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Professionalization of State Legislative Campaigns in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia: Evidence from the 2000 Election Cycle

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The literature on how modern political campaigns are conducted is an underdeveloped field in political science. While the trend in “professionalizing” campaign tactics—the employment of modern campaign techniques in order to enable a campaign to be more efficient and effective in contacting voters—has received some attention at the congressional level, there has been no systematic examination of whether (and to what extent) state legislative campaigns are using these tools. There has also been no examination to determine whether professionalization is affecting all candidacies equally. Based on a mail survey of state legislative candidates in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina during the 2000 election, this study finds that there is some utilization of professional campaign techniques in state legislative races for these states. While incumbency appears to have a negligible effect, state senate candidates are more likely to employ professional techniques than state house candidates.

INTRODUCTION

“I had no idea what I was getting myself into.” This statement is a common sentiment among state legislative candidates when reflecting on their first campaign experience. Of course, they are not alone. While many voters know something of the voting process—particularly in the wake of the
2000 presidential election—less is known regarding how campaigns attempt to persuade voters to their cause. This is particularly true of downballot campaigns, which have received generally less attention than national level races. As one study notes, "the American public does not recognize, and therefore does not appreciate, the personal efforts that state legislative candidates make" (Moncrief et al., 2001, 90). This study begins the process of expanding our understanding by examining campaigns conducted in three southern states (South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia) during the 2000 election cycle. Specifically, campaign organization, fundraising, and voter contact activities are considered. While examining three southern states does not tell us much about what candidates do across the country, it does tell us something about these states, as well as suggesting areas of future research.

The question of how state legislative campaigns are conducted is significant because state legislators are important policymakers regardless of the region in which they serve. In any state, legislatures are key actors in education policy, criminal justice policy, and congressional redistricting to cite just a few prominent examples. As Faucheux and Herrnson note, "State legislators represent the backbone of American politics and government.... The campaigns they wage may not consume as much money and attract as much attention as those for federal and statewide offices, but the chambers they are elected to fill represent a critical political and policy battleground" (Faucheux and Herrnson, 1999, 21).

State legislative elections have often been viewed as "amateur operations" compared to their national-level counterparts in the Congress. In these "downballot" contests, direct voter contact

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1 Downballot campaigns typically are defined as the additional campaigns that are waged below the level of U.S. Congress and statewide offices in a given election.
techniques—rallies, canvassing, phone calls, etc.—have been the traditional mainstay of campaigning. To supplement the traditional tactics, some of the less expensive forms of indirect voter contact techniques have also been added, particularly radio, print advertising, and direct mail. In recent campaigns, the greater use of indirect voter contact has extended to the limited use of television as a campaign tool at the local level.

These "amateur operations" appear to be evolving in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Campaign tools that have been used with success at the national level seem to be "trickling down" to state-level races in this region. The process may even be helped along by an aggressive campaign management sector. Since many view state-level elections as something of a "training ground" for future national candidates, some commentators have urged national-level political consultants to become involved in state and local elections as a way of establishing clients in future national contests (Secrest and Walker, 1997, 52). But the questions remain "how professional are these campaigns?" and "are they all equally professional?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on campaigning at the presidential or congressional level is quite extensive, but state legislative campaigning, like most areas of state and local politics, is an area that has only recently begun receiving significant attention. As Frank Sorauf notes regarding campaign finance, "Beyond illustrations and scraps of data...campaign finance is just one more aspect of state politics on which even the ordinarily brave hesitate to make more than a rough estimate" (1992, 32). While there is a developing literature on state legislative elections, there is relatively little scholarly attention to campaigning at the state legislative level. There are an increasing number of works that could be described as "how to" manuals. Works such as The Campaign
Manager and Taking Back Politics have become increasingly important to low-level campaigns (see Shaw, 1996; Allen, 1996). However, beyond their advice to candidates, there is little systematic evidence regarding what candidates are actually doing.

The one systematic examination of state legislative campaigns was a recent study by Faucheux and Herrnson titled See How They Run. This nation-wide survey of 364 state legislative candidates from the 1996 and 1998 campaign cycles explored a wide variety of campaign issues, including a candidate's willingness to use negative information, candidate perspectives on campaign finance reform, and candidate perceptions of voter information levels. Faucheux and Herrnson found assessments of negativity in campaigning were relative. Three-quarters of the candidates surveyed felt that they had run positive campaigns, but nearly a third of the respondents felt that their opponents had run negative campaigns. The study found that state legislative candidates relied extensively on individual contributions and self-financing to run their campaigns, and that while most support campaign finance reform, few doubted its effectiveness. Finally, Faucheux and Herrnson also found that more than three-quarters of the candidates believed voters are poorly informed when it came to candidate issue stands and elections (1999, 27).

