

# THE EFFICIENCY OF CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE CONTRIBUTIONS IN HOUSE ELECTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The Republican Party has historically held a strong financial advantage over the Democrats in Congressional elections. The National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) generally has a large resource advantage over the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) in Congressional elections, allowing the Republicans to outcontribute the Democrats in most Congressional districts. Further, the NRCC also led the DCCC in developing a centralized organization for managing Congressional campaigns. Thus, many scholars of political party activity in US Congressional elections believe that in the 1970s and 1980s the NRCC was the more effective campaigning force in terms of both total resources and efficiency (targeting close races for contributions). Although there is no question the Republicans were more effective fundraisers than the Democrats, empirical evidence reveals it was the DCCC that was better at targeting close races for contributions in the late 1970s and the 1980s. In the 1990s, NRCC efficiency improved relative to the DCCC, with both committees now operating as efficient campaign organizations.

KEY WORDS ■ campaign finance ■ congressional campaign committees ■ Congressional elections ■ contribution efficiency

## 1. Introduction

The Republican Party has historically held a strong financial advantage over the Democrats in Congressional elections. Republican Party committees typically raise more money than their Democratic counterparts (Sorauf, 1988, 1992; Sorauf and Wilson, 1990). The most important of these committees in Congressional elections are the House campaign committees, comprised of members of the House of Representatives. These are known

as the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC). These House campaign committees contribute the bulk of party funds to Congressional races. The NRCC generally has a large resource advantage over the DCCC in Congressional elections, allowing the Republicans to outcontribute the Democrats in most Congressional districts. Further, the NRCC also led the DCCC in developing a centralized organization for managing Congressional campaigns (Herrnson, 1988, 1989; Jacobson, 1985–6). Thus, many scholars of political party activity in US Congressional elections believe that in the 1970s and 1980s the NRCC was the more effective campaigning force both in terms of total resources and efficiency (targeting close races for contributions). Although there is no question the Republicans were more effective fundraisers than the Democrats, empirical evidence reveals that the DCCC was better at targeting close races for contributions in the late 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, NRCC efficiency improved relative to the DCCC, with both committees now operating as efficient campaign organizations.

The collective action problem faced by the congressional campaign committees is well known (Jacobson, 1985–6). In Congressional elections, the collective interest of the party is to maximize their representation in the House. An efficient distribution of party resources would primarily focus on marginal districts, supporting weak incumbents and strong challengers, while leaving strong incumbents to fend for themselves and ignoring weak challengers who represent a poor investment. However, the individual interest of the incumbent members of the DCCC and NRCC is to win re-election. Their preferred distribution strategy would focus on incumbents regardless of the closeness of the race, increasing the chances of re-election for all incumbents.

Campaign contribution limits combined with the tremendous fundraising success of the NRCC and the Republican Party as a whole enabled the NRCC to avoid confronting this collective action problem since at least the late 1970s. Simply put, the Republicans had so many resources that funding the campaigns of incumbents to the maximum amount allowed by law while still contributing heavily to close races was possible. This was not an option for the relatively resource-poor DCCC, who needed to solve the collective action problem if they wished to fund marginal districts. Gary Jacobson argues that the contribution limits imposed by the Federal Elections Campaign Act (FECA) resulted in the Republicans distributing resources more efficiently than the Democrats, since the Republicans could contribute to incumbents up to the legal limit and still have money left over to fund challengers and open seats (Jacobson, 1985–6: 611–12). This assumes that both parties were unable to solve their collective action problem, and would thus fund incumbents first. However, the empirical evidence reveals that at least as early as 1978 the Democrats in fact *had* solved the collective action problem (at least partially), and were better able than the Republicans to ignore safe incumbents and target close races for contributions throughout the 1980s.

Several scholars have already pointed out that the congressional campaign committees are strongly influenced by the closeness of a race when making contributions, indicating at least partial success on the part of both parties in solving the collective action problem (Dwyre, 1994; Herrnson, 1988, 1992, 1994; Kolodny, 1998). However, because of the large amount of money contributed by the NRCC to competitive races and the centralized organization of the NRCC relative to the DCCC, the NRCC is usually regarded as better at identifying and allocating resources to competitive races (Herrnson, 1988, 1989; Jacobson, 1985–6). The finding in this article that the DCCC led the NRCC in becoming an efficient campaigner contradicts this belief.

