POWER AND CLASS CONFLICT IN CAPITALIST DEMOCRACY:
BUSINESS CONTRIBUTIONS, LABOR CONTRIBUTIONS,
AND TWO DECADES OF LEGISLATIVE INFLUENCE IN THE U.S.

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

What role do special interest groups play in governmental decision making? Social scientists have debated the role of special interests in governmental decision making for decades with little consensus. Three main competing theories emerge from these debates: state-centered theory, pluralism, and elite-power theory. In my dissertation, I directly test hypotheses derived from these theories. Using longitudinal data, I statistically analyze the influence of special interest groups on governmental decision making by examining how Political Action Committee (PAC) campaign contributions influence legislators' roll call votes over a twenty-year period in the U.S. House, 1985-2004, controlling for factors considered important in roll call voting. Converting my variables into separate legislator-by-legislator matrixes to account for similarities of legislative behavior, I employ an innovative statistical method (Quadratic Assignment Procedure, or 'QAP,' regression) that has a proven record of eliminating the problems associated with relational data.

My findings show a statistically significant impact of PAC contributions on roll call voting, net of other factors—including party. This significant impact is consistent across all twenty years. Further, the findings show that big business PAC contributions

have a significant effect on roll call voting, while labor PAC contributions are less significant, particularly in recent years. These findings support the predictions of elite-power theory but fail to support state-centered and pluralist theories. In addition to contributing to the debates among social scientists over class, power, and the role of special interest groups in governmental decision making, my research has policy-oriented implications. In particular, the findings imply that under our current campaign finance system the voices of the people could be muffled by the calls of special interests, suggesting reform may be needed.

DEDICATIONS

This is dedicated to my wife, who has supported me through this process, and to my parents, who worked hard in blue-collar jobs so I wouldn't have to.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Defined as an ideal type, democracy is a form of government in which "the people" rule (Sørensen 1998). Foremost among the various roles of democratic government in capitalism is regulating economic activity and distributing its rewards via legislation. In James Madison's words, "the regulation of…various and interfering [class] interests forms the principle task of modern legislation…" (Madison 1787). Rule of the people in legislative decision making is thus vital to ensuring that economic activity and its rewards are not controlled and owned by a mere minority of individuals; in other words, that the economic interests of the majority are represented rather than the interests of a small advantaged class. This is why it is crucially important to determine the extent to which special interest groups have an influence on legislative decision making. Special interest influence could undermine the democratic rule of the people, and, thus, jeopardize the representation of majority economic interests. This risk would be especially high in situations where a special interest group representing a small minority of the populace, in class-based terms—such as big business—exerted prolonged influence, amounting to class dominance.

Do special interest groups have a significant influence on legislative decision making? If so, do groups representing big business exert prolonged influence, dominating the process? Social scientists have debated what role, if any, outsiders play on decision-making in government for over a century. Three main competing theories of power and government have emerged from these debates—elite-power theory, pluralist theory, and state-centered theory—each of which would provide a different answer to the specific questions posed above. In simplified terms, elite-power theory would assert that special interest groups do influence decision making, and special interests representing big business dominate over the long term; pluralist theory would also contend that special interest groups influence decision making, but would argue that this influence is diffuse—groups representing one social class have no more influence over time than groups representing other classes; and state-centered theory would argue that special interest groups do not influence legislative decision making in any significant fashion.

The debates between these three theories remain unresolved to this day because much of the work in this area has focused on the question of big business unity rather than influence, and/or concentrated on specific legislative decisions rather than legislative decision making more generally. What is needed, then, is an approach that examines special interest group influence on legislative decision making over time. One way of accomplishing this would be to look at influence on legislative roll call voting—the process of voting on bills and resolutions—over a prolonged period in the U.S. House (the House is preferable over the Senate because there are 435 house members versus only 100 senate members, thus providing more individual decisions to analyze. House members generally cast over 500 roll call votes per year, creating traceable patterns of

behavior over time. And one manner in which special interest groups could influence roll call voting is through campaign contributions. Special interests groups give literally hundreds of millions of dollars to U.S. house members each election cycle.

Do campaign contributions influence legislative roll call voting? The media and the public would both likely say "yes." Associated Press reports and other journalistic pieces frequently reveal what appears to be an influence of money on votes. This then fuels suspicion and cynicism among the general public, leading many to view the system as corrupt. Summarizing results from a number of recent public opinion polls, Mayer (2001) shows that in general, the public is suspicious of the role that money plays in U.S. politics and is growing very cynical about our current campaign finance system. Occasional questionable actions of politicians in public exacerbate this perception. For instance, a house leader was recently criticized for openly inviting contributors to advise him of any interest they had in upcoming energy legislation at a fundraising event (CNN 2004), undoubtedly fueling public perceptions of corruption. Yet the empirical research on whether or not campaign contributions influence roll call voting is inconclusive.

In a comprehensive review of thirty-three studies on the topic, Baumgartner and Leech (1998) find that thirteen studies conclude contributions are highly influential in roll call voting, fourteen conclude contributions are marginal and/or limited by other variables, and six conclude contributions do not affect roll call voting. The literature on big business influence is similarly mixed. For example, while Ashford (1986) finds big business contributions have a significant affect on legislative roll call voting on business issues, Neustadtl (1990) finds evidence to the contrary. But all of the above studies have at least one of two serious limitations that may account for the variation in their findings:

they examine only a subset of roll call votes, which could detrimentally limit the field of examination, biasing the results, or they fail to explicitly take into account the social context of voting. Additionally, establishing causality has proven difficult.

In this study, I correct for the limitations of the studies above in examining whether or not special interest groups influence legislative roll call voting. I first determine the general relationship, if any, between special interest groups on roll call voting. I next address the causality question in this relationship. I then proceed to determine the degree to which class-based groups exert influence, thereby helping resolve the debates between the theories of power and government outlined above. To balance my analysis, I examine the influence of groups representing big business *and* groups representing opposed class interests—labor. Specifically, I examine how big business and labor political action committee (PAC) campaign contributions to house members influence the similarity in the way those members vote on bills, examining all possible dyadic combinations of members and all the bills they voted on during a twenty-year period in the U.S. House, 1985-2004. Examining all the bills reduces the risk of bias; examining dyads of legislators helps take into account the social context of voting. So joining this with the initial discussion that began this chapter, in the study that follows I seek to (1) establish whether or not there is a general influence of class-based special interest groups on patterns of legislative decision making, and (2) determine the degree to which class-based groups (focusing on big business, but including labor to provide balance) exert influence over a prolonged period of time, resulting in a class dominance and potentially jeopardizing majority economic interests. Before proceeding, I briefly present justification for the general approach I use in this study, which I hope will help

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answer the potential concerns of readers and better establish the paradigmatic and theoretical foundations of my work. Justification for specific analytic strategies will follow later.

Why Class?

One may be tempted to ask why I place such an emphasis on *class*-based special interest groups in this study. Sometimes when we think of special interest groups in politics, we envision issue-based groups organized around various contested rights, such as abortion rights or the right to bear arms. While such groups are important—and the debates they engage in around those contested rights are often heated—they represent only those individuals who are truly passionate about a position on a specific issue. Class-based groups, however, represent groups—or literally classes—of people on the most fundamental concerns in capitalism and the foremost subjects of legislation: economic activity and the distribution of its rewards. Economic activity is the machinery of the capitalist system; and its rewards are the materials of our subsistence—without these rewards, we would not survive. Economic activity and its rewards are therefore at the core of many power struggles in society. This is one of the central notions in the conflict perspective in sociology, the paradigm from which this study emerges.

The conflict perspective sees society as the venue for power struggles. One of the pivotal struggles in the conflict perspective is that which occurs between classes over economic activity and its rewards. But why are classes so important? Popular discourse around class in the U.S. suggests that the only "classes" in our society are rather arbitrary, income-based groupings of people into "upper," "middle," and "lower" classes, or some variation thereof (see Figure 1.1). These classes have little consequence for social
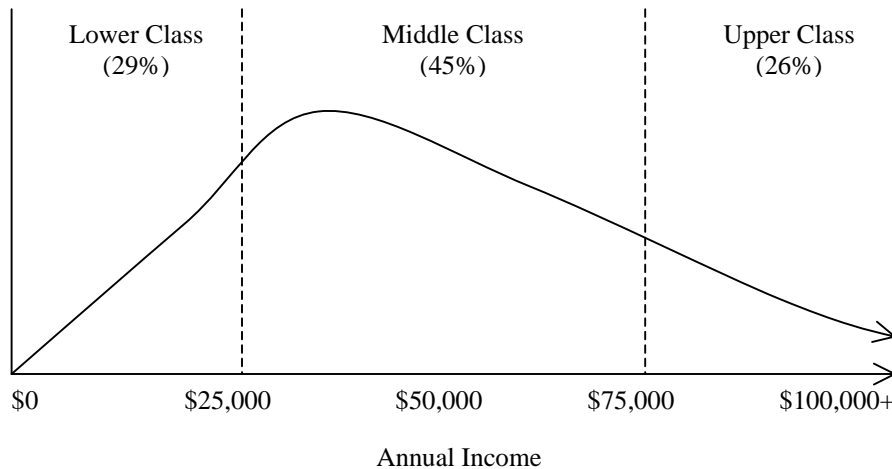
Figure 1.1: Income-Based Class Conceptualization Popular in U.S. Discourse (Percentages in each Class Calculated using 2003 U.S. Census Income Data).

relations in society, let alone social conflict. It is difficult to envision conflict emerging between, for instance, the upper class and the lower class, because they do not have opposing interests; they just happen to exist in different places on an income distribution. This is where sociological conceptualizations of class rooted in the conflict perspective become theoretically and empirically useful.

Sociological conceptualizations of class rooted in the conflict perspective view income as a correlate or byproduct of class position, not a determinant. Instead, role in economic activity—specifically the means of production—is the determinant of class position. From this perspective, the most important class divide is between those who own the means of production and those who do not; and the greatest distance between classes exists between big business and labor (see Figure 1.2). Of course, there is a sizable gray area between big business and labor made up of those who own a share of the means of production via stock ownership, or those who have a degree of authority

Does not Own the Means of Production	Has Some Ownership of, or Authority over, the Means of Production (Contradictory Class Locations)			Owns the Means of Production
Labor (40%)	Expert (16%)	Supervisory (29%)	Small Business (13%)	Big Business (2%)

Figure 1.2: Class Conceptualization Based on Role in the Means of Production (Percentages in each Class Based on E. Wright's 1985 Study of Classes in the U.S.).

over the means of production via management positions. Those falling in this gray area could be viewed as members of "contradictory class locations" (E. Wright 1985) because of their contradictory roles in economic activity. But the reason why big business and labor are so important is because they have opposing interests stemming from their very different relationships to the means of production.

Because big business owns the means of production, labor is forced to sell its productive capacity to big business for a wage, while big business profits by paying labor a wage less than the value of labor's productive capacity. Put differently, big business' profits come largely from the surplus of labor's productive value—a notion originating in the writings of Locke and appearing most vividly in the work of Marx, sometimes referred as the "labor theory of value" or the "surplus value theory of labor." Thus, from this perspective, the objective interests of big business and labor in terms of the rewards of economic activity are diametrically opposed—big business earns more income when labor is paid less, while labor earns more income when big business reaps a smaller surplus of labor's productive value. This is the key distinction between this conceptualization of class and the conceptualization noted earlier ('upper,' 'middle,' 'lower'). Because in this conceptualization the income of one class rises as the income of

the other group falls, class interests truly are opposed. It is from these divergent interests that conflict between big business and labor emerges.

The most direct conflict between big business and labor occurs at the site(s) of production—the farms, factories, or offices where production takes place. Strikes, lockouts, and other forms of workplace unrest are examples of this. But the site of production is merely one arena of conflict. Arguably, some of the most important power struggles between big business and labor may occur in the political arena, particularly in the legislature where laws are made. This makes sense when considering the importance of this arena. The rules that govern production (and, thus, economic activity and its rewards) are decided upon in the political arena; tax codes, labor laws, trade policies, and countless other regulations affecting production are debated and enacted in the legislature. It is no wonder organizations representing big business and labor in the political arena invest vast resources in attempts to influence legislators and their decisions. Perhaps the most glaring example of this is PAC campaign contributions. Business and labor give large sums of money to legislators via PACs (see Table 1.1).

As Table 1.1 shows, big business and labor PACs contribute tremendous sums of money to house members—combined, they tend contribute more than one hundred million dollars in present house races. What makes this especially impressive is that these staggering figures include only PAC contributions to the winning candidates. When adding contributions to losing house candidates, these numbers rise significantly (and, of course, this is not even counting contributions to senatorial candidates, not to mention state-level legislative candidates or candidates for executive offices). What is interesting about these numbers is not just the sheer sum of money contributed by these class-based

Year(s)	Big Business	%	Labor	%	Combined	%	All PAC $
1983-1984	$20,782,627	26.6%	$21,119,040	27.0%	$41,901,667	53.7%	$78,081,277
1985-1986	$24,434,055	28.9%	$21,499,296	25.5%	$45,933,351	54.4%	$84,512,263
1987-1988	$29,377,560	29.8%	$26,043,028	26.5%	$55,420,588	56.3%	$98,480,414
1989-1990	$32,358,885	31.6%	$28,998,854	28.3%	$61,357,739	59.9%	$102,274,201
1991-1992	$35,186,488	31.6%	$26,936,047	24.1%	$62,122,535	55.7%	$111,469,933
1993-1994	$36,900,907	32.2%	$27,716,154	24.1%	$64,617,061	56.3%	$114,756,457
1995-1996	$46,131,568	32.7%	$36,080,310	25.5%	$82,211,878	58.2%	$141,266,237
1997-1998	$46,403,697	30.2%	$39,192,048	25.5%	$85,595,745	55.7%	$153,671,895
1999-2000	$58,849,301	31.7%	$42,708,898	23.0%	$101,558,199	54.7%	$185,630,513
2001-2002	$65,199,345	32.5%	$48,061,597	23.9%	$113,260,942	56.4%	$200,689,619

Table 1.1: Sums of Big Business and Labor PAC Contributions in Actual Dollars to Winning U.S. House Candidates, and Percent Equivalent of All PAC Money, 1983-2002 (Sums Based on Data Obtained from the Federal Election Commission, or FEC).

groups, but, also, that their contributions account for the majority of all PAC contributions to winning house candidates in each and every election cycle. In other words, big business and labor contribute more money than all the other PACs combined, which includes a vast array of issue-based groups such as professional organizations, voluntary associations, etc. Also interesting to note is the fact that big business contributes such a high percentage of all the money given when, in actual numbers, they represent merely two percent of the U.S. population (E. Wright 1985). Class-based special interest groups thus lead the pack in PAC campaign contributions, and big business and labor, in particular, are the most important contributors. This highlights the reality that big business and labor engage in power struggles in the political sphere, and

underscores the necessity of studying these two groups (particularly big business given its disproportionately high contributing).

Why Influence?

One may be tempted to ask why I focus on the general *influence* of big business on legislative decision making in this study as opposed to other potential indicators of big business political success, such as policy outcomes beneficial to big business over time, or simply big business getting what it desires on bills. Part of the answer to this question lies in the theoretical foundations of this study. This is a study of power, rooted in the long-standing theorizing in sociology on power structure. In this venerable work, power is conceived of as influence between social actors. While getting what is desired and benefiting from it over time are both presumably byproducts of this influence, influence between social actors is the essential avenue through which these desires and benefits are realized (Blau 1964), and, thus, should be the true core of inquiry in a study of power. This is apparent in the earliest theoretical formulations of power forwarded by scholars such as Simmel (1955), Weber (1947, 1968), and Marx (1843), all of whom wrote about power as firstly a form of relational influence. This is also apparent in more contemporary theoretical elucidations of power.

In his seminal work on power, Lukes (1974) refers to power as existing on multiple dimensions; and within each of these dimensions, power is, at its crux, a matter of relational influence. For instance, decisional power (first-dimensional power) involves A directly influencing B in an exchange to do what B would not otherwise do. Structural power (second-dimensional power) involves A either directly or indirectly influencing B's status in an exchange (or even B's ability to participate in the exchange) via rule-

making privileges. With structural power, then, when A is not the maker of the rules, A needs to influence those making the rules to influence B's status or participation. This is a case of dual influence that involves exercising decisional power over those who wield structural power by virtue of their rule-making position in society. The parallels between this hypothetical example and the subject of this study—the influence of big business on legislators and their decisions on bills—are clear.

There could still be some understandable concern, though, about my focus on general influence rather than other indicators of political success—big business getting what it desires, for instance. In the approach I use in this study, I am technically unable to determine whether or not big business gets legislators to decide in their favor on bills—I can only show that big business influences their decision making in a general sense. Put differently, I am unable to determine whether or not big business gets what it wants, only that big business has influence. One could view this as problematic because it is at least possible to imagine a scenario where big business (or any other special interest, for that matter) could influence a legislator to make decisions counter to the group's wishes. For instance, if a legislator grows to dislike a particular big business after a number of interactions, it is possible the legislator could make a decision on a bill that is in the opposite interest of that business. But from a logical standpoint, this sort of scenario would arise rarely compared with situations in which interactions would result in decisions in favor of the business, particularly since some interactions would involve the giving of campaign contributions—the lifeblood of a politician—for which there could in theory be favors given in return. Even more importantly, from an empirical standpoint,

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determining the wants of any special interest group on specific pieces of legislation is shaky—particularly the wants of class-based groups such as big business.

Unlike issue-based special interest groups that make their wishes on specific bills very clear via public statements of their positions, class-based groups are typically more discreet. Labor sometimes makes their positions known via union press conferences or publications; big business does so less frequently. This renders empirically determining the interests of big business (and labor) on most bills difficult, if not impossible. To do so would require one of two things: surmising the interests of big business or labor from the textual content of bills, or limiting the scope of analysis to only those bills in which big business or labor have expressed a clear position.

The problem with surmising the interests of big business or labor from the textual content of bills is that it introduces room for researcher error. On many bills, inferring the interests of business or labor would be a precarious activity, amounting to little more than guessing. With these bills, it is not immediately evident what interest big business or labor may have in them. Moreover, even if their interests seem somewhat evident, there are undoubtedly occasional instances in which some big businesses would seem likely to be for a bill while other businesses would seem likely to be against it (same for labor groups), or even rare instances in which big business and labor would both seem likely to have the same stance, complicating things further. Surmising the interests of big business or labor therefore requires making questionable judgments, at best, and may require making awkward (or even illogical) choices when big business and labor interests diverge or intersect in unusual ways.

I already addressed the problem with limiting the scope of analysis to only select bills earlier when discussing the limitations of the literature on campaign contributions and roll call voting. Limiting the scope of analysis to just a selection of bills introduces the potential of bias in the results. Including all bills in analysis is a much more empirically sound approach to testing the relationship between campaign contributions and roll call voting. Furthermore, some research in this area suggests that more visible bills—bills big business or labor are presumably more likely to express positions on—are the very bills in which influence is more difficult to uncover (Jones and Keiser 1987), likely because these bills require that legislators follow the party line or listen to constituent interests rather than special interests (Neustadtl 1990). So interestingly, limiting the scope of analysis and focusing on the bills that seem most relevant could actually conceal the degree of influence that is actually taking place. Focusing on select bills is therefore problematic, indeed.

The preceding arguments underscore the importance of studying the general influence of big business on legislative decision making as opposed to attempting to examine whether or not business gets what it (seemingly) desires. One could still argue, however, that a better approach would be examining whether or not big business accumulates benefits over time via policy outcomes. But it is worthwhile to keep in mind that every decision and subsequent social action has consequences—some anticipated, others unanticipated; some intended, others unintended (Merton 1936). Certain decisions and actions that seem advantageous may prove disadvantageous, the result of imperfect and/or incomplete information and the consequent fallibility of so-called "rational" decision making. This is particularly true in the realm of social policy, where this reality

is sometimes referred to as the "law of unintended consequences." What may seem like a beneficial policy at one point in time to a particular big business—or even big business as a whole—may not prove beneficial in its outcome, particularly at a later point after the policy is implemented. For instance, policy mandating that the minimum wage be kept low may seem beneficial to big business, but in the long term such a policy could result in a stagnation of the standard of living among labor sufficient enough to lessen consumerism, reducing profits and slowing economic activity. Examining policy outcomes for big business could thus produce biased results because of the confounding effect of unintended consequences. Examining the general influence of big business on legislative decision making prevents such bias.

