty-four candidates reported that their primary competitors did not cause them to spend money or had any effect on their campaigns, with all but two of these uncompetitive primaries occurring in the less competitive races. Eleven candidates reported some attempt by their party or members of their party to exert some ideological pressure upon the nominee—either by determining who the nominee would be, or by attempting to sway the candidate on issues. These candidates are not concentrated in any particular category of competitiveness—three were very competitive, four were somewhat competitive, and four were long shots. All of the candidates who reported such pressure, however, were either recruited by the party or faced a primary opponent. The sole such candidate who did not face what he or she
termed a “divisive” primary or a contentious party endorsement claimed to be being pulled toward the center:

A couple times we were told, “Look, if you don’t start doing things in a fairly conventional manner it’s going to be hard for you to raise money.” Their advisors come in here and by the time they leave your head’s kind of spinning, because there’s a certain element of overwhelming you with “This is how you have to do it.” . . . These guys would come in from Washington and say, “We’ve done all this national polling, we’re talking to the DNC, Clinton’s done a lot of polling, Clinton’s going to win big in this district” and these were not the issues we were all that enthralled with. (Wisconsin)

Aside from this candidate, however, discussions of local party intervention on issues break down quite neatly—candidates who reported strong local parties felt that any issue pressure that was applied to them was applied in order to ensure a centrist candidacy, while candidates who reported weak local parties felt that issue pressure was exerted in order to pull the eventual nominee away from the political center. These latter types corresponded well with the areas that Fenton and Mayhew contend are weak party states. Several Minnesota candidates, Wisconsin candidates, and Chicago-area Republican candidates of all different levels of competitiveness talked about how they were pulled off-message by a divisive primary and were never able to unite the party behind them. One somewhat competitive candidate felt his chances were destroyed by his primary: “What [the other primary candidates] started to do was attack me as the frontrunner with all sorts of allegations, none of which were true. I think that might have diminished my candidacy in the eyes of at least some of the public. Republican voters still voted for me overwhelmingly, but that was really the beginning of the end. The primary was the beginning of the end of this campaign” (Illinois).

Another very competitive candidate had a similar story:

I had been actively involved in the Republican Party for eighteen years, so I had a track record. At district caucuses, I was the one who was called on throughout the whole district to get up and talk on legislative activity. I am a politically moderate Republican. That doesn’t mean I don’t have a strong conservative record on many, many issues, including a number of social issues, but what happened here is a candidate came out of nowhere. He spent far more money in the primary than any candidate had ever spent up here. When he spent that amount of money, in attack
mode, I had to respond. I didn’t have the opportunity to really develop a positive aura and talk about my record, talk about my plans. I was on the defensive very much in the primary campaign. . . . My opponent inflamed the passions of a number of groups in the party. He also distorted certain things. If you don’t have the money to clarify these issues, if you don’t have the money to tell your story, that stuff sticks. (Wisconsin)

Because the two parties in Minnesota endorse candidates prior to the primary date, some candidates can win the endorsement but lose the primary, or vice versa. In many cases, ideologically committed party activists can deny centrist candidates the endorsement, even though these candidates may be more electable. This difference is reflected in the statements of these somewhat competitive Minnesota candidates:

The candidate that will most likely emerge next time is a former military man. The first words out of his mouth at the district convention, that question was, “What are the most important issues to you?” His answer was “Life.” There was nothing else. As he was saying this, someone was filming this event. Is he willing to take that conservative slant, to sell his soul as I did to get the endorsement? He probably will if he really wants it. I just think the Republican Party, unless we start coming together as an entity, will lose. Legislators do well in some areas, but they won’t do well in the district as a whole. There’s no coordination of efforts whatsoever. Legislators worked with me because I was one of them. They won’t work with other people. I talked to somebody from [a county in the district] the other day. He’s the old Republican guard, and the new Republican guard has just pushed him out. There’s a lot of anger that has to be overcome, and that’s going to lead to more defeats. (Minnesota)

The party activists in my district are very conservative. They didn’t like my candidacy, and they will work against me if I run again in 1998. What I would like to do is get more moderates involved in the process. That’s my biggest complaint, that I don’t criticize the conservatives for doing what they do, they’re simply using the process the way it’s supposed to be used. My biggest concern is that moderates, you know, we like to bitch and complain, but we don’t organize, so we have only ourselves to blame. (Minnesota)