The reason for the disparity between previous findings and the findings presented here springs from the differences in the way efficiency is defined. Past studies that have found the NRCC to be more efficient than the DCCC have focused on the *total* amount of resources a committee contributes to types of candidates and races (challengers, incumbents and open seats). With this approach, the Republicans were considered efficient because they were able to outcontribute the Democrats in close races, even though they were also wasting money on uncompetitive races. The analysis here focuses on the *proportion* of total committee contributions to House campaigns that were contributed to marginal races. Efficiency here is not defined as the raw amount of resources a committee can bring to bear in certain districts, but the accuracy with which a committee targets close races for contributions. Thus, although the Democrats were outspent in most competitive races, they contributed a far higher proportion of their resources to close races, leading to a more efficient distribution of their resources.

However, the impact of the Republican resource advantage on measuring efficiency raises a larger question. Given their resource advantage, why would efficiency matter to the Republicans? First, money spent on safe incumbents is wasted money from the party's viewpoint. For example, the NRCC ran a debt of USD 384,712 in 1982, while contributing USD 260,410 (in 1982 dollars) to 38 candidates who won with more than 70 percent of the two-party vote. Money spent on safe incumbents could better be used to retire debt, as a hedge against a bad year in the future, or as contributions to other federal, state and local races where they might make a difference. Second, it is possible that party contributions have a value beyond their monetary amount. There is evidence that some PACs and individuals take cues from parties to identify close races (Jacobson and Kernell, 1983: 37; Kolodny and Dwyre, 1998; Sorauf and Wilson, 1990: 196). Party contributions make up only a small proportion (generally around 5 percent) of all funds raised by major party candidates in an electoral cycle. However, if party contributions are a signal to other contributors that a candidate favored by the party is in a close race, this would attract contributions from other sources that far outweigh the value of the party contribution itself. Thus if other contributors are watching the parties for guidance in making

their own contributions, then it may be more important for the party to send a clear signal than to contribute resources that are only a small fraction of what it takes to win in most districts. In this respect, the Republican resource advantage might actually be an electoral disadvantage. With more money to go around it would be even harder to solve the collective action problem and convince safe incumbents to forgo party resources, and every dollar contributed to safe incumbents dilutes the signal sent to other contributors.

Thus the large resource advantage of the Republicans over the Democrats in House elections in the 1970s and 1980s did not necessarily lead to a large electoral advantage. Ironically, greater fundraising ability may have made the NRCC a less effective strategic campaigner, since it did not need to confront the collective action problem and develop an efficient distribution of resources. In Section 2, I empirically examine the distribution of resources of the DCCC and the NRCC in 1978, confirming that the DCCC was more efficient in its distribution of resources than the NRCC in this year. This examination suggests several methods for measuring the efficiency of party committee contributions in House elections. Section 3 develops these measures of resource distribution efficiency and applies them to the DCCC and NRCC, examining the efficiency of their contributions from 1978 through 1998. In the fourth section, I examine and explain the changes in efficiency in the NRCC and DCCC over time, and conclude.

## **2. Examining Political Party Committee Contribution Efficiency**

An efficient distribution of resources by a party committee would concentrate contributions in districts where the race is expected to be close. Thus, a party committee distributing its resources efficiently would contribute considerably more to competitive races, and less to safe incumbents and challengers with little chance of winning. In contrast, if the party committee is behaving inefficiently, comparatively more resources will be contributed to safe incumbents and weak challengers. For example, if a party committee was unable to solve the collective action problem this would lead to inefficiency, since safe incumbents would receive a greater share of resources than a strategy focused on close races would allocate.

Some scholars make a distinction between 'offensive' and 'defensive' strategies for years when national conditions are favorable or unfavorable, respectively (Herrnson, 1989; Jacobson and Kernell, 1983). An 'offensive' strategy contributes proportionately more to challengers than a 'defensive' strategy, which contributes more to incumbents. However, it is important to realize that both of these strategies are equivalent to contributing to the competitive races – in a good year the other party's incumbents will be vulnerable, while in a bad year the party's own incumbents will be vulnerable. Contributing to the competitive races in every year will thus produce

