



The Relationship Between Political Parties and Interest Groups: Explaining Patterns of PAC Contributions to Candidates for Congress

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Interest groups are policy maximizers, while political parties are focused on maximizing the number of seats they win in Congress. These competing goals have important implications for the relationship between interest groups and parties. In this study I develop and test a theory concerning the patterns of hard money contributions from Political Action Committees (PACs) to candidates for the U.S. Congress. I argue that interest groups have preferences as to which party controls a majority of seats in Congress, which leads them to direct “sincere” and electorally useful money to this party (i.e., labor groups prefer Democrats, corporate groups prefer Republicans). When interest groups donate funds to the “other” party, the donations are designed to have as minimal electoral impact as possible. Interest groups accomplish this by giving “strategic” donations to this party in the following way: donate less money almost exclusively to incumbents (who typically do not need the money in order to be reelected). Thus, while many PACs do give money to both Democrats and Republicans, which indicates the importance of access, it is evident from the overall pattern of donations that these groups clearly favor either one party or the other.

Modern campaigns for the U.S. Congress require significant sums of money in order to be reasonably competent (Jacobson 2001). While candidates for seats in Congress do raise money from individuals, they heavily depend upon the financial support of interest groups to fund these campaigns. Indeed Political Action Committees (PACs) donate millions of dollars to candidates for federal office each electoral cycle. Thanks to the Federal Election Campaign Act, the record of who gives money to whom is quite clear. While scholars may be awash in data when it comes to campaign finance, this does not translate into a clear theoretical understanding of why interest groups give money to certain candidates and not others, and what the groups receive in return for these financial contributions. While “hard money” donations come from both individuals and interest groups, in this work, I am primarily interested in the relationship between interest groups (Political Action Committees) and candidates for federal legislative offices (the House and the Senate).¹

PACs are multicandidate committees, which is to say that they are created to raise and distribute campaign funds to

numerous candidates for federal office. Each committee may give up to \$5,000 to each candidate per election (primary, general, and run-off elections are all separate and a candidate can receive the statutory maximum from a group for each one of these elections). PACs are also able to spend independently for or against candidates—these are efforts that are wholly independent from, and not coordinated with any official campaign. While the largest PACs raise and donate hundreds of thousands of dollars each election cycle, the average interest group raises and donates significantly less than that. Regardless of the size of a PAC, each group has a finite amount of money that it can donate in a given cycle and, naturally, the group seeks to maximize its usefulness. The key questions guiding this work are how do interest groups allocate their money among the multitudes of candidates? What are the principles guiding the allocation strategies? A fuller understanding of these patterns of donations ought to give us insight into the motivations of interest groups and their relationship with political parties.

First, I describe some prior research on PAC contribution. I outline my argument with respect to the motivations of interest groups; then the hypotheses are presented. In the following section, I describe the data used to test the hypotheses. Next are presented the results followed by the conclusions.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

With the passage of the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) and the reporting requirements therein, extensive and detailed data are available for campaign contributions from the Federal Election Commission (FEC). The availability of this data has spurred many studies trying to link

¹ While “soft money” donations played a significant role in how groups give money to political parties, hard money (from individuals and groups) remains the most important source of funds. Soft money has also been outlawed by federal legislation, although this has led to the rise of 527 groups who raise and spend money on political campaigns, although they must remain uncoordinated from the official campaigns.

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donations to voting behavior of members of Congress. Evidence directly linking voting behavior to the receipt of financial donations has been elusive — in large part because of the difficulty of disentangling motivations for both donating money as well as voting behavior. If PACs only give money to those people they are reasonably sure will support the preferred policies of the PAC, then there ought to be a direct correlation, but the causal arrow may run from the vote to the donation, not vice versa. Writing prior to the campaign finance reforms in the early 1970s, Bauer, Pool, and Dexter (1972) cast doubt on the commonly held view that interest groups had unlimited amounts of money to spread around Washington. They write “wherever one looked at the persons actually spending that money, one saw only harassed men with tight budgets and limited campaign funds, once their essential organizational overheads has been met” (345). Hall and Wayman (1990) demonstrate that simply examining final passage votes on the floor of the House misses where money can make a difference. They show that campaign contributions activate members long before the final passage vote. The committee stage, where members are more likely to have the ability to shape legislation, is where one can find a connection between money and legislative activity. Wright (1990) argues that the act of lobbying has a greater impact on voting behavior than does a donation from a PAC. He also examines votes at the committee level and finds that the number of times a member is contacted by a lobbying group is much more important in explaining voting behavior than financial contributions.