What is to Come?

So in the chapters that follow is a study, rooted in the conflict perspective in sociology and the theorizing around power structure, of big business power—and class conflict between big business and labor—in U.S. politics. This study focuses on the general influence of these class-based groups on legislative decision making over a twenty-year period in the U.S. House. Each specific chapter, then, provides a specific key component of this study in a cumulative sense, revealing very interesting patterns of influence and presenting an increasingly clear picture of big business power and class conflict in U.S. politics. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on power and government mentioned earlier, expounding the ideas of elite-power theory, pluralist theory, and state-centered theory. Chapter 3 gives background information on the U.S. campaign finance system and addresses the issue of campaign contributions and legislative roll call voting, examining more closely the prior work in this area. Chapter 4

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discusses the analytic strategy used in this study versus other strategies, and derives testable hypotheses from the theories discussed in earlier chapters. Chapter 5 describes the data, variables, and statistical methods used in this study. Chapter 6 introduces results based on analyses of the effects of PAC contributions, in general, on legislative roll call voting in U.S. House and addresses concerns surrounding causality in these results. Chapter 7 presents results on the effects of big business and labor PAC contributions, specifically, giving a better sense of patterns of big business and labor influence on legislative decision making. Chapter 8, then, discusses the findings of the study in a broad perspective and provides concluding statements regarding big business power and class conflict in U.S. politics.

CHAPTER 2

THREE THEORIES OF POWER AND GOVERNMENT

As I noted in chapter one, the debates among social scientists regarding what role

outsiders play on decision making in government go back over a century, with three main

competing theories emerging from these debates—elite-power theory, pluralist theory,

and state-centered theory.[1] To avoid inviting criticism, I should be clear that these three

theories are broad groupings that encompass diverse perspectives within. For instance,

each of these three main theories contain both "traditional" hard versions of their

constituent arguments and "soft" versions of their arguments, which I will address in

some detail later in this chapter. But I feel that subdividing these theories into additional,

distinct "sub-theories" would serve little, if any, intellectual purpose, and could even

obscure the main arguments of the theories by diving too deeply into taxonomy. The

primary purpose of this chapter is *not* to precisely categorize ideas and the individuals

responsible for them, but, instead, is to provide the reader a general understanding of the

main theoretical ideas regarding power and government. To that end, in the following

paragraphs, I present the three theories above in a chronological fashion (see Figure 2.1),

discussing how each emerged and how they are related to one another. Next, I discuss in

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[1] There are other theories of power and government, but these three, in particular, are most pertinent here.

more detail the problems with the theories (particularly in their 'soft' forms), the debates between the theories, and why these debates remain unresolved to this day. I conclude by proposing a different approach to answering the questions raised by these theories that, in my view, will help finally resolve the debates over power and government.

Elite-Power Theory (Traditional)

Hunter   Mills   Poulantzas   *"Soft" Elite-Power Theory*

Pluralist Theory (Traditional)

Polsby   Dahl   Burstein   *"Soft" Pluralist Theory*

State-Centered Theory (Traditional)

Block   Skocpol Amenta   *"Soft" State-Centered Theory*

| 1950s | 1960s | 1970s | 1980s | 1990s | 2000s |
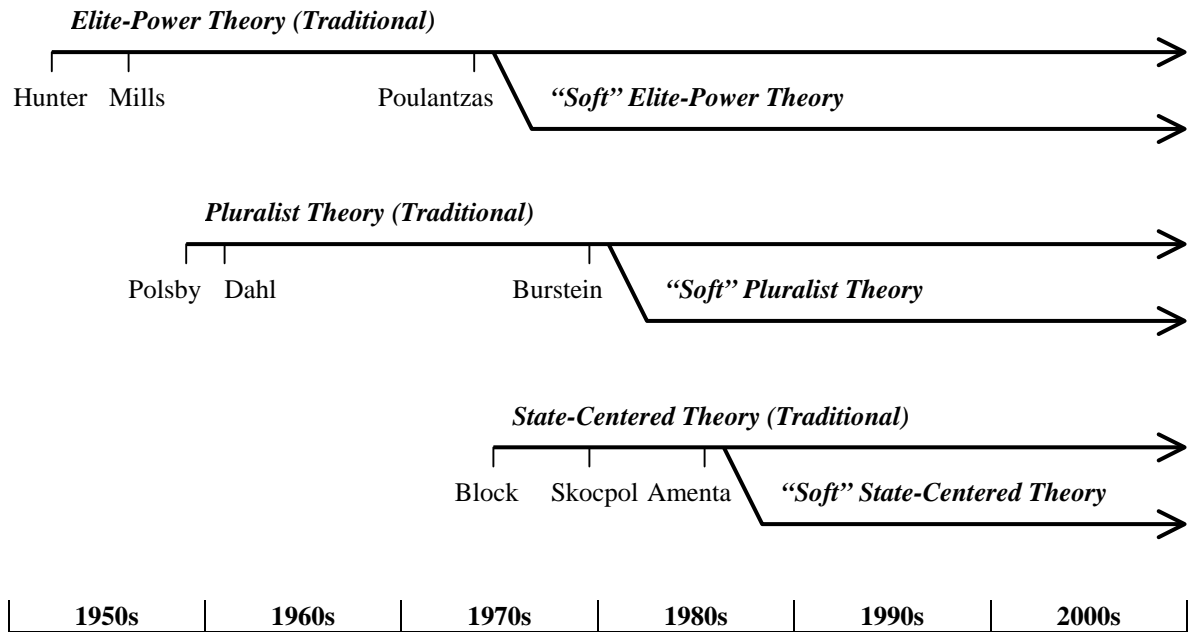
Figure 2.1: Chronological Depiction of Elite-Power, Pluralist, and State-Centered Theories in their Traditional and "Soft" Forms, Mid-Twentieth Century – Present.

Elite-Power Theory

Elite-power theory argues that big business dominates the government. It contends that while special interest groups and other actors in society attempting to influence the government are diverse, groups within the same realm of general class interest (big business, in particular) rarely compete with one another and often act in ways that promote their class-wide interests. It has its origins in Marx's writings

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concerning the role of the government in ensuring the success of big business. He famously claimed, along with Engels, that big business enjoys "exclusive political sway," and that members of the government are "a committee for managing the common affairs of [big business]" (Marx and Engels 1848). Even earlier than this, Marx (1843) referred to the legislature as a "sanctioned, legal lie" because, in his view, the legislature exists solely to serve the interests of big business and provide the legal basis for the exploitation of labor despite its claims to serve the interests of the majority.

Hunter and Mills extended the ideas of elite-power theory in the U.S. on the community and national levels, respectively, in the mid-twentieth century. While neither claimed direct lineage to Marx—in fact, both framed their individual studies as, in part, responses to Marx's claims (Domhoff 1990)—their work fits well in the tradition Marx's work began. Hunter's (1953) study on community power structure in Atlanta, GA showed that those in community decision-making posts are either members of the big business class or are connected to big business via relational networks. He thus argued that big business dominates community decision making. His book served as a very important foundation for future elite-power work on networks of community influence and decision making (e.g. Laumann, Marsden, and Galaskiewitz 1977; Laumann and Pappi 1976), and spurred considerable backlash among pluralist theorists, which I will address shortly. Mills's (1956) well-known study showed that on the national level in the U.S., there is a relatively small number of interconnected people who reside at the top levels of the economic, political, and other institutions that make the rules. Mills showed that big business (or the 'corporate rich,' as Mills referred to them) overlaps significantly with those at the top of the political arena, presumably leading to influence over political

decision making. Mills's book has remained a popular mainstay in sociology to this day, and has helped spawn other impressive works on national power structure in the U.S., the most notable of which are a series of books by Domhoff (1967, 1983, 1998, 2002) addressing the question, "Who rules America?" and answering, after detailed analyses, "Big business does."

The research highlighted above shows that elite-power theory has traditionally argued, at least implicitly, that big business exercises direct influence over governmental decision making. More recent works in this camp, though, have begun to question this traditional version of elite-power theory. Coming out of an argument by Poulantzas (1974) for a more structural view, these more recent works provide a softer version of elite-power theory. Essentially, this "soft" version contends that big business appears to dominate governmental decision making because of the apparent political victories they accrue over time from beneficial policy outcomes, but that this appearance is deceiving. In reality, they argue, big business "dominates" not because they have any significant direct influence on governmental decision making, but, instead, because the structure of capitalist society necessitates that the government create a legal and social environment conducive to the success of big business. So, if members of the government make decisions that favor big business, it is not necessarily because big business influences them to do so—it may simply be because they decide in ways that are good for the maintenance of the capitalist economy, in general. The emergence of this soft version of elite-power theory has led to considerable debate within the elite-power camp, and both traditional and soft versions of the theory are present in contemporary work on power and government.

Pluralist Theory

Pluralist theory contends that no single bloc of interests dominates the government. Pluralist theory views the government as a "neutral arena open to societal influence" (Gilbert and Howe 1991:205). It also argues that the interest groups and other actors in society attempting to influence government are diverse, often with competing interests. Pluralist theory therefore contends that no one bloc of these groups (for instance, big business) should be able exert more influence on governmental decision making than other blocs—in other words, the majority enjoys political influence. Pluralist theory thus has ideological roots in ideal conceptions of representative democracy in which the people rule. Academically speaking, though, pluralism did not emerge as a major theoretically informed body of research until after elite-power theory's challenges to ideal conceptions of democracy in the mid-twentieth century.

Some of the most significant works in pluralism were direct responses to the elite-power works of Hunter and Mills. The best known of these are probably Polsby's targeted arguments against elite-power theory and its approach to studying power, and Dahl's oft-cited book on community power in New Haven, CT. Polsby (1960) attacked elite power theory for approaching the issue of power and government from what he viewed as a biased assumption that an elite few rule. Polsby argued that most elite-power theory approaches studies of power and government with the question "Who rules?" rather than "Does anyone rule?" He then argued that this initial question sets the stage for finding that an elite group of select individuals (big business) rules because it is built on this very assumption. In this argument against elite-power theory, then, he was directly criticizing the approaches of Hunter and Mills, both of whom began with questions of

who rules. Dahl (1961) attacked elite-power theory based on the findings of a study he conducted on community power structure in New Haven. Its findings were very different from Hunter's findings on Atlanta. In Dahl's study, he found that a vast array of groups held some political sway in the community, and that decisions affecting the community were not dominated strictly by big business. Dahl's work therefore runs in direct contradiction to Hunter's work, raising question about the degree to which big business actually dominates political decision making, at least at the community level.

In recent years, there has been a movement within pluralist theory toward focusing on the general public as an agent of influence on the government rather than focusing on special interest groups. Burstein's work is probably the most representative—at least in sociology—of this focus on the public. Burstein (1998) argues that public opinion has a significant effect on governmental decision making, and that studies of power and government should "bring the public back in." In the process, he downplays the role of special interest groups. For instance, in a recent article in *Contexts*, the non-academic "popular" magazine of the American Sociological Association (ASA), Burstein (2003) argues that campaign contributions do not matter much in legislative decision making relative to public opinion. Political scientists involved in this new movement log similar arguments, but they tend to emphasize the role of elections and constituents' interests as the main forces of influence. So this new "soft" pluralism, while maintaining that a vast plurality of actors influence governmental decision making, focuses on the public and downplays the role of special interest groups. Of course, there are still those more traditional pluralists who acknowledge the potential role of interest

groups, but now pluralist theory encapsulates both the more traditional view and the new, soft version.

State-Centered Theory

State-centered theory argues that state actors rule. It emphasizes the primacy of individuals within the state in governmental decision making, contending that the state is "autonomous," generally impervious (or unresponsive) to outsiders such as special interest groups. As Akard (1992) notes, state-centered theory rejects "all theories that…explain state policies with reference to economic or other 'societal level' phenomena" (p. 598). It therefore rejects both elite-power and pluralist theories (Gilbert and Howe 1991). In large part, it arose as an alternative view of power and government in response to the debates in the mid-twentieth century between elite-power theory and pluralist theory. Specifically, though, it grew out of the move toward a more structural view within elite-power theory.

After Poulantzas published his critique of traditional elite-power theory, U.S. sociologists took the argument a step further, focusing on the state. While a structural Marxist at the time, Block was in many regards the most instrumental early figure in this movement. Block (1977) argued, just as Poulantzas did, but in very memorable terms, that "the ruling class does not rule"—in other words, state actors make decisions that favor big business independent of any big business influence. He took the argument a step further, though, arguing that the reason why state actors decide in the favor of big business is primarily for self-preservation. In other words, members of the government decide firstly in ways that protect their own interests—it just so happens that often those interests correspond with the interests of big business. In those occasional instances in

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which those interests do not correspond (for instance, when their own popularity is at stake, or a popular uprising seems eminent), these "relatively autonomous" state leaders will decide against big business. Soon after Block's depiction of state actors as relatively autonomous, this burgeoning line of theorizing took off, becoming more resolute in its claims about the exclusive power of governmental bodies and their members.

Skocpol was a pivotal figure in the solidification of true state-*centered* theory. She argued that governmental decision making can be explained almost entirely as a function of the independent influences of transnational governmental relations, internal governmental structure, past decision making patterns, political parties, and, of course, the calculations of governmental actors themselves (Skocpol 1980). Interestingly, though, despite her initial hard line, she soon relaxed her claims to a degree, helping create a "soft" form of contemporary state-centered theory with her then student, Amenta. This softer version of state-centered theory cedes that outsiders may sometimes influence governmental decision making. For instance, Amenta and Carruthers (1988) argue that "middle class" social movement organizations played a role in the formulation and passage of old-aged policy. But this softer form of state-centered theory maintains that big business plays little, if any, significant role in governmental decision making. For instance, work in this area argues strongly that big business had little or nothing to do with the social policies of the New Deal (Amenta and Parikh 1989; Skocpol and Amenta 1985). So state-centered theory has undergone fairly rapid change since its inception— even to some degree in the same individual's work—but at its core its primary focus is still the state, even if it now grants in its soft form that *some* outside actors (mainly middle class groups) may have an influence on governmental decision making.

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Problems with the Theories

The primary problem with these theories is that they have all become too fluid and watered down in their "soft" versions, essentially becoming ineffectual in their ability to explain the workings of power in government. Granted, social science theories need to be more flexible and generalized than theories in the physical or natural sciences. Human behavior is less predictable than the behavior of the physical universe/world, or even the behavior of other living beings, because humans are social beings with unique traits: consciousness and agency. In other words, humans are more or less aware of their social and physical surroundings and are able, despite various structural constraints, to make calculated decisions based on that awareness, complicating the task of predicting our behavior. This is why social science theories tend to make far more general statements than theories in the physical or natural sciences, and tend not to be viewed as absolute truths the way theories in these other sciences are. Yet social science theories still need to (1) *explain* social phenomena and (2) exhibit a level of *falsifiability* to maintain their utility and warrant being called "theories," particularly in the face of opposing theories. I argue here that the soft forms of the theories of power and government have failed in this regard.

As the descriptions of the theories in the preceding paragraphs and Figure 2.1 show, all three of these theories began as hard, distinct explanations of the workings of power in government. With time, though, these theories generated softer forms. Basically, as researchers in these areas found what appeared to be situations that did not quite conform to the expectations of their respective theories, they adjusted the theories to better explain what these new findings. Of course, one could argue that this is merely part

of the normal process of accumulation of scientific knowledge and the subsequent

evolution of explanation: as new evidence emerges that does not fit perfectly with the

claims of a given theory (but does not necessarily counter its core claims), the theory

should be revised to accommodate this new evidence. But at what point does

accommodation undermine *explanation*? As accommodation carries a theory further and

further away from its core claims, the theory may eventually lose its ability to

distinctively explain what it seeks to explain. Put differently, the theory may become

overly broad and become virtually indistinguishable from competing theories. This is

exactly what has happened with the soft versions of the theories of power and

government (see Figure 2.2).

		Do Special Interest Groups have a Direct Influence on Governmental Decision Making?	Does Big Business have a Dominant, Direct Influence on Governmental Decision Making?
Elite-Power Theory:	Traditional	Most of the Time	Most of the Time
	Soft	Sometimes	Almost Never
Pluralist Theory:	Traditional	Most of the Time	Almost Never
	Soft	Sometimes	Almost Never
State-Centered Theory:	Traditional	Almost Never	Almost Never
	Soft	Sometimes	Almost Never

Figure 2.2: Chart Depicting the Answers of Traditional and Soft Versions of Elite-Power, Pluralist, and State-Centered Theories to Two Key Questions Regarding the Role of Special Interest Groups in Governmental Decision Making.

Figure 2.2 shows that the traditional versions of elite-power, pluralist, and state-centered theories provide distinct sets of answers to the two key questions posed regarding special interest groups and governmental decision making. For instance, traditional elite-power and pluralist theories agree that special interests influence governmental decision making, but they disagree strongly on the issue of whether or not big business dominates this influence—elite-power theory answers, "almost always," while pluralist theory responds, "almost never." This difference clearly distinguishes them from one another as explanations. Traditional state-centered theory is distinct in its own right, then, as it enters the debate arguing against both traditional elite-power and traditional pluralist theories on whether or not special interest groups influence governmental decision making at all, countering their answers with, "almost never." But the soft versions of these theories are quite broad in some instances and are virtually indistinguishable in the answers they provide to these key questions.

As shown in Figure 2.2, the soft versions of the theories provide basically the same answers. Certainly, these soft theories may arrive at their answers from different lines of reasoning, but their answers are almost identical in the end. Take the question of whether or not special interest groups, in general, have influence on governmental decision making. While the nuances of their explanations differ in some regards, all three theories ultimately provide the broad, ambiguous answer, "sometimes." Soft elite power theory argues that while the government is structured in the interest of maintaining the capitalist system, special interest groups may occasionally influence its decision making (but not big business—big business does not need to since most governmental decisions support their interests in the first place); pluralist theory argues that the general public

may be more important than special interest groups, but special interests groups may sometimes have influence nonetheless (especially those in the 'middle'); and state-centered theory argues similarly that special interest groups (middle class groups in particular) may occasionally have an influence on governmental decision making. On the question of whether or not big business dominates this influence in a direct fashion, all three respond, "almost never." Again, they may arrive at this answer differently (although, as my discussion of the link between soft elite-power theory and state-centered theories earlier reveals, these two follow a similar logic), but they ultimately come to the same general conclusion.

The fact that the soft versions of these theories are broad and virtually indistinguishable creates a major dilemma in addition to the problem of deficient explanation—it renders them *unfalsifiable*. This means that most research findings on power and government could be used to back the claims of any one of these three soft theories. From the perspective of those wedded to a specific theory, this is quite convenient—any findings can be construed as "support" for their theory. From the perspective of social science, though, this is disastrous. In this situation, explanations of power and government cannot advance; knowledge of power and government cannot progress. This is precisely what has happened. The debates between elite-power, pluralist, and state-centered theories have entered into gridlock, and new work in this area is growing sparse because of this. Since the soft versions of these theories fail to distinctively explain much and cannot be falsified, they have little or no utility aside from impeding the progress of work on power and government. I will therefore focus on the traditional, hard versions of these theories in this study. But even from the perspective of

the traditional versions of these theories, the debates remain unresolved because of research differences.