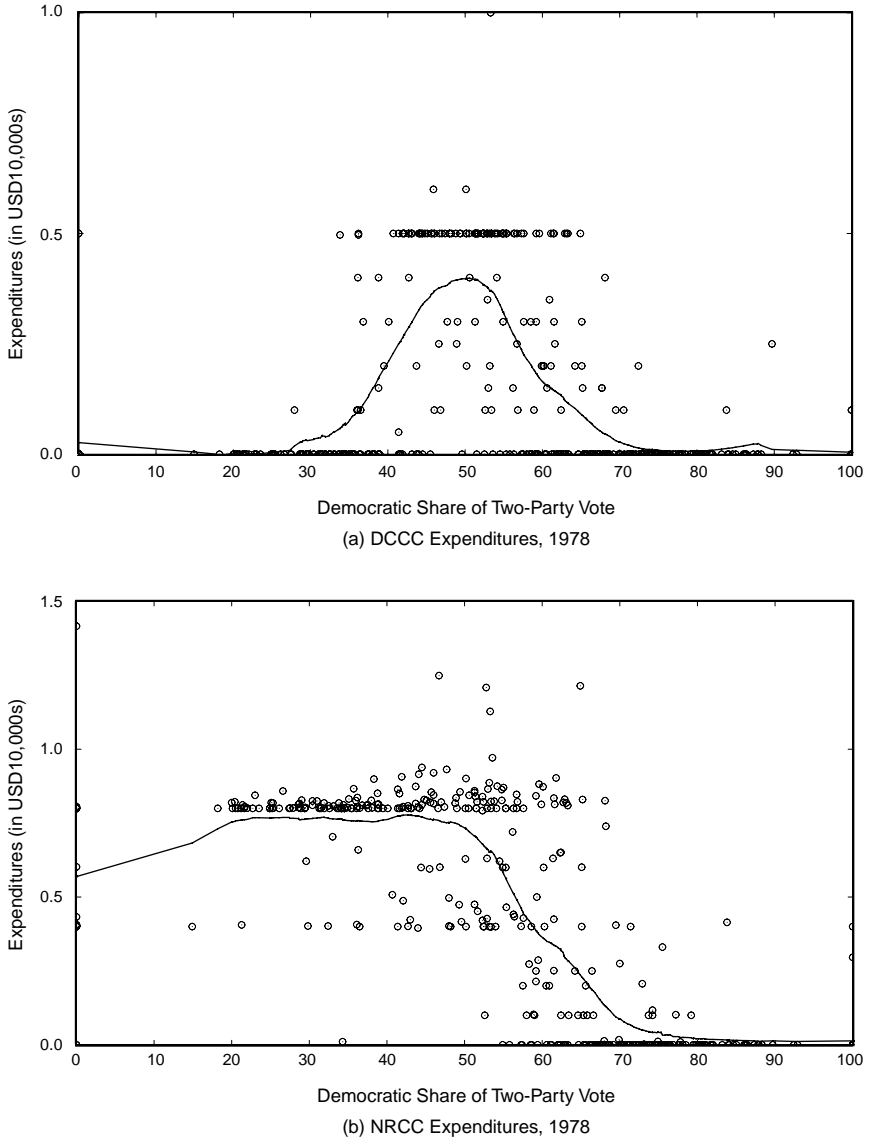
a pattern of contributing more to challengers in good years and incumbents in bad years. Thus the measures of efficiency that I examine in this article are focused on the marginality of districts, and not the presence of an incumbent, challenger, or open seat.

One way to examine the efficiency of the distribution strategies of party committees is to plot the campaign resources expended in each race against the share of the two-party vote received in each race. Although the actual election results would not be available to the party committees as they make their contribution decisions, they would have information about the likely closeness of each race (in the form of polls, reports by local party organizations and other research). Gary Jacobson created hypothetical efficient and inefficient distributions of resources over election outcomes (Jacobson, 1985–6: Figures 1 and 2). The hypothetical efficient distribution is sharply peaked around 50 percent of the two-party vote, while the hypothetical inefficient distribution is skewed towards races where the party won easily. By plotting the campaign resources contributed to each race against the two-party vote share received in each race we can examine how closely each party committee strategy conforms to these hypothetical distributions in each election year.