In a study of the goals that motivate economic interest groups, Gopoian (1984) finds that donations made by PACs do conform to many of the negative preconceptions that we have about these groups. To wit, they are “self-interested, materially oriented, and narrowly focused.” However, Gopoian also shows that some PACs have a strong ideological orientation and that their actions can be explained, at least in part, by their desire to effect a government that conforms to their ideology. Wawro (2001) re-examines data on campaign contributions and voting behavior of members of Congress in a way that allows him to “account for individual specific effects, such as the predisposition to vote for or against a particular piece of legislation.” After accounting for these effects, Wawro finds no evidence that campaign contributions bias the voting behavior of MCs. This finding is consistent with prior research that indicates contributions do not have direct effects on voting (see Wright 1990). However, Stratmann (2002) does find evidence for vote buying by special interest groups. He overcomes the simultaneous equation bias by looking at two votes on financial services legislation that occurred in 1991 and 1998. This allows him to examine winners and losers in the legislation and how the two parties in Congress voted and connect this to from which side incumbents received money.

Member characteristics are clearly important in the calculus made by interest groups as to how to allocate their money for contributions. Grier and Munger (1993) show that committee assignments are more important in the House of Rep-

resentatives than in the Senate, which fits general expectations as to how each chamber operates (individual Senators are quite powerful, while committees and committee assignments are influential in the House). Ideology and political competition are both, not surprisingly, important factors in the allocation of donations. Poole and Romer (1985) demonstrate that simple spatial models are effective in explaining which groups give money to which candidates.

Timing is an important factor in allocation strategies. Research has shown that early money is generally more useful than late money (Biersack, Herrnsen, and Wilcox 1993; Krasno, Green, and Cowden 1994). However, McCarty and Rothenberg (2000) develop and test a formal model that indicates that the value of early money actually has relatively less importance than common wisdom suggests. In part, they argue this is because incumbents do not want to pay the price of greater access that early donations would buy the interest groups. Stratmann (1998) shows that PACs do make contributions in the weeks surrounding important events (i.e., elections or critical pieces of legislation are being considered in Congress). Thus, we have some knowledge about what interest groups do with their money and the effect of donations on behavior of members of Congress.

However, the common wisdom with respect to the motivations for giving and the patterns of donations revolves around access—which is to say that interest groups are motivated to donate money in order to buy the ability to meet with and talk to the MC or a staffer about policies that concern the group. Variants of this argument are abundant in both the academic and the popular press. For instance, Lowery and Brasher (2004: 133) state: “PACs linked to larger interest organizations commonly pursue an access strategy.” On page 138 they write:

A few sectors—energy and natural resources for Republicans and labor for Democrats—are strongly committed to one party or another, suggesting that they follow an electoral strategy. But most of the economic sectors do not put all of their eggs in one partisan basket. They give to both parties; or, more specifically they give to incumbents, which means that they give to both parties.

Thus, the gist of this quote indicates that most groups are interested in access, rather than affecting election outcomes. A recent newspaper article profiling donations from Wall Street companies wrote that the banking industry sought to “hedge its bets” by “spread[ing] money widely to get the most benefit from it.”² The article went on to show how people associated with banking interests had donated to both President Bush’s reelection campaign as well as John Kerry’s campaign. One is left with the feeling that most donations from connected PACs is one mainly interested in buying access from already entrenched incumbents without much regard for ideology.

² From “Goldman Employees Beat Peers as Most Active Political Donors” by Michael S. Derby. The Wall Street Journal, August 23, 2004 page C3.

