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# The Circus That Wasn't: The Republican Party's Quest for Order in California's 2003 Gubernatorial Recall Election

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## Abstract

Contrary to media reports, California's 2003 recall election was anything but a circus. Despite the presence of 135 candidates, just 3 managed to split 94% of the vote, and the winner came close to achieving a majority. In this article, the author uses elite interviews and a social network analysis of campaign donations to study how the Republican Party sought to impose order on the potentially chaotic political environment. The author finds that a network of Republican donors, activists, and officeholders coordinated their efforts to advantage Arnold Schwarzenegger and pressure other Republicans out of the race.

## Keywords

elections, parties, direct democracy, recall, California

How does a political party behave when it is hamstrung by institutional rules? State and local parties throughout the United States face all manner of legal restrictions, from campaign finance regulations to open primaries to prohibitions on formal nominations. What do the parties do when suddenly faced with such restrictions? Do they simply yield to state regulation and do the best they can under the new regime, or do they try to find ways around the rules to do what strong parties do?

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The California gubernatorial recall election of 2003 provides an unusually stark example of parties dealing with a new challenge. Under the rules of the recall, there would be no primary election to secure party nominees for the ballot to replace sitting Governor Gray Davis, candidate entry barriers were unusually low, and the whole campaign season would span a mere two months. In the resulting frenzy, 135 candidates, including actors, activists, pornographers, comedians, and others, qualified for the recall replacement ballot, which spanned four pages. Despite the potential for chaos, the final tally of election returns appeared remarkably mundane. Three candidates—a liberal Democratic lieutenant governor, a conservative Republican state senator, and a moderate Republican entertainer—split 94% of the popular vote. The winner took office with 49% of the vote. Concerns about the winner receiving as little as 10% of the vote and representing only a sliver of California voters proved unfounded.

As I argue in this article, the winnowing of the vote was neither accidental nor entirely the result of rational voters deciding not to waste their votes (Duverger 1954). Rather, the political parties, operating in an environment that would seem largely hostile to them, imposed order on what might otherwise have been a chaotic election. I focus largely on the efforts of California's Republican Party to control the election, and specifically on the work of prominent endorsers and high-level campaign donors. Using a series of qualitative interviews, I look at the work by several Republican leaders to recruit Arnold Schwarzenegger to run for governor and pressure other highly qualified candidates to abandon the race. I also use social network analysis to study campaign donation patterns among the Republican recall candidates. The results suggest a good deal of order on the Republican side in a political environment that was not particularly conducive to party organization.

This article is less a study of *why* California Republicans settled on Schwarzenegger, or why any party would coordinate on a certain type of candidate, than a study of *how* this coordination came about. Although it is a case study of only one U.S. state during an unusual episode in its recent history, I believe that this episode brings into sharp relief some of the fundamental features of party dynamics; the recall demonstrates how party elites can overcome institutional hurdles to achieve a desired goal.

## Parties in Hostile Environments

Before examining how a party might adapt to an adverse political environment, I define what exactly a party is and what it is trying to accomplish. Schattschneider (1942) defines a party as a group of individuals attempting, through legal means, to control the government. Even if some members of the party are content to hold power for its own sake, there will necessarily be a sizeable group of members who want to achieve some programmatic goals. They wish to move the government in some direction.

To achieve this, they concentrate on nominating as ideologically extreme a candidate as they feel they can get away with. That is, they want a candidate who is ideologically in sync with them but is just moderate enough to prevail in a general election, given the partisan leanings of the state or district and the prevailing political winds (Bawn et al. 2006; Masket and Noel 2011).

Even if they can identify such a candidate, it is no small feat to get her or him nominated. Party nominations are rarely secured in conventions today; becoming the party's nominee usually requires prevailing in a primary election. Nonetheless, party leaders have become adept at ensuring that their chosen candidate wins the nomination. Having agreed on a candidate, they ensure that that candidate receives the lion's share of endorsements, funding, and expertise—all of which are vital in the relatively low information environment of a primary—while seeing that no other candidates receive such resources (Cohen et al. 2008; Masket 2009).

Even if party organizations lack the command-and-control hierarchy that Richard Daley utilized in mid-20th-century Chicago, their leaders can still coordinate on candidates they like and communicate their support to other donors and activists either directly or indirectly. That is, they can personally encourage donors and activists to support a candidate, or those donors and activists may follow the cues of party elites as they are communicated in the media or campaign material. Donors and activists follow these elite cues to avoid wasting resources on candidates who are unlikely to succeed. By maintaining control over the allocation of these key campaign resources, party leaders can ensure that their candidates, once in office, stay true to their relatively extreme stances, lest they find themselves out of a job.

Governors and state legislators, however, have a way of thwarting the best laid plans of parties. Knowing that strong parties will force them to take positions out of step with what their constituents desire (Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001), and knowing that such stances can threaten reelection efforts (Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002; Wright and Berkman 1986), officeholders may seek to insulate themselves from party pressures. They may create an open primary or “jungle” primary laws, allowing a more moderate primary electorate. They may establish a nonpartisan legislature, as Minnesota had for many years and as Nebraska currently has. They may allow for candidates to run in multiple party primaries, as California did in the first half of the twentieth century. In many cases, these reforms have their desired effect; legislative partisanship is virtually nonexistent in Nebraska (Wright and Schaffner 2002) and was substantially reduced in the early-twentieth-century California legislature (Masket 2007). Sometimes, however, parties find ways around these obstacles.

The electoral rules implemented in California's 2003 gubernatorial recall provide an interesting test of party resilience. With no primary to settle a nomination race and low barriers to candidate entry, this election seemed like one over which of the parties had little control. It appeared that the candidates would simply fight it out among themselves and the parties would muddle through with the results. In fact, as I argue, the parties managed to impose considerable control over the environment.

## **Methodological Approach**

I use a variety of methods to examine the manner in which California Republican elites overcame the adversities of the primary-less recall election to nominate, in effect, Schwarzenegger for governor. One method is purely qualitative: I interviewed 17 prominent donors, activists, campaign consultants, and party officials who were

active in the 2003 recall election. These interviews were conducted in 2006 and 2007—long enough after the recall to allow for some reflection and distance but timely enough that memories would not be terribly compromised. Interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes and were recorded with the respondents' consent. Most interviews were conducted in person, although a few were done over the telephone. A list of interview respondents can be found in the appendix. For the qualitative evidence, I also draw from Joe Mathews's (2006) book *The People's Machine*, which is an excellent source of elite views on Schwarzenegger's political career.

The other method is more quantitative, involving a multitiered analysis of campaign donations in the 2002 gubernatorial election and the 2003 recall election. I examine donation patterns in the two elections to determine the degree to which major donors coordinated on particular candidates prior to the nomination or election. I also use social network analysis (SNA) tools in the study of these donation data to determine patterns in donor activity.

For the purposes of clarity, I have chosen to focus on the Republican Party's actions during this unusual election. There was, of course, an equally interesting story occurring on the Democratic side as well, involving a spirited debate over which candidate to put forward as a possible replacement for Gov. Gray Davis or whether to even offer a replacement candidate at all. However, the incentives and behavior of Democratic leaders were sufficiently different from those of Republican leaders during this election that to combine them would complicate and lengthen the article without offering much additional explanatory power.

### **“A Sprint with No Primary”**

The California gubernatorial recall of 2003 has been analyzed for a variety of purposes. Although it was an unusual election in many respects, it offered a convenient natural experiment for scholars in a wide range of subfields. The lengthy ballot made for good studies of ballot order effects (Ho and Imai 2006), voter turnout (Barreto et al. 2006; Barreto and Ramírez 2004; McDonald 2003), and voters' ability to manage complexity (Alvarez et al. 2004). Scholars have also used the recall to examine the ability of voters to sort out candidates and vote strategically so as to not waste their votes (Alvarez and Kiewiet 2009; Kousser 2004; Shaw, McKenzie, and Underwood 2005). Kousser, Lewis, and Masket (2007) examined the effect of the successful recall on California's legislators, while Hussey (2004) studied strategic behavior by the parties during the recall election.