Faucheux and Herrnson also looked at campaign operations. They contended that the key divide between professional and non-professional campaigning at this level is money—those campaigns that raised more than $50,000 tended to run sophisticated campaigns and those below $50,000 tended to be volunteer-driven campaigns that "live off the land" (Faucheux and Herrnson, 1999, 23). Campaign operations were only one of many areas that the study examined, but money was the only variable that was explored. There are other factors that correlate with increased fundraising capacity that might provide a more
sophisticated look at which campaigns opt for more professional techniques.

*See How They Run* represented the first extension of a concept that had been developed at the congressional level. Studies of U.S. House elections have explored campaign professionalization since the early 1990's. Herrnson (1992) used professionalization to explain fundraising success among House candidates. He noted that contemporary congressional elections require a candidate to assemble an organization that can conduct technologically sophisticated activities and raise large amounts of money from parties, PACs, and individuals (Herrnson, 1992, 858). By measuring the number of specialized campaign activities performed by professional political consultants in the 1990 campaign cycle, Herrnson found that campaign professionalism is positively correlated with fundraising success. He also contended that incumbents and Republicans tend to run more "professional" campaigns (Herrnson, 1992, 863).

Herrnson extended his analysis of professionalism in U.S. House races in a later work by examining the effects of professionalism on organization, strategy, and electoral success. Again, he found professionalism is linked to more effective campaigns. While he reaffirmed his earlier finding linking professionalism with incumbency, he also noted that professionalism improves electoral performance. Particularly for challenger and open-seat candidacies, increased professionalism was more likely to "make the difference" (Herrnson in Thurber and Nelson, 2000, 67).

Using data from the 1990 and 1992 campaign cycles, Stephen Medvic also examined the role of professionalization on U.S. House campaigns. Conceptualizing political consultants as a precious campaign resource not unlike money, Medvic's analysis is mostly consistent with Herrnson (1998, 150). Medvic found that increased use of consultants, and therefore increased professionalization, was more prevalent with incumbent campaigns. He
also found that campaigns in competitive races were more likely to use political consultants. Lastly, contrary to Herrnson, he found that Democrats tended to run more professionalized campaigns (Medvic in Thurber and Nelson, 2000, 104). However, this finding may be explained by the fact that the Republican Party is a better campaign resource for its candidates than its Democratic counterpart (Maisel, 1993, 69).

Both Herrnson and Medvic have linked professionalization to the use of professional political consultants, though Herrnson also incorporates paid staff members in his more recent analysis (Herrnson in Thurber and Nelson, 2000, 68). However, many state legislative and local campaigns cannot afford to employ these consultants. Further, there is little theoretical basis for expecting consultants to be more effective than other campaign staffers (Thurber, 1998, 149). Hence, the conceptual definition for campaign professionalization needs modification in order to be applied to state legislative campaigns.

The elements of organization, money, and media are central to professional campaigns. Campaigns that are "professional" will be more highly developed in these areas than their amateur counterparts, and will are more likely to win because of it. Faucheux and Herrnson describe professional campaigns as "research- and media-driven," as well as using "paid consultants and sophisticated vote-getting techniques" (Faucheux and Herrnson, 1999, 23). These attributes make a campaign more efficient in deciding which voters to target, what message to use to persuade those voters, and how to ensure that the voters participate on election day. Amateur campaigns would not have significant experience with these skills, would not campaign as efficiently, and are less likely to win as a result. It seems logical that professional campaigns would perform better electorally than amateur campaigns in state legislative elections, and research from the congressional-level supports this hypothesis.
Since organization, money, and media are key indicators of professional campaigns (see Herrnson in Thurber and Nelson, 2000), this study focuses on them when contemplating how much state legislative campaigns have professionalized.

Beyond a general examination of campaign professionalization in the three southern states, this study also seeks to explore where variation in campaign techniques might exist—and by extension, why. Specifically, the study looks at two plausible factors relating to professionalization—level of office and incumbency. Certainly, there is reason to expect that state senate candidates might be more adept at modern campaign techniques than their contemporaries in the state house of Representatives. In spite of the fact that they typically draw similar salaries, state senate seats represent a larger segment of the population, are typically elected less frequently (though both North Carolina and Georgia’s Senates are elected on two-year terms similar to the state house of representatives) and are generally viewed as more prestigious positions (McNeely, 1997, 21). Further, at the national level, there is a general perception among scholars that there is a fundamental difference between House and Senate elections (Waterman, 1990, 99).