Compare these responses with those of candidates from “strong party” areas of Ohio and Illinois. One somewhat competitive Democrat said that
I guess I made the decision to run as soon as I won the party’s endorsement, of the executive committee. You know how these things go. It begins with speculation, people start talking, you start talking to people about whether you should go, people started encouraging me to run, there started to develop a consensus among party leaders that I would be the strongest candidate among those who were thinking of running. There were some other party establishment folks who had been longtime members of the party who had been talking about it, but clearly wouldn’t be the strongest candidate. The party chairman and leadership sort of dissuaded those folks that this just wasn’t the right time. (Ohio)

A second-time Republican candidate took a more nuts-and-bolts approach to the local party organization: “I’d say that there are organizations there. There are organizations that you can mold and get to take a more active role. You don’t have to go in and tell them what to do. They’ll call you and say they’re walking precincts, they want literature. . . . Our effort last time enabled us not only to endear ourselves to the local Republican organizations, but also to begin building a base outside those organizations” (Illinois).

Another second-time candidate had faced a primary, yet it proved not to be a divisive one. A campaign staffer remarked on the primary that

The key thing was that he didn’t stop campaigning after his last race, so when he declared and filed as a candidate he already had a base of support in all of these different counties. He knew the party structure, the party structure knew him. They knew that he was going to be someone who would be there to help. So he was not in a situation of saying, “You don’t know me, but here I am, God’s gift to the Republican Party in this district. I’ve never done anything for you here in this county, but now I want you guys to go out and campaign for me.” It’s the personal relationships in this district, particularly in the rural areas, that make a huge difference in terms of getting people in the party excited and involved in the campaign. (Illinois)

Sixty-eight percent of the Illinois candidates—six of the seven Republicans and seven of the twelve Democrats—claimed that the local parties in their districts were “strong,” although their categorization of local party organizations included district, township, and county organizations. The same sentiment was shared by 56 percent (seven of twelve Democrats and two of four Republicans) of Ohio candidates, 50 percent (three of five De-
mocrats, two of five Republicans) of candidates in Wisconsin, and 29 per-
cent (two of the six Republicans, no Democrats) of Minnesotans. It is dif-
ficult to generalize these stories beyond the personalities of the individuals
considered, but it is clear from the interviews that party strife rarely hurt
Ohio or Illinois candidates, while it did damage several candidates in Min-
nesota and Wisconsin. This may also be an artifact of 1996—the same
Ohio candidate quoted at length above about how his party’s executive
committee arrived at its endorsement also noted that the Democrats had
lost the seat in 1994 because the party had failed to arrive at a consensus
and a fairly contentious primary resulted.

The Role of Parties in Three Congressional Campaigns

To further illustrate some of the dynamics of party involvement in House
races, let us consider three different candidates with whom I spoke. Ideally,
case studies selected here should demonstrate the difference between
strong and weak parties—that is, between organizationally strong parties
and ideologically unified parties—as well as the difference between party
participation in different types of campaigns. Unfortunately, however, the
negative responses about party pressure I received from several of the can-
didates in Minnesota and Wisconsin must remain unattributed because
these candidates were reluctant to be singled out as critics of their local
party leaders. Thus, I limit the scope of this chapter’s case studies to three
campaigns, as I have in the previous chapter, and I note areas in which
these candidates—and especially the long-shot and somewhat competitive
candidates considered here—accord with or differ from the candidates in
states or districts with more ideological parties.