Why the Debates are Unresolved

The debate between elite-power theory and pluralist theory is unanswered in part because researchers in these camps have focused on different questions. Elite-power research has focused lately on the question of big business unity rather than big business influence on governmental decision making. Granted, the question of unity is important—traditional pluralist theory argues that big business cannot unify since it encompasses widely divergent interests (for instance, interests based on different sectors of the economy) while elite-power theory argues that it can. Most research on this question supports the notion that big business unity can and does occur (Roscigno 1992). Even on a key element in this study—campaign contributions—research suggests big business is fairly unified. For instance, Mizruchi (1992) shows there is considerable consistency in the way big businesses contribute money to political campaigns, especially if those businesses have interlocking directorates. And Clawson, Neustadtl, and Bearden (1986) illustrate that while big business PACs sometimes follow varying strategies in their contributions to candidates, at the level of individual races their contributions are very similar. So the aforementioned research is important in answering the question of unity. But it fails to address the more important question on power and government: Does this unity result in influence over governmental decision making? This is not to say that pluralist research has done a better job in this regard. While pluralist research alleges to address questions of influence directly, often pluralist work involves simply asking political leaders who, if anyone, influences them, which could clearly elicit evasive or

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scripted answers. And besides, most of this research is done on the micro scale in communities, which may not translate well to the national level—arguably the more important level for broader questions about the workings of power in the U.S. government.

The debates between state-centered theory and the other theories is unresolved partly because research in these debates focus on specific cases rather than more general influence. While a case study approach produces detailed, historically rich information unattainable using other methods, it does not yield broadly generalizable findings on governmental decision making and its influences. In other words, all of the researchers in these debates may be partially correct in their interpretations of their case study findings—it may be that on a specific policy or policy program outsiders played a significant role, while in another policy or policy program outsiders played a minimal role. I contend that what is more important is the general pattern of influence that develops over time. I suspect state-centered researchers would argue vehemently against me here. Historical case study research has become the staple methodology of their work, and has provided the grounds on which they criticize other theories. But I submit that they misunderstand the logic of social-scientific theory testing here. The logic in social science theory testing is that an exceptional case alone neither proves nor disproves the rule. Therefore, studying specific cases is an inadequate means of truly testing which theory most accurately depicts the workings of power in government. Is studying cases useful? Yes, absolutely. It provides very rich, very detailed historical information that is very insightful. Does it provide grounds for supporting (or rejecting) a theory? No. Maybe if evidence coming out of multiple case studies accumulates over time showing a

clear pattern, it would provide such grounds. But a relatively small number of case studies showing little or no special interest group influence on governmental decision making—particularly in the face of other case studies showing the opposite (e.g. Jenkins and Brents 1989)—does not provide such grounds.

A Different Approach

What is needed, then, is an approach that examines the *influence* of special interest groups on *general patterns* of governmental decision making. This is the best way to truly test the theories of power and government (in their traditional forms, of course—in their soft forms they are overly broad, indistinguishable, and unfalsifiable, as noted earlier, rendering 'testing' them futile) and help resolve the debates between them. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a good indicator of general patterns of governmental decision making is legislative roll call voting. As noted there, house members usually cast over 500 votes per year, creating traceable general patterns of decision making over time. And one significant manner in which special interest groups could influence roll call voting is through campaign contributions. As Table 1.1 shows, big business and labor PACs contribute large sums of money to winning house candidates, creating the very real potential for influence over those legislators' decisions. In the next chapter, I discuss our campaign finance system in the U.S. and detail prior research on campaign contributions and roll call voting.

CHAPTER 3

CAMPAIGN FINANCE, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND ROLL CALL VOTING

As earlier discussion shows, big business and labor PACs contribute grand

amounts of money to winning U.S. House candidates alone, not counting the money they

contribute to losing candidates and candidates for other political offices. But what exactly

are PACs, and why do big business and labor contribute money via PACs? PACs are

legally sanctioned special interest groups that collect money from multiple individuals

and then contribute it directly toward the election efforts of political candidates. In other

words, PACs give "hard money" contributions (directly to candidates). Big business and

labor contribute money via PACs because they are prohibited from giving money right

out of their operating budgets to candidates; this compels them to gather money from

their executives, other employees, stockholders, or other associates/members for

campaign contributions. Of course, individuals are allowed to, and sometimes do,

contribute directly to candidates themselves. But this is a study of class-based special

interest group influence on legislative decision making, focusing on big business and

labor as classes. And since PACs are, in a very real sense, *the* special interest groups

contributing money to campaigns on behalf of big business and labor, they are the logical

focus.[2] These PACs are subject to at least some regulations; and our campaign finance

system is rather complex in both its current form and its history. Brief descriptions of

current and historical U.S. campaign finance are therefore warranted, and follow in

Figure 3.1 (descriptions of key terms in U.S. campaign finance) and the following

paragraphs.

Term	Description
Soft Money	What: Money given to political parties for disbursement rather than directly to candidates. Players: Virtually any entity or individual who wishes to contribute. Restrictions: Practically none—only that the money cannot directly go to candidate. Tracking: Poor since it is filtered through parties. History: Came about after 1979 ruling relaxed constraints on contributing.
Hard Money	What: Money given directly to candidates for their election campaigns. Players: Individuals and PACs can contribute—others cannot. Restrictions: Varies depending on who is contributing, an individual or a PAC. Tracking: Good—tracked by the FEC. History: Hard money contributions have existed for a long time, but are a little better tracked and regulated because of rulings in the early 1970s calling for their regulation.
PACs	What: Political Action Committees—groups that solicit, collect and contribute money. Players: Issue-based special interest groups. Class-based special interest groups (such as big business and labor). Restrictions: Can contribute up to $5,000 per candidate per election (primary, regular). Tracking: Good—tracked by the FEC. History: Came about after early 1970s rulings established the legal basis through which big business, labor, or other groups can contribute (big businesses and labor unions are prohibited from contributing directly to candidates—they can only contribute via PACs).
FEC	What: Federal Election Commission—regulatory agency responsible for collecting and examining hard money filings and enforcing the rules. History: Created in 1974.

Figure 3.1: Chart Providing Descriptions of Key Terms in U.S. Campaign Finance.

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[2] One could argue that individuals connected with specific big businesses or labor organizations merit examination, but their individual contributions are not necessarily representative of their broader class-based interests. For instance, Burris (2001) finds that big business executives tend to follow an ideological pattern when giving, giving money to candidates they like, while big business PACs give more pragmatically to a wider array of candidates to ensure future access and potential influence.

Current U.S. Campaign Finance

Despite the relative complexity of our campaign finance system, it can essentially be boiled down to these three interrelated realities: (1) it is a fairly open system, allowing generous contributions; (2) it is not very well regulated; and (3) it is becoming even less well regulated, and, thus, more open. To recognize these realities, take, for instance, "soft money" contributions (given to political parties), which are increasingly questioned in popular discourse. Soft money contributions are virtually unregulated. Any big business, labor group, or other entity or individual can contribute an unlimited amount of soft money in a given election cycle. The only rule governing soft money contributions is that they "cannot [legally] be used to explicitly advocate the election of a specific candidate" (Clawson, Neustadtl, and Weller 1998), which, in practice, simply means the money is filtered through state- and local-level parties before eventually promoting a candidate.

Soft money is thus indirect and very difficult to track, rendering the study of soft money contributions and their effect on legislators' decisions virtually impossible (this one reason why I focus on hard money PAC contributions in this study; the other reason is that soft money, while used in congressional elections, is more prominent in presidential elections). The explosion of soft money contributions came about after a 1979 revision of campaign finance law relaxed constraints on reporting and allowed state and local political parties to become more involved in national elections. The recently passed and oft-mentioned "McCain-Feingold" legislation seeks to place *some* limits on soft money contributions (it was watered down before it passed), but it is currently under scrutiny in the courts. Hard money contributions such as those from PACs are better

regulated and quite well tracked, but the regulations are still rather weak, and attempts at enforcing the regulations have largely failed.

PACs are subject to a number of (weak) rules. In terms of limits on direct contributions to candidates, in a single calendar year, multiple-candidate PACs (the vast majority of big business and labor PACs) are allowed to contribute up to $5,000 per candidate per election ('election' meaning primary or general election, essentially doubling this to $10,000 per candidate per year). So while there are limits on their contributions, PACs are able to contribute fairly generous sums directly to candidates. In terms of reporting, PACs are legally required to report all of their contributions to the Federal Election Commission (FEC), meaning their contributions can be readily tracked (and studied). The FEC is then responsible for examining PAC filings and enforcing the above regulations, taking action against PACs or candidates who break the rules.

Unfortunately, the FEC is poorly funded, and, thus, somewhat handicapped. Its funding comes from Congress. In other words, the very individuals whose campaign money the FEC regulates decide on how much it is budgeted. As such, the FEC receives *barely* adequate funding and is continually looking over its shoulder fearing that Congress may lessen its current budget if it is too strict enforcing regulations (Alexander 1992). Moreover, the FEC is an evenly divided committee (by law) that requires a majority to make decisions. It is no surprise, then, that it takes it a very long time to make decisions and take action. For instance, it took the FEC so long to consider one recent case of apparent campaign malfeasance that the candidate involved had been elected, served his term, and was reelected before the alleged wrongdoing was examined (Clawson et al 1998).

Abbreviated History of U.S. Campaign Finance and PACs

Clearly, PAC activities are governed by relatively weak regulations that are poorly enforced because of the handicaps of the FEC. But on a grander level, there is a broad legal-historical framework from which PACs emerged that merits some attention to truly understand the current status of PACs. Discussing this legal-historical framework involves briefly looking at a few key campaign finance reforms of the 1970s. The first reform was in 1971 when Congress passed the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA). FECA attempted to put regulations in place that would help limit contributions. For instance, it enacted the first solid regulations requiring reporting and disclosure of campaign finance activities. It also attempted to curb the growing number of individual contributions by authorizing groups—PACs—to pool money and contribute it. This created the initial legal basis from which PACs grew (particularly big business PACs, which until then scarcely existed). Law had previously always prohibited direct contributions to candidates from big businesses and labor unions. Technically, this was still the case with FECA in that big businesses and labor unions were still prohibited from giving money directly from their operating budgets. But FECA helped opened the door to soliciting money from select employees and/or members, pooling it, and contributing it.

Partially in response to the Watergate scandal, FECA was amended and "strengthened" in 1974. It was strengthened in that the 1974 amendments placed limits on contributions, required more detailed quarterly reporting and disclosure, and created the FEC. Yet FECA was also concurrently weakened from the perspective of PACs in that the 1974 amendments removed the Hatch Act provision existent in the 1971 version, which had prohibited big business and labor unions with government contracts from

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creating PACs. Then in 1975, an FEC "SunPAC" decision approved the use of big

business operating funds to solicit political money from *all* employees and stockholders,

ensuring big business that urging any of its associates to contribute was perfectly legal. A

1976 decision to limit this to just stockholders and executives and their families (except

for twice-yearly solicitations of other employees) did little to slow the growth of big

business PACs (Alexander 1992).

Attempts to reform our campaign finance system since the mid-1970s—

particularly reforms that truly seek to limit PAC contributions—have had little luck.

Again, this is no wonder considering those in a position to legislate reform (members of

Congress) are also those who, arguably, have the least interest in such reform. Goidel,

Gross, and Shields (1999) summarize the more recent attempts, and failures, at reform:

"A Republican-led filibuster in the Senate stopped campaign finance legislation in

the 100th [1987-1988] Congress. Although reform did pass the House and the

Senate in the 101st [1989-1990] and 103rd [1993-1994] Congresses on party-line

votes, differences could not be resolved in the conference committee…. More

than ninety bills to reform the campaign finance system were introduced in the

104th [1995-1996] Congress. None passed" (Pp. 33-34).

As noted earlier, soft money reforms were finally passed just recently under the McCain-

Feingold legislation, but the reforms are significantly watered down and are presently

under question in the courts, which is precisely what happened to the 1970s reforms.

The Supreme Court has made a number of decisions weakening the 1970s

reforms. In 1976, the *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S. 1, Supreme Court case closely

scrutinized the 1974 FECA amendments. The court repealed some of the amendments

under concerns about limiting the "free speech" of contributors. More recent Supreme Court decisions have supported the *Buckley v. Valeo* decision, and, in some cases, have weakened the 1974 FECA amendments further. In sum, various court decisions since the 1974 FECA reforms have "gutted much of the letter and intent of the 1970s reform efforts" and are a major "impediment to comprehensive campaign regulation," leaving our present campaign finance laws stagnant and weak (Goidel et al 1999:27).

One very important thing that should be mentioned about the *Buckley v. Valeo* decision and more recent decisions, though, is that they established "corruption" as a legitimate reason for limiting campaign contributions. For instance, while repealing some of the 1974 FECA amendments, *Buckley v. Valeo* upheld some limits on contributions because of the "corruption or appearance of corruption" contributions entail, thereby establishing corruption—loosely defined as a direct influence of contributions on governmental decision making—as a key element (alongside 'free speech' concerns) in deciding whether or not limits on contributions are constitutional.

The *Nixon v. Shrink*, 528 U.S. 377, decision in 2000 maintained this emphasis on corruption, establishing that solid evidence of influence and corruption is necessary before more reforms can be enacted. This contradicts the focus of many who oppose limiting contributions. For instance, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is against limiting contributions, a stance it bases almost solely on free speech concerns, and files court briefings to this effect. Similarly, Bradley Smith (2001), a law professor who happens to sit on the FEC, writes prolifically and speaks publicly about the "folly" of limiting campaign contributions, arguing that limits on contributions would limit free speech. He then uses this as grounds to claim that limits on contributions are

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unconstitutional. But the Supreme Court has clearly set a precedent for measuring concerns about influence and corruption equal to concerns about free speech in judging the constitutionality of contribution limits. The broader question of this study—whether or not PAC campaign contributions influence legislative decision making—is thus an important one.

Campaign Contributions: What They Do

Do campaign contributions influence legislative decision making? As evident in the discussion that follows, answering this question requires special analyses that are provided in this dissertation. However, to prepare the background for these analyses it is useful to begin the discussion presenting what contributions unquestionably do (see Figure 3.2).

First, campaign contributions determine who can successfully run for office. Before entering a full-blown political race, would-be candidates—with the exception of independently wealthy candidates—need to do well in the "money primary," the process of requesting contributions for a bid for office, because it costs so much to successfully run for office today (Clawson et al 1998). In practice, this means that those who are already in office need to spend an incredible amount of time soliciting contributors for their support, taking time away from their duties. It also means that those who do not secure enough support from contributors early on are typically compelled to drop out.

Second, campaign contributions help determine who wins an actual election. In the vast majority of races, the person who receives the most money in campaign contributions wins. Of course, this is partly a function of contributors hedging their bets—contributors will give more money to candidates who are expected to win

(typically the incumbent) so they can increase their odds of access to those candidates once they are in office. This leads to the third thing contributions unquestionably do: they result in contributor access.

| Campaign Contributions | → | "Money Primary" Win (Legislator) | → | Election Victory (Legislator) | → | Legislative Access (Contributor) | → | *Influence? (Contributor)* |
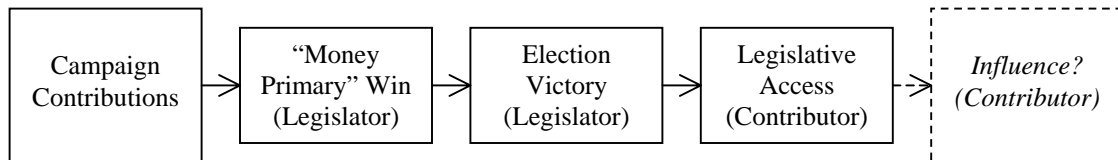
Figure 3.2: What Contributions Unquestionably Do—and Potentially Do—in our System

Contributors and politicians alike agree that campaign contributions result in access. For instance, in an interview Clawson et al (1998) conducted with a corporate executive concerning the pragmatic value of his company's PAC, he said bluntly, "[Without the PAC] I wouldn't have the access, and it may sound like [a lie], but I am telling you very sincerely, I wouldn't know…Bob Y, the local congressman as well as we know him…" (pg. 78). And in interviews conducted with former members of Congress by Schram (1995), one former representative explained, "You get invited to a dinner somewhere and someone gives you some money. And then you get a call a month later and he wants to see you. Are you going to say no? … You're not going to say no. So it does buy access" (pg. 62). Another former representative put it more concisely: "People who contribute get the ear of the member and the ear of the staff. The have the access…" (pg. 62). But does access result in actual *influence*?

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As already noted in Chapter 1, the media tend to promote the notion that

campaign contributions influence legislative decision making, which likely leads to the

deeply seated belief among the general public that our system is corrupt with influence.

But is there really influence? Contributors almost never admit this is the case, and

members of the legislature are typically reluctant to openly admit it. But in the interviews

conducted by Schram (1995) of former legislators, some offered hints that influence

occurs. For instance, one former house member said, "There's not tit for tat in this

business, no check for a vote. But nonetheless, the influence is there. Candidates know

where their money is coming from…I think by and large it is undeniable that campaign

funds influence the process" (pp. 16-17). Another former member noted, "You see the

effectiveness of money in too much of the legislative process…. In some instances, the

hand of the oil companies is much involved in certain amendments, or [other groups]"

(pg. 19). Others provided more blatant statements. For instance, one former

representative stated:

> "…the current method of campaign funding that we currently have...has a serious
>
> and profound impact on not only the issues that are considered in Congress, but
>
> also the outcome of those issues.… Often an issue would never have been raised
>
> in the first place were it not for the strength of a particular interest group…. And
>
> the outcome of some votes…are influenced by the contributions of those
>
> interests" (pp. 31, 49).

One former member even admitted, "I am sure that on many occasions—I'm not proud of

it—I made the choice that I needed this big corporate client and therefore I voted for, or

sponsored, its provision, even though I did not think that it was in the best interests of the

country or the economy" (pg. 28). So by some former legislators' own admissions, campaign contributions sometimes influence legislative decision making—even votes on bills, or roll call voting. But do campaign contributions have a consistent general influence on roll call voting?

Campaign Contributions and Roll Call Voting

Most sociological studies on how campaign contributions influence legislative decision making focus on early stages of the policy process rather than roll call voting. This is understandable. Roll call voting is just one part of the business of the legislature. It is also the final stage of policy making. One would imagine that there is even greater influence in early stages of policy making, and a number of researchers suggest this. For instance, Clawson et al (1998) argue that campaign contributions are a means of influence on early stages of policy making. They highlight the role of contributor access in behind-the-scenes negotiations taking place in agenda setting when bills are introduced, shaped, and debated. Domhoff (1990) also underscores the importance of campaign contributions in the early stages of policy making. He contends that contributors, think tanks, and other influential actors play a significant role in policy formation. While it is very likely that campaign contributions play an influential role in the early stages of policy making, concretely discerning the impact of contributions in these stages is very difficult given the elusive nature of early policy-making processes. Roll call voting is a more public, concrete stage of policy making. Moreover, while roll call voting is just part of the business of the legislature, it is a large part. As noted earlier, legislators cast over 500 roll call votes per year in current assemblies.

The little sociological research on the effects of campaign contributions on roll call voting produces varied findings. Neustadtl (1990) finds that labor contributions are positively related to legislators' votes on labor issues, but big business contributions are negatively related to legislators' votes on business issues. The findings of Burns, Francia, and Herrnson (2000) correspond with Neustadtl's (1990) findings—they find some evidence that labor contributions are significantly related to congressional voting on labor issues. But Ashford's (1986) findings differ from Neustadtl's (1990)—she finds that big business contributions are positively related to voting on business issues.

The more extensive literature on the topic in political science and other disciplines reflects a similar level of disagreement. In a comprehensive review of thirty-three works on the topic, Baumgartner and Leech (1998) find that thirteen works conclude contributions are highly influential in roll call voting, fourteen conclude contributions are marginal and/or limited by other variables, and six conclude contributions do not affect roll call voting. As such, the relationship between contributions and roll call voting is not very clear. But all of the studies in the literature above have at least one of two serious limitations that may account for the variation in their findings: (1) they examine only a small subset of roll call votes, or (2) they fail to explicitly take into account the social context of voting.