Evidence comparing upper and lower legislative chambers in the states are limited (Moncrief in Thompson and Moncrief, 1998, 40) and somewhat mixed in their findings. Malcolm Jewell, analyzing a data set of state legislative elections created by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), finds that incumbency is stronger in state house elections than in state senate elections. However, he notes that the difference is relatively minor with more than half of the states studies having a gap of less than two percentage points (Jewell, 1994, 485). Another study examining factors contributing to incumbent safety in state legislative elections contends that it is not important whether one serves in the state house or
state senate, but rather the length of one’s term (Carey, Niemi, and Powell, 2000, 684). Certainly, state senate candidates tend to raise more money in their election efforts (Moncrief in Thompson and Moncrief, 1998, 40). According to *The State*, the cost of winning a state senate seat in South Carolina was nearly four-times more expensive than winning a state house seat.

Whether incumbents run significantly different campaigns than their challengers is another question worth exploring. The advantages of incumbency are a well-researched phenomenon in American politics. It is well established that incumbents are more likely to win. The connection between incumbency and winning that was first discovered in U.S. House elections has also been explored at the state house level. What is more, there is evidence that the power of incumbency is growing in the states. Scholarly studies have found that the turnover rate in state house chambers between the 1930s and the 1980s has declined significantly (Niemi and Winsky, 1987, 124) and that most legislative incumbents win by increasingly comfortable margins (see Jewel and Breaux, 1998; Garand, 1991). In fact, given the advantages incumbents hold in state house elections, many potential challengers simply refuse to run (Moncrief, 1992, 557). Still, some incumbents are safer than others are. Recent research has demonstrated that district type, the professionalization level of the legislative body (vice professionalization in campaigns), and the term length are all significant factors in predicting incumbent safety in state legislative elections (Carey, Niemi, and Powell, 2000, 690).

Incumbents did well in the three states under study during this election cycle. In North Carolina’s state house elections,

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2 Sheinin, Aaron. “Cost of Winning Legislative Seats Skyrockets in the Past Five Years.” *The State* 4 February 2001, p. B1. The cost of winning the average House Seat was $41,000. The cost of winning the average Senate seat was $162,000.
only six of the 120 incumbents lost their seats. In South Carolina, only four incumbents (out of 124) lost their elections. There are traditional explanations for the success of incumbents—increased name recognition, better fundraising resources, more political connections within the district—but do incumbents run different types of political campaigns? The studies of campaign professionalization at the congressional level suggest that they do (see Herrnson, 1992; Medvic in Thurber and Nelson, 2000).

DATA AND METHODS

In the 2000 general election cycle, there were 250 state legislative contests (64 in South Carolina, 100 in North Carolina, and 86 in Georgia) between Democratic and Republican candidates in the three states. However, the entire legislative membership of all three states (576 seats) was up for reelection. Hence, 56% of incumbents faced no challenge at all. Previous research on incumbency in state legislative elections has explored the decline in contested races (Jewell and Breaux, 1988; Weber, Tucker and Brace, 1991). The decline in contested seats may be the result of state context, biased districting, or the popularity of a particular incumbent. Whatever the reason, to include legislative candidates who were not seriously campaigning would distort the results of the study. In order to acquire a more accurate picture of how campaigns are run at the state house-level, these untested cases were discarded. Disregarding these cases is not to contend that the elected officials from these districts did not en-

4 A limited number of these “unopposed” contests did see the incumbent challenged by a third party such as the Constitutional Law, Reform, or Libertarian Parties. However, given the lack of electoral success for third party candidates, it is presumed that these did not compel the incumbents to give a full campaign effort.
gage in fund raising or other campaign activities. However, given that they had no challenge from the other major political party, it is presumed that they did not have to mount a serious campaign to retain their seat.

Focusing on just the contested races, anonymous surveys were sent to the candidates in these 250 races. The response rate for the survey was 47.6% (238). Of the 152 state senate candidates identified, 72 responded (47.3%). Of 348 state house candidates, 164 responded (47.1%). Within the entire group, 43% (102) identified themselves as incumbents, 56% (133) as challengers, and 1% (3) as competing in open seat contests.

The three states share some important similarities with one another, but also some significant differences. Beyond region, the states all have a similar population density, with North Carolina having a density of 165 people per square mile, South Carolina having a density of 133, and Georgia a density of 141. These are relative close to one another when compared to the national average population density of 79. While there are variations in geographic contexts both across and within the states, the similarity in population density suggests a similar campaign environment. The states also seem to enjoy the same relative level of legislative professionalization. Legislative professionalization is seen to be a relevant factor in the state legislative election literature (see Squire, 1998; Carey, Niemi and Powell, 2000). All three states are classified as “semi-professional,” as are most states in the former confederacy.

