

# Crystal Elephants and Committee Chairs

## Campaign Contributions and Leadership Races in the U.S. House of Representatives

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Researchers know very little about the quest for internal power in the U.S. House of Representatives because the leadership climb takes place largely behind closed doors. The current article attempts to shed some light on the heretofore little-known process by focusing on one aspect of this climb that actually is public: legislators' decisions to make contributions from their so-called leadership political action committees. In contrast with much of the extant literature, the data show that leadership-minded legislators carefully consider the ideological positions of potential recipients of their help when deciding how to distribute their campaign contributions. I also show that parties, when they use the right tools, can harness the ambition of leadership-minded legislators to the benefit of the party as a whole.

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Although congressional leaders are vital to the everyday administration of Congress, we know relatively little about how legislators are selected for these positions or how they run internal House campaigns for their leadership positions, largely because these campaigns are run almost entirely behind closed doors. How do legislators choose their lieutenants in leadership fights? Do they worry about the value of their potential leadership positions as well

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as their own changes of securing those positions? Despite the paucity of data on how prospective leaders navigate the leadership ladder, there is at least one publicly available clue prospective leaders leave behind: the choices they make about which colleagues to support with campaign donations from their so-called leadership political action committees (PACs), the type of PAC legislators create for the sole purpose of making donations to other legislators. To get a peek at how prospective leaders climb the leadership ladder, the current article exploits the fact that legislators are required by law to report such donations. Legislators interested in leadership positions are likely to be concerned with two questions. First, how can they maximize the probability that they will win a leadership position? And second, how can they maximize the value of the position they hope to hold? Furthermore, these two questions may have answers that point to wholly divergent contribution strategies.

With respect to maximizing the probability of winning a leadership position, legislators would likely begin by ensuring that those colleagues who are most ideologically proximate to them are firmly in their camp. Given that all legislators have equal leadership votes and given that those legislators who are ideologically predisposed to support a particular candidate will need the least amount of coaxing, potential leadership candidates with finite resources would do well to spend those resources where the candidates are most likely to reap supportive votes. To that end, leadership-minded legislators would want to support those colleagues who are ideologically closest to them.

At the same time, leadership-minded legislators are likely to be concerned about the value of the leadership positions themselves. What is the sense in working hard to secure a leadership position only to learn after taking office that the position itself has little or no value? Furthermore, leadership-minded legislators might be able to affect the value of those leadership positions in two ways. First, leaders in the majority party are far more powerful than leaders in the minority. This is because majority party leaders, from the speakership to committee chairs, have far more say regarding policy. To that end, leadership-minded legislators ought to be concerned about either keeping or maintaining the majority for their own party. And second, leaders in ideologically more homogeneous parties are more powerful than leaders in ideologically heterogeneous parties. This is because, according to the conditional party government argument (Aldrich & Rohde, 2000; Rohde, 1991), rank-and-file members of homogeneous parties are willing to cede more authority to their leaders in an effort to effect policy change more successfully. To that end, leadership-minded legislators ought to be concerned about

maximizing the homogeneity of the party and, thus, ought to support candidates close to the median voter of their party.

## What Is a Leadership PAC?

If these concerns exist among potential leaders, we should expect to see their concern reflected in the donation patterns among legislators with leadership PACs, because leadership-minded legislators almost certainly create such PACs to assist them in climbing the leadership ladder. Although there is not a large literature on leadership PACs, we know that donations tend to be focused on keeping or maintaining the majority of seats in the legislature (Currinder, 2003; Heberlig & Larson, 2005; Wilcox, 1989, 1990). At the same time, there is little evidence that ideology is a factor at all in leadership PAC contribution behavior (see Currinder, 2003, for an exception). Creating leadership PACs provides donors outside the legislature with another outlet for their contributions to those legislators who may not need the money but are most attractive to donors. Federal law limits individual contributions to a campaign to US\$1,000 per election (now increased to US\$2,000), but donors may contribute another US\$5,000 per year to a leadership PAC. (Note that the primary, the general, and any runoff election are each considered separate elections under Federal Elections Commission rules.) In other words, one donor can give US\$1,000 to a legislator's personal campaign and another US\$5,000 to that legislator's PAC. Therefore, a legislator without a leadership PAC can contribute only US\$1,000 per election to a colleague, but fronting a leadership PAC allows that same legislator to contribute US\$5,000.