As stated above, the final results of the recall election ended up looking unremarkable, with the winner receiving nearly half of the vote share and two rivals splitting almost all of the remainder. However, even if the final election results appeared roughly typical of modern elections, the political environment of California's 2003 gubernatorial recall was a highly unusual one. According to Patrick Dorinson, a campaign staffer for the Schwarzenegger campaign, the recall was “a sprint with no primary.” Indeed, of the 17 political elites I interviewed, roughly half used the term *sprint*

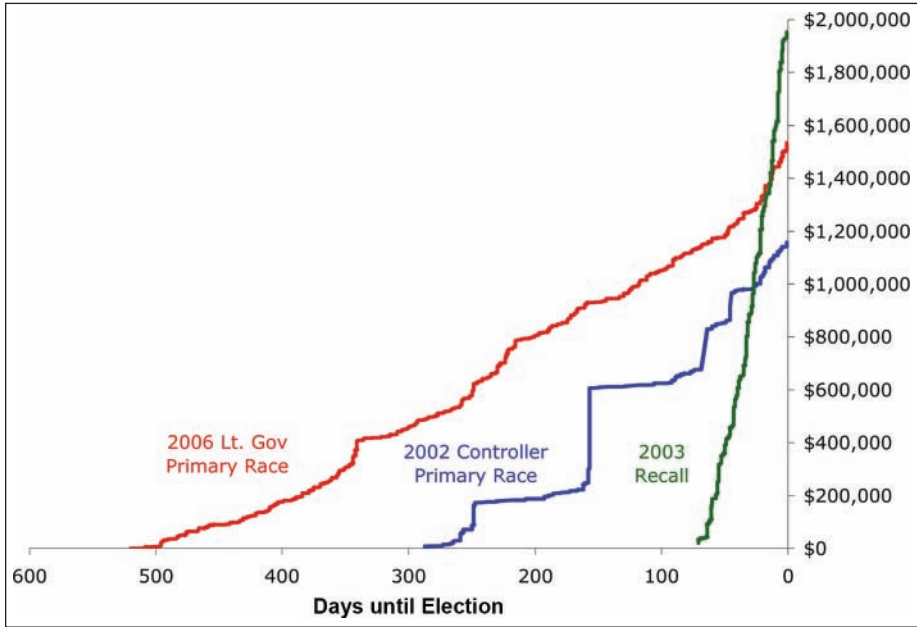


Figure 1. Fund-raising by Sen. Tom McClintock in three statewide races

in describing the political atmosphere. California Republican Party chair Duf Sundheim described the environment best when he said,

Well, it was 24-7, and it just was—you know, you didn't sleep. . . . You never know what kind of obstacles there are gonna be. But this was the 100-year flood, right? So there were no rules. . . . It was just kind of like, "Hey, what makes sense here?" . . . Experience didn't matter. Logic was the key—logic and stamina.

A visual depiction of this sprint-like environment appears in Figure 1. This graph demonstrates the funds raised by state Sen. Tom McClintock, a Republican from the Southern California city of Thousand Oaks, in two statewide primary races and in the 2003 California recall election. The regular statewide races show a more typical fund-raising approach. In 2002, McClintock began raising funds for his run for state controller roughly 10 months before the Republican primary, raising an average of \$4,037 per day. He started even earlier for his 2006 run for lieutenant governor, taking in \$2,952 per day over 18 months. But the recall was a different sort of race altogether. The secretary of state certified the recall petition on July 23, 2003; the election would be held just 76 days later, on October 7. And the graph shows what a candidate had to do to remain competitive in that environment—raise funds at an extraordinary rate. In

McClintock's case, it was \$27,525 per day, nearly \$2 million in two months, almost 10 times the pace of his fund-raising in 2006.

The second unusual aspect of the recall race was the lack of a primary. In fact, the recall involved two simultaneous contests: a yes–no question of whether Governor Gray Davis should be recalled and a replacement candidate election should the first question receive majority approval. However, the threshold for candidates seeking to be on the replacement ballot was atypically low: 65 signatures plus a \$3,500 filing fee.

The recall was, in one sense, a tremendous opportunity for California Republicans.<sup>1</sup> Having lost two successive gubernatorial elections and having controlled a single house of the legislature for only two years out of the previous three decades, it was another chance at controlling a branch of government without having to wait until 2006 for the next election. At the same time, the recall presented a formidable challenge. For Republicans to succeed, they would have to field a highly qualified candidate and make sure that other high quality candidates did not split the Republican vote. Given the low entry threshold, the high media attention, the unpredictability of a multicandidate race, and the enormous potential payoff, this was no small task. In theory, anyone who ever had half a notion to be governor might run, and a good many did.

How did the Republican Party achieve their goals in this seemingly unmanageable environment? I turn first to the qualitative evidence. In general, when I speak of the California Republican Party, I am referring to more than simply the employees of that formal organization. Except where otherwise indicated, I am referring to the “expanded” party—the network of activists, elite donors, key officeholders, and opinion makers who work with and on behalf of Republican causes and candidates. This is consistent with a line of research that sees parties less as formal hierarchies and more as informal networks (Bernstein 1999; Dominguez 2005; Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009; Masket 2009; Schwartz 1990).

### *Recruiting Arnold Schwarzenegger*

The common depiction of Arnold Schwarzenegger in the months leading up to the recall election was one of a successful film star, bodybuilder, and businessman who had just suddenly decided to parlay his achievements in his previous fields into political success. Some profiles saw him as intelligent while others were less flattering.<sup>2</sup> Nearly all these profiles missed two important facts about Schwarzenegger: that he had been flirting with politics nearly all his adult life and that California Republicans actively recruited and groomed him for his gubernatorial run.

Schwarzenegger's lifelong interest in politics is revealed by his work as a surrogate for George H. W. Bush during the 1988 presidential campaign, his service as the chair of that president's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, and his very public lobbying on behalf of the Special Olympics, not to mention his marriage to a scion of the Kennedy family. But the role that GOP leaders played in recruiting him as a candidate was less well known until described by Mathews (2006).

As Mathews makes clear, a team of California Republican insiders sought meetings with Schwarzenegger as early as 2001 to evaluate him as candidate material. These

insiders had close ties to former governor Pete Wilson (1991–99) and can be thought of as a moderate, pragmatic wing of the state’s Republican Party. They included Wilson aide Bob White, political consultant George Gorton, Republican party chair Shawn Steel, Republican media consultant Don Sipple, and former gubernatorial spokesperson Larry Thomas. At one point, this group, along with Wilson, met with Schwarzenegger and encouraged him to think about running for office, although which office that would be had not yet been determined.<sup>3</sup> According to Mathews’s (2006, 69) account of this meeting, “If he decided to seek office, Wilson told Schwarzenegger, the people around this table could help him set up a fund-raising network and find people to teach him the issues.”

These insiders advised Schwarzenegger not to form an exploratory committee, which would attract too much attention, but to instead work on his one area of weakness as a candidate—voters’ assumption that he had no knowledge of policy. They advised him to champion a state initiative campaign that would develop the actor’s political and policy credentials while tying himself to a team of campaign professionals and building a fund-raising network responsive to him (pp. 83–84).