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5 Session length and legislator salary are key indicators of legislative professionalization. South Carolina legislators meet for five months each year and receive a salary of $10,400. Georgia’s legislators meet three months one year and two months in the second year, and receive a salary of $16,200. North Carolina’s legislators meet six months in the first year of the session and two months in the second year. They receive a salary of $13,951. The above salary figures do not include per diem or other sources of legislative compensation.
The three states also have some significant differences. One difference is the length of term for the upper chamber. South Carolina’s state senators serve four-year terms, where North Carolina and Georgia state senators serve two-year terms. There is also some variation in district types, with North Carolina using multi-member districts while South Carolina and Georgia use the traditional single-member districts. While the sample of three states is not suitable for generalizations to the national population of state legislative elections, it does allow for some generalizations in the states under study.

After the sample was selected, the survey questions were broken down by their relevance to the three subcategories of the study: campaign organization, fundraising, and voter contact techniques. Each section was broken down into frequency distributions for the entire sample, as well as the frequency distribution for each category (level of office and candidate status). The level of office and candidate status variables were then cross-tabulated with each response question to determine if the relationships that are observed in the table are statistically significant beyond the sample. In this instance, “beyond the sample” means the findings can be generalized to state legislative races in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia during the 2000 election cycle. Chi-square tests using a confidence level of more than 95% (or p < .05) were used to test for these statistically significant correlations.

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6 Given their relatively low numbers (3 responses), open seat candidates were included with challengers in the “non-incumbent” category.

7 Given the different findings of Herrnson (1992) and Medvic (2000) on political parties as a variable in campaign professionalization, that variable was also cross tabulated. However, political party did not yield any statistically significant differences between campaigns, and therefore is not included.

8 Chi-square tests are used to determine if a relationship between two variables is sufficiently strong to reject the Null Hypotheses (that two variables are not related) in the larger population. Statistical significance is determined by comparing the chi-square ($\chi^2$)
Campaigns must have three key components in order to compete—they must have organization, they must have money, and they must be able to talk to the voters. Indeed, the first two are designed to facilitate the third. As a result, this study examined these three areas individually to determine what types of campaign techniques are being applied and by whom.

Campaign Organization

Running an effective political campaign at any level requires the management of a complex set of tasks. Management requires organization. Yet, state legislative campaigns are less likely to employ a campaign infrastructure, particularly when compared to their national-level counterparts. They are less likely to establish a campaign headquarters, and less likely to use paid campaign staff. Most state legislative candidates seem to break the first rule of campaign management: Never manage your own campaign.

The survey results confirm these generalizations. Just over one-half (54%) of the respondents used campaign headquarters. Only 50% incorporated a campaign manager, and of those, the overwhelming majority (78%) had managers who served only on a part-time basis. What is more, these managers were very likely to be volunteers. More than 82% of the respondents indicated that they used no paid campaign staff. One state house candidate in South Carolina, Lucian Norton, indicated that his campaign organization was essentially himself, with his wife answering the phone.9

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9 Interview with Mr. Lucius Norton, State House Candidate, 15 November 2000.
If organization and paid staff are hallmarks of professionalized campaigns, then state senate candidates seem to be more "professional" than are their counterparts in the state house. As Table 1 indicates, state senate candidates in the current sample were more likely to have the benefits of modern campaign organizations than their counterparts are in the state house. While

| Table 1 |
| Impact of Level of Office and Candidate Status on Campaign Organization |
| (in percents) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Headquarters</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters not in a Residence*</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters donated as in-kind Contribution</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Staff**†</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Manager</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Manager Serving Full-Time</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Consultant</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*statistically significant difference between Senate and House Candidates at the p = .05 level.
†statistically significant difference between Incumbents and Challengers at the p = .05 level.

state house and state senate candidates tend to use campaign headquarters in roughly similar numbers, there were statistically significant differences in where those headquarters are located and how they are financed. State senate candidates were more likely to have campaign headquarters that were not located in their homes ($\chi^2 = 4.30$, df =1, p < .05). They were also more
likely than house candidates to have their headquarters donated as an in-kind contribution ($\chi^2 = 5.393, df = 1, p < .05$).

Senators also had advantages in staffing. Even though state senate candidates were only slightly more likely to have a campaign manager in this sample, there were statistically significant differences in whether that manager served full-time ($\chi^2 = 13.1, df = 1, p < .05$). State senate campaigns were also more likely to have paid staff support to implement their campaign strategy ($\chi^2 = 6.939, df = 1, p < .05$). They also appeared more likely to use outside campaign consultants to improve their campaign strategy, though this difference is not statistically significant. Nevertheless, state senate campaigns appear to have more formal organization and professional support than their counterparts do in the state house.

