

# Congressional Campaigns

It should be apparent by now that much of the action in congressional election politics takes place outside of the formal campaigns and election periods. This in no way implies that campaigns are inconsequential. The bottom line is that votes must be sought and the most concentrated work to win them takes place through the campaign. The formal campaign is, of course, crucial to those candidates, including most nonincumbents, who have not been able to match the more-or-less incessant campaigning now typical of congressional incumbents.

Despite the dramatically expanded involvement of national organizations in recent years, congressional election campaigns have not lost their predominantly candidate-centered focus. To be sure, party committees, political action committees (PACs), and other types of organizations have become major players, but mainly by learning to operate effectively in an electoral system where candidates rather than parties are normally the centers of attention. Credit belongs to parties and PACs, along with independent professional campaign consultants, for the continuing stream of innovations in campaign technology and strategy that have transformed congressional campaigning in recent years. They also, consequently, share responsibility for higher costs, harsher rhetoric, greater partisan polarization, and the effects that all of these things have had on how members of Congress do their job.

Election campaigns have a simple dominant goal: to win at least a plurality of the votes cast and thus the election. Little else is simple about them, however. Campaigns present candidates difficult problems of analysis and execution, which, even in the best of circumstances, are mastered only imperfectly.

The analytical work required for an effective congressional campaign is suggested by the variety of campaign contexts set forth in Chapter 2. States and districts are not homogeneous lumps; voters do not form an undifferentiated mass. They are divided by boundaries of community, interest, class, race, generation, ideology, moral values, and geography. Candidates (and those who help them put campaigns together) need to recognize these myriad boundaries and to understand their implications for building winning electoral coalitions. Often, those without political experience do not understand these intricacies—and this in itself guarantees failure.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Linda L. Fowler, “Candidate Perceptions of Electoral Coalitions: Limits and Possibilities” (Paper presented at the Conference on Congressional Elections, Rice University and the University of Houston, January 10–12, 1980).

The basic questions are straightforward: Which constituents are likely to become solid supporters? Who might be persuaded? Which groups are best written off as hopeless, and how can they be discouraged from voting? How can potential supporters be reached? How can they be induced to vote? What kinds of appeals are likely to attract their support? All these questions must be answered twice, and in different ways, if there is a primary contest. They cannot be addressed at all without some cognitive handle on the constituency: Campaigners are necessarily theorists.

Successful campaigners recognize this, at least implicitly. Members of the House develop highly differentiated images of their constituencies. Their behavior is guided by a coherent diagnosis of district components and forces. Knowledge is grounded in experience; they learn at least as much about their constituents from campaigning and from visiting the district between elections as their constituents learn about them. This kind of learning takes time, and its necessity is another reason for viewing House elections from a time perspective longer than a campaign period or a two-year term.<sup>2</sup> It is also one source of the incumbency advantage and helps to explain why politically experienced nonincumbents make superior House candidates.

The analytic tasks facing Senate candidates are, in most states, substantially more formidable than those facing House candidates. Senate candidates normally deal with larger and more diverse constituencies, scattered over much wider areas. Incumbents as well as challengers usually suffer far more uncertainty about how to combine constituent groups into winning coalitions. Few have the opportunity to know their states as intimately as House candidates may know their districts.

In earlier times, candidates could sometimes get a feel for unfamiliar neighborhoods and communities from local party activists who were a part of them. Now they are more likely to rely on professional research—if, of course, they can afford it. Commercial vendors offer detailed voter lists, complete with information on family income, demographics, consumption patterns, group memberships, voting history, addresses, and phone numbers. Professionally conducted polls probe the opinions and attitudes of district residents. Focus groups—small groups of ordinary citizens brought together to mull over candidates, issues, and campaign themes under the guidance and observation of experienced researchers—provide a sense of what lies behind the polling results. Intelligence gathering, like every other aspect of campaigning, can now be farmed out to specialists if a campaign has enough money to hire them.<sup>3</sup>

The deepest understanding of the political texture of a state or district will not, by itself, win elections. Effective campaigns require a strategy for gathering at least a plurality of votes and the means to carry out that strategy. The central problem is communication. As Chapter 5 will show, what voters know about candidates has a strong effect on how they decide to vote. Voters who have no information about a candidate are much less likely to vote for him or her than those who do. The content of the information is equally consequential, to be sure, but no matter how impressive the candidate or persuasive the message, it will not help if potential voters remain unaware of them.

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<sup>2</sup>Richard F. Fenno Jr., *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1978), pp. 171–172.

<sup>3</sup>See any edition of *Campaigns & Elections* for the ads of vendors of these and all other campaign services.

Two resources are necessary to communicate with voters: money and organization. They may be combined in different ways, but overcoming serious opposition requires adequate supplies of both. Money is crucial because it buys access to the media of communication: radio, television, newspapers, direct mail, pamphlets, videos, billboards, bumper stickers, bullhorns, websites, and so on. Organization is necessary to design and execute campaign strategy, to raise money, to schedule the candidate's use of personal time devoted to cultivating voters and contributors, and to help get out the vote on election day or, increasingly, during the absentee and early voting period leading up to election day.

## CAMPAIGN MONEY

Raising money is, by consensus, the most unpleasant part of a campaign. Many candidates find it demeaning to ask people for money and are uncomfortable with the implications of accepting.<sup>4</sup> Most do it, however, because they cannot get elected without it. The trick, neophyte campaigners are advised, is to “learn how to beg, and do it in a way that leaves you with some dignity.”<sup>5</sup> Fundraising is also enormously and, to candidates, distressingly time consuming, especially for Senate candidates from large states.<sup>6</sup>

Congressional campaign finances are supposed to be regulated by the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) and its amendments, enforced by the Federal Election Commission. The law requires full disclosure of the sources of campaign contributions and also restricts the amount of money that parties, groups, and individuals may give to congressional candidates.<sup>7</sup> The FECA was originally intended to limit campaign costs and to reduce the influence of wealthy contributors in electoral politics. The opposite occurred, partly because the Supreme Court declared limits on campaign spending to be an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment,<sup>8</sup> partly because the Act itself, by establishing a clear legal framework for campaign finance activities, invited parties and PACs to flourish.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, *Money in Congressional Elections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 170–171; and Martin Schram, *Speaking Freely: Former Members of Congress Talk about Money in Politics* (Washington, DC: Center for Responsive Politics, 1995), pp. 71–76.

<sup>5</sup>Diane Granat, “Parties’ Schools for Politicians Grooming Troops for Election,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 42 (May 5, 1984): 1036.

<sup>6</sup>Schram, *Speaking Freely*, pp. 37–46.

<sup>7</sup>Before the passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, individuals could give no more than \$1,000 per candidate per campaign (the primary and general election campaigns are considered separate campaigns), up to a total of \$20,000 in an election year; nonparty PACs could give no more than \$5,000 per candidate per campaign (other party contribution limits are discussed later in this chapter). Under the BCRA, individual contributions limits were raised to \$2,000, to be adjusted for inflation after 2002; for the 2012 elections, the limit is \$2,500 (see [http://www.fec.gov/press/20110203\\_newlimits.shtml](http://www.fec.gov/press/20110203_newlimits.shtml), accessed October 29, 2011). The inflation-adjusted maximum that may be donated to all candidates by an individual in 2012 is \$46,200. The PAC limits were not changed and not indexed.

<sup>8</sup>*Buckley v. Valeo*, 96 S.Ct. 612 (1976).

<sup>9</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, “Parties and PACs in Congressional Elections,” in *Congress Reconsidered*, 4th ed., ed. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1988), pp. 117–121. For a balanced and thorough account of all aspects of campaign finance in the 1980s, see Frank J. Sorauf, *Money in American Elections* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1988).

In response to concerns that party contribution limits were choking off traditional local party activity in federal elections, Congress liberalized the FECA in 1979 to allow unrestricted spending for state and local party-building and get-out-the-vote activities. In 1996, a Supreme Court decision freed parties to engage in unfettered independent spending for their candidates.<sup>10</sup> Funds for these activities were commonly called “soft money,” as distinguished from the “hard money” raised and spent under the FECA’s limitations. Other groups may also finance independent campaigns either explicitly (in which case their spending has to be reported to the Federal Election Commission) or under the guise of “issue advocacy” or “voter education” (which need not be reported, as long as the campaign does not explicitly urge a vote for or against a particular candidate). Organizations taking the latter route are called “527” or “501(c)” groups, after the sections in the tax code regulating them. The details of a group’s organization determine the section under which they fall; 527s are purely political organizations, whereas 501(c) groups include social welfare organizations, labor unions, and business associations.

Unrestricted raising and spending of soft money, along with unregulated issue advocacy and voter-education campaigns, effectively destroyed the limits on campaign money in federal elections. The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA), enacted in 2002, attempted to put the lid back on by banning soft money and regulating independent spending on issue advocacy and voter education. But the explosive growth of campaigning by 527 groups beginning in 2004 and of independent party spending beginning in 2006, discussed in the following, shows that, while BCRA may have affected the sources of money spent outside the candidates’ official campaigns, it could not prevent the injection of massive, essentially unregulated sums into election politics.<sup>11</sup> The Supreme Court put the final touches on an unfettered system in 2010 by overturning a ban on campaigns financed directly from corporate and union treasuries on the ground that organizations enjoyed the same First Amendment rights as individuals.<sup>12</sup> The decision inspired a liberal public relations firm, Murray Hill Inc., to announce that, because “corporations were people too,” it would file to run for Maryland’s 8th District.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>*Colorado Republican Federal Campaign Committee v. Federal Election Commission*, 518 U.S. 604 (1996).

<sup>11</sup>Robert G. Boatright, Michael J. Malbin, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyed Wilcox, “Interest Group and Advocacy Organizations After BCRA,” in *The Election After Reform: Money, Politics and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act*, ed. Michael J. Malbin (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), pp. 137–138.

<sup>12</sup>*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 130 S.Ct. 876 (2010).

<sup>13</sup>“Until now,” Murray Hill Inc. said in a statement, “corporate interests had to rely on campaign contributions and influence peddling to achieve their goals in Washington. But thanks to an enlightened Supreme Court, now we can eliminate the middle-man and run for office ourselves”; see Catherine Rampell, “Corporation Says It Will Run for Congress,” *New York Times*, February 2, 2010, at <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/02/corporation-says-it-will-run-for-congress> (accessed June 3, 2011). Murray Hill Inc. never made it to the ballot; its attempt to register to vote was rejected by the Maryland State Board of Elections because it was “not human,” at [http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1010/44388\\_Page2.html](http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1010/44388_Page2.html).

## Contributions to Candidates

Aggregate figures on the amounts and sources of money contributed to House and Senate campaigns from 1972 through 2010 are presented in Table 4-1. Average campaign receipts have grown steadily, although the growth rate is considerably less impressive than these nominal dollar figures would suggest if inflation is taken into account. In real dollars, contributions to House candidates have grown an average of 8 percent and those to Senate candidates rose an average 10 percent, from election year to election year over this period.

**TABLE 4-1**
**Sources of Campaign Contributions to House and Senate Candidates, 1972–2010**

	Average Contributions (dollars)	PERCENTAGE OF CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:				
		Individuals	Parties	PACs	Candidates <sup>a</sup>	Unknown
<i>House</i>						
1972	51,752 <sup>b</sup>	60 <sup>c</sup>	27	14	—	9
1974	61,084	73	4	17	6	—
1976	79,421	59	8	23	9	—
1978	111,232	61	5	25	9	—
1980	148,268	67 <sup>c</sup>	4	29	—	—
1982	222,260	63 <sup>c</sup>	6	31	—	—
1984	240,722	51	3	39	6	—
1986	280,260	52	2	39	7	—
1988	282,949	49	2	43	6	—
1990	291,246	48	1	44	7	—
1992	358,925	50	1	39	10	—
1994	414,812	54	1	37	8	—
1996	510,997	55	1	34	7	3
1998	544,349	53	1	36	6	4
2000	661,472	53	1	35	7	4
2002	699,736	50	1	37	9	3
2004	766,752	57	.6	36	4	3
2006	953,044	54	1	35	5	5
2008	1,031,148	54	.02	34	7	5
2010	1,160,870	58	.2	34	6	2
<i>Senate</i>						
1972	353,933 <sup>b</sup>	67	14	12	.4	8
1974	455,515	76	6	11	1	6
1976	624,094	69	4	15	12	—
1978	951,390	70	6	13	8	—
1980	1,079,346	78 <sup>c</sup>	2	21	—	—
1982	1,771,167	81 <sup>c</sup>	1	18	—	—

(Continued)

	Average Contributions (dollars)	PERCENTAGE OF CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:				
		Individuals	Parties	PACs	Candidates <sup>a</sup>	Unknown
1984	2,273,635	68	1	20	11	—
1986	2,721,793	69	1	25	6	—
1988	2,649,492	68	1	26	6	—
1990	2,166,031	70	1	24	5	—
1992	2,638,964	68	1	25	6	—
1994	3,659,650	61	1	17	22	—
1996	3,274,940	63	1	19	13	4
1998	3,530,099	62	1	19	12	6
2000	5,305,051	55	.2	14	25	6
2002	4,013,845	68	.9	20	8	3
2004	5,418,860	76	.6	17	4	2
2006	7,943,400	68	.3	13	13	5
2008	5,698,551	64	.02	20	5	11
2010	7,555,000	64	.3	14	14	8