A Long-Shot Campaign in a Strong Party State

The Twelfth District in Illinois is described by Politics in America as the
state’s most Democratic district outside Chicago (see Duncan and
Lawrence 1997, 426). Schwartz (1990, 217), in fact, singles out the dis-
trict’s largest county, St. Clair County, as one of only two counties outside
of Chicago where Republicans are reluctant to allocate money at any level.
The Democrats here are conservative Democrats, however. The Twelfth
stretches from East St. Louis and Belleville along the Mississippi River
down to Cairo, including some of the poorest parts of Illinois. Several de-
caying industrial towns share the district with oil refineries and poor rural
communities. The Twelfth has more in common with neighboring districts in Missouri and Kentucky than it does with the majority of Illinois congressional districts. Much of the Twelfth was represented prior to the 1992 redistricting by Democrat Glenn Poshard. After redistricting, Poshard’s district moved east and Democrat Jerry Costello, a socially conservative Democrat with roots in the Democratic machine of the East St. Louis area, took over the district. As a neighboring Democratic candidate described the Twelfth, “The way my district is drawn, they cut off all the Democratic strongholds, they’re all in Jerry Costello’s district. The strength of the party there, as far as it being a party, there’s a lot of strong county organizations out there in the smaller counties. The party organization in my area, because of the way the district is cut, is hard to put together.”

Other candidates agreed that the Twelfth had been drawn to be the lone clearly Democratic district in southern Illinois. Bill Clinton and Al Gore won the district overwhelmingly in 1992, 1996, and 2000, although both Costello and Poshard’s districts had voted narrowly for Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Even in the 1980s, however, the Republican Party never mounted much of a threat to Costello. He has not had a well-financed opponent since the 1992 redistricting, and as of 1996 he had won each of his last three races with 66 percent or more of the vote. In 1996 the Republican candidate was draftsman and gun activist Shapley Hunter, from the small prison town of Tamms, near the district’s southern border. Hunter raised only $4,800, and he had only minimal support from the national or state party in a campaign that yielded 27 percent of the vote.

Of the three candidates considered here, Hunter was clearly the most interested in party-building in his campaign, yet it is difficult to find evidence that his party influenced the views he expressed. As he put it, there is clearly much more party-building necessary in his district than in more competitive districts:

The Republican Party here in Alexander County has been a pretty minimal force over the years, so immediately when they saw they had new blood in there they immediately made me county chairman, put my neck on the chopping block. It was through my connections as the county chairman that I met a number of people and became known as a solid conservative. When this year’s congressional race came up, we had committed ourselves to have a conservative candidate to run in this district, and unfortunately the ones we had hoped would run, all of them more or less backed out. They thought this was not a winnable year for them, whatever their reasons were. I don’t know what their reasons were for backing out. So the state central committeeman for this district was call-
ing around trying to find a good conservative, and he finally approached me. I told him up front I was an unknown with no money. He just said, “Give it the best you can, that’s all we can ask.” That’s what I did. . . . I don’t know how far down the list I was. We were working with [the other potential candidates] and we thought we would get a commitment from at least one of them all the way through to the primary, but when we got down to the filing deadline, they said they didn’t believe Costello was beatable. At least, I believe that. I don’t know their true reasons for not running. The consensus was that he just wasn’t beatable. I actually think that he is beatable, given the press coverage of [Costello’s recent ethics problems]. It would have been winnable for somebody who wanted to run that kind of race. But that’s not the type of race I run, so I may have been my own worst enemy in that regard.

Hunter’s campaign received very little press coverage; what campaign coverage there was was of Costello’s ties to an alleged racketeer in the St. Louis area. As Hunter noted, he might have been able to use those ties to his advantage, but with a $4,800 treasury he probably would have had little success even had he tried. Hunter was aware that he would receive little assistance from the national party, and he did not appear to be upset about that: “I went into this race realizing that I had no money at all, and I knew that I was not to count on money from the national or state parties. I didn’t want to try to burden them because I know there were a lot of races that were crucial, and I wanted to make sure that they had an adequate level of funding. I didn’t want to be guilty of depriving someone else of that money. I wanted to run on whatever I could muster up here, with the time and money I was able to raise.”

Hunter did not go out of his way to raise money, and he made a decision to take no PAC money. He did make use of information provided by the state party and of the national party’s basic support for candidates: “I tried to keep as much track of Costello’s record as possible. Part of that was due to the support we got from the national party. The RNC is very good about sending out packets on what they call the key votes of interest to the Republican Party.”