The campaign that emerged from that meeting, a successful effort to pass an after-school activities program for California school children in 2002, was essentially a dry run for a statewide office campaign. Schwarzenegger traveled throughout the state. His speeches were focus-group tested and edited (p. 87), and media appearances were arranged so that he could be photographed with police officers, educators, and children (p. 103). Mathews even suggests that Schwarzenegger’s film roles were massaged to support his political image (p. 95).<sup>4</sup>

The account of Schwarzenegger’s recruitment is reminiscent of the recruitment of General Dwight Eisenhower to run for president in 1952 (Halberstam 1993). In both cases, a network of moderate to conservative political and business figures recruited a popular candidate with little political experience to rescue their party from obscurity. And in both cases, the candidates’ political views were not especially well known and, once revealed, were more moderate than many in the party were comfortable with. But the chance of regaining control of the executive branch after many years in the wilderness outweighed concerns of ideological purity. Bawn et al. (2006) demonstrate that time out of power tends to lead parties to nominate more moderate candidates (also see Masket and Noel 2011; Schrager 2008, 16). Or, as Schwarzenegger media spokesperson Rob Stutzman summed up in an interview,

Nothing cures ideological purity like losing a couple elections. So they [party insiders] saw, in Arnold, the opportunity to win and basically govern and have a place of primacy again politically for Republicans, no matter what kind of Republican he was.

### *Winnowing the Field*

Finding a good candidate is only one of the tasks a party must address to prevail in an election. The second step is to clear a path for that candidate, something that is unusually



complicated in a short race with no primary and a low entry barrier for candidates. Perhaps party officials did not worry so much about the dozens of unknown Republican candidates on the ballot, but the presence of several other candidates was worrisome for those trying to secure the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger. These candidates included the following:

- Bill Simon, who less than a year earlier was the Republican nominee for governor. He lost narrowly to incumbent Gray Davis in 2002.
- Peter Ueberroth, the former commissioner of Major League Baseball and the man credited with rescuing the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics from bankruptcy.
- Tom McClintock, a fiscally conservative state senator who had been the party's nominee for state controller the previous year.
- Darrell Issa, a Southern California congressman who had largely bankrolled the signature-gathering efforts of recall supporters.
- Richard Riordan, the popular former mayor of Los Angeles and a close friend and ideological ally of Schwarzenegger. Riordan had been considered the prohibitive favorite in the 2002 gubernatorial election but ended up losing his party's primary to Simon.

Any one of these candidates on his own would have made a credible nominee in a typical gubernatorial election. Each had a strong base of support within the party and a network of financial supporters and political professionals loyal to him. And while none was as famous as Schwarzenegger, each had substantial statewide name recognition. Had even a few of them stayed in the race, it could have easily split the Republican vote and handed another victory to the Democrats. With the exception of McClintock, however, each candidate would abandon the race shortly after entering it.

Riordan and Issa departed the field relatively quickly. Riordan had been in close contact with Schwarzenegger during the summer of 2003 about the recall, and both had reached an agreement that only one of them would run for governor. Issa withdrew shortly after Schwarzenegger's entry into the race, apparently in response to close media scrutiny of his criminal record, which included several weapons-related arrests in the 1970s. Issa gave a press conference on August 7th in which he tearfully announced his withdrawal but promised to continue funding the recall (Spagat 2003; Wildermuth 2003b).

The remaining candidates proved more tenacious in their campaigns. One of the things the formal state Republican Party did to address this situation was to endorse Schwarzenegger on September 29. Although the formal party usually avoids endorsements in a primary race, its members agreed that the recall was unusual and demanded some sort of party role in winnowing the field. That the party would agree to endorse Schwarzenegger, a prochoice, pro-gun-control moderate with prominent friends in the gay community, came as a surprise to some members. Duf Sundheim, the chair of the state GOP, explains what happened in a meeting of county chairs:



They [the county chairs] thought that they were the only one that was for Schwarzenegger. And it's because they weren't talking with each other. So then when we got to the convention, I sat them down in the room, and I said, "Okay, how many think that Schwarzenegger should get out, and we should all get behind McClintock?" And very few hands went up. And I said, "Okay, how many think that McClintock should get out, and we should all get behind Schwarzenegger?" And you should have seen the stunned look on their faces as they raised their hands, because they saw many other hands go up, and that's when the activists understood that this death wish that we historically had had in the party was over.

This vote, explains then-chair of the California County Chairmen's Association Ron Nehring, "led to opening the door for the state party board of directors to also endorse Arnold Schwarzenegger in the recall election." Sundheim also repeatedly contacted different candidates, pursuing a strategy that could be interpreted as passive-aggressive party pressure:

What I would do is I would call those candidates and say . . . "What can we do to help you?" And I would then go have weekly briefings with those candidates. You know, "Well, Harry, how much money did you raise last week? Who's your campaign team? What kind of events are you attending? How many people are going to those events?" You know, and I'd say . . . "I saw a poll yesterday where you've gone from twelve to four. How are things going? Can you turn this around?" Our mantra was, "We're encouraging everybody, but at some point, most of the candidates are gonna have to put what's in the best interest of the state ahead of their personal ambition."

Beyond the party endorsement and phone calls, different candidates called for different tactics. Bill Simon, in particular, felt that as the party's most recent gubernatorial nominee, he had a special claim to the party's backing. To many in the party, the most recent entry on Simon's résumé worked only to undermine Simon's credentials. According to GOP attorney Tom Hiltachk, "Simon had his chance the year before, and it was a hard sell to say, 'Well, you should give him another chance.'" *L.A. Times* journalist Dan Morain echoed these thoughts by saying that Simon "was a loser. He'd already lost. . . . I mean, if the Republicans really wanted to win . . . why would they put up a guy who had already been rejected?" The fact that Simon seemed to be the one Republican in the state who could not defeat the unpopular Gray Davis in 2002 suggested that he was not the best candidate to lead the recall effort.

Party leaders engaged in some unusual tactics to discourage Simon's campaign. At one point, the state Republican Party issued a press release claiming that they had called the Simon campaign encouraging him to leave the race (Marinucci and Wildermuth 2003). However, according to Simon aide K. B. Forbes, the campaign received no such phone call. Instead, the party was publicly airing its problems with Simon, in Forbes's

words, “to unnerve people from committing resources and time and energy.” To that extent, the party appears to have succeeded; Simon’s 2003 fund-raising efforts were anemic compared to his efforts in 2002. It also appears to have affected Simon’s own perception of the political terrain:

I felt like, well, I probably had a good chance, but maybe it was somebody else’s turn and that maybe my day would come again at a later point. But that wasn’t really my time. I kind of felt like it was Arnold’s time.

Simon’s rationale for running had been that voters needed a fiscally conservative alternative to Schwarzenegger, someone who would fight all tax increases. Simon’s campaign appeared to be helped when billionaire investor Warren Buffett, an advisor to the Schwarzenegger campaign, publicly criticized Proposition 13, the 1978 limitation on property taxes. However, Schwarzenegger’s very public repudiation of Buffett, and the former’s endorsement by Estelle Jarvis, the widow of Proposition 13’s author, helped bolster his credibility with fiscal conservatives and undermined Simon’s campaign narrative (Mathews 2006, 155). Simon’s campaign received another blow on August 22 when the conservative Lincoln Club of Orange County backed Schwarzenegger and urged Simon and McClintock to leave the race. “We’re very fond of those guys, and we’ve backed them in the past,” said Lincoln Club president Tracy Price, “but we don’t believe either of them has enough dry powder to win this race” (Wildermuth 2003a). Simon withdrew the next day.