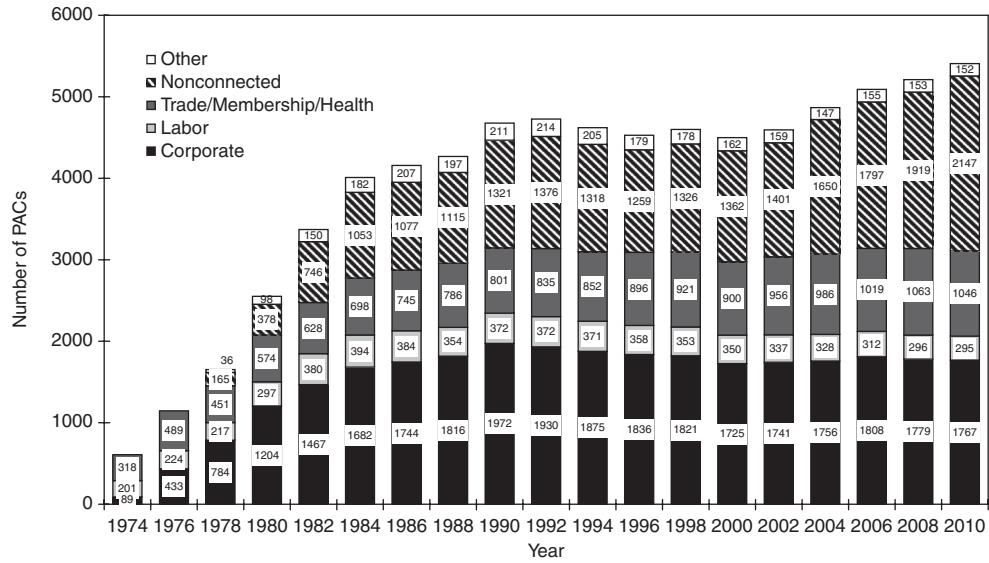
<sup>a</sup>Includes candidates' loans unrepaid at the time of filing.  
<sup>b</sup>Some contributions before April 7, 1972, may have gone unrecorded.  
<sup>c</sup>Includes candidates' contributions to their own campaigns.

Sources: Compiled by author from data supplied by Common Cause (1972 and 1974) and the Federal Election Commission (1976–2010).

Private individuals contribute the greatest share of campaign money; Senate candidates are especially dependent on individual donations. PACs are the second most important source of campaign funds. Their share grew rather steadily until the early 1990s, peaking at 44 percent for House candidates (1990) and 26 percent for Senate candidates (1988) before falling back in the four most recent elections to averages, respectively, of 36 percent and 18 percent. This category includes the various committees organized by unions, corporations, trade and professional associations, ideological and issue-oriented groups of many kinds, and political leaders.

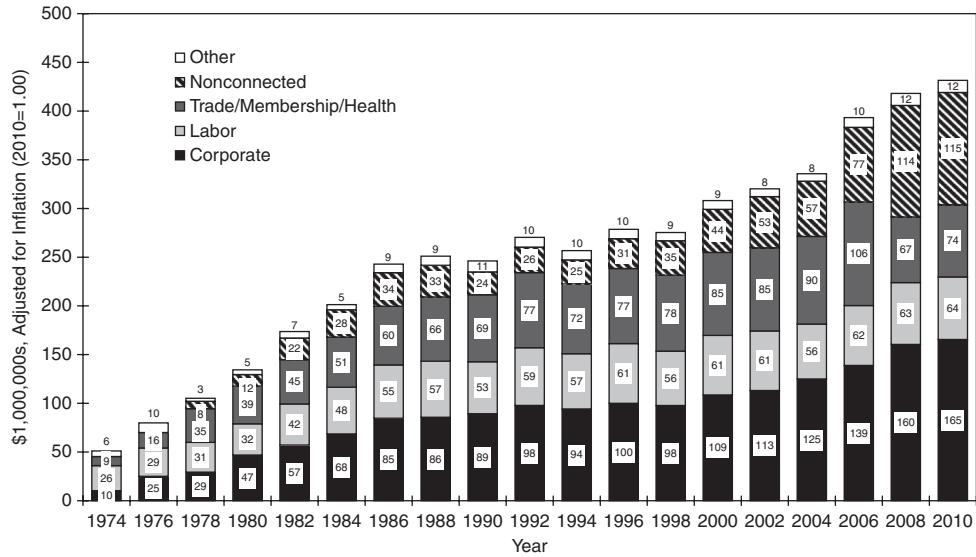
### PACs

There is a simple explanation for the growth and then modest decline in the financial importance of PACs. As campaign costs increased and the real value of the dollar declined (losing more than 80 percent of its value between 1972 and 2010), candidates, constrained by the FECA's fixed contribution limits, naturally put more effort into soliciting funds from sources that may legally contribute up to \$10,000—the PACs—and less into soliciting private individuals, who were limited to contributions only one-fifth as large. As Figures 4-1 and 4-2 indicate, the number of PACs available for solicitation also grew dramatically during the first decade under the FECA, as did the amount of money at their disposal. This growth



**FIGURE 4-1**  
Political Action Committees, 1974–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.



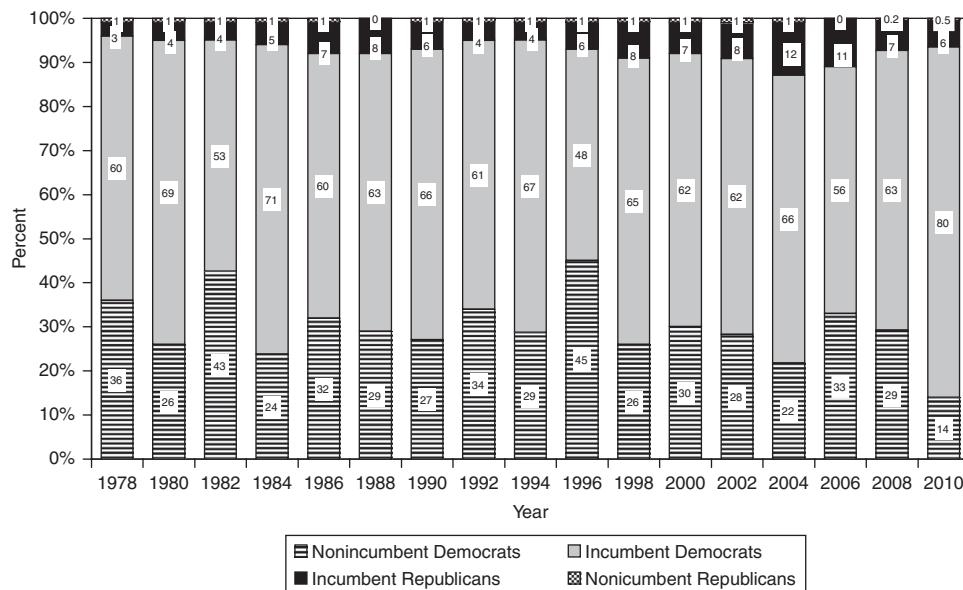
**FIGURE 4-2**  
Contributions by Political Action Committees, 1974–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.

flattened out in the mid-1980s while campaigns continued to raise larger sums, eventually reducing the PACs' share of the total. After BCRA raised the ceiling on individual contributions but not on PAC donations in 2002 (from \$1,000 to \$2,000 per campaign, effectively \$2,000 and \$4,000 when the primary is included) and allowed them to rise with inflation (hence a limit of \$2,400 for 2010), the relative efficiency of soliciting PACs rather than individuals declined. Still, the number of PACs and their total contributions increased again in the past decade, reflecting the fierce fights for control of the House and Senate in recent elections.

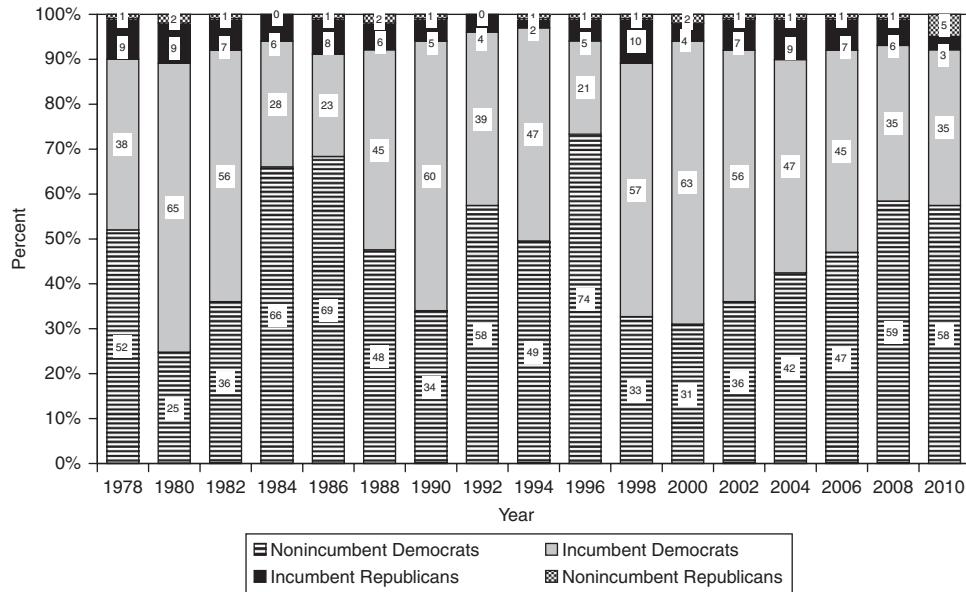
Business-oriented PACs have grown the most in both numbers and total contributions to congressional candidates under the FECA. The number of corporate PACs rose from 89 to 1,972 between 1974 and 1992 before falling off somewhat, ending up at 1,767 in 2010; corporate PAC contributions have multiplied more than sixteenfold in real (inflation-adjusted) dollars since 1974. Corporate PAC contributions surpassed those of labor PACs in 1980, and because business associations dominate in the trade/membership/health category, labor's importance relative to business as a source of campaign funds has declined.

This development created a potential problem for Democrats. Organized labor has traditionally been the Democrats' principal source of PAC funds, and only labor PACs have shown much inclination to supply the venture capital so important to the party's nonincumbent candidates. Figures 4-3a and 4-3b document the overwhelming preference of labor PACs for Democratic candidates. The growing



**FIGURE 4-3a**  
The Distribution of Labor PAC Contributions to House Candidates, 1978–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.



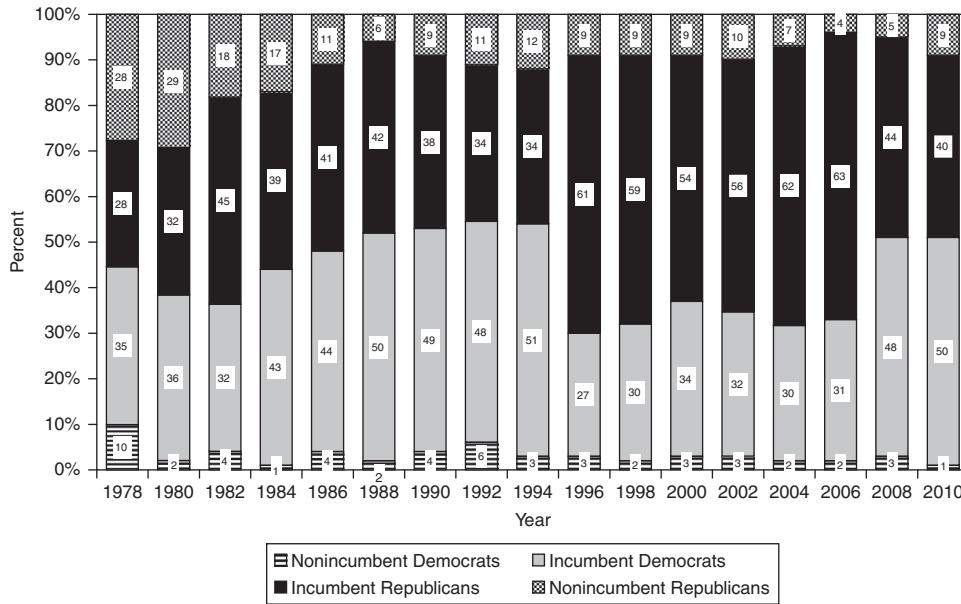
**FIGURE 4-3b**  
The Distribution of Labor PAC Contributions to Senate Candidates, 1978–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.

financial strength of corporate and trade association PACs during the first decade after passage of the FECA was expected to benefit Republicans, and according to the data in Figures 4-4a–b and 4-5a–b, this expectation was borne out in 1978 and 1980. Republican challengers in both House and Senate contests were treated generously (compared to other election years) by business-oriented PACs in those elections.

