

## Campaign Professionalism and Organizational Strength in the State Parties

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Despite a steady stream of research on the strength of party organizations, some important changes in the campaigns industry remain unexplored. Much of the existing work on party strength appeared in the 1980s; this was during the time that political consultants were beginning to be discovered by more political scientists after establishing a strong presence in many campaigns across the nation. Although scholars debate whether consultants and parties cooperate or compete with each other, the modern connection between parties and consultants is unmistakable. This paper explores the connection between campaign professionalism and party organizational strength at the state level to begin to understand how state parties operate in modern campaigns vis a vis political consultants.

### Political Parties and Organizational Strength

More than 20 years ago, Gibson et al. (1983) observed that up-to-date, comparative examinations of the 50 state party organizations are rare. The same remains true today. Despite a steady stream of research on the subject (Aldrich 2000; Burrell 1986; Coleman 1996; Gibson et al. 1985; Gibson, Frendreis, and Vertz 1989; Huckshorn et al. 1986) overall, “the empirical literature of political science has little to say about political parties as organizations,” (Gibson et al. 1983, 194; see also Sartori 1976).

Contemporary work on party strength builds on two fundamental areas of political science: political culture and political behavior. Historically, party strength is directly connected to political context and geography. This is especially true in the southern United States. Whether fundamental transitions in Southern politics came before strong or weak political parties or vice versa, geography, context and competition are essential ingredients in exploring party strength. V.O. Key’s (1949) classic study of Democratic Party dominance in the southern United

States lays the groundwork for several contemporary analyses (especially Aldrich 2000 and Gibson et al. 1983). The connection between political behavior and party strength is equally important. Despite the fact that voters have allegedly strayed from parties since the 1960s (Campbell et al. 1960; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979), party organizations have become stronger (Gibson et al. 1983; Huckshorn et al. 1986; Gibson, Frendreis, and Vertz 1989; Aldrich 2000).

As we head toward examining the potentially competitive relationship between parties and consultants, it is worth noting that these two previous threats—the independence movement and historically weak Southern parties—did not kill party organizations as predicted. In this paper, our findings add to the evidence that political consultants have not killed parties either. We find that even organizationally weak parties can still exercise power by recognizing those tasks which consultants can perform better than the party, and working to unite consultants with needy candidates.

There is no universal operationalization of “organizational strength.” In general, however, organizational “strength” refers to a party’s ability to compete at the ballot box. Hershey (2005), notes, for example, that in addition to traditional measures of party strength such as the size of a state party’s budget and staff, “There are other ways to measure party strength. A strong party would work effectively to register voters, tell them about party candidates, and get them to the polls on Election Day. It would be successful in filling its ticket with viable candidates” (48). However, most works—including the two we rely on for the underpinnings of this paper—use quantified indices of party strength.

Gibson et al. (1983, 198)—the forerunners to Aldrich’s data which is at the core of this paper—focus on two dimensions of party strength: “organizational complexity” and “programmatic capacity.” Organizational complexity includes factors such as office facilities

and part-time versus full-time staff, party budgets and staff experience and tenure.

Programmatic capacity is more straightforward; it primarily means providing services to candidates, such as fundraising.

Gibson et al. (1983) and Aldrich (2000) quantify party strength based on surveys of state party chairs. Both methods essentially rate party strength based on the number of different organizational functions performed by the party. Aldrich's measure replicates Gibson et al.'s, and adds "a few items of special interest," (Aldrich 2000, 655). Aldrich's measure of party strength is based on 49 different activities parties might undertake. Those activities are measured against five areas of party strength (indices): 1. headquarters accessibility (i.e. the party owning/renting an office facility versus operating from the chairperson's home) 2. candidate contributions (making financial contributions to candidates) 3. candidate recruitment (recruiting a full slate of candidates) 4. services to candidates (fundraising, research, etc.). Aldrich's final measure explores "professionalization." Aldrich's professionalization index checks for the presences of six elements of party strength: 1. a full-time party chair 2. a salary for the chair 3. chair's salary level; 4. a full-time executive director 5. chair's tenure 6. a comptroller/bookkeeper.