Despite Hunter’s current role as Alexander County Republican Party Chairman, his ties to the state and national party are tenuous. His chairmanship may provide evidence of Schwartz’s (1990, 114) contention that Republican leaders in Illinois neglect the southern counties because their political culture is so different from that of the rest of Illinois. Hunter said that he had only recently become involved in the Republican Party. He was raised in a Democratic family in rural New Madrid County, Missouri, but
argues that if the New Madrithians of his youth “saw what the Democratic Party was like today, they would be Republicans.”

Hunter also identifies little with the Illinois Republican “establishment”—he had not backed Illinois’s Republican governor, Jim Edgar, in his previous reelection effort—and considered himself fortunate to be running in a year when the sole statewide Republican candidate, Senatorial nominee Al Salvi, was also seen as a political outsider. Hunter hoped that his campaign would help Salvi, and he also found that Salvi was helpful to him:

Salvi was here several times, and his wife was here more than he was. Whenever he was down here he invited me to appear with him, and I was glad to go. I think the Salvi campaign and mine had a lot in common in that both of us were somewhat at odds with the party regulars. Al ran against [Illinois Lieutenant Governor] Bob Kustra [in the Republican Senatorial primary], who was the party’s choice to run that race. He had the conservatives’ support, but it took a lot of work after the primary to get the rest of the party behind him. In some areas he probably still didn’t manage to get that support as well as he needed it. And I’m running down here as a virtual unknown and not a party regular, I just ran as a loose cannon pretty much down here in the Twelfth District. I think Al Salvi and I had a lot in common in that regard. He was supportive of Republican candidates everywhere, but I particularly noticed it when he was down here.

Hunter emphasized that he had few problems with his opponent, a sentiment that he shared with several of the long-shot challengers to politically moderate incumbents. He admitted that the next serious Republican effort would be when Jerry Costello leaves Congress, and that he was unlikely to be involved in that effort. Looking back on his campaign, he mentioned that “If it had been another 1994, they wouldn’t have had to come down and find me. They would have had some candidates that would have stepped up. I think this district is winnable for the Republicans if you can get out and get the message out. But the timing is a big part of it.”

Hunter thus seems somewhat ambivalent; on the one hand, he ran in order to help the Republican Party out in the district and hopefully in the state, but on the other hand, he is skeptical about the direction the party will take in the Twelfth District in the future. In response to my question about whether he expected to help out the 1998 Republican candidate in the district, he remarked that
It's hard to say. It depends who the candidate is and what their positions are. If they're a party regular, I would say no, I'm probably not going to have a lot of influence. If it's someone like myself who's an outsider, who's not a party regular, who's interested in working with a lot of the far right-wing groups that I'm more familiar with, then I may have some influence just through contacts. But I would say that the odds are that it's probably going to be a party regular next time and they're probably going to try to work through the traditional party structure.4

A Somewhat Competitive Campaign in a Strong Party State

In Ohio’s Twelfth District, which is comprised of the eastern half of Columbus and several blue-collar suburbs, Democrats have had less success than in the Illinois Twelfth. Bill Clinton carried the district by a narrow 47 to 45 percent margin in 1996 but lost it by an equally narrow 42 to 40 percent margin in 1992. George Bush, Ronald Reagan, and Gerald Ford had carried the district by much more comfortable margins in the previous four elections, winning by at least 20 percent of the vote each time. Democrat Bob Shamansky had won the district’s House seat in 1980, despite Reagan’s popularity, but he was unseated in 1982 by a thirty-year-old Republican state senator, John Kasich. Kasich, chairman of the House Budget Committee from 1994 to 2000, carried the district comfortably until his 2000 retirement. Democrat Cynthia Ruccia, a Democratic Party activist with no previous political office, ran against him in 1994 and 1996, seeking to put together a coalition of black voters, blue-collar workers, and affluent liberals in her own suburb of Bexley. Although she raised over $250,000 in both of her bids, she received only 33 percent of the vote each time. Ruccia received some financial assistance from the DCCC in 1994 but reported less attention from the national party in 1996.

