

POSC 110: Introduction to American Politics
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Paper 4
Ideas or Power – Who Gets Funded?

Organized interests are concerned with promoting their interests conditioned on the likelihood of success. That is, they are strategic, realizing that they need to maximize the benefit given that they are unlikely to get 100% of what they seek. Another way of putting this is that strategic interests often bend to the dictates of Washington power in order to benefit from their political activity.

You will examine the degree to which strategy dictates contributions to members of the Senate in the 114th Congress (January 2015-end of 2016). We'll combine this with data on their estimated ideology (from the voteview.com website). The value of the ideology data is that we can use these scores as one proxy for the interests that groups seek. The extent to which interest groups contribute beyond a narrow ideological band is one indicator of the presence of strategy.

The contribution data we will use are from the Center for Responsive Politics website:

<http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/>

To keep the scope of our inquiry manageable, you will examine the contributions of an interest sector – in this case, the banks. There are a variety of interests inside this sector, of course, and you should briefly (i.e., in one paragraph) explore how diverse their contribution patterns are. But then shift your focus back to the sector-level (assuming the banks are one united entity) and explain why some senators get more money than others (the focus most of the paper here).

One variable you should use is the ideology of the recipient. Ideology, available in the spreadsheet I will provide to you, is defined on a scale from -1 (perfectly liberal) to +1 (perfectly conservative). A zero score indicates a moderate. Discuss the evidence briefly about the variability of recipients (how variable are the ideologies of the recipients of banking contributions?). Then examine the other factors that shape contribution decisions. What factors make some Senators magnets for money and others not? You will have to examine additional sources of evidence to discern the patterns.

It will not be sufficient to cherry pick one or two cases. I want to see you discuss many cases to illustrate what factors are in play in the Senate.