However, Gibson et al. (1983) and Aldrich (2000) do not include political consultants when considering party staff.<sup>1</sup> Yet, consultants are central to the "division of labor" and "professionalization of leadership positions" necessary for strong parties (Gibson et al. 1983; Aldrich 2000). We suggest that hiring consultants might not only help strong parties be stronger, but could also allow weak parties to gain strength by enabling them to play a larger role in campaigns without having to hire full-time, internal staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we find no evidence that works focusing on party strength consider consultants in any serious fashion, and usually not at all.

### Political Parties, Political Consultants and Organizational Strength

During the “golden age” of political parties, “[a]n individual candidate’s ‘organization’ was often little more than a loyal following within the party,” (Herrnson 2004, 69).<sup>2</sup> Political parties and their loyal band of cronies played significant roles in orchestrating House and Senate campaigns until the mid-twentieth century. By the 1950s, few candidates could depend on parties to win nominations and elections on their behalf.

By the 1980s, political consultants had become major strategic players in many campaigns at national and state levels (Dulio 2004; Herrnson 2004; Sabato 1981; Strother 2003; Thurber and Nelson 2000), even though consultants are excluded from the research on party strength published during the 1980s. “As political parties lost control of campaigns, the essential nature of modern campaigns changed...[W]hen candidate-centered elections became the norm, campaigns had to focus on selling the candidate to a wide group of potential supporters” who were not necessarily partisan loyalists (Hrebennar, Burbank and Benedict 1999, 6). Persuading those voters meant emphasizing mass media through political consultants’ technical expertise (Herrnson 1988). Consultants have therefore become the key actors responsible for campaign strategy, theme and message (Dulio 2004; Dulio and Nelson 2005; Johnson 2001; Johnson 2000; Medvic 2001; Thurber, Nelson and Dulio 2000; Thurber and Nelson 2000; Thurber 2001). Consultants also report taking over many campaign-management functions that were once the purview of political parties and campaign managers (Dulio and Nelson 2005).

Whether consultants’ increasing power is good or bad for parties is open to debate. Some observers say that consultants’ influence has dangerous consequences, as candidates become

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<sup>2</sup> Part of this section of the paper is adapted from Garrett (2005).

increasingly removed from their campaigns and constituents, and parties become relics of a bygone era. Those who believe that consultants have led to the downfall of parties subscribe to the “adversarial” view of party-consultant relationships (Agranoff 1972; Petracca 1989; Rosenbloom 1973; Sabato 1981). According to the adversarial view, as consultants grow stronger, parties weaken (Kolodny and Logan 1998; Abbe and Herrnson, n.d.).

However, a growing consensus is emerging among political scientists and practitioners that parties and consultants are allies. According to the “allied” view of party-consultant relationships, the two sides enjoy a symbiotic relationship (Kolodny and Logan 1998; Abbe and Herrnson, n.d.; Kolodny 2000; Dulio and Thurber 2003). From the allied perspective, even given the rise of political consultants, parties continue to be relevant by dividing electioneering tasks with consultants—such as polling, media production and direct mail on the consultant side which parties cannot do as efficiently, and research and voter mobilization on the party side which consultants cannot do as well (Abbe and Herrnson n.d.; Kolodny 2000; Dulio 2004; Dulio 2005; Dulio and Thurber 2003). While the allies and adversaries theories provide a framework for exploring the relationship between parties and consultants, little empirical data exists to put those theories to work—or whether consultants are connected to stronger party organizations.

### Data and Hypotheses

To assess the impact of organizational strength on the use of campaign professionals in state parties, we turned to two unique data sets. Both are surveys of state parties, with each focusing on one aspect of the question at hand. First, in 1999 John Aldrich and his colleagues<sup>3</sup> conducted the “State Party Organizations Study” profiled above. The second survey we employed was conducted in 2002 by James Thurber and his colleagues at American University’s

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<sup>3</sup> Aldrich’s co-researchers were Brad Gomez and John Griffin. See Aldrich (2000).

Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies (CCPS).<sup>4</sup> The CCPS study explores state-party use of political consultants during the 2002 elections, including why parties hire consultants, whether state parties would recommend that their candidates hire consultants in the upcoming election cycle, and the division of labor between consultants and parties in modern campaigns. Respondents included executive directors and other party elites responsible for hiring consultants at state parties (e.g., political directors or communications directors).

Aldrich et al. conducted a mail survey and received 65 responses from state chairs across the nation; more on this survey can be found in Aldrich (2000). The CCPS survey, conducted by telephone, received 87 respondents in the final sample of this survey more information on the CCPS survey is available from the authors.