Pete Ueberroth’s campaign had a significantly different rationale. He had been positioning himself as the centrist, can-do businessman, assuming that he would be the person reform-minded voters would turn to when Schwarzenegger’s celebrity-based candidacy eventually flopped (Mathews 2006, 167). Dan Schnur, Ueberroth’s campaign advisor, gave his boss some encouraging news early in the race: “When I first came to work for him, I told him my opinion that in a multicandidate race . . . someone could win without going negative.” The odd dynamics of a race with so many candidates and the possibility of a candidate winning with just a sliver of the electorate’s support made a low-cost, all-positive campaign seem possible.

But the same partisan forces that helped drive Simon from the race were also at work on Ueberroth. Several key party insiders, who had by this point declared their loyalty to Schwarzenegger’s candidacy, began pressuring Ueberroth and others to drop out. Ueberroth, says Schnur, “began to receive calls from various business and political types urging him to reconsider . . . primarily Schwarzenegger’s more prominent supporters in those two communities.” Public urgings to quit from the Lincoln Club as well as from political leaders in the Antelope Valley north of Los Angeles took a toll on Ueberroth (Maeshiro 2003). As other respected voices in the business community, including the state Chamber of Commerce, coalesced around Schwarzenegger, Ueberroth began to realize that he could not win the way he had hoped (Mathews 2006, 167).

Finally, Schnur broke the news to Ueberroth that to become governor, he would have to pull down Schwarzenegger’s vote share:

I said, "Given the way this race has developed, there is no way for you to win unless you decide to go on the attack against the frontrunner," who at that point was Schwarzenegger. I said, "I'm not advising you to do that, and I'm not saying that if you do that you will be elected governor. But I am saying that if you don't, you won't be." And it took him about 30 seconds. And he said, "Okay. Well, then I'll call a news conference tomorrow."

Ueberroth withdrew on September 8.

Sen. Tom McClintock experienced the same sorts of pressures faced by Simon and Ueberroth. Some of those providing the pressure admitted to mixed feelings, considering McClintock a friend and a loyal fiscal conservative. As Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, said,

Tom McClintock is a friend, and as I explained to him at that time, when we endorsed Arnold, I said, "There is absolutely nothing wrong with Tom McClintock, who has gotten a 100% grade on all our report cards. The guy is perfect." But at some point, you have to make a decision as to whether or not Tom, at that time, could've defeated [democratic lieutenant governor] Cruz Bustamante, and if you cast it in terms of a Republican who can beat the Democrat, we ended up going with what we thought was a sure win, to make sure that Cruz Bustamante would not become the next governor.

Similarly, Buck Johns of the Orange County Lincoln Club added, "A lot of these people here . . . have been buddies with McClintock a lot longer than we've been buddies with Arnold Schwarzenegger" (Leshner 2003).

Nonetheless, these people and others publicly and privately urged McClintock to abandon the race in favor of Schwarzenegger. Party insiders loyal to Schwarzenegger called McClintock regularly. According to McClintock,

There were individuals contacting me, "worried about my political future," they said, and some sincere, some not very sincere. . . . Every day they'd have some functionary on the television saying, "If he doesn't get out of the race today, it'll be the end of his political career. He'll never be able to run for dog-catcher. We will recall him." There were all sorts of threats that were being conveyed through the public airwaves by party officials, but very few direct contacts. The direct contacts were through the intermediaries dispatched by the Schwarzenegger camp.

Yet McClintock remained in the race. To many, this was not a surprise. Explains attorney Tom Hiltachk, "Tom was very secure and very principled and secure in his principles. And there was no way Tom was ever going to bow out of the race." Entreaties to party solidarity were not terribly effective with McClintock. In his own words, "I'm not exactly what you would call a 'party establishment' type."

In the end, McClintock took just over 13% of the vote, which did not come close to costing Schwarzenegger the election. The actor beat Democrat Cruz Bustamante 49–31. Green Party activist Peter Camejo took nearly 3% of the vote. None of the other 131 candidates—including Simon and Ueberroth, whose names were still on the ballot—commanded more than half a percentage point.

## Patterns in Campaign Donations

As the qualitative evidence in the previous section suggests, there was considerable effort by Republican Party elites to winnow the field and advantage Schwarzenegger over the other candidates. These efforts largely involved strategic endorsements and a combination of public and private pressure on candidates. But what role did campaign donors play in this winnowing? As Figure 1 shows, a steady flow of cash was crucial in the compressed campaign schedule of the recall. Donors could make or break a candidate very quickly in this environment. According to Rob Stutzman, having a core group of large-money donors backing a candidate can send a signal to other donors and to the party at large that the candidate should be backed. “It’s probably 12–15 of the right people that pull together money—they do the work of organizing fund-raising,” says Stutzman. And indeed, three of the donors that Stutzman identified as key—the New Majority of Orange County, the Carusos of Santa Monica, and Doug Manchester of San Diego—all quickly donated the maximum of \$21,200 to the Schwarzenegger campaign.

One way of examining fund-raising success by the Republican recall candidates is to compare their efforts to those of candidates in a more traditional Republican primary. The primary election of 2002 makes an effective comparison. Two of the major Republican recall candidates—Bill Simon and Tom McClintock—were also running for statewide office in 2002, the former for governor, the latter for controller. The 2002 gubernatorial race also featured former L.A. mayor Richard Riordan, a moderate politician with views and a support base similar to Schwarzenegger’s. Finally, the 2002 gubernatorial race featured California secretary of state Bill Jones, a center-right Republican officeholder.

Any remotely credible candidate has a set of donors loyal to him or her. That network, however, is usually insufficient to ensure nomination; the candidate must claim the backing of a large swath of party donors to win. Thus, we would expect to see candidates holding onto some core of their donors from one election to the next; Simon and McClintock should hold their own donors from 2002 to 2003, Schwarzenegger should pick up Riordan’s centrist donors, and Ueberroth may inherit Jones’s supporters. But how the larger body of donors moves is indicative of party insider behavior.

To analyze this behavior, I have compiled a data set consisting of all the donations of \$1,000 or more made to Republican candidates in the 2002 gubernatorial primary and the 2003 recall election. I have also included those who donated to McClintock’s controller primary campaign in 2002. By pooling these candidates’ donors, we can see how many donors contributed to multiple campaigns and over multiple election

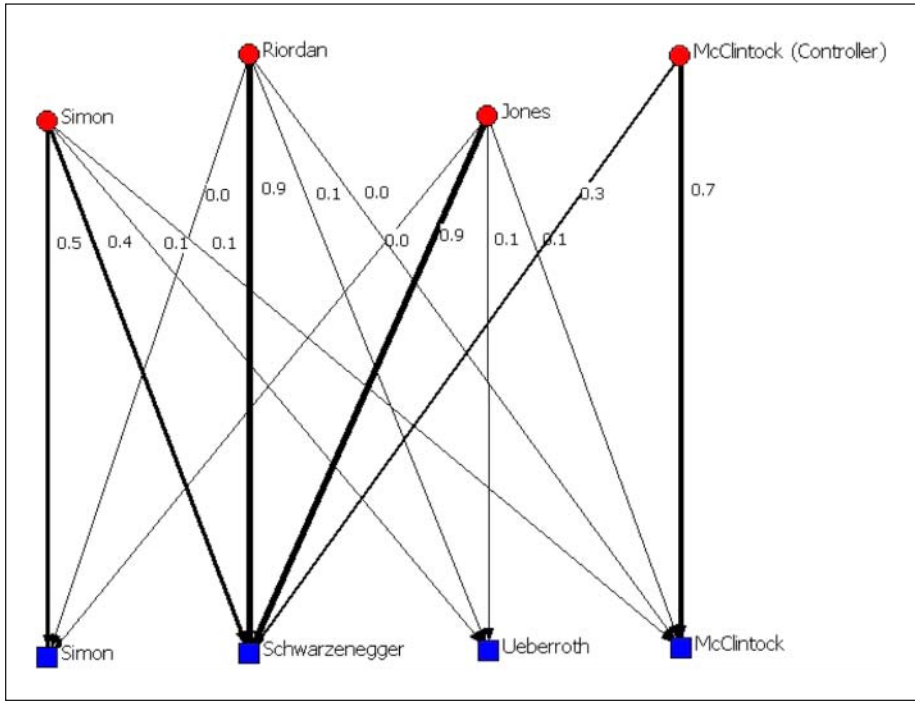


Figure 2. Donor behavior from 2002 to 2003

cycles. The resulting data set consists of 5,685 donors; 3,095 of them donated in the 2002 Republican primary cycle, 2,590 donated in the 2003 recall, and 310 donated in both years.

