

The Organizational Structure of State Parties

Doug Roscoe

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

State parties play a critical role in establishing representation both in the electoral process and also internally within the party. In both the Democratic and Republican parties, power tends to flow from the bottom up in a series of representational linkages. In general, local committees select members of the state committee and state convention, and the state parties select the members of the national committees and determine the selection of national convention delegates. State parties sit in the middle of this representational linkage, and the set of party rules and structures defined in each state party's charter/constitution/by-laws, and often in state law, determine how most of those connections will occur. Though it's not inaccurate to say there are literally a hundred different ways of organizing state parties, there are some common patterns and organizational structures. This paper presents results from an analysis of these charters and statutes and describes the variation in how the rules define and structure state party organizations. The analysis emphasizes the structures of representation within the party: how do party officials, state committee members, convention delegates get selected; how are lower-level committees at the district, county, and town level organized and how do they articulate with the state committee; and how does the state committee determine national representation in the national committee? The findings here reveal remarkable diversity in the ways state parties formally organize themselves and a variety of ways in which intraparty democratic representation is realized.

Prepared for presentation at the 2025 State of the Parties Conference

For nearly 200 years, political party organizations have been central to electoral politics in the United States. Their role has changed, and they have evolved in many ways during this period, but throughout they have maintained an institutional presence in the political environment. Like any institution, their structure reflects a shared understanding, both formal and informal, about how individuals may become associated with the institution and the ways in which they can interact and engage in collective action. Today, the central source of this understanding for political party organizations is the party's formal organizing document, which can take on a variety of names (charter, constitution, by-laws, rules, etc.), but which I will refer to simply as a "charter." These documents define the organizational elements of parties, how those elements inter-relate, how decisions are made, what actions may be undertaken by the various elements, and more. In many states, statute also prescribes party organizational structure to varying degrees.

American parties are not, of course, single organizations but rather a set of committees at the national, state and local levels. Each of these committees has its own charter document, at least at the national and state levels. Even at the local level, about 80% have a formal charter document (Roscoe and Jenkins 2016). Though each committee is distinct, the charters provide specific rules for how the committees at each level link up. The DNC and RNC, for example, have formal rules about the state parties' selection of national committee members (for example, the number allocated to each state and their gender diversity), but within those rules, each state party committee may do things differently (for example, selecting national committee members at a state convention or by a vote of the state committee). Similarly, state party charters typically define the local committees (or conventions) that select the members of the state committee. Local committees may have their own charter to organize their decision making, within the bounds of the state party rules.

Within this set of interconnected committees, state parties sit at a critical nexus. As noted, the national committees are composed of members selected by state parties, and the state party charters define the sub-state committees and how they interact with the state. Consequently, the state party charters provide a wide window into the institutional structure of the party organizations overall.

Institutional Theory and Political Parties

Why is an analysis of party institutional structure worth undertaking? Institutional approaches once dominated our understanding of politics, but were, of course, largely eclipsed by behavioral frameworks in the mid-20th Century. Theorists in more recent decades, as part of a "new institutionalism" movement, have reasserted the value of institutional description (Peters 1999). The key insight is that institutions establish rules and expectations that can have powerful effects on behavior. While it is important to understand the motivations and decision making processes of political actors, those dynamics occur within institutional contexts that enable and constrain, encourage and prohibit, what those actors do. In short, structure shapes behavior.

There have been some institutional approaches to political parties in the literature. For example, Eldersveld (1964) described party organizations as a stratarchy, in which each layer at the national, state and local levels maintains a degree of autonomy. This institutional structure meant cooperation across party committees was voluntary and based on mutual benefit, rather than centralized management. There is also a long literature describing the organizational traits of local party committees (Cotter et. al 1984; Roscoe and Jenkins 2016), focusing particularly on the factors that provide capacity, such as having a full set of officers, a campaign headquarters, a telephone listing or paid staff. Organizational approaches also have encompassed an ecological perspective on parties, highlighting the degree to which they adapt and evolve as the environment shifts (Masket 2020; Roscoe and Jenkins 2016).

Though none of this work has been blind to the formal rules that establish the organizational structures under examination, there has not been any systematic work to catalog the variety of structural arrangements among both Republican and Democratic parties in all fifty states. Absent this basic description, it's impossible to know in what ways this institutional variation might shape behavior. The analysis presented in this study provides a descriptive picture of these structures, as a first step toward understanding the broader effects of institutional variation.

This analysis is important because parties are democratic institutions, and play a critical semi-public role (Epstein 1986). Because the institutional rules for elections nearly mandate a formal party nomination for winning public office, the ways in which party organizations operate and produce nominees is an essential part of the democratic process. If nominations are necessary and parties nominate, then we need to ask how parties represent their members. As the analysis here makes clear, the formal party rules focus extensively on how this representation happens.

Measuring the Structure of State Parties

Extracting the organizational features of parties from the charter and statute documents can present some challenges. Many charters are lengthy, covering a broad variety of provisions, and both charters and statute are written in formal, legalistic language. Coding many features often requires connecting provisions in disparate sections of the charter or even across the charter and state law. To aid in this analytical work, I relied on the textual analysis capacities of a Large Language Model, specifically Anthropic's Claude 4. A Large Language Model (LLM) is a generative artificial intelligence program that is trained on data to generate text based on semantic context.¹

¹ All LLMs use training data to produce a set of vectors comprising thousands of dimensions for the set of tokens (words or fragments of words) in the training data, as well as a set of billions of model weights that encode connections, patterns, and transformation rules among tokens in the training data. A user prompt is then translated into tokens and those tokens become part of the context that is processed by the model through multiple layers using the model weights. Transformer models, the key innovation behind current LLMs, dynamically regulate the attention of the model to various tokens in a way that puts the generated tokens into a meaningful semantic context. The scale of the models, in terms of training data, tokens available in the "context window," weight parameters, and processing layers, make current models exceptionally powerful at processing language.

Current frontier models, like Claude 4, are much more capable than earlier models that operated solely through deep-learning text-prediction algorithms. Claude 4 is a hybrid model that can engage in web searches, generate and run code to complete math or statistical operations, and compile artifacts like documents or datasets. These capacities make it an extremely useful tool for textual analysis.

Using the LLM for the coding process required several steps. The first involved my coding a dozen party charters independently, to be used as a calibration set. Next I created an initial set of project documents that were uploaded to a project folder within the LLM system that would be accessible to the LLM for all of the coding attempts. These documents included: a *lexicon* defining a set of key terms that would need to be employed in the coding; a *variables* file describing the variables to be coded and the rules for the coding; and an *instructions* file that explained how to conduct the coding process. These files are available in the Appendix. As the calibration process unfolded, I added a fourth document that provided a model for how to format the dataset artifacts that the LLM was producing for each party.

The collection of the charters was straightforward. Almost all state parties provide a copy of their charter on their website (some parties employ two separate documents—e.g., a constitution and by-laws—to establish their structures and rules). For some parties that don’t post their charter on their website, a general web search located the charter. For others, an email request was successful. To identify relevant statute, I leveraged the LLM’s capacity for web search and artifact creation to scrub online sources of state law and to compile all sections related to political parties. These statute documents were generally over-inclusive, for example pulling in any code related to primary or general elections where party was mentioned. As a result, a statute document for every state was created, though there is considerable variation in the extent to which they prescribe particular party organizational structures. In order to check for LLM accuracy, I audited a selection of the statute provisions pulled into the artifact documents to compare directly against the online versions, and there was perfect agreement in all cases.