We combined the data sets by matching the party affiliation and state of the responses from each data set. Not all responses from the Aldrich survey matched the responses from the Thurber survey—for instance the CCPS study had responses from elites in both the Democratic and Republican Parties in Alaska while Aldrich only received a response from the Democratic state chair. After sorting through the responses and eliminating the cases that were unavailable, 56 cases were included in our analysis. We do not believe that either the different survey methods (mail for Aldrich and phone for CCPS) or the different time frame (1999 for Aldrich and 2002 for Thurber) pose any significant problems because the two data sets address different questions and were used for two different purposes in our study. The Aldrich data was used solely to create a list of “strong” and “weak” state party organizations, and the more recent CCPS data was used solely to investigate the role and use of consultants in state parties.

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<sup>4</sup> The CCPS survey was administered by Harris Interactive. Thurber’s co-researchers were David A. Dulio and Candice J. Nelson. More information is available from the authors.

To analyze the differences between organizationally strong and organizationally weak state parties in their reliance on outside political consultants we first needed to create a measure of organizational strength. We relied solely on the Aldrich data to build an index and used several variables that would indicate party strength. Most of those variables are used in Aldrich's own measures of party strength. We omitted others, however, because they were closely linked to the services and tasks we were interested in examining whether consultants provided to the parties.

Our revised party-strength index included: whether the chair was full- or part-time; were the state party offices operated out of the chair's home, business, or separate building; whether or not the chair was salaried; if the state party contributed to various campaigns (governor, U.S. House, U.S. Senate, state house, state senate, or other state constitutional or local office); if the party employed an executive director, how active the party was in recruiting candidates in races around the state; and if the state party engaged in activities with county-party organizations, such as sharing mailing lists, or conducting joint fundraising programs, get-out-the-vote (GOTV) drives or registration drives. Each of these variables was converted to a dichotomous 0-1 variable (although many were already dichotomous in the original Aldrich data set). These 15 variables were then aggregated to create an overall party strength index. State parties that scored a 10 or higher on this index (after the responses were aggregated the index had values ranging from 3 to 15) were coded as "strong," and those scoring 9 and lower were coded as "weak."<sup>5</sup> These categories provided the basis of comparison in the data on professionalization in the state parties.

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<sup>5</sup> This is admittedly an arbitrary cutoff for what defines "strong" or "weak" parties. However, we have confidence in the cut point because it is a conservative one—rather than, say, the median value—that includes a relatively small number of state parties (in the final analysis we had 20 state parties in our "strong" category and 36 in our "weak" category). In addition, we had a limited theoretical foundation from which to work.



We believe there are competing hypotheses that might explain any differences strong- and weak political parties utilize political consultants. For instance, it might be that strong state parties employ professionals more than their weaker counterparts because they have the structure and budget to do so. Alternatively, perhaps weaker state parties look to consultants more than stronger organizations because weak parties need more help to be competitive than strong parties. Building on prior work, we also examine state party elites' attitudes on whether their relationships with consultants are allied or adversarial.

### Party Elites' Attitudes about Campaign Professionalization

Before assessing how state parties with different levels of organizational strength utilized consultants in 2002, we examined how state party elites viewed the role of parties and outside professionals generally. This continues previous work which shows that party elites generally believe that consultants are increasingly involved in elections at all levels (Dulio and Thurber 2003; Dulio and Nelson 2005). Here, we find some interesting trends and differences between operatives in strong and weak state party organizations. Table 1 reports party operatives' mean responses on the question of whether the role of parties and professional consultants has increased or decreased. At every level, more party operatives in strong state-party organizations indicate a sense that party roles had increased, as seen by their higher mean ranking on the question of whether parties' role has increased or decreased over time. In terms of differences across levels of organizational strength, the smallest difference was at the local level (3.75 for strong parties compared to 3.72 for weak organizations). Putting aside the question of parties' role in primary election for a moment, local parties also received the lowest mean ranking for both strong and weak organizations, indicating that the local level is where the fewest party

operatives saw an increase in party power. Overall, there is little difference between strong and weak party organizations at the local level.