Figure 2 shows how donors' loyalties shifted (or did not) from 2002 to 2003. It analyzes only those donors who contributed in both election cycles. The circles at the top of the graph represent the various Republican gubernatorial candidates in 2002, plus McClintock. The squares at the bottom of the graph represent the Republican candidates in the 2003 recall. The lines connecting the dots vary in thickness to indicate the proportion of multiyear donors for one 2002 candidate that went on to support each 2003 candidate, and each line is labeled by the proportion. For example, of the multiyear donors who backed Richard Riordan in 2002, 90% went on to fund Schwarzenegger in 2003 and 10% supported Peter Ueberroth in the recall. This suggests that Schwarzenegger was largely able to secure the centrist donors from 2002.

On the far right of the graph, we see that Tom McClintock largely held onto his core of donors from 2002 to 2003; 70% of those who had given to his 2002 controller campaign stayed with him in 2003, with only 30% bleeding off to Schwarzenegger. Simon did not have nearly as much success holding onto his donors; only 50% of his 2002 donors stayed with him, with 40% defecting to Schwarzenegger and Ueberroth and

**Table 1.** Elite Donor Support, 2002 and 2003

2002	Riordan	Simon	Jones	
Percentage of elite donors supporting candidate	65.5	27.6	20.7	
2003	Schwarzenegger	Simon	Ueberroth	McClintock
Percentage of elite donors supporting candidate	86.2	20.7	0.0	3.4

Note: "Elite donor" is defined as a donor who contributed at least \$20,000 in 2002 and \$21,200 in 2003. Rows do not sum to 100 as some donors contributed to multiple candidates.

McClintock splitting the remaining 10%. Of Jones's backers, 90% went on to back Schwarzenegger, with the remainder going to Ueberroth and McClintock.

The lesson to draw from this is that Schwarzenegger did not win the recall election simply because of his fame. He drew monetary support from across the spectrum. Not only did he claim the lion's share of the donors who had backed the centrist Riordan in 2002, but also he successfully poached donors from Jones, Simon, and McClintock. McClintock had enough of a personally loyal donor base to allow him to stay in the race, although not enough of one to prevail in 2003. Although these data are silent on matters of causality (e.g., Did Simon fail to get donors because it looked like he could not win, or did his lack of donors cripple his electoral prospects?), they suggest some degree of donor coordination. Simon and Ueberroth simply could not claim the donors they had hoped to; most of the party's persistent donors had already backed Schwarzenegger, who seemed to be an obvious focal point for Republican elite activity.

Another way to look at donor coordination is to examine just the most elite of the donors (see Table 1). I define elite donors as those who donated at least \$20,000 in 2002 and \$21,200 in 2003.<sup>5</sup> This represents a very select group of donors—only 29 Californians met this stringent test. These are the sort of donors suggested by Rob Stutzman as being key to fund-raising patterns; they send signals that other donors and endorsers receive and follow. If they can coordinate on a candidate, they are forming, in effect, a united front for the party (Cohen et al. 2008; Schattschneider 1942); others donors will follow their lead, securing the nomination for their preferred candidate. And it is interesting to note how these elite donors contributed to candidates in 2002 and 2003.

The elite donors in 2002 were hardly coordinated in their support. The majority of them actually supported Riordan, who had been expected to win the nomination throughout much of 2001. His stumbles in early 2002 and a concerted effort by Governor Davis's reelection campaign to undermine Riordan, whom it considered to be its greatest threat, left Republicans backing Simon (Block 2002). Notably, the elite donors did *not* choose to back Bill Jones. A respected public servant with a proven ability to win statewide, Jones was nonetheless a pariah in Republican circles because while he initially

supported George W. Bush's 2000 presidential run, he shifted his endorsement to Sen. John McCain (Weintraub 2002) shortly before Bush clinched the nomination.

Notably, the elite donors showed near unanimity in 2003, with nearly 90% of them backing Schwarzenegger. Simon and McClintock split the remainder, with Ueberroth receiving none of their support. To the extent that other donors are willing to follow these elites' examples, their coordination on Schwarzenegger sent an unambiguous signal. In an environment where the lack of a primary prevented the party from formally putting forward a nominee, key donors were able to coordinate on Schwarzenegger and form a united front for him.

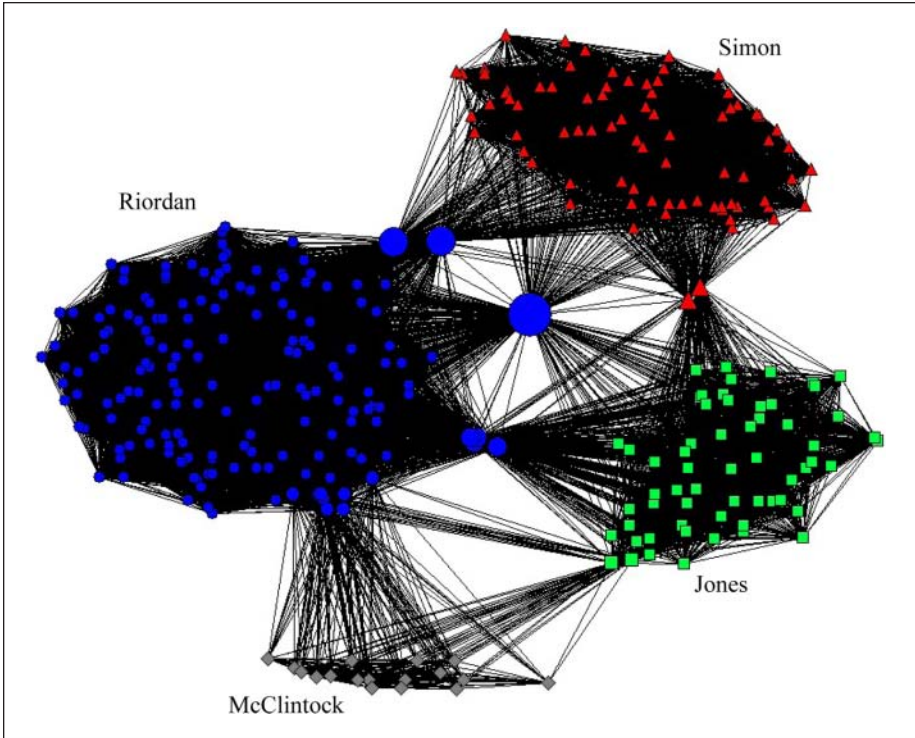
## Social Network Analysis

A study of patterns in campaign donations during these elections using SNA gives us additional leverage on understanding donor behavior. SNA examines the underlying links between individuals as derived from their public behavior. Although it has only recently been employed in the field of political science, SNA has been used to determine coalitional behavior among extended party actors (Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009), factional alliances among political consultants (Doherty 2006), and preprimary convergence among donors in congressional nomination races (Dominguez 2005), among other things. For the purposes of this study, I use donations in both the 2002 Republican gubernatorial primary (plus McClintock's controller race) and among Republicans in the 2003 recall. I treat the data as a one-node network, focusing solely on donors. SNA helps us see the extent to which donors split their contributions among several candidates and in what manner they do so.