WHAT DO INTEREST GROUPS WANT?

Interest groups are policy maximizers. Organized interests exist to transmit the policy preferences of their constituents to our elected officials. Groups are interested in passing legislation more favorable to their preferred policy outcomes. Initially, we can think of organized interest groups as policy maximizers who are not interested in partisanship. Since MCs in either party are not in complete agreement with their co-partisans, and there exists, to some extent, ideological overlap between the two parties, some interest groups may very well find members from both sides of the aisle that are sympathetic to their preferred policies. This is not to say that all interest groups are completely non-partisan—indeed there are many interest groups that are explicitly ideological in nature—such as EMILY's List. Here, however, I am not interested in explaining the behavior of the ideological groups, but rather those PACs connected to a labor or corporate group. While most PACs that are not directly related to a specific party claim to be bipartisan or non-partisan, the fact that they overwhelmingly give to one party or the other is an indication of some commitment to partisanship. Some groups are proudly partisan (the National Federation of Independent Businesses, for example), while others stress the nonpartisan nature of their group (the Competitive Enterprise Institute). But where these groups find their ideological “friends” is, in part, a function of the distribution of ideology among the members of Congress. Interest groups want to maximize the number of Representatives who share their partisanship. I begin with the assumption that interest groups should have no partisan preference at all, given that they are simply looking for votes on specific pieces of legislation (Stratmann 2002).

However, I argue, that for three primary reasons, interest groups do have at least a weak party preference. First, the interest group will naturally have an ideological affinity for one party or the other (i.e., no interest group is perfectly indifferent between the two parties). Second, political parties pressure those groups that do lean in their direction to make more donations to their preferred party and less to the other party.³ Third, interest groups understand the importance of majority party status in Congress. For instance, in an interview with an official from a business, and therefore Republican-leaning, interest group, party clearly does play a role in the allocation of resources. When I asked why his group gave money to a certain Democratic candidate, he responded: “Sure [Congressman X] is going to vote for Gephardt [for Speaker], but we can count on him to support us on many issues.”⁴ Thus, the importance

of party is not only evident—it was the first thing that came to this person's mind. This pro-business group clearly, and not surprisingly, wants the GOP to have a majority of seats in Congress so that they can control the agenda and committees, but the group is also willing to support some Democratic incumbents because of policy overlap and access. In terms of the importance of access for interest groups, I argue that access does matter, although not to the extent that common wisdom suggest—the idea of a purely access-oriented PAC is misguided. The notion that interest groups are formed solely on the basis of showering incumbents from either party with money so that they can have access to MCs does not comport with the data, nor does it make sense logically.

The desire for access to elected officials is premised on the notion that these groups have specific policy preferences. If an interest group takes the time and effort required to start a PAC, raise money, and distribute those dollars to office-seekers, the group must have some defined policy preferences. This is not to say that groups are not interested in access, they are. Nonetheless, I argue that an interest group's primary concern revolves around policy outputs, which are better effected by some set of representatives (i.e., one party or the other) rather than having the ability to have a meeting with a random set of elected officials.

Interest organizations seek to maximize the number of Representatives from their preferred party and the organization's primary goal is to use its money to maximize the electoral significance of that money. It is possible that given a district's underlying preferences (moderate, liberal, or conservative) both major parties will want to run a candidate that closely resembles the overall median voter in that district, with the Democrat slightly to the left of the Republican candidate (Sullivan and O'Connor 1972). Thus, while a representative from either party may vote on key issues in such a way that an interest group is ambivalent about which party controls the seat, it is more likely the interest group nonetheless has an underlying preference for which party ought to control the chamber, which would then lead the group to prefer the candidate from one party over the other. However, incumbency complicates this relationship. If an interest group prefers the Democrats to the Republicans but a moderate Republican represents a certain district and votes in accordance with the interest groups preferences on key issues, then the group faces a complicated choice. While the current incumbent supports all of the policy proposals in a way that satisfies the interest group, the same representative will vote for the Republican Party when it comes to the organization of the House. What course does an interest group take under these circumstances?