Cynthia Ruccia’s campaign received far more media attention than did Hunter’s, in part because it was a particularly nasty campaign and it featured several widely criticized campaign advertisements (see Eaton 1996). Whereas many competitive candidates rarely need to spend time convincing party leaders of their viability, such appeals were a major activity for Ruccia in her 1994 campaign:

I had understood in looking at the way this district was redistricted in 1990 that a Democrat could win in this district because we had the same Democratic performance in this district as in [victorious 1996 candidate] Ted Strickland’s district, maybe four-tenths of a percent less. It was not
going to be an easy race, but on paper it was doable. It took me time to sell the DCCC on that, but I got a fair amount of assistance after I had opened their eyes to it. Now when the 1996 election came around, it was a whole different story, because Kasich had been on his own meteoric rise at the time, so he became sort of a target. People became involved in my race for philosophical reasons. When it came down to party help, I got more than a lot of people got, but it's a horse race for them, they add up the numbers and see how people are going to do before they allocate the resources. They put me in kind of special category, but I didn't get to experience, for example, what [victorious Ohio Democratic challengers] Ted Strickland or Dennis Kucinich got. I wasn't in quite that category.

Ruccia received small financial contributions from the party in 1994, as well as a few in-kind contributions. The Democratic Party also directed several interest groups hostile to Kasich her way. Ruccia recognized, however, that beating Kasich would have been quite an upset. This is one reason why ties with the state and local party organizations were important to her; she argued that she hoped her campaigns would make her a more viable candidate for Congress or for another local elected office at some future point. She had hoped for a good relationship with local party officers, and she was partly successful in this regard. State party leaders were able to arrange for her to have President Clinton, Jesse Jackson, and John Conyers campaign in her district. The state party was not able to offer more than this, however:

I was received very well by the state Democratic Party. What I really appreciated was that I always had access to [state party chair] David Leland if I needed some help, and he was always straight with me, told me what they couldn't do. I knew that in working with him, if I had specific requests, that if he could do it, he would do it. I didn't get any double talk. I caught on really quickly, though, that any help I was going to get was going to come from the DCCC. The state party supports state candidates, and the local party supports local candidates.

Ruccia reported friction within the local party, however, which stemmed from feuds over the Columbus mayoral race. She stressed that the local party itself was supportive, but that previous opponents of Kasich actively sought to undermine her campaign. Once Ruccia had emerged as the nominee, local party leaders sought to mend fences, but they were not entirely successful. Ruccia reported little help from any previous opponents of Kasich, with the exception of Bob Shamansky, the in-
cumbent whom Kasich beat in 1982. Even though there was not a contested primary for the Democratic nomination, there were candidates who had aspired to run in the primary, and their ties to the Democratic Party may have harmed Ruccia’s efforts in the general election. The closest thing there was to an attempt to affect the issues of the campaign, according to Ruccia, was criticism by the district’s 1992 Democratic nominee of Ruccia’s campaign.

Could she have won? Probably not. Kasich ignored her during the campaign, but she claims that she did manage to make him campaign and spend money within the district. As the other Ohio candidates quoted earlier noted, this is a major function, at least in the eyes of challengers, of running against an incumbent as powerful as Kasich. Like many of the candidates who sought the backing of the DCCC and NRCC yet fell short, Ruccia learned well the importance of money in a congressional campaign:

I was as thrifty as I could be. I’m a businesswoman, so I do understand about the bottom line, where you can skimp and where you have to spend money. But what they expect in Washington, especially in the 1996 election, they were so obsessed about money. That’s all anyone talked about. It was so amazing, they never wanted to hear anything at all except how much money I had, or if you had your own money to put into the race, and how you were going to raise it and where you were going to get it. Beyond that, no one was interested at all. You couldn’t call them and ask them for anything without being grilled for ten minutes about money. Nothing else mattered.

The solution? Ruccia lowered her sights in 1998 to run for the Ohio House (also, unfortunately for her, unsuccessfully). In my interview, she told me that she hoped to build more of a base in the party by running for a lower-level office, and that perhaps this would help her run again for the U.S. House in the future.

**A Very Competitive Campaign in a Weak Party State**

It is difficult to distinguish between the two sequential positioning alternatives when considering very competitive candidates. This is so because in both, parties or candidates are willing to move away from their *ex ante* preferred positions where they can increase their probability of winning by doing so, and this is the case by definition for very competitive candidates. Thus, the fact that Lydia Spottswood, the Democratic challenger from the
First District of Wisconsin, ran in a state where parties have traditionally been more ideological and less well-organized does not have as much of an effect on her campaign as did the benign neglect of the Republicans in Shapley Hunter’s campaign or the financial debates to which Cynthia Ruccia referred. Spottswood’s campaign was a priority for her party’s national organization, the DCCC, and it was thus not markedly different from the campaigns of very competitive candidates in Ohio or Illinois in terms of the attention it received from her party.