Problem 1: Selecting only Certain Bills

Virtually all the studies in the literature on contributions and roll call voting include only a selection of bills. In fact, in the review by Baumgartner and Leech (1998) they find that most of the studies in this area focus on a single issue, and, thus, very few votes—in many cases, fewer than ten. Of the thirty-three studies reviewed, only nine

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directly analyze ten or more roll call votes. More importantly, *none* of the studies analyze all the roll call votes in a given Congress, so they are all guilty of selecting only certain roll call votes for analysis within a broader context. The scant sociological literature on roll call voting is similarly guilty. For instance, Neustadtl (1990) analyzes forty-one roll call votes in his study, which is certainly better than most. But there were actually 890 roll call votes in the Congress he analyzed (the 99th Congress, 1985-1986), meaning he analyzed less than five percent of the votes he could have analyzed just in that Congress.

In Chapter 1, I briefly mentioned why selecting only certain cases for analysis is problematic. It limits the field of examination, potentially biasing the results. When a researcher selects only certain cases for analysis, even if the justification for doing so seems worthy, risk of biasing the results is introduced. In particular, the risk that the research will produce a "false positive" result (a statistically significant relationship is found when the relationship is not actually significant—error of type I) or a "false negative" result (a statistically significant relationship is not found when the relationship actually is significant—error of type II) increases.

On the question of how campaign contributions influence roll call votes, selecting only certain bills for analysis likely elevates the risk of producing a false negative result. Research shows that campaign contributions have little, if any, influence on highly visible roll call votes (Jones and Keiser 1987). So if a researcher selects for analysis a set of bills that seem particularly important to big business or labor—bills that, not coincidentally, would probably be highly visible—the researcher would likely find that contributions are not significant, potentially a false negative finding.

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The fact that campaign contributions have little effect on highly visible roll call votes makes sense from the perspective of a legislator interested in maintaining public support. When a bill is more visible, the public is more likely to pay attention. With this increased attention, the public may be more likely to notice if the legislator clearly decides in the interests of contributors rather than the people. If the public notices this, they may come to view the legislator as corrupt, withdrawing their support. This concern was reflected well in the words of one former House member Schram (1995:93) interviewed:

> "If nobody else cares about it very much, the special interest will get its way. If the public understands the issue at any level, then special interest groups are not able to buy an outcome that the public may not want. But the fact is that the public doesn't focus on most of the work of the Congress…. And all of us, me included, are guilty of this: If the company or interest group is (a) supportive of you, (b) vitally concerned about an issue that, (c) nobody else in your district knows about or ever will know about, then the political calculus is quite simple."

The fact that campaign contributions matter on less visible bills also makes sense from the standpoint of the legislative process and typical bill contents. As noted earlier, legislators often cast 500 or more votes per year. That means that in any given Congress, there are typically around 1,000 bills that are voted on. Very few of these bills ever garner public attention, because most of them *seem* minor in their impact on society and do not deal with especially controversial issues. But a closer look at the large pool of seemingly minor bills would reveal that they often conceal provisions that provide major benefits to particular groups. For instance, Clawson et al (1998) point out that provisions

giving a particular big business a benefit are often inserted in bills, but in a way that is

virtually unreadable to the average citizen—often in the form of "…a business

incorporated in the year Y whose principal location of operation is Z town is exempted

from…." And they find that most big business executives point to these sorts of

undetectable loopholes as the big accomplishments of their PACs, sometimes bragging

"this provision saved our company X million dollars" (pg. 71). Former legislators point

toward this same pattern, as Schram (1995) finds. For instance, one former representative

explained:

> "The public will often look for the big example; they want to find the grand-slam
>
> example of influence of these interests. But rarely will you find it. But you can
>
> find a million singles…regulatory change, banking committee legislation…a
>
> change in securities laws relative to the Energy and Commerce Committee, a
>
> change in when you get audited, a slight change in FDA guidelines that governs
>
> what order in which they review pharmaceutical drugs….
>
> One of the ironies…was the extent to which business PACs will support [virtually
>
> anyone]. And the answer to that has always been: …because ninety percent of
>
> what most of these businesses needed was not the grand slam, but the single. They
>
> would rather consistently hit the singles than go for the grand slam. They needed
>
> to affect their bottom line. The bottom line was their bottom line" (pp. 93-94).

But the cost of these "singles" for the public can add up over time, as one legislator

confessed:

> "On the tax side, the appropriations side, the subsidy side, and the expenditure
>
> side, decisions are clearly weighted and influenced…by who has contributed to

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the candidates. The price that the public pays for this process, whether it's in subsidies, taxes, or appropriations, is quite high" (pg. 89).

So because highly visible bills are less likely to be influenced by campaign contributions, selecting a small subset of bills that seem important (and, by deduction, are likely more visible, because if they are more visible they seem important) is a poor strategy. It increases the odds of producing a false negative result, or, put differently, of finding nothing. This likely explains why some of the studies in the literature claim campaign contributions have no effect on roll call voting.

How can this issue be resolved? Some could argue that controlling for issue visibility in analysis would solve the problem (e.g. Neustadtl 1990). But I contend that in such cases, it is virtually impossible to truly control for issue visibility, because again, when selecting bills that seem important, one is likely selecting bills that are more visible to begin with. In other words, because of the initial selection bias, issue visibility would be restricted and biased as well. Besides, controlling for issue visibility obscures the larger problem—that any case of selecting on the dependent variable introduces the risk of bias in the results. I therefore maintain that examining all the roll call votes during an extended time period (a two-year Congress, for instance) in analysis is the best solution, because it captures the many less visible bills *and* prevents bias.

Problem 2: Ignoring the Social Context of Voting

From a sociological perspective, the social context of behavior is vitally important, yet virtually no studies of roll call voting explicitly take into account the social context of voting—in other words, they fail to construct their models of voting in a way that accounts for the social interdependence of legislators. Spatial modeling, a method of

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analyzing roll call votes advanced by the works of Poole and Rosenthal (1985) and Heckman and Snyder (1997), is the prevailing method in the roll call vote literature. It is methodologically rigorous, but as it is typically applied it does not diverge much from standard attribute models of behavior—spatial modeling implicitly assumes that it is legislator attributes that matter most in roll call voting, downplaying the role of social relations.

Yet few serious scholars of roll call voting would argue that social relations are unimportant. The legislature is a social arena, bringing legislators into frequent contact with one another, embedding them in relational networks (Caldiera and Patterson 1987). Moreover, receiving a campaign contribution is, in essence, the establishment of a relational tie. Even policy making itself is a social process, implying that social relations should play a key role in legislative voting (Davidson and Oleszek 1998). A relational approach to the study of roll call voting would allow one to examine how social relations may impact roll call voting while still allowing one to include legislator attributes as factors. This is therefore the approach I use in this study. I describe this approach in much more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYTIC STRATEGY AND HYPOTHESES

In this dissertation I determine the general influence, if any, of special interest groups on roll call voting, and then proceed to examine the degree to which groups representing big business and labor exert prolonged influence, thereby helping resolve the debates between the theories of power and government. The specific analytic strategy I employ is as follows: drawing on a unique approach in sociology—the relational approach—I statistically analyze how PAC contributions (in general, and big business and labor, specifically) to house members influence the similarity in the way those members vote on bills, examining all possible combinations of members and all the bills they voted on in ten different Congresses spanning a twenty-year period in the U.S. House, 1985-2004. In Chapter 5, I will explain the specifics of *how* I do this. In this chapter, though, I discuss *why* I pursue this analytic strategy, providing some technical and substantive background on different components of this strategy. I conclude by concisely reviewing the theories of power and government again, deriving testable hypotheses from these theories.

General Analytic Strategy: Quantitative Analysis

The general analytic strategy I pursue in this study is built on quantitative

analysis. Quantitative analysis, as its name suggests, involves quantifying information

into numerical data and analyzing it statistically. In social science, quantitative analysis is

often contrasted with qualitative analysis—analysis without statistics, relying on

information gathered from in-depth interviews, observation, etc. Sometimes these

strategies are even treated as if they are conflicting analytic strategies, one superior to the

other. I am not interested in engaging in this sort of debate. I strongly believe both

quantitative and qualitative analyses have their own unique strengths and weaknesses,

and which one is better often depends on the purpose of the research undertaken.

Qualitative analysis is ideal for generating a deeper understanding of a social

phenomenon or process and giving voice to an understudied or misunderstood social

group; quantitative analysis is ideal for identifying general relationships among social

phenomenon (Ragin 1994). Both can be used to test theory, but qualitative analysis is

ideal for identifying underlying theoretical mechanisms while quantitative analysis is

ideal for identifying general patterns/trends. Given that the purpose of this study is to test

theories of power and government through looking at general patterns of decision making

over time in the U.S. House, using quantitative analysis is the better strategy here.

In quantifying information into numerical data, quantitative analysis essentially

creates "variables" that can then be analyzed. Variables are simply logical groupings of

attributes or values that *vary* from case to case. For instance, age is a variable that

includes values (for instance, number of years of life) that vary from person to person.

There are different types of variables in quantitative analysis. A "dependent variable" is

what the research is attempting to explain (the 'effect'). In this study, legislative roll call

voting is the dependent variable. An "independent variable" is any variable that is used to

explain the dependent variable (the 'cause'). The main independent variable in this study

is PAC campaign contributions. Finally, a "control variable" is simply a secondary

independent variable that should be included in a statistical model in addition to the

primary independent variable because it likely has an effect on the dependent variable. In

this study, party affiliation is one such control variable.

	Variable 1	Variable 2	Variable 3	Variable N
Legislator A	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*
Legislator B	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*
Legislator C	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*
Legislator Z	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*

Figure 4.1: Typical Organization of Data in Quantitative Analysis

Once variables have been created, they are typically organized into a database or

spreadsheet for analysis, where the cases are on Y-axis and the variables are on the X-

axis. In other words, the rows are the individual cases, the columns are unique variables,

and in the cells are the values of those cases on those variables (see Figure 4.1). Once the

variables are organized in this fashion, they can be statistically analyzed. Generally,

statistical analyses model the dependent variable as a mathematical function of the

independent variable(s) and the control variable(s). "Regression" is one such analysis

tool. In regression, the purpose is typically to measure the extent to which the

independent variable(s) co-vary with the dependent variable in the presence of control

variable(s). Co-varying can exhibit a number of different patterns: as the independent

variable(s) go up, the dependent goes up as well (a 'positive relationship'), or goes down

(a 'negative relationship'), or follows some other measurable pattern.

If two variables co-vary strongly enough against the potential of error, it is said

that there is a "statistically significant relationship" between them. In other words, the

relationship between them is strong enough (in the face of potential error) that it meets a

predetermined statistical threshold of confidence—typically ninety-five percent or higher.

So a statistically significant relationship is "significant" because we can be ninety-five

percent (or more) confident that the relationship between the two variables is real, not

just a product of error. In this study, then, if my findings meet these criteria, I can say that

there is a "statistically significant relationship between PAC contributions and legislative

roll call voting."

So linking this technical discussion of quantitative analysis back with the

discussion of the problems of previous research on campaign contributions and roll call

voting (limiting the number of roll call votes, which, in statistical terms is referred to as

'selecting on the dependent variable;' and ignoring the social context of voting, which in

statistical terms is a case of 'model misspecification'), what sort of quantitative approach

should one employ to resolve *both* of these issues? In particular, what approach could

help resolve these issues in both a statistically sound and theoretically grounded manner?

From a statistical standpoint, any approach that seeks to analyze multiple roll call

votes should not use the typical organization of data shown in Figure 4.1. Looking at

Figure 4.1, this typical way of organizing data assumes a single, easily quantifiable

dependent variable. Put differently, each variable—including the dependent variable—is

a distinct column in the database. This would be fine if one were using a single roll call

vote as the dependent variable. In such an instance, voting could easily be quantified as 1 = yea, 0 = nay, and 1's and 0's would simply be input for each case, or legislator. But again, selecting a single roll call vote for analysis is a terribly inadequate (and likely biased) means of testing the general relationship between PAC contributions and roll call voting. It is therefore best to include multiple roll call votes. This creates a quandary, though: *How can one measure multiple roll call votes in a single variable?* Unfortunately, there are few methods used in roll call vote studies that provide a good solution to this dilemma, and virtually none that concurrently account for the social context of voting.

Standard Approaches to Studying Roll Call Voting

The leading approach to studying roll call voting in social science is spatial modeling. Spatial modeling emerged after substantial methodological innovation, largely coming out of the pivotal works of Poole and Rosenthal (1985) and Heckman and Snyder (1997). Spatial modeling identifies legislators' "ideal points" in Euclidean space, mapping their voting preferences. It then seeks to predict the legislators' votes based on these ideal points. In other words, the purpose of spatial modeling is *NOT* to *explain* roll call voting as a function of certain independent variables; instead, its purpose is to *predict* how legislators will vote on particular roll call votes as a function of ideal point estimates. This distinction may at first appear artificial since the words "explain" and "predict" are sometimes used interchangeably in quantitative analyses. But in this instance the distinction is actually very important, because spatial modeling essentially ends up analyzing single roll call votes due to its emphasis on prediction. It often relies on data from many roll call votes to estimate the ideal points with which it predicts these

single votes; but since it essentially attempts to predict a legislator's "next vote," so to speak, it often analyzes single votes in the end.

	Variable 1	Variable 2	Variable 3	Variable N
Legislator A, Bill 1	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*
Legislator A, Bill 2	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*
Legislator A, Bill 3	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*
Legislator Z, Bill N	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*	*(value)*

Figure 4.2: Neustadtl's Organization of Data to Include Many Bills in a Single Variable

So the leading method of analyzing roll call votes provides no help in resolving the quandary of how to measure multiple votes in a single variable because it essentially uses a single vote as the dependent variable. An alternative method of analyzing roll call votes used by Neustadtl (1990), though, succeeds in measuring multiple votes in a single variable. It does so by changing the cases to legislator-bills rather than just legislators. So, in other words, the cases take on the following pattern (see Figure 4.2 for more detail): Legislator A, Bill 1; Legislator A, Bill 2; Legislator A, Bill 3; … Legislator Z, Bill N (where N = the finite number of bills analyzed). This approach thus avoids the problem of analyzing a mere subset of bills (although, as noted earlier, Neustadtl's study analyzes only forty-one of a possible 890 bills, so it still technically selects on the dependent variable). This approach does nothing, however, to take into account the social context of voting (which was also true of spatial modeling). It treats the legislators as independent agents; and treats their voting decisions on bills as a process unrelated to others' decisions—a process taking place in a social vacuum. What is needed, then, is an approach that allows for the examination of many votes in one variable *and* accounts for

the social context of voting. The relational approach would accomplish both in a theoretically grounded and statistically sound manner.

The Relational Approach: Theory and Substantive Background

Sociologists have long recognized the importance of relations between individuals or entities in society. Indeed, research shows that relations are important for a wide variety of social phenomena. Based on this, some social theorists argue that to understand any social phenomenon, we must conceive of society as consisting in unfolding relations rather than static "things," focusing our attention on relations rather than substances. For instance, Emirbayer (1997) argues that a key dilemma in social science today is that many social scientists choose "substantialism" over "relationalism." Substantialism, Emirbayer writes, posits that "it is *substances* of various kinds [things, beings, essences] that constitute the fundamental units of all inquiry," and that "systematic analysis is to begin with these self-subsistent entities, which come 'preformed,' and only then to consider the dynamic flows in which they subsequently involve themselves" (pp. 282-83). This is reflected in the standard approaches to studying roll call voting outlined above. Relationalism, on the other hand, posits that "the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the [changing] functional roles they play within that transaction," and that "the latter, seen as a dynamic, unfolding process, becomes the primary unit of analysis rather than the constituent elements themselves" (p. 287). In short, the relational approach shifts the focus to relations rather than individuals or other entities, focusing on unfolding processes rather than substances. The relational approach thus fits the dynamic world of power and politics well.

As noted in Chapter 1, sociologists have conceived of power as, in essence, relational influence, dating back to the classic works of Marx, Weber, and Simmel. In studies of political power and influence, sociologists usually find that influence is dependent on relations. For instance, research demonstrates that a group's rise to political power and control over the state can depend greatly on their position in a relational network, as with the rise of the Medici in fifteenth century Italy (Padgett and Ansell 1993). Studies of U.S. political power structure in more modern times highlight the importance of relations as well, showing how relational ties are important for building cohesion among the national elite (i.e. Domhoff 2002; Useem 1984).

Sociological studies of political behavior also show quite convincingly that relations matter. For instance, research on political participation and voting among the public demonstrates that relations can be very important determinants of this form of political behavior (Knoke 1990). And extensive research by Mizruchi (1992) shows that big business political behavior—their PAC contributions to political campaigns—can depend greatly on their relations with one another. In this study, I examine a different form of political behavior—the decision-making behavior of legislators—as a function of these PAC contributions. Relations should be important in this form of political behavior as well. The legislature is a social workplace, bringing legislators into frequent contact with one another, embedding them in relational networks. Further, policy making is a social process, implying that social factors play a significant role in legislative voting.

The places within which people work and spend time enhance their chances of socializing with individuals who share that space (Feld 1981). Put differently, individuals who work together are more likely to come into contact and form relationships with one

another because of close proximity and overlapping activities. Following this logic, the legislature can be considered a workplace that brings legislators into contact with one another, increasing their odds of relationship formation. Supporting this, Caldeira and Patterson (1987) show that the legislature is a social arena where relationships and friendships are forged. This makes sense. People form relationships with their coworkers in some capacity—particularly when their jobs require that they work together to make decisions and progress. And this is precisely what the job of policy making entails.

Policy making is a multiple-stage process that involves an immeasurable amount of social interaction and negotiation from start to finish. In agenda setting, legislators take cues from fellow legislators (and likely outsiders) in deciding what items should take precedence (Kingdon 1984). In policy formulation, legislators compose early drafts of bills prior to formally introducing them in the legislature, often working together with other legislators, co-authoring and cosponsoring the bills (Burkett and Skvoretz 2001). Once a bill has been introduced to the legislature, it is sent to committees or subcommittees of legislators where it is discussed and debated in various steps (Davidson and Oleszek 1998). Finally, after a bill has been discussed and debated in committees, it is considered on the session floor and voted on in roll call votes. Even at this stage, more negotiation and compromise takes place as legislators openly support or oppose the bill and propose amendments before voting. And voting itself is social. For instance, voting can depend on previous agreements between legislators, sometimes referred to as "logrolling" (in other words, a legislator supports one bill as a favor to another legislator, and then that favor is returned later). So the relational approach is certainly the best

approach to studying roll call voting from a theoretical and substantive perspective. But how does this approach work in practice? Is it statistically sound?

The Relational Approach: Methodology

Drawing on the ideas of Simmel and other early theorists, a methodology emerged in the early- to mid-twentieth century that sought to directly measure the relations among and between individuals and/or entities. This method, at the time referred to as "sociometry," was a core method in the growing field of sociological social psychology. In fact, the official academic journal in sociology on social psychology was named *Sociometry* based on this method. Today, sociometry is more mathematically advanced and is typically referred to as "social network analysis" (today there is a relatively newer academic journal named *Social Networks*) or "relational analysis." Despite the new name, the focus remains the same: the relations among and between individuals and/or entities.

This focus on relations can be extended to statistical modeling tools such as regression. A relational approach to regression treats cases as *inter*dependent rather than independent. In other words, it assumes that cases (the individuals or entities under study) have some relationship to one another, and explicitly takes this into account in organizing the data. In so doing, it shifts the units of analysis to the relational dyads between cases— or, put differently, dyads of cases. Applying this approach to this study, then, the units of analysis would not be legislators themselves, as shown in Figure 4.1, but, instead, would be dyads of legislators. Take, for instance, the dependent variable, roll call voting. Using a relational approach, this variable could be set up as its own spreadsheet matrix, with legislators as the rows and columns (see Figure 4.3). In each cell, then, would be a value

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	Legislator A	Legislator B	Legislator C	Legislator Z
Legislator A	-	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*
Legislator B	-	-	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*
Legislator C	-	-	-	*(similarity value)*
Legislator Z	-	-	-	-

Figure 4.3: A Variable Organized as a Dyadic Relational Matrix.

representing the similarity in voting between dyads of legislators (the percent of times

they voted the same way, for instance) across any number of bills. Alternatively, it could

be set up in a more similar fashion to the organization of data shown in prior figures with

variables as the columns by setting up arc lists, where the cases would be as follows (see

Figure 4.4 for more detail): Legislator A, Legislator B; Legislator A, Legislator C;

Legislator A, Legislator D; Legislator Y, Legislator Z. Either way, this relational

approach resolves both shortcomings of prior work—it allows for the analysis of an

unlimited number of bills in a single variable, *and* it treats voting as a potentially social

process rather than something that occurs in a social vacuum.