While it is beyond the scope of this writing to account for all of the different variables that might affect how a group chooses a candidate, I do seek to make broad generalizations about these kinds of choices. Interest groups want to avoid being shut out of the policy process altogether. Giving money to moderate incumbent members of the “opposite” party gives these groups an entrée to that other

³ A recent former chairman of the NRCC routinely visited pro-business groups and showed them the differences in voting behavior between Democrats and Republicans to try to stem the amount and number of donations from these groups to the Democrats. Personal interview, August 2002, with Director of Congressional Affairs staffer

⁴ Personal interview, August 2002, with Director of Congressional Affairs staffer. This person preferred to remain anonymous.

party. Since the majority party in Congress is very important, particularly in the House of Representatives, most groups want to have a foot in the door to powerful members of the opposite party to at least have the ability to provide information about how certain policies might affect them. The literature on contributions calls this behavior access-oriented giving. I label donations of this type “strategic,” since they serve the purpose of helping interest groups gain access, but does not represent their sincere preference in terms of which party controls the seat. At the same time, it is important to note that these donations are going to the less-preferred party (the party this interest group would rather not see in the majority), and thus, interest groups want to minimize the electoral impact of such donations. Luckily, there is an easy way for a group to simultaneously maximize its ability to talk with powerful members of Congress, and yet minimize the electoral impact of its donations—give money only to powerful incumbent members, who are typically from safe districts. The probability of these members losing a reelection bid is very small; however, these members still need to have viable campaigns and large war chests to discourage quality challengers from running in the first place and to defeat anyone who does run against them. Furthermore, powerful members often times will redistribute money donated to their campaigns to fellow partisans. This increases their standing and power inside their own party.⁵

The difference between sincere and strategic donations centers around the electoral utility of the donations themselves. Sincere donations are given to maximize the electoral benefit to the group’s preferred candidates. Strategic donations are more oriented toward access to the opposite party; however, the donations are made to ensure access, but minimize the electoral impact. Thus, a group gives less money to its less preferred party, but even the dollars given to that party have less utility than money given to the other party. Recently, it was reported that the Carpenter’s Labor Union PAC was beginning to give more money to Republicans. “In the 2002 battle for Congress, the union is contributing nearly a half-million dollars to GOP candidates for federal offices. That is double the level of support the group offered to Republican candidates in 2000. It still is giving big to Democrats, too, but GOP donations represent a major turn in strategy.”⁶ However, buried further down in the article, the following information makes the union’s pattern of donations more clear: “While they have boosted contributions to House Republicans in general, the union has taken a pass on some of the hottest races around the country, donating to Republicans in only two of the 21 races identified as ‘toss ups’ by political analyst Stuart Rothenberg. They have donated to Democrats in 13 of those races.”

DONATIONS AND ELECTIONS

One of the cornerstones of the argument presented here is the notion that campaign contributions are fundamentally about affecting election outcomes. Donations are, for the most part, not made to buy votes or to buy access, but are used by many groups to try to bring the distribution of ideological positions in Congress closer to the ideal point of the interest group. This is not to say that access is not an important part of the donation process; however, the primary goal of donations from PACs is to influence election outcomes.

Expected Patterns

Labor groups are interested in electing Democrats. They will give most of their money to Democratic candidates. When they do support a Republican it will almost always be an incumbent. Donations to challengers to incumbents and candidates running in open seat elections will almost always be Democrats.

Corporate groups are primarily interested in electing Republicans. Most donations will go to GOP candidates and when a donation is made to a Democrat the candidate will generally be an incumbent. Support for challengers to incumbents and candidates for open seats go primarily to Republicans.