The effect of incumbency is not as clear regarding campaign organizations. Incumbents were less likely to have a campaign headquarters and less likely to have had that headquarters donated as an in-kind contribution, a disparity that is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.055, df = 1, p < .05$). Incumbents were also less likely to have a campaign manager, though these managers were more likely to be serving on a full-time basis and to have paid staff to support the campaign operations. However, none of these differences is strong enough to apply beyond this sample.

The organizational element of professional campaigning was present in many down-ballot campaigns in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina during the 2000 cycle. If a campaign is to have a strategy, it must have a strategist. If a campaign is going to have professional staff, it must have a place for them to work. From the current study, it appears that state senate campaigns are more likely to employ professional campaigning in their organizational design than state house campaigns. The findings on how incumbency might have influenced professional campaigning are not clear from this study.
Campaign Finance

While campaign finance in state legislative elections is a field that has received relatively little attention prior to the 1990’s, one trend that has been established is the increasing costs of running state legislative campaigns. The increasing cost of running an effective campaign stems from the growing “professionalization” of the campaign itself: the use of campaign managers, sophisticated mail-targeting and polling techniques, and more reliance on media advertising (Moncrief in Thompson and Moncrief, 1998, 39). South Carolina appears to be a part of the trend with the average cost of a state senate seat more than doubling in the past four years, from approximately $78,000 in 1998 to $162,000 in 2000.\(^\text{10}\) While this study cannot address any trends in these three states beyond the 2000 campaign cycle, there is evidence to support the theories of incumbency advantage in fundraising and the increased prominence of state senate campaigns over their colleagues in the state house. Hence, if “professionalizing” a downballot campaign requires greater financial resources, it seems likely that state senate candidates and incumbents would be the first campaigns to employ these new tactics.

The source of the campaign contributions can also matter when it comes to professionalization. State party organizations often contribute to downballot campaigns but the contribution is not always a direct monetary contribution. In-kind contributions could take the form of polling, voter identification through phone-banking, direct mail production, and consulting. Certainly, parties can also provide a labor pool of personnel who are experienced in the art of campaign management. Donations from Political Action Committees could also provide such “professional” campaign resources, albeit to a lesser extent. The finan-

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the sources of those contributions do not appear to be dramatically different.

The evidence from the three states is not good news for challengers. Not only were they likely to raise less money than their incumbent competitors were, but they were also more likely to go into debt. The median amount of fundraising for the incumbent was 66% higher than the median challenger ($50,000 for incumbents and $30,000 for challengers). Further, as Table 2 illustrates, there is a statistically significant difference on whether these candidates incurred a personal debt in the name of their campaign ($^2 = 31.0, df = 4, p < .05$). Very few incumbents registered any campaign debt (18%), while many non-incumbent candidates had debt (48%). However, the absolute figures do not reveal the amount of the debt. Certainly, South Carolina State Senator Hugh Leatherman incurred a significant debt in retaining his seat from a strong challenger—he borrowed $170,000 in his contest against Judge Patsy Stone.12

As previous research has validated (Cassie and Thompson in Thompson and Moncrief, 1998, 161), incumbents are also more likely to receive money from PACs—a finding that was statistically significant ($^2 = 13.678, df = 1, p < .05$). Incumbents in the sample also appear less likely to receive support from their state party organization, which is consistent with the literature (Jewell and Morehouse, 2001, 150). However, the differences in the current sample were not strong enough to generalize to all state legislative candidates in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia.

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cial source that is least likely to convey any additional benefit beyond the additional financial resources is financial contributions by the candidate themselves. Hence, it is not only the amount of the contribution but also the source of a campaign war chest that may provide insight into campaign professionalization.

Undoubtedly, more money is spent for the average state senate seat than for the average state house seat. The reasons are obvious: fewer state senate seats are up for election in any given time period; state senate seats are often considerably larger than state house districts; fewer state senate seats swings are necessary to change the majority-minority status of a party and therefore each state senate seat may be more critical. There are only a few studies to confirm these points. One study of states in the northwestern U.S. found that the average money per candidate spent in the 1988 election cycle was at least 75% higher for state senate candidates compared to their counterparts in the state house (Moncrief in Thompson and Moncrief, 1998, 39).