	Variable 1	Variable 2	Variable 3	Variable N
Legislator A, Legislator B	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*
Legislator B, Legislator C	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*
Legislator C, Legislator D	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*
Legislator Y, Legislator Z	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*	*(similarity value)*

Figure 4.4: Relational Data Organized such that Variables are Columns

So, what I do in this study is the following: I organize all of the variables into

dyadic relational matrixes, focusing on similarities and/or relations between dyads of

legislators, *i* and *j* (specific descriptions of the variables and how they are coded follow in

Chapter 5). I then run statistical analyses modeling similarity in roll call voting among dyads of legislators as a mathematical function of their similarity in receipts of PAC contributions (for instance, receiving contributions from the same PACs), controlling for other sources of similarity and/or relations between them. Using these dyadic relational variables in analyses allows me to concurrently account for the effects of both legislator attributes *and* legislator social relations on roll call voting. Legislator attributes, in this case, are framed as similarity, or *homophily*, between two legislators. So, for instance, "gender" is framed as a form of homophily, measuring whether or not legislators i and j are the same gender. Legislator relations, then, are framed as *social ties* between two legislators stemming from joint connections to intra- and extra-legislative "foci," to use Feld's (1981) terminology. For instance, "committee membership" is framed as a social tie, measuring how many committees legislators i and j sit on together.

Of course, the distinction between legislator attributes and legislator relations is not black and white. For instance, there is considerable evidence that people who share similar attributes are more likely to interact and form relationships (e.g. Blau, Blum, and Schwartz 1982; Marsden 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001), sometimes referred to as the "principle of homophily" (Mark 2003). Moreover, variables like party affiliation defy categorization because they can be viewed as either attributes or relations. Party is often viewed as an ideological label, essentially an attribute of legislators. But party is not a fixed attribute of a legislator derived entirely from ideological beliefs. It is in part through relational processes that one comes to identify with a party. Further, party is an important basis of socialization and friendship formation in the legislature (Caldeira and Patterson 1987), and partisanship derives its strength in the legislature, in part, from

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socialization dominated by party organizations (Davidson and Oleszek 1998). And in voting, research suggests that legislators tend to choose party colleagues as models for their own voting (Norpoth 1976), indicating social influence rather than purely ideological influence.

Campaign contributions—the main independent variable(s) in this study—are similarly ambiguous. Receiving a contribution from a particular PAC is the establishment of a relational tie with that contributor, but does it influence relations within the legislature? There is some indication it does. For instance, prior work in this area shows that campaign contributions are a significant correlate of legislator self-reported relations at the state level (Peoples 2005). But since this relationship is not known at the national level, it raises some question about *how* receiving campaign contributions from the same PACs would influence the similarity in roll call voting between dyads of legislators (if it would). Would campaign contributions simply lead them to vote the same way independent of one another, or would contributions lead to greater contact between the legislators, which, in turn, would lead to greater vote agreement? It is possible either is true. But again, one benefit of using dyadic relational variables that it accounts for the effects of both attributes *and* relations, so it concurrently allows for either possibility and lends itself to potentially testing the specifics of *how* influence operates in future study. What is important in this study, though, is whether or not the influence exists—not necessarily the "how" of the influence—because the main purpose of this study is to examine class-based special interest group influence on legislative decision making, addressing the debates between the theories of power and government from Chapter 2.

Hypotheses: Predictions of the Three Power Structure Theories

The statistical analyses I employ in this study essentially examine the following: (1) Whether receiving PAC campaign contributions from the same sources significantly influences the degree of similarity in roll call voting between dyads of U.S. House members, controlling for party and other factors; and, if so, (2) whether big business PAC contributions have a more significant influence over roll call voting than labor PAC contributions. Hypotheses derived from the theories of power and government (in their traditional versions) would make very different predictions regarding the potential findings of these analyses:

(a) The *elite-power hypothesis* would predict that receiving PAC contributions from the same sources *does* significantly influence the degree of similarity in voting between dyads of U.S. House members; and that big business PAC contributions are more significant in their influence than labor contributions. This stems from elite-power theory's focus on the dominance of big business over governmental decision making.

(b) The *pluralist hypothesis* would predict that receiving PAC contributions from the same sources *does* significantly influence the degree of similarity in voting between dyads of U.S. House members, but that big business PAC contributions are no more significant in their influence than labor contributions. This stems from pluralist theory's contention that groups attempting to influence governmental decision making enjoy fairly equal success in their efforts, balancing one another out.

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(c) The _state-centered hypothesis_ would predict that receiving PAC contributions

from the same sources *does NOT* significantly influence the degree of

similarity in voting between dyads of U.S. House members; and therefore

neither big business PACs nor labor PACs have any influence. This stems

from state-centered theory's emphasis on the primacy of the government and

its inside actors in governmental decision making.

Thus, the analyses in this study—in addition to providing theoretically grounded and

statistically sound solutions to the problems with current research on contributions and

roll call voting—provide fairly direct tests of the predictions of elite-power, pluralist, and

state-centered theories (in their traditional versions), helping resolve the long-standing

debates among social scientists over power and government. Chapter 5, then, details

these analyses—describing in detail my data and where I obtained them, my variables

and how I construct/code them, and my statistical models.

CHAPTER 5

DATA, VARIABLES, AND METHODS

Data

In this study, I analyze data on members of the 99th through 108th assemblies of

the U.S. House and their PAC contributors. The 99th U.S. House began in January of

1985, and the 108th House ended in December of 2004. My data thus cover ten different

assemblies of the house spanning a twenty-year period (the House meets for two years at

a time).

I analyze data on the House only (I exclude the Senate) for two reasons: First, as I

already noted in Chapter 1, the House is preferable to the Senate in a study of legislative

decision making because there are more house members (435) than senate members

(100), resulting in more individual decisions to analyze. Second, the House is better for

potential future cross-national study for comparability reasons. In the future one may

wish to do cross-national work comparing relationships found in this study on the U.S.

with patterns elsewhere. But many other nations do not have a functioning "upper

house," or senate, as we do in the U.S.; in most democratized nations the only functional

lawmaking body is a "lower house" similar to the U.S. House, making the House the

more comparable body. Studying the House rather than the Senate therefore provides

more roll call vote decisions to analyze and leaves open more opportunity for future comparative/cross-national research.

From the perspective of party dominance, the assemblies of the House I include in my data exhibit very interesting qualities. Democrats dominated the 99th through 103rd assemblies; Republicans dominated the 104th through 108th (see Table 5.1 for additional details). My data thus span a perfectly split twenty-year time period in the U.S. House— ten years of Democrat rule followed by ten years of Republican rule. In this partisan regard, then, my data provide a fair level of balance, and allow for comparing and contrasting findings based on these two different party majorities.

	Years	Majority	Democrat	Republican	Independent
99th House	1985-1986	Democrat	253 (58.2%)	182 (41.8%)	0 (0.0%)
100th House	1987-1988	Democrat	258 (59.3%)	177 (40.7%)	0 (0.0%)
101st House	1989-1990	Democrat	260 (59.8%)	175 (40.1%)	0 (0.0%)
102nd House	1991-1992	Democrat	267 (61.4%)	167 (38.4%)	1 (0.2%)
103rd House	1993-1994	Democrat	258 (59.3%)	176 (40.5%)	1 (0.2%)
104th House	1995-1996	Republican	204 (46.9%)	230 (52.9%)	1 (0.2%)
105th House	1997-1998	Republican	206 (47.4%)	228 (52.4%)	1 (0.2%)
106th House	1999-2000	Republican	211 (48.5%)	223 (51.3%)	1 (0.2%)
107th House	2001-2002	Republican	212 (48.7%)	221 (50.8%)	2 (0.5%)
108th House	2003-2004	Republican	204 (47.0%)	229 (52.8%)	1 (0.2%)

Table 5.1: Party Divisions in the 99th through 108th U.S. Houses, 1985-2004.

I separate my data into ten distinct data sets—a data set for each two-year assembly of the House. The data in each set provide a variable measuring the similarities in voting between house members across all the roll call votes in that respective two-year period. In addition, the data include a variable measuring members' similarities in receipts of campaign contributions from PACs in the two-year election cycle prior to the respective two-year house examined. This is to temporally order the data such that the contributions analyzed precede roll call votes, since temporal ordering is important in establishing causality (causality issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6). Finally, the data also incorporate control variables measuring the similarities between the legislators in terms of their party affiliation, race, gender, committee overlap, district proximity, and tenure. A list of the variables as well as a short description of each is presented in Figure 5.1. Descriptive statistics for the variables for each two-year house— including the number of cases (relational dyads), the mean, and the standard deviation— are provided in Table 5.2. More detail on the variables, how they were collected, and how they are measured follows in the paragraphs below.

Variables

Dependent variable: vote similarity

I use data on legislative votes—the way in which legislators voted on bills— collected by Poole and Rosenthal. Poole and Rosenthal have compiled roll call vote records and created raw roll call vote data sets for the 1st through 108th assemblies of the U.S. House (and Senate), and have made this data available through two sources: the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) data archives at the University of Michigan; and their own personal Website, www.voteview.com. For

Variables	Source	Description/Measurement
Dependent Variable		
Vote Similarity	Poole and Rosenthal, available electronically through ICPSR or www.voteview.com	proportion of votes legislators *i* and *j* agreed on out of the total they could have agreed on
Main Independent Variable(s)		
All PAC Contributions (Logged)	FEC filings, available electronically at the FECs Website (direct download for recent years, FTP for older)	log of the # of PAC contributors legislators *i* and *j* share adjusted for # they could share
Big Business PAC Contributions (Logged)	FEC filings, as above	log of the # of big business PAC contributors legislators *i* and *j* share adjusted for # they could share
Labor PAC Contributions (Logged)	FEC filings, as above	log of the # of labor PAC contributors legislators *i* and *j* share adjusted for # they could share
Control Variables		
Same Party	Congressional and biographical references	dummy: 1 = legislators *i* and *j* are in the same party (0 = not)
Same Race	Congressional and biographical references	dummy: 1 = legislators *i* and *j* are the same race
Same Sex	Congressional and biographical references	dummy: 1 = legislators *i* and *j* are the same sex
Committee Overlap	Congressional and biographical references	sum count of the # of legislative committees legislators *i* and *j* sit on together
Other Variables Tested		
All PAC Money (Logged)	FEC filings, as above	log of the total minimum $ amount legislators *i* and *j* share from the same PAC contributors
All Big Business PAC Money (Logged)	FEC filings, as above	log of the total minimum $ amount legislators *i* and *j* share from the same big business PAC contributors
All Labor PAC Money (Logged)	FEC filings, as above	log of the total minimum $ amount legislators *i* and *j* share from the same labor PAC contributors
Tenure Similarity (1)	Congressional and biographical references	negative absolute value of the difference in years of tenure between legislators *i* and *j*
Tenure Similarity (2)	Congressional and biographical references	minimum # of years legislators *i* and *j* have served together in the legislature
District Proximity	Congressional and biographical references	dummy: 1 = legislators *i* and *j* represent districts in the same state

Figure 5.1: Chart Listing and Describing all Variables Created and Tested in Analyses.

	99th House 1985-1986	100th House 1987-1988	101st House 1989-1990	102nd House 1991-1992	103rd House 1993-1994	104th House 1995-1996	105th House 1997-1998	106th House 1999-2000	107th House 2001-2002	108th House 2003-2004
Vote Similarity	.618 (.161)	.644 (.170)	.641 (.161)	.626 (.173)	.606 (.211)	.602 (.230)	.650 (.181)	.676 (.161)	.697 (.170)	.683 (.196)
All PAC Contributions	.125 (.056)	.130 (.055)	.134 (.053)	.128 (.053)	.144 (.053)	.115 (.052)	.108 (.052)	.112 (.051)	.116 (.048)	.111 (.048)
Big Business Contributions	.103 (.061)	.109 (.058)	.109 (.056)	.102 (.056)	.091 (.051)	.094 (.050)	.086 (.051)	.085 (.049)	.093 (.048)	.090 (.049)
Labor PAC Contributions	.135 (.116)	.147 (.112)	.155 (.112)	.142 (.118)	.163 (.114)	.135 (.120)	.116 (.104)	.125 (.102)	.125 (.103)	.114 (.103)
Same Party	.512 (.500)	.516 (.500)	.519 (.500)	.522 (.499)	.514 (.500)	.500 (.500)	.498 (.500)	.494 (.500)	.497 (.500)	.498 (.500)
Same Race	.856 (.351)	.840 (.367)	.848 (.358)	.860 (.346)	.817 (.387)	.824 (.381)	.829 (.375)	.825 (.379)	.828 (.376)	.825 (.379)
Same Sex	.908 (.289)	.899 (.301)	.890 (.312)	.895 (.306)	.806 (.395)	.816 (.387)	.803 (.397)	.780 (.413)	.770 (.421)	.778 (.415)
Committee Overlap	.166 (.393)	.204 (.446)	.199 (.436)	.209 (.446)	.191 (.423)	.161 (.386)	.174 (.399)	.200 (.430)	.215 (.445)	.227 (.455)
N	94,395	93,961	94,395	93,961	93,961	93,096	93,961	93,528	93,528	94,395

Table 5.2: Descriptive Statistics (Means) for Variables Used in Analyses (Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

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this study, I use their roll call data on the 99th through 108th assemblies, including data on how members voted on *all* of the roll call votes that took place during each two-year period (see Table 5.3 for more detail on these votes). I include all house members who voted in two or more of the roll call votes in a given two-year assembly, excluding those house members who voted in only one—or none—of the roll call votes in a given two-year period, dropping them from the data (this situation only occurs in those very rare circumstances when a legislator was elected but did not proceed to serve in the House).

	Years	Total Votes in Assembly	Votes Per Year (Average)
99th House	1985-1986	890	445
100th House	1987-1988	939	470
101st House	1989-1990	879	440
102nd House	1991-1992	932	466
103rd House	1993-1994	1,122	561
104th House	1995-1996	1,340	670
105th House	1997-1998	1,166	583
106th House	1999-2000	1,209	605
107th House	2001-2002	990	495
108th House	2003-2004	1,217	609
Averages	1985-2004	1,068	534

Table 5.3: Roll Call Vote Summary Statistics, 99th through 108th Assembly of the House.

To prepare the variable for analysis using a relational approach, I shift the units to relational dyads. To do so, I convert the data into legislator-by-legislator dyadic relational matrixes (similar to the matrix shown in Figure 4.3 in the last chapter) using methods

outlined by Moody (1999). In each cell of the matrix is a value representing the proportion of bills and resolutions that dyads of legislators, i and j, agreed on given the total possible number of bills they could have agreed on, taking into account nonvoting (since some legislators did not vote on certain bills, due either to absenteeism or conflicts of interest, I could not use a simple count of vote agreement—I needed to take into account nonvoting). The total number of dyads in each two-year period is roughly 94,395: ((435 senders) * (435 – 1 receivers)) / 2.

Main independent variables: all PAC contributions, big business and labor

I obtained information on legislators' receipts of PAC campaign contributions electronically through the FEC. The data cover all the election cycles leading to the respective assemblies of the House I analyze. In other words, the data cover the years 1983 through 2002, and are divided into two-year periods that correspond with their respective two-year assemblies of the House (1983-1984 corresponds with the 99th House, 1985-1986; … 2001-2002 corresponds with the 108th House, 2003-2004). In the FEC data, PAC contributions are all included in a single data file, but are identifiable by type. As such, big business ('corporation with capital stock') and labor are clearly identifiable class-based types within the data file.

Big business and labor exhibit interesting patterns of contributing. As already noted in Chapter 1, big business and labor combined account for the majority of the money contributed to winning U.S. House candidates (see Table 1.1 for more detail). Big business makes more contributions—and contributes more money—than labor, but both make a large number of contributions totaling many millions of dollars. Conventional wisdom might suggest that big business contributes more to republicans, while labor

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makes most of its contributions to democrats. This is not necessarily true, though, as

Tables 5.4 and 5.5 show. A large share—sometimes more than half—of big business's

contributions go to democrats, a reality lamented by one republican house member

interviewed by Schram (1995): "It never, ever occurred to me that the big bulk of [big

business PAC contributions] would go to democrats. I thought they were big-business

republicans…." And while the majority of labor's contributions go to democrats, up to

one third or more of their contributions still go to republicans.

	Years	Contributions to Democrats	Contributions to Republicans	Actual Money to Democrats	Actual Money to Republicans
99th House	1985-1986	22,149 (46.0%)	26,028 (54.0%)	$9,585,515 (46.1%)	$11,197,112 (53.9%)
100th House	1987-1988	25,207 (48.7%)	26,562 (51.3%)	$12,309,441 (50.4%)	$12,124,614 (49.6%)
101st House	1989-1990	28,087 (50.7%)	27,264 (49.3%)	$15,739,422 (53.6%)	$13,638,138 (46.4%)
102nd House	1991-1992	28,122 (53.3%)	24,598 (46.6%)	$18,322,964 (56.6%)	$13,968,414 (43.2%)
103rd House	1993-1994	27,237 (53.1%)	24,013 (46.9%)	$19,764,859 (56.2%)	$15,421,429 (43.8%)
104th House	1995-1996	23,847 (45.4%)	28,717 (54.6%)	$17,631,881 (47.8%)	$19,268,026 (52.2%)
105th House	1997-1998	19,252 (31.6%)	41,555 (68.2%)	$14,594,778 (31.6%)	$31,299,019 (67.8%)
106th House	1999-2000	20,003 (35.2%)	36,732 (64.6%)	$15,874,126 (34.2%)	$30,457,486 (65.6%)
107th House	2001-2002	23,079 (38.2%)	37,333 (61.7%)	$21,519,615 (36.6%)	$37,190,456 (63.2%)
108th House	2003-2004	20,267 (35.8%)	36,245 (64.1%)	$22,178,692 (34.0%)	$42,927,002 (65.8%)

Table 5.4: Big Business PAC Contributions to Winning House Candidates in the 99th through 108th Houses, 1985-2004, by Party (Percentage going to Party in Parentheses).

	Years	Contributions to Democrats	Contributions to Republicans	Actual Money to Democrats	Actual Money to Republicans
99th House	1985-1986	17,198 (62.6%)	10,265 (37.4%)	$14,070,835 (66.6%)	$7,048,205 (33.4%)
100th House	1987-1988	17,750 (69.8%)	7,686 (30.2%)	$16,249,466 (75.6%)	$5,249,830 (24.4%)
101st House	1989-1990	18,052 (69.4%)	7,967 (30.6%)	$19,558,978 (75.1%)	$6,484,050 (24.9%)
102nd House	1991-1992	18,258 (65.4%)	9,615 (34.5%)	$21,552,222 (74.3%)	$7,388,775 (25.5%)
103rd House	1993-1994	17,309 (77.0%)	5,105 (22.7%)	$21,237,106 (78.8%)	$5,564,938 (20.7%)
104th House	1995-1996	15,025 (69.3%)	6,576 (30.3%)	$19,384,312 (69.9%)	$8,192,853 (29.6%)
105th House	1997-1998	17,697 (63.2%)	10,197 (36.4%)	$25,535,801 (70.8%)	$10,365,621 (28.7%)
106th House	1999-2000	19,698 (69.3%)	8,655 (30.5%)	$30,313,325 (77.3%)	$8,760,298 (22.4%)
107th House	2001-2002	18,644 (67.4%)	8,976 (32.4%)	$31,111,554 (72.8%)	$11,479,573 (26.9%)
108th House	2003-2004	17,194 (61.2%)	10,872 (38.7%)	$30,560,233 (63.6%)	$17,429,874 (36.3%)

Table 5.5: Labor PAC Contributions to Winning House Candidates in the 99th through 108th Houses, 1985-2004, by Party (Percentage going to Party in Parentheses).