Figure 3 shows the results for those 331 individuals who donated between \$5,000 and \$9,999 to candidates in the 2002 GOP primary race.<sup>6</sup> The graphical image was generated by NetDraw using its spring-embedding algorithm, which seeks to maximize distances between nodes for ease of visibility. NetDraw was asked to draw four factions (for the four candidates), and those factions were matched up with their recipient candidates. The lines between nodes indicate points of similarity. For example, a line connecting a circle (a Riordan supporter) to a diamond (a McClintock supporter) indicates that those two donors gave to both candidates. These relationships were determined irrespective of the donation amount.

For these figures, I was interested in identifying the most critical or "central" actors in the network of donors. However, the term *central* has several definitions in the field of social network research. *Degree centrality* measures the number of direct connections a given node has with other nodes. In the donor data, however, anyone who donated to a given candidate was automatically connected to anyone else who donated to that candidate, making essentially everyone appear to have a high level of degree centrality. Similarly, *Eigenvector centrality*, a measure of each node's connectedness with other highly connected nodes, is thrown off by these data in which so many nodes are so interconnected. Instead, I have chosen to weight each node's size using *betweenness centrality*, which measures position within a network. Betweenness accounts for





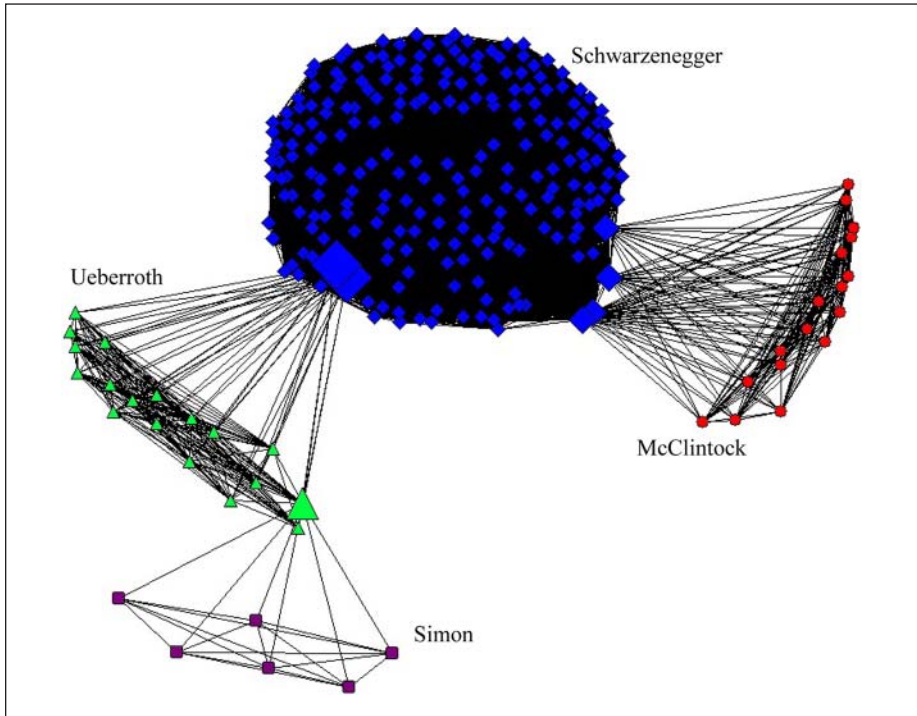
**Figure 3.** Social networks analysis of donations in 2002 gubernatorial race (plus McClintock), \$5,000–\$9,999 level

Note: Each node represents a donor to one of the Republican candidates. Nodes located between one or more clusters donated to that many different candidates. Node sizes are weighted by “betweenness,” a measure of centrality to a network. Centrality figures calculated by NetDraw version 2.081.

an actor’s connectedness with her or his neighbors; nodes that bridge clusters (or, in this case, donate to multiple candidates) have higher betweenness values. Such high-betweenness nodes are often considered brokers, holding a great deal of power within a network (Hanneman and Riddle 2005).

A few points make themselves obvious here. The vast majority of donors gave to only one candidate. Within factions, the network’s “density” (the measure of the number of existing connections divided by the number of connections that potentially could exist) is functionally 1, meaning that all donors who could be connected are connected. Between factions, the density is relatively low. The implication is that donors, for the most part, do not hedge their bets, even in a race in which frontrunner status shifts frequently and the outcome is uncertain. Donors picked their candidate and stuck with him until the primary.

A second point is that Riordan received the lion’s share of donations in 2002, even though he would lose the gubernatorial primary. Indeed, the most “between” nodes are all placed within Riordan’s faction. A third point is that the connections between



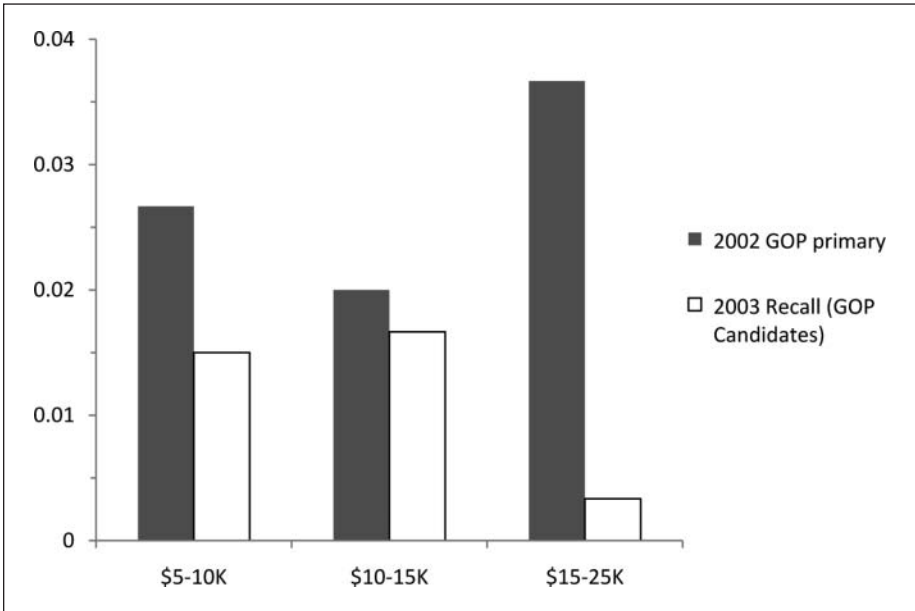
**Figure 4.** Social networks analysis of donations to Republicans in 2003 recall, \$5,000–\$9,999 level

Note: Node sizes are weighted by “betweenness,” a measure of centrality to a network. Centrality figures calculated by NetDraw version 2.081.

factions vary in density. There are many points of connection between Riordan and McClintock and between Riordan and Jones. Jones and McClintock, however, are connected by only one donor. Simon actually appears to be the most isolated here, in that there are only three points of contact between him and Riordan and two between him and Jones. All this suggests that very few donors who were willing to support the conservative Simon found it acceptable to back the more moderate Riordan or Jones.

Another surprising finding is that there are no connections between Simon and McClintock. Given that they were running for different offices but held similar ideological views, one might expect them to draw from a common pool of conservative donors. This finding is consistent, however, with the idea that McClintock had developed his own very loyal group of donors, one that was not necessarily large enough to gain him a gubernatorial nomination but may have been sufficient for other races.