The creation of leadership PACs seems to be a rational response to a reality that is clear in the literature on campaign finance: Those whose elections need money the most face the most difficulty in raising funds. Incumbents have a cash advantage over challengers at the beginning of elections, and that advantage only increases as the campaign continues (Krasno, Green, & Cowden, 1994). The number of competitive House seats has declined because fewer and fewer challengers can afford to run even a bargain-basement campaign (Abramowitz, 1991). And challengers are ill-equipped to react to an increase in incumbent fundraising (Ragsdale & Cook, 1987). Indeed, issues such as these have made campaign finance reform a lightning rod issue within the electorate and Congress itself.

This is not to say, however, that leadership PAC contributions regularly have a decisive effect on actual electoral outcomes, which is likely to be

part of the reason they have received such scant attention in the literature. On the other hand, there is little evidence that any individual type of PAC donation is decisive partly because, so often, these donations are specifically directed at races where the outcome is all but predetermined. But understanding leadership PAC donations is important because they represent the tip of the iceberg that is the jostle for leadership positions in the House. It is certain that more senior legislators have mentoring relationships with more junior members or partnerships with fellow senior legislators, and part of these relationships is about building goodwill for an eventual leadership run. But all of this activity takes place behind the scenes. Because leadership PAC contributions are readily visible, we may use them to glimpse the behind-the-scenes machinations that go into determining who will take on leadership roles in the House—a decidedly important question, but one that is otherwise unavailable for empirical study.

The study of leadership PACs is also important theoretically because it allows researchers to construct a more nuanced view of legislators' goals. Fenno (1973) claimed that legislators have three competing goals: reelection, institutional power, and good public policy. Following Mayhew (1974), students of Congress reasoned that because meeting the reelection goal was a necessary condition to meeting either one of the other two goals, researchers could simply model legislators as purely reelection seeking. Indeed, this simplification made possible a large percentage of the research that informs our current understanding of congressional behavior (see, e.g., Arnold, 1990; Fiorina, 1977; Loomis, 1988). Yet studying how legislator-sponsors make leadership PAC contributions allows researchers to observe behavior that is by definition not related to the reelection goal. Furthermore, the more developed research on traditional PACs allows us to differentiate even between behavior aimed toward gaining institutional power or toward affecting the ideological and partisan timbre of Congress.

## Theoretical Connections With Traditional PACs

Our understanding of leadership PACs can also be informed by what we already know from the relatively more developed literature on how traditional PACs operate. Indeed, scholars have paid considerable attention to the role and persistence of traditional PACs in financing congressional elections (see, e.g., Coleman & Manna, 2000; Gopoian, 1984; Gray & Lowery, 1997; Grier, Munger, & Roberts, 1994; Hojnacki & Kimball, 2001; McAdams & Johannes,

1987; McCarty & Rothenberg, 1996; Mitchell, Hansen, & Jepsen, 1997). We know, for example, that PACs make contributions strategically in an effort to affect policy outcomes (Eismeier & Pollock, 1986; Snyder, 1990; Wright, 1985) and that these strategies differ among different types of PACs (Burns, Francis, & Herrnson, 2000; Poole, Romer, & Rosenthal, 1987; Rudolph, 1999). These contributions can be influential in affecting legislators' vote choices at the state level (Gordon, 2001), but the effect is less clear among federal legislators (Grenzke, 1989). Although some legislators typically receive more PAC donations than others (Box-Steffensmeier & Grant, 1999; Romer & Snyder, 1994), national parties can provide a more efficient distribution of campaign resources (Jacobson, 1985). A similar systematic body of work explaining member-to-member giving or the behavior of leadership PACs, both alternate means of distribution of wealth among candidates, does not yet exist.