With the FEC data, I construct three measures of campaign contributions for the study: one based on shared PAC contributions from *all* types of PAC contributors; one based on shared PAC contributions from *big business* PAC contributors, specifically; and one based on shared PAC contributions from *labor* PAC contributors, specifically. Operationally, "shared contributions" means receiving contributions from the same sources, regardless of the number or money amount. I use these measures based on shared contributions rather than measures based on money for a number of reasons: First, PAC contributions usually involve set money amounts. PACs frequently solicit contributions in predetermined sums (such as asking $50 per plate at a fundraising meal); and more importantly, PACs then give this money in fixed quantities to candidates, often

$500 or $1,000 per candidate per election. Second, innovative research by Mizruchi (1992) set a precedent for measuring shared contributions in studies of corporate political action rather than measuring money amount per se, because in theory the contribution tie is what matters in a social-relational context more so than money amount. Third, and perhaps most importantly, *I constructed and tested measures based on money amount in preliminary models and they produced results very similar to measures based on shared contributions*—so adding this to the first two reasons, it seemed more appropriate to use the shared contributions measures in the final models.

Again, I arranged the data into dyadic relational matrixes. With each measure, all of which follow Mizruchi (1992), in each cell of the matrix is the log of the number of contributors legislators *i* and *j* share controlling for the number of contributors each has where N_{ij} is the number of people contributing to both legislators *i* and *j*, N_i is the number contributing to legislator *i*, and N_j is the number contributing to legislator *j* (see Figure 5.2). I log all the variables because their distributions are highly skewed. Again the total number of dyads for each two-year period is roughly 94,395.

$$Similarity(ij) = \frac{N_{ij}}{\sqrt{N_i N_j}}$$

Figure 5.2: Equation for Contribution Similarity Variable(s).

Control variable: ideology/party

A number of studies in political science have found that personal ideology is a very strong determinant of roll call voting—so strong, in fact, that some argue ideology is

the primary dimension on which legislators make decisions (e.g. Poole and Rosenthal 1985, 1991; Schneider 1979). There are, however, a number of problems with most presently used measures of legislator ideology. Often these measures are based on scores derived from interest group indexes, yet these indexes are usually surveys of legislators' past votes on issues, which presents a tautology since using scores from these indexes to explain roll call votes is essentially using votes to explain votes (Jackson and Kingdon 1992). One way this problem of measurement can be resolved is by using party as a proxy of ideology.

Legislator ideology can be viewed as a factor that corresponds somewhat well with simple left-right or liberal-conservative categories; party affiliation, too, corresponds somewhat well with left-right categories. Thus, party is a factor that, at least to some degree, likely taps legislator ideology. Using party as a proxy of ideology is somewhat limiting in that there are generally two main categories with which to belong, whereas an interest group score-based measure could include a range of possible scores. Nonetheless, party does not pose tautological issues when used as a vote predictor, and it shares an important characteristic with ideology measures—great predicting strength.

In studies of roll call voting that include party as a predictor, party almost always emerges as the quintessential vote determinant (Weisberg 1978). In fact, a number of studies suggest that the effect of contributions on roll call voting *becomes less significant or even non-significant* when party is added to the equation (e.g. Chappell 1982; J. Wright 1985, 1990), which makes its inclusion critical to this study. In practice, research no longer questions whether or not party affects voting, but, instead, tends to focus on issues of accurately estimating just how strong the effect of party is, spurring

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methodological debates (e.g., Snyder and Groseclose 2000, 2001; McCarty et al 2001). One of those debates asks whether or not party *and* other indicators of ideology should be included in the same statistical models.

While some researchers would argue that party and ideology are different enough to merit the inclusion of both in models of roll call voting, recent statistical testing and scrutiny suggests that major methodological issues arise when both are included in models (Herron 2001). As such, I use party in my models as a proxy for ideology, and exclude any additional measures of ideology from the analyses (of course, though, I also keep in mind that party is not merely an ideological label—it is also a source of social relations in the legislature—as discussed in the last chapter). In constructing the party variable, I again arranged the data into a dyadic relational matrix. In each cell of the matrix is a dummy value (1 or 0) where 1 indicates that legislators *i* and *j* are in the same party. Again, the total number of dyads for same party is approximately 94,395 for each two-year period.

Control variable: same race.

It is a well-known fact in sociology that race is correlated with a number of important socioeconomic factors. These factors, such as family wealth, help dictate objective group interests. Moreover, research shows that race is an important factor affecting socialization (e.g. Blau, Blum, and Schwartz 1982), bringing people together around these common objective interests. This is quite clear in the political sphere, where there are a number of race-based political organizations that aim to promote and defend group interests. Furthermore, there are a number of formal organizations in the political sphere that unite legislators of the same race, such as the Congressional Black Caucus,

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and research suggests that these organizations can be very influential forces in politics (S. Wright 2000). As such, race likely influences the way legislators vote on roll calls, meriting its inclusion as a control variable. Information on legislators' racial backgrounds was obtained from various congressional biographical references. In constructing the racial homophily variable, I again arranged the data into dyadic relational matrixes. In each cell of the matrixes is a dummy value where 1 indicates that legislators i and j are the same race. Again, the total number of dyads for the same race variable is roughly 94,395 for each two-year period.

Control variable: same sex.

Sex is also an important factor affecting socialization, and should in theory affect roll call voting. A review of the relatively small body of existent research on sex and roll call votes yields mixed findings, though. One study suggests sex affects roll call voting family leave legislation (Segal and Brzuzy 1995). Similarly, another study argues that sex affects voting on women's issues, with female legislators voting more favorably than males toward policies that benefit women (Thomas 1989). But a study on general roll call voting suggests that sex has little impact overall (Barnello 1989). As such, the relationship between sex and roll call voting is not clear, warranting further examination. Plus, given the importance of sex in sociological research, it should virtually never be excluded as a control variable in much any study of behavior or decision making, let alone a study of legislative decision making. Information on legislator sex was gathered from various biographical references. In constructing the sex homophily variable, I again arranged the data into separate dyadic relational matrixes. In each cell of the matrix is a

dummy value where 1 indicates that legislators i and j are the same sex. Again the total number of dyads for the same sex variable is around 94,395 each assembly.

Control variable: committee overlap.

As noted before, the legislature is a workplace that brings its members into contact via proximity and overlapping activities. Within the legislature, there are specific tasks that may bring certain representatives into closer contact. One of those tasks is serving on committees. Legislative committees bring legislators together and increase their odds of establishing relationships and friendships with one another (Caldeira and Patterson 1987). While it is true that legislators have some choice in what committees they sit on, this interest in a committee does not guarantee that all the legislators choosing to participate in that committee carry the same ideological viewpoints on issues. As such, committees are arenas with diverse viewpoints where negotiation and compromise are crucial—without compromise and some convergence of ideology, bills would never leave committee for roll call voting on the house floor.

Given that committees are clearly arenas where interactions and influence take place, committee overlap should be a social tie that has importance for roll call voting. In other words, the greater committee overlap between two legislators, the more likely they are to vote similarly on bills. I therefore include committee overlap as a control variable in my models. In constructing the committee overlap variable, I again arranged the data into a dyadic relational matrix for each two-year assembly of the house. In each cell of the matrix is the number of legislative committees that legislators i and j sit on together. The total number of dyads for committee overlap is again around 94,395 each assembly.

Other variables: tenure similarity, district proximity.

The longer two legislators have been in the legislature together, the more likely they are to have been in contact with one another. Furthermore, there are a number of orientations and events geared toward incoming cohorts of legislators (Davidson and Oleszek 1998), bringing them into contact. So even legislators who have been in the legislature for a short time are more likely to come into contact with one another if they are in the same cohort. Therefore, tenure similarity can be considered, in the very least, a weak tie that links legislators to one another. I therefore include tenure similarity as a control variable in my preliminary analyses. I constructed two different dyadic relational measures of tenure similarity for testing: one measuring the negative absolute value of the difference in the number of years legislators i and j have overlapped in the legislature, the other simply measuring the minimum number of years legislators i and j have served in the legislature together. Neither measure ended up being statistically significant in the test model results, though. Additionally, neither had any measurable impact on the main relationship under study—the relationship between campaign contributions and roll call voting. I therefore exclude tenure similarity in the final models for the sake of parsimony.

Another variable that yielded similar non-significance in a statistical sense was district proximity. One would think that district proximity would have some influence on roll call vote similarity between dyads of legislators. Generally speaking, being from the same state should place legislators' interests closer together because of similar constituencies. And from the perspective of campaign contributions, legislators should, conceivably, receive contributions from more of the same PACs if they are from the same geographic region, meaning that controlling for district proximity would seem crucial in

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analyses of how campaign contributions influence roll call voting since it is possible that

any statistically significant effect of contributions is merely a reflection of constituency

interests. This said, I constructed a dyadic relational measure of district proximity for

testing that measures whether or not legislators *i* and *j* represent districts in the same

state. The measure was non-significant in the preliminary models, and did not have a

discernible impact on the relationship between campaign contributions and roll call

voting. I therefore exclude district proximity in the final models, but nonetheless feel

confident that the final models are parsimonious *and* robust.

Methods

As noted in Chapter 4, regression is a commonly used statistical method in social

science research. Regression models the dependent variable as a mathematical function of

the independent variable(s) and the control variable(s). It essentially tries to fit the data to

a line, determining the nature of the relationships, if any, between the independent

variable(s) and the dependent variable in the presence of controls. Most standard

"parametric" forms of regression carry certain statistical assumptions that should be true

in order to ensure mathematically sound, error-free results. One of the most central

assumptions of parametric regression is that the cases are independent. Yet as the

discussion in Chapter 4 revealed, a relational approach assumes the cases are

interdependent, and explicitly organizes the data to reflect this, thereby violating this

assumption and creating a statistical problem known as "autocorrelation." There are a

few statistical techniques that help resolve this problem. One is to use parametric

regression, but add control variables for all senders and receivers. This may not resolve

the issue entirely, though, as the data would still nonetheless violate the central

assumption, even if this technique would essentially control for all sender and receiver fixed effects. A better technique would be to use nonparametric statistics.

There are a few nonparametric statistical techniques available. The type of technique most appropriate for this study is quadratic assignment procedure (QAP) regression. Innovative work by Mizruchi (1992) set a precedent for using QAP regression in sociological studies of political power structure. QAP is a very conservative, rigorous form of regression that eliminates the assumption of case independence in a very systematic fashion. QAP uses logic similar to bootstrapping whereby the dependent variable relational matrix is regressed on the independent variable relational matrixes once, and then the actors attached to each node are semi-randomly shuffled—the difference is that QAP uses a permutation procedure to preserve the structure of the relations in the matrix in this shuffling procedure. After shuffling the actors, regression is performed again with this new, semi-random configuration of actors. This shuffling, re-regressing procedure is repeated many times (typically 1,000), and the original regression coefficients (with all the actors in their actual, original positions) are compared with the distribution of subsequent coefficients to determine their statistical significance (Hubert and Schultz 1976). For instance, if a given coefficient from the original regression model is greater than 95% of the coefficients in 1,000 other "shuffled" models, the coefficient is significant at the .05 level, one-tailed test.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS: DO PAC CONTRIBUTIONS, IN GENERAL, *AFFECT* VOTING?

In this chapter, I present and discuss the results of my analyses on the relationship between special interest groups, in general, and legislative decision making. I then explore issues of causality in these results, examining whether or not contributions *affect* roll call voting. My analyses utilize QAP regression to statistically analyze the impact of *all* PAC contributions on legislative roll call voting. Examining the influence of *all* PAC contributions on roll call voting—before examining the influences of big business and labor PAC contributions, specifically, which I present in Chapter 7—is important because the current literature on the general impact of contributions is very mixed: some studies find a statistically significant relationship between contributions and votes, some do not.

As I argued in Chapter 3, the mixed findings in this line of research are a consequence of the fact that most of the studies have one of two problems: they select only a subset of votes for analyses, or they ignore the social context of voting. My analyses correct for both problems. I include all the roll call votes that occurred in each two-year assembly examined; and I explicitly take into account the social context of voting by shifting my units to relational dyads, measuring similarities/relations among dyads of legislators.

Initial Results

Table 6.1 presents results from the first set of statistical models. Let me first provide some background to help with interpreting the results. The numbers beside the variables in Table 6.1 are coefficients of the statistical relationship (or 'covariance') between those variables and similarity in roll call voting for each respective two-year assembly of the House. Positive numbers represent a relationship whereby as the variable increases, the similarity in roll call voting between dyads of legislators also increases; in other words, they co-vary in the same direction. Negative numbers (there are none in this table, but in later tables there will be) represent the opposite relationship: as the variable increases, the similarity in voting decreases. In a general sense, the larger the coefficients, the stronger the relationship between the respective variable and the dependent variable. The coefficients in this table are "unstandardized" coefficients, meaning that they have not been adjusted in such a way that they are expressed in a common metric. Nonetheless, these unstandardized coefficients are a fairly good indicator of relationship strength interpreted in terms of the slope of metric-specific variables.

The asterisks in the table indicate the level of statistical significance of the relationships. One asterisk means the variable has a relationship with similarity in roll call voting that we can be at least 95% confident is real—not a product of chance or error. Two asterisks means the variable has a relationship with voting that we can be 99% (or more) confident is real. At the bottom of the table, the "R-square" is a number ranging from 0 to 1 representing the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the variables in the model. Finally, the "N" is simply the number of cases (in this case, relational dyads) analyzed in the model.

	99th House 1985-1986	100th House 1987-1988	101st House 1989-1990	102nd House 1991-1992	103rd House 1993-1994	104th House 1995-1996	105th House 1997-1998	106th House 1999-2000	107th House 2001-2002	108th House 2003-2004
All PAC Contributions	.653**	.569**	.494**	.528**	.503**	.550**	.435**	.468**	.362**	.434**
Same Party	.218**	.237**	.211**	.269**	.351**	.380**	.291**	.252**	.268**	.340**
Same Race	.008	-.001	.027*	.015*	.021**	.060**	.041**	.025*	.033**	.030**
Same Sex	-.009	-.019*	-.018*	-.014	-.007	.019*	.006	.004	.004	.004
Committee Overlap	.003	-.001	.016**	.006*	.008*	.003	.008**	.003	.009**	.005*
R-Square	.653	.635	.551	.731	.804	.826	.785	.762	.731	.873
N	94,395	93,961	94,395	93,961	93,961	93,096	93,961	93,528	93,528	94,395

Table 6.1: Coefficients from QAP Regressions of Similarity in Roll Call Voting on All PAC Contributions, Controlling for Party, Race, Sex, and Committee Overlap, 99th through 108th Houses, 1985-2004 (One-Tailed Tests, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01).

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The coefficients in Table 6.1 for the main independent variable, all PAC

contributions, show that there is a *positive* relationship between PAC contributions and

similarity in roll call voting in all two-year assemblies analyzed. Legislators' similarity in

receipts of campaign contributions thus co-varies in the same direction as their similarity

in roll call votes. In more specific terms, *the greater the number of PAC contributors*

dyads of legislators share, the higher their percentage of similarly in roll call voting. For

instance, a dyad of legislators who share 250 PAC contributors in common would likely

vote the same way in a higher percentage of roll calls than a dyad of legislators who share

only ten PAC contributors in common. Importantly, the coefficient for this relationship is

strong and positive in all the assemblies analyzed, and, thus, the relationship clearly

flows in this positive direction. Moreover, this relationship is statistically significant in all

models, suggesting PAC campaign contributions are *significantly* related to patterns of

roll call voting.

As Table 6.1 shows, PAC contributions have a *consistent, statistically significant*

relationship with patterns of roll call voting throughout the twenty-year period. In every

single assembly of the House analyzed, PAC contributions are statistically significant in

their relationship with roll call voting at the .01 significance level, meaning that we can

be more than 99% certain that the relationship is real—and this is controlling for other

important variables, such as party affiliation, race, sex, and committee overlap, showing

that *PAC contributions are significant even when other important factors are accounted*

for. This is an important finding given that some would argue the relationship between

PAC contributions on roll call voting is conditioned by the impact of party or other

factors (e.g. Chappell 1982; J. Wright 1985, 1990); in other words, that contributions do

not really matter that much when other factors are considered. These findings do not

support this. Instead, these findings show that PAC contributions matter independently of

those other factors—contributions have a statistically significant relationship with

legislators' patterns of voting on roll calls *independent of* the influences of party, race,

sex, and committee overlap.

Finally, as Table 6.1 demonstrates, the R-square of all the models is quite high,

ranging from .551 in the 101st assembly of the House to .873 in the 108th assembly. This

means that these models explain 55.1% to 87.3% of the variance in roll call voting over

this twenty-year period. It is unusual for statistical models to explain this much of the

variance in a dependent variable. Even compared with other studies of roll call voting,

which typically have relatively high R-squares, these numbers are impressive (especially

since some models of roll call voting produce artificially inflated R-squares because of

using interest-group indexes as an independent variable, essentially using votes to explain

votes). These high R-squares support my contention that a relational approach to studying

roll call voting is appropriate, given that this relational approach explains as much of the

variance in roll call voting as other approaches.

The findings in Table 6.1 show that correcting for the problems in the literature

on campaign contributions and roll call voting by analyzing all the roll call votes in an

assembly, and taking into account the social interdependence of legislators in those

analyses, yields a consistent statistically significant relationship between contributions

and roll call voting (and explains voting very well). This underscores the validity of my

approach, and shows that contributions and roll call voting, are, indeed, related.

Importantly, this relationship is remarkably consistent, showing that the correlation

between the two is unswerving over time. But is this statistically significant correlation a causal relationship whereby contributions affect votes, or are votes affecting contributions? To use a common phrase: Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

The Causality Question

This causality question—or the question of the chicken and the egg—is a question that legislators themselves ponder. And which came first, the contribution or the vote, is unclear from their accounts. For instance, one former legislator Schram (1995:48) interviewed said, "I believe most of these contributors give to members of Congress whose views are consistent with theirs." But another former legislator rebutted:

"Of course, members of Congress will always assert that they first deeply held their views…*before*…they sought the financial support of the [relevant special interest group]. But it's frankly very difficult for the *public* to accept. And it's very difficult form *me* to accept, having been in the system, that the chicken always came before the egg and it is not the other way around, that people consciously or subconsciously tailor their views to [their sources of campaign funding]" (pp. 48-49).

So clearly, legislators disagree on the causality question. What about so-called "political pundits?"

Political pundits disagree as well. Where they stand on the causality question depends on how critical they are of the possibility that contributions are even related to governmental decision making. For instance, the award-winning economist and journalist Paul Krugman is open to the possibility that contributions are related to governmental decision making. He therefore frequently asserts that PACs influence votes in his

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editorials in the *New York Times*. Molly Ivins, a top-selling author and journalist, also

agrees that contributions are related to decision making in the government, and therefore

contends that contributions affect decisions such as roll call votes. David Primo, a

political scientist and public opinion scholar, though, is critical of the possibility that

contributions are significantly related to legislative decisions. He thus refers to the

causality question as a key reason why the public should not view campaign finance as a

major issue in his recent *Independent Review* article (2002:213). And Paul Burstein, a

sociologist and political commentator, questions the idea that Congress is "for sale," and

suggests that contributions often go to legislators who are already predisposed to support

the contributors' views in his recent *Contexts* piece (2003:23). But what does the

empirical literature say?

While researchers sometimes highlight the possibility that PAC contributions go

to legislators who are more likely to vote in the PACs interest to begin with (e.g. Wawro

2001; J. Wright 1985), empirical work on the contributing strategies of PACs counters

this. For instance, Burris (2001) shows that whereas wealthy individuals give

ideologically, big business PACs contribute pragmatically. This implies that these PACs

do not closely scrutinize legislators' campaign platforms and voting records before

making contributions; big business PACs simply give money to the candidates that are

most likely to win an election (and to both candidates when the race is close) to increase

their access and potential influence once the legislator is in office. An examination of

contribution patterns supports this assertion. As shown in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 in the last

chapter, big business PACs contribute about as much to Democrats as they do to their

presumed ideological allies, Republicans. Similarly, labor PACs contribute substantially

to Republicans, even though Republicans are assumedly their ideological nemeses. What does this imply for the analyses and results described earlier? Because my analyses examine PAC contributions—which are typically given pragmatically—rather than individual contributions—which are typically given ideologically—I already provide a level of protection against the possibility that votes are influencing contributions rather than contributions influencing votes. I also build other safeguards into my analyses founded in social-scientific criteria for establishing causality.