Figure 4 shows the donations patterns among contributors to Republican candidates in the 2003 recall, again among the 327 individuals who gave between \$5,000 and \$9,999. Here, Schwarzenegger seems the overwhelming choice of donors at this level, although four of his supporters also gave to McClintock. The donors with high betweenness scores are all in Schwarzenegger’s camp, with the exception of one donor who



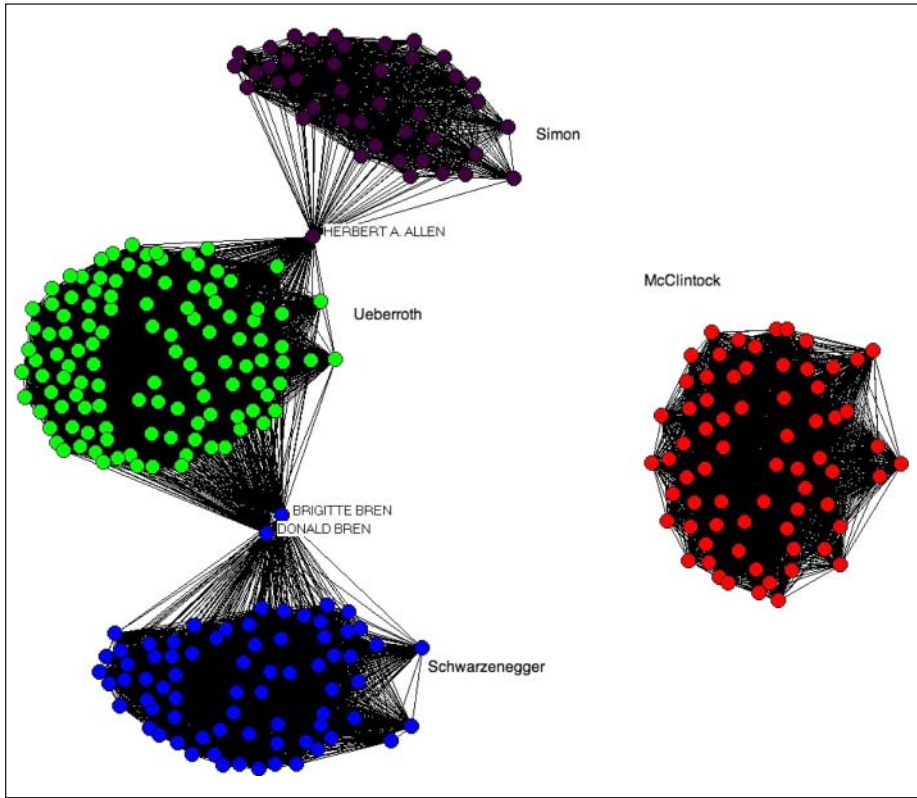
**Figure 5.** Average density of cross-candidate donor groups in two elections, by contribution size

gave to both Ueberroth and Simon. Ueberroth appears to have his own base of loyal contributors. However, it is a small one with almost no ties to any other candidate. Simon, in this race, appears truly isolated. He has a small cadre of funders with one tie to Ueberroth's donors and no ties anywhere else. This small, personally loyal group clearly could not sustain him.

Although these two snapshots suggest a different sort of donation pattern between 2002 and 2003, they are only slivers of the overall donor pool. Figure 5, however, examines cross-factional behavior at several levels of donation. The figure charts the average density between different candidate factions at three different levels of donations. These figures were calculated using Ucinet version 6.

As the figure shows, intercandidate density is lower in the recall at all three levels of donations. The higher density during the earlier contest is indicative of an environment in which the party was not quite sure what it wanted or what was going to happen. Simon had solid conservative credentials; Riordan had cross-party appeal; Jones had proven statewide electability. No one represented the total package. To the extent that donors wanted to be on the winning team, it was difficult to know which team that was. A number of donors hedged their bets and gave across factional lines.

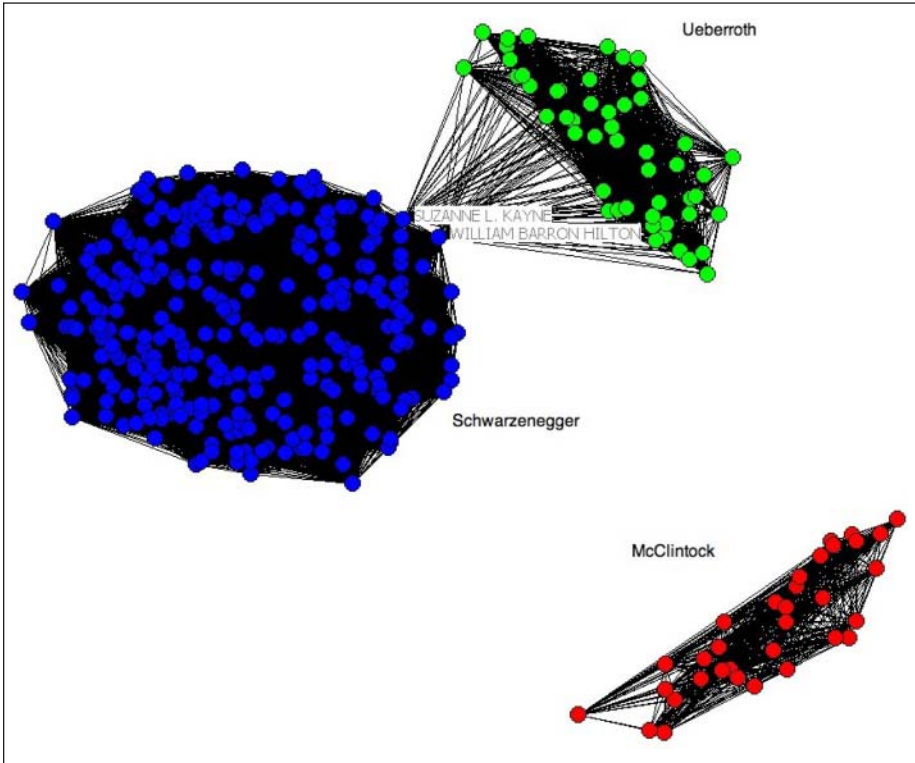
This happened considerably less during the recall. A series of cross-sections during the two months prior to the recall election shows how donors behaved. Figures 6 through 8 account for all donations of \$1,000 or more to Republican recall candidates



**Figure 6.** Donations to 2003 GOP recall candidates, July 31–August 23

during specific time periods. In Figure 6, we see the donations patterns from July 31, 2003 (when the first donations were logged), to August 23 (when Bill Simon withdrew from the race). Essentially, all the candidates are tapping their own personal networks of donors. The only donors backing more than one candidate are Herbert Allen, a director of the Coca-Cola Company, and the Brens, prominent Orange County philanthropists. McClintock’s donors stand completely alone. It is not obvious from this image who the preferred candidate would be—each has a comparable number of supporters, although Simon’s network looks the thinnest.

Figure 7, meanwhile, shows donor patterns during the week before Peter Ueberroth’s September 9 withdrawal from the race. Ueberroth is clearly still pulling in money, but his donor pool at this point pales to Schwarzenegger’s. The two donor pools are joined by just two donors. Again, McClintock stands completely alone. His donor base is smaller than the others, but it appears greatly loyal to him; none has donated to another candidate.