The greatest differences between elites from strong and weak parties appear at the national level (mean rating of 4.05 vs. 3.67) and in primary elections (mean rating of 4.06 vs. 3.26), with operatives from strong parties more likely to indicate that parties' roles have increased significantly in recent years in both areas. In contrast, elites in both strong and weak party organizations say that parties' roles at the state level have clearly increased (mean rankings of 4.10 and 3.83). Reinforcing this point is the fact that operatives in both types of organizations reported their highest mean ranking here. The high rankings for increasing influence among state parties are no surprise since the data come from state-party employees. Although the influence of state parties certainly could have increased, self-interest may also be party of these responses since state parties need to be relevant for the operatives to keep their jobs.

[Table 1 about here.]

Very different results were found when party elites were asked about the role of political consultants at different levels of campaigns. In every instance, fewer elites from strong party organizations than weak parties said that consultants have usurped power from parties. Again, however, only a small difference between operatives from strong and weak party organizations was found at the local level (mean ranking of 3.45 vs. 3.69 for strong and weak parties, respectively). Further, for both types of organizations, this is the lowest mean ranking on the questions concerning consultants' roles indicating that fewer state party elites see consultants having an increasing role at this level. We should also not be surprised by this result, given that professional consultants have not become as dominant in local elections as they have in higher-level races, whether they be in races viewed by strong or weak party organizations.

In what we believe to be an important finding, the largest differences, however, were at the state level (3.60 for those from strong parties and 4.08 from weak parties). More operatives from weaker state parties report that consultants are having more of an impact in the very races to which they are closest. This could be due to the fact that these parties do not have the resources they need to assist their candidates as much as they might like, and they have seen consultants become major players in their party's state campaigns. Elites in strong parties, on the other hand, likely because of their parties' institutional capacity, have not seen the same kind of impact from outside consultants.

On average, those operatives from both organizationally strong and weak parties see the greatest increase in consultants' presence at the national level (mean ratings of 3.89 and 4.15); given the ubiquitous nature of professionals in campaigns for Congress and the White House, this is also something we would expect to see. Overall, however, in each instance, even in the responses from elites from strong state parties, the mean responses on questions of consultants' roles were all over 3.5—clearly leaning toward a greater role for consultants at all levels. We believe that this is an admission from state party operatives of the pervasive nature of consultants in modern campaigns.

Prior work has also shown that party operatives in the states believe that there are some services that candidates demand during a campaign that are better provided by professional consultants than by parties, but that there are other services that are better provided by parties (Dulio and Thurber 2003; Dulio and Nelson 2005). Generally, these tasks fit into a two-category division of labor: those services *consultants* are better suited to provide are focused on message-creation and delivery (polling, media, and direct mail) while *parties* are better at providing

services requiring more time and staff resources (opposition research, GOTV, and fundraising).<sup>6</sup> Party elites also believe that parties maintain a strong role in providing campaign management or strategic advice.<sup>7</sup> Given the differences between strong and weak parties in their views of the role of consultants, there might also be differences in whether operatives from different parties view the idea that consultants have taken over providing specific services during campaigns.

We do find a few differences between individuals in organizationally strong and weak parties on the question of whether professional consultants have taken over the provision of specific services from parties.<sup>8</sup> First, we should note that there is no difference between those in strong or weak party organizations when it comes to their general attitude on whether consultants are better able to provide some services than are parties. They agree with equal vigor—more than 61 percent of operatives in each group said that there are some services which consultants provide some services that parties cannot.

In the areas of fundraising, field operations and GOTV efforts, and opposition research—those areas that consultants and parties agree are best provided by parties—there is little or no difference between those from strong or weak organizations (see Table 2). In addition, the low aggregate responses, especially for GOTV efforts, reflect the feeling that both groups also see that consultants have not replaced parties in these areas. In a finding that is consistent with prior work, party elites from both strong and weak parties also were skeptical that consultants had taken over in the area of management and strategic advice. As Dulio and Thurber (2003) argue, party operatives still believe they have something to offer in the area of management and strategic advice.

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<sup>6</sup> This division of labor reflects the “allied” vision of party-consultant relationships discussed previously.

<sup>7</sup> However, using in-depth qualitative data, Garrett (2005, chapters 4-5) finds that political professionals of all stripes say that parties generally play little role in providing strategic advice.