The calibration process focused on refining the definitions in the lexicon to remove ambiguities and to add special coding notes to the instructions about key distinctions or to highlight directions for specific issues. The dataset artifacts produced by the LLM included the coding for each variable as well as an indication of where in the charter or statute the coding decision was identified and a brief rationale for the coding decision. This is a typical entry, in this case for the variable ‘county’ that codes whether the party uses county-level committees:

county	1	PA Statute Section 807, PA Dem Rules Rule VII Section 1(a)	County committees clearly established - members elected at Spring Primary in gubernatorial election year
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The latter two columns proved invaluable in the calibration process. In coding the basic features—for example whether the party has county parties, a state convention, etc.—the LLM

was nearly always in agreement with the control coding. Discrepancies tended to emerge around more complicated concepts, such as ex officio selection, or around organizational arrangements that were clearly ambiguous given the coding scheme. The calibration, then, was important for refining the lexicon and the coding instructions to resolve these discrepancies. It is notable that in many of the cases where the LLM coding diverged from my control coding, a review of the LLM rationale persuaded me that it was the more correct way to code that variable for that case.

After calibration, the LLM was then used to code the remaining parties. However, this was not a totally unsupervised process. In addition to the coding-context information in the datasets, which I reviewed, the LLM would also produce a textual summary of the key points from each party's coding process, identifying any unusual features or challenging coding circumstances. All of this information helped me identify additional clarifications that were needed and resolve ambiguities that arose.

To code for organizational features, I use a set of terms to describe the common ways these parties organize themselves. In many cases, these terms are obvious and straightforward, but parties use different terms to describe the same things, so it's important to be explicit about what organizational feature counts as what, regardless of what the parties call them. The following are the key terms used in the analysis here, as defined in the lexicon (see the Appendix for the full set of defined lexicon terms):

- party unit: an organized collection of individuals with charter-defined selection criteria and roles; these party units almost always are geographically defined
- committee: a party unit comprising a group of individuals who are selected in some way from a larger population and which occupy ongoing positions on the committee, typically for some set term of time
- convention: a party unit comprising a group of individuals who are selected in some way from a larger population and which convene for a single meeting occasion and then disband
- selection: the general term to describe how individuals are chosen to hold formally defined positions on a party unit (e.g., as members of committees, or delegates at conventions etc.)
- election: a selection process in which a population votes to choose individuals to hold formally defined positions (this population can be the general electorate, but can also be a party unit, such as a committee, caucus, or convention)
- ex officio: add-ons for a given party unit in which holding a particular position in another party unit defined in the charter or statute provides automatic selection for position in the given party unit (e.g., all county chairs might serve as members of the state committee); the other position must be within the formal party organizational structure, not external elected office or membership in club or interest-caucus
- dead end committee: a committee that is involved in no selection processes for any other committees, including election or ex officio selection.

Describing the Organizational Structure of State Parties

The analysis will start by considering some basic organizational features: what kinds of committees and what kinds of conventions, at what geographical levels, do state parties use. This investigation will also consider how members of these party units are selected and whether the units are “dead ends” that are not involved in further selection processes. Next, some summary measures of organizational form will be examined. Finally, the analysis will consider some of the geographical factors that may explain variations in organizational form.

Committee Types

Every state party has a formal state committee, of course, but below that there is variation in the party units that are used. Table 1 presents the frequencies for the various committee types. County committees are the most ubiquitous, which should not be surprising to those who have studied state and local parties. Only twelve state parties lack county committees. These twelve include both parties in New England states in which town committees serve the equivalent role (CT, MA, RI), as well as Alaska, and North Dakota, which use state legislative districts as their primary unit, and Delaware, which has a subdivision system that is close-to but not exactly county-based.

The widespread use of county committees (or town or legislative district) as a primary unit does not preclude the use of other committee types. Precinct committees are the next most common, used by 55 state parties. It’s important to note that in many cases these precinct “committees” may only comprise a pair of precinct committeepersons, but that nonetheless qualifies as a party unit. Next most common are congressional district committees, used by nearly half the parties. These play an interesting and variable role in party structures, as we’ll explore further. Roughly a third of parties have state legislative district committees and local (town/municipal) committees.²

There are some differences in the frequency of committee types between the groups of Republican and Democratic parties, but they are generally small. In both cases, the ordering of most-to-least common is the same. This pattern of similarity will recur in the analysis, and there may be several reasons for it. First, the not-uncommon role of statute in prescribing party structures drives similarity. And the two parties in a state may have looked to each other for ideas about how to organize. Finally, as will be shown later in the analysis, organizational structures reflect some basic geographical realities, which affect both parties in a state in exactly the same way. The similarity between Democratic and Republican parties emerges in almost all of the data,

² The coding process generated separate variables for the presence of town committees and municipal committees, but in some cases I will combine these into a “local” committee type. Where municipal committees exist, they generally supplement another geographical layer, like counties (e.g., all counties get a committee and several big cities get a committee). Where towns are employed, they more often are used as a comprehensive unit tiling the entire state.

Table 1: Types of Committee Organization (Percentage of Parties)

	Total	Democrats	Republicans
County committees	88	88	88
Precinct committees	55	50	60
Congressional district committees	48	46	50
Legislative district committees	34	38	30
Local committees	31	36	26

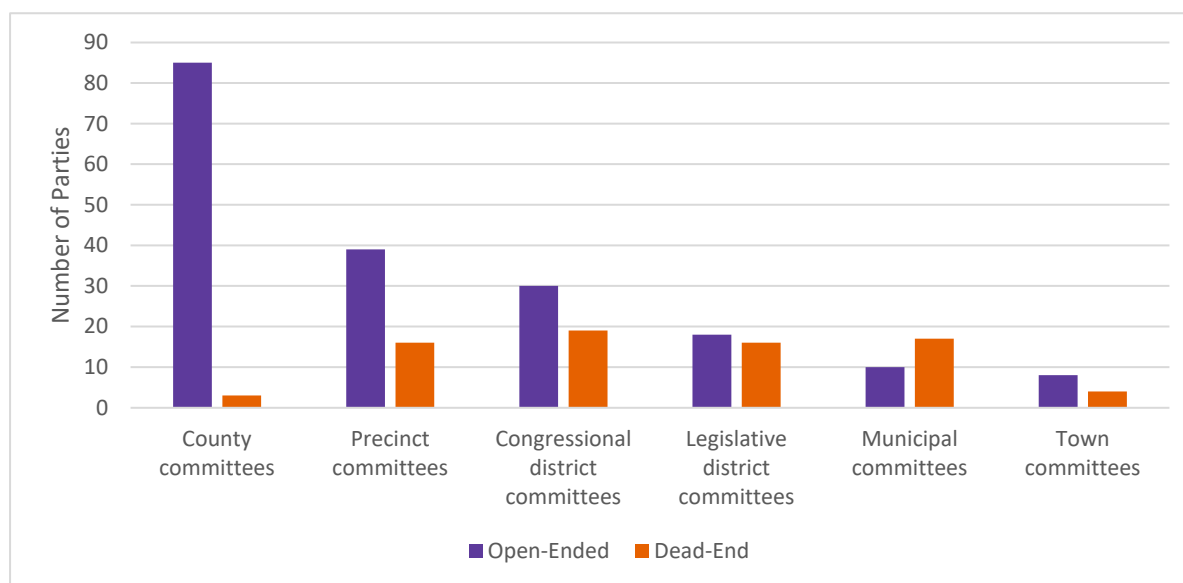
and consequently many of the analyses will simply combine them into a single group of state parties.

