What role do parties play in determining which interests committees represent? In this article, I compare committee organization and representativeness in Nebraska’s nonpartisan legislature with those in the partisan senates of Kansas and Iowa. I demonstrate that when parties do not organize legislative conflict, committees are less representative of the full chamber. I argue, however, that committee representativeness does not necessarily result from parties actively working to create representative committees. Rather, when legislative conflict has a definitive partisan structure and the committees are always controlled by the majority party, representative committees will result as a simple by-product of the partisan structure and organization.

There is a great deal of debate in American politics about the effect that party has on legislative politics. One aspect of this debate involves the organization and role of committees in legislatures. Scholars often view committees as serving the committee members’ own self-interests, the interests of the legislature, or the interests of the party caucuses. But what role does party play in determining which interests committees represent? Parties may be influential in producing more-polarized committees that are less representative of opinion in the full chamber (Cox and McCubbins 1993). On the other hand, competitive parties may actually serve to produce committees that are more representative of the chamber’s interests (Aldrich and Battista 2002). Furthermore, it is not clear whose interests committees represent when parties are entirely absent from the process.

In this article, I compare committee organization and representativeness in Nebraska’s nonpartisan legislature with these characteristics in the partisan senates of Kansas and Iowa. I show that Nebraska’s committee system is not influenced by parties. Committees in the Nebraska unicameral legislature are not organized according to partisan considerations, and seats are not assigned by party leaders or caucuses. This lack of partisan organization appears to have important
consequences for the role that committees play in the legislature, specifically with regard to whether or not committees are representative of the full chamber. When parties are absent from the legislature, committees tend to do a poor job of representing opinion in the full chamber; when parties are active, committees are more representative of the legislature. In addition, I argue that committee representativeness does not necessarily result from parties actively working to create representative committees. Rather, such committees are more likely to evolve simply because partisan legislatures structure opinions among their members and divide seats on committees in a partisan manner. In fact, legislative chambers with the most polarized, cohesive party caucuses should also have the most representative committees.

I begin by outlining the debate on party influence in legislatures and examining how this debate informs the research on committee organization. I then demonstrate the lack of partisan influence on the organization of Nebraska’s committee system and compare the Nebraska system with the Kansas and Iowa systems. My findings reveal the important role that party plays in encouraging the formation of committees that represent their parent chambers.

Party Influence in Legislatures

A debate over the importance of parties in legislatures has resulted largely in response to Krehbiel’s (1993, 1998) assertion that political parties are not central to the policymaking process in Congress. Krehbiel argues that members pursue their own personal policy preferences with little, if any, role for party, and his empirical model of roll-call voting behavior is successful in explaining members’ votes without accounting for party. Thus, Krehbiel (2000) concludes that members’ own preferences dominate the party’s role and that most studies purporting to demonstrate party influence in roll-call voting are, in fact, demonstrating that legislators follow their own preferences.

In response to Krehbiel, a number of scholars have employed a wide variety of data and techniques to demonstrate party effects in Congress (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001; Snyder and Groseclose 2000). Yet many of these studies have struggled to demonstrate conclusively that party plays an important role, hampered by different methodological challenges (Smith 2000). One of the major challenges for much of the research focusing on the influence of party on legislative behavior has been the consistent focus on the U.S. Congress—an institution with active political parties—without a suitable comparison to a legislature without parties (Squire and Hamm...
Jenkins (1999) has addressed this weakness by adding a historical comparison. He compared roll-call voting in the U.S. House during the Civil War with that in the nonpartisan Confederate House and found less structure and ideological polarization in the chamber without parties.

Additional research has extended the debate regarding the influence of parties to the states, where 99 legislative chambers provide the potential for variation in partisan influence and structure. Of particular interest for the study of party effects is the nonpartisan Nebraska legislature. In their analysis of roll-call voting in Nebraska, Welch and Carlson (1973) found many small dimensions to conflict in the legislature but no enduring coalitions that resemble those found in partisan chambers. Aldrich and Battista (2002) confirmed this finding by comparing roll-call votes in Nebraska with those in eight other state legislatures. They also concluded that there is little form or definition to roll-call voting in the Nebraska unicameral, but conflict is highly structured along party lines in other legislatures. Finally, Wright and I (Wright and Schaffner 2002) compared the nonpartisan Nebraska unicameral with the partisan Kansas senate. We found that although candidates for both legislatures express partisan issue positions during the campaign, this ideological structure disappears in Nebraska roll-call voting but becomes more pronounced in Kansas. Without parties to bundle issues and present agendas for electoral gain, the ideological structure of conflict in the legislature disappears.

Thus, comparative research from state legislatures appears to indicate that party matters in structuring roll-call voting behavior. But what role does party play in other aspects of the legislature? I seek to extend the comparative examination of party effects to the committee system. To understand completely the importance of political parties in the process of committee assignments and operations, one must refer to a comparative baseline in which parties are not active. The research on Nebraska’s legislature has clearly demonstrated that parties are absent from the full chamber and that the lack of parties has an important effect on roll-call voting. But to what extent might the absence of parties influence the committee system? I discuss the relationship between parties and committees in the following section.

**Political Parties and the Committee System**

One part of the debate about the role of parties in legislatures involves the extent to which parties influence the organization of committees in the chamber. In particular, political scientists have focused
on understanding the purpose of committees for legislative policymaking by understanding whose interests committees generally reflect—those of the committee members themselves, those of the full chamber, or those of the party caucuses (Maltzman 1999). Traditionally, committees have been viewed as acting independently of their colleagues who do not serve on the committee (Arnold 1979; Fenno 1973; Ferejohn 1974; Shepsle and Weingast 1984; Weingast and Marshall 1988). This conception of committees relies on the idea that members with particular interest in the jurisdictions of committees tend to win spots on those panels. Because members largely find themselves assigned to committees according to their own preferences, committee membership may be biased and less representative of the chamber as a whole. Legislators may be willing to engage in logrolling and leave each committee to their respective jurisdiction. Thus, committees may function as providers of particularistic benefits to the members assigned to them and their political allies, rather than as contributors to the production of policies representative of the full chamber (Freeman 1965; Lowi 1969; Ripley and Franklin 1980).

A second view on committees sees their role as providing information and expertise for the benefit of the entire chamber (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1990; Krehbiel 1991; Maas 1983). In this case, committees are viewed as agents of the chamber, generating expertise in issue areas and reducing information costs for other legislators to produce public policy representative of the chamber as a whole. Committee assignments are used to ensure that committee membership is representative of the chamber (Krehbiel 1991). Through this selection process, the chamber is able to rely on the expertise of their committees because they know that those committees’ preferences are similar to their own.

Either of these models of committee organization may be reflected in legislatures, regardless of the presence of political parties. Without parties to influence committee assignments, members may simply seek the assignments most beneficial for their own reelection goals, they may be appointed so that the committee represents the full chamber, or some combination of these strategies may arise. These scenarios may also occur in partisan legislatures despite party interests.

But in legislatures with active parties, there is an additional possibility: committees may be created to serve the needs of the party rather than those of the legislature. In this case, party caucuses control the selection of their members to the committee and the party has an incentive to assign members who will represent the party’s interests in the committee (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). If parties attempt to create committees that represent the party
Legislative Committees

Aldrich and Battista (2002) have found that in states with more-partisan polarization and party competition, committees are actually more representative of the chamber than are committees in states with less polarization and partisan competition. Aldrich and Battista argue that when parties are competitive and polarized, the legislative debate is more policy-oriented and parties are more likely to create committees that reflect this debate. Thus, committees should be more representative of the overall balance of opinion in the full legislature. When parties are less polarized and competitive, debate is less concerned with policy, and committee assignments should be more reflective of members seeking their own interests.

Thus, one view of party influence on committee organization sees the party’s role as minimal, since committees either serve their own members’ interests or the interests of the full chamber. The other view sees parties as having a role, either in making committees more representative of caucus interests or in making them more representative of the chamber. But what is the true role of party in this process? As with the debate over the influence of party on roll-call behavior, the congressional literature on committee organization mostly lacks the proper comparative perspective to answer this question sufficiently. In this article, I extend previous analysis by using the Nebraska legislature as a comparative baseline for assessing the influence of party on committees. In the following section, I explain why Nebraska provides an excellent case for judging the role of committees when parties are absent from the chamber.

Organization of Committees in Nebraska’s Nonpartisan Legislature

Nebraska provides a good baseline for analyzing the role of parties in legislatures, because parties, even of an informal nature, do not exist in the Nebraska unicameral. During campaigns for the Nebraska legislature, candidates’ party affiliations tend to be well known and are often noted in newspaper stories despite the fact that candidates
run on a nonpartisan ballot. Nevertheless, since party labels were removed from the ballot in Nebraska’s state legislative elections, parties play little or no role in these contests. Party recruitment of candidates is minimal (Kolasa 1978), and citizens fail to vote along party lines (Schaffner, Streb, and Wright 2001). For parties to play an important role in driving the behavior of officeholders, parties must be important for office seekers (Aldrich 1995). In partisan elections, candidates benefit from the “brand name” of their party label, which provides voters with information about candidate ideology and saves candidates the cost and effort of communicating this information to the public themselves. In Nebraska, however, legislators gain little from trying to appear more Republican or Democratic in the legislature, since such partisanship has little electoral payoff.

The norm of nonpartisanship is also quite strong in Nebraska’s unicameral and enforced by the citizenry and by political elites, who both wish to maintain a truly nonpartisan legislature. For example, the 1997 state legislature reelected a Democrat as its Speaker by a vote of 38 to 10, despite the fact that the state Republican chair actively lobbied Republican members (who held a 26–22 advantage in the legislature) to vote for the Republican candidate (Hord 1997). The state Republican chair came under a great deal of scrutiny from both parties in the legislature for his efforts to make the vote for Speaker a partisan vote. Most legislators felt that the chair wrongly attempted to disrupt the spirit of nonpartisanship within the chamber.

In addition, there are internal, institutional reasons that informal parties have not emerged in the Nebraska unicameral. For instance, one way that party leaders reward and punish their members is by selectively granting committee assignment requests and appointing committee chairs. But rules in the Nebraska legislature make it difficult for any potential leader either to reward a party member or to identify his or her supporters. By rule, the election of the Speaker and of the committee chairs is done by secret ballot—legislators are free to vote for whichever candidate they choose without revealing their vote. Anonymous voting for such positions does not lend itself well to the formation of disciplined parties in the legislature. Instead of relying on party caucuses to organize and assign members to committees, the Nebraska legislature has institutionalized a geographic-oriented caucus system to make assignments. Nebraska’s 49 districts are divided into three geographic regions: the Omaha Caucus, the Lincoln Caucus, and the West Caucus. These caucuses are not created informally by members; rather, they are created by rule, and members are assigned to a caucus according to the legislative district they represent. Each
Legislative Committees

caucus receives a particular number of seats on each committee, and the caucuses and caucus leaders are instrumental in determining assignments for those seats.

Thus, Nebraska’s legislature appears to provide a truly nonpartisan setting that is useful for drawing meaningful comparisons with other chambers where parties are active. I use the state senates in Kansas and Iowa to establish this comparison. The Kansas and Iowa senates are of similar size to the Nebraska unicameral, and each chamber has levels of professionalization that are below average (King 2000; Squire 1992). In addition, committees appear to serve a similar function in each of the three chambers; in each case, most legislation is referred to a standing committee that is charged with reporting on that legislation to the full chamber. Kansas and Iowa have active party caucuses and party-controlled committee assignment procedures. Kansas is a one-party (Republican) dominant state, although the Republican Party has been divided in recent years between conservative and moderate members. In the Kansas senate, committee appointments are made by the Committee on Organization, Calendar, and Rules. This committee includes nine members of the majority party, including the party leaders, and senate rules mandate that each party should have representation on committees proportional to its membership in the chamber. Iowa has high levels of two-party competition, and committee assignments are under the control of the majority leader (Bibby and Holbrook 2004). Thus, the three states provide a nice contrast between two systems where parties actively organize committees (one with high two-party competition, the other in a largely one-party state) and a nonpartisan system where parties play no role in that organization.

Figure 1 presents evidence of the difference between committee assignments in Nebraska and those in Kansas and Iowa. Each figure shows the percentage of a committee’s membership that was Democratic during the 1999–2000 legislative session. For Kansas and Iowa, the differences in the sizes of the Democratic contingents on committees were small. In Kansas, Democrats accounted for between 25.0% and 44.4% of the seats on committees, usually approximating the 32.5% of seats that they held in the chamber and never granting the minority party control. Iowa’s committees were even more representative of the partisan balance in the chamber, ranging between 36.4% and 40.0% of the membership on committees, compared to the 40.0% of the senate seats they held.

As one would expect from a state maintaining a strict adherence to nonpartisanship, the partisan balance on Nebraska’s committees varies a great deal. Although 42.6% of the full unicameral was
FIGURE 1
Partisan Balance on Committees in Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska

Kansas

Iowa

Nebraska
Legislative Committees

composed of registered Democrats, the percentage of seats that Democrats maintained on that chamber’s committees ranged from 25% to 67%. In fact, even though Democrats are a distinct minority in the full legislature (Republicans outnumbered Democrats 27–20 at the beginning of the session), Democrats actually controlled 50% or more of the seats on 6 of Nebraska’s 15 committees—an occurrence that would be extremely unusual in any partisan legislature. Thus, Nebraska’s committee assignments truly appear to be made absent of partisan considerations, the consequences of which I will explore in the following section.

**Political Parties and Representative Committees**

My central question concerns the role of parties in organizing committees. To examine this question, I determined how closely the median member on each committee was to the median member in each chamber on NOMINATE scores derived from roll-call votes. Previous research on this topic has used Monte Carlo simulations to determine whether committees are more or less representative than they would be if members were assigned to them randomly (Aldrich and Battista 2002; Battista 2004). Indeed, research using this technique has demonstrated that Nebraska’s committees are “neither obviously representative nor unrepresentative” (Battista 2004, 170). But this methodology effectively controls for a critical difference between partisan and nonpartisan legislatures by taking the ideological distribution of legislators as a given. The ideological distribution of legislators is not an exogenous factor; it is a consequence of the salience of parties in the chamber. When parties are absent from legislatures, those legislatures tend to exhibit less ideological structure and cohesion among legislators (Wright and Schaffner 2002). This lack of structure and predictability may make it more difficult for legislatures to create representative committees, or it may make the creation of representative committees easier. Regardless, I am interested in understanding how the structure induced by parties affects the degree to which committees represent the chamber, not whether or not committees are representative of the chamber given that this structure does or does not exist.

To examine the competing expectations, I used roll-call votes cast in each chamber during the 1999–2000 session, utilizing data acquired from the Representation in America’s Legislatures project (Wright 2004). I included both Kansas and Iowa because party competition in Iowa was greater than in Kansas during this period. This discrepancy allows for a comparison of a chamber with high party...
FIGURE 2
Ideology of Median Committee Members in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska

Iowa

Kansas

Nebraska
Legislative Committees

competition (Iowa), a chamber with a dominant majority party (Kansas), and a chamber with an absence of parties (Nebraska). For each chamber, I included all votes that were even mildly contested—where the losing side constituted at least 5% of the votes. This criterion resulted in 223 votes in Nebraska, 254 votes in Kansas, and 314 votes in Iowa. I then calculated NOMINATE scores for members in each chamber (Poole and Rosenthal 1997).

To determine how closely a committee represents the chamber, I compared the first-dimension NOMINATE score for the median member of the full chamber to those for the median members of each committee. Figure 2 presents these comparisons. The vertical line in each figure presents the ideological position of the median member of the chamber. The dots present the median member on each committee, arranged from the most representative committees at the top to the least representative at the bottom.

Figure 2 indicates that committees are more representative of the chamber in legislatures where parties are more salient. In Iowa, committees are very representative of the full chamber on the first dimension. The scores for the median members of the committees range from −.578 to −.693, and the average distance from the chamber median is just .033. In Kansas, there is more variation in the composition of the committees, with the NOMINATE scores of the median members ranging from −.161 to .498 and the average distance of a median committee member from the chamber median is .144. Thus, Kansas’s committees are somewhat less representative than Iowa’s. This finding provides preliminary evidence for the importance of parties in the process of creating representative committees: where party competition is higher, committees tend to be more representative of the chamber (Aldrich and Battista 2002).

There is some difference between the representativeness of committees in Iowa and Kansas, but Nebraska clearly has the least representative committees. The NOMINATE scores for the median committee members in the Nebraska unicameral range from −.616 on the Health and Human Service Committee to .745 on the Education Committee—a range of 1.36. Furthermore, the average distance between the median legislator in the chamber and the committees on Nebraska’s first dimension is .252, much larger than that for Iowa or Kansas. Some committees represent the full chamber very closely: Revenue, Retirement, Banking, Commerce and Insurance, Business and Labor, and General Affairs. On the other hand, there are a number of committees whose median members fall quite a distance from the chamber median: Health and Human Services, Urban Affairs, Judiciary,
FIGURE 3
Ideology of Median Committee Members in Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska (two dimensions)

Iowa

Kansas

Nebraska
and Education. In fact, it is difficult to find a pattern that explains why some committees are more representative of the chamber median than others. For example, Education is the least representative committee in Nebraska, which is surprising when one considers the importance of education issues for state governments.

Most research focusing on committee representativeness only accounts for how representative committees are along a single dimension. Yet the nonpartisan Nebraska legislature tends to have less structure to its roll-call voting, meaning that no single dimension explains as much of the conflict in that chamber as could be explained in comparable partisan legislatures. Furthermore, many state legislatures have a second dimension of conflict that occurs on a geographic basis (that is, urban-rural). In the years considered here, Nebraska’s first dimension of roll-call voting was not structured by partisanship or geography; the second dimension was somewhat influenced by these factors. Although Kansas’s first dimension was structured along party lines, its second dimension also had a geographic component to it (Wright and Schaffner 2002). Thus, it may be important to consider at least the first two dimensions when examining the extent to which committees represent the full chamber. Figure 3 presents the location of the median member of the chamber and the median member of each state’s committees in the two-dimensional NOMINATE space.

Figure 3 reveals similar patterns to those found in Figure 2. On the second dimension, the average distance between committee and chamber medians is .142 for Iowa, .123 for Kansas, and .174 for Nebraska. Nebraska still has the least representative committees on this dimension, although the differences between that chamber and those of Iowa and Kansas are less pronounced than the differences found for each chamber’s first dimension. A comparison of Euclidean distances provides a way to measure how far each state’s committees fall from the chamber median while accounting for both dimensions. The average Euclidean distance in Iowa was .147; in Kansas it was .216; and in Nebraska it was .345. Thus, even with comparison on two dimensions, Nebraska’s committees still constitute the least representative panels.

The findings presented in Figures 2 and 3 indicate the importance of parties for creating committees that are more representative of the chamber. But why does this increased representativeness emerge? Figure 4 presents the distribution of each party’s legislators according to the first-dimension NOMINATE scores in each chamber, providing some insight into this question. The distribution of Iowa legislators indicates that lawmakers in this chamber are very polarized and
FIGURE 4
Distribution of Legislators on First NOMINATE Dimension

_Iowa_

Density

_Nominate Score_

_Democrats_  _Republicans_

_Kansas_

Density

_Nominate Score_

_Democrats_  _Republicans_

_Nebraska_

Density

_Nominate Score_

_Democrats_  _Republicans_
Legislative Committees

cohesive along party lines. In Kansas, the minority Democratic Party is also cohesive, but the majority Republicans are distributed over a wider range, evidence of the division between moderates and religious conservatives that has existed since the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, an important finding is that, in both Kansas and Iowa, there is no overlap between the parties—no Democrat is more conservative than the most liberal Republican and no Republican is more liberal than the most conservative Democrat. These distributions stand in stark contrast to the range found in Nebraska: members of Nebraska’s parties are dispersed throughout the ideological space, with the distributions of both parties almost entirely overlapping. This wide dispersion of legislators along the first NOMINATE dimension provides a basis for understanding why partisan chambers are likely to have more representative committees.

The first important conclusion to draw from Figure 4 is that when committee seats are allotted according to the partisan balance in the full chamber, legislatures with active parties should be able to create more representative committees as a simple by-product of their distinctiveness and cohesiveness along the ideological space. For example, because of the high level of party polarization in Iowa, the Iowa Republicans could choose any 9 legislators from their caucus to place on a 15-member committee, and that committee would have a first-dimension median NOMINATE score that was no lower than \(-0.816\) (if they placed their 9 most conservative members on the committee) and no higher than \(-0.528\) (if they placed their 9 most moderate members on the committee). Neither of these values lies very far from the chamber median member at \(-0.617\). Thus, the use of a partisan-based allotment ensures that the median member on Iowa committees will be fairly close to the chamber median, regardless of which 9 legislators are assigned to which committees.

Such a process does not work in Nebraska, for two reasons. First, as discussed earlier, seats on Nebraska’s committees are not allotted with reference to the partisan balance in the chamber. Some committees include a large majority of Democratic members, and other committees are controlled by Republicans. If there was this discrepancy in Kansas and Iowa, then those states would also have committees that were far less representative of the chamber median, even with the more cohesive party caucuses from which to draw members. Six of Nebraska’s committees are evenly divided or include a majority of Democratic legislators. In Iowa, those 6 committees would not be close to the chamber median, because their median members would be Democrats rather than Republicans. For example, if Iowa created a 15-member
committee that gave Democrats a one-seat majority, then the most representative committee possible (one with the most-moderate Democrats) would have a NOMINATE value of .51. Even if stacked with the most-moderate Democrats, this committee would be very unrepresentative of the parent chamber, whose median legislator has a –.617 NOMINATE score. Thus, cohesive parties need not consciously try to create committees that represent the caucus or the chamber; representativeness will simply occur if the majority party has a majority of seats on each committee.

The second reason that Nebraska’s committees are not representative of the chamber is that Nebraska’s legislative parties are not cohesive. In fact, even if committee seats were divided among the parties as dictated by the partisan balance of the full chamber, Nebraska’s committees would still likely be less representative. Nebraska legislators are widely dispersed ideologically, meaning that only a few senators are close to the chamber median. For example, the median member of an average committee in Iowa falls just .033 points from the median member of the chamber. Yet in Nebraska, only six legislators fall within that distance of the chamber median (including the median member). Nebraska’s committees would only be representative of the chamber median if the members close to the chamber median also happened to be the median legislators on a number of committees. So these members would not only have to be on most of the committees, but also have to be the median members on those committees, a scenario that is clearly unlikely with the distribution of legislators in that chamber.

As noted earlier, Battista has found that Nebraska’s committees are not “obviously representative nor unrepresentative” (2004, 170), a finding that seems contrary to what I have found here. Nevertheless, these two conclusions are reconcilable when one considers that Battista takes the lack of structure found in the Nebraska legislature as a given, even though it is the chaotic pattern of roll-call voting in Nebraska that is its defining feature (Wright and Schaffner 2002). Parties create structure and cohesion in legislatures by lending order to political conflict. This structure not only produces more stable, enduring, and predictable coalitions in the chamber; it also appears to make it easier for legislatures to create committees that are more likely to represent the interests of the full chamber. In the absence of the order and predictability that parties encourage, legislatures will be less capable of organizing committees in a way that ensures that committees are representative. Battista’s finding that Nebraska’s committees are no more or less representative than might be produced by random assign-
ment may be correct. Indeed, given the disorganization of ideology in the chamber, any method of assigning committee membership would be unlikely to produce committees that are as consistently representative of the chamber as those in Iowa. Yet it also seems safe to conclude that Nebraska’s committees would be far more representative of the legislature if conflict within the chamber were structured along party lines and if committees were divided according to the partisan balance of the chamber.

Thus, my findings suggest that parties are important for creating representative committees. But do committees necessarily pursue their own interests rather than those of the chamber when parties are absent? There is no conclusive way to determine whose interests Nebraska’s committees pursue; still, we may be able to draw some conclusions from how the committees are organized. Often, particularized interests are based on geographic location (the location of army bases, farmland, sea ports, and so on). In this case, the three geographic caucuses could be viewed as facilitating the pursuit of such interests: the Omaha Caucus has more interest in urban issues, the Lincoln Caucus has more interest in education issues (since the flagship campus of the University of Nebraska is located in Lincoln), and the West Caucus is more concerned with agricultural issues. While each caucus received some seats on every committee during this legislative session, some caucuses received a disproportionate share of seats on particular committees of interest.

Table 1 presents the distribution of seats for each caucus on each committee. On a few committees, membership was dominated by one of the three regional caucuses. The Omaha Caucus held a distinct advantage on two committees that might be of most interest to their constituents: Urban Affairs, and Business and Labor. The Lincoln Caucus held 50% of the seats on the Education Committee, which is not surprising since the state’s flagship university is located in Lincoln. Finally, as one might expect, the rural West Caucus held 50% of the seats on the Agriculture Committee. This distribution of committee seats is not necessarily evidence that Nebraska’s committees focus on their members’ own interests rather than those of the chamber, but Nebraska’s legislature does seem to have developed an assignment process that ensures that groups with more of an interest in some jurisdictions get more power over the relevant committees. In the absence of the party influence on the division of committee assignments, the Nebraska committees may be designed to follow the independent-committees model rather than to serve the interests of the chamber or the parties.
### TABLE 1
Caucus Seats on Each Nebraska Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Omaha Caucus</th>
<th>Lincoln Caucus</th>
<th>West Caucus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Caucus Dominates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriations</td>
<td>33.3% (3)</td>
<td>33.3% (3)</td>
<td>33.3% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking, Commerce, Insurance</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/Telecommunications</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Omaha Caucus Dominates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Labor</td>
<td>57.1% (4)</td>
<td>28.6% (2)</td>
<td>14.3% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Affairs</td>
<td>57.1% (4)</td>
<td>14.3% (1)</td>
<td>28.6% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Human Services</td>
<td>42.9% (3)</td>
<td>28.6% (2)</td>
<td>28.6% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>62.5% (5)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lincoln Caucus Dominates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>50% (4)</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/Military/Veterans</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>50% (4)</td>
<td>37.5% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West Caucus Dominates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>50% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Affairs</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>62.5% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

Krehbiel’s 1993 work on Congress challenged scholars to answer the question “Where’s the party?” Implicit in Krehbiel’s question and explicit in his research is the notion that parties are relatively inconsequential in determining legislative behavior. With regard to committee organization, Krehbiel finds minimal influence for parties in committee assignment decisions, and he argues that committees are created in a way that makes them tools of the chamber rather than the party (1991, 1993). In contrast, the findings presented in this article reveal the importance of political parties for producing committees that represent the legislature. In the chamber with the most party competition (Iowa), committees are consistently representative of the chamber median. In Kansas, where one party holds a distinct advantage, committees are somewhat less consistently representative but still fall fairly close to the chamber median. In contrast, where parties are not active (Nebraska), committees are spread widely across the ideological space and are often very unrepresentative of the full chamber. Thus, as legislative parties become increasingly polarized and cohesive, committees become more representative of the chamber.

While the findings in this article highlight the importance of parties for creating representative committees, they are not necessarily incompatible with Krehbiel’s contention that party leaders lack influence. Krehbiel takes the ideological distribution of legislators as a given and then finds limited party effects in the assignment of legislators to committees within that legislature. Yet the highly structured ideological distribution of legislators is, itself, a function of whether or not parties exist in the legislature (Wright and Schaffner 2002). Thus, the simple fact that committee organization occurs along partisan lines, coupled with the role that parties play in structuring legislative conflict, creates committees that represent the chamber. When legislative conflict has a definitive partisan structure and the committees are always controlled by the majority party, representative committees will result as a simple by-product of the partisan structure and organization. The representativeness of committees may still vary somewhat, depending on how cohesive the majority party is (Aldrich and Battista 2002), but there will not be as wide a range of committee midpoints as occurs when party is absent. When partisan structure and organization is lacking, legislatures have more difficulty organizing committees in a way that makes these groups representative of the chamber. In this case, committees may act independently of the legislature and focus on providing benefits to the members.
These findings appear to underscore the importance of parties for legislative policymaking. Committees can fill an influential role for legislative bodies, allowing for a division of labor and the distribution of information costs (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1990). But committees will not effectively play this role if members of the full chamber cannot trust that committees share the chamber’s preferences. The findings in this article suggest that parties are instrumental in fostering a linkage between committees and their parent chambers. When legislators can trust that their committees represent the chamber’s interests, legislatures can make policy more efficiently by delegating to those committees. Parties thus appear to facilitate the democratic relationship not only between citizens and their legislatures, but also between legislatures and their committees.

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NOTES

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1. Two notable exceptions are Battista 2004 and Overby and Kazee 2000. Overby and Kazee do not examine the Nebraska legislature in their analysis, and later in this article, I will discuss in more detail Battista’s research, which does address the Nebraska unicameral.

2. The relatively low levels of professionalization for these chambers might be cause for concern if committees were less constrained to be representative in less-professionalized legislatures. If this were the case, then any party effects uncovered in this analysis might not apply to more-professionalized legislatures (where committees are more constrained by the chamber). Overby, Kazee, and Prince (2004) have found, however, that the percentage of outlying committees is not statistically related to the professionalization of the legislature. Thus, the party effects uncovered in this article are not likely to be contingent on the lack of professionalization in these chambers.

3. Hall and Grofman (1990) dispute the validity of using roll-call votes from the chamber floor to test hypotheses regarding the extent to which committees are outliers from the chamber. My analysis seeks to test for differences across chambers, and, since any shortcomings of the measure should apply to all chambers, intrachamber differences uncovered here are not likely to be the result of these limitations.

4. Democrats held 40% of the seats in the Iowa senate but only 32% of senate seats in Kansas. Furthermore, previous research indicates that there was substantial partisan polarization in the Iowa legislature during this period (Aldrich and Battista 2002).
5. See Battista 2004 for a discussion of the drawback of this technique when assessing representativeness.

6. The logic of using medians is well established in spatial modeling of legislative behavior. Theoretically, successful legislation must win approval from the median member of the committee. If means are used instead, then the results differ significantly. Means are particularly problematic in a polarized legislature. Consider the case of Iowa, where the mean NOMINATE for the chamber is −.15, while the median is −.617. This wide gap between the mean and the median occurs because of the highly polarized distribution of legislators in the Iowa senate. In fact, only one member in the chamber is within .35 of the mean, whereas all 30 Republicans are within that distance of the chamber median. Thus, when one uses means, Nebraska’s committees appear, on average, more representative of the chamber than Kansas’s and Iowa’s committees, a result attributable to the fact that means do a poor job of accounting for dynamics in polarized chambers.


8. Education issues will likely be of interest to all members of the legislature because the states play an important role in primary and secondary education. Still, the existence of the University of Nebraska in Lincoln may increase the salience of education even more for legislators in that area.

REFERENCES