<sup>8</sup> In these differences, it is interesting to note that those from weak state parties illustrate views similar those of professional consultants (see Dulio and Nelson 2005 for consultant data).

In the areas of polling and campaign advertising, there were measurable differences between elites strong and weak parties, with those from weak parties more likely to say that consultants had taken over for parties in these areas. However, we should be careful to say that even though they had a lower mean rating, party operatives from strong party organizations did not fully reject the idea that consultants had taken over the provision of these services, either. One area where we may have expected this trend to continue was direct mail. However, here there was a small difference in the opposite direction.

[Table 2 about here.]

### Campaign Professionalization in Strong and Weak Parties

There are at least two ways that state parties (and parties in general) can involve professional political consultants in their efforts to get candidates elected: they can recommend specific consultants to their candidates and they can pay for their services directly (either for candidate use or their own purposes). It is well established at the national level that political parties are not shy about recommending consultants to their candidates (Herrnson 1988; Sabato 1981). However, we know less about the importance of this practice at the state level. When asked about the practice of recommending consultant to candidates, state-party operatives were clear that this is nearly a universal practice. In state party organizations defined as strong as well as weak, 80 percent or more said that they would recommend outside consultants to their candidates. We believe that one reason these figures were not closer to 100 percent is the presence of competitive races in the states. In states without serious competitive races party organizations, be they strong or weak, may not feel the need to recommend outside consultants; their candidates will likely either coast to victory and not need as much help in their campaign,

let alone in identifying professionals, or never be in the running as token opposition and not even think about hiring professionals. It is highly likely that strong candidate-centered campaigns have already identified skilled consultants on their own. Clearly, however, state parties are as involved as their national party brethren in funneling consultants to their candidates through recommendations.

When we examine those types of consultants parties say they will recommend to their candidates, we find evidence consistent with that reported above in terms of the increased role of consultants and the division of labor between parties and consultants. Overall, huge majorities of state-party operatives from both strong and weak parties said that they would recommend pollsters, media consultants, and direct mail specialists to their candidates (see Table 3). This is no surprise since all are central to message creation and delivery—the category of services noted above that consultants and party elites have both say consultants now dominate. The parties—especially weak state parties—choose not to provide these services in-house presumably because they do not have the infrastructure to do so.<sup>9</sup>

[Table 3 about here.]

However, an interesting and large difference between strong and weak party organizations appears in the area of recommending fundraising consultants. A full 73 percent of party operatives from weak parties said that they would recommend a fundraiser to their candidates compared to only about 44 percent of those from strong party organizations. While fundraising is an integral part of what political parties do—both to fill their own coffers and to help their candidates—weaker state party organizations are less well equipped to help their candidates in this area. For weak parties, fundraising is, therefore, just another service that they

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<sup>9</sup> In each instance reported in Table 3, more state party operatives from weak party organizations than from strong parties said that they would recommend these consultants.

do not have the resources to provide, making consultants the only real alternative. Overall, these data suggest that strong *state* party organizations share national parties' view that consultants are important resources, skilled at providing polling, media and direct mail. Interestingly, while national parties and strong state parties do not generally emphasize consultants' roles in fundraising, weak state parties have little choice but to use consultants as fundraisers. Not only do weak state parties not provide services such as media production or polling to their candidates, they also do not provide as much support in fundraising as their strong party counterparts.

Party elites were also asked about which factors influence their decisions to recommend particular consultants to candidates. Specifically, they were asked about seven attributes, including the consultant's: ideology, win/loss record, experience in that particular state, fees and affordability, experience in the particular type of race, past record on ethical issues, and any experience working for state or national parties. The order of the mean ratings (see Table 4) provide some clue as to what each kind of party is interested in when they recommend consultants to candidates. For instance, the highest mean ranking for those from weak organizations was on the importance of the consultant's experience in the state. This was only the sixth-highest rating for operatives from strong parties. In contrast, the highest mean rating from strong party organizations was the consultant's experience in the particular type of race followed closely by fees or affordability; these factors were tied for third in the list of ratings from weak organizations. We believe that these figures are a clear signal that the operatives from weak state parties are referring candidates to consultants who have a track record in their states, because the party alone cannot provide the same quality of advice to candidates. Interestingly, although in these cases consultants are clearly replacing parties, the party-

consultant relationship is not necessarily adversarial. Indeed, it appears that weak parties are willingly reducing their roles in campaigns. In doing so, they are ironically allied with political consultants.