A final point to note about committee types is the presence of state executive committees that may exist in addition to the primary state committee. Most states use these types of committees, which are smaller and meet more regularly, to conduct business between the larger meetings of the state committee. These executive committees are required in 67 state parties and are available as an option in 18 others, leaving only 15 states that have no provisions for any type of executive committee.

The committees that exist at varying levels in a state often play an important linkage role, connecting party members at lower levels to party roles higher up. For example, precinct committee persons elected at primary elections may have ex officio membership on county committees; county committees might elect delegates to a state convention or members of the state committee; county committee chairs might serve ex officio on the state committee. In contrast to these “open-ended” committees, some party units can be a “dead end,” meaning their members are involved in no further selection processes.

Figure 1 graphs the frequency of open-ended and dead-end committee types (taking both Republican and Democratic parties combined). Perhaps the most notable feature is the dominance of open-ended county committees. County committees are by far the most common and are almost entirely open-ended. This reinforces the conclusion that county committees are absolutely central to the internal democracy of state parties. Precinct committees are generally open-ended, as well, but a significant minority are dead-ends. There is a more even split among the congressional district and state legislative district committees. It’s a reasonable speculation that this reflects a historical legacy. These committees likely arose to manage nominations for congressional and legislative seats in those districts, back when the party organizations controlled the nomination process. Today, with nominations controlled by primary voters, many of these committees function like vestigial structures. The “primary function” assigned to the dead-end county committees of the Alabama Republican party are typical of dead-end district committees: “To assist and promote party candidates for congress and party candidates for state offices.” Without a linkage role and no power over nominations, these committees are charged with a public facing set of responsibilities.

Figure 1: Committee Type by Open-Ended vs. Dead-End (Number of Parties)



Convention Types

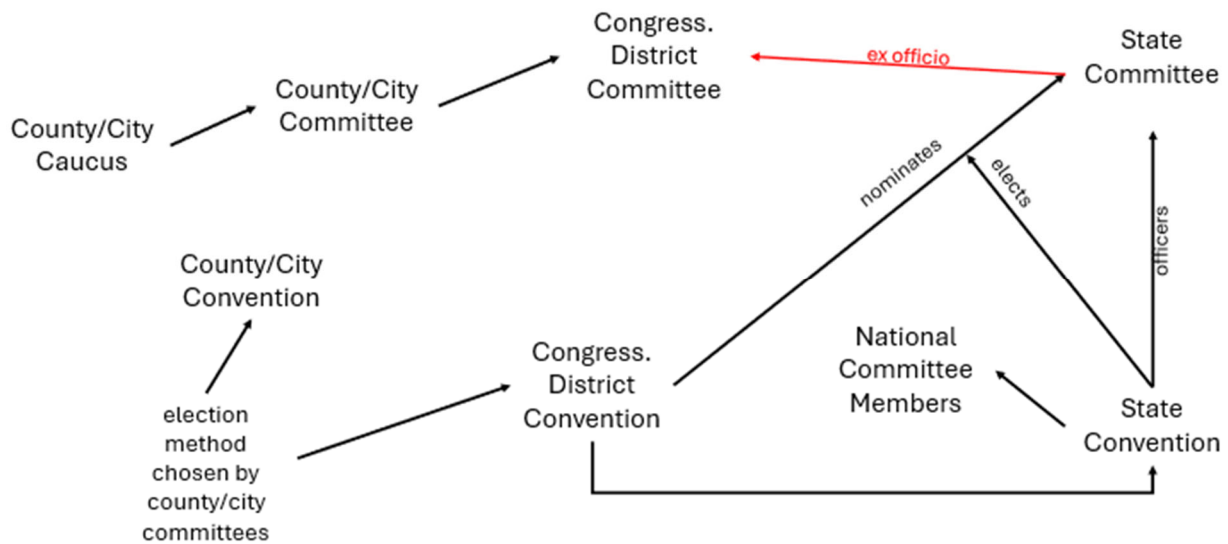
In addition to established committees, state parties employ conventions at various levels to serve linkage roles and to set party policies. Table 2 provides the data for convention use. Most, but not all, state parties have provisions in their charter for a state convention. It's important to note that some of the eleven parties that are coded as not having state conventions may in fact hold them, but may do so as an action of the state committee, rather than as a charter requirement. Below the state level, county conventions are used by just under half the parties, congressional district conventions by about a third, and legislative district and local conventions used by just a few parties.

The role of these conventions varies considerably, and it's beyond the scope of the analysis here to unpack that variation. But some examples might be helpful. The Georgia Republicans use county conventions to select state convention delegates and congressional district conventions to select state committee members. Virginia Republicans use congressional district conventions to elect the chairs of the congressional district committees. The Virginia Democrats have a complicated arrangement, graphed in Figure 2: congressional district conventions nominate state committee members and also elect state convention delegates; those state convention delegates then elect the state committee officers and also elect the state committee members from among those nominated by congressional district conventions.

Table 2: Types of Conventions (Percentage of Parties)

	Total	Democrats	Republicans
State convention	89	92	86
County convention	45	44	46
Congressional district convention	32	34	30
Legislative district convention	11	10	12
Local convention	5	8	2

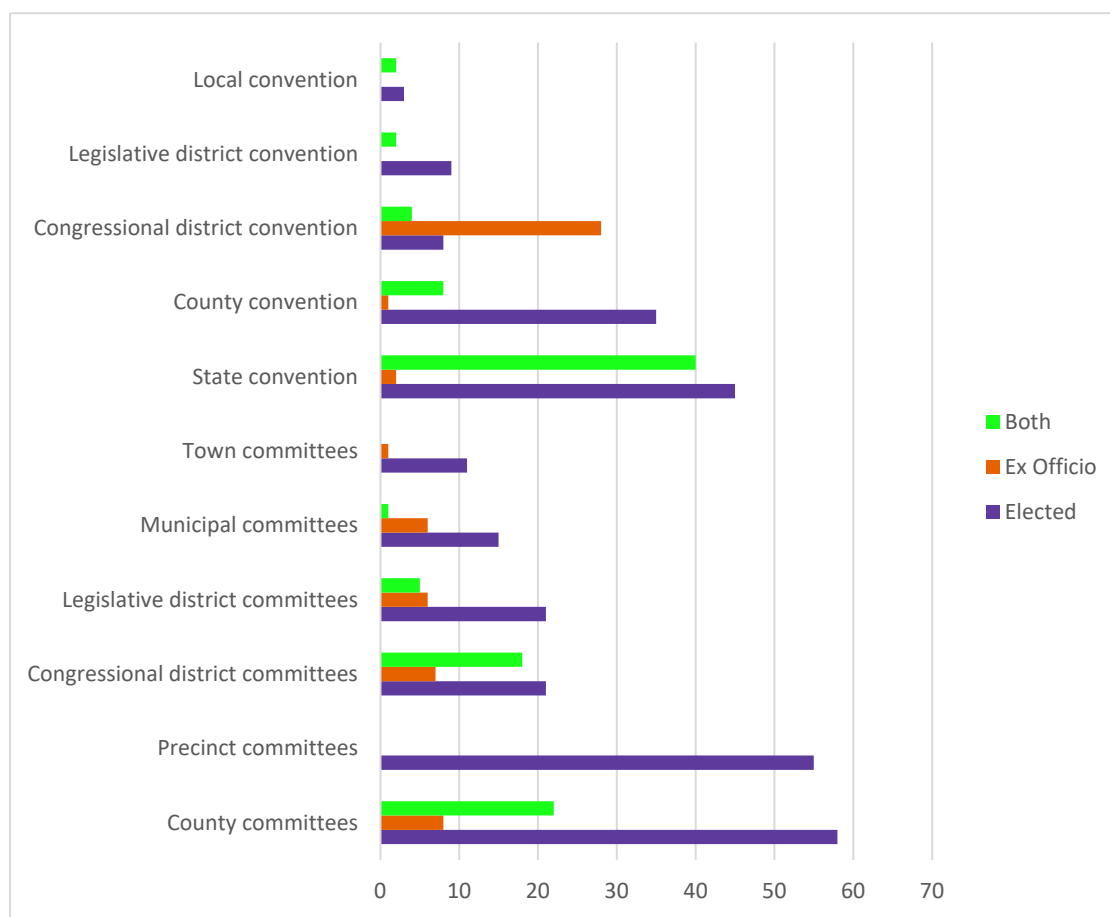
Figure 2: Virginia Democratic Party Structure