Most closely related to the current question is the concept in the extant PAC literature of Type I and Type II PAC contributions (Welch, 1980; Wright, 1985). In that literature, traditional PACs make Type I contributions in tight races, where the goal is to affect which candidates win seats. On the other hand, Type II PAC contributions go to candidates in safe seats in an effort to persuade those who already have seats in Congress to cast votes in agreement with their views on issues. These studies find that PACs behave differently based on type: Ideological PACs make contributions in tight races (Welch, 1980), and corporate PACs make contributions in safe races (Wright, 1985).

Drawing from this literature, contributions from leadership PACs can be similarly divided. Potential leaders will make Type I contributions, those meant to affect outcomes, in an effort to help their parties get or maintain a majority. Furthermore, given a potential leader's concern about maintaining party homogeneity for the sake of protecting powerful positions, these contributions will, given a scarcity of resources, be most apt to go to legislators who are most ideologically proximate to the party median. On the other hand, potential leaders will make Type II contributions, those meant to persuade sitting legislators who are expected to be safely reelected, in an effort to garner support for an eventual leadership run. Gathering support of colleagues who are most likely to remain in office for an eventual leadership run only makes sense. Persuading colleagues who then leave the House before a leadership election is wasted effort. Taken together, then, these two assertions create a unified theory of PAC contributions: Potential leaders ought to give to those colleagues who are ideologically close to the party in tight races and to those who are ideologically close to themselves in safe races.

## **A Collective Action Problem**

The two types of contributions also differ on another dimension. Making Type II contributions is a clear benefit to the potential leader making the contribution. Any attempt at persuading sitting legislators to vote for a donor in an eventual leadership run provides benefits to the particular donor doing the persuading and to that donor alone. *Ceteris paribus*, the more persuasion, the more likely a potential leader is to win an eventual leadership race. Type II contributions, thus, yield a private good to the contributor. In contrast, however, making Type I contributions yields a public good. This is true on two dimensions. First, being a member of the majority party is itself of value (Cox & Magar, 1999; Cox & McCubbins, 1993, 2005). All members of the party, even those who are not interested in leadership positions, benefit if the party maintains or acquires majority status. In addition, all those legislators who are interested in running for a powerful position get the added benefit of protecting the level of power associated with those positions because helping colleagues whose ideological proclivities closely mirror those of the party median will yield a more ideologically homogeneous party. This, in turn, means more powerful leadership positions, according to the theory of conditional party government (Aldrich & Rohde, 2000; Rohde, 1991).

But like any public good, the benefits associated with having an ideologically homogeneous party are subject to collective action problems (Olson, 1965). Indeed, the entire party benefits if leadership-minded legislators help those in danger of losing their seats, but how can the party compel those legislators to help when the benefits associated with free riding are greater? Current party leaders ought to be interested in encouraging leadership-minded colleagues to support legislators in tight races because majority status benefits the entire party. Leaders also ought to encourage leadership-minded legislators to support colleagues in tight races who are close to the party median because party homogeneity benefits current leaders even more than it benefits potential leaders.

## **Solving the Collective Action Problem**

If the unified theory of leadership PAC contributions posited here is correct, donation patterns of potential leaders ought to differ if parties differ on their ability to solve the collective action problem. Considering campaign contribution patterns within the two major parties during the 2000 election affords a quasi experiment to assess the effects of party coercion on the

ability of individual donors to overcome the collective action problem. This is because parties that year exerted, based on press accounts at the time, obviously different levels of pressure on their members. The Democrats urged party members to support candidates important to the party but provided no selective benefits, so the collective action problem remained. Furthermore, the Democrats' approach to fundraising in the 2000 election relied largely on major events for big donors outside of Congress, aimed at raising "soft money" for the party (Van Natta & Broder, 2000).