[Table 4 about here]

In addition to consultants' experiences in the particular type of race, their conduct was also important to operatives in both strong and weak of organizations. One final interesting result from these data is the relative lack of importance of any experience the consultant might have working for a state or national party organization; this was the lowest mean ranking by operatives from both strong and weak organizations. Based on prior research which shows parties act as training grounds for consultants (Kolodny and Logan 1998; Thurber, Nelson and Dulio 2000), and that consultants with party experience get more party business than those without such experience (Kolodny and Logan 1998), we might have expected previous employment with parties to be more important. However, the mean ratings for those from both strong and weak organizations only approach 3, which corresponds to "somewhat important" in the set of survey responses.

When examining the hiring practices of state political parties, we again see evidence of the pervasiveness of consultants in today's campaigns. State-party elites were asked whether or not they planned to hire the same four types of consultants noted above—pollsters, media consultants, direct mail specialists and fundraisers—in the 2002 cycle. As Table 5 illustrates, there are no substantive differences between strong and weak party organizations in their hiring of pollsters or direct mail specialists. In both cases, large majorities of operatives in both strong and weak organizations said that they "probably" would or "definitely" would hire these types of consultants (88.9 percent and 83.4 percent for pollsters, and 94.4 percent and 88.6 percent for



direct mail specialists among strong and weak party organizations respectively). Again, this speaks to the division of labor noted above: parties do not engage in creating the services or goods geared toward message-creation and delivery in modern campaigns. Instead, they rely on consultants to provide message services.

In terms of the parties' hiring of fundraisers, a small difference appears between strong and weak party organizations. However, the absence of a large difference in this case is not because of the near unanimous response that parties would hire this type of consultant, but in the parties' relative lack of interest in hiring a fundraiser. Here, only about one in three party organizations (both strong and weak) said that they "definitely" would hire a fundraiser. The results here also fit with the division-of-labor hypothesis discussed throughout, which coincides with the allied perspective of consultant-party relationships. Party organizations are more likely to perform services and functions that are related to activities requiring more staff resources and time, with fundraising certainly falling into that category. Strong party organizations in the states likely have the staff and resources to do as much fundraising as they need without much outside help. This may also be the case with weak party organizations, but it might also be the case that weak parties simply do not raise enough money to warrant the help of an outside professional.

[Table 5 about here.]

The only curious result in this set of findings is the party operatives' response to the question of whether they would hire a media specialist in 2002. Fewer state party elites in total said their organization would hire a media consultant compared to pollsters or direct mail specialists. With the cost of media buys always increasing, it is not likely to be cost-efficient for state parties to engage in their own media campaigns as compared to in-house production of

direct mail. However, there was a large difference between strong and weak parties in terms of the number saying that they would hire a media consultant, as more operatives from weak parties said their organization would hire a media consultant than those from strong parties. This is exactly the opposite result we might expect. It is not likely to be the case that strong parties do not need the services of a media consultant because they have the in-house capacity to produce television ads, since even parties at the national level have moved away from providing this service. It is also not very likely that weak party organizations would be in a position to hire a media consultant and then buy air time required to put the spot on the air, given the smaller budgets with which these organizations work.

It could be that this result is a function of the particular election cycle the operatives were during the time of the survey. Perhaps weak state party organizations that responded that they would hire a media specialist were expecting financing help that would pay for consulting fees and airtime. If there were weak party organizations that had competitive races in their states—for the U.S. House, U.S. Senate, or a governorship—they may have had assistance they normally would not receive. It may also be that strong state party organizations lacked any type of competitive race in their states and decided not to unnecessarily spend money.