Wisconsin’s First District, an industrial district in the southeastern part of the state which includes the cities of Racine, Kenosha, Janesville, and Beloit, is one of several districts that were targeted by both the DCCC and by organized labor. The First District had been represented by Democrat Les Aspin from 1970 until 1992, and then was represented for one term by Democrat Peter Barca from 1992 to 1994. Although the district has consistently leaned Democratic in presidential voting—Michael Dukakis carried it by a 51 to 49 percent margin in 1988, Bill Clinton defeated George Bush 41 to 36 percent in 1992 and defeated Bob Dole 50 to 38 percent in 1996, and Al Gore carried it by a 49 to 47 percent margin in 2000—Barca was a casualty of the Republican sweep in 1994, losing by slightly over one thousand votes to third-time Republican candidate Mark Neumann. When Barca decided not to run again in 1996, Lydia Spottswood, the Kenosha city council president, emerged from a four-candidate primary and went on to receive 49 percent of the vote in a losing campaign against Neumann. This race featured a blizzard of issue advertisements and independent expenditures by the parties, by the AFL-CIO, and by other interest groups.

Spottswood, although she was not well known outside of Kenosha prior to her election bid, did well in large part because of the high level of party support. She reported high levels of involvement from all levels of the party. She is one of the only very competitive candidates who reported any type of recruitment effort by the local party:

In April, after I was reelected [to city council], I was approached by the county Democratic leadership to run for the state legislature. In May, however, we realized that we didn’t have a challenger from the Democratic Party for the seat in Congress, and I had been a supporter of Les Aspin’s and a supporter of Peter Barca’s, and a moderate to conservative Democrat. I had not seen the incumbent closely—I do not know him personally, but I had a very bad feeling about how he approaches his job. I met with some key people in the district in the middle of May, basically to ask the question “Should I be changing races?” The decision was yes, I
probably should change races, because I had one opponent [in the state legislature primary] who I thought could do a good job. We then tried to figure out who else was out there with district-wide name recognition, it was necessary for someone to have that to run a good race, and that wasn't happening. The second question was who's out there with the ability to raise money very, very quickly. The consensus was that I was in the best position to do that.

Wisconsin’s early September primary is one of the latest in the country, which can be a recipe for a long and draining primary. Spottswood ran in the primary against three other candidates, one of whom, Doug LaFollette, a relative of former Senator Robert LaFollette, had a significant advantage in terms of name recognition at the beginning. Spottswood said that several prominent Wisconsin representatives sought to influence the outcome of the primary:

It was a strange primary. I was the first to announce, and in the beginning I took a lot of personal attacks from my opponents. What happened that changed the primary radically was that labor came to my support, and the Wisconsin delegation, Barrett, Kleczka, and Obey, announced their support as well. My primary opponents immediately became very hostile and defensive, and stepped up the personal, negative attacks on me. I suppose they just were doing what they thought they had to do to win. So from that standpoint you could describe it as somewhat divisive. I was the most conservative of the Democrats in the primary, and interestingly, that was the key to labor's support for me. Certainly, I understand their issues, but I think they also thought I had the best chance to win the general.

Hard feelings do not appear to have lingered after the primary, however. If there were any ill feelings after Spottswood won, they seem to have had little effect on the race. Peter Barca became involved in the race after the primary, but like the DCCC, he had remained neutral until that point:

He didn't want to be involved until the general. Toward the end of the campaign he started to call us with suggestions, although he's apparently out of town a lot for his job. Later on he started making an effort to get in touch with us, more to answer questions than anything else. It was a little frustrating, because we thought he would have all kinds of help to offer us, but the good news is that labor made up for it, and the county and state Democratic Parties came forward and volunteered themselves.
Although the DCCC chose not to become active in Spottswood’s campaign or any other Democrat’s campaign until after the primary, it did provide research for all of the candidates in the primary. Once the primary was over, however, the DCCC became heavily involved. Spottswood summed up its activity: “They did help get some financial resources, contributions from the Democratic leadership in Washington. They also helped in terms of technical support and research that we needed. We had a consultant who would help us out, who would tweak us if we were not emphasizing something as much as we should. They did some independent expenditure; we were aware of it but didn’t have control over it.”