DATA

The data used here come from the detailed files from the Federal Election Commission (FEC), which collects information on candidates, PACs, and donations. Typically, three separate files for each two-year election cycle must be merged (PACs, candidates, and specific donations) so that one can connect a specific dollar amount given from a specific group to a specific candidate. For the purposes of this study I first parsed the interest group data set to include just those groups that are not explicitly affiliated with one party or the other.⁷ I excluded PACs created by individual members for the purpose of collecting money for their own campaigns, since I am interested in how interest groups make decisions on whom to give money. I also used only those groups that fell into the corporate or labor category for interest group type. I included those PACs that gave at least \$50,000 in an election cycle since I am interested in groups that make more than just a handful of donations. Next, I parsed the candidate data down to only those candidates who received a donation from the set of PACs described above. Finally, I kept only those donations to candidates made by writing a check to the campaign.⁸

⁵ This behavior could, in part, foil the purpose of the strategic donation, which is given to minimize electoral impact.

⁶ “White House, Carpenters Level Democrats’ Blue-Collar Base,” by Greg Hitt. Wall Street Journal, October 4, 2002, page A10.

⁷ Using FEC jargon I used just Non-Party Non-Qualified groups and Qualified Non-Party groups. This excludes committees that are designated for specifically the House or Senate, or affiliated explicitly with a party organization.

⁸ There are other methods of contributing to a campaign, which are excluded from the analysis. For instance, “in-kind” contributions (like

≡ TABLE 1
1989-90 LABOR AND CORPORATE DONATIONS BY PARTY AND SEAT STATUS

Candidate Status		Labor Donations		Corporate Donations	
		Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Republican
Challenger	Average	\$ 1,925	\$1,314	\$ 903	\$ 1,234
	N	2,472	57	289	2,546
Incumbent	Average	1,226	1,110	752	725
	N	15,681	1,428	18,121	16,543
Open seat	Average	1,907	2,731	748	977
	N	1,819	36	610	2,513
Totals	Average	1,374	1,156	755	814
	N	19,972	1,521	19,020	21,602

RESULTS

For each of the twelve election cycles between 1979 and 2002, I calculated the pattern of donations by labor and corporate interest groups broken down by party (Democrat and Republican) and candidate status (challenger, incumbent, or an open seat). The table entries include both the number of donations to candidates in each cell, as well as the average dollar amount of the donations. I include data from two election cycles in the body of this writing; due to space limitations, the results for other years are not included (the patterns in the omitted years did not differ substantively).

Table 1 presents the data for donations from labor and corporate related PACs to candidates for the House and Senate in the 1989-90 election cycle. Labor groups made 2,472 donations to Democratic challengers with the average donation of \$1,925. These same groups gave only 57 donations to Republican challengers with the average donation being \$1,314. Overall Labor PACs gave nearly 20 times the number of donations to Democrats as they did to Republicans (and the average donation was larger to Democratic candidates). Corporate PACs in the same election cycle act mainly in the reverse, although the total number of donations to Democrats is nearly equal to that of Republicans. But this is in 1990 when the Democrats still had a stranglehold on the House, and there is always a bias in donations favoring the majority party. Corporate groups gave nearly ten times as many donations to Republican challengers compared to challengers running as Democrats. Furthermore, the average donation to a Republican is significantly higher than those that went to Democrats (\$1,234 versus \$903).

These general patterns follow in every election cycle for which we have data. Labor groups give overwhelmingly to Democrats and when they do give to Republicans it is almost exclusively to incumbents. Corporate groups favor the GOP, although they do give more donations to Democrats than labor groups give to Republicans, but typically cor-

porate groups give less money less often to the Democrats, and concentrate most of these donations on incumbents. There have been some changes over time however.

The biggest change occurs around 1994 when the Republicans, after 40 continuous years of being in the minority, regained control of the House. Leading up to 1994, corporate groups would give more money and more donations to Republicans, but in some years they would give nearly as many donations to Democrats. Certainly nothing like the 10 to 1 or 20 to 1 ratios that labor groups had, favoring the Democrats. Naturally, this is because the GOP was in the minority and looked to perhaps be there for another 40 years. After the Republicans gained majority control of Congress, however, corporate groups began to give more overwhelmingly to their more favored party—the GOP. Table 2 contains data from the 1995-1996 election cycle. Labor groups remain faithful to the Democrats, but corporate groups clearly begin to give less money to Democratic candidates. This finding supports prior research on this subject. Rudolph (1999) finds that majority party status does matter for corporate PAC contributions, however labor PACs remain faithful to the Democrats regardless of whether or not they are in the majority. The number of donations overall now favors the GOP by more than 2 to 1 and for challengers the ratio is closer to 4 to 1 in favor of Republican candidates.