We can begin to better understand these data on hiring decisions by examining factors behind the decision, as well as who the consultants would perform services for (either the party, its candidates, or both). Taking the latter first, in terms of whom the consultants that are hired by state parties will work for, there was also great agreement between those from strong and weak party organizations. In the areas of polling, media, and mail, sizeable majorities of operatives from both strong and weak parties said that the consultants they hired would work for both the party and for its candidates. In general, between one quarter and one third said that consultants

would work exclusively for the party, and very few said that they would work exclusively for candidates. Media consultants are a slight exception. More state party elites said that the media consultants they hired would work solely for a candidate—11 percent of those from weak parties and 14 percent from strong parties reported this arrangement. As for fundraisers, the majority of party officials (again from both strong and weak party organizations) said that the fundraisers would work only for the party and the rest said that they would work for both the party and its candidates (not one party operative said the fundraiser they hired would work exclusively for a candidate). This is a curious finding given the preponderance of evidence that shows parties do not turn to outside professionals for help in fundraising. But the reader should remember that relatively few party operatives said that their organization would hire a fundraiser in the first place, and this question was asked only of those who said they would hire fundraisers in the first place. The lack of responses indicating that a consultant hired by the party would work solely for candidates should not be a surprise given the few scenarios which make it appropriate for parties to pay for services provided to their candidates and that when parties spend money, they want to get some of the benefit from that spending.

We can get more of an indication about party hiring practices by looking at some of the reasons party operatives report that they hire consultants. There are several reasons state parties may want to hire outside consultants. For instance, they might find it more economical to pay consultants for a small amount of work that needs to be done rather than invest in the infrastructure and staff needed to produce the same service in-house. Parties might also be encouraged by the national party organization to hire consultants, or state parties simply may not perform that service. Here again, we see some complimentary evidence for the existence of an “allied” division of labor between parties and consultants. In the cases of pollsters and media

consultants, the mean ratings from party operatives from both strong and weak organizations indicate that the most important reason they do look to hire these consultants is that their organization does not provide this particular service. The mean ratings for strong (3.38 for pollsters and 3.38 for media specialists) and weak parties (4.00 and 3.54) far outpaced the reason with the second highest mean rating (see Table 6). The aggregate rankings from operatives from both strong and weak organizations in both cases were the same—that their organization did not provide the service, followed by they would be directed to by the national party, followed by cost savings on staff salaries—but the average ratings from strong parties were lower in each case indicating that fewer operatives in those states saw *each* factor as important. As for hiring direct mail consultants, the fact that their party does not provide that particular service was again the reason with the highest mean ranking for operatives from weak party organizations; those from strong parties were much less likely to rate this as important. More operatives from strong party organizations said that cost savings on staff was the biggest reason for hiring a direct-mail specialist.

[Table 6 about here.]

A more general point about consultants in state parties is important here as well. In the case of each type of consultant asked about the factor that was the most important for most party elites was that their organization did not provide that particular service (except mail consultants for strong parties where it was a close second). In other words, both strong and weak party organizations find that they need consultants because they do not perform or provide certain services, but this is even more important among weaker state parties.

The story is much different, however, when we turn to fundraising consultants. There were no differences between strong and weak parties in the order of importance of the different

factors or the importance of individual factors. For instance, the fact that their organization did not perform this particular service was the (it was also the lowest mean ranking for any factor related to the hiring of any consultant asked about). The highest mean rating (and it was relatively low compared to the other ratings in questions about other consultants) centered on the fact that hiring a fundraiser was an important way to save money on salaries.<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion

This paper advances the literature on party organizational strength by examining the role of outside professionals in state parties. By examining how state parties with different organizational capacities look to and use professional consultants we have a better understanding of both parties' and consultants' role in state campaigns. The adversarial and allied schools of party-consultant relationships are also familiar territory. We find further evidence of the allied view here in that state party operatives do not have a hostile view toward outside professionals. In fact, they look to them for help in areas that they know they cannot as effectively help their candidates. This holds for both organizationally strong and weak parties, although weak parties may be looking to consultants for help slightly more often because of their lower levels of resources and lack of infrastructure. However, we should be clear that our findings do not indicate that state party organizations are dead or irrelevant. Instead, we believe we have further evidence of a division of labor between consultants and parties that help parties achieve their main goal of winning elections.

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<sup>10</sup> Recall that few state parties said that they would hire a fundraiser.