On the other hand, the Republicans' strategy relied much more on member-to-member contributions. Their Battleground 2000 effort attempted to funnel money from relatively rich candidates to their poorer, electorally weaker Republican colleagues. The program publicized giving to other legislators—top donors even receive crystal elephants for their efforts—to encourage cash-rich Republicans to share the wealth (Wegner & Earle, 2000). More important, the Republican leadership made it clear that fundraising prowess would be considered when committee chairs and other powerful positions were filled (Bolton, 2000; Foerstel, 2000), thus providing a selective benefit to those legislators who were generous with their less fortunate colleagues. Yet an understanding of how these incentives work is again limited because virtually all of the activity occurs behind closed doors. We cannot know precisely what the parties did to coerce legislators to assist particular candidates, nor can we know precisely how potential leaders responded to that pressure. But we can observe leadership PAC donations, and we can assess whether or not those donations reflect the patterns posited here.

## Hypotheses

One can easily test how potential leaders select recipients based on ideology because Poole-Rosenthal DW-Nominate scores provide ideological values both on the dimension of party cleavage and a second dimension, one that cuts across party labels.<sup>1</sup> The variable of interest is ideological distance from the recipient to both the party median position and the legislator-donor's own position. Constructing such a variable requires simply computing the absolute value of the difference between the two Poole-Rosenthal scores. Those distance variables allow the investigation of the following hypotheses.

If legislator-donors use leadership PACs to their own benefit like other groups use traditional PACs, we would expect them to behave like both Type I PACs and Type II PACs. They will contribute to competitive races in an effort to affect the future ideology of the body as a whole and will also

contribute to safe races in an attempt to secure access to legislators who are likely to remain in the body long enough to vote on future leadership elections. This implies the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Potential leaders will make contributions to candidates who have smaller ideological distances from the legislator-donor on both dimensions, regardless of how competitive races are.

Second, potential leaders will wish to reinforce their own party's majority. Donating to safe candidates does not help the party because they, presumably, will easily win their elections. In this sense, potential leaders who make contributions to help the party will behave like Type II PACs: They will contribute only in competitive races. Furthermore, the party is likely to be best served by legislators who will vote with the party median rather than vote as party mavericks.<sup>2</sup> But legislators will be able to make such donations only if the party has successfully overcome the collective action problem. Therefore, this logic implies the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* When races are competitive and parties offer selective benefits to donors, legislator-donors are more likely to make donations to candidates who have smaller ideological distances from the party on the dimension of party cleavage.

## The Data

The data consist of information on all incumbents in the 2000 election. Each observation is a dyad composed of each of the 38 Republican House leadership PACs that made donations to 10 or more incumbents in the 2000 election, paired with each of the 224 Republican members of the 106th Congress<sup>3</sup> and the 21 Democratic House leadership PACs paired with each of the 213 Democrats.<sup>4</sup> The dependent variable is either 0 if no donation was made or the amount of the donation if a donation was made.

I include donations only from leadership PACs, not donations from legislators' campaign funds or personal funds. I do this because the question of interest is the behavior of potential leaders, not of the membership in general. Those legislators who have opted to create leadership PACs are clearly either leaders already (and are potential leaders in the sense that they would like to keep their power) or have already made a decision to take a more leaderlike role in the House. There is no theoretical reason to believe that all members



of Congress are currently actively climbing the leadership ladder, thus, implying that including all members of Congress as leadership-minded legislators is not theoretically justified. Furthermore, the dyad construction of the data precludes the use of all members as potential leaders because it would result in a data set of far too many "0s." (Most legislators, after all, do not donate to most of their colleagues.) Such a dependent variable would have virtually no variance for the independent variables to explain.