Party Unit Selection

As should be clear, both committees and conventions can play important roles in intraparty democracy. It is interesting, therefore, to understand how members of these party units are selected. The coding process makes a basic distinction between election and ex officio selection. By election it is meant that the members of some geographical population or the members of some other party unit vote to select the members of a different party unit. Ex officio selection occurs when the members of a party unit are automatically selected for membership on that unit by virtue of their membership on a different party unit. For example, in the case of the Virginia Democrats graphed in Figure 2, congressional district committee members are selected by both processes: county/city committees elect some of the district members, but in addition all state

Figure 3: Selection Process for Party Units (Number of Parties)



committee members serve automatically as district members (ex officio) in the districts where they reside.³

Figure 3 presents the data on selection processes. The ubiquity of both county committees and state conventions stands out, of course, and for both election is the more commonly used selection process, although ex officio is also broadly used, and a combination is very common for state conventions. For example, among the 88 parties using county committees, 58 rely on election alone, 8 on ex officio selection alone, and 22 use both. For parties with a state convention, only two use only ex officio selection, with the rest about evenly split between strict election and a system using both processes.

Precinct committees are most notable for using only election processes, which is not surprising since there is no lower level that might provide ex officio members. Among the other committees,

³ The term *ex officio* is not necessarily used by the parties to describe these processes and does not imply they serve only as non-voting members. It's also important to point out that ex officio selection, as defined here, only occurs when the automaticity derives from their membership on another party unit (committee, convention). The coding process distinguishes another automatic selection process, termed "add-on," for members who qualify for membership because of an external role (for example, governors or state legislative party leaders are often automatic members of the state committee).

the general pattern is reliance on either strict election or a mix of both processes. The only outlier is the set of congressional district conventions, where ex officio-only selection dominates. This pattern hints that congressional district conventions play a distinctive role as an intermediate stage in the intraparty linkage process in many states.

One final pattern about selection is worth discussing: how national committee members are chosen. There are only two party units granted the power to select national committee members and roughly half the parties use one or the other: 54 state parties give this power to the state committee, and 46 give it to the state convention. The relative percentages are almost identical for Democrats and Republicans (28 Democratic parties and 26 Republican parties use the state committee).

Structural Configurations

So far the analysis has mainly considered features in isolation, but it can be useful to have some sense of the overall structure within each state party. This task presents some challenges, since it's almost literally true that there are 100 distinctive party organizational structures. What traits or feature can be identified to understand patterns in that variation?

A basic starting point is to assess how many committee levels are established in each party. Some parties are relatively simple. Figure 4 graphs the structure of the Pennsylvania Republicans, which comprises two basic party units: county committees and a state committee. Regional caucuses of state committee members also sit in the structure. Contrast this to the relatively complex party structure of the Virginia Republicans in Figure 2 or the exceptionally complicated arrangement used by the Illinois Republicans, displayed in Figure 5.

A simple starting place is to count the number of committee levels among the five most common sub-state types: precinct, county, congressional district, legislative district, local (town/municipal). The distribution is bell-shaped, not surprisingly, with about two-thirds of the parties having 2 or 3 sub-state committee levels and the mean number coming in at 2.6. Overall, 48 parties have 1-2 levels, and 52 have 3-5, though only two parties have all five levels.

The distribution of convention use (leaving aside state conventions) takes a different shape, with 44 parties holding no conventions, and another 40 holding only one or two convention levels. Only six parties use conventions at three or four levels. We can add together the number of total party units, combining the committee and convention counts to get a more complete picture. The average number of sub-state party units is 3.5 (again, excluding state committees and state conventions). But the distribution has a positive skew, and there is one party with nine units (Missouri Democrats), one with eight (Minnesota Democrats), and another four parties with seven units.

A unit count is a relatively simple measure. It would be helpful to identify certain types or configurations of structures that are commonly deployed. There's no objective way to do this,