Competitive Seats

To further test the theory that corporate and labor related interest groups do have strict party preferences I can examine only those seats in Congress that were electorally competitive. Only a relatively small percentage of the total number of seats up each two years are actually interesting insofar as the winner is not apparent prior to Election Day. In competitive elections we should see an even greater distinction between these kinds of groups. When labor gives to Republicans it will not be for seats in which Democrats have a reasonable opportunity to win the seat. Rather than using election outcomes to determine which seats are competitive and which are not, I use Congressional Quarterly's ratings of

donating a computer to the campaign) or independent expenditures by a group on a campaign are examples of these other methods.

≡ TABLE 2
1995-96 LABOR AND CORPORATE DONATIONS BY PARTY AND SEAT STATUS

Candidate Status		Labor Donations		Corporate Donations	
		Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Republican
Challenger	Average	\$2,120	\$1,750	\$1,002	\$1,302
	N	6,088	8	505	1,930
Incumbent	Average	1,349	1,120	783	842
	N	13,602	2,165	13,437	30,193
Open seat	Average	2,265	1,320	1,110	1,271
	N	3,899	89	2,066	4,822
Totals	Average	1,699	1,130	832	922
	N	23,589	2,262	16,008	36,945

elections that occur prior to Election Day. Thus, these are the seats in which CQ finds no clear favorite running up to the election. Corporate groups will give to Republicans in these kinds of elections and labor groups will give to Democrats.

In the 1989-90 election cycle corporate groups gave five times as many donations to Republican candidates in competitive districts than they gave to Democrats (see Table 3). The average donation to Republican candidates was also significantly higher than those to Democratic candidates. We are least likely to see donations from corporate groups to Democratic challengers, and this is in fact the case. Only 17 donations were given by these interest groups to Democratic candidates challenging Republican incumbents. More than 700 individual donations were given to GOP challengers of Democratic incumbents.

Labor groups acted in a similar fashion only, although they favor the Democrats. They gave more than 40 times the number of donations to Democrats than to Republicans who were running in a competitive election. Further, the average size of the donation to a Democrat was \$1,849 while the few Republicans who did receive a donation from a labor group averaged on \$868.

The data for the 1995-96 election cycle are in Table 4. The patterns hold for this year as well. Corporate groups want Republicans to win and concentrate their dollars to make this happen. Namely, by helping Republican candi-

dates where they need to most help. Labor groups continue to concentrate their efforts to elect Democrats only more so for these competitive elections.

Multivariate Analysis

While the cross-tabulations presented above provide a nice foundation for our theory, we can also analyze the data in a multivariate setting. Table 5 demonstrates the results of these analyses. The first set of coefficients in Table 5 is a model of total donations from corporate PACs to all congressional candidates for the 1999-2000 election cycle. The dependent variable is the sum of all donations from corporate groups to each candidate. There are six independent variables⁹ covering the six possible types of candidates: Republicans running as incumbents, challengers, and open seat candidates; and also Democrats running as incumbents, challengers, and open seat candidates. I expect that GOP candidates will receive significantly more from corporate groups and the data support this hypothesis. Republican incumbents receive over \$180,000 on average from all corporate groups, while Democratic incumbents receive about half that much. Challengers and open seat candidates

⁹ The six categories cover each possible candidate so the regression models are run without a constant term.