Furthermore, I include only sitting members of Congress as potential recipients for much the same reason. The question of theoretical interest is how sitting legislators work with other sitting legislators in an attempt to climb the leadership ladder. Behavior toward people outside the legislature, regardless of whether they are running for office, is immaterial to this question. Also, including challengers is impossible for two theoretical reasons. First, much like the reasoning above, the resultant data set would offer virtually no variance on the dependent variable, thus, making statistical estimation impossible. Second, there are no similar ideological scores for legislators who are not currently sitting in the House. Because the hypotheses all relate to ideological positioning, challengers cannot be included.

The dependent variable is normally distributed but with both a right and a left censorship. It is censored to the left by 0 because no donor can contribute negative cash. Furthermore, it is censored to the right by 5,000, the legal limit of a contribution. Because the variable is distributed censored normal, the proper estimation procedure is Tobit. In addition, because the hypotheses make predictions about both competitive and safe races, I include dummies for both in the regression and suppress the constant.<sup>5</sup>

The variables of theoretical interest are the distances between recipients and both donors and parties. As explained above, these are measured using Poole-Rosenthal DW-Nominate scores. Furthermore, the hypotheses indicate that results will be different in safe districts as compared to competitive districts. For this reason, the distance variables are each interacted with two dichotomous variables: one coded 1 for safe districts, 0 otherwise; the other coded 1 for competitive districts, 0 otherwise. A district is considered safe if it received a safe designation by Cook's Call, an index<sup>6</sup> constructed for each congressional district by policy analyst Charles Cook.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, there are eight separate distance variables, four interacted with the safe dichotomous variable and four interacted with the competitive dichotomous variable. Within each set of four variables are two distance variables measuring proximity to the party and two measuring proximity to the donor. Within the two distance variables are one variable measuring distance on the dimension of party cleavage and one measuring distance on the second dimension. These

interactions allow for variation in the effect of ideological proximity in safe or competitive races, thus, providing a test of the hypotheses of interest. For example, the hypotheses imply a negative value for safe districts with respect to proximity to the legislator-donor but not proximity to the party. Furthermore, the hypotheses imply a negative value for competitive districts for proximity to the legislator-donor on both dimensions and party only on the dimension of party cleavage.

A proper test of the hypotheses requires controlling for several variables unrelated to ideology that also may affect the value of a donation. Several of these are dichotomous variables describing characteristics of the recipient. First, a variable on retirement is coded 1 if the recipient announced plans to retire, 0 otherwise, because we would presume that legislators who will not be running again require less cash.<sup>8</sup> Second, we might suspect that legislators hoping to make a leadership run would expect to gain support for their colleagues from the same state or region. This would be true for much the same reason legislators would be most likely to support a colleague who is ideologically most close to them. Legislators from the same area of the country might suspect that a potential leader would carry the needs of that area with him or her as he or she climbs the leadership ladder. In this sense, legislators from the same area might be more predisposed to support the potential leader anyway, thus making legislators from the same area a good bet for expending potential leaders' effort. To that end, I include two dichotomous variables describing the geographic relationship between the recipient and the donor. A variable describing the state of origin is coded 1 if the recipient is from the same state as the donor, 0 otherwise. Also, a variable describing the region of origin is coded 1 if the recipient is from the same region of the country as the donor, 0 otherwise. Third, legislators who are already members of the leadership may be less likely to be targets for help from legislators who are attempting to climb the leadership ladder themselves. To control for this, I add a series of dummy variables to account for the leadership positions of potential recipients of donations. First, a variable related to holding a committee chair is coded 1 if the recipient is a chair of a committee, 0 otherwise. Second, a variable related to holding a subcommittee chair is coded 1 if the recipient is a chair of a subcommittee, 0 otherwise. Third, a variable related to having a position on a power committee is coded 1 if the recipient has a position on Rules, Ways and Means, or Appropriations, 0 otherwise. Also, I include a variable called manager, coded 1 if the recipient was a floor manager when the House brought its impeachment of President Bill Clinton to the floor of the Senate, 0 otherwise. Media reports at the time indicate that many Republicans feared that the managers would be special targets of Democrats