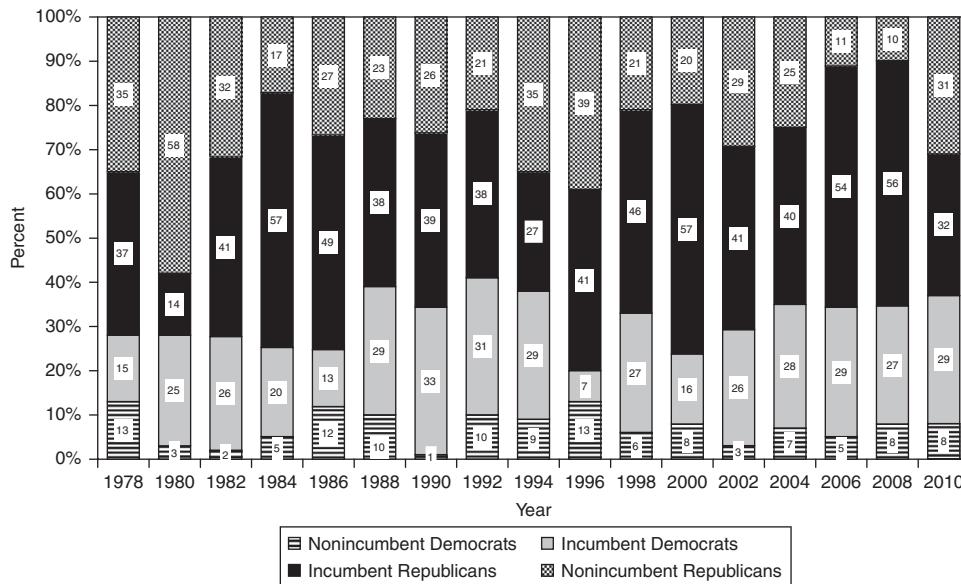
After 1980, however, business PACs became more even-handed; 49 percent of corporate and 54 percent of trade association PAC dollars went to Democrats in 1994, for example—but only because so many of them pursued a dual strategy. They were generous to incumbents of either party who were in positions to help or hurt their interests and were likely to remain there. As long as Democrats controlled Congress, business-oriented PACs sought to keep doors open and to avoid antagonizing Democratic members who look unbeatable—hence, their generosity to incumbent Democrats and stinginess with Republican challengers. They were, however, also willing to support promising nonincumbent Republicans—insofar as they could find any—as part of a long-term strategy aimed at electing a more Republican, hence more ideologically congenial, Congress. Nonincumbent Democrats were given very short shrift.

Because PACs contribute strategically, the pattern of PAC contributions displayed in these figures varies with electoral expectations. Business-oriented PACs give more to nonincumbent Republicans when Republican prospects look bright, particularly in Senate elections (note 1980, 1994 and 2010), and more to



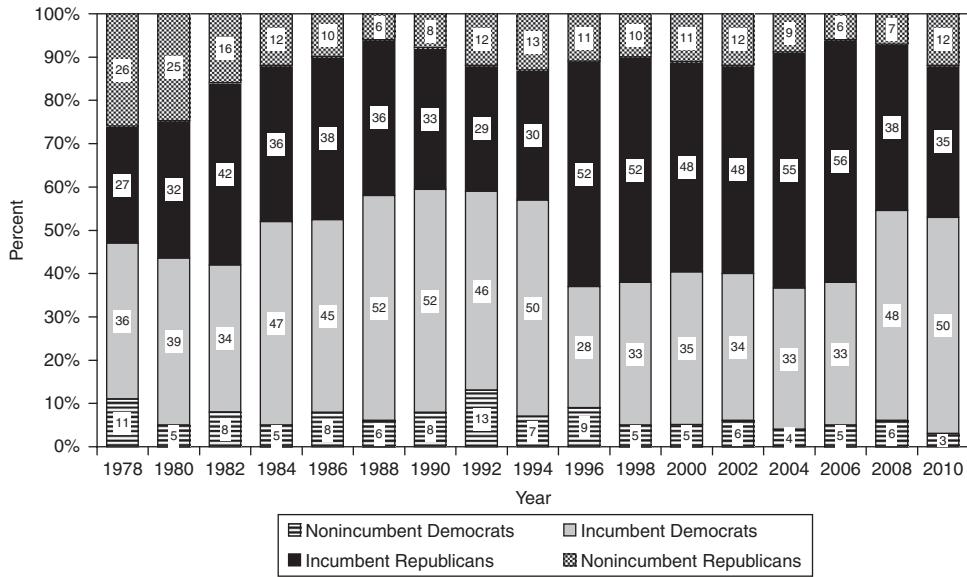
**FIGURE 4-4a**  
The Distribution of Corporate PAC Contributions to House Candidates, 1978–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.



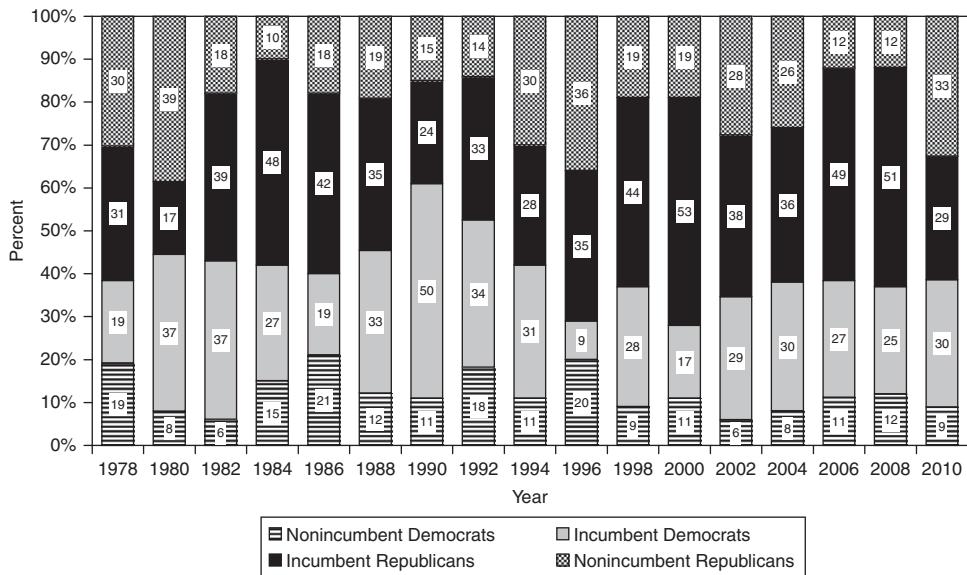
**FIGURE 4-4b**  
The Distribution of Corporate PAC Contributions to Senate Candidates, 1978–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.



**FIGURE 4-5a**  
The Distribution of Trade/Membership/Health PAC Contributions to House Candidates, 1978–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.



**FIGURE 4-5b**  
The Distribution of Trade/Membership/Health PAC Contributions to Senate Candidates, 1978–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.

Republican incumbents when the opportunities for taking seats from Democrats look dim and they face strong Democratic challenges, as in 1982, 2006, or 2008.<sup>14</sup>

Labor does the same thing from the opposite side, investing relatively more in Democratic challenges when conditions favor Democrats (e.g., 1982, 1996, and 2006) and relatively less when they do not. Because it matters a great deal how much challengers raise and spend, strategic contributions by PACs and other donors reinforce national partisan trends, with important consequences (discussed at length in Chapter 6). Both business and labor PACs tend to give lavishly to candidates for open seats of their preferred party; the absence of an incumbent makes for a more competitive election and the best opportunity to take a seat from the other party.

Several notable trends appear in these data. Note the sharp decline in the proportion of corporate and trade association PAC money given to nonincumbent Republican House candidates (from more than 25 percent in 1978 and 1980 to a paltry 6 percent in 1988) and the parallel rise in money given to Democratic incumbents (from 35 percent to more than 50 percent) through the 1980s. These patterns reflect several realities. First, Republican challengers, as a group, were unusually unpromising in the 1986–1990 period.<sup>15</sup> Second, and related, Republican challengers lacked exploitable issues. (Both of these phenomena are discussed in Chapter 6.) Finally, Democratic officials pursued business PAC funds vigorously, with pointed reminders as to which party, in all likelihood, would control Congress after the election.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Democrats were so successful at raising PAC money, at least for their incumbents, that by the late 1980s, Republican leaders—who had initially celebrated PACs as a healthy expression of pluralist democracy—wanted to ban them outright.<sup>17</sup>

The 1994 election changed all that. Even before election day, the Republican surge caught the eye of PAC officials, who began opening their coffers to competitive nonincumbents. Some were no doubt responding to prospective Speaker Newt Gingrich’s October threat that those who did not join the Republican cause could expect “the two coldest years in Washington” after the election.<sup>18</sup> Following the election, pragmatic business PACs scrambled to atone for years of supporting incumbent Democrats by helping newly elected Republicans to retire their campaign debts and prepare for 1996. Willing to make a marriage of convenience with Democrats as long as Democrats were running the show, the PACs were now free to pursue a love match with the ideologically more compatible

<sup>14</sup>Theodore J. Eismeier and Philip H. Pollack III, *Business, Money, and the Rise of Corporate PACs in American Elections* (New York: Quantum Books, 1988), pp. 79–94.

<sup>15</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, *The Electoral Origins of Divided Government: Competition in U.S. House Elections, 1946–1988* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 62–64.

<sup>16</sup>For a fascinating account of how Tony Coelho, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, persuaded business PACs to support Democratic candidates, see Brooks Jackson, *Honest Graft: Big Money and the American Political Process*, updated ed. (Washington, DC: Farragut Publishing Company, 1990).

<sup>17</sup>Chuck Alston and Glen Craney, “Bush Campaign-Reform Takes Aim at Incumbents,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 47 (July 1, 1989): 1648–1659.

<sup>18</sup>“Momentum Helps GOP Collect Record Amount from PACs,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 52 (December 3, 1994): 3457.

Republicans, who no longer talked of banning PACs.<sup>19</sup> Without their majority status and committee power to attract PAC contributions from business interests, the balance of PAC campaign resources shifted against the Democrats.

The shift is clearly evident in Figures 4-4a–b and 4-5a–b, most strikingly in the data for House elections. In the period 1988–1994, corporate PACs gave an average of 53 percent of their money to Democrats and 49 percent of their money to Democratic incumbents. For the six elections following the Republicans' takeover of Congress in 1994, the comparable figures were 34 percent and 31 percent, respectively. A nearly identical shift occurred in the pattern of trade association PAC donations. Of course, some of this change reflected the increase in the relative number of Republican incumbents; but a more detailed analysis, taking this and other relevant factors into account, found that loss of majority status cost Democratic incumbents an average of roughly \$36,000 in corporate and trade association PAC contributions, a reduction of about 19 percent in money from these sources.<sup>20</sup> After the Democrats retook control of Congress 2006, however, corporate and trade association PACs immediately reverted to their pre-1994 patterns, giving more than half their contributions to Democrats (nearly all of it to incumbents) in 2008 and 2010. If history is any guide, the balance will swing sharply back toward the Republicans for 2012.

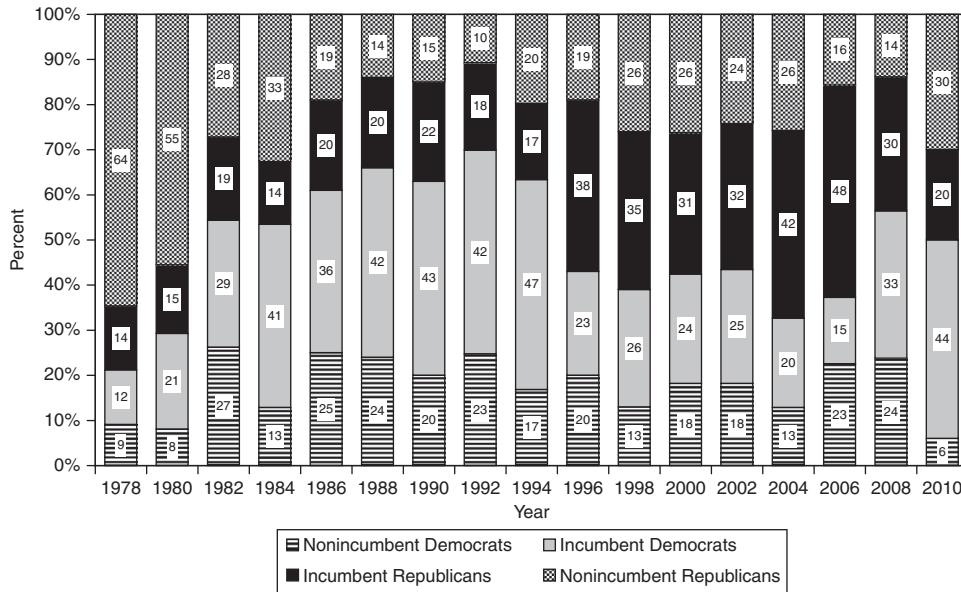
PAC contributions to Senate candidates are also influenced by majority status, although contribution patterns are a good deal more variable across election years, reflecting variations in the incidence of competitive campaigns and in the set of states holding Senate elections. Over the years covered by Figures 4-4b and 4-5b, Democrats running for reelection to the Senate got an average of 32 percent of corporate and 27 percent of trade association PAC contributions when Democrats controlled the Senate, compared with 25 percent and 21 percent, respectively, when they did not. Again, a more detailed analysis indicates that, all else being equal, Senate majority status is worth an average of about \$51,000 in corporate and trade association PAC contributions.<sup>21</sup> These groups have been most generous to incumbent Republican senators facing contrary national tides (2006 and 2008).