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Table 1. State Party Elites' Mean Ratings of Their Views of the Role of Parties and Consultants, by Organizational Strength

	<u>Weak Parties</u>	<u>Strong Parties</u>
Has the role of political parties at the local level	3.72	3.75
Has the role of political parties at the state level	3.83	4.10
Has the role of political parties at the national level	3.75	4.05 <sup>a</sup>
Has the role of political parties in primary elections	3.26	4.06 <sup>b</sup>
Has the role of political consultants at the local level	3.69	3.45
Has the role of political consultants at the state level	4.08	3.60 <sup>c</sup>
Has the role of political consultants at the national level	4.15	3.89 <sup>d</sup>
Has the role of political consultants in primary elections	3.94	3.84

<sup>a</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.11$

<sup>b</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.002$

<sup>c</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.014$

<sup>d</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.16$

Mean rankings based on a scale where 1 = "decreased very much"; 2 = "decreased somewhat"; 3 = "stayed the same"; 4 = "increased somewhat"; and 5 = "increased very much"

Table 2. State Party Elites' Views of Services Provided by Parties and Consultants, by Organizational Strength

	<u>Weak Parties</u>	<u>Strong Parties</u>
Campaign advertising	3.17	2.85 <sup>a</sup>
Fundraising	2.44	2.45
Get out the vote	1.83	1.75
Polling	3.22	3.00 <sup>b</sup>
Opposition research	2.56	2.55
Direct mail	2.80	3.00
Management or strategic advice	2.50	2.53

<sup>a</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.08$

<sup>b</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.13$

Mean rankings based on a scale where 1 = “strongly disagree”; 2 = “somewhat disagree”; 3 = “somewhat agree”; and 4 = “strongly agree”

Table 3. Political Consultants State Parties Recommend to their Candidates, by Organizational Strength

	<u>Weak Parties</u>	<u>Strong Parties</u>
Percent saying they will recommend		
Pollsters	92.3%	87.5%
Direct mail	100%	93.8%
Media	92.3%	81.3%
Fundraiser	73.1%	43.8% <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Fisher's Exact Test,  $p = 0.058$

Table 4. Factors in State Parties' Decisions to Recommend Consultants to their Candidates, by Organizational Strength

	<u>Weak Parties</u>	<u>Strong Parties</u>
Experience in the state	4.25	3.50 <sup>a</sup>
Past record on ethical issues	4.19	3.79 <sup>b</sup>
Experience in the type of race	4.00	4.00
Fees or affordability	4.00	3.95
Ideology	3.72	3.60
Win/loss record	3.58	3.60
Previous experience in another state or national party	2.94	2.95

<sup>a</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.001$

<sup>b</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.04$

Mean rankings based on a scale where 1 = "not at all important"; 2 = "not very important"; 3 = "somewhat important"; 4 = "very important"; and 5 = "extremely important"

Table 5. State Party Decisions to Hire Professional Political Consultants, by Organizational Strength.

	Pollster		Direct mail specialist		Media consultant		Fundraiser	
	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong	Weak	Strong
Definitely will not hire	0.0%	5.6%	5.7%	5.6%	2.9%	18.8%	22.2%	21.1%
Probably will not hire	16.7%	5.6%	5.7%	0.0%	17.1%	31.3%	27.8%	15.8%
Probably will hire	27.8%	22.2%	28.6%	22.2%	37.1%	25.0%	16.7%	26.3%
Definitely will hire	55.6%	66.7%	60.0%	72.2%	42.9%	25.0%	33.3%	36.8%
N	36	18	35	18	35	16	36	19

Chi-Square = 5.975  
p = 0.05

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Table 6. Factors in Parties' Decisions to Hire Outside Consultants, by Consultant Type and Organizational Strength

	<u>Weak</u>	<u>Strong</u>
Pollsters		
Party does not perform that service	4.00	3.38 <sup>a</sup>
Party likely to be directed by national party	2.93	2.56
Allows party to save on staff salary	2.70	2.56
Direct mail		
Party does not perform that service	3.71	2.73 <sup>b</sup>
Party likely to be directed by national party	3.19	2.24 <sup>c</sup>
Allows party to save on staff salary	2.61	3.00
Media		
Party does not perform that service	3.54	3.38
Party likely to be directed by national party	3.04	2.75 <sup>d</sup>
Allows party to save on staff salary	2.61	2.75
Fundraiser		
Party does not perform that service	2.35	2.25
Party likely to be directed by national party	2.72	2.58
Allows party to save on staff salary	3.06	2.83

<sup>a</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.04$

<sup>b</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.005$

<sup>c</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.001$

<sup>d</sup> difference of means test,  $p = 0.12$

Mean rankings based on a scale where 1 = "not at all important"; 2 = "not very important"; 3 = "somewhat important"; 4 = "very important"; and 5 = "extremely important"