≡ TABLE 3
1989-90 LABOR AND CORPORATE DONATIONS BY PARTY AND SEAT STATUS FOR COMPETITIVE SEATS

Candidate Status		Labor Donations		Corporate Donations	
		Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Republican
Challenger	Average	\$1,812	\$918	\$776	\$1,449
	N	233	11	17	736
Incumbent	Average	2,178	717	857	585
	N	175	12	143	431
Open seat	Average	1,735	1,500	693	839
	N	431	2	122	309
Totals	Average	1,849	868	781	1,094
	N	839	25	282	1,476

≡ TABLE 4
1995-96 LABOR AND CORPORATE DONATIONS BY PARTY AND SEAT STATUS FOR COMPETITIVE SEATS

Candidate Status		Labor Donations		Corporate Donations	
		Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Republican
Challenger	Average	\$2,260	\$1,000	\$998	\$1,329
	N	1,424	1	181	370
Incumbent	Average	1,582	1,303	885	880
	N	512	174	382	3,532
Open seat	Average	2,353	1,796	1,178	1,390
	N	1,122	12	336	1,561
Totals	Average	2,177	1,333	1,017	1,056
	N	3,058	187	889	5,463

uniformly receive less in donations from these interest groups, although Republican candidates, both as challengers and open seat candidates receive significantly more than Democratic candidates in the same category. In fact the coefficients for donations to Democratic challengers and open seat candidates are not statistically discernable from zero. Similarly, the patterns from the early analyses hold in the multivariate model (the right most side of Table 5). To wit, Democrats are heavily favored over Republican candidates with incumbents doing far better than open seat candidates or challengers.¹⁰ Donations to Republican challengers or open seat candidates are sufficiently rare that the coefficients are not statistically significant.

CONCLUSION

There are a multitude of reasons that can inspire an interest group to donate money to a candidate for Congress: access, geography, ideological affinity, activity on a specific piece of legislation, or partisanship, to name a few. Political scientists have examined many of these factors and access is generally regarded as among the primary reasons for hard money contributions. While not denying this proposition, the evidence presented here indicates partisanship is also a prime mover. Even groups traditionally thought of as access oriented (corporate groups) allocate their funds to maximize the electoral usefulness of funds to the party they prefer, in this case the Republicans. Labor groups are clearly more parochial than corporate PACs insofar as they direct substantially higher proportions of their money to the Democrats, nonetheless they do give money to Republicans and the lion's share of these dollars go to incumbents. It is impossible to disentangle the motivations of interest groups completely in terms of access versus electoral strategies, since if a group helps elect or reelect an MC, the group will certainly have access to that member. Nonetheless, giving money to challengers and open seat candidates clearly involves more risk (as well as an upside of greater reward) since the odds

of victory is significantly lower for these candidates than it is for incumbents.

A purely access-oriented strategy of donations implies that a group is willing and able to work with just about anyone who is in office. The evidence presented above demonstrates that both labor and corporate groups have a strong preference for which party controls the U.S. Congress. By maximizing the electoral utility of dollars given to candidates from their preferred party, both of these types of interest organizations are pursuing an underlying electoral and ideological strategy. Thinking about donations in terms of sincere versus strategic is also a useful way to further

≡ TABLE 5
MULTIVARIATE MODEL OF DONATIONS FROM CORPORATE AND LABOR GROUPS TO CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES, 1999-2000 ELECTION CYCLE

Variable	Corporate Donations	Labor Donations
Republican Incumbent	182,050.00*** (9,290.39)	16,349.06*** (5,452.52)
Democratic Incumbent	97,682.70*** (9,363.06)	132,099.10*** 5,128.89
Republican Challenger	26,235.64* (14,118.71)	2,625.00 20,462.09
Democratic Challenger	10,832.67 (14,377.79)	63,278.09*** 5,621.37
Republican Open Seat	91,521.21*** (14,746.51)	7,365.22 11,350.32
Democratic Open Seat	27,695.29 (19,289.83)	107,133.20*** 9,736.49
N	672	623
R ²	.45	.60

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The model was run without a constant so that all six categories would be listed in the table. The dependent variable is the total amount (i.e., the sum) of donations from corporate groups to each candidate in the dataset.

* p < .01, *** p < .001.

¹⁰ Similar models were run for other election cycles and the patterns were similar.

understand party motivations. Groups will give money for access to their less-preferred party, but it is done in such a way to minimize any impact on election outcomes, while sincere donations are targeted to have an effect on elections wherever possible.

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