For example, Figure 1 plots the campaign contributions of the DCCC and the NRCC against the two-party vote in the 1978 House election. The x-axis measures the Democratic share of the two-party vote, while the y-axis measures hard money contributions by the committee to each race. A party's hard money contributions in a district can take one of two forms. The first is a direct contribution to the Congressional candidate; this is limited by law to USD 5000 per election (primary, general and special elections). The second is coordinated party expenditures, which entails spending by the political party on behalf of the candidate. Coordinated expenditures are also limited by law; limits in each year are calculated as USD 10,000 plus the Cost of Living Adjustment applied from the base year of 1974 (Federal Election Commission, 1996). All hard money contributions are included in the measure of contributions in each race.

Since it is difficult to determine the strategies pursued by each committee from the scatterplots of contributions on electoral outcome, I fit a non-linear regression line to each graph using locally weighted least squares, or loess curves (Cleveland, 1993; Jacoby, 2000). For the loess curves in this section the regression for each point was run using the surrounding 20 percent of the data.

Figure 1A presents the scatterplots and loess curves for contributions by the Democratic share of the vote across all districts for the DCCC in 1978, while Figure 1B presents the same information for the NRCC in 1978 (note these subfigures have different y-axis scales, and the points for the largest contributions by each committee are not displayed, since they are larger than the maximum y-axis value). If these committees are behaving efficiently then we would expect to see more resources expended in those districts where



**Figure 1.** Congressional campaign committee expenditures, 1978

the vote was closest, and comparatively fewer resources expended on safe incumbents or weak challengers.

Examination of the loess curves in Figure 1 reveals that the DCCC tended to concentrate resources in the marginal districts in 1978, as we would

expect with an efficient distribution of resources. In contrast, the loess curve for the NRCC in 1978 is relatively flat from the marginal districts to the safe Republican incumbents. This indicates that the NRCC was expending nearly as many resources in districts that were fairly easy wins as in the districts that were most competitive. This contribution pattern is consistent with a failure to solve the collective action problem, leading to safe Republican incumbents appropriating NRCC resources for themselves that would be better spent on marginal districts. There is no equivalent tail on the right-hand side of the loess curve for the DCCC, indicating that the DCCC was more successful at solving the collective action problem than the NRCC.

The resource advantage enjoyed by the NRCC over the DCCC in 1978 is also apparent in Figure 1. The NRCC contributed a total of USD 1,813,924 to Congressional races in 1978, compared to the USD 537,438 of the DCCC (in 1978 dollars). This disparity in resources enabled the NRCC to outcontribute the DCCC in all competitive House races, while still funding safe incumbents. Conversely, the DCCC needed to confront the collective action problem if it wished to fund close races. Thus, the resource gap between the Republicans and the Democrats in 1978 likely led to an efficiency gap as well, with the Democrats forced to become more efficient than the Republicans in order to compete in competitive districts.

This example suggests a measure of contribution efficiency. The distribution of contributions by the DCCC in 1978 was concentrated in close races, and was efficient in terms of the party's goal of maximizing the number of seats won. The distribution of contributions by the NRCC in 1978 was skewed in favor of safe incumbents, and was inefficient in terms of party goals. Thus, comparing the closeness of races to resources contributed will tell us the relative efficiency of each party committee. The next section develops such a measure, and applies it to the DCCC and the NRCC from 1978 through 1998.

### **3. A Measure of Party Efficiency**

The relative efficiency of party committees can be determined by comparing the closeness of each race to the resources contributed by the committee to each race. However, directly comparing the contributions of Republican and Democratic committees to Congressional races is misleading because of the large resource advantage of the Republicans. Most Republican committees can outcontribute their Democratic counterparts in close races, but are less efficient because they also contribute a great deal to safe incumbents. Thus, the relevant measure of resources when examining party efficiency is the *proportion* of total committee contributions to House campaigns that were contributed to each district. The proportion of total committee contributions in each district is simply calculated as the amount of hard money