angry about impeachment, thereby making them likely leadership PAC recipients. I also include a variable to account for the number of terms a legislator has served because those legislators who have been around longest are the most likely to have large campaign war chests in their own right and, therefore, would be less likely to be moved by help from a legislator attempting to climb the leadership ladder. I also control for the total amount the leadership PAC contributed during the 2000 election because a larger PAC will, *ceteris paribus*, make more and larger donations. There are other potential reasons legislators may support particular colleagues, such as support on a particular bill. Accounting for other factors, such as region and the position of the potential recipient, these other reasons are likely to be random across all potential recipients. To that end, we cannot measure them, but omitting them will not bias the results obtained here.

## Results

The most noteworthy result of the regressions is the differences between the two major parties, as the theory predicted. Those results are described below.

### Republicans

Results of the Tobit regression for Republicans appear in Table 1.<sup>9</sup> Both hypotheses are confirmed. First, Hypothesis 1 is supported because the distance between the legislator-donor and the recipient is statistically significant, in the direction hypothesized, for both competitive and safe races. As distances between the legislator-donor and the recipient become smaller, contributions become larger. Furthermore, this result is true for both the dimension of party cleavage and the second dimension. This indicates that legislator-donors use campaign contributions in a fashion similar to Type I and Type II PACs: They are attempting to affect public policy by supporting candidates in tight races who are ideologically close to themselves, and they are attempting to buy access for future leadership votes where it is cheapest—from those safe incumbents who are already ideologically proximate to them.

Also, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed because the distance between the party and the recipient is statistically significant in competitive races in the direction hypothesized. As distances between the party median voter's ideal point and the recipient become smaller, contributions become larger. This result is especially interesting because, as would be expected, this result exists only on

**Table 1**  
**Tobit With Amount of Donation as**  
**the Dependent Variable (Republican)**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Deviation
Safe seat interaction		
Dimension 1 distance from donor	-10233*	1777
Dimension 2 distance from donor	-2966*	377.6
Dimension 1 distance from party	-344.8	1725
Dimension 2 distance from party	-649.8	674.0
Competitive seat interaction		
Dimension 1 distance from donor	-5159*	1334
Dimension 2 distance from donor	-1233*	276.1
Dimension 1 distance from party	-6510*	1376
Dimension 2 distance from party	668.5	579.1
Dichotomous controls		
Retire (1 if announced retiring)	-2651*	437.0
Same state (1 if from same state)	1647*	484.7
Same region (1 if from same region)	-777.6*	248.9
Recipient is committee chair	-2196*	710.1
Recipient is subcommittee chair	-538.2	315.0
Recipient is on power committee	-403.1	260.7
Recipient was floor manager	1151*	426.8
Recipient's seat is safe	-8013*	466.6
Recipients' seat is competitive	-2867*	361.6
Other controls		
Recipient's terms in office	-187.1*	57.79
Total amount PAC gave	0.01069*	0.0006
Log likelihood	-11149	
N	8512	

Note: The constant is suppressed and dummies for safe and competitive districts are included. PAC = political action committee.

\* $p < .05$ .

the dimension of party cleavage. Therefore, the legislator-donors are supporting candidates who are likely to support the party's ideal point in tight races. Furthermore, legislator-donors appear to make such donations only on the dimension that would matter most to the party, indicating that one reason for the contributions is to curry favor with the party, likely in an effort to shore up support for future leadership or committee bids.