In response to a question about what the “tweaking” that the consultant did entailed, she responded that

It was mostly technical. They were trying to track where we were with our budget, how we were using resources, what resources we hadn’t tapped into that we needed to consider, how we were doing our media work and our buys, they were more decisions in that regard than “You’re not talking about the same things as the president, you should be doing that.” They weren’t trying to make me a clone of the president. It was how well we were doing in the district and what they had in the way of resources that we might not be aware of information-wise, trying to gauge how we were relative to other field operations, GOTV efforts, all those kinds of things.

The state party served as a coordinator of efforts in the campaign, ensuring that the vice president, Tipper Gore, Dick Gephardt, and others were able to schedule time in the district, and identifying potential contributors within the state. Although resources also were being sought for the two open-seat races in Wisconsin, Spottswood’s race is one of the few races I consider here where the Democratic Party, at all levels, was extremely involved in the campaign. In the end, the party’s effort turned out to be insufficient to ensure victory. Several reasons were advanced by local journalists. One obvious reason might be that Spottswood was still outspent almost two-to-one by Neumann ($1.2 million to $700,000). News commentators also opined that the attack ads aired in the campaign may have turned off voters on both sides (Schultze 1996). Still others claimed that even though Spottswood got a boost from the primary, she did wind up spending money there that would have been more effectively spent in the general (Scolaro 1996). Spottswood was quoted in the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel claiming that had she had two more weeks to campaign,
she would have won (Schultze 1996). In my interview, she did place some of the blame for her loss on the late primary, but she also added that she thought her campaign had been beneficial for the Democratic Party in her district: “Our campaign kept the party energized in our district, despite the late start. I think most Democrats were stunned to see a woman virtually unknown outside my own city be able to close the gap so profoundly.”

Each of these candidates illustrates several features of the relationship between candidate competitiveness and party assistance. Lydia Spottswood’s race is one where the combination of a vulnerable incumbent and a strong local and state party effort brought about an extremely close race, a race that was a top priority for both the national Democratic and Republican Parties. At no point in the campaign was Spottswood’s issue focus affected by the party. She had the resources and the desire to hire consultants to help shape the message of her campaign, but her party appears to have had enough confidence in her to let her run her own campaign. Meanwhile, the race in Ohio’s Twelfth District featured a challenger who was aware of the resources that were available to a candidate like Spottswood, but who was also aware that these resources would not be available to her and that she would have to do much more to prove herself to both political elites and to voters. For the most part, her campaign does not appear to have been important enough to the national or state parties for them to try to affect her issue positions; disagreements on issues within the local party had enough of an effect that Ruccia seemed hesitant to claim that her campaign would have a long-term effect on Democratic fortunes in her district.

Shapley Hunter is somewhat more self-effacing than other long-shot candidates were, yet his campaign also demonstrates that long-shot candidates share several traits. These candidates tend to be individuals who recognize the futility of trying to raise large sums of money, of trying to bend the ear of the national party, and of investing a large amount of personal time or effort in an uphill campaign. Hunter, however, did have clear personal goals in his campaign, as did his party. Local Republicans sought to build a local party base among disaffected voters such as Hunter; Hunter sought to reach out to fellow conservatives and to build a base for candidates with similar views, as well as for himself. Hunter showed no signs of interest in the technicalities of receiving national party support, in part because he knew he had little chance of getting that support and that it was not worth his time to concern himself with the fundraising, polling, and
consulting details of which Spottswood and Ruccia spoke. In a way, Hunter had more freedom than either of those two did—he had the freedom to do and say whatever he wanted, to let his conscience be his guide. Both Spottswood and Ruccia spoke of the difficult ethical decisions they had to make in their campaign, and about the effects of the political process upon beliefs and personal ideals. It is no surprise that many candidates of Hunter’s ilk spoke more enthusiastically and freely about their campaigns than did a number of the veteran politicians I interviewed.