The “nonconnected” category is made up largely of PACs with clear ideological or issue agendas, many of which therefore care more about influencing the makeup of Congress than about having access to officeholders. They thus comprise the only set with any inclination to be more generous to nonincumbents than to incumbents. The notable shift over time among nonconnected PACs, displayed in Figures 4-6a and 4-6b—from a strongly pro-Republican to a pro-Democratic bias and then back to favoring Republicans—reflects changes in the composition of this category. Many of these groups raise their money through direct-mail appeals, which are most effective when they invoke threats that make people fearful or angry enough to send a check, which is easier to do in opposition than in power. Conservative PACs thus flourished in the late 1970s, when all bad things could

<sup>19</sup>“To the '94 Victors Go the Fundraising Spoils,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 53 (April 15, 1995): 1055–1059.

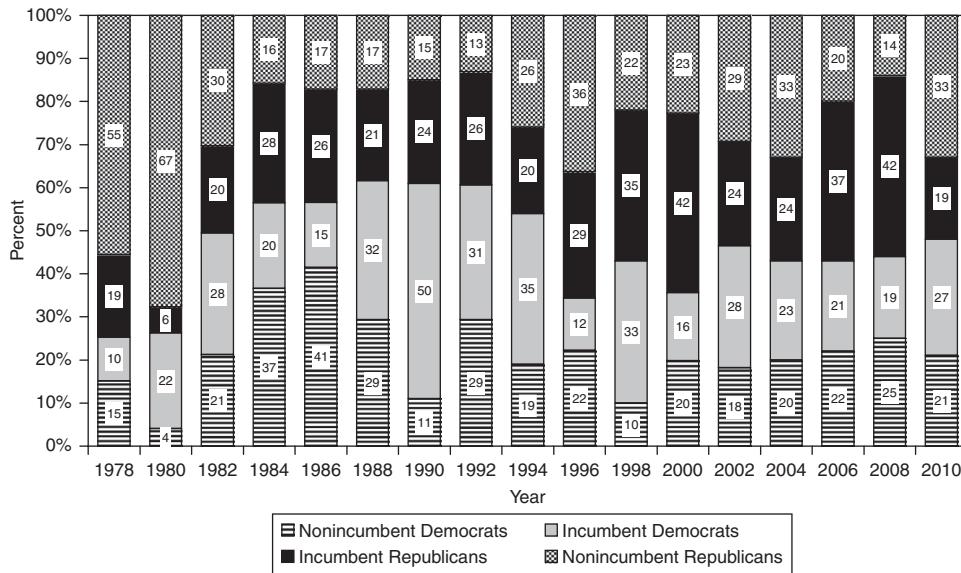
<sup>20</sup>Gary W. Cox and Eric Magar, “How Much Is Majority Status in the U.S. Congress Worth?” *American Political Science Review* 93 (June 1999): 302–303.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 304–306.



**FIGURE 4-6a**  
The Distribution of Nonconnected PAC Contributions to House Candidates, 1978–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.



**FIGURE 4-6b**  
The Distribution of Nonconnected PAC Contributions to Senate Candidates, 1978–2010

Source: Federal Election Commission.

be blamed on Democratic leaders such as Jimmy Carter, Tip O'Neill, and Teddy Kennedy. Later, liberal PACs found gold in the Reagan administration, which, along with policies that threatened liberal values, offered such serviceable villains as James Watt (a secretary of the interior openly hostile to the environmental movement) and Edwin Meese (an uncompromisingly conservative attorney general). Conservative ideological PACs began to revive once Bill Clinton became available as a bogeyman, and in 1994 nonincumbent Republicans running for the House got more money than Democrats from nonconnected PACs for the first time since 1984. Since then, Republicans have continued to be favored by groups in this category, with 2008 as a notable exception on the House side.

### Party Money

Judging by the evidence presented in Table 4-1, the political parties appear to be an unimportant and diminishing source of campaign money. They now account for only a tiny share of direct contributions received by House and Senate candidates. However, these data vastly understate the amount of help, financial and otherwise, congressional candidates receive from party sources. In close elections, the party may spend more in total for a candidate than the candidate's own campaign.

Direct party contributions are limited to \$5,000 per candidate per election for House candidates. This means that any party committee can give, at most, \$10,000 to a candidate in an election year (\$15,000 if there is a primary runoff). Both the national committees and the congressional campaign committees of each party can contribute this amount, so direct national party contributions can amount to \$20,000 in House campaigns, a small fraction of what it costs to run a minimally serious campaign. The maximum allowable contribution to Senate candidates from all national party sources is only \$52,600. Parties cannot be a major source of *direct* campaign contributions because the FECA will not allow it.

The FECA contains a special provision allowing party committees to spend money *on behalf of* congressional candidates, however. This *coordinated spending* is also limited, but the limits are higher and, unlike contribution limits, rise with inflation. The original limit of \$10,000 set in 1974 for House campaigns had grown to \$43,500 by 2010. The ceiling on coordinated party spending for Senate candidates varies with the state's population; in 2010, it ranged from \$87,000 in the seven least populous states to \$2,395,400 in California. The Senate limit applies to House candidates in any state with a single House seat.<sup>22</sup> State party committees are permitted to spend the same amount as national party committees on coordinated campaign spending but rarely have the money to do so. The parties have solved this problem by making the national party committee the state party's agent for raising and spending the money. In practice, this loophole doubles the amount the national party may spend on its candidates.

National party committees may thus play an important part in financing congressional campaigns. In 2010, for example, national party sources could give as much as \$117,000 worth of assistance to a House candidate (direct donations of \$5,000 in both the primary and general elections from the party's national

<sup>22</sup>Federal Election Commission, *Federal Election Commission Record*, June 2007, pp. 16–17.

committee, the congressional campaign committee, and the state party committee, plus twice \$43,500 in coordinated expenditures). For Senate candidates, the total varied from about \$225,000 to \$4.8 million, depending on the state's voting-age population. Although these are significant sums, they still amount to no more than 20 percent of what it typically costs to mount a competitive campaign.

Of course, national party committees can spend money for candidates only after they have raised it. Following the FECA's enactment, Republican committees quickly outstripped their Democratic counterparts in raising funds. Between 1976 and 1984, total receipts for the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) and National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) grew from \$14 million to \$140 million. Over the same period, total receipts of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) and Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) increased only from \$195,000 to \$19 million. Subsequently, Democratic fundraising picked up, but Republican committees enjoyed a large fundraising advantage in every election cycle until 2005–2006, when the parties' Hill committee fundraising was nearly even (\$260 million for the DCCC and DSCC, and \$268 million for the NRCC and NRSC).

Republican superiority in fundraising initially gave the party's congressional candidates a considerable advantage in party contributions and coordinated spending, but the Democrats closed some of the gap in the 1990s. Both parties now raise enough money to support all of their competitive candidates to the legal limit in direct contributions and coordinated spending. Between them, the Hill committees spent \$41 million on assistance of this kind in 2010.

Coordinated party expenditures can be made for almost any campaign activity. The only condition is that the party as well as the candidate have some control over how the money is spent. The party committees typically foot the bill for conducting polls, producing campaign ads, and buying broadcast media time—major expenses in areas where technical expertise is essential. In 1992, for example, the NRCC conducted polls for 117 Republican House candidates and produced 188 TV ads for forty-five, including twenty-two nonincumbents. The DCCC itself produced no ads for Democratic candidates, but 240 used the party's media center to create their own. Party committees compile lists of voters to target, develop and hone campaign issues, and conduct “opposition research”—combing the public (and sometimes private) records of the other party's candidates to find weak points to attack. Both parties' committees also scrutinize the records of their own incumbents to detect points of vulnerability that might require special defenses.<sup>23</sup>

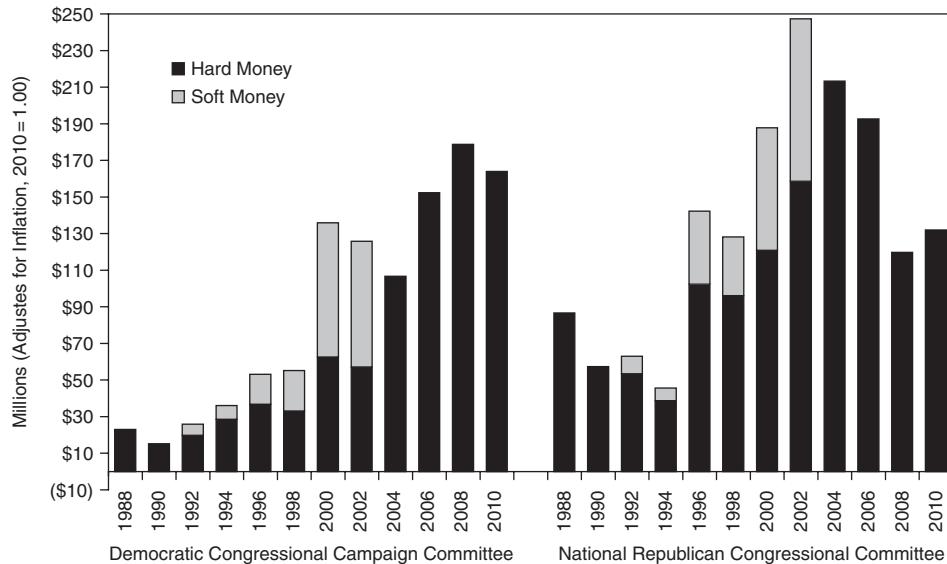
Coordinated spending does not begin to exhaust the services now performed by the Hill committees; indeed, it comprises a decreasing portion of their assistance to candidates. They run programs to train candidates and campaign managers in all aspects of campaigning: fundraising, personnel management, legal compliance, advertising, press relations, and so on. For example, prior to the 1996 elections, the Republican National Committee (RNC) held training seminars in forty-one states involving 6,000 Republican candidates and activists, the NRCC conducted three four-day candidate schools, and the NRSC offered seminars on fundraising and

<sup>23</sup>Paul Herrnson, *Congressional Elections: Campaigning at Home and in Washington* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1995), pp. 88–92.

campaign techniques attended by representatives of twenty-two Senate campaigns. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) organized training sessions for 3,000 campaign operatives, and the DCCC and DSCC conducted training seminars for nonincumbent candidates and their campaign staffs.<sup>24</sup> Especially on the House side, the Hill committees have become trade schools of modern electoral politics.

The Hill committees have also assumed a central role in helping candidates raise money from PACs and other contributors. In addition to advising on fundraising techniques and targets, they serve as matchmakers between potential contributors and promising but needy candidates. PACs use party cues in making strategic investment choices, so getting onto their party’s “watch list” of competitive races has become crucial to the prospects of nonincumbent candidates. The Hill committees also arrange to have safe incumbents use their fundraising prowess to help their party’s other candidates (see the next section, Contributions from Other Members of Congress). Hill committee staffs also help candidates find suitable managers, consultants, pollsters, media specialists, direct-mail outfits, and other campaign professionals.

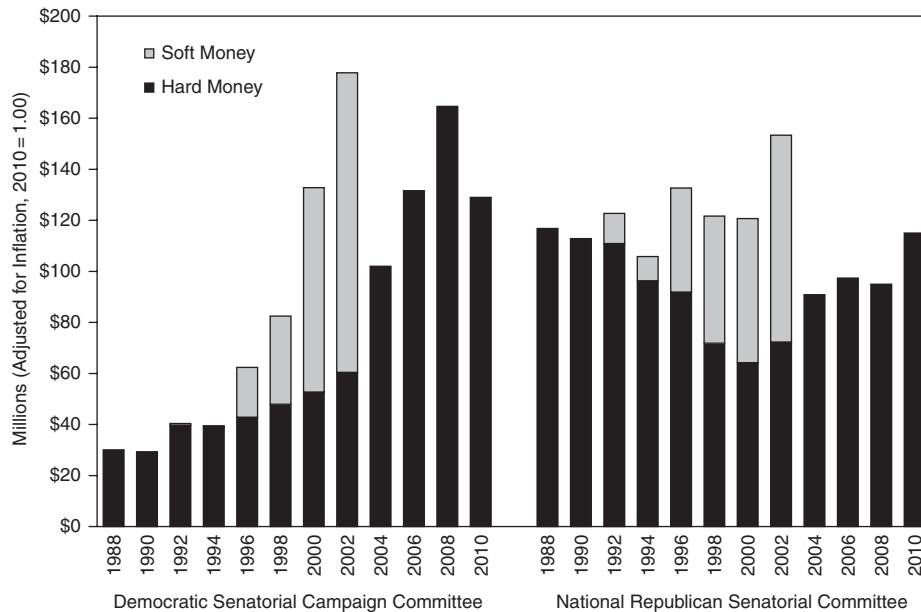
Beginning in 1996, the national party committees began exploiting the soft money option more intensely and, by 2002, transfers of both soft and hard money to state parties to be used to promote the election of House and Senate candidates had come to dwarf all other party assistance. Figures 4-7 and 4-8 display the trends in soft and hard money expenditures from 1988 through 2010. After BCRA banned the transfer of soft money to state parties for federal campaign activities



**FIGURE 4-7**  
**Hard and Soft Money Spent by House Campaign Committees, 1988–2010**

Source: Compiled by Author from Federal Election Commission Data.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

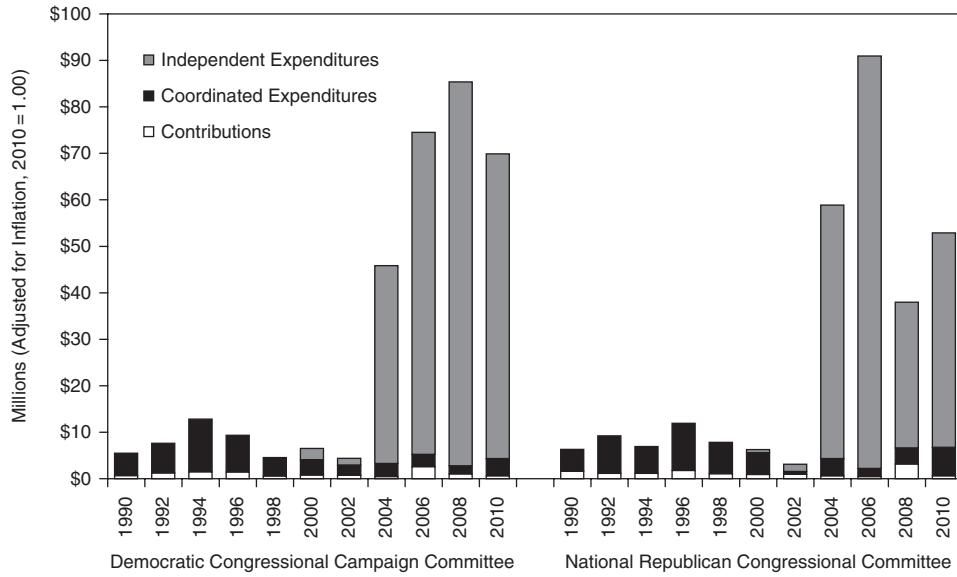


**FIGURE 4-8**  
**Hard and Soft Money Spent by House Campaign Committees, 1988–2010**

Source: Federal Election Commission.