Figure 4: Pennsylvania Republican Party Structure

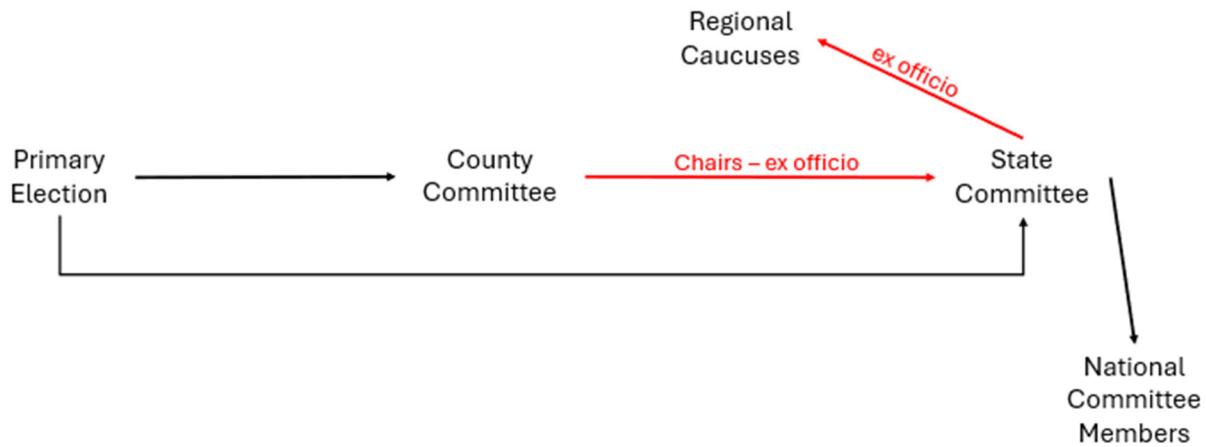
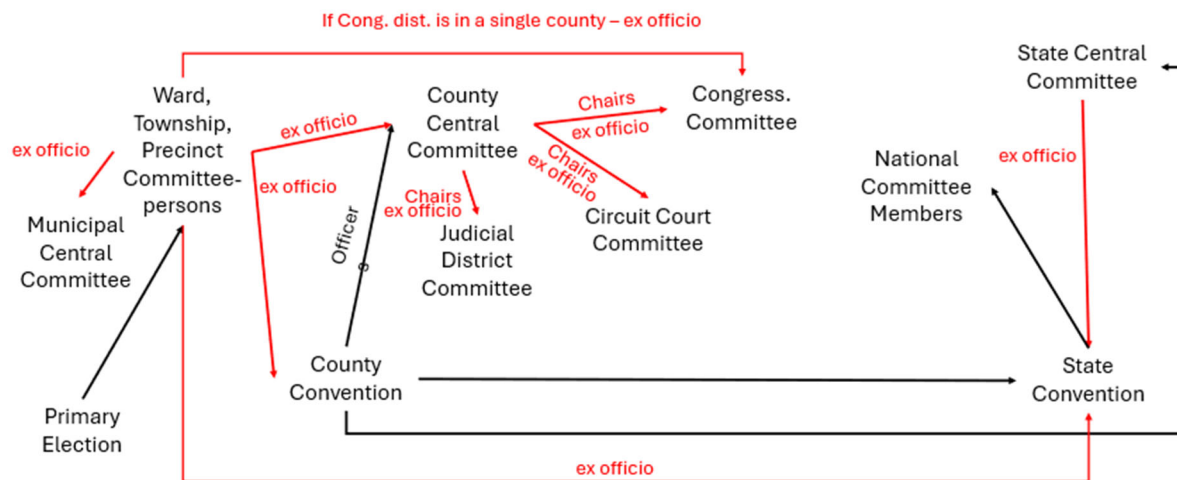


Figure 5: Illinois Republican Party Structure



but a simple typology can be created based on some of the patterns already observed. This typology would divide the parties into five categories:

County: parties with county committees but no congressional district committees

County-District Open: parties with county committees and open-ended congressional district committees

County-District Closed: parties with county committees and dead-end congressional district committees

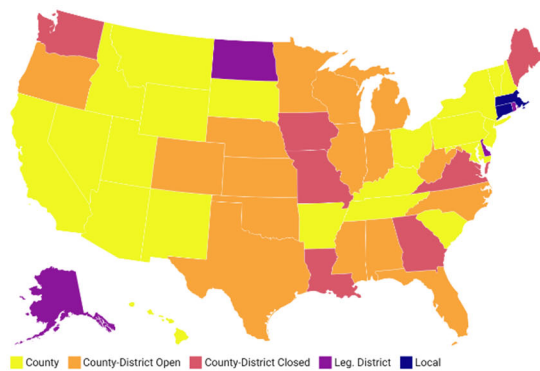
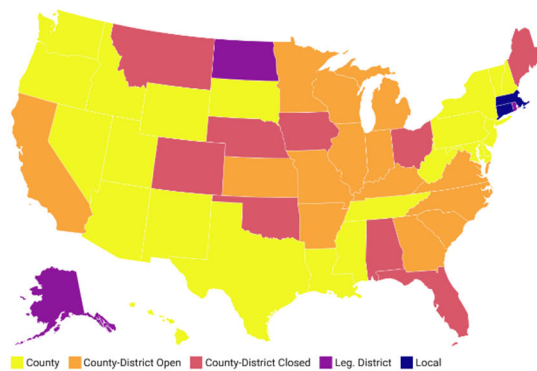
Legislative District: parties with legislative district committees but no county committees

Local: parties with local committees but no county or legislative district committees

The distribution of these types is provided in Table 3. The basic County type is the most common, both overall and across the Democrats and Republicans. That said, County-District Open parties

Table 3: Organizational Types

	Total	Democrats	Republicans
County	43	21	22
County-District Open	30	16	14
County-District Closed	16	7	9
Legislative District	7	4	3
Local	4	2	2

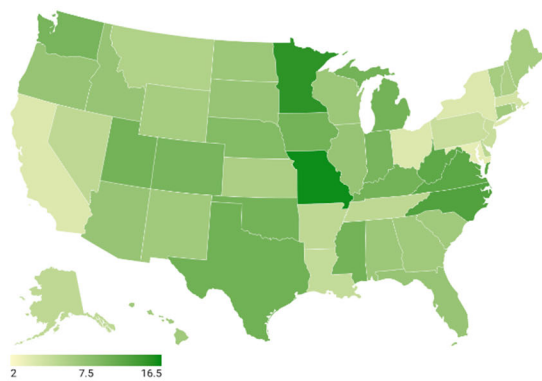
Figure 6: Organizational TypesDemocratsRepublicans

are not far behind, and overall the total number of County-District Open and County-District Closed (46) is higher than the number of County parties (43). Finally, a handful of states use a Legislative District or Local structure. Figure 6 graphs these typologies, and clear geographical patterns are discernable. County structures are common in the Eastern rust belt and across the mountain West. The upper Midwest tends to adopt Count-District Open structures. Local structures are a New England phenomenon. Also clear is a high degree of similarity between the Democrats and Republicans. Though they may employ a different number of units, states are very likely to use similar basic structures.

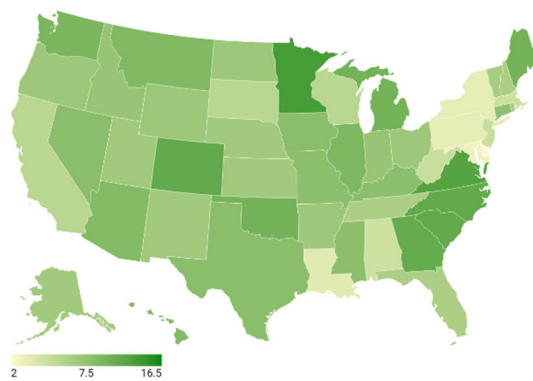
Before considering what shapes these geographical patterns, it will be worth considering how “participatory” these party organizational structures are. Parties are representational vehicles, and state parties are designed to reflect local sentiments upwards to the state and then national level. We can imagine that parties using more units, with a greater reliance on election over ex officio selection, and a greater tendency toward open-ended over dead-end units, might be viewed as providing greater opportunities for participation and intraparty democratic linkage. To get at this facet of structure, I constructed a Participation Index, which provides one point for each party-unit level, with an additional 0.5 for those that provide election as a selection process and an additional 0.25 for those that are open-ended. The additional values are arbitrary, but are

Figure 7: Participation Index

Democrats



Republicans



meant to recognize that election is probably a more important facet of participation than open-endedness.

The Participation Index scores are graphed in Figure 7. There are some common patterns across the parties—greater participation scores along the southeastern coastal states, less participation in lower New England, New York, and through the Eastern rust belt, as well as in parts of the South. Both parties in Minnesota have high scores. But there are also some differences. The Missouri Republicans, for example, do not come close to matching the participation scores of their Democratic counterpart. The average index scores across all the states is nearly the same—7.6 for the Democrats, 7.4 for the Republicans—so the differences average out, but there are clearly some factors that drive the two parties in a state to design slightly different structures. Even in a state like Illinois, in which statute determines much of the party structure, the Republicans score two points higher than Democrats. Overall, however, there is clearly a tendency for states to have similar participation scores—the bivariate correlation is 0.59.