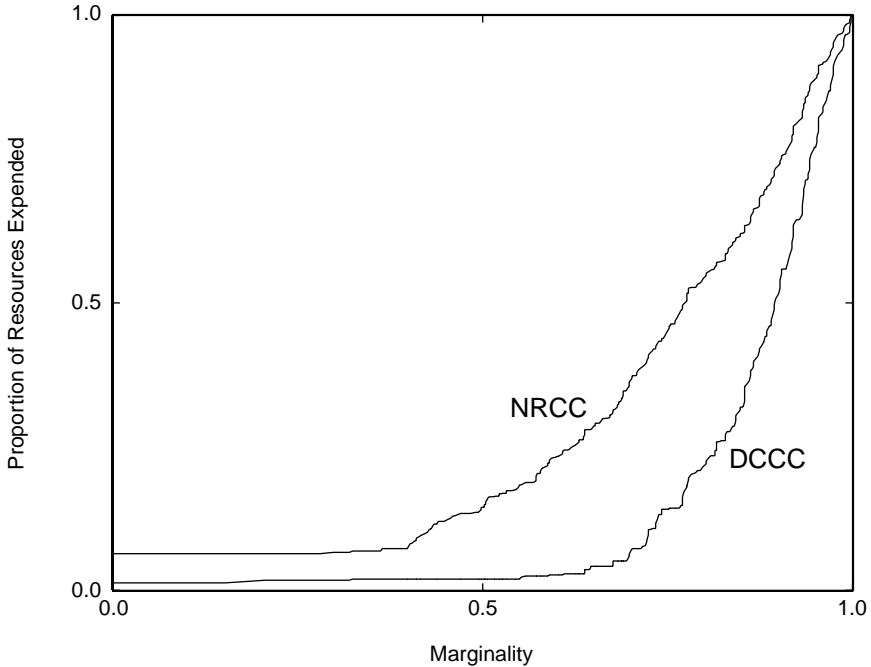
contributions by the committee in that district divided by the total amount of hard money contributions by the committee to all House campaigns.

The other piece of information required to determine the relative efficiency of party committee contributions is a measure of the closeness of the race, or marginality. The measure of marginality I use is calculated as  $1 - (|50 - DV| / 50)$ , where DV is the Democratic share of the two-party vote. This measure runs from 0 for the least marginal districts (a Democratic vote share of 0 or 100) to 1 for the most marginal districts (a Democratic vote share of 50). From the proportion of resources expended in each district and the marginality of each district I develop several measures of congressional campaign committee efficiency.

The first measure of efficiency I develop is based on a cumulative spending distribution across the marginality measure. These cumulative spending distributions are calculated as running sums of the proportion of contributions from the least to the most marginal districts. That is, the value of the cumulative spending distribution for a committee in the least marginal district is the proportion of total contributions made to that district, the value in the next-to-least marginal district is the proportion of total contributions made to that district plus the proportion of total contributions made to the least marginal district, and so on (thus the value of the cumulative spending function in the most marginal district is 1). Graphing a committee's proportion of contributions against marginality creates increasing curves across the measure of marginality that represent the cumulative proportion of contributions made by the party committee as marginality increases. More efficient distributions of contributions concentrate on the most marginal districts, and thus the cumulative spending distribution will increase more rapidly as marginality increases. Conversely, less efficient distributions will increase rapidly early as contributions are made in races that are not marginal, and will increase less rapidly as marginality increases. If a committee contributed equally to all districts the curve would be close to a 45 degree line.

Recalling our example from the previous section, the distribution of contributions for the DCCC was believed to be more efficient relative to the NRCC in 1978. The cumulative spending functions for the DCCC and NRCC in 1978 are presented in Figure 2.

The relative inefficiency of the NRCC when compared to the DCCC in 1978 is apparent in this figure. The NRCC contributed much more to their safe incumbents than the DCCC, leading the cumulative spending function of the NRCC to increase more quickly over the safe districts and less quickly over the marginal districts relative to the DCCC. More efficient distributions of contributions will be more convex with respect to the top left corner of the graph, indicating a greater proportion of contributions were made in more marginal districts. Conversely, as the curve becomes less convex this indicates that a greater proportion of contributions is being made in less marginal districts. Thus, as the contributions of a party committee grow



**Figure 2.** Cumulative expenditure functions for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), 1978

more efficient, the area beneath the cumulative spending function will decrease.

A convenient way to summarize this information is by calculating an efficiency index, calculated as 1 minus the area beneath the cumulative spending function. This efficiency index ranges from 0 to 1, with higher numbers indicating greater efficiency. Because both the marginality scale and the proportion of contributions made run from 0 to 1, the (hypothetical) maximum area under the cumulative spending function will be 1, and the (hypothetical) minimum will be 0 (of course, the actual distribution of districts on the marginality scale may make either extreme value unattainable). If a party committee were to contribute only to uncontested districts, then the cumulative spending function would spike up to 1 at 0 on the marginality scale, making the area under the cumulative spending function equal to 1 and the efficiency index equal to 0. Conversely, if a party committee was to contribute only to districts where the two-party vote was evenly split, the cumulative spending function would spike up at 1 on the marginality scale, making the area under the cumulative spending function equal to 0

and the efficiency index equal to 1. Contributing an equal amount to each district would result in an efficiency index score of about 0.5.