The evidence from the three-state analysis confirms these findings. The median\(^{11}\) amount raised in a state house campaign was $35,000, where the median for a state senate contest was $63,000. However, the sources of the money do not appear to be significantly different. In the sample, state senate candidates were slightly more likely to get campaign support from their state party organization and slightly more likely to go into debt. They were also marginally less likely to receive contributions from political action committees. Hence, state house candidates certainly raised less money than state senate candidates did, but

\(^{11}\) While multiple measures of central tendency are reported, this study relies primarily on medians. Means can be affected by large increases in spending in just one or two races. Since medians reflect the numbers at which half the candidates spent more and half spent less, they are far less sensitive to the effect of just one or two cases with hyper-inflated spending.
Hence, the data seem to validate that the "mother’s milk of politics" continues to flow towards both higher-level candidates and incumbents in the three states. Higher campaign contributions can “buy” a more professional campaign—paid staff, polling data, broadcast television. While financial sources vary, the strongest variations appear to turn on incumbency status, not

**TABLE 2**

**IMPACT OF LEVEL OF OFFICE AND CANDIDATE STATUS ON FUNDRAISING**

(in thousands of dollars and percents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thousands of dollars</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Contributions Raised</td>
<td>$86</td>
<td>$42</td>
<td>$73</td>
<td>$41</td>
<td>$53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Contributions Raised</td>
<td>$63</td>
<td>$35</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$30</td>
<td>$38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Incurred Personal Debt*</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Provided Material Support</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigns Receiving PAC Contributions</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant difference between Incumbents and Challengers at the p = .05 level.

office—state house and state senate candidates tend to draw from the same resources proportionately.

The lack of fundraising among challengers is potentially a significant factor in the outcomes of their elections. In 2000, the South Carolina reelection rate for incumbents was 97%; in the North Carolina state house, it was 95%. While there are incumbents who went into debt in order to prevail in their elections, I
suspect that they felt that the money was well spent. The chal­
leengers, who were largely unsuccessful in spite of their willing­ness to incur financial debts, probably feel somewhat less
satisfied.

Voter Contact Techniques

Ultimately, any campaign is going to have to talk to voters if
it intends to get a majority of those voters to carry them to vic­
tory on election day. However, the method by which communi­
cating with voters is done varies greatly. Downballot campaigns
have traditionally been conducted using a combination direct and
low-cost indirect voter contact techniques. As one author noted,
state legislative campaigns tend to be “intimate and retail,” pri­
marily using face-to-face methods of voter contact (Gaddie,
1998, 11). Still, state legislative campaigns in the states under
study show signs of professionalization. In particular, the use of
broadcast and cable television and internet websites are forms of
modern campaign communication that were featured promi­
ently in these downballot races.

Media Tactics

Modern media is a tool increasingly use by many campaigns.
Given the relatively large district sizes, it is difficult for candi­
dates or some representative of their organizations to have direct
contact with every voter. Media campaigning is essential to
communicating campaign messages to the bulk of the electorate.
However, given the lower budgets in state legislative races, it is
not surprising that the candidates used the less expensive media
outlets more frequently. In particular, direct mail, newspaper, and
radio advertising are popular campaign tools. This study found
nothing to contradict this point. Of all respondents, 62% indi­
cated that they employed radio advertising and 74% indicated
that they employed newspaper advertising.
The most common media tool in the sample was direct mail. Faucheux and Herrnson in *See How They Run*, also found direct mail to be one of the most commonly employed campaign techniques (Faucheux and Herrnson, 1999, 25). However, as can be seen in Table 3, several indirect voter contact techniques were used in higher proportions than Faucheux and Herrnson found in their study of the 1996 and 1998 campaign cycles. The higher levels are particularly apparent in the cases of cable television, radio advertising, and internet websites.

Direct mail is becoming an increasing important tool in the conduct of state legislative campaigns. According to *Campaigns and Elections*, campaigns at all levels spend more money on direct mail than any other budget item ("We’ve Got Mail," 1999, 22). Mail offers several advantages including the ability to target specific individuals thanks to increasingly sophisticated computer databases and the ability to communicate campaign messages under the "radar" of mass media scrutiny. Candidates in state legislative races for the three states were big believers in mail—at 82% it was the most commonly used tool among the 238 respondents. With that in mind, the initial analysis found no statistically significant relationships between level of office and the use of direct mail. However, there was a difference in degree, if not kind, when it comes to direct mail. The sample reveals that state senate candidates were more likely to invest in larger direct mail campaigns (defined as 7 mail pieces or more) than their state house counterparts ($\chi^2 = 7.4$, df =1, $p < .05$). This difference allowed them to have more extensive contact with their targeted constituencies.

The only other statistically significant difference in the way state house and state senate candidates in these states ran their
campaigns is in the use of newspaper advertising. State senate candidates are significantly more likely to employ newspaper advertising ($\chi^2 = 10.332$, df = 1, $p < .05$). While state senate candidates are also more likely to use television, radio, billboards, and internet websites than state house candidates, the low levels of statistical significance do not permit generalizations to all state house candidates.