The Geographical Origins of Party Structure

The distribution of Participation Index scores in Figure 7, as well as those for organizational type in Figure 6, clearly suggest geography is an important element behind the patterns. Some of this is regional, but in other cases the parties in particular states resemble each other much more than they resemble their co-partisan neighbors. It's not surprising to find that geography plays a role in shaping party structure. Party charter documents are always amendable, of course, but the basic structures tend to be durable. Evidence for how durable is outside the scope of this analysis, but it seems safe to assume that party structures change rarely and, when they do,

incrementally.⁴ Indeed, the vestigial congressional and legislative district committees appear to be evidence of this conclusion.

As a consequence, state party structures are likely to reflect long-term geographic factors, rather than more volatile and evolving forces, like party competition or state socioeconomics. A simple model is estimated here, including four variables:

total number of counties in the state: this number varies considerably, and states with few counties may find a county-based system difficult or impractical without other, overlapping jurisdictions

total land area: larger states may have communication challenges, particularly in prior eras, and it may incentive the use of lower-level units and/or more units

population: a larger population may push state parties to have more units and a higher degree of participation

percentage of the state that is urbanized: urbanized areas may present unique influences; counties, for example, may not provide adequate unit diversity in cities that fall within a single county, so precincts may be more likely; also, the legacy of machine politics may have unpredictable effects on state party structure⁵

The model results are presented in Table 4, which examines the use of the various committee types, and in Table 5, which looks at the summary measures. Across both tables, a few general patterns are visible. More populous states tend to have simpler structures and lower participation index scores, which is the opposite of expectations. It does appear, however, that larger states are more likely to use precinct committees; they are less likely to use local ones, but this may reflect the fact that the use of precincts tends to reduce the chances of having local committees (they are correlated at $-.31$). Urbanization increases the chances of having precinct committees, as expected, but is unrelated to any of the other structure variables.

Perhaps most notable, however, is the consistent impact of the number of counties on party structure. States with more counties are more likely to have precinct committees, county committees, and congressional district committees, and they have a higher number of party units

⁴ Compiling a record of how the charters have changed over an extended historical time frame would be an interesting but challenging project. It's probably safe to speculate that the basic structural features examined here, like the types of party units and how they're selected, change extremely rarely. If they do, it would be likely to occur following periods of major change in the role of the party organizations. So we might hypothesize a period of revision after Progressive Era reforms as well as after the 1970s reforms around presidential nominating contests. These considerations suggest the current structures measured here have been in place since at least the 1980s.

⁵ The latter two variables do change over time, and this may introduce some error into the model, insofar as the values of these variables were different when these structures were first adopted; at the same time, the relative values of the variables across the states are probably similar (e.g., New York was always highly urbanized and populous relative to other states). Any error here is likely to reduce the likelihood of finding a significant relationship.

Table 4: Explaining Organizational Features – Committee Levels

	Precinct	Local	County	Leg. Dist.	Cong. Dist.
Number of counties	.021** (.008)	.001 (.009)	.047* (.025)	-.002 (.007)	.030*** (.008)
Total area (100s of miles)	.004*** (.001)	-.003*** (.001)	-.0004 (.0003)	.0004 (.0003)	-.001 (.001)
Population (100,000s)	-.016*** (.005)	.001 (.007)	.034 (.021)	-.010 (.006)	-.0002 (.004)
Percent urban	.041* (.025)	-.031 (.021)	-.054 (.033)	.013 (.018)	-.004 (.019)
Constant	-5.274	3.034	3.53	-1.175	-1.157
Pseudo R ²	.32	.20	.43	.07	.19

Note: Cell entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

*p<.10; **p<.05; ***p<.01.

Table 5: Explaining Organizational Features – Summary Measures

	Committee Count	Convention Count	Unit Count	Participation Index
Number of counties	.010*** (.003)	.011*** (.003)	.020*** (.004)	.030*** (.006)
Total area (100s of miles)	-.00003 (.0001)	.00003 (.0001)	-.0000004 (.0002)	.00001 (.0003)
Population (100,000s)	-.003 (.002)	-.004** (.002)	-.007** (.003)	-.011** (.004)
Percent urban	-.005 (.008)	.008 (.008)	.003 (.029)	.005 (.020)
Constant	2.52	-.022	2.50	6.018
Adj. R ²	.13	.12	.18	.17

Note: Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. *p<.10;

p<.05; *p<.01.

overall as well as higher participation scores. The “county-count” may be an under-examined element of political geography, but here it plays an important role. The distribution of the county-count is interesting, as Figure 8 indicates. There is a big group of states with relatively few counties (<25 or so), a normally distributed group roughly between 25 and 125, and then two outliers, Georgia at 159 and Texas at 254. Smaller states tend to have fewer counties, but there are exceptions that are interesting. The New England states tend to have few, (ME 16, MA 14, VT 14, CT 8, RI 5), so it makes sense that they would have town-based committees rather than county-based.

Figure 8: Distribution of Number of Counties in Each State

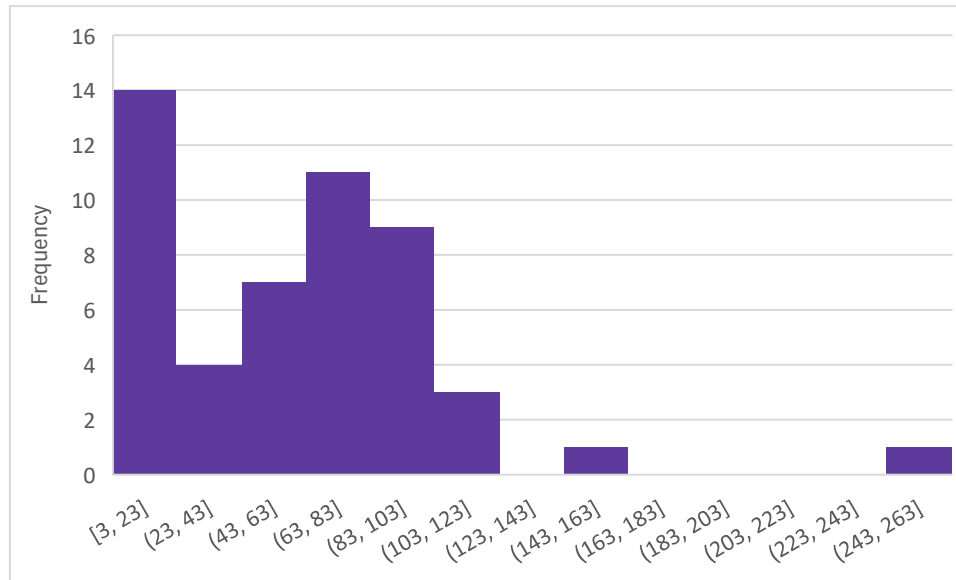


Table 6: Number of Counties by Organizational Type

	Mean Number of Counties	N of Parties
County	47	43
County-District Open	92	30
County-District Closed	76	16
Legislative District	23	7
Local	11	4

These patterns are clearer in Table 6, which provides the average number of counties in the various types of party organizational structure. The town-based New England states can be found at the bottom, deploying local committees as their main unit in conjunction with relatively few counties. County-based systems tend to arise in states with higher county-counts, and County-District Open parties tend to have the highest county counts.⁶ It makes sense that as the number of counties goes up, the need to have the additional layer of congressional district committees becomes important in order to have some focus on races at that level. Texas, for example, has an average of nearly seven counties per US House district; Georgia has over eleven. And when the number is very high, those district committees tend to play a linkage role within the organization, elevating their importance.