Note that we cannot directly compare these contribution efficiency scores across years, as the distribution of districts across marginality changes from election to election. However, these scores can be compared across committees within the same election year, and give a rough idea of changes in efficiency across years.

Other measures of efficiency were also calculated. For both congressional campaign committees in each year I determined the proportion of resources expended in elections where the Democratic share of the vote was between 40 percent and 60 percent, where the Democratic share of the vote was between 45 percent and 55 percent, and in the 25 most marginal districts. Obviously, a higher proportion of total resources expended in these more marginal districts indicates greater efficiency. These measures have the advantage of being simpler to calculate and understand than the efficiency score described above, but they do not consider the distribution of resources by a committee across all districts. Like the efficiency score, these measures cannot be directly compared across years, since the distribution of districts across marginality varies from year to year, but direct comparisons in a given year are valid, and these measures also give some indication as to how efficiency for a committee has changed over time.

Table 1 presents the various measures of contribution efficiency for the DCCC and the NRCC from 1978 through 1998. These scores were calculated over all 435 districts from 1978 through 1988. In the 1990s, these

**Table 1.** Contribution efficiency scores, 1978–98

Year	<i>Democratic vote between 40 and 60 percent</i>		<i>Democratic vote between 45 and 55 percent</i>		<i>25 Most competitive districts</i>		<i>Efficiency scores</i>	
	<i>DCCC</i>	<i>NRCC</i>	<i>DCCC</i>	<i>NRCC</i>	<i>DCCC</i>	<i>NRCC</i>	<i>DCCC</i>	<i>NRCC</i>
1978	78	46	48	26	19	10	86	72
1980	80	47	47	27	19	10	86	71
1982	76	47	49	26	17	9	86	76
1984	80	38	46	20	22	9	86	70
1986	70	46	44	25	29	14	83	74
1988	60	42	34	20	30	17	78	71
1990	65	59	42	34	18	15	80	78
1992	70	58	42	34	13	10	83	78
1994	71	68	44	44	15	16	84	80
1996	73	86	50	53	18	18	85	87
1998	78	82	38	38	24	22	83	85

*Note:* Entries are percentages of total committee contributions to House candidates in that year, except for efficiency scores.

scores were calculated over 434 districts – the single district in Vermont was excluded because that seat was held by an Independent candidate (Bernard Sanders), who was first elected in 1990 and was re-elected throughout the 1990s.

Note that there is a great deal of congruence between the efficiency scores and the simpler measures of committee efficiency. A greater concentration of resources in the marginal districts is reflected in higher percentages of total resources expended in the types of districts identified in the first three measures, and in higher efficiency scores. Note that contribution and coordinated expenditure limits could reduce the efficiency measures – as a committee spends more money, the contribution and coordinated expenditure limits may force some of that money into less marginal districts. However, this is still a valid indication of inefficiency by the committee, as they could limit their expenditures on House campaigns to only the closest races, and divert the remaining money to other goals, as described in Section 1.

The DCCC held a clear efficiency edge over the NRCC by all four measures of efficiency examined here from 1978 through 1988. The gap narrowed considerably in the 1990s, and by the late 1990s the two committees were virtually indistinguishable in terms of efficiency. The narrowing of the efficiency gap was due to increases in NRCC efficiency as the NRCC scaled back contributions to safe incumbents – the DCCC has maintained relatively high levels of efficiency since at least 1978. The reasons for these changes in efficiency are discussed in the next section.

#### **4. Discussion**

The empirical results of the previous section will be surprising to many scholars. Many believed that because the NRCC had a more centralized organization for managing Congressional campaigns it was more efficient than the DCCC in contributing to these campaigns. However, the analysis above reveals it was the DCCC that was more efficient with its contributions from 1978 through the 1980s.