Incumbency also has a limited impact on determining which campaigns would employ more "professional" media tools. While there is a statistically significant difference between incumbents and challengers on the use of broadcast television ($\chi^2 = 5.328$, df = 1, $p < .05$), Table 3 makes clear that there is little

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**TABLE 3**

**IMPACT OF LEVEL OF OFFICE AND CANDIDATE STATUS ON MEDIA TACTICS**  
(in percents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Tactic</th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>F &amp; H Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast Television†</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cable Television</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper*</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Website†</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billboards</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Mail</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 or more pieces of Direct Mail*</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant difference between Senate and House Candidates at the $p = .05$ level.  
†Statistically significant difference between Incumbents and Challengers at the $p = .05$ level.
distinction between the candidates on the use of cable television, newspaper, radio, direct mail, or billboards.

That incumbents in the three states appear to be slightly more likely to use television is some indication that they are running more professional campaigns than their opponents are. The use of television, both broadcast and cable, has been seen as a harbinger of the new professionalization in local campaigns. Of course, the chief drawback to television is the cost. As the sample indicates, challengers and incumbents are increasingly turning to cable. Cable television has been seen as the low-cost alternative to broadcast television. However, cable presents both opportunities and challenges to the modern campaign. Because of the number of channels associated with cable television, cable offers the ability to conduct "radio-like" targeting of specific campaign messages (Shea, 1996, 208). That also means that it has a smaller potential audience than broadcast television.

The arrival of the internet as a campaign tool has been a widely anticipated phenomena. Many of the state legislative candidates in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia used the internet. However, the use of the internet among these state-level candidates appears to lag behind the national trend. According to a survey by Campaigns and Elections, 63.3% of all federal, state, and local candidates in the 1998 campaign cycle used internet sites (Murphy, 1998, 40). By contrast, only 40% of the state legislative candidates in the three states employed an internet site to advocate their candidacy.

Most of the candidates using the internet were challengers. A cross-tabulation of campaign websites with the status of the candidate suggests that the two variables are correlated in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. Non-incumbents were significantly more likely to employ websites ($\chi^2 = 18.673$, df =1, $p < .05$). Greater use of internet may be explained by the relatively low cost of internet websites and the lack of financial re-
sources that often bedevils non-incumbent candidates relative to their competition. Many in both academic and professional circles have anticipated the emergence of the internet as a campaign tool (Klotz, 1997, 482; Noble, 1999, 50). Some even suggest that challengers would be the more likely to employ the internet. Jeremy Carl hints at this possibility when he notes, “The internet permits the smaller candidates, who may not be as well-funded, to have an effective medium with which to respond to the mass media’s support of major candidates” (Carl, 1995, 56).

The results show that there are some minor differences in campaign media strategies in these states that are explained by level of office and candidate status. The trends within the sample are largely consistent with the notion that state senate campaigns and campaigns run by incumbents are more “professional,” albeit to a minor degree. These trends are particularly true of state senate candidates, who used all eight campaign tactics in equal or larger numbers than state house members. However, few of these differences are statistically significant. State senate candidates are more likely to use newspapers and larger amounts of direct mail; incumbents are more likely to use broadcast television; challengers are more likely to use the internet. Further research may uncover more compelling distinctions in explaining who uses which media techniques in downballot campaigns in these states.

**Direct Voter Contact**

Making the case directly to the voters has often been considered the main campaign tool of downballot campaigns. Direct voter contact involves personally appealing to voters at their homes, dropping literature at selected households, calling them on the telephone, or some combination thereof. It is not an effective tactic in higher-level contests. Indeed, at the level of presidential contests, door-to-door canvassing by the candidate is
often done for the benefit of the media, as its symbolic importance may garner television attention.

Among state legislative candidates in this study, there is no statistically significant relationship between most direct voter contact activities and level of office. As Table 4 indicates, both state senate and state house campaigns in these states canvassed with volunteers and the candidate in roughly the same proportions.

Candidates also used rallies and phone banks in nearly identical amounts. The use of telephones has become a mainstay of modern campaigns, whether it is for identifying supporters, persuading voters, or measuring voter attitudes (polling). Because of their relatively low cost (particularly when calling within a local

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter Contact Technique</th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Incumbent</th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canvassing by Candidate†</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canvassing by Volunteers†</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rallies and Meetings</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonebanking†</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Opinion Polling*</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant difference between Senate and House Candidates at the \( p = .05 \) level.
†Statistically significant difference between Incumbents and Challengers at the \( p = .05 \) level.
increasingly popular in local campaigns as a method of contacting voters. These phone banks are also very flexible, allowing for quick alterations in campaign strategy (Jameson, 1999, 69).

