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## *The Impact of Unified Party Government on Campaign Contributions*

This article examines the connection between unified party government and campaign contributions. Our central argument is that unified party government confers a substantial, but previously overlooked, fundraising advantage to intra-chamber majority parties. We examined data on corporate campaign contributions to U.S. House incumbents and state legislators in 17 different legislative chambers. We found a strong fundraising benefit accruing to intra-chamber majority status across all of these legislatures, but the benefit is heavily conditioned by the presence of unified or divided government. The results offer important implications for our understanding of the financial balance of power in American politics and for the vast scholarly literature on unified party government.

Why are some politicians more successful than others at raising money? Why do financial donors give generously to some legislators and not to others? When, and why, do members of one political party outraise the opposition party? Previous answers to these important questions have emphasized the legislator's electoral status, ideological compatibility with donors, and institutional clout. In this article, we argue that a core feature of the United States political structure is critically absent from consideration in the previous research: the separation-of-powers system. Past studies of campaign contributions have focused almost exclusively on allocation patterns within single legislative chambers.<sup>1</sup> But isolated legislative chambers do not make laws unilaterally. Creating law requires the concurrent assent of a bicameral legislature and a veto-wielding executive.

This fundamental aspect of U.S. politics has vital, but previously overlooked, implications for explanations regarding the financial balance of power between the two major parties. If donors care about influencing the direction of public policy and strategically weigh the

costs and benefits of their contributions, then they should condition their contributions on the partisan configuration of the elected branches. We argue that the financial fortunes of intra-chamber majority parties rise and fall with changes to and away from unified government. A swing to unified government accelerates the fundraising capacity of the majority party, while a shift to divided government decelerates fundraising.

Our evidence comes from two different sources. First, we examined campaign donations from corporate political action committees (PACs) to members of the U.S. House between 1980 and 2004. We found that changes to or away from unified government produced substantial changes in individual-level campaign finances. Moreover, substantial reallocations occurred between the parties even when party control within the House did not change.

Our second source of evidence is derived from U.S. state legislatures. Recent political history fails to provide any instances of the U.S. House changing party control *and* simultaneously creating unified party government. It is thus impossible to fully estimate, at the national level, both the separate and combined effects of intra-chamber majority status and unified party government on contribution patterns. The states, on the other hand, provide the kind of variation that the relatively limited partisan configuration of Washington, DC, prevents. Using a unique dataset of business-sector contributions to individual state legislators in 17 separate instances of party change—a dataset including more than 1,200 legislators—we uncovered a strong relationship between majority status and campaign contributions, but one that is conditioned by the presence of divided or unified government.

Beyond helping to explain the financial balance-of-power between the parties, these results provide a new perspective on the heated debate over the effect of unified party government. Students of American politics are split over the effect of unified party control on governmental outcomes. Some argue that there are substantial differences (for example, Binder 2003); others see relatively few differences (for instance, Mayhew 1991). Our approach offers a new way to measure the effect of unified government. To the extent that campaign financiers are astute observers of politics and rational in their decision making, observing their donation strategies can reveal much about the relative worth of unified and divided government. The results presented here suggest that unified government exerts a powerful influence. Corporate dollars, at both the federal and state levels, follow changes in unified and divided government. The argument and findings presented here, moreover, highlight a new window into the collective fates of fellow partisans. Party members are bound together by more than simply

national tides or the electoral reputations of their party labels. Their financial fates are intimately linked together, as well. Campaign donors appear to impose their own version of collective party responsibility on an otherwise disjointed separation-of-powers system.

### **Campaign Contributions and the Partisan Balance of Power**

The potential influence of private money on the political process has been the subject of long-standing scrutiny by pundits and scholars. Of particular concern has been the possibility that campaign contributions sway the votes of legislators and distort public policy toward moneyed interests (see, for example, McConnell 1966). An important emerging theoretical perspective, however, maintains that campaign donations do not purchase roll-call votes, *per se*, but instead buy legislative “time” or “access” (for example, Hall and Deardorff 2006, Hall and Wayman 1990, and Hansen 1991). According to this line of argument, campaign donations serve as signals of common goals between donors and legislators, and subsidize a legislator’s effort to work with a donor on mutually shared objectives (Brunell 2005; Hall and Deardorff 2006).

This conclusion follows from a series of premises about the incentives driving legislators and campaign contributors. Legislators in pursuit of reelection must decide how to apportion their most precious scarce resource—time—across a range of activities: attending committee hearings and markup sessions, appearing on the floor to vote, working behind the scenes to forge coalitions, and doing constituency work (Fenno 1977; Hall 1996). Legislators also vary in their ability to influence legislation and deliver favors for interest groups. Some legislators are simply more productive than others, depending on the particular issue at stake and their clout within the chamber (Denzau and Munger 1986; Hall and Deardorff 2006). For instance, committee chairs typically hold agenda-setting powers—deciding which bills to consider, scheduling hearings, and convening markup sessions—that give them a direct hand in deciding the fate of legislation.

Given the variation in legislators’ policy interests and abilities to influence legislative outcomes, where will strategic donors target their campaign contributions? Denzau and Munger’s (1986) theoretical model of the legislative marketplace posits that groups steer contributions to those legislators who provide the greatest supply of legislative output at the lowest cost. In other words, financial contributors target members who can most efficiently turn legislative effort into favors. According to this model, the factors that augment a legislator’s

productivity include electoral safety, expertise in a subject area, and clout in the policymaking process. In the clout category, committee chairs, members of committees that oversee the policy area of concern to the interest groups, and leadership positions all generate increased productivity (Denzau and Munger 1986; Hall and Wayman 1990).

Another institutional asset that may boost a legislator's productivity is majority party status. The majority party maintains a greater number of slots on committees, chairs the committees, and wields crucial procedural privileges at the floor stage of the legislative process (Aldrich and Rohde 2001; Cox and McCubbins 2005). Thus, all else being equal, the marginal rate at which a unit of effort turns into legislative output should be greater for members of the majority.

Even among equally committed allies, some legislators are more efficient in producing progress toward a common goal than others. . . . Majority party leaders, likewise, have procedural prerogatives involving floor scheduling and the appointment of conferees, such that they might accelerate, delay, or kill legislation with relatively little effort. In a highly partisan chamber, majority party membership alone should render a member more efficient. (Hall and Deardorff 2006, 77)

From a strategic donor's perspective, contributing to majority members should be a more efficient deployment of resources than spending on equally situated minority members.

This theoretical conjecture has received persuasive empirical support in recent studies of the U.S. Congress (Ansolabehere and Snyder 2000; Cox and Magar 1999; Rudolph 1999). Examining the aftermath of the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress, these studies have found that PACs disproportionately shifted their contributions to members of the new majority party. Rudolph (1999) used a pooled time-series approach to determine that per-member Republican receipts from business interests increased by \$17,450. Similarly, Cox and Magar (1999), who focused on returning members, found that House Republicans gained, on average, \$34,516 in new receipts from corporate and trade PACs. For House Democrats, the financial hit was considerable: the switch cost them nearly 18% of their overall receipts.

Where, then, does the separation-of-powers system fit into this analysis? There is good reason to suspect that unified or divided partisan control of government might affect the advantage of majority status within an individual chamber. In periods of divided government, the opposition still occupies an organizationally strategic position to block legislation it deems unfavorable. Under unified government, the probability that one of the other branches will vote against or "veto" a particular bill should decline. This reasoning does not assume that a

unified majority party operates unchecked. Rather, the procedural advantages provided to the majority are thought to increase the likelihood of majority-sponsored bills receiving favorable treatment and bills disliked by the majority being kept off the agenda (Cox and McCubbins 2005).

Putting theories of campaign donor behavior together with the potential policy effect of unified government leads to our central expectation. If interest groups direct their donations according to the productivity of a legislator and unified government enhances productivity, then the financial advantages accruing to majority status should be even greater during periods of unified party control of government. In other words, unified government should fully open the financial spigot for the majority party.

A key assumption of our argument is that donors perceive a difference between unified and divided party control. The difference between the two regimes is, however, the source of considerable debate among political scientists. Mayhew (1991), most notably, has argued that just as many important programs get passed during divided government as during periods of unified government. Building on Mayhew's empirical findings, both Krehbiel (1998) and Brady and Volden (2006) have emphasized how the supermajority hurdles present in the Senate filibuster and constitutional veto provisions may blunt the legislative capacity of a unified majority party. Yet other scholars (see, for example, Binder 2003 and Coleman 1999) have found substantive differences in legislative outcomes across unified and divided regimes, specifically in policy areas that include the primary financial decisions of the federal government, such as budget outlays (see McCubbins 1991) and tax policy (Cox and McCubbins 1991). Similar patterns have been discerned in earlier eras of U.S. politics (Stewart 1991) and in the state legislatures (Alt and Lowry 1994). Analyzing patterns of campaign donations before and after changes in party government can help shed light on this debate. To the extent that campaign donors are astute observers of, and rational participants in, the lawmaking process, their behavior can tell us how much they value unified party government.

### **Campaign Contributions in the U.S. House of Representatives**

Our research design allowed us to examine changes in receipts to individual legislators across sequential electoral cycles (Cox and Magar 1999; Romer and Snyder 1994; Stratman 2000). The benefit of looking at temporal changes is that any time-invariant characteristics of a member or that member's constituency can be held constant. Thus, one can hold constant any time-invariant individual characteristics while

varying changes in unified and divided party control. This technique provides for stronger internal validity than a cross-sectional design, because it minimizes the possibility of omitted-variable bias.

Equation (1) presents the model used to test our expectations. The dependent variable is the change in individual-level receipts from corporate PACs between electoral cycles (*Annual Reports*). Consider the following example. The 1992 election gave the Democrats unified control of the national government. To examine the effect of unified government, we would track the growth in receipts by member, taking the difference between member receipts in the 1994 election and the 1992 election. Hence, in this example, we would calculate the dependent variable as  $\Delta Campaign Receipts = Receipts_{i1994} - Receipts_{i1992}$ . Throughout the article, as a shortcut, when discussing these two-year electoral cycles, we will refer to the first election in the cycle (in this example, 1992).

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta Campaign Receipts = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 Majority_{it} + \beta_2 \Delta Unified Government_{it} & (1) \\ & + \beta_3 Majority_{it} \times \Delta Unified Government_{it} \\ & + \beta_4 Majority Leadership_{it} \\ & + \beta_5 Majority Leadership_{it} \times \Delta Unified Government_{it} \\ & + \beta_6 \Delta House Majority Party_{it} \\ & + \beta_7 \Delta House Majority Party_{it} \times Majority_{it} \\ & + \beta_8 \Delta House Majority Party_{it} \times Majority Leadership_{it} \\ & + \theta X_{it} + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it} \end{aligned}$$

Why focus on corporate PACs and not labor? The central reason is because ideological concerns appear to largely motivate labor PACs (see, for example, Cox and Magar 1999, Jacobson 2001, Rudolph 1999, and Souraf 1992). Labor groups donate to members with issue positions that are consistent with their political principles—usually Democrats (Cox and Magar 1999; Jacobson 2001; Rudolph 1999; Souraf 1992).<sup>2</sup> Corporate PACs, on the other hand, tend to pursue a strategy of legislative access. Thus, we would expect their campaign contributions to be more sensitive to variations in legislative power (Cox and Magar 1999; Rudolph 1999).<sup>3</sup>

The data cover 1980 through 2004. We chose to start in 1980 because it is the first year for which Federal Election Commission files are available in electronic format. The data for earlier years are buried in the original hard copy files. To make the estimates comparable over time, we converted contributions into constant dollars (2004) using the Consumer Price Index, which is the standard in the literature (see, for instance, Jacobson 2001). The main independent variable of interest is whether the member is in the majority (*Majority*). This dummy variable

is coded as 1 for members of the majority and as 0 for members of the minority (later we will discuss the one switch in the House majority, in 1994). Being in the leadership could substantially affect changes in receipts. To capture this possible effect, we included a dummy variable coded as 1 for members of the majority leadership (*Majority Leadership*). We defined *Majority Leadership* as the Speaker of the House, the majority leader, and the majority whip.

Our central expectation was that a change to or away from unified government would alter the receipts of members of the majority party. To test this expectation, we included a variable indicating whether or not there was a change in unified government ( $\Delta$ *Unified Government*). This variable is scored as +1 for the election following a switch to unified government, 0 for no change, and -1 for electoral cycles following a switch to divided government.<sup>4</sup> The elections of 1992 and 2002 produced unified government. The elections of 1982 and 1994 produced divided government. In the remaining elections, there was no change in unified or divided government. Interacting  $\Delta$ *Unified Government* with *Majority* and *Majority Leadership* provides the critical test for our hypothesis regarding unified government.

Consider the example of 1992 again. The Democrats were the majority party in the U.S. House. They kept their majority status in the 1992 election, but the presidency went to the Democrats, giving them unified party control. So, in this example, *Majority* is scored as 1 for Democrats and as 0 for Republicans.  $\Delta$ *Unified Government* is scored 1 for members of both parties. The interactive variable *Majority*  $\times$   $\Delta$ *Unified Government* therefore equals 1 for Democrats and 0 for Republicans. Recall that the dependent variable is calculated as  $Receipts_{i1994} - Receipts_{i1992}$ . Thus, the interactive variable (*Majority*  $\times$   $\Delta$ *Unified Government*) captures the marginal impact of the shift to unified government for those House members in the majority—in this example, the Democrats.

One might wonder why the model includes the “level” variables *Majority* and *Majority Leadership* when the analysis is otherwise concerned with changes. Our reason is that these levels are necessary for us to test the effects of changes on unified government on members of the majority. We can test to see what happens to members of the majority party (and the majority leadership) when there is change to unified or divided government but majority status *within* the House does not change.

To account for the one change in majority status that did occur in our dataset—the Republican takeover in the 1994 election—we included a variable ( $\Delta$ *House Majority Party*) that takes a value of 1 for members of both parties in the 1994 election and 0 for all other years.

This variable is also interacted with *Majority Status*. A stand-alone variable,  $\Delta$ *House Majority Party*, will register the effect of 1994 on the Democrats, and the interaction will indicate the size of the marginal increase for Republicans. To account for the expected substantial impact of 1994 on the Republican leadership, we also interacted  $\Delta$ *Majority Status* with the leadership variable.

The model also includes a series of individual characteristics intended to adjust for potential sources of variation across members: the incumbent's previous margin of victory, the legislator's status as a first-term member of the House, and the member's previous level of corporate receipts. Including the previous value of receipts helps us to control for pretest variation in the level of campaign receipts across members. It also addresses potential validity threats arising from a "regression to the mean" effect that might arise when we look at changes over time.<sup>5</sup>

Although our research design controls for time-invariant factors, there may be additional factors that shift in the short term—such as a member's roll-call record, electoral safety, committee status, or district boundaries—any of which could influence campaign donations. To account for these potential changes, we collected a series of additional control variables. The first is change in a member's roll-call record, measured as the change in a member's first-dimension DW-NOMINATE score (that is, how much more conservative a member's voting record became) (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). The expectation is that as a member's roll-call record becomes more conservative, the member will receive more corporate donations. The second variable is the increase or decrease in the member's previous electoral margin. Third, we included a variable indicating whether a member moved on or off a control committee (namely, Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Rules). We coded this variable as +1 if a member moved onto a control committee, 0 if there was no change, and -1 if the member moved off a control committee. The committee assignment data came from research by Nelson (2005) and Stewart and Woon (2008). Finally, because the data straddle redistricting cycles, we included a dummy variable indicating whether a member's district was redrawn.<sup>6</sup>

Because there is no information on these additional control variables prior to a member's first election (for example, there is no committee status or roll-call record prior to the first election), we could not calculate the change in these variables for members serving their first term. As a result, including these additional controls forced us to drop first-term members. To ensure that the results were not driven by this reduction in the sample, we ran the analysis twice—first with the additional control variables and then without them.

We estimated the model using ordinary least squares regression (OLS). To account for unobserved differences across election cycles, such as national partisan tides, we included separate year effects ( $\lambda_t$ ). Because the model contains repeated observations (legislators over time), the standard OLS assumption of independence may be violated. Accordingly, we estimated the model with robust standard errors clustered by legislator.

The results are presented in Table 1. Column (1) presents results for the model that excludes first-term members and includes the legislator-specific control variables that change over time. The results support the argument that unified government provides a financial boost to members of the House majority. Critically, the interaction between majority status and unified government is positive and significant.

Because the model contains interactions, we must note that the coefficients represent conditional effects (Aiken and West 1991; Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006; Jaccard and Turrisi 2003). There are two ways to discern the effect of unified government. The first is to consider the impact of a change to unified or divided government for members of the majority party (that is, to hold majority status constant). The *overall* effect for members of the majority is  $\beta_1 \text{Majority}_{it} + \beta_2 \Delta \text{Unified Government}_{it} + \beta_3 \text{Majority}_{it} \times \Delta \text{Unified Government}_{it}$ . When each variable takes a value of 1, the increase in receipts equals \$23,014. A switch to divided government, on the other hand, leads to a decrease of \$8,544 for members of the majority. The net difference between these two values is \$31,585. This difference constitutes the marginal effect of a switch to unified government versus a switch to divided government for members of the majority party.

For members of the minority party, the effect of changes in unified or divided government are insignificant, as indicated by the stand-alone coefficient on the  $\Delta \text{Unified Government}$ . The fact that changes in minority party receipts are largely invariant to changes in unified government should not come as a surprise. The House minority is hardly in a position to push a positive agenda, regardless of whether there is unified or divided control of the federal government. Thus, one would not expect much of an effect among members of the minority party. It is among the majority party that the real action should take place. And this pattern is what we see in the results.

A second way to detect the impact of unified government is to hold constant  $\Delta \text{Unified Government}$  while letting *Majority Status* vary. Of primary interest is the net difference between the majority and minority parties when there is a switch to unified government. The overall effect on the majority is \$23,014. For the minority party, a switch to unified

TABLE 1  
The Impact of Unified Government on  
Congressional Campaign Contributions, 1980–2004

OLS Estimates DV = $\Delta$ Campaign Receipts	(1)	(2)
Majority Party	7,235** (1,718)	7,152** (1,604)
Majority Party $\times$ $\Delta$ Unified Government	10,996** (4,111)	14,942** (3,642)
$\Delta$ Unified Government	4,783 (4,123)	-3,822* (2,542)
Majority Leadership	29,527 (25,159)	34,266* (23,724)
Majority Leadership $\times$ $\Delta$ Unified Government	86,424** (52,343)	71,779* (52,461)
$\Delta$ House Majority Party	-14,079** (7,446)	-22,233** (4,201)
$\Delta$ House Majority Party $\times$ Majority Party	52,282** (8,358)	76,137** (7,583)
$\Delta$ House Majority Party $\times$ Majority Leadership	262,091** (39,888)	248,961** (42,872)
First-term Member		29,036** (2,652)
Previous Electoral Margin	397** (79.56)	100* (73)
Previous Corporate Receipts	-.05** (.02)	-.07** (.02)
$\Delta$ Voting Record	21,567 (35,892)	
$\Delta$ Electoral Safety	-176** (86)	
$\Delta$ District Boundaries	9,425 (6,760)	
$\Delta$ Control Committee Status	14,995** (5,575)	
Constant	-9,829 (7,156)	11,293** (5,550)
Observations	3828	4720
R-Squared	0.08	0.10

*Note:* Robust standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses.

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ , one-tailed test.

government leads to an insignificant increase of \$4,783. The marginal effect of majority status when there is a switch to unified government is therefore \$18,231. In other words, the *difference* in the growth of receipts between the two parties rises by \$18,231.<sup>7</sup>

The substantive amounts are striking. In terms of corporate contributions, the difference between a swing to unified government versus a swing to divided government for members of the majority party accounts for nearly 30% of the average level of corporate contributions (where the average was \$115,537). In terms of total expenditures, this figure accounts for 5.6% of the mean campaign expenditures (\$578,596). Aggregating these numbers across the entire membership, we see a sizable financial lift for the majority party.

The boost from unified government also extends to the majority leadership. House leaders are central figures, with the power to delay, block, or expedite legislation. But during unified government, this power is magnified. Copartisans preside over the Senate and occupy the Oval Office, giving donors even more reason to seek the good graces of the House leadership. This motivation is clearly reflected in donors' allocation patterns. A switch to unified government boosted leadership receipts by an additional \$86,424. We should acknowledge that these results rest on a small number of observations and so should be treated with some caution. A significant result is nevertheless suggestive and fits with past reports that members of the leadership are consistently the largest recipients of campaign donations (Apollonio and La Raja 2006; Cassie and Thompson 1998).

The large and significant interaction between  $\Delta$ *House Majority Party*  $\times$  *Majority Party* indicates that Republicans received a spike in receipts following their 1994 takeover of the U.S. House. This election also produced the return of divided party control. Although the creation of divided government typically would drive down majority receipts, this effect appears to have been counteracted by a change in majority status. To calculate the overall effect of the 1994 switch on Republicans, we must include all the relevant main effects and interactions, which yields an overall impact of \$43,738 for the Republicans in 1994 [ $\text{Majority} + (\text{Majority} \times \Delta\text{Unified Government}) + \Delta\text{Unified Government} + \Delta\text{House Majority Party} + (\Delta\text{House Majority Party} \times \text{Majority Party})$ ]. The magnitude estimated here coincides with previous estimates (Cox and Magar 1999; Rudolph 1999). Yet the importance of unified government on the majority party raises an intriguing counterfactual: what if a Republican had been in the White House during the Republican takeover of Congress? Our results suggest that the flood of money redirected into the coffers of a new majority would

have been even more overwhelming. We tested this conjecture in our analysis of state legislatures, the results of which we discuss later in the article.

Also of interest are the results for the control variables. The change in a member's voting record is positive but not statistically significant. This finding is not surprising if we consider the relatively moderate changes in a member's voting record between Congresses. Indeed, during this time period, the average change in DW-NOMINATE scores was only .002. This result does not mean ideology is an unimportant influence on campaign receipts, only that ideology changes little from one Congress to the next (Poole 2007).<sup>8</sup>  $\Delta$ *District Boundaries* was insignificant. Moving onto a control committee increased a member's receipts by \$14,995. Additionally, increasing electoral safety reduced receipts \$176 for every percentage point.

Column (2) reflects the model that includes first-term members and excludes the control variables measuring short-term changes. The overall pattern of results remains the same. The interaction between majority status and unified government remains positive and significant. The magnitude of this interactive coefficient stays roughly the same. This constancy suggests that the results in the model (1) column are not a product of the exclusion of first-term members. One noteworthy difference between the columns concerns the interaction between unified government and majority leadership. This interaction is only significant at .10, yet it remains substantively large and in the correct direction. We used a small number of observations to estimate this coefficient, so it is perhaps not surprising to observe a wide confidence interval. The other difference of note is that the main effect for  $\Delta$ *Unified Government* is negative and significant. The size of this coefficient,  $-\$3,222$ , indicates that minority receipts take a small hit following a switch to unified government.

In sum, the results reveal a substantial financial boost to members of the House majority when there is a switch to unified government—especially among the rank and file. There are, however, some potentially confounding factors that we must address. First, do changes in each individual branch influence the results? That is, does a change in party control of the Senate affect donations in the House absent a change in the party of the presidency, or does a similar change in the presidency affect donations absent a change in the Senate? To test this possibility, we reran the model but added variables indicating a change in the party of the presidency and a change in the party of the Senate. We coded these variables as +1 if the change in the presidency or Senate matched the majority party in the House,  $-1$  if the change opposed the majority in the

House, and 0 if there was no change. We then interacted these variables with the House majority status variable. Both the Senate and presidency interactions were insignificant, yet the interaction with unified government remained significant. These results support the notion that joint combination of party control (that is, unified government) is needed to produce the added premium for members of the House majority.

Another concern might be that growth in the cost of House campaigns during this period could—even if we adjust for inflation and include year effects—influence the results. To test for this possibility, we reran the model but included a linear time trend coded as 1 in 1982 and increasing by 1 every election cycle thereafter. This variable, while significant, had no effect on the results of interest.

Third, the models do not include a separate variable denoting the partisanship of the candidates. Rerunning the model with a dummy variable for Republican did not affect the results. Indeed, the Republican dummy variable was insignificant, suggesting that partisanship (once majority status and unified government are controlled for) does not drive *changes* in corporate receipts.

There is a notable limitation to our research design: the absence of a change in intra-chamber party control accompanied by a switch to unified government. In other words, the cell containing an interaction between a change in majority status and a change to unified government is empty. To address this lacuna, we turned to the state legislatures.

### **Campaign Contributions in the State Legislatures**

To examine the effects of majority status and unified government on campaign finance in the states, we collected receipts for individual legislators in states where a chamber switched partisan control from 1994 to 2004. The data came from the nonpartisan National Institute on Money in State Politics, which tracks and compiles campaign finance receipts in state legislatures. The data series begins in 1994, so this is where we start, as well. Ideally, the analysis would include all party switches between 1994 and 2004, but a number of legislative chambers had to be excluded. First, for a number of switches, the National Institute on Money in State Politics simply did not have the data, a limitation that grows more problematic the further back in time one goes. So we were forced to exclude several states that had legislative partisan switches. Second, because we lacked individual-level electoral data, we chose to exclude switches that straddled a redistricting. Moreover, the switch in the Michigan House of Representatives in the 1996 election coincided with the initial widespread implementation of term limits, confounding

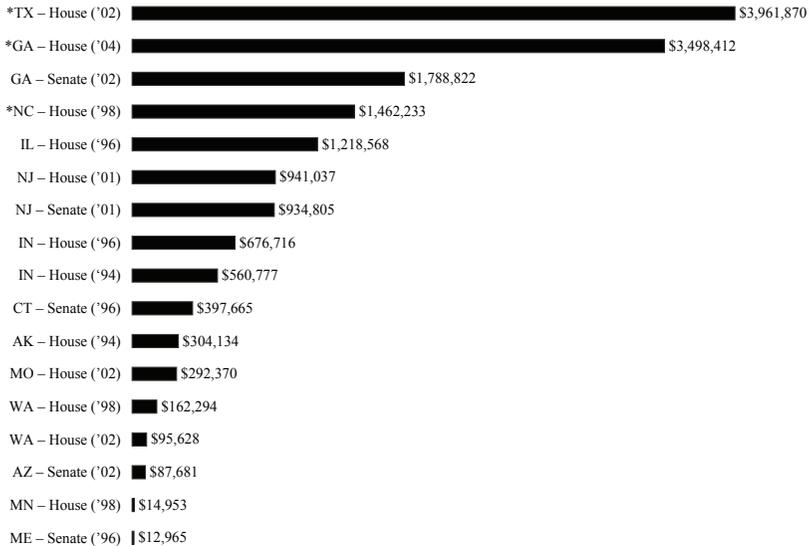
any attempt to identify the effect of changes in party control. Hence, we excluded Michigan, too. We were therefore left with a sample of 17 separate changes of party control (all listed in Figure 1), comprising 1,279 legislators.<sup>9</sup> These limitations notwithstanding, the resulting sample provides—to the best of our knowledge—the most extensive analysis of state legislative campaign finance data to date.

An important point about the state data is that all trade and corporate donations, from PACs *and* individuals, are combined to form a single “business” category. Some states prohibit contributions directly from corporations (such as Texas and North Carolina), yet individuals associated with business may still give. Hence, it is important that our analysis not be restricted solely to PACs. Fortunately, the data from the National Institute on Money in State Politics classify PAC and individual donors according to the sector of the economy with which they are identified (agriculture, restaurants, and so forth), allowing us to examine all contributions from the business category. To facilitate comparisons across different years, we converted the data into 2004 constant dollars.

Figure 1 illustrates the partisan direction, and magnitude, of the swings in financial fortunes (total majority party dollar change – total minority party dollar change). First, note the striking pattern for new majority parties. In every instance, the new majority party did better than the minority counterpart. This discovery runs contrary to much of the state politics literature, which reports only mixed evidence for the effect of majority status on campaign receipts (see, for example, Cassie and Thompson 1998; Ramsden 2002; and Thompson, Cassie, and Jewell 1994).<sup>10</sup> When one looks at changes—rather than at levels, as the previous literature did—one sees more clearly that donors value majority status. In every case in our sample, the majority party received a financial shot in the arm relative to the minority.

Second, three of the four largest swings occurred in states that switched to unified government. In many cases, these reversals in party fortunes were dramatic. Consider, for example, the North Carolina House of Representatives before and after the Democrats captured the lower chamber in the 1998 election. Democratic receipts increased by 106% (from \$1.2 to \$2.5 million), while Republican proceeds declined by 8% (from \$2 to \$1.8 million), a net difference of 114% (or \$1.5 million). In Texas, after the Republican takeover of the House, Republican receipts increased by nearly \$4.5 million. Although Democratic coffers also increased, they did so by a much smaller \$570,000. Overall, this difference represents a 61.3% net swing in receipts toward the Republicans.

FIGURE 1  
Financial Swings to New Majority Parties  
in the State Legislatures



*Note:* These are all the legislative chambers in the sample. The dollar amounts are the difference in differences between the majority and minority party (i.e., majority party change – minority party change). The year of election producing a switch is in parentheses. An asterisk indicates that switch led to unified government.

These aggregate numbers powerfully suggest that majority status and unified government both create financial boons for legislators in the majority. If, however, the majority party simply ran more incumbents than the minority did, then the aggregate numbers might overstate the importance of majority control. To address this issue, along with variation in state size and wealth, we examined individual-level receipts.

The individual-level model is presented in equation (2). The dependent variable is again the difference in campaign receipts for an individual member before and after a change in majority status. Here, the dependent variable is measured in two different ways. The first is simply as the change in constant dollars. On the one hand, this measure has the advantage of being a straightforward, interpretable metric. On the other, states vary in a number of ways—population, size of the economy, size of districts, campaign finance regulations, the cost of campaigning, and more—and any of these factors might cause heterogeneity in this otherwise simple dollar estimate of majority status. To make

more comparable cross-state assessments, we also standardized the dependent variable by weighting by district population (in thousands; see Apollonio and La Raja 2006 and Cassie and Thompson 1998). This transformation puts all of the data onto a common metric—dollars per thousand district residents—allowing for more reasonable cross-state comparisons.<sup>11</sup>

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta Receipts_{ij} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta Majority Status_{ij} + \beta_2 \Delta Leadership_{ij} & (2) \\ & + \beta_3 (\Delta Majority Status_{ij} \times \Delta Unified Government_{ij}) \\ & + \beta_4 (\Delta Leadership_{ij} \times \Delta Unified Government_{ij}) \\ & + \beta_5 \Delta Unified Government_{ij} + \beta_6 Previous Receipts_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

We are also interested in the consequences of advancing into the majority leadership. As in the U.S. Congress, the majority leadership in state legislatures is typically responsible for structuring the legislative agenda, making these members an obvious focal point for interest groups wanting to influence the lawmaking process. Previous research has shown that state party leaders receive substantially more donations than rank-and-file legislators receive (Apollonio and La Raja 2006; Cassie and Thompson 1998). We defined *leadership positions* as the Speaker of the Assembly (or, in the case of state senates, the presiding officer) and the majority leader. Information on the leadership structure for each legislature came from the National Council of State Legislatures. The variable is coded as 1 for leaders in the new majority and as 0 otherwise. We also included the lag value of receipts as a control.<sup>12</sup>

The potential for heterogeneity in the state-year sample raises questions about the appropriateness of pooling the data. One way to address this potential problem would be to run state-by-state OLS, producing separate intercept and slope estimates for each state. A significant drawback to this strategy is the small number of legislators in several sample states. For example, the Alaska House of Representatives only has 40 members. The small sample size may result in noisy estimates. A second option would be to pool all of the legislatures into one model and allow the estimates of majority status to borrow strength across states (Bartels 1996; Gelman and Hill 2007), but the data being clustered by chamber and year likely violates the standard OLS assumptions of independence.

To account for both within-state clustering and cross-state differences, we estimated a multilevel model (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002; Steenbergen and Jones 2002). This modeling strategy is well suited for nested data, especially when some of the units contain a small number of observations (Gelman 2006). Moreover, cross-state variation can be

modeled by including state-level covariates. By explicitly modeling the intercept in equation (1) as a function of state-level predictors and a random error term, we produce the following equation:

$$\beta_{0j} = \alpha_{00} + \alpha_{01} \textit{Public Financing}_{jt} + \alpha_{02} \textit{Gross State Product}_{jt} + \alpha_{03} \textit{Professional Legislature}_{jt} + \eta_{0j} \tag{3}$$

We included three variables that the previous literature identified as creating differences across states: public financing of elections, the gross product of the state  $t$ , and the professionalism of the legislature (Cassie and Thompson 1998). We included the  $\eta_{0j}$  error term to control for any remaining cross-state variation (Western 1998).

Thus, we created a micromodel to estimate differences in campaign receipts for individual legislators using equation (2) and a macromodel to estimate variation across states via equation (3). Substituting equation (3) into equation (2) and rearranging terms produces the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta \textit{Receipts}_{ij} = & \alpha_{00} + \beta_1 \Delta \textit{Majority Status}_{ij} + \beta_2 \Delta \textit{Leadership}_{ij} \\ & + \beta_3 (\Delta \textit{Majority Status}_{ij} \times \Delta \textit{Unified Government}_{ij}) \\ & + \beta_4 (\Delta \textit{Leadership}_{ij} \times \Delta \textit{Unified Government}_{ij}) \\ & + \beta_5 \Delta \textit{Unified Government}_{ij} + \beta_6 \textit{Previous Receipts}_{ij} \\ & + \alpha_{01} \textit{Public Financing}_{jt} + \alpha_{02} \textit{Gross State Product}_{jt} \\ & + \alpha_{03} \textit{Professional Legislature}_{jt} + (\eta_{0j} + \varepsilon_{ij}) \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

We used this model to test our hypotheses and estimated via restricted maximum likelihood.

It is important to point out two potentially relevant changes for which we lack sufficient data: changes in committee assignments and changes in electoral vulnerability. This lack of data will lead to poor predictions for any legislator who moves on or off a power committee or whose electoral prospects change dramatically. Despite the lack of data to control for these factors, we are confident that the model results are not significantly affected. As long as there are not a substantial number of these changes and they are not distributed unequally among the two parties, any omitted-variable bias should be minimal, because the model implicitly controls for time-invariant member-specific factors.

The results are presented in Table 2. The coefficients of primary interest are majority status and its interaction with unified government. We expected unified government to augment the productivity of majority status, creating an even greater shift in donations from business groups. This trend is exactly what we found. The coefficient for the interactive

TABLE 2  
 The Impact of Majority Status and Unified Government  
 on Campaign Contributions in State Legislatures  
 when Majority Status Changes, 1994–2004  
 (standard errors in parentheses)

Restricted Maximum Likelihood Estimates Dependent Variable = $\Delta Receipts_{ij}$	Unweighted Dollars	Dollars per 1000 District Residents
<i>Individual Level</i>		
$\Delta$ Majority Status <sub>ij</sub>	17,282** (4,336)	180** (52)
$\Delta$ Majority Status <sub>ij</sub> × $\Delta$ Unified Government <sub>ij</sub>	17,444** (7,765)	437** (93)
$\Delta$ Unified Government <sub>ij</sub>	-16,178 (15,774)	-293 (207)
$\Delta$ Majority Leadership <sub>ij</sub>	47,138** (13,710)	849** (165)
$\Delta$ Majority Leadership <sub>ij</sub> × $\Delta$ Unified Government <sub>ij</sub>	399,997** (31,721)	5,646** (383)
Previous Receipts <sub>ij</sub>	.15** (.02)	49** (17)
<i>State Level</i>		
Professional Legislature <sub>j</sub>	-20,650* (11,397)	-191 (149)
Gross State Product <sub>j</sub>	.009 (.03)	280 (431)
Public Financing <sub>j</sub>	-9,108 (14,725)	-265 (193)
Constant	-6,418 (8,877)	155 (117)
State Level $\sigma$	15,649** (4,432)	210** (58)
Residual $\sigma$	63,021** (1,257)	758** (15)
Log-Likelihood	-15,883.06	-1,485.82
N	1279	1279
Number of Units	17	17

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ .

variable is positive and significant. A switch to unified government increases the effect of majority status to \$34,726, up from \$17,282 during periods of divided government.<sup>13</sup> The same pattern holds for the per district size measure: the effect of majority status is \$180 per 1,000 district residents under divided government, and \$617 during unified government.

A clear example of this dynamic occurred in the recent Republican capture of the Georgia House of Representatives in 2004, which supplied the Republican Party with unified control of the state government. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported that by the summer of 2006, months before the election, Republican coffers were overflowing: house members had already raised 86% more in their first year and a half in power than they had in all of the previous electoral cycle. Lawmakers and lobbyists attributed this growth to the newfound Republican majority. According to one lobbyist, "In the past . . . [business donors] have donated to the Democrats who controlled state government, but feel more comfortable with the Republicans now in charge."<sup>14</sup>

The conditional value of majority status is further reinforced by the results for Majority Leadership. The value of entering the majority party leadership is estimated at a striking \$481,861 when there is a switch to unified government (Unweighted Dollars column) or \$6,752 per thousand district residents (last column). As an example, consider the case of Tom Craddick in Texas. After becoming Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives in the 2002 election, Craddick's receipts from business interests jumped from \$830,000 to \$2.4 million, an increase of over \$1.5 million. By combining the results for Majority Leadership with the results for Majority Status, we can see that donors place a considerable dollar value on majority status and unified government.

As for the control variables, the more money raised in the previous cycle, the greater the differences will be when majority status changes. The coefficient for *Professional Legislature* is negative and significant in the unweighted model but insignificant in the model weighted by district size. Moreover, neither the coefficient for *Gross State Product* nor *Public Financing* is significant, indicating that cross-state differences are not being driven by variations in state wealth or campaign finance regulations.

While the results demonstrate a connection between unified government and majority status on campaign finance, we further tested for an effect by analyzing cases of unchanged intra-chamber majority status. Specifically, for each state chamber in our sample (see Figure 1), we gathered data for an election in which the intra-chamber majority status did not change, which allowed us to hold constant  $\Delta$ Majority Status while varying Changes in Unified Government. This analysis

also provided a comparable baseline to the U.S. House analysis, which had cases of change in unified government while majority status stayed the same.

For the vast bulk of these states, we collected data from the election cycle after the change in majority status. For example, the Texas House of Representatives changed majority status in the 2002 election, with the Republicans wresting the legislative majority from the Democrats. In our first analysis (Table 2), we examined individual-level changes in campaign receipts between the 2002 and 2004 elections. For this second analysis, we examined how receipts changed in the Texas House of Representatives from 2004 to 2006, a period where majority status remained constant. This process produced a similar “partner” for every state chamber in our sample.

The main reason for using the cycle after a switch involved data availability. Using the election before a switch would have caused us to lose a significant fraction of states.<sup>15</sup> We were forced to make exceptions when the “after” period straddled a redistricting (as it did in North Carolina, Washington, and Minnesota). For these states, we used the election cycle prior to the change in majority status. The resulting sample provided a pair for each state chamber with unchanging majority status. In five of these states, there was a switch to unified government (due typically to changes in control of the governorship); in the rest, there was no switch.

For this test, we interacted *Majority* with  $\Delta$ *Unified Government*. If unified government has an effect, then we should see a positive and significant coefficient on this interaction for those states that switched to unified government. As Table 3 shows, this pattern is precisely what we find. The left-hand data column presents the results with the dependent variable not weighted by district size. The interaction is positive and significant. For members of the majority party, there is a substantively strong increase of \$15,548 corresponding to a switch to unified government. Moreover, the coefficient is insignificant on the stand-alone majority variable, which measures the effect of being in the majority when neither majority status changes nor is there a switch to unified government. This insignificant coefficient mirrors the findings for the U.S. House. The right-hand column presents the results with the dependent variable weighted by district size. Again the interactive variable is positive and significant. The marginal impact of *Majority Status* increases by \$255 during a switch from divided to unified government. This finding too is consistent with our expectations and puts the state legislative results on a comparable plane with the results for the U.S. Congress.

Overall, the results across a broad array of democratic legislatures and time periods confirm an effect of unified party government on the campaign finance balance of power.

TABLE 3  
 The Impact of Unified Government  
 when Majority Status Does Not Change, 1994–2004  
 (standard errors in parentheses)

Restricted Maximum Likelihood Estimates Dependent Variable = $\Delta Receipts_{ij}$	Unweighted Dollars	Dollars per 1000 District Residents
<i>Individual Level</i>		
Majority Status <sub>ij</sub>	-1773 (2660)	-88 (41)
Majority Status <sub>ij</sub> × $\Delta$ Unified Government <sub>ij</sub>	14,548** (4,934)	167** (75)
$\Delta$ Unified Government <sub>ij</sub>	-2600 (6552)	-2.59 (228)
Majority Leadership <sub>ij</sub>	11,664 (16,618)	302 (253)
Majority Leadership <sub>ij</sub> × $\Delta$ Unified Government <sub>ij</sub>	151,782** (40,824)	1292** (622)
Previous Receipts <sub>ij</sub>	-.32** (.007)	-.34** (.01)
<i>State Level</i>		
Professional Legislature <sub>j</sub>	-2,987 (5886)	6.52 (224)
Gross State Product <sub>j</sub>	.077** (.014)	.001* (.0005)
Public Financing <sub>j</sub>	-4,106 (8,117)	66 (302)
Constant	-8,675 (5,609)	-184 (200)
State Level $\sigma$	8,333** (2,291)	360** (85)
Residual $\sigma$	37,001** (785)	563** (12)
Log-Likelihood	-13389.17	-8719.04
N	1127	1127
Number of Units	15	15

*Note:* The stand-alone coefficient on Majority Status in the right-hand data column reaches standard levels of statistical significance, but the coefficient is *in the wrong direction*. The null hypothesis is  $\beta \leq 0$  and the alternative hypothesis is  $\beta > 0$ —hence, the absence of an asterisk. The reason this table has 15 units, as opposed to the 17 in Table 2, is that the previous table includes two majority switches in the Indiana General Assembly (1994, 1996) and the Washington House of Representatives (1998, 2002).

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ .

**Conclusion:**  
**Assessing the Separation of Powers and Campaign Finance**

Students of U.S. politics have long debated the capacity of political parties to impose collective responsibility across the formal separation-of-powers system established by the Constitution. Some scholars have emphasized the joint rewards that fellow partisans can reap by promoting a coordinated legislative program and cooperating to fashion an electorally attractive party label. Others have remained skeptical, largely viewing party organizations as hollow vessels within which self-reliant politicians pursue independent goals.

These two perspectives are not entirely incompatible, but they obviously place different accents on the analytic value of parties. Perhaps nowhere are these differences more acute than in scholarly debates over the significance of party control of government. On one side of the debate are those who argue that a single party controlling the executive and legislative branches increases the odds of a governing party passing an ambitious legislative agenda, but divided party government promotes conflict and stalemate (see, for example, Binder 2003 and Fiorina 1996). On the other side, several high-profile works challenge the notion that major differences occur between unified and divided regimes (consider Brady and Volden 2006, Krehbiel 1998, and Mayhew 1991). The difficulty of crafting agreements across co-equal institutions, amplified at the federal level by the supermajority filibuster, makes passing legislation difficult under any circumstances. And those laws that do pass frequently pass with broad bipartisan coalitions, regardless of unified or divided party control. Thus, according to this view, changes in partisan control of the elected branches often yield little more than “revolving gridlock” (Brady and Volden 2006).

For this article, we took a new approach to this fundamental debate in American politics by studying the reaction of campaign donors to shifts in unified or divided party control. Our results indicate that a switch to unified party control confers a substantial financial bonus to members of the majority, even if intra-chamber majority status is unchanged. Unified government provides majority parties with a vital advantage in the all-important quest for campaign resources. Examining corporate campaign donations and party switches in both U.S. House elections and 17 different state legislatures, we found that campaign contributors clearly reward members of the majority party, and this premium is accentuated during periods of unified government. The magnitude of this advantage is striking. In the U.S. House, a switch to unified government increases majority member receipts by over

\$34,000 and accounts for nearly 30% of an individual member's average corporate receipts. Aggregated over the entire membership, these results represent a tidal shift in the amount of money flowing to the majority party. The same can be said with regard to the state legislatures, where we found striking evidence of the advantage bestowed by a switch to unified government.

These findings, spanning multiple legislative bodies and time periods, demonstrate that unified party control of government dramatically tilts the competitive advantage to members of the majority party and away from the minority. Although the results do not tell us the precise policy differences between unified and divided regimes, they do suggest that business donors clearly perceive a difference. For this reason alone, unified government appears to be a commodity well worth capturing. The evidence further suggests that the fates of fellow partisans are bound together to a greater extent than previously realized. Research into political parties typically conceives of the shared connection between partisans in either policy or electoral terms. But our results indicate that their *financial fates* are tied together, as well. From this perspective, it appears that business donors impose their own version of collective responsibility on the United States's political parties.

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## NOTES

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1. The exception is Grier and Munger's (1993) comparison of House and Senate incumbents. Grier and Munger did not, however, consider the role of the president.

2. Running our model with labor donations as the dependent variable uncovered miniscule effects in the U.S. House and insignificant results in the state legislatures. The effect of unified government was significant for the U.S. House, but the substantive effect was very close to 0. In the state legislatures, the results were statistically insignificant. These findings are consistent with the existing literature's reports that labor PACs implement an ideological strategy when disseminating campaign contributions (Cox and Magar 1999; Jacobson 2001; Rudolph 1999; Souraf 1992).

3. We also considered including the U.S. Senate in our analysis, but the complications of analyzing the Senate outweighed the benefits. The senators' staggered six-year terms made it nearly impossible to accurately synchronize changes in unified government with Senate electoral cycles.

4. We coded the 2000 election as divided. The Senate operated under a power-sharing agreement between Democrats and Republicans for the first 7 months of 2001 and, following James Jeffords's defection from the Republican Party in May 2001, was divided for the other 17 months of the 107th Congress. We chose to code this period as divided government for two complementary reasons. First, the majority of the two-year period was divided (17 months versus 7). Second, the year and a half leading up to the November campaign, during which campaign donors would be most attuned to party control, was divided.

5. One concern might be that including a lagged value of campaign receipts biases the other covariates. Achen (2000) and Keele and Kelly (2006) have argued that including a lagged dependent variable can, under certain conditions, bias the other coefficients *downward* toward 0. If so, our model would provide a conservative test. Upon analyzing a series of simulations, however, Kelly and Keele determined that the costs of including the lag were typically minimal.

6. The model does not include seniority, which would certainly be important in a cross-sectional design. In our design, however, the gain in seniority for every member from  $t-1$  to  $t$  is always 1, thus providing no variation.

7. Although including separate year effects should help us to adjust for differences across electoral cycles, there still may be unmodeled temporal heterogeneity. We examined this possibility using cross-validation (Beck 2001). Specifically, we ran the model but dropped one year at a time and examined the model's performance for the excluded year. The mean absolute errors of these predictions all fell within a narrow range. No year stood out.

8. Moreover, dropping party switchers from the model had no substantive bearing on the results.

9. These data include three ties (Indiana House of Representatives, 1996; Washington House of Representatives, 1998; New Jersey Senate, 2002). In these cases, we coded the party that switched from minority status into the tie as a new majority party. Excluding these cases does not alter the substantive results.

10. The most extensive study to date is Cassie and Thompson's (1998) examination of 17 legislatures. Cassie and Thompson found that in only 10 states (59%) did majority party incumbents outraise minority party members.

11. Another option would be to include district population as an independent variable instead of transforming the dependent variable. We ran a model in this format, and the substantive results were unchanged. Transforming the dependent variable has a number of advantages, however. In particular, it allows one to compare the independent variables across states using the same metric (analogous to transforming public policy measures into a per capita metric). Transforming the dependent variable also keeps our results comparable to those reported in the past literature on state-level campaign finance.

12. Whereas *ΔUnified Government* took on three values in the U.S. House model, here it becomes a simple dummy variable, where 1 indicates a switch to unified government and 0 indicates continued divided government. There were no cases in the sample of a change in majority status leading to a switch to divided government.

13. Because the main effect for  $\Delta$ *Unified Government* is nowhere near significant, we treated it as 0 when we calculated the overall effects.

14. Allen Judd, "GOP Flush with Donations; Party Has Big Edge in Georgia House," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 4 June 2006, page 1 section D.

15. The data from the National Institute on State Money begin in 1994 but only for a handful of states. The coverage of states becomes more complete for more recent elections. Choosing the "after" period allowed us to capture data for every state in our sample, whereas using the "before" period would have sacrificed data for more than half of the states.

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