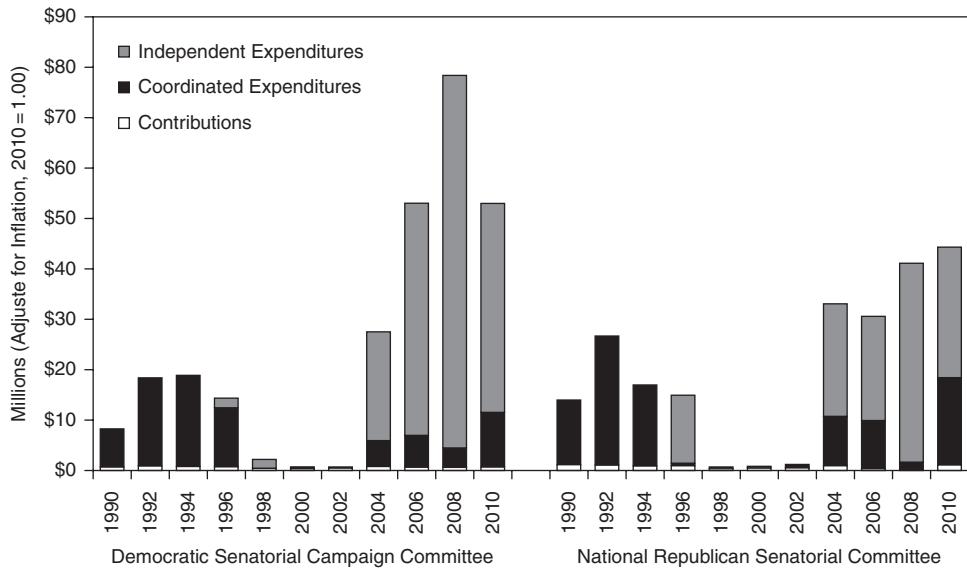
following the 2002 elections, the parties adapted by ratcheting up their hard money fundraising. They also redirected their efforts into independent campaigns, which since 2004 have absorbed by far the largest share of Hill party resources (Figures 4-9 and 4-10). This avenue had been neglected while the soft money spigot was still open (note the low sums for 1998–2002) but was exploited with a vengeance once it was closed off.

With independent spending added to the mix, national party committees have become responsible for a substantial share of the funds spent on serious congressional campaigns. Party committees, like other donors and independent groups (discussed in more detail later), concentrate their efforts in competitive races, and in recent elections nearly every potentially competitive candidate has enjoyed adequate funding from one source or another. Figures 4-11 through 4-14 display the distribution of candidate, party, and independent campaign spending in the 2008 and 2010 campaigns according to the competitiveness of the contest (competitive contests are defined as those in which the candidate of the party currently holding the seats won less than 55 percent of the major party vote). Parties and outside groups now account for a notable proportion of spending in the hottest contests; in 2010, for example, about 30 percent of the money spent in competitive House races, and about 34 percent of the money spent in competitive Senate races, was outside the candidates’ control. In the Colorado and West Virginia Senate races, outside groups spent more trying to elect a candidate than did the candidate’s own campaign. The party committees have contributed to the ever-growing concentration of funds in the



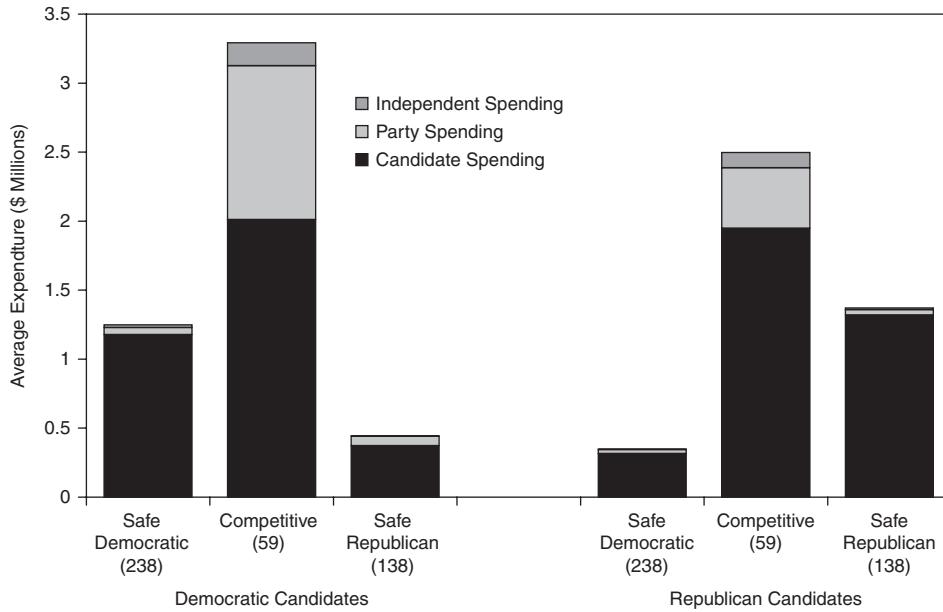
**FIGURE 4-9**  
House Party Committee Campaign Activity, 1990–2010

Source: Compiled by Author from Federal Election Commission Data.



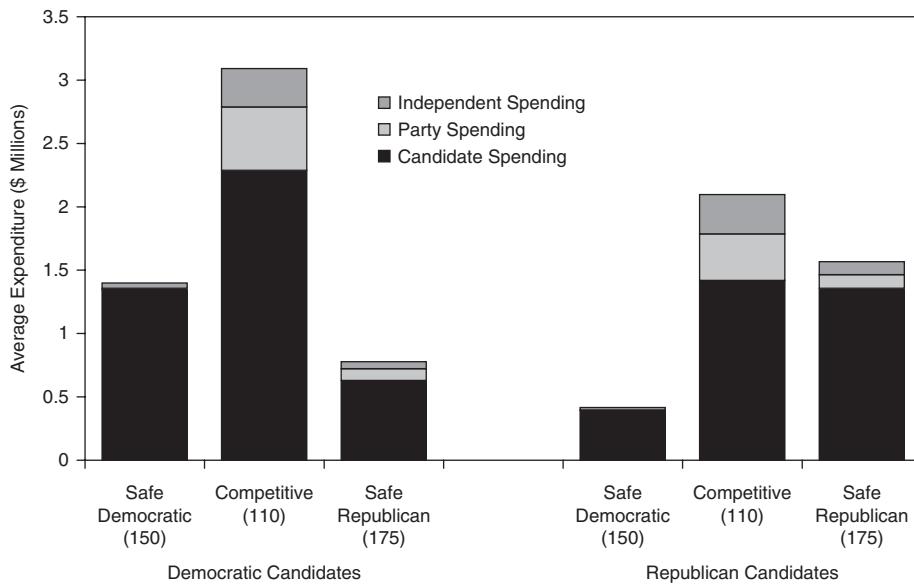
**FIGURE 4-10**  
Senate Party Committee Campaign Activity, 1990–2010

Source: Compiled by Author from Federal Election Commission Data.



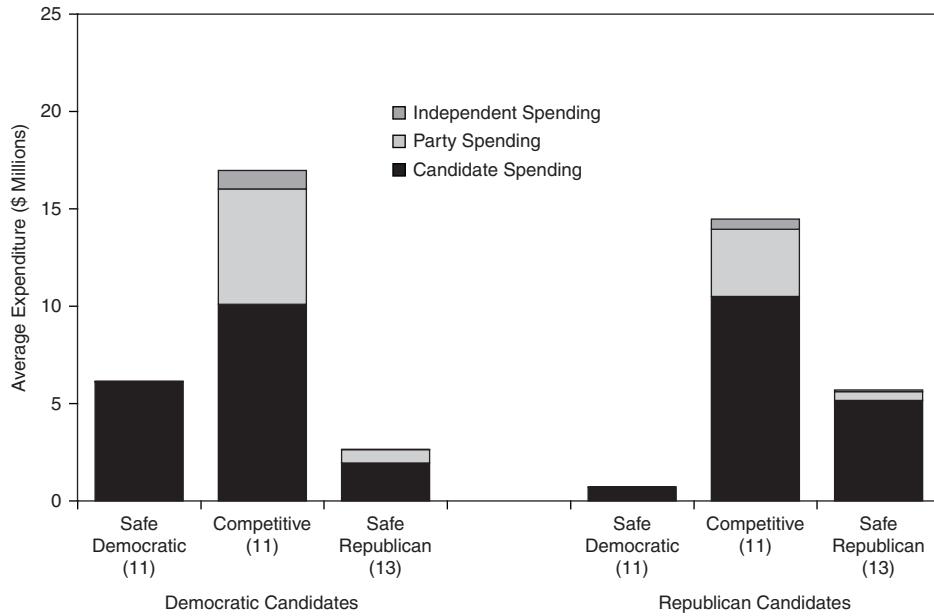
**FIGURE 4-11**  
House District Competitiveness and Campaign Spending, 2008

Source: Compiled by Author from Data Supplied by the Federal Election Commission and the Center for Responsive Politics.



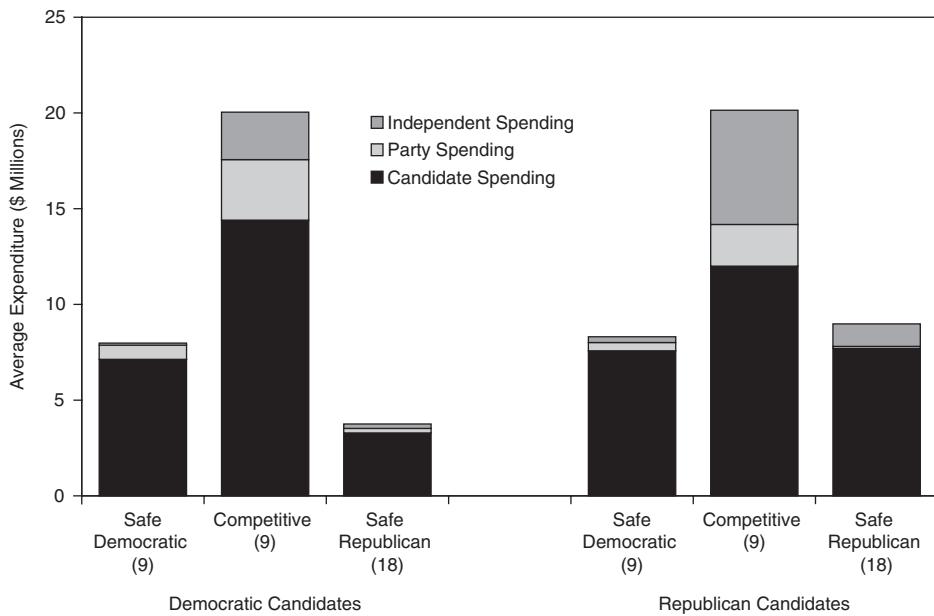
**FIGURE 4-12**  
House District Competitiveness and Campaign Spending, 2010

Source: Compiled by Author from Data Supplied by the Federal Election Commission and the Center for Responsive Politics.



**FIGURE 4-13**  
State Competitiveness and Senate Campaign Spending, 2008

Source: Compiled by Author from Data Supplied by the Federal Election Commission and the Center for Responsive.



**FIGURE 4-14**  
State Competitiveness and Senate Campaign Spending, 2010

Source: Compiled by Author from Data Supplied by the Federal Election Commission and the Center for Responsive Politics.

most competitive races, because, like other strategic participants in congressional campaign finance, they invest most heavily in what they anticipate to be close campaigns. In 2010, about three of four party dollars went to these contests.