However, campaigns’ use of telephones to conduct public opinion surveys varies significantly with the level of office. Public opinion polling is becoming increasingly common for all campaigns: 40% of those surveyed reported incorporating a public opinion poll within three months of election day. But not all candidates are equally likely to employ public opinion polls. Consistent with the notion that the professionalization of campaigns is “trickling down” to the lower level campaigns, state senate candidates are more likely to use polls than state house candidates at statistically significant levels ($\chi^2=4.903, df=1, p<.05$). In the sample, 51% of state senate candidate responded that they had employed polling, where as only 35% of state house candidates responded in a similar manner. The variation in the use of polling may be attributable to state senate candidates having more money to spend.

Challengers seem to be far more likely to employ direct voter contact techniques. As table 4 indicates, they are more likely to canvass (both personally and through volunteers), use rallies and group meetings, and employ phone banking to identify supporters and persuade undecided voters. Non-incumbents were far more likely to “walk the district” (67%) than their incumbent competitors were (35%). Challengers’ use of these techniques is likely due to several factors including their lack of financial resources and their need to improve name recognition, usually far below the name recognition of the incumbent. Further, with the exceptions of rallies and meeting, the correlation between candidate status and the other direct voter contact techniques are all
statistically significant. Hence, on direct voter contact, it appears that candidate status is the key issue—challengers are more likely to employ the campaign techniques that are not typically hallmarks of professional campaigns.

CONCLUSION

It is important to emphasize that this study deals with data from only a few states that are geographically concentrated in one region of the country. Therefore, generalizations to the national population of state legislative campaigns are not possible. Nonetheless, the analysis points to some trends that are worthy of further study.

In an age of sophisticated, high-tech campaigns that can be extraordinarily expensive, downballot contests in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia seem to reflect a distinctly different type of campaign. While the use of high-cost media tactics are present, many of these campaigns use more of the traditional, low-cost methods such as canvassing, direct mail, radio, and print advertising. This is not to say that national and state-level campaigning are completely distinct. Certainly, there is growing evidence that local campaigns in the three states are emulating successful techniques that are employed at the national level. While following successful national techniques may lead to more effective campaign techniques, it does have some negative side effects such as increasingly expensive campaigns requiring more candidate attention to fundraising activities.

13 Chi-Square test for the relationship between candidate status and the use of canvassing by the candidate produces the following information: $\chi^2 = 25.203$, df = 2, $p < .05$. Chi-Square test for the relationship between candidate status and the use of canvassing by volunteers produces the following information: $\chi^2 = 4.28$, df = 1, $p < .05$. Chi-Square test for the relationship between candidate status and the use of phone banking produces the following information: $\chi^2 = 4.95$, df = 1, $p < .05$.

THE JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
PROFESSIONALISM OF STATE CAMPAIGNS

In these three states, whether a candidate was seeking an office in the state senate or state house had a direct bearing on the type of campaign they ran. In money and organization, state senate campaigns are obviously the prime beneficiaries of this recent trend in "professionalization" of downballot campaigns. These campaigns were more likely to establish a professional campaign organization by using full-time campaign managers, paid staff, and outside consultants. State senate candidates in these states also had significantly more money to spend—a fundamental necessity for media campaigning. However, there were no significant differences in voter contact activities, save the more frequent use of newspapers and the more prolific use of direct mail by state senate candidates. With these observations in mind, it appears that there is some evidence to support the "trickle-down" philosophy of professionalization in downballot campaigns for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Incumbency status appears to have less significance in campaign activities in the three states. Except for the financial advantage, incumbents did not show significantly more professional behavior in organization or voter contact activities. The financial advantage should not be underestimated. While incumbents were more likely to have money to spend, it was less likely that it was their money. Financial advantage seems to explain how incumbency status might prompt variations in media tactics, such as the use of broadcast television. It also explains why challengers might turn to low-cost media tactics, such as the internet, and traditional direct voter contact activities in greater numbers. Given that this finding is somewhat at odds with the studies of professionalization at the congressional level, this is a promising research question for a study with a nation-wide sample of state legislative candidates. Future research might also explore the amount of voter contact techniques, as opposed to simply surveying the types employed, may yet find a strong dis-
tinction between how incumbents and challengers run their campaigns.

The findings are instructive but there is more work to be done in the area. Research employing a nation-wide sample is paramount. A more representative sample of state legislative campaigns is one way to gain confidence in the relationships demonstrated here. An expanded sample would also allow the further exploration of relationships that seemed plausible but were unsubstantiated in this study. The conduct of political campaigns at the state and local level is an interesting and understudied area of political science. In ascertaining the "tools of the trade" in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia downballot elections, this study enlightens us as to how political candidates in the three states attempt to persuade voters to their cause.

REFERENCES


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