There are a number of criteria for establishing causality in scientific explanation (Lazarsfeld 1959). There are three, in particular, that are pertinent to social science research: First and foremost, there must be a *temporal ordering* between variables such that the cause precedes the effect in time. I measured my PAC contributions variable for the two years prior to the two-year assembly of the House from which votes were analyzed in each cycle. This is thus a safeguard built into my analyses that is reflective of the first criterion for establishing causality. The second criterion is that there must be an *empirical correlation* between the variables under question. One cannot build a safeguard for this, per se, aside from analyzing variables that are likely related and hoping to find an empirical correlation. Such a correlation clearly exists here, as the findings in Table 6.1 show—PAC contributions and roll call voting are significantly related, thus satisfying the second criterion. The third criterion, then, is that the correlation between the variables cannot be explained by other variables; that the relationship is *NOT spurious*. The fact that I include control variables in my analyses for other potentially important variables, such as party affiliation, race, sex, and committee overlap, thus provides a safeguard specifically related to this third criterion of causality.

But one could conceivably argue that I have not sufficiently accounted for the possibility that votes affect contributions. For instance, one could argue that my safeguards related to the first and third criterion of causality fall short. While I have provided temporal ordering such that contributions precede votes in time, I have not taken into account the possibility that legislators' decisions or actions (especially their votes) prior to receiving those contributions affected the contributions, which, in turn, affected the present votes. After all, while Burris (2001) shows convincingly that PAC contributors generally follow a pragmatic strategy in contributing versus individual contributors, this does not mean that they never contribute ideologically, giving money to those legislators who seem support their views. In this vein, prior decisions/actions could be considered a variable that explains the statistically significant relationship between contributions and present voting, making this relationship spurious. So how have researchers addressed this issue empirically?

The Issue of Measuring Prior Decisions

Very few researchers empirically address the issue of prior decisions. Often researchers cite "difficulty" as a reason why this issue is not addressed. But true difficulties—translated here as methodological problems—only arise when researchers attempt to address this issue with reference to *prior ideology*—a variable that has a number of problems, as discussed earlier. Using *prior roll call votes*—or *roll call voting over time*—to account for prior decisions instead would be a much less problematic (and, arguably, more sound) approach to addressing the issue. Of course, even accounting for prior roll call voting presents some difficulty—translated in this instance as tediousness—given that there are roughly 1,000 roll call votes in any given two-year

assembly of the House. But taking into account prior roll call voting can and should be done to truly understand how prior decisions may impact the relationship between contributions and present roll call votes. Only a handful of researchers do this.

Grenzke (1989) and Wawro (2001) both take into account prior roll call voting in their studies, but in two very different manners. Grenzke creates panel data on legislators who served in the U.S. Congress all assemblies from 1973 to 1982, and then analyzes how their contributions—and their prior voting—are related to their voting in each of the five assemblies. Wawro argues against Grenzke's approach, though, contending that Grenzke's approach builds a "survivor bias" in the construction of the panel data, creating sample selection problems. Moreover, Wawro posits that contributions should, conceivably, only influence those votes that occur a short time (weeks or months) after the contribution is given. Wawro therefore analyzes how legislators' recent contributions are related to their voting over time *within* single assemblies of Congress, using advanced statistical analysis (panel analysis) techniques. Despite their differing approaches, both reach the same conclusion in their studies: campaign contributions do not significantly *affect* roll call voting—rather, voting likely affects campaign contributions. But both studies are plagued by serious methodological problems.

As Wawro (2001) rightly contends, Grenzke's (1989) approach commits sample selection bias by examining the roll call voting of only those legislators who served consecutively from 1973 through 1982. But in Wawro's attempt to correct for this flaw in Grenzke's work, Wawro commits an equally serious type of selection bias: selecting on the dependent variable. Wawro limits his analyses by selecting votes that are deemed "important" to the PACs analyzed. I discuss the many problems with this approach in

great detail in earlier chapters—but again, the core problem is that it selects on the

dependent variable, narrowing the number of votes under examination. Moreover,

conceiving of voting as a function of contributions given just weeks or months

beforehand, as Wawro does, greatly tightens the time frame of potential influence. From

a theoretical perspective, assuming that roll call voting could be influenced by

contributions occurring a year or two beforehand seems far more reasonable than

Wawro's limited time frame.

Answering Causality Concerns

I develop a two-pronged approach to correct for the errors committed by Grenzke

(1989) and Wawro (2001)—sample selection bias and selecting on the dependent

variable—in accounting for prior roll call voting, thereby answering concerns about

causality (see Figure 6.1). My two-pronged approach involves examining the roll call

votes of two groups in a given two-year assembly of the House—(1) freshman legislators,

and (2) non-freshman legislators. With the freshman legislators, I simply analyze their

similarity in voting as a function of their similarity in receipts of PAC contributions,

controlling for other variables, in much the same way I did before. The advantage of

examining freshman legislators separately is that they have no prior voting history, and,

thus, no voting record on which contributors could base their contributions. With the non-

freshman legislators, I do the same as above, but I add a control variable for their

similarity in voting in the prior assembly of the House. This "lagged control variable" for

their roll call voting in the previous two-year period thus explicitly accounts for their

prior decisions. This two-pronged approach corrects for sample selection bias by

including both freshman and non-freshman legislators in the overall analyses, rather than

? Causality Question

Prong 1: Examine Freshman Legislators Only

Advantage: No Voting History

Prong 2: Examine Non-Freshmen with Lagged Control

Advantage: Accounts for Prior Voting
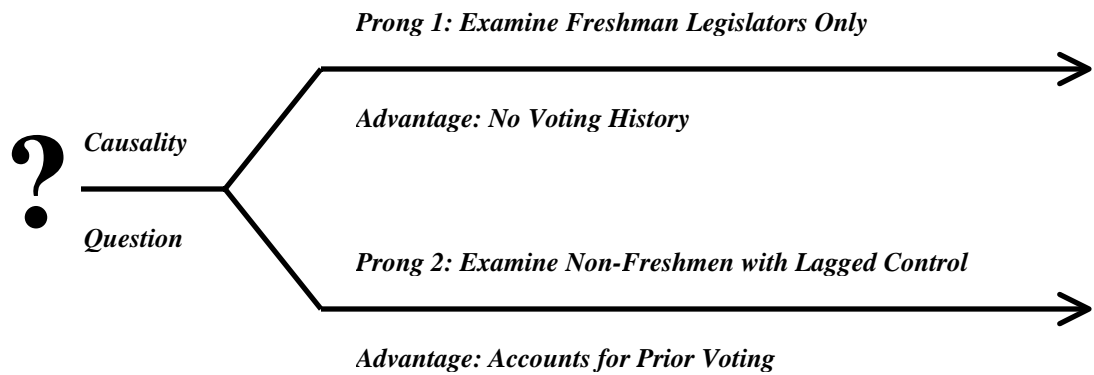
Figure 6.1: Two-Pronged Approach to Answering Causality Question

ignoring the voting patterns among freshman legislators. It avoids selecting on the dependent variable by analyzing all the votes in a given assembly of the House, as my earlier analyses do. And an additional benefit is that it models roll call voting as a function of PAC contributions given in the two years prior to voting rather than limiting it to just weeks or months.

In implementing this two-pronged approach, I need to choose an appropriate two-year assembly of the House. I feel the most appropriate assembly of the House is the 104th assembly, 1995-1996. There are a number of reasons why this is the case. First, since this is the only causal test I conduct for my twenty-year period (mainly because of 'tediousness' issues noted earlier—conducting such analyses on every session would prove very time-consuming and would likely not yield much variation considering the patterns across these assemblies in the relationships already found are quite consistent), it is best to pick an assembly temporally near the middle of this period to better defend the case that it is reflective of general patterns that may exist throughout the twenty years.

The 104th assembly of the House is generally in the middle of this period. Second, though, related to the first reason above, it might be interesting to examine an assembly reflective of our current partisan divide in the House. The 104th House was dominated by Republicans, as more recent assemblies have been. Third, and most importantly, it is important to examine an assembly that has a large enough class of freshmen legislators to satisfy the rules of statistical confidence (one of the general rules in statistics is that there should be a fairly large number of cases—at least more than thirty—to have confidence in model results). There were a large number of freshman legislators in the 104th assembly of the House—close to ninety in all. The 104th assembly of the House is thus the most appropriate assembly to analyze in this two-pronged approach.

Results of Causal Analyses

The results from my two-pronged analyses are presented in Table 6.2. Model 1 in the table is actually the model from the earlier analyses, repeated here just for reference. Model 2 in the table is the model with freshman legislators only. Model 3 is the model with non-freshmen only, controlling for prior vote similarity. Model 2 shows that among dyads of freshman legislators, similarity in receipts of PAC contributions is significantly related to similarity in roll call voting. In other words, the more PAC contributors two freshman legislators share, the more likely they are to vote the same way in roll calls. Granted, the relationship between PAC contributions and roll call voting is not quite as strong among dyads of freshman legislators as it is for the 104th assembly as a whole (see Model 1 for comparison). This may be due, in part, to party influences among this new cohort of legislators. Members of the new majority party (Republicans) dominated this freshman class, and research shows that party socializes new legislators very intensely

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(Davidson and Oleszek 1998). But the relationship between contributions and roll call voting is, nonetheless, significant at the .05 significance level.

	Model 1 (All Members)	Model 2 (Freshmen Only)	Model 3 (Non-Freshmen Only)
All PAC Contributions	.550**	.309*	.189**
Same Party	.380**	.425**	.099**
Same Race	.060**	.022	.039**
Same Sex	.019*	.010	.016
Committee Overlap	.003	.001	.002
Prior Vote Similarity	-	-	.730**
R-Square	.826	.944	.876
N	93,096	4,371	56,616

Table 6.2: Coefficients from QAP Regression of Similarity in Roll Call Voting Among all Legislators, Freshman Legislators, and Non-Freshman Legislators in the 104th House, 1995-1996, on All PAC Contributions Controlling for Party, Race, Sex, Committee Overlap, and Prior Voting (One-Tailed Tests, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01).

The fact that the relationship between PAC contributions and roll call voting is statistically significant among dyads of freshman legislators helps bolster the case that the relationship between PAC contributions and roll call voting is *causal* whereby *contributions affect voting*. One could contend, however, that the case still has cracks. Many freshman representatives have political histories—for instance, many of them

previously served in state-level roles in which they made decisions. A person could argue

that PACs may research this decision-making history at the state-level (or whatever level

of politics the candidates had previously served) and get at least some sense of their

ideological stance. Moreover, even those new representatives who have no political

history campaigned on a platform—a platform on which their ideological views were

showcased. Even their party identification is at least in part an indicator of their

ideological views. So PACs that may be contributing partly based on ideology (even

though most of the time they do not) would have at least some sense of the

representatives' ideological views during the campaigns, and, thus, Model 2 may not

completely resolve concerns surrounding causality. This is where Model 3 becomes very

important.

Model 3 shows that among dyads of non-freshman legislators, similarity in

receipts of PAC contributions is significantly related to similarity in roll call voting in the

104th assembly controlling for similarity in voting during the prior (103rd) assembly.

Specifically, the more PAC contributors dyads of non-freshman legislators share, the

more similarly they vote on roll calls in the present two-year assembly, regardless of their

similarity in voting in the previous assembly. And while the coefficient is not quite as

large as the coefficient in the original model (Model 1), it is still statistically significant at

the .01 significance level, just as in the original model. The fact that contributions are

significantly related to roll call voting among non-freshman legislators—even controlling

for previous voting patterns—strengthens the case even more that this relationship is

causal whereby *contributions affect voting*.

The results from Models 2 and 3 in Table 6.2 together provide strong evidence that PAC contributions are not merely correlated with roll call voting in an ambiguous way, but, instead, that they are causally related to roll call voting—they *affect* roll call votes. This is not to deny that the relationship may also work in the opposite direction. It may still be the case that to a certain degree, roll call voting affects contributing patterns. But these analyses demonstrate rather clearly that contributions affect voting patterns. Freshman legislators tend to vote more similarly on roll calls the more PAC contributors they share, despite the fact that they technically have no voting history on which contributors could base their contributions. Non-freshman legislators vote more similarly the more PAC contributors they share controlling for their prior vote similarity, suggesting PAC contributions have an effect on roll call voting independent of the effects of prior voting. These findings thus silence critics' claims that contributions do not affect roll call voting—contributions *do* affect roll call voting.

Now that it is established that special interest groups (PACs), in general, influence roll call voting through their campaign contributions, it is possible to move on to the second, key question of this research: Which class-based special interest groups have a greater influence on roll call voting—big business PACs or labor PACs? The answer to this question will follow from analyses in Chapter 7. The answer will reveal which hypothesis—elite-power, pluralist, or state-centered—best estimates the role of class-based special interest groups in legislative decision making, and, thus, will help resolve the long-standing debates in social science over power and government.

CHAPTER 7

RESULTS: BIG BUSINESS PAC INFLUENCE VS. LABOR PAC INFLUENCE

In this chapter, I report and discuss the results of my analyses on the influence of class-based special interest groups—namely, big business and labor—on legislative decision making. My analyses again utilize QAP regression, this time to statistically analyze the influence of big business and labor PAC contributions on legislative roll call voting from the 99th assembly of the House through the 108th assembly. The results of these analyses show interesting patterns of influence over time, and help resolve the debates between elite-power, pluralist, and state-centered theories. In the following paragraphs, I first present the findings and discuss, in chronological fashion, the varying patterns of big business and labor influence over the ten assemblies analyzed. I then discuss the findings in a broader context, addressing how the theoretically-derived hypotheses from Chapter 4 are answered by these findings. Finally, I conclude by discussing the implications of my findings for the ongoing debate among social scientists on power and government.

Results: Chronology of Influence

The results in Table 7.1 show the influence of big business PACs and labor PACs on roll call voting in each of the ten different assemblies of the House analyzed, 99th

	99th House 1985-1986	100th House 1987-1988	101st House 1989-1990	102nd House 1991-1992	103rd House 1993-1994	104th House 1995-1996	105th House 1997-1998	106th House 1999-2000	107th House 2001-2002	108th House 2003-2004
Big Business Contributions	.139**	.018	-.016	.092*	.133**	.287**	.224**	.231**	.251**	.228**
Labor PAC Contributions	.301**	.302**	.301**	.243**	.134**	-.011	-.007	.089*	-.037	.059*
Same Party	.223**	.239**	.208**	.268**	.361**	.407**	.313**	.267**	.287**	.355**
Same Race	.019*	.010	.036**	.024**	.020*	.056**	.037**	.025**	.028**	.028**
Same Sex	-.006	-.017*	-.010	-.007	-.004	.019**	.007	.005	.003	.004
Committee Overlap	.007*	.005*	.020**	.010**	.011**	.005**	.010**	.005**	.009**	.006*
R-Square	.653	.641	.566	.733	.798	.819	.777	.754	.728	.869
N	94,395	93,961	94,395	93,961	93,961	93,096	93,961	93,528	93,528	94,395

Table 7.1: Coefficients from QAP Regressions of Similarity in Roll Call Voting on Big Business PAC Contributions and Labor PAC Contributions Controlling for Party, Race, Sex, and Committee Overlap, 99th through 108th Houses, 1985-2004 (One-Tailed Tests, * = p < .05, ** = p < .01).

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through 108th. The results illustrate interesting patterns over time. In the 99th (1985-1986) assembly, big business and labor PAC contributions both had a statistically significant influence on roll call voting in a positive direction. In other words, the more big business PAC contributors dyads of legislators shared in this assembly, the more similarly they voted on roll call votes; likewise, the more labor PAC contributors they shared, the more similarly they voted. Results from just this one assembly could paint a picture of a House in which opposing class-based groups share equal influence over decision making. But later assemblies paint a different picture.

The results from the next two assemblies—the 100th (1987-1988) and 101st (1989-1990)—show a strong labor influence. Labor PAC contributions were positively and significantly related to roll call voting in both of these assemblies, while big business contributions were not significant. But this period of labor strength was short-lived. By the 102nd (1991-1992) assembly, big business had begun to rebound. While their contributions in this assembly did not influence roll call voting as significantly as labor, their contributions were, nonetheless, positive and significant at the .05 level.

In the 103rd (1993-1994) House, big business gathered even more strength, this time matching labor's success. This 103rd assembly appears very similar to the 99th assembly, in that both big business and labor share relatively equal, positive influence over roll call voting. Again, the more big business PAC contributors dyads of legislators shared in the 103rd assembly, the more similarly they voted on roll call votes; and the more labor PAC contributors they shared, the more similarly they voted as well. This was the last time labor would enjoy influence on par with big business, though, as the next five assemblies ushered in a period of big business dominance.

The results from 104th (1995-1996) assembly illustrate a clear victory for big business over labor in terms of influence over roll call voting. Big business enjoyed strong, statistically significant, positive influence over roll call voting in this assembly; labor, however, was not significant, and actually had a negative influence. In other words, the more big business PAC contributors legislators shared, the more similarly they voted in this assembly; but the more labor PAC contributors they shared, the less similarly they voted. This suggests that labor's PAC contributions to members of this assembly were probably opposite the intended influence, if they had any influence at all. This serious defeat for labor—rendering them non-influential, at best—continued into the next assembly. Patterns in the 105th (1997-1998) assembly of the House mirror patterns in the 104th. Big business enjoyed strong, positive and significant influence over roll call voting, while labor basically had little or no influence. It wasn't until the 106th assembly that labor finally exercised at least some influence in a positive direction.

The results from the 106th (1999-2000) House show that while big business still dominated over labor in terms of influence on roll call voting, labor at least had some influence. The relationship between labor PAC contributions and roll call voting in this assembly was positive and significant at the .05 significance level, suggesting perhaps a resurgence in labor influence. But this resurgence was very brief: In the 107th (2001-2002) House, labor once again returned to a position of little, if any, influence. The relationship between labor PAC contributions and roll call voting in the 107th house was non-significant, and the direction of the relationship was again negative, just as it had been in the 104th and 105th Houses. Big business, meanwhile, continued to maintain strong positive influence over legislative decision making. In this assembly, big business

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PAC contributions had a statistically significant positive influence on roll call voting at the .01 significance level—the more big business PACs dyads of legislators shared, the more similarly they voted. Big business' dominance continued into the most recent assembly.

In the 108th (2003-2004) assembly, big business maintained their strength—the relationship between their PAC contributions and roll call voting by this time was very consistently strong and positive. And while labor had at least a positive influence in this assembly, the relationship between labor PAC contributions and roll call voting was only marginally significant, suggesting again that big business dominated over labor in terms of influence.

Summary of Patterns over Time

So clearly, the results in Table 7.1 show that the relative influence of big business versus labor fluctuated some over time. In the 99th through 103rd assemblies, big business was at least rivaled in strength by labor. During this period, big business' influence was not consistently significant; labor's influence, however, was more consistent, not only in the positive direction, but, also, significance. But in the 104th through 108th assemblies, big business dwarfed labor in influence. Big business PAC contributions had a significant influence over roll call voting in all these assemblies, while labor had a significant influence only once during this more recent period. Naturally, this leads one to ponder ways of explaining this variation.

