

Political Science 389–003 (Fall 2007): paper assignment

This paper has three parts. Your paper must address all three parts in content, although it need not be divided explicitly into three parts. A unified discussion is likely to be better. In any case you'll want to address parts I and II in ways that help support the strongest argument you can make to address part III.

Part I: Pick a congressional (i.e., U.S. House) district in the 2006 election in which an incumbent ran for reelection. For three individuals and three PACs that made a hard money contribution to the incumbent sometime during the 2005–2006 campaign period, explain what interests apparently motivated each individual and each PAC to contribute. Investigate the incumbent's committee memberships and roll call votes, special interest group ratings, federal expenditures in the district or other concrete facts to construct plausible arguments regarding the contributors' motivations. It may be very difficult to decide whether a contributor has benefitted from any particular federal expenditure, either before or after the election, so don't despair if you can't pin down such information—but also don't give up too easily. For individual contributors, the individual's employer (or occupation) as recorded in the Federal Election Commission Itemized Contributions data files (available through opensecrets.org, FECInfo and other websites) will almost certainly be good evidence regarding the material concerns the person is bringing to the campaign.

Part II: Connect your analysis in Part I either to the new soft money or to the national congressional campaigns (or both). For the relationship to the new soft money, establish a connection between at least one of the contributors discussed in Part I, either an individual or a PAC, and one or more non-PAC 527 groups. Say something interesting about the link (e.g., why has someone both given hard money and put money into a 527 group, why does an organization have both a PAC and a 527 group, do there appear to be informal alliances between a PAC and a 527 group). For a connection to the national campaigns, identify and explain contributions at least two individuals have made to one of the congressional campaign committees. Note that 527 groups are likely to have documented activity in the national campaign (e.g., through GOTV efforts), so the boundary between the two options I have described for this part may be fuzzy. Feel free to mix and match in reasonable and interesting ways.

An alternative for Part II is to focus the Part II discussion not on the incumbent but on the challenger. Because 2006 was a very favorable year for the Democrats, it may be fruitful to look at Democrats who challenged a Republican incumbent. In this case you'll want to do a mirror image of Part I for two PACs that gave to the challenger, or you need to explain the contributions of one PAC and develop a discussion along the lines of Part II for either a non-PAC 527 or a congressional campaign committee that gave to the challenger.

Part III: Use your findings from Parts I and II, along with relevant material from course readings and other information as you see fit, to discuss how effectively (or not) BCRA has helped to eliminate the effects of soft money that BCRA proponents thought were undesirable. You should relate your discussion to the relevant essays in the volume edited by Malbin (2005).

The paper should be no more than 15 double-spaced "typed" pages in length. **The paper is due in class on Monday, October 22.** Use normal citation formats for bibliographic references. Be sure to include the date of access along with the URL for any

citations to web pages. For a description of formats used in political science journals see http://www.library.cornell.edu/newhelp/res_strategy/citing/apa.html and http://www.library.cornell.edu/newhelp/res_strategy/citing/apa.html#electronic.

IMPORTANT: You must let me know as soon as possible which district and incumbent you plan to study. To choose a district you may find it helpful to consult the Election Returns web sites, just to get a sense of the range. **Email your selection to me (wmebane@umich.edu), by Wednesday, September 26. I will allow only one person to study each incumbent—first come, first served.** If I haven't received your district choice and approved it by **October 3**, I will impose a grade penalty on any paper you may submit for this assignment. You may work together to gather information for the paper.

Some web sources with information that should be helpful for this assignment are listed on the syllabus (the online version has live links). The opensecrets and FECInfo sites are probably essential for finding information about contributors. The Congressional Directory site has information about House Members' committee memberships during the 109th Congress. The Project Vote Smart site has extensive information about interest group ratings of House members, among other useful information. Thomas is a comprehensive portal to information about Congress, including information about which bills each House Member sponsored or cosponsored, and roll call votes. Of course you are free to consult any other sources you think may help your investigations.

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