Substantively, the largest<sup>10</sup> of the coefficients in competitive seats is that relating donations to distance from the party. Indeed, the coefficient -6510 seems to defy the data set, which is censored at 5000. But keep in mind that Poole-Rosenthal scores vary from slightly less than -1 to slightly more

than 1, which means that all values are fractions. To better understand the coefficients in substantive terms, consider the effect of the distance-to-party coefficient on two Republican recipients. Frank Wolf of Virginia, who is only 0.001 from the party median, can expect, all other values held constant, to receive almost US\$580 more per leadership PAC than notably more liberal Constance Morella of Maryland, who is 0.09 from the party median.<sup>11</sup>

## Democrats

The results of the Democrats' equation are presented in Table 2.<sup>12</sup> They are clearly different from those reported for the Republicans. Most notable, the results indicate that ideological proximity of the recipient to the party is not related to the amount of contributions.<sup>13</sup> As expected, only one of the two hypotheses is confirmed.

First, Hypothesis 1 is clearly supported in competitive races and receives nominal support in safe races. Democrat legislator-donors give to candidates in unsafe races when those candidates are ideologically more proximate to their own ideal points. The result is true on both dimensions, although the coefficient is much larger on the dimension of party cleavage. In other words, Democratic donors are trying to change the ideological timbre of Congress by helping those candidates closest to them who also need the help most.

In safe races, signs on both coefficients are in the direction hypothesized, but only the coefficient on Dimension 2 is statistically significant. Therefore, we can be more certain that legislators-donors consider the wedge dimension than that they consider the dimension of party cleavage when they make their contributions in safe districts.

At the same time, however, there is no evidence that the Democrats' attempts to change the ideological timbre of Congress translate to shoring up the median of the Democratic Party. For this reason, Hypothesis 2 is not supported for Democrats. Indeed, the coefficient on proximity to the party on Dimension 2 in unsafe districts is statistically significant, although in a direction opposite to that hypothesized. In other words, distance further from the party on the wedge dimension translates to greater contributions for Democrats. The fact that the Democratic Party did not make efforts to provide selective benefits to those donors who help the party prevented party candidates from reaping the rewards of their more prosperous colleagues.

The results for the Democrats, then, indicate that Democrats make contributions to shore up their own ideological positions in both safe and competitive races. In contrast to their Republican counterparts, there is no evidence that Democratic legislator-donors make contributions in any effort to help their party. This is especially significant in the face of the efforts by their colleagues

**Table 2**  
**Tobit With Amount of Donation as the**  
**Dependent Variable (Democrat)**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Deviation
Safe seat interaction		
Dimension 1 distance from donor	-2691	2687
Dimension 2 distance from donor	-3115*	878.9
Dimension 1 distance from party	4366	3264
Dimension 2 distance from party	-222.5	1240
Competitive seat interaction		
Dimension 1 distance from donor	-5424*	1979
Dimension 2 distance from donor	-2715	576.0
Dimension 1 distance from party	81.02	2717
Dimension 2 distance from party	2161*	780.9
Dichotomous controls		
Retire (1 if announced retiring)	-7561*	1586
Same state (1 if from same state)	1865*	704.7
Same region (1 if from same region)	-606.8	426.3
Recipient is on power committee	-3033*	564.8
Recipient's seat is safe	-8990*	757.3
Recipient's seat is competitive	-3844*	510.7
Other controls		
Recipient's terms in office	-220.0*	52.65
Total amount PAC gave	0.009284*	0.0006987
Log likelihood	-5225	
N	4473	

Note: The constant is suppressed and dummies for safe and competitive districts are included. PAC = political action committee.

\* $p < .05$ .

on the other side of the aisle who do help their party. Republicans who are close to their party can expect financial assistance, but Democrats close to their party cannot. Most important, this result indicates that political parties can overcome collective action problems, provided that the parties provide selective benefits rather than simply relying on mere admonitions for support.