**Conclusions**

Political parties, in the words of the candidates with whom I spoke, are not merely tools to be used in elections, nor are they solely vehicles for ideological expression. The national party campaign committees function as service providers for those candidates who can garner attention from them, but other aspects of the party network are not as easy to categorize. It is not possible to completely discard the notion of party-based campaigning, to dismiss the notion that even (or, in some cases, especially) long-shot candidates are influenced in their position taking by the instrumental or ideological preferences of their party. It is also not possible, however, to attribute candidate position taking solely, or even primarily, to the preferences of political parties. In many cases here, the parties did not care what positions their candidates espoused. In others, the parties trusted their candidates’ judgment to take positions that would best help them run competitive campaigns. And in still others, (the Hunter case in particular) political culture may have preceded any influence of parties themselves.

Research has established the central role of the national campaign organizations in contemporary congressional campaigns, and these interviews do nothing to diminish this role. This role, however, is not what Mayhew, Fenton, and Elazar are discussing when they analyze party strength and political culture. These interviews demonstrate that state and local parties—including not only official party leaders but elected politicians and other concerned partisans—do have an important role to play in national elections, particularly in the races of those candidates whom the DCCC and NRCC do not help. It is in these subnational organizations and networks that we can make distinctions in party strength and in which we can identify motives within political parties that go beyond short-term maximization of votes or probability of winning. A state or local party organization that mediates between national political figures and local can-
candidates, coordinating their efforts, can help maximize a candidate’s potential. Yet these parties may also be concerned with testing ideological appeals or reinforcing the priorities of the party at the state level or of the party activists, even at the expense of fielding competitive candidates in a particular district. A local party may help recruit candidates that are appropriate to a district, and it can provide some help for candidates who are not receiving help from national or state party organizations. Local parties, however, may also have their particular ideological agendas, and these may not accord with the views of the party’s candidates or with majority preferences in a district or even among party members in a district.

These interviews demonstrate that party strength can vary dramatically across small geographic and political distances. It may have been difficult to unseat any House Democrats in Minnesota in 1996, yet the divisions reported by most of Minnesota’s Republican candidates may have discouraged some of these candidates from running in the future. Minnesota’s Republican Party was at the time of this study the weakest of the parties considered here in terms of its representation in Congress, and despite recent gains, internal strife may limit its ability to improve its fortunes in the near future. It is difficult to generalize about Minnesota’s Democratic Party based on the lone interview here, but it seems to share with its Republican counterpart a more ideological focus and a lower level of organizational strength. According to Democratic candidates in Ohio, Ohio’s Democratic Party, also in somewhat bad shape following the 1994 elections, gained back two seats in 1996 in part because of the efforts of younger Democrats to foster an organized, statewide effort. The parties in other states illustrate patterns described by Mayhew and Fenton; Illinois and Ohio did have stronger state and local party efforts and organization. In these states, financial and organizational effectiveness, rather than ideology, was a frequent topic of discussion, except in the case of Chicago Republicans. Wisconsin’s state and local parties showed some sign of organizational strength, yet it is difficult to gauge whether or not this was because of high stakes—two open seats, one very competitive race, and three incumbents who had only narrowly been reelected in 1994—and extensive involvement by the national party organizations in Wisconsin in 1996. Despite the expected competitiveness of many Wisconsin districts, Wisconsinites were still more likely than were candidates from Ohio or Illinois to talk about ideological pressure from their state or local parties.

Why do parties matter in these elections? Earlier, I noted that 1996 was an atypical year because of the low number of uncontested seats. This is one indicator that both parties were particularly involved in the 1996 House candidacies of many candidates who had little realistic chance of
winning. Clearly, the parties had some stake in each of these elections. In some cases, the parties exerted ideological pressure, while in others, they may have seen benefits in letting candidates express their own views, in letting enthusiastic political amateurs “swing away” at the incumbent.

As I pointed out in chapter 3, however, party organization and party culture is one of the major ways in which the candidates I have chosen are unrepresentative of all candidates. In the next chapter I explore differences in expressive campaigning across election years and across regions of the country.