Party money does not come without strings. For example, in the extremely tight race for Colorado's 7th District in 2002, NRCC officials funneled about \$2.4 million into the campaign of Republican Bob Beauprez, eventual victor by a mere 121 votes. Along with the money came continuing NRCC oversight of Beauprez's campaign; as his annoyed campaign manager put it, "they crawl up our ass on a daily basis."<sup>25</sup> The state party's executive director reported that the NRCC instructed how the money was to be spent "down to the dollar."<sup>26</sup> The national party used its clout to shape the content of the campaign—the results were not always pretty. One direct-mail piece featured "side-by-side photographs of a cigar-chomping lobbyist and a rabid dog. The oversized postcard inveighed, 'what do you get when you cross this [cigar-chomping lobbyist] with this [rabid dog]? You get Mike Feeley [Beauprez's opponent]. And he wants to be your congressman.'<sup>27</sup>

The Beauprez–Feeley race was not unique in this regard. National parties invest millions in congressional campaigns with the sole purpose of winning, and their inclination is to do whatever it takes to come out ahead. In doing so, they may even ignore their own candidate's preferences or reelection strategies. When Republican representative Jim Leach of Iowa was running for reelection in 2002, he publicly asked the party to stop running TV ads against his opponent because he thought them distorted and unfair. Leach also sought to position himself as a moderate (his district had given Al Gore 56 percent of its votes in 2000) but some national party-driven Republican ads extolled his support of "Iowa's Conservative Values." Despite Leach's protest, the party committees kept on broadcasting ads, spending \$1.5 million in the process. The national party may have made Leach the winner in spite of himself; one close observer of this contest concluded that "it is doubtful that he would have won without" its unwanted help.<sup>28</sup> In 2006, Republican committees spent only \$21,000 for Leach, none against his opponent, and he lost the seat.

### Contributions from Other Members of Congress

In an era of very narrow legislative majorities, when control of both the House and Senate is up for grabs every two years, members have powerful interest in helping fellow partisans win elections. Many of them also aspire to leadership positions in their party. Because in any given election most members face little electoral risk themselves, they can use their fundraising prowess as incumbents to help their party and themselves by funneling money into the campaigns of colleagues in competitive

<sup>25</sup>Daniel A. Smith, "Strings Attached: Outside Money in Colorado's Seventh District," in *The Last Hurrah? Soft Money and Issue Advocacy in the 2002 Congressional Election*, ed. David B. Magleby and J. Quin Monson (Provo, UT: Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, Brigham Young University, 2003), p. 194.

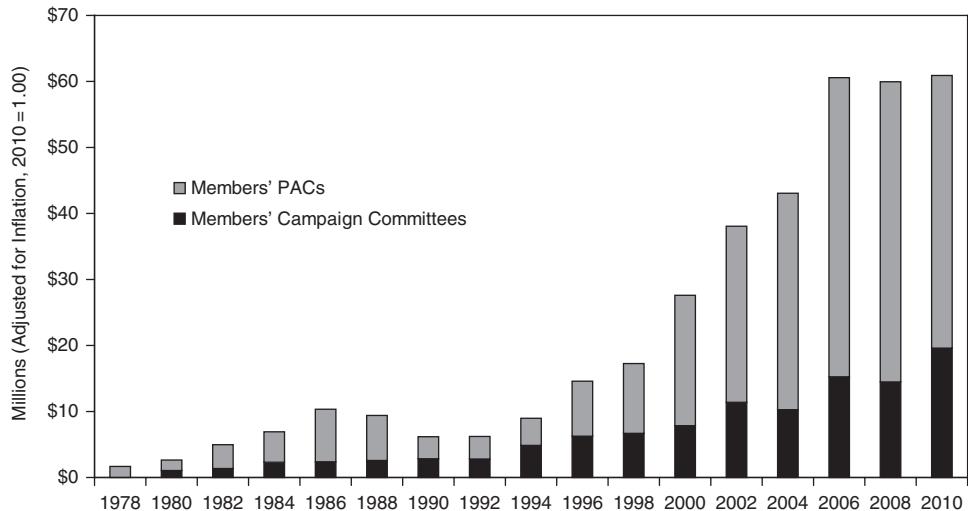
<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>28</sup>David Redlawsk, "The 2002 Iowa Senate and Congressional Elections," in *The Last Hurrah?* ed. Magleby and Monson, pp. 74, 84, 85.

racers. They may form their own “leadership” PACs to pass out funds, contribute directly from their own campaign committees, or help attract contributors to other candidates’ fundraising events.<sup>29</sup> When successful, the strategy increases their party’s representation and puts some of the winners in their debt. For example, Susan Davis, Adam Schiff, and Jane Harman, three California Democrats who defeated Republican incumbents in 2000, received \$130,000, \$170,000, and \$130,000, respectively, from members’ PACs and campaign committees. It is far from coincidence that Nancy Pelosi was elected minority leader in 2003, on her way to becoming Speaker of the House, in 2007, after having contributed more than any other Democrat to other House candidates over the previous two election cycles, about \$1.9 million.<sup>30</sup> Final figures are not yet available for 2010, but at least five members passed more than \$1 million on to their party’s other candidates that year.

As Figure 4-15 shows, members’ donations to other candidates have grown steeply in the past decade; in 2006, 2008 and 2010 safe incumbents contributed \$60 million to colleagues’ campaigns.<sup>31</sup> Both parties have participated in the trend,

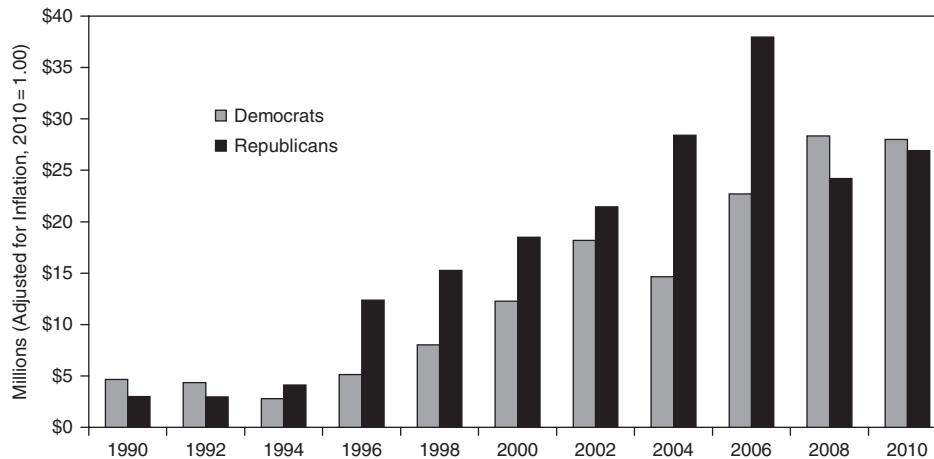


**FIGURE 4-15**  
Contributions of Members’ Campaign Committees and PACs to House and Senate Candidates, 1978–2010

Sources: 1978–2002, Anne Bedlington and Michael J. Malbin, “The Party as Extended Network: Members Giving to Each Other and to their Parties,” in Michael J. Malbin, ed., *Life After Reform: When The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act Meets Politics* (Roman and Littlefield, forthcoming), Figure 7.1; 2004–2006, Center for Responsive Politics, “Spreading the Wealth,” at <http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/wealth.php?cycle=2010> (accessed October 26, 2011).

<sup>29</sup>For a general analysis of these practices, see Eric S. Heberlig and Bruce A. Larson, “Redistributing Campaign Funds by U.S. House Members: The Spiraling Costs of the Permanent Campaign,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 30 (2005): 597–624.

<sup>30</sup>Anne Bedlington and Michael J. Malbin, “The Party as Extended Network: Members Giving to Each Other and to Their Parties,” in *Life After Reform: When the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act Meets Politics*, ed. Michael J. Malbin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. 179.



**FIGURE 4-16**  
House and Senate Members' Contributions to Other Candidates' Campaigns,  
1990–2010

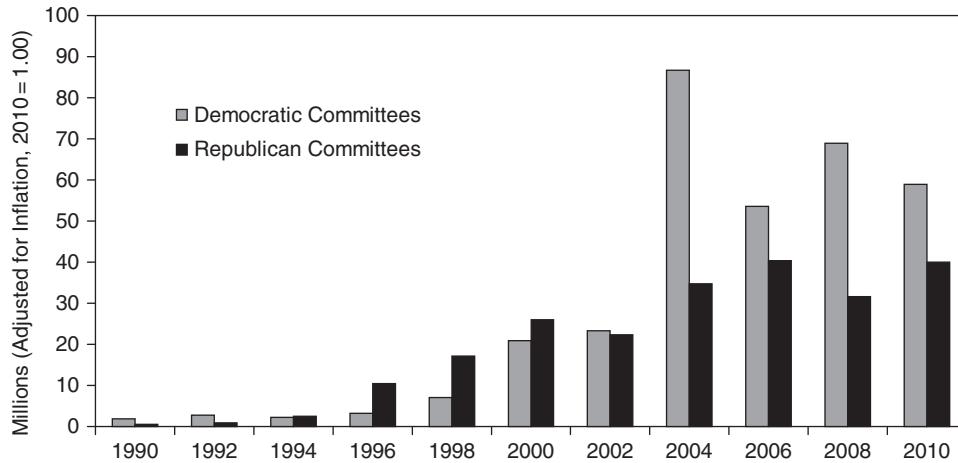
Source: Center for Responsive Politics, "Spreading the Wealth," at <http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/wealth.php?cycle=2010> (accessed November 28, 2011).

although Democrats were playing catch-up during the years when Republicans controlled Congress (Figure 4-16). At the same time, in response to heavy pressure from congressional leaders, members have also been transferring increasing sums to their party's campaign committees (Figure 4-17); in 2010, such contributions accounted for 24 percent of NRCC and 22 percent of DCCC receipts.<sup>32</sup>

Plainly, the growing awareness of the stakes involved in the party's collective electoral performance has led to a steep increase in national party involvement in congressional campaigns. However, this activity has not necessarily shifted the focus of electoral politics away from individual candidates and back to parties. Rather, most of the parties' activities are explicitly designed to produce candidates who are more competitive in the candidate-centered system as it currently operates. Republicans in particular set a high priority on recruiting and training candidates because their "farm team"—candidates holding the lower elective offices that serve as stepping stones to Congress—was, at least prior to the 1990s, much thinner than that of the Democrats. During the 1980s, national-level

<sup>31</sup>Figures are adjusted for inflation, 2010 = 1.00.

<sup>32</sup>From data reported at [http://www.fec.gov/press/2010\\_Full\\_summary\\_Data.shtml](http://www.fec.gov/press/2010_Full_summary_Data.shtml) (accessed May 30, 2011); for an analysis of the sources of members' generosity to the Hill committees, see Bruce A. Larson, "Incumbent Contributions to the Congressional Campaign Committees, 1990–2000," *Political Research Quarterly* 57 (2004): 155–161; for broader accounts congressional party contribution patterns, see Marian Currinder, *Money in the House: Campaign Funds and Congressional Party Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009); and Damon Cann, *Sharing the Wealth: Member Contributions and the Exchange Theory of Party Influence in the U.S. House of Representatives* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008).



**FIGURE 4-17**  
House and Senate Members' Contributions to Congressional Campaign Committees, 1990–2010

Source: Center for Responsive Politics, "Spreading the Wealth," at <http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/wealth.php?cycle=2010> (accessed October 28, 2011).

Republican committees even invested in state legislative races, not only to elect more Republicans to the bodies that draw congressional district lines but also to expand their pool of seasoned candidates. (State legislatures are the single most important source of future members of Congress; half the present members of the House have served in them.) Newt Gingrich, while serving as minority leader, formed a PAC (referred to as the GOPAC) to recruit, train, and finance candidates for state legislatures; Republicans whose initial forays into state politics were sponsored by Gingrich's GOPAC swelled the ranks of the majority that elected him Speaker in 1995.<sup>33</sup> Today, both parties are heavily involved in candidate recruitment, again with a focus on potentially competitive seats; one important source of the Democrats' success in 2006 and 2008 lay in finding and nurturing House candidates who were sufficiently conservative to win some Republican-leaning districts (if not, as it turned out in most cases, sufficiently conservative to survive the anti-Democratic wave in 2010).

The flowering of national party activity in congressional election politics represents a sharp departure from past congressional campaign practices. Formerly, parties were most active in congressional campaigns at the state and local levels. The declining vigor of these party units and their separation from congressional campaigns helped foster the system of personal, independent campaigning now typical of congressional candidates. Parties at the national level focused on presidential elections, making only the most limited forays into other federal elections.

<sup>33</sup>John F. Persinos, "The GOP Farm Team," *Campaigns & Elections*, March 1995, p. 20.

The steep increase in national party activity has altered this pattern radically. From the beginning, national party activities have had the potential to reduce diversity and independence in the conduct of campaigns; the mere existence of a centralized source of advice on campaign management, strategy, and tactics imposes some uniformity on campaigns. Yet party officials are more concerned with winning elections than with restructuring electoral politics and so adapt their activities to current political habits. Not until the 1990s did the political environment offer campaign themes that resonated across numerous districts and states, and not until 1994 did these themes have a strong partisan thrust. However, once conditions were right, the Republicans' national party infrastructure helped individual candidates take full advantage of their extraordinary opportunity and the party enjoyed a historic victory. In 2006 and 2008, it was the Democrats' turn and they, too, proved organizationally capable of exploiting national issues locally to great effect, as did the Republicans once again in 2010.

