



Interest Groups in the Electoral Process

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context (one more polarized) has had powerful effects on the electoral goals of many interest groups. Said Bernadette Budde, senior vice president for the Business-Industry Political Action Committee, in moderating a 2002 discussion on BCRA, "There is something about the nature of the majority in the legislature or the consensus building within the parties that motivates [some interest groups] to be involved" (Breux Symposium 2002, p. 29).

More than two decades ago, Gopoian (1984, p. 262) argued, "The conventional wisdom holds that corporations are inclined towards bipartisanship in their PAC activity for a variety of reasons, including the likelihood of having to deal with a Democratic-controlled House, and the sharp ideological schism in the ranks of the Democrats which renders many conservative Democratic candidates palatable to corporation interests." Jackson (1990b) recounts the story of how Tony Coelho, former chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (and later Al Gore's campaign manager in 2000), convinced many corporate PACs in the 1980s to contribute to Democrats under the assumption of long-term Democratic control of the House. In 1988, the partisan context compelled Evans to agree: "If oil PACs had their druthers, Congress would be Republican," but they have had "to accommodate themselves to the reality of Democratic dominance of the House" (1988, p.1056).

Clearly, as noted in Chapter 2, this situation changed in the 1990s. Parties in the late 1990s grew more ideologically polarized and homogeneous, and majority control of each chamber became a primary focus of congressional elections. With such changes in the partisan context, we might expect a change in the electoral tactics of groups like the ones noted by Evans and Gopoian. Said one interview respondent: "In the Senate, 51 seats gets you the agenda. For interest groups today, it's easier [than in years past]. We're good; their bad. And to win, it's on the fringes, moving 3-4 percentage points."⁷

Some scholars have already noted the importance of changing partisan contexts in relation to interest group electoral participation. Eis-meier and Pollock (1985), for example, examine tactical shifts between the 1980 and 1982 congressional elections, noting the "election-specific partisan forces" that inspired observed disparities in spending.⁸ Cox and Magar (1999) ask, "How much is majority status worth in Congress," noting that the Republican gains of 1994 caused changes in