## Conclusion

The question of how legislators rise through the leadership ranks has heretofore been unanswered, largely because potential leaders leave so few

tracks behind. The current project shows that political ideology plays a key role in determining with whom potential leaders attempt to forge relationships. Specifically, potential leaders target two types of their colleagues. First, they seek out legislators who are both ideologically close to them and who are likely to remain in the House long enough to assist in a leadership bid. These colleagues form the base of support the potential leaders hope to transform into a successful leadership election. Second, however, potential leaders also target those colleagues who are at most risk of losing their seats and who are ideologically closest to their parties. This is because doing so may increase the value of any leadership positions they receive in the future. But the second type of target is subject to a collective action problem, and potential leaders will expend effort on such colleagues only if their party has successfully been able to overcome this problem.

It is impossible to know what role the Republicans' ability to overcome the collective action problem had on the election of 2000. But House Republican candidates led, on average, their Democratic opponents by a scant 1.3% of the vote (Barone, 2001, p. 21). Furthermore, if Democrats had been successful in only 10 more congressional districts, they would have secured the majority in 2000. In the current political climate, small factors can have large effects.

Indeed, this is a point not lost on the Democratic Party, which announced the creation of a program for the 2004 election, Frontline, part of their push to emulate the Republicans' efforts to funnel cash to those candidates who need it most (Billings, 2003; Bresnahan & Cillizza, 2002). If this is the case, efforts to reduce party influence by banning soft money may have been for naught. In the post-Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 world, leadership PACs may be the new medium for parties to use money to compel legislators to behave. And although the amounts of money generated may be smaller compared with larger PACs, parties control legislators' behavior on both sides of the equation. They can compel those legislators who have leadership PACs to use that money to the benefit of the party. And furthermore, they can compel those legislators who need the money most to vote with the party or face not being identified to leadership PACs as a needy candidate.

More important from a theoretical standpoint, these findings indicate that parties can indeed affect the behavior of legislators. But this strategy relies far more on carrots than on sticks. Ambitious legislators may find that helping candidates that are like them will help them gain support for a leadership race. At the same time, however, helping candidates that are like the party, at least when the proper mechanisms are in place, may be at least as

important in an era when campaign contribution lists make their way into meetings where committee and leadership assignments are determined.

## Notes

1. The second dimension is often widely viewed as “race,” or a North–South divide. See Poole and Rosenthal (1997) for more information on this feature of ideology scores.

2. Democrat Zell Miller’s recent speech at the Republican National Convention decrying the presidential candidacy of Democrat John Kerry illustrates the inconvenience parties face when their members are unfaithful.

3. Note that this implies that legislator–donors may contribute to their own campaigns. Although rare, the behavior does occur.

4. Note that the number of Republican and Democrat members of Congress does not sum to 435 because when legislators died and were replaced, both legislators are included in the data.

5. Obviously, allowing a constant and omitting one of the dummies does not change the estimated standard errors or their coefficients.

6. As reported in Barone and Ujifusa (1999). By definition, the measure is a “call” by one policy analyst. But the analyst is obviously attempting to be as correct as possible, and it is unlikely that the measure contains systematic bias that would affect the results of this study.

7. Approximately 67% of incumbents’ districts received a safe designation in the 2000 election.

8. Despite this, donations to “lame ducks” are surprisingly common.

9. Although it would be interesting to analyze each of the leadership political action committees individually, this is often not possible as the individual Tobit estimation fails to converge in more than half the cases. Those that do converge yield results similar to the aggregate results reported here.

10. In absolute value.

11. Because  $-6510 * 0.001 = -6.510$  for Wolf and  $-6510 * 0.09 = -585.9$  for Morella.

12. The committee chair, subcommittee chair, and manager variables are necessarily excluded from the Democrat regression, as Democrats were precluded from holding these positions because they were in the minority during the period in question.

13. Dummying the variables of interest by party and running Democrats and Republicans in the same regression (omitting those variables that relate to the Republican observations only) reveals a statistically significant difference between the coefficients on Democrats and those on Republicans. Although the substantive meaning of this pooled regression matches that described here, I do not report it because it suffers from omitted variable bias.

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