### Self-Financing by Candidates

Aside from individuals, PACs, and parties, candidates can also obtain campaign money from their own pockets. The Supreme Court's 1976 decision in *Buckley v. Valeo* overturned limits on how much of their own money candidates may spend to get elected, which gives no small advantage to wealthy candidates. They can finance as lavish a campaign as the family fortune allows without the aggravation fundraising entails, while their opponents must spend time hustling limited donations from a large number of individuals and groups. The most notorious example is Jon Corzine, who made a fortune in investment banking and spent a fair chunk of it—\$60.2 million—to win a New Jersey Senate seat in 2000. Another example is Peter Fitzgerald, who spent \$13.8 million of his own money in defeating incumbent Carol Moseley-Braun in a 1998 race for an Illinois Senate seat.

Tapping the family fortune does not guarantee victory, to be sure; in 2010, Republican Linda McMahon, former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment, spent \$50 million in pursuit of a Connecticut Senate seat but won only 44 percent of the vote. Pursuing West Virginia's 2nd District, Democrat James Humphreys spent \$6.1 million in 2000 and another \$7.8 million in 2002, but he lost both contests to Shelly Moore Caputo, whose total campaign spending was less than one-third as much. In fact, wealthy self-financed candidates lose far more often than they win. Jennifer Steen found that in elections from 1990 through 1998, only five each of the top twenty self-financers in both House and Senate contests were successful (and two of the Senate winners were incumbents).<sup>34</sup> Of the sixty-eight House candidates spending more than \$1 million of their own on general election campaigns between 2002 and 2010, only eleven won, all but one by taking open seats. Only seven of the eighteen similarly self-financed Senate candidates were successful over this period, and four were already incumbents. More than a third of these candidates did not even get past the primary. Steen found that, on average,

<sup>34</sup>Jennifer Steen, "Self-Financing Candidates in American Elections," Dissertation website at <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/jsteen/facts.htm> (accessed November 4, 1999).

candidates contributing substantial sums to their own campaigns did only slightly better than candidates financed by others.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this unimpressive record, BCRA's designers thought it necessary to accommodate the incumbent's nightmare of facing a multimillionaire opponent by including a provision that raised contribution and party spending limits for candidates facing self-financed opponents. The limits would be raised on a sliding scale depending on the level of self-financing; at maximum, the limits for individual contributions to Senate candidates could be increased sixfold and the limits on party support are entirely eliminated. In 2008, a 5-4 Supreme Court majority rejected this attempt at leveling, arguing that "it imposes an unprecedented penalty on any candidate who robustly exercises [his or her] First Amendment right, requiring him to choose between the right to engage in unfettered political speech and subjection to discriminatory fundraising limitations."<sup>36</sup> BCRA also tried to discourage high levels of self-financing by limiting the amount candidates may loan their campaigns to \$250,000; anything more must be a personal donation to the campaign that cannot be recouped from contributors later (something winners would have been able to do before BCRA).

Obviously, great personal wealth is not a prerequisite to winning a seat in Congress. But candidates not enjoying the fundraising advantages that come with incumbency normally must be prepared to invest some of their own money—\$50,000 or more—to pay startup costs and to demonstrate commitment, with little hope of recouping any of it if they lose.

### Fundraising Tactics

The most important aspect of fundraising is convincing potential donors that their money will not be wasted. Donors must be persuaded that the candidate has a plausible chance of winning and would be more attentive to their values and interests than would the opponent. Incumbents are, of course, in the best position to be persuasive. For nonincumbents, techniques of persuasion range from polls and old election returns to a smooth tongue backed by a lively imagination, and from recitation of a political record to solemn promises. PACs and other contributors, understandably wary of such salesmanship, often take cues from each other and, more importantly, from party campaign committees in deciding who is worth an investment.

With or without party matchmaking, large contributions must usually be solicited face-to-face by the candidate or a prominent, high-status fundraiser. Smaller contributions are sought at meetings, rallies, dinners, through direct-mail appeals sent to individuals at home, and on campaign websites. Direct mail can be expensive; in 1992, Congressman Robert Dornan of California spent \$1,151,338 to raise \$1,407,922; \$967,650 of the total went to direct-mail solicitation.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.; see also Jennifer Steen, *Self-Financed Candidates in Congressional Elections* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

<sup>36</sup>*Davis v. Federal Election Commission*, 554 U.S. 724 (2008)

<sup>37</sup>Dwight Morris and Mureille E. Gamache, *Handbook of Campaign Spending: Money in the 1992 Congressional Elections* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1994), p. 29.

This form of fundraising has raised some concern because direct-mail pleas are the most successful when they play on strong emotions, such as anger, fear, or frustration, to convince people to support the candidate. Extremist candidates—Dornan, a flamboyant conservative firebrand, again serves as an example—are thus best able to exploit this method.<sup>38</sup> Internet fundraising, by comparison, is very cheap but requires even more intense commitment on the part of donors; as one veteran direct-mail fundraiser put it, "You think of the mail as fundraisers as chasing donors. The Internet, when it works, is donors chasing fundraisers, which is a truly unnatural act."<sup>39</sup>

No matter how candidates raise the money, timing is crucial. It is as important to have money available when it is needed as it is to have it in the first place. In general, money available early in the campaign is put to much better use than money received later. Early money is seed money for the entire campaign effort; it is needed to organize, plan, and raise more money. This circumstance adds to the advantage of personal wealth; it also enhances the importance of national party and other organizations that are willing to make contributions and provide help early in the campaign. Emily's List, a PAC devoted to electing pro-choice women to Congress, takes its name from an acronym extolling this approach: "Early money is like yeast (it makes the dough rise)." Emily's List is also the premiere proponent of "bundling"; rather than contribute money directly to candidates, the PAC directs the individual contributions of its members to designated candidates. That way, it can provide help in excess of the \$5,000 PAC contribution limit. The Emily's List website boasts of having raised nearly \$83 million for its candidates since 1985.<sup>40</sup>

## INDEPENDENT, "VOTER EDUCATION," AND "ISSUE ADVOCACY" CAMPAIGNS

Candidates and parties have never enjoyed exclusive control over congressional campaigns; independent campaigns conducted by PACs and other organizations have been part of the process since the adoption of the FECA. But until the 1990s, their part was minor, with independent spending never accounting for more than 3 percent of total campaign spending, and in most election years it was closer to 1 percent. In the 1990s, however, interest groups developed a new avenue for large-scale involvement in electoral politics beyond the control of the candidates. The Court's *Buckley* decision construed the FECA "to apply only to expenditures for

<sup>38</sup>Xandra Kayden, "The Nationalizing of the Party System," in *Parties, Interest Groups, and Campaign Finance Laws*, ed. Michael J. Malbin (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1980), p. 266.

<sup>39</sup>David B. Magleby and Kelly D. Patterson, *War Games: Issues and Resources in the Battle for Control of Congress* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, 2007), p. 20.

<sup>40</sup>"Emily's List: What We Do," at <http://emilyslist.org/what/> (accessed June 9, 2011); for more on the organization's early years, see Ilka M. Knepper, "Emily's List: Verdraengen Political Action Committees Amerikanische Parteien?" (Master's thesis, Zentrum fuer Europa und Nordamerikastudien, Fachbereich Politikwissenschaft, Georg-August-Universitaet Goettingen, 1994).

communications that in express terms advocate the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate for federal office.” Prior to the enactment of BCRA, the Court had ruled that the First Amendment protects the right to conduct unrestricted so-called voter-education or issue-advocacy campaigns, even if clearly intended to influence voters (by, for example, tendentious comparisons of candidates’ issue positions), as long as such terms as “vote for,” “elect,” “vote against,” “defeat,” and “reject,” are not used.<sup>41</sup> In 2007 the Court rejected BCRA’s attempt to limit the effect of these campaigns through a ban on mentioning candidates’ names in them during a fixed preelection period (thirty days for primaries, sixty days for general elections).<sup>42</sup> Then, in 2010 the Court decided, in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, that any limit at all on any independent campaigning violated the First Amendment.<sup>43</sup>

Independent campaigns are now conducted by so-called super PACS organized solely for this purpose as well as 527 and 501(c) organizations after, named for the provisions in the tax code applying to them. The 527 groups may raise and spend unlimited sums for voter mobilization and issue advocacy. Although their campaigns ads must still refrain from specifically advocating a vote for or against a candidate, forswearing the Court’s forbidden “magic words” does not inhibit the production of ads that are indistinguishable from ordinary campaign ads.<sup>44</sup> The 501(c) organizations may engage in political activity, particularly internal communications with their members, but political activity is not supposed to be their primary purpose; the U.S Chamber of Commerce, the biggest outside spender in 2010, is an example.

Spending by such groups for and against congressional candidates grew slowly and was a relatively small part of the financial mix until 2006, when independent spending increased more than fourfold, partly a rechanneling in response to the ban on soft money contributions to parties.<sup>45</sup> That upward trajectory continued through 2010 (Figure 4-18), with a particularly large jump for entities allied with the Republican Party. Table 4-2 lists the nonparty independent groups that spent at least \$3 million in 2010. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce was the biggest outside spender, followed by the American Action Network, whose board is composed largely of current or former Republican elected officials, and American Crossroads, organized by veteran Republican operatives Karl Rove and Ed Gillespie. Most of the independent spending for Democrats came from unions. Only one of the twenty-two, the National Association of Realtors, showed any bipartisan inclinations. In 2010, overall, groups favoring Republican candidates

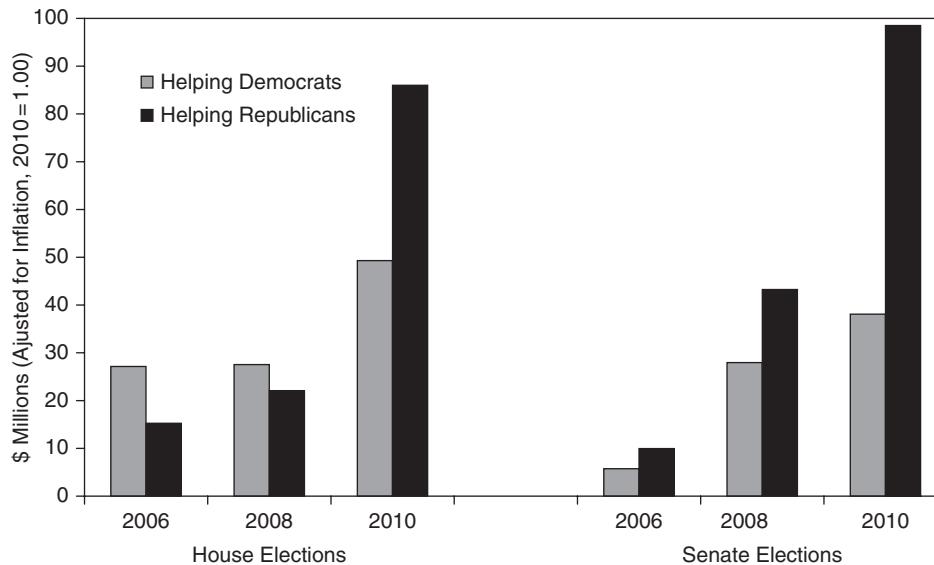
<sup>41</sup>Jonathan D. Salant, “GOP Bumps Up Against Court Precedent in Trying to Block AFL-CIO,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 54 (April 13, 1996): 996–997.

<sup>42</sup>*Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc.*, 551 U.S. 449 (2007).

<sup>43</sup>*Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 130 S.Ct. 876 (2010).

<sup>44</sup>One study found that fewer than 10 percent of *candidates’* broadcast ads used any of the words deemed by the Court to be out of bounds for issue advocacy campaigns; see “Straight Talk on Campaign Finance: Separating Fact from Fiction,” Paper No. 5, The Brennan Center for Justice (undated), at <http://www.brennancenter.org/dynamic/subpages/paper5.pdf> (accessed July 2, 2007).

<sup>45</sup>Stephen R. Weissman and Ruth Hassan, “BCRA and the 527Groups,” in *The Election After Reform*, ed. Michael Malbin (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 79–111.



**FIGURE 4-18**  
Independent Spending by Nonparty Groups, 2006–2010

Source: Campaign Finance Institute, "Reportable Spending by Party and Non-party Groups in Congressional Elections, 2006–2010," at [http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/federal/PostElec2010\\_Table1\\_.pdf](http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/federal/PostElec2010_Table1_.pdf).

spent \$119 million and those favoring Democrats spent \$79 million (only about \$12 million was spent by groups not clearly allied with a party). Because the Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision, which freed corporations and unions to finance campaigns from their treasuries, was so recent, its contribution to the sharp increases shown in Figure 4-18 remains uncertain. But this decision will assuredly contribute to the continued growth in outside spending.

Groups incorporated as 501(c) organizations are not required to disclose their donors. Thus, for example, the sources of the money spent by the top two outside spenders in 2010, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Action Network, remain hidden. Democrats, fearing that *Citizens United* would allow corporations and wealthy donors to attack their candidates anonymously, proposed legislation that would compel disclosure of most sources of funds spent on independent campaigns. Republicans successfully filibustered the bill in the Senate, arguing that disclosure would inhibit corporate "free speech" by exposing donors to retaliation (boycotts, protest demonstration) by offended citizens—just the kind of accountability Democrats presumably wanted to impose.<sup>46</sup>

As the law now stands, it is possible not only for any individual or organization to spend without limit to influence congressional electorates but to do so anonymously. Some shadowy groups have exploited this opportunity by conducting stealth campaigns behind innocuous-sounding fronts. For example, three groups

<sup>46</sup>David M. Herszenhorn, "Campaign Finance Bill Is Set Aside," *New York Times*, July 27, 2010.