The roots of DCCC efficiency start in 1970, when Tip O'Neill (Massachusetts) took over as chairman. Mike Kirwan (Ohio), the previous chairman, had a policy of giving USD 500 to every Democrat who was running for the House, but O'Neill put an end to this, and began to push the DCCC towards a more efficient contribution strategy (O'Neill and Novak, 1987: 207). However, only limited progress towards a truly efficient distribution was made – automatic contributions of USD 1,000 were made to each Democratic incumbent in the 1970 election cycle (Kolodny, 1998: 121; Menefee-Libey, 2000: 121).

O'Neill left the DCCC after the 1972 election cycle to become majority leader, and in 1977 became Speaker of the House. In the meantime, the DCCC, now under Wayne Hays (Ohio), maintained much the same strategy

it had for the previous 30 years (Menefee-Libey, 2000: 122). No doubt the electoral advantages conferred on the Democrats by the Watergate scandal reduced the impetus to improve contribution efficiency – the Democrats were winning and maintaining a comfortable majority in the House, and few saw the need to reorganize electoral strategy in 1974 or 1976.

However, the DCCC shifted to an efficient distribution of resources in the 1978 election cycle. James Corman (California) became chair of the DCCC in 1976, and with the support of O'Neill, Corman moved to improve the effectiveness of the DCCC in House elections (Menefee-Libey, 2000: 129–30). Efficiency improved markedly in 1978, as O'Neill and Corman backed a more tightly targeted distribution strategy (Menefee-Libey, 2000: 134). After Corman lost his House seat in the 1980 election, Tony Coelho (California) took over as the chair of the DCCC, and is credited with boosting its visibility and fundraising capabilities. With increased funds came increased pressure from Democratic incumbents for a share, but with the support of O'Neill the DCCC continued to pursue an efficient distribution of resources (Menefee-Libey, 2000: 138). After the election in 1986 O'Neill retired, and Coelho was elected House Democratic Whip, but by then the DCCC had established itself as a professional organization with the sole purpose of winning seats for the Democrats.

In contrast, the NRCC was quite inefficient with its distribution of resources throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Although the fundraising ability of the NRCC was far ahead of that of the DCCC, its distribution strategy favored incumbents. Guy Vander Jagt (Michigan) was the chair of the NRCC from the 1976 through the 1992 election cycles. Although Vander Jagt was aware that the efficiency of the NRCC needed to be improved – the NRCC created an 'Incumbent Review Panel' in 1982 in an attempt to deny incumbent requests for money (Kolodny, 1998: 148–9) – the NRCC remained inefficient throughout the 1980s. After the disappointing 1988 election, Vander Jagt hired Ed Rollins, a political consultant who was Reagan's 1984 campaign director, to be co-chair of the NRCC. Despite the negative view of Rollins (and his substantial salary) held by the President and most Republican Members of Congress, NRCC efficiency improved significantly in 1990.

Rollins resigned after the 1990 election, but the movement towards greater NRCC efficiency continued as the House Republicans considered the opportunities afforded by the upcoming 1992 election. Before the 1992 election, 66 House members announced their retirement for reasons ranging from the upcoming redistricting, to the grandfather clause allowing members to keep excess campaign funds for personal use, to the House Bank scandal (Kolodny, 1998: 200). Reapportionment also allocated more seats to the West and South, where the Republicans were strong.

Newt Gingrich (Georgia), the House Republican Whip, involved himself heavily in the 1992 and 1994 elections, hoping a significant increase in the number of Republicans in the House would bolster his bid to become House

Minority Leader, or even Speaker of the House (Kolodny, 1998: 199–200). Vander Jagt and Gingrich pushed an efficient distribution strategy for the NRCC designed to take advantage of the opportunities afforded in 1992. When Vander Jagt lost his primary election in 1992, Bill Paxon (New York) took over in the new chair of the NRCC. Paxon and Gingrich continued driving the NRCC in a more efficient direction, soliciting funds from incumbents for use in close races and denying funding to those who held safe seats (Kolodny, 1998: 205). Like the DCCC more than a decade earlier, the NRCC began to establish itself as a professional organization designed only to win seats for the party.