At first glance, this fluctuation of big business influence versus labor influence may seem explicable by the party composition of the House. In the first five assemblies, when big business was rivaled by labor, Democrats were the majority in the House. In the

second five assemblies, when big business dominated over labor, Republicans were the majority. While party control in the House undoubtedly had something to do with this variability, this explanation only goes so far. For instance, it does not explain the significant strength of big business during the 99th assembly, which was Democrat-controlled. Of course, one could note here that a Republican majority ruled the Senate at the time and argue that this was the source of big business strength. After all, the House and the Senate share agenda setting and lawmaking to some degree. But big business showed a significant level of strength by the 102nd assembly, and by the 103rd assembly was quite strong—despite Democrat rule in the House and Senate (and the oval office in the 103rd). No matter what the explanation, there was at least some variability in the degree of influence exercised by big business versus labor early on in this twenty-year period. Later in this period, though, big business clearly dominated. And overall, even taking into account the variation early on, big business exercised more influence than labor.

Big Business Strength

From virtually any angle taken, *big business emerges as the more influential class-based group in House roll call voting during this twenty-year period* (see Figure 7.1 for more detail). This is not to ignore the influence that labor had during the early part of this period, nor is it to deny that in some assemblies labor was more significant than big business. It is simply to accurately depict the statistical results presented in Table 7.1 in their totality. For instance, *big business PACs had a positive influence in nearly every single assembly*—in other words, receiving contributions from the same big business PACs consistently led legislators to vote more similarly with the exception of one

assembly. Labor PACs, however, had a negative influence three different assemblies; in

these assemblies, receiving contributions from the same labor PACs led legislators to

vote less similarly.

	Big Business	*Labor*
All Ten Assemblies, 1983-2004		
Direction of Influence?	Positive nine assemblies.	Positive seven assemblies.
Significance of Influence?	Significant at .05 or better eight assemblies.	Significant at .05 or better seven assemblies.
	Significant at .01 or better seven assemblies.	Significant at .01 or better five assemblies.
Relative Influence versus Other?	More influence than labor five assemblies.	More influence than big business three assemblies.
Most Recent Five Assemblies, 1995-2004		
Direction of Influence?	Positive all five assemblies.	Positive two assemblies.
Significance of Influence?	Significant at .05 or better all five assemblies.	Significant at .05 or better two assemblies.
	Significant at .01 or better all five assemblies.	Significant at .01 or better zero assemblies.
Relative Influence versus Other?	More influence than labor all five assemblies.	More influence than big business zero assemblies.

Figure 7.1: Chart Depicting Big Business Strength in the U.S. House based on Findings.

When considering statistical significance, *big business PACs had a statistically*

significant influence on roll call voting in eight of the ten assemblies analyzed. Labor,

however, had a statistically significant influence in seven of the ten assemblies, and fewer

when considering that their influence was marginally significant in the 108th House. And

looking specifically at significance levels reveals a greater advantage for big business. *Big business was significant in its influence at the .01 significance level seven of the ten assemblies*. Labor, on the other had, was significant at this higher confidence level just five of the ten assemblies. So out of the ten assemblies analyzed, big business PACs had a significant influence on roll call voting more frequently (eight assemblies overall) and more strongly (seven assemblies at the .01-level) than labor PACs (seven and five assemblies, respectively).

More importantly, from the perspective of which class-based group dominated in specific assemblies, big business emerges as the overall victor. *Big business had a distinctly more significant influence on roll call voting than labor in five of the ten assemblies* (104th assembly through the 108th assembly). Labor, however, had a more significant influence than big business in just three assemblies (the 100th through the 102nd). In the two assemblies not mentioned, big business and labor were too similar in their influence to determine a clear victor. So, to put this in win/loss terms, big business had a record in these ten conflicts with labor of five wins, three losses, and two draws—a pretty good record. Even more impressive is that big business is working on a long string of zero losses in recent assemblies, and an even longer string of at least having a significant effect on voting.

The strength of big business in recent assemblies is unmatched, even by labor's seemingly impressive strength in the first few assemblies. For instance, in looking at labor's string of consecutive assemblies in which they had a significant influence on roll call voting, there is a discernible pattern of lessening strength with time. Had statisticians analyzed their influence at that time the way I have here, they could have perhaps

predicted the eventual demise of labor as a significant force in House decision making. The coefficients for labor PAC influence go down in magnitude during the latter part of this period, before dropping off completely in the 104th assembly. Big business, however, has shown no signs of decline in the most recent five assemblies, as summarized in Figure 7.1. The coefficients for big business PAC influence have consistently remained at .224 or higher beginning with the 104th assembly—statistically significant at the .01 level the entire time. And even in the two assemblies before the 104th, big business gained an increasing level of significance after its brief period of abeyance. *So big business' robust influence on House roll call voting began in the early 1990s and has lasted some fourteen years into the present.* Moreover, *big business has dominated over labor during the last ten years into the present*, and will likely continue this dominance.

Hypotheses: Reject or Fail to Reject?

So given the above findings, how well do the theoretically-derived hypotheses presented in Chapter 4 approximate the influence of special interest groups on roll call voting in the U.S. House? First, it is obvious that the state-centered hypothesis provides a poor estimation of this influence. This should have been clear even after discussing the results from the first set of analyses in the last chapter. Because the state-centered hypothesis predicts that that outsiders, in general, should not have an influence on governmental decision making, and, thus, neither big business PACs nor labor PACs should have any influence on roll call voting, my findings fail to support its predictions. The findings in Chapter 6 show that special interest groups do, indeed, have a significant influence on roll call voting in the House via their PAC contributions. The findings in this chapter show further that class-based special interest groups have a consistent, significant

influence. Frequently big businesses is significant, sometimes labor is significant, and in some assemblies of the House, both big business and labor share significant influence over roll call voting. Based on these findings, *I must reject the state-centered hypothesis*.

The pluralist hypothesis provides at least a better approximation of special interest group influence on roll call voting. Because the pluralist hypotheses at least acknowledges that outsiders such as special interest groups should have an influence on governmental decision making, the findings from Chapter 6 show that on this count the pluralist hypothesis is supported. But the pluralist hypothesis goes on to predict that no single class-based group should dominate. Not big business. Not labor. This prediction is largely unsupported by the findings in this chapter. First of all, there are only two assemblies of the ten analyzed in which big business and labor share relatively equal influence over roll call voting. The rest of the time, one group (frequently big business) exerts more significant influence than the other does. So, in viewing each of these assemblies individually, eight times out of ten the pluralist hypothesis is unsupported. But one could argue that the pluralist hypothesis should be applied more broadly over time— that patterns in particular assemblies cannot necessarily lend support (or take support away) from the hypothesis. In other words, patterns over the twenty-year period as a whole may better reflect the predictions of pluralist theory. Even from this perspective, though, pluralist theory falls short. While there is some variation in the relative strength of big business versus labor during this twenty-year period, it is clear that big business emerges as the more dominant force over this time span. This is particularly true of more recent years. As such, the pluralist hypothesis prediction that neither group should

dominate is not supported from this angle, either. *I therefore must reject the pluralist hypothesis* (at least in terms of its prediction of class-based influence.

The elite-power hypothesis provides the best estimation of special interest group influence on roll call voting. The elite-power hypothesis rightly predicts that special interest groups, in general, influence roll call voting, as evident in the findings from Chapter 6. More importantly, the elite-power hypothesis correctly predicts that in terms of class-based special interest groups, big business has a greater influence on roll call voting than labor. Granted, this prediction is not always correct when viewing specific assemblies. As the findings in this chapter demonstrate, there were a few assemblies of the House in the past twenty years in which labor exercised a greater influence over roll call voting than big business. But there were more assemblies in which big business dominated. Moreover, the overall trend across these assemblies is a trend of big business dominance, as noted in the last section and in Figure 7.1. This is particularly true of more recent years. Since the early 1990s, big business has maintained a consistent, statistically significant influence on roll call voting via their PAC contributions. And since the mid-1990s, this big business PAC influence has been absolutely dominant relative to labor. Big business has handily defeated labor since the beginning of the 104th assembly. *I thus fail to reject the elite-power hypothesis.*

Implications for Debates on Power and Government

The main implication of the findings in this chapter (and the last) for the debates on power and government is that elite-power theory generally provides the best explanation of present workings of power and influence in governmental decision making, at least in the U.S. House. Of course, one could protest this conclusion as too

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far-reaching; that I have not adequately acknowledged the nuances of these three theories of power and government in coming to this conclusion. But I contend again here, as I did in Chapter 2, that the cumulative adding of "nuances" to these theories has brought them to a level of softness beyond utility, rendering them useless as explanations of power and government in their soft versions. For instance, a person could point to the strong effects of party in my models and argue that this is evidence supporting state-centered theory since the significant effect of party shows that factors within the state are important for decision making. But I would rebut that this is a soft reading of state-centered theory, far too accommodating. State-centered theory, in its traditional form, does not merely argue that factors within the state are important in governmental decision making. Traditional state-centered theory contends that factors within the state are *all*-important in decision making; that outside factors play virtually no role (e.g. Skocpol 1980). From this perspective, then, my findings—even with party as a significant variable—do not support state-centered theory as an explanation of power and government. While it is worth noting that party is significant, this does not undermine the fact that outsiders such as big business exercise significant influence in roll call voting—a fact that traditional state centered-theory would predict against. State-centered theory is thus a deficient explanation of power and government in its traditional form.

One could also argue, even from the perspective of the more traditional versions of the theories, that pluralist theory works just as well as elite-power theory in explaining the findings of this chapter depending on which set of assemblies is examined. For instance, a person could point toward the findings from the first five assemblies—99th through 103rd—and argue that these findings demonstrate a fair level of balance between

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big business and labor, supporting the pluralist perspective. I will grant that traditional pluralist theory provides at least a plausible explanation of the patterns found in this earlier period. But given that big business began to clearly dominate starting in the 104th assembly, pluralist theory less credibly explains the overall patterns in this larger time span relative to elite-power theory; and pluralist theory completely fails to explain the patterns in the most recent five assemblies. This underscores the importance of examining patterns over time. Just looking at the 99th assembly of the House, for instance, would lead one to conclude that pluralist theory is the best explanation of power and government since big business and labor both have influence and are fairly equally balanced. But examining the twenty-year period as a whole reveals that while pluralist theory may help elucidate the initial patterns, more recent patterns in the House are best explained by elite-power theory.

Drawing on the discussion in the last paragraph, one implication for the debate over power and government is that what is the best theoretical explanation may depend on what time is observed. Even the patterns in the early part of the time frame of this study may be better explained by pluralist theory than elite-power theory. But the patterns also suggest that labor only rivaled big business in influence until the early 1990s, at which point big business began to dominate. So even if it is ceded that pluralist theory may apply to patterns in the earlier period under study, more recent patterns—from the mid-1990s leading into the present—are unquestionably best explained by elite-power theory. Elite-power theory is thus the best explanation of contemporary power and government in the U.S. dating back at least ten years. Granted, at some point in the future it may not explain power and government as well as it does presently. But based on the

patterns over the past ten years, it is clear that elite-power theory is the best explanation

of contemporary patterns of power in government in the U.S.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Study Setup

This study has explored power and conflict in U.S. politics by examining the relative influence of opposed class-based special interest groups on legislative decision making in the U.S. House. Drawing on the conflict perspective in sociology, the subjects have been big business and labor as classes because of their opposing economic interests and their open conflict in the political arena via their respective special interest groups— PACs. Moreover, the underlying focus has been on influence as opposed to other indicators of political success, because influence is at the crux of theorizing on power in sociology, and influence is the first step toward achieving desired ends social exchange.

Examining influence on legislative decision making is crucially important for understanding the workings of power and government—and democracy as a whole— because legislation regulates economic activity and its rewards, the machinery and sustenance of our capitalist system and our everyday lives. If a class-based special interest group representing a minority of the populace, such as big business, exercises significant influence over legislative decision making, this calls into question the degree to which the interests of the people are truly represented in our democracy.

The two main questions surrounding influence in this study have been: (1) Do special interest groups, in general, have a significant influence on legislative decision making? (2) If special interest groups do have such influence, does big business wield more influence than other groups (namely, their opposition group—labor)? Three guiding theories of power and government provide different answers to these questions. Elite-power theory would contend that special interest groups do have a significant influence on legislative decision making, and that big business wields the greatest influence. Pluralist theory would argue as well that special interest groups have a significant influence, but would disagree that big business dominates, instead arguing that groups are relatively equal in power. State-centered theory, then, would argue that special interest groups do not have a significant influence on legislative decision making.

One problem with the three theories is that in more recent formulations, they have been softened to a degree that undermines their explanatory power and ultimately renders them unfalsifiable. In other words, in their softened forms they would be virtually indistinguishable in their answers to the above questions, and most research evidence could be construed as support for any one of the theories. This has led to a serious slowdown in the production of new research in this area. Additionally, problems with the extant research in this area—problems such as focusing on big business unity rather than influence; or studying isolated, non-generalizable policy cases—have created gridlock in the debates on power and government. Therefore, this study has focused on testing the more traditional versions of the theories above, and has examined special interest group influence (via PAC campaign contributions) on roll call voting in the U.S. House as the means of testing.

Members of the House cast over 500 roll call votes per year, on average. Most house members receive copious campaign contributions before winning their seats, and many of these contributions come from special interests groups via PACs. PACs are essentially the front organizations of special interest groups in the political sphere. PACs are set up and run by big businesses, labor groups, and other groups that have an interest in policy. As shown in earlier chapters, PACs—particularly big business and labor PACs—give generously to winning house candidates (see Tables 1.1, 5.4, and 5.5 for more detail). These PAC contributions would therefore seem to be an obvious avenue of influence on roll call voting. But prior research is unclear on this point. The literature shows that campaign contributions unquestionably help lead to primary and election victories for candidates, and help lead to access for contributors. But do they lead to influence?

The media and public both believe contributions result in influence for contributors, but the empirical literature is mixed. Some studies find evidence that contributions significantly influence governmental decision making, while others find evidence to the contrary. The reason why the empirical literature is mixed is because studies on contributions and roll call voting commit at least one of two errors: they examine only a selection of bills in their analyses, and/or they ignore the social context of voting. In statistical terms, examining only a subset of bills is the problem of selecting on the dependent variable, which narrows the field of analysis and introduces bias. Ignoring the social context of voting is essentially a case of model misspecification considering that the legislature is a social arena and roll call voting is a social process. In this study I have therefore corrected for these problems by (a) analyzing all the votes in each

assembly of the House under study, and (b) using relational dyads as my units, measuring similarities/relations among all possible combinations of members.

Summary of Study Findings

The findings pertaining to the first main question if this study on whether or not special interest groups, in general, have a significant influence on legislative decision making suggest that special interest groups do indeed have a significant influence. Results of the analyses show very clearly that there is a significant positive relationship between PAC contributions, in general, and roll call voting (see Table 6.1). Legislators who receive contributions from the same PACs tend to vote more similarly in roll call votes. This significant relationship is consistent across all ten assemblies of the House analyzed. But one could argue that a significant relationship between contributions and roll call voting does not imply that the contributions really *influence* voting. In other words, this relationship does not necessarily show that PAC contributions *causally affect* roll call voting. It could be that voting affects contributions. I have addressed this concern a number of different ways.

First, by examining PAC contributions, which research suggests are given pragmatically, I have provided at least a safeguard against the possibility that votes are affecting contributions. Second, by setting up my analyses in a way that conforms to social-scientific criteria for causality—for instance, building temporal ordering into my models such that contributions precede votes in time—I have provided an additional safety measure. But more importantly, I have employed a two-pronged approach to further exploring causality issues: (1) examining freshman House members only, since they technically have no voting history on which contributors could base their

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contributions, and (2) examining non-freshman legislators separately, controlling for their prior voting patterns.

Applying this two-pronged approach to an appropriate assembly (the 104th, which is appropriate because it had many freshmen and is in the middle of the period, yet is similar to more recent assemblies) has yielded strong evidence that the relationship between contributions and voting is causal. In the model with just freshman members of the House, the relationship between contributions and roll call voting maintains its significance (see Table 6.2). This shows that even in the absence of a voting history— and, thus, less of a basis for ideological contributing—contributions still matter. In the model on non-freshman legislators controlling for their prior voting, contributions retain their significant relationship with roll call voting (see Table 6.3). This demonstrates that even when taking into account legislators' prior decisions, their present voting is significantly determined by their campaign contributions from PACs. These findings show very convincingly that the relationship between PAC contributions and roll call voting is, indeed, causal, whereby contributions *affect* votes. As such, over the past twenty years, PAC contributors, in general, have enjoyed significant *influence* on legislative decision making. But which class-based group enjoys more influence—big business or labor?

The findings pertaining to the second question of this study show that depending on the time period, both big business and labor have had a significant influence on roll call voting via their PAC contributions. But in more recent years, big business PACs have dominated, while labor PACs have been weak and inconsistent in their influence. And even looking at the twenty-year period as a whole, big business clearly exerted more

influence than labor overall. For instance, big business PACs had a significant influence in a greater number of assemblies than labor, particularly at the more stringent .01 confidence level. And in looking at which group had more influence in specific assemblies, big business holds the advantage: big business had distinctly greater influence than labor in five assemblies, while labor had greater influence than business in just three (and the two groups were essentially tied in two assemblies).

Theoretical Implications and Cross-National Extensions

The findings of this study thus provide evidence that of the three guiding theories of power and government, elite-power theory provides the best explanation of the workings of power in the U.S. House during this twenty-year period, especially in more recent years. Other theories simply fall short. State-centered theory fails to explain the patterns in these assemblies given that contributions clearly have an effect on roll call voting, which state-centered theory would predict against. Pluralist theory has some explanatory relevance to the earlier patterns, since in some of the earlier assemblies big business and labor rival one another in influence. But for the period as a whole, elite-power theory has greater relevance since big business exerts greater influence than labor overall. Moreover, elite-power theory is by far the best explanation of more recent patterns, making it the most relevant theory for contemporary understanding of power and government. These findings are very important for the progression of research in this area, because they show that while patterns of power vary over time, in recent years big business is the most powerful class-based group, and, thus, elite-power theory is the best contemporary explanation of power and government.

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In broader terms, the findings of this study confirm worries of the public and the media that special interest groups have a significant influence on governmental decision making. The findings also substantiate concerns regarding the representativeness of our democracy: A small minority of the populace, in class-based terms, *is* exerting a disproportionate amount of influence on policy making. Big business represents a very small percentage of the population in class-based terms—around 2% according to E. Wright (1985)—yet big business dominates over the labor class—representing roughly 40% of the population—in the political sphere. This raises serious questions regarding the degree to which our democracy is truly representative of the people in the U.S., particularly in terms of their economic interests. Since the primary role of legislation is the regulation of economic activity and its rewards, does big business influence result in greater economic advantage for the few and greater poverty for the many? If so, should our campaign finance system be changed to ensure the voices and interests of the people are not drowned out by the calls of special interests, particularly big business?

Future study should explore these questions concerning the broader societal consequences of big business influence. It could very well be the case that disproportionate big business influence results in greater inequality in U.S. society, and this should be explored. Also, future study should explore campaign finance systems in a comparative perspective to examine the possibilities that a different campaign finance system could bring. For instance, there are a number of capitalist democracies throughout the world that more strictly regulate campaign finance activities than we do in the U.S. For instance, in Canada, greater limits are placed on contributions, limiting the amount and number of contributions that can be given. And soft money is prohibited in Canada.

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In Poland, though, a newly emerging capitalist democracy, soft money contributions are the primary form of contributing. Both of these specific cases would provide interesting case studies and would allow for invaluable comparative analyses, helping determine whether or not different campaign finance systems result in different patterns of influence.

Grounded in the conflict perspective in sociology, this study has sought to explore the influence of special interest groups—big business and labor, in particular—on governmental decision making using uniquely sociological methods. The findings show that special interest groups have an influence on roll call voting in the U.S. House via their PAC contributions. They also show that big business dominates over labor in this influence, particularly in recent years. These findings have major implications for the ongoing debates on power and government in social science. Elite-power theory stands as the best theory explaining contemporary patterns of influence. These findings also have major implications for broader concerns in social science, such as democracy and inequality. They imply that our current campaign finance system undermines democratic rule of the people, allowing special interest groups—particularly big business— significant influence over policy making. This significant influence of big business may be exacerbating already growing problems of inequality in the U.S., suggesting that our system may require change to ensure the economic interests of the people are not secondary to the interests of a small minority of the populace, in class-based terms.

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