⁶ Removing the Texas Democrats doesn't change this much, dropping the county count from 92 to 86.

The Representational Role of State Parties

Though there is considerable variation in the organizational structure of the state parties, one clear commonality is the attention to intraparty representation. These are clearly democratic organizations. Considerable attention is paid in every charter to the ways in which the preferences and interests of party members are represented upward to the state level and onwards to the national level.

Geography is central to the representational process. Each party has a unique way of creating often overlapping and interrelated geographical units that express a representational linkage from the local to the statewide level. The existence of local units is not surprising. US parties arose and found their heyday as a way of marshalling campaign labor at the community level. The remarkable diversity in the ways these local units are defined and in how they link upwards is more surprising. It risks confusing apples with oranges, but one would seem safe to conclude that state legislatures vary much less than state party organizations in their institutional forms.

Why is there such diversity? It may be partly idiosyncratic, the result of a path dependent process in each state over many decades of evolution. One can't read the charters without suspecting many provisions have a very particular story behind them, a grievance or battle that culminated in some new charter provision designed to "prevent *that* from ever happening again." But there are systematic factors at work as well. Geography may not be destiny, but it's definitely central for determining how parties organize themselves.

An important question that should follow from this descriptive analysis of the charters and statutes is whether party structure matters. As noted earlier, institutionalist approaches provide value by revealing structures that shape behavior and outcomes. Do some types of structure make parties more effective at their goals? Are some organizational types "better?" Does the answer depend on context? Do parties need to adapt to their particular state environments?

These questions are beyond the scope of the findings presented here, but the complexity of the charters and the robust representational linkages they instantiate raise an interesting implication. The shift to direct primaries has rightly been viewed as a historical process that democratized the nomination process. In the 19th Century, party nominations were closed and tightly controlled by a small number of elite party actors. Primaries opened up the process, and that opening has only expanded. Today, particularly with the practice of open primaries and even top-two nominations, there often seems to no longer be a "party that nominates," but rather just a preliminary election or set of elections, in which anyone who wants to participate can vote, that culls the number of candidates down for the general election. What would it mean to return nominations to the parties? Would we return to the era of smoke-filled back rooms and closed elite bargaining? The charters of contemporary state parties seem to hint otherwise, as robust channels of intraparty democracy now seem to be the organizational norm. It's quite plausible to imagine a party nomination process that involves only individuals selected for some position with the various party units that is nonetheless open, transparent, and highly democratic.

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Appendix

Lexicon

- political party (or party): an organization that exists for the purpose of getting affiliated candidates elected to office so that they can control government and establish public policies in line with the party's ideas and principles; parties are organized primarily around committees at the national, state, and local levels that are defined by standing rules at the national level and by charters (and occasionally state law) at the state level
- charter: the set of rules established by a state party committee that defines the structure of the party organization within the state, defines local party units, provides guidance about the activity of the various party units, creates rules for selection of members and delegates for committees and conventions, and for other purposes; may also be called "by-laws," "rules," "constitution," or similar terms.
- party unit: an organized collection of individuals with charter-defined selection criteria and roles; these party units almost always are geographically defined
- committee: a party unit comprising a group of individuals who are selected in some way from a larger population and which occupy ongoing positions on the committee, typically for some set term of time
- convention: a party unit comprising a group of individuals who are selected in some way from a larger population and which convene for a single meeting occasion and then disband
- caucus: a meeting at which all eligible members of some population in a geographical area are able to attend and participate
- selection: the general term to describe how individuals are chosen to hold formally defined positions on a party unit (e.g., as members of committees, or delegates at conventions etc.)
- election: a selection process in which a population votes to choose individuals to hold formally defined positions (this population can be the general electorate, but can also be a party unit, such as a committee, caucus, or convention)
- primary: an election in which all registered voters in a geographical area are eligible to participate (these may be closed (only people registered to vote as a party member can vote in the primary) or open (voters can pick whichever party's primary they want to vote in), or somewhere in between)
- add-ons: these are positions on a given party unit that provide automatic membership on that party unit by virtue of the individual's position or identity (for example, state legislative party leaders may automatically be members of the state committee); add-ons include ex officio members, but in the usage here add-ons are not necessarily members of another party unit that is defined in the charter or statute; for example, state legislative leaders and club and interest-caucus leaders might be add-on members of the state committee

- ex officio: add-ons for a given party unit in which holding a particular position in another party unit defined in the charter or statute provides automatic selection for position in the given party unit (e.g., all county chairs might serve as members of the state committee); the other position must be within the formal party organizational structure, not external elected office or membership in club or interest-caucus
- automatic members: individuals who are members of a party unit automatically, without a selection process; automatic members are considered ex officio if their membership in another party unit qualifies them automatically and add-on if there is another position or membership, outside of a party unit, that qualifies them automatically
- point of lowest entry: this is the role at the lowest level of the party hierarchy at which a person previously uninvolved in the party organization might assume some formal position; a common example might be a precinct committee member or a county committee member
- primary state committee: the state-level party committee with the broadest membership and most extensive and supreme authority; if there is only one state committee, it is by definition the primary state committee (even if it includes the term “executive” in its title)
- executive state committee: a state-level committee that is smaller than the primary state committee and provides operational direction and guidance between meetings of the primary state committee; if there is only one state committee, it cannot be an executive state committee (see the definition for primary state committee)
- clubs: party-affiliated organizations that support party goals but that are not a formal party unit within the charter-defined party structure
- interest-caucus: a type of club that is usually defined around a particular political interest; these are labeled “caucuses” in the charters, but they differ from the kind of “caucus” defined here in the lexicon
- dead end committee: a committee that is involved in no selection processes for any other committees, including election or ex officio selection. Important: A committee is dead end based on its own institutional role, not the other positions its members may hold. If members select others for higher positions only by virtue of other positions they hold (not by virtue of membership in this committee), the committee is still dead end.

Variables

- precinct: binary whether it has precinct committees
- precinct_elect: binary whether precinct committee member are elected
- precinct_exo: binary whether precinct committee member are selected ex officio (Note: _exo variables should only be coded as 1 when automatic membership derives from holding a position in another committee/party unit defined in the charter. Automatic membership based on external elected office or membership in a club, interest-caucus or other external organization or position should be coded under _addon variables only)

- precinct_dead: binary whether it is a dead end committee
- municipal: binary whether it has city committees
- municipal_elect: binary whether city committee member are elected
- municipal_exo: binary whether city committee member are selected ex officio
- municipal_dead: binary whether it is a dead end committee
- town: binary whether it has town committees
- town_elect: binary whether town committee member are elected
- town_exo: binary whether town committee member are selected ex officio
- town_dead: binary whether it is a dead end committee
- county: binary whether it has county committees
- county_elect: binary whether county committee member are elected
- county_exo: binary whether county committee member are selected ex officio
- county_dead: binary whether it is a dead end committee
- legdist: binary whether it has state legislative district committees; these committees could encompass state house districts, state senate districts, or both
- legdist_elect: binary whether state legislative district committee member are elected
- legdist_exo: binary whether state legislative district committee member are selected ex officio
- legdist_dead: binary whether it is a dead end committee
- congdist: binary whether it has congressional district committees
- congdist_elect: binary whether congressional district committee member are elected
- congdist_exo: binary whether congressional district committee member are selected ex officio
- congdist_dead: binary whether it is a dead end committee
- other: binary whether it has other committees
- other_type: string variable with type of other committees
- other_elect: binary whether other committee member are elected
- other_exo: binary whether other committee member are selected ex officio
- other_dead: binary whether it is a dead end committee
- state_convention: binary whether it has a state convention
- state_convention_elect: binary whether state convention delegates are elected
- state_convention_exo: binary whether state convention delegates are selected ex officio
- county_convention: binary whether it has a county convention
- county_convention_elect: binary whether county convention delegates are elected
- county_convention_exo: binary whether county convention delegates are selected ex officio
- congdist_convention: binary whether it has a congressional district convention
- congdist_convention_elect: binary whether congressional district convention delegates are elected
- congdist_convention_exo: binary whether congressional district convention delegates are selected ex officio

- `local_convention`: binary whether it has a local convention (where local can be municipal or town)
- `local_convention_elect`: binary whether local convention delegates are elected
- `local_convention_exo`: binary whether local convention delegates are selected ex officio
- `legdist_convention`: binary whether it has a state legislative district convention
- `legdist_convention_elect`: binary whether state legislative district convention delegates are elected
- `legdist_convention_exo`: binary whether state legislative district convention delegates are selected ex officio
- `low_entry`: what unit is the lowest entry point; 1 precinct; 2 county; 3 city/town; 4 state legislative district; 5 congressional district
- `statecomm_elect`: binary whether state committee members are elected
- `statecomm_exo`: binary whether state committee members are selected ex officio
- `statecomm_addon`: binary whether state committee members include add ons
- `state_exec`: binary whether there is a required state executive committee in addition to the primary state committee
- `state_exec_opt`: binary whether there is an optional state executive committee in addition to the primary state committee
- `nat_comm`: which unit chooses national committee members; 1 state committee; 2 state convention; 3 other

Instructions

Project Overview

Analyze 100 state party organization charters (also called by-laws, rules, constitutions, etc.) to code organizational structure variables. Each state has both Democratic and Republican party organizations, creating 100 total units to analyze.

Key Sources to Examine

1. **Party Charters/By-laws**: Primary source for organizational structure
2. **State Statutes**: Legal requirements that may supplement or override charter provisions
3. **Precedence Rule**: When statute conflicts with charter, statute takes precedence; when statute provides optional provisions (e.g., parties “may” do something), then charter takes precedence

Analysis Process

Step 1: Document Review

- Review the uploaded state party charter/by-laws/constitution
- Review the uploaded relevant state statutes governing political party organization
- Note any conflicts between charter and statute provisions

Step 2: Variable Coding

Use the variables.docx file to code each binary and categorical variable:

Committee Types to Identify:

- Precinct committees (`precinct`, `precinct_elect`, `precinct_exo`, `precinct_dead`)
- Municipal/city committees (`municipal`, `municipal_elect`, `municipal_exo`, `municipal_dead`)

- Town committees (town, town_elect, town_exo, town_dead)
- County committees (county, county_elect, county_exo, county_dead)
- Legislative district committees (legdist, legdist_elect, legdist_exo, legdist_dead)
- Congressional district committees (congdist, congdist_elect, congdist_exo, congdist_dead)
- Other committees (other, other_type, other_elect, other_exo, other_dead)

Convention Types to Identify:

- State conventions (state_convention, state_convention_elect, state_convention_exo)
- County conventions (county_convention, county_convention_elect, county_convention_exo)
- Congressional district conventions (congdist_convention, congdist_convention_elect, congdist_convention_exo)
- Local conventions (local_convention, local_convention_elect, local_convention_exo)
- Legislative district conventions (legdist_convention, legdist_convention_elect, legdist_convention_exo)

State-Level Structure:

- State committee member selection (statecomm_elect, statecomm_exo, statecomm_addon)
- Executive committee existence (state_exec)
- National committee member selection (nat_comm)
- Point of lowest entry (low_entry)
- Structure source (structure_source)

Key Coding Point - _elect and _exo variables:

- when assessing if selection is by election or ex officio, consider only the selection of regular members of party units, not the officers; the selection of officers should be ignored

Key Coding Distinction - Ex Officio vs Add-Ons:

- Code as ex officio only when automatic membership comes from holding a position in another party unit defined in the charter or statute (e.g., county chairs serving on state committee)
- Code as add-on when automatic membership comes from external positions like elected office, organizational leadership, club or interest-caucus membership, or other non-party positions
- Legislative members, mayors, governors, etc. should be coded as add-ons, not ex officio

Key Coding Point - Dead End Assessment:

- When determining if a committee is dead end, focus on whether the committee itself provides a pathway to higher levels - Ask: "Do people select others for higher positions specifically by virtue of being members of THIS committee?" - If members only select others by virtue of other positions they hold, the committee is dead end.
- Also, if members of a party unit are selected by or from a higher party unit (for example, state committee members serving ex officio as congressional district members in the district they reside in), this in itself does not mean the party unit is not a dead end; dead end status refers only to the selection power of the lower

party unit itself: does that party unit have the power to select members on any other committees? When higher-level committee members automatically become members of lower-level committees, this is "ex officio downward" and does NOT make the lower committee a pathway upward.

Key Coding Point - Geography

- in some cases, a party unit draws members or delegates from lower-level geographical units (for example, the state committee allocates a certain number of members to each congressional district or county, or a county committee elects a certain number from each precinct); this use of geographic selection units is not, in and of itself, evidence of the existence of a party unit at the lower level
- to code for the existence of a party unit at a given level, there should be a provision specifically for that committee or convention at that level
- Specific charter section/page reference
- Relevant statute citation (if applicable)
- Rationale for coding decision
- Any ambiguities encountered

Step 4: Key Definitions to Apply

Reference lexicon.docx for precise definitions of all key terms, including:

- Selection vs. election vs. ex officio vs. add-ons
- Committee vs. convention vs. caucus
- Dead end committee (no pathway to higher levels)
- Point of lowest entry
- Primary vs. executive state committee

Output Requirements

CSV File

Create a structured dataset with:

- State identifier
- Party identifier (Republican/Democratic)
- All coded variables from variables.docx
- Source notes for each variable
- Other notes about each variable
- use the uploaded file titled "example coding file" as a model on which to base the formatting of the output file
- the file should be downloadable as a .txt or .csv file

Ambiguity Report

For each charter, document:

- Coding ambiguities encountered
- Unclear charter language
- Suggestions for lexicon clarification
- Recommendations for instruction improvements

Quality Control Checks

- Verify statute vs. charter precedence applied correctly
- Ensure binary variables are properly coded (0/1)

- Check that categorical variables use specified codes
- Confirm all required variables are coded
- Validate that source citations are complete

Common Challenges to Watch For

- Different terminology used across states
- Implicit vs. explicit organizational structures
- Conflicting information between documents
- Outdated charter provisions superseded by statute
- Ambiguous selection mechanisms