The development of the DCCC and the NRCC into efficient campaign organizations followed similar paths, although the DCCC embarked on its path earlier. In both instances, committee chairs with long tenures (21 electoral cycles for Kirwan, 9 for Vander Jagt) were replaced with new members who had new ideas about the role of a congressional campaign committee, and pushed the committee towards a more efficient distribution of resources. Both transitions had support from powerful members of the House outside the committee (O'Neill for the Democrats and Gingrich for the Republicans), without whom the battle to induce incumbents to give up their share of resources could not have been won. The primary difference is in the time the transition to an efficient campaign organization took place.

Why was the DCCC able to solve its collective action problem in the late 1970s, while the NRCC was unable to solve this problem until the early 1990s? The answer has to do with money and majority status. In the 1970s the Democrats held a comfortable majority in the House, and the DCCC was relatively resource poor. When O'Neill and Corman sought to solve the collective action problem for the DCCC and induce safe incumbents to give up DCCC resources, the actual financial burden incumbents were asked to endure was light. With little money to spread over many incumbents, each incumbent couldn't expect much from the DCCC anyway, so incumbents allowed the DCCC to switch to an efficient strategy without much of a fight. Once the DCCC began to increase its fundraising capabilities under Coelho the battle grew sharper, but the DCCC had already established itself as a professional organization dedicated to winning seats for the Democratic Party.

In contrast, the NRCC had plenty of resources in the 1970s, and was also a minority in the House. Vander Jagt made efforts to solve the collective action problem, but he was asking the relatively few Republican incumbents to give up a much more substantial amount of support than the Democratic incumbents were asked to forgo. Since the NRCC had enough money to contribute to both incumbents and close races, it was easier politically to avoid the battle and maintain an inefficient distribution of resources. One theory holds that if the chances of a change in party control of a legislature are small, leadership strategy shifts from the unattainable goal of winning majority status to protecting the incumbents already holding seats, since

these incumbents will be most likely to be in a position to return a favor after the election (Gierzynski, 1992: Ch. 2). However, Vander Jagt seems to have made an effort to solve the collective action problem for the NRCC through innovations such as the Incumbent Review Panel. Unlike the DCCC, these efforts to solve the collective action problem were unsuccessful. It wasn't until Rollins joined the NRCC during the 1990 election cycle that the NRCC began to deny funds to safe incumbents and thus become more efficient. Rollins' status as an 'outsider' most likely made it easier for him to make the tough decisions required for an efficient distribution of resources (which no doubt accounts for his lack of popularity among House Republicans). The opportunity to become the majority party for the first time in four decades helped maintain Republican support for an NRCC distribution of resources designed to maximize the number of seats won. Like the DCCC, the NRCC is now established as a professional organization designed only to win seats for the Republicans. However, the greater resources available to the NRCC (and thus to Republican incumbents) made the battle to solve the collective action problem more difficult than it was for the DCCC in the 1970s, and it wasn't until the early 1990s that circumstances were right to finally establish the NRCC as an efficient campaign organization. While increased NRCC efficiency does not replace other explanations of Republican success in House races in the 1990s, such as the partisan realignment of the South or redistricting plans favorable to the Republicans, it certainly compliments them and contributes to our understanding of how the Republicans attained a majority in the House in 1994.

Today, both the DCCC and NRCC are very efficient campaigners, concentrating their resources in the closest races. In fact, some scholars believe that party committees are now *too* focused on contributing to competitive races, and are thus missing opportunities to win seats in districts that may not look promising in early polls but that would be competitive with party support (Herrnson, 1992: 57-8; Jacobson, 1993: 132-6). Thus it may be that the best distribution of resources in terms of efficiency may not be the best electoral strategy for winning seats. It remains to be seen if this trend towards efficiency by the congressional campaign committees will continue, or if they will begin to gamble on less likely challengers. Another question left unanswered in this article is the role of soft money. The DCCC and NRCC made millions of dollars' worth of soft money expenditures in the 1990s (Dwyre, 1996; Herrnson, 2000). These expenditures cover administrative expenses, contributions to state parties, and issue advocacy advertisements. No doubt these soft money expenditures have an impact on Congressional races and the effectiveness of the congressional campaign committees.

Despite the significant financial and organizational advantages of the NRCC, it was the DCCC that first solved the collective action problem and moved towards an efficient distribution of campaign resources. In fact, as discussed above, the resource advantages of the NRCC were likely a

disadvantage in solving the collective action problem. Today, both committees are established as professional campaign organizations designed to win seats for their party. The only surprise here is that it was the Democrats who led the way.

### Note

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