**TABLE 4-2****Top Independent Spending Groups, 2010**

Group	Total Spent (dollars)	Partisan Orientation
US Chamber of Commerce	32,851,997	Republican
American Action Network	26,088,031	Republican
American Crossroads	21,553,277	Republican
Crossroads Grassroots Policy Strategies	17,122,446	Republican
Service Employees International Union	15,952,331	Democrat
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees	13,185,800	Democrat
National Education Association	10,245,561	Democrat
American Future Fund	9,599,806	Republican
Americans for Job Security	8,991,209	Republican
National Association of Realtors	8,890,737	Bipartisan
National Rifle Association	8,351,636	Republican
Club for Growth	8,240,060	Republican
60 Plus Association	7,096,125	Republican
America's Families First Action Fund	5,878,743	Democrat
League of Conservation Voters	5,496,070	Democrat
Americans for Tax Reform	4,140,044	Republican
AFL-CIO	4,044,898	Democrat
EMILY's List	3,968,701	Democrat
Commonsense Ten	3,257,033	Democrat
VoteVets.org	3,218,871	Democrat
Our Future Ohio PAC	3,068,144	Democrat

Source: Center for Responsive Politics, "2010 Outside Spending by Groups," at <http://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/summ.php?cycle=2010&type=p&disp=0>.

active in 2002 on the Republican side—the United Seniors Association, the Seniors Coalition, and the 60 Plus Association—were all creatures of the pharmaceutical industry, promoting candidates who supported the industry's prescription drug plan.<sup>47</sup> Stealth was carried to an extreme in some House races that year. Jill Long Thompson, Democratic candidate for Indiana's 2nd District, was hammered during the last three weeks of the campaign in a series of twelve automated phone calls, each of which reached at least 40,000 households. The calls, including one featuring the voice of Barbara Bush, the president's mother, reiterated Long Thompson's

<sup>47</sup>"Pulling Strings from Afar," *AARP Bulletin Online*, February 3, 2003, at <http://www.aarp.org/bulletin/consumer/a2003-06-30-pullingstrings.html> (accessed October 15, 2007).

Republican opponent's campaign theme.<sup>48</sup> Chris Kouri, Democrat competing for North Carolina's 8th District, faced a similar automated onslaught.<sup>49</sup> In neither case did anyone admit responsibility for the phone calls and their origin remains a mystery. Both Long Thompson and Kouri lost. More systematic evidence that "voter education" campaigns can be effective comes from a study of the AFL-CIO's \$25–\$35 million campaign against sixty-four Republican incumbents in 1996; the campaign deprived targeted freshmen of their sophomore surges and, arguably, cost as many as seven of them their seats.<sup>50</sup>

Independent groups usually coordinate their campaigns with those of the parties and candidates, albeit tacitly, in order to stay within the law. Indeed, most serve as reliable components of one or the other party's coalition.<sup>51</sup> Some, however, have their own agendas and are willing to sacrifice a party's interest to further their own. The Club for Growth, for example, a group dedicated to electing antitax purists, has mounted primary campaigns against Republican incumbents it considers insufficiently conservative. Contrary to the wishes of national Republican leaders, the group sponsored a primary challenge to moderate Republican Senator Lincoln Chaffee of Rhode Island in 2006. The challenge fell short, 46–54, but it probably helped weaken the incumbent, who lost the general election to Democrat Sheldon Whitehouse by a similar margin. Had the conservative Republican backed by the Club for Growth won the nomination, he would certainly have done even worse than Chaffee. Thus, the Club was willing to sacrifice Republican control of the Senate (which the Democrats won by a single seat in 2006) in order to move the Republican Party rightward.

## CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATIONS

Campaigns require organization. Raising funds, handling the legal formalities, gathering intelligence, designing and executing advertising strategies, holding events, and identifying supporters and getting them to cast ballots are complex and demanding tasks that have to be carried out in a brief and inflexible time frame. It takes experience and savvy to do any one of them well. It is neither easy nor cheap to build a good campaign organization.

Many incumbents keep at least an embryonic campaign organization permanently in place, often as personal staff. Other candidates must normally build organizations from scratch—one reason why seed money is so important. There was a time when, in many places, vigorous party organizations operated on a permanent basis and worked for entire party tickets. This is rarely the case

<sup>48</sup>John Roos and Christopher Roderiguez, "Indiana Second District—Hoosier Values and Outside Money," *The Last Hurrah?* p. 22.

<sup>49</sup>Eric S. Heberlig, "North Carolina's Eighth and Ninth Districts," *The Last Hurrah?* p. 260.

<sup>50</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, "The Effect of the AFL-CIO's 'Voter Education' Campaign on the 1996 House Elections," *Journal of Politics* 61 (1999): 185–194.

<sup>51</sup>Paul S. Herrnson, "The Role of Party Organizations, Party-Connected Committees, and Party Allies in Elections," *Journal of Politics* 71 (October 2009): 1207–1224.

now. Even when parties were robust, congressional candidates were not centers of attention, since local parties were interested primarily in patronage and members of Congress controlled little of that. Now that local party organizations have lost much of their value as campaign allies (at least until the national party decides to finance their federal campaign activities), congressional candidates are even more on their own when it comes to mounting a campaign.

For candidates who can afford it, the easiest way of acquiring a campaign organization is to buy one. Professional campaign specialists have taken over many of the functions formerly performed by local parties and have pioneered a variety of new electoral techniques adapted to an age of television and computers. It is possible for a candidate to hire a single outfit that will handle the entire campaign. More commonly, candidates engage a team of specialists—campaign managers, accountants, media consultants, pollsters, fundraisers, researchers, and the like. Professional services do not come cheap. Incumbents can afford them; often challengers cannot and must soldier on without much professional assistance. A 1992 study, for example, found that virtually every incumbent had a paid campaign manager, while 35 percent of challengers' House campaigns were managed by volunteers.<sup>52</sup> No doubt most poorly financed challengers—and 131 reported spending less than \$50,000 in 2010—continue to run campaigns without professional help. Senate challengers, with larger campaigns and bigger budgets, are much more likely to make use of professional campaign services. Hiring experienced professionals is now one sign of a serious campaign, and candidates who cannot afford to do so are unlikely to attract much attention from PACs or party committees.<sup>53</sup>

Short of buying a complete team package, the only way most nonincumbent congressional candidates can have an adequate campaign organization is to assemble one themselves (although the most promising candidates can expect extensive help from national party officials). Close political friends, the “personal constituency” that Fenno noticed all of his congressmen had acquired, form the core. Other components are added as they are available. Some Democrats, for example, receive extensive organizational help from labor unions. Fragments of local parties can sometimes be used. Inner-city African American candidates may work through neighborhood churches. Republican candidates espousing “family values” are helped by Christian fundamentalist congregations and other conservative organizations. Local groups associated with the conservative Tea Party movement worked for like-minded Republican candidates in 2010. Single-issue groups, such as environmentalists, opponents of gun control, or those on opposite sides of the abortion issue, provide organizational help to supporters of their causes. Almost any existing group with political interests can be absorbed into a campaign organization. The kind of organization a candidate assembles depends on what kinds of groups are available, which ones he or she can appeal to, and the candidate's range of contacts, resources, and level of political skill.

<sup>52</sup>Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*, p. 64.

<sup>53</sup>Paul S. Herrnson, “Do Parties Make a Difference? The Role of Party Organizations in Congressional Elections,” *Journal of Politics* 48 (1986): 612–613.

The campaign organizations of poorly funded House challengers tend to be personal, ephemeral, and dependent on volunteers. Because they are ephemeral and rely on people giving their time and energy without pay, a great deal of effort goes into internal organizational maintenance. Xandra Kayden observed that “most of the campaign staff devotes most of its time to creating and maintaining the campaign organization.”<sup>54</sup> Such campaign organizations cannot be hierarchical because sanctions are so few. They cannot learn from their mistakes because they exist for such a short time and go out of business at the very time the real effectiveness of their work is measured—when the votes are counted. It is not surprising that so few are successful.

### Campaign Strategies

In a broad sense, everyone knows what campaigns are supposed to do: find and expand the pool of eligible voters favoring the candidate and make sure that they vote. Figuring out just *how* to do it is another matter. As one political veteran told John Kingdon, “I don’t know very much about elections. I’ve been in a lot of them.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, the central motif of almost every discussion of campaign strategy is uncertainty.

What is the most efficient way to reach voters? No one knows for sure. The conventional view is that “half the money spent on campaigns is wasted. The trouble is, we don’t know which half.”<sup>56</sup> The effects of uncertainty about what works and what does not pervade campaign decision making. Successful candidates are inclined to do what they did in the past—they must have done something right, even if they cannot be sure what; a degree of superstition is understandable. Other candidates follow tradition. Kayden concludes that, “basically, campaigns produce literature because campaigns have always produced literature.”<sup>57</sup> The same may be said of yard signs, bumper stickers, and campaign buttons. They appear in every election year, not so much because they have ever been shown to be effective but because everyone expects them and their absence would be noticed, if only by the campaign’s activists (hence, they may be part of organizational maintenance).

On the other hand, uncertainty also invites innovation. Challengers, underdogs, and former losers have an incentive to try new tactics, if only to get desperately needed attention from the news media. For example, Lawton Chiles won a surprise victory in the 1970 Florida Senate election by walking the length of the state, talking and listening to people along the way. Other candidates quickly imitated him. While it was still fresh, the tactic generated abundant free publicity and far more attention than Chiles and the other candidates could afford to buy. Similarly, Tom Harkin, challenging the Republican incumbent for Iowa’s 5th District in 1972, made news by working for one day at a time in a variety of blue-collar jobs, ostensibly to get close to the common experience. Others soon picked up the idea. Senator Bob Graham of Florida made such workdays his political trademark,

<sup>54</sup>Xandra Kayden, *Campaign Organization* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1978), p. 61.

<sup>55</sup>John W. Kingdon, *Candidates for Office: Beliefs and Strategies* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 87.

<sup>56</sup>One of Fenno’s congressmen raised it to 75 percent; see Fenno, *Home Style*, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup>Kayden, *Campaign Organization*, p. 120.

logging more than 385 between his first successful campaign in 1978 (for governor) through the end of his third and final Senate term in 2004.<sup>58</sup>

Whatever seems to work for one is imitated by others,<sup>59</sup> so the novelty and, therefore, effectiveness of such tactics fade. But there is always something new. In 1980, Kenneth Snider, Democratic challenger in Indiana's 8th District, dropped in on voters with the helicopter he had purchased especially for the campaign; the news media loved it.<sup>60</sup> Snider lost the election but won a respectable 45 percent of the vote. Two years later, Republican Dan Burton, campaigning in his 1948 fire engine, was more successful; he has represented Indiana's 5th District ever since.<sup>61</sup>

Other modes of transportation have not been overlooked. Challenger Gene Freund undertook what might be called the "Tour d'Iowa," pedaling his bicycle 800 miles through twenty-seven counties of Iowa's 5th District in 1988.<sup>62</sup> In 1986, another challenger had been desperate enough for publicity to bicycle 340 miles across the Nevada desert along the shoulder of Interstate 80 in August.<sup>63</sup> Neither of these cyclists crossed the finish line first, but David Minge's 500-mile bike tour through forty-seven towns in nine days helped him win Minnesota's 2nd District in 1992. Minge repeated the tactic in 1994, narrowly holding off a challenger who, among other things, campaigned from a train.<sup>64</sup>

Sometimes a vehicle can even embody the campaign's central theme. In 1994, Greg Ganske campaigned for Iowa's 4th District in the "Nealmobile," a DeSoto made in 1958, the year the incumbent, Neal Smith, was first elected to the House. A sign on the roof asked: "WHY is it still running?"<sup>65</sup> In a year when *career politician* was a nasty epithet, Ganske drove the Nealmobile right in to the House. Candidates also travel in battered pickup trucks, old station wagons, and other humble vehicles to show that they are just plain folks, not out-of-touch Washington insiders. In 2006, as voters watched gas prices rise above \$3.00 per gallon nationally, the fuel rather than the vehicle provided the gimmick. Mike Weaver, Democratic challenger to Ron Lewis in Kentucky's 2nd District, "filled motorists' gas tanks for \$1.20 per gallon, the price gasoline cost when Lewis was first elected to Congress in 1994," paying the difference out of pocket; Lewis thereupon accused Weaver of the federal crime of trying to buy votes.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>58</sup>Michael Barone and Richard Cohen with Charles E. Cook Jr., *The Almanac of American Politics 2004* (Washington, DC: National Journal, 2003), pp. 384–385.

<sup>59</sup>Marjorie Randon Hershey, *Running for Office: The Political Education Campaigners* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1984), pp. 69–79.

<sup>60</sup>"The Outlook: Senate, House, and Governors," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 38 (October 11, 1980): 3014, 3017.

<sup>61</sup>Alan Ehrenhalt, "House Freshmen: Campaign Traditionalists," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 41 (January 8, 1983): 30.

<sup>62</sup>Jonathan Roos, "Freund Hopes to Grab Coattails," *Des Moines Register* (August 23, 1988), p. A2.

<sup>63</sup>"Outlook: Nevada," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 44 (October 11, 1986): 2453.

<sup>64</sup>Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa, *The Almanac of American Politics 1994* (Washington, DC: National Journal, 1993), p. 691; "