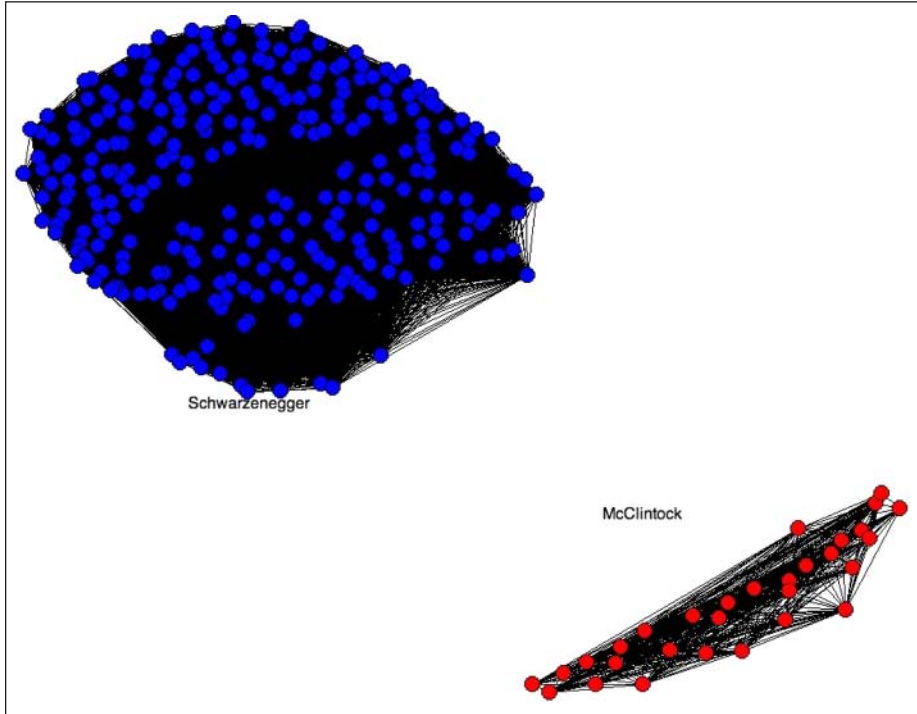


**Figure 7.** Donations to 2003 GOP recall candidates, September 1–9

The pattern in Figure 8, which covers September 17 to 24, is very similar to what the fund-raising race would look like for the remainder of the campaign. Schwarzenegger is pulling the bulk of money, but McClintock holds onto a smaller but loyal base with no ties to Schwarzenegger. No other Republican candidate is pulling in any money.

## Discussion

The interview and fund-raising data described above paint a picture of a political party that adapted to a challenging political environment to maximize its chances of victory. The rules of the recall precluded a primary, which parties typically rely on to provide closure to a nomination race in a manner that ensures the legitimacy of the nominee. If a candidate does not win a primary, even if she or he has performed better than expected and has earned a devoted following, she or he typically bows out and backs the nominee.<sup>7</sup> There was no such agreed-on endpoint for partisan campaigns during the recall. This presented a dangerous situation for Republicans, who had excellent prospects for a victory but could have squandered them by having too many high-quality candidates splitting the vote.



**Figure 8.** Donations to 2003 GOP recall candidates, September 17–24

The party’s solution was to rally around an obvious focal point—Schwarzenegger—quickly and to signal to other candidates that withdrawing was in their best interests. Key Republican leaders like Rep. David Drier, the Orange County Lincoln Club, and, eventually, the formal state party backed Schwarzenegger (even while conceding publicly that he was not a perfect match for them ideologically) and urged other candidates to leave the race, sometimes with implicit threats. Party donors, meanwhile, coordinated on their chosen candidates very early, with almost no donors spreading around money to multiple candidates. The bulk of them coordinated on Schwarzenegger, depriving other good candidates of the resources they needed to compete.

The data presented here are silent on matters of causality. That is, we cannot know whether donors converged on Schwarzenegger because a lot of key endorsements were going his way or if endorsers decided to back the candidate who was gaining a lot of financial support. The “sprint”-like nature of the recall meant that many of these events occurred nearly simultaneously. It is quite likely that both influenced each other and also that many donors and endorsers reached the Schwarzenegger conclusion independently.

What the data do suggest is that the extended Republican Party—the network of donors, activists, officeholders, opinion makers, and even the formal party organization—was



actually behaving like a strong party in an environment that was hostile to such an entity. In a remarkably short time span and in an environment that was ripe for ambitious politicians, the party helped to winnow the field and advantage its chosen candidate in every way possible.

This is not to say that Schwarzenegger could not have won without the party's help. He was certainly an attractive candidate in many regards, and his name recognition and personal financial resources could have put him over the top anyway. But the party did not want to take unnecessary chances. And even if he had won without party help, that could have posed two problems from the party's perspective. First, he probably would have won with a much smaller vote share, which would have reduced his apparent mandate and limited what he could accomplish in office. Second, he would not have owed anyone anything. Schwarzenegger entered office indebted to many conservative groups and officeholders whom he may have otherwise ignored. To be sure, as a governor he was not the most loyal conservative, particularly on environmental and social issues. And any incumbent, no less one of Schwarzenegger's stature, will have some resistance to activist pressures. But at the very least, thanks to their work in the recall, conservative groups gained a foot in the governor's door.

## Appendix

### *People Interviewed about 2003 Recall*

Respondent	Title	Date interviewed
Hector Barrajas	Deputy political director, CA Republican Party	10/5/07
Ted Costa	Principal, People's Advocate	10/4/07
Jon Coupal	President, Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association	10/4/07
Patrick Dorinson	Republican political consultant	10/5/07
Ed Emerson	Democratic political consultant	10/5/07
K. B. Forbes	Former campaign manager for Bill Simon	7/5/06 (telephone)
Tom Hiltachk	Attorney	10/5/07
Tom McClintock	Republican state senator	10/4/07
Dan Morain	Staff writer, <i>Los Angeles Times</i>	10/5/07
Ron Nehring	Chair, CA Republican Party	12/14/07 (telephone)
Sal Russo	Republican political consultant	10/4/07
Roger Salazar	Democratic political consultant	10/5/07
Dan Schnur	Former campaign consultant to Pete Ueberroth	9/25/07 (telephone)
Bill Simon	2002 Republican gubernatorial nominee	7/14/06 (telephone)
Julie Soderlund	Former spokesperson for Arnold Schwarzenegger	10/5/07
Rob Stutzman	Former aide to Arnold Schwarzenegger	12/27/07 (telephone)
Duf Sundheim	Former chair, CA Republican Party	10/5/07



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## Notes

1. For the purposes of this article, I do not delve into the issue of whether the 2003 recall was in itself a Republican creation. To be sure, most of its early backers were Republicans. Yet the state and national Republican parties distanced themselves from the effort during the signature-gathering stage, and there is at least some evidence that the recall received widespread support only because some prominent Democrats backed it (Mathews 2006, 113).
2. Shortly after the election, the satirical newspaper *The Onion* (2003) ran the headline, “Muscleman Put in Charge of World’s Fifth-Largest Economy.”
3. These insiders do not seem to have considered a recall as a means for Schwarzenegger’s rise at that time. They were grooming him for a traditional run for statewide office.
4. Schwarzenegger became famous playing a cop-killing robot in 1984’s *Terminator*. To get elected to office, he needed the support of law enforcement and other public servants. *Terminator 3*, which was in production throughout 2002, cast the actor as a hero who shot only to maim. At one point in the film, he is even driving a fire engine. According to Mathews (2006, 95), “*Terminator 3*’s director, Jonathan Mostow, joked publicly that he had signed up to direct a movie only to walk into a political campaign.”
5. Proposition 34, which passed in 2000, set the maximum donation for gubernatorial candidates at \$20,000 for 2002 and \$21,200 for the next cycle. However, these limits did not go into effect for statewide offices until after the 2002 election.
6. This is an admittedly arbitrary donation range. I wanted to somehow limit the number of donors to examine so we could obtain a clearer picture of their behavior. I was interested in capturing the behavior of people who are not casual donors; people at the \$5K to \$10K level are presumably strategic and thoughtful in their donations and contribute in multiple election cycles. However, the patterns are virtually identical when one looks at donors at lower and higher contribution levels.
7. The power of the primary is often reinforced by “sore loser” or simultaneous filing laws. These laws, which are on the books in 46 states, prevent a candidate who loses the primary from running in the general election against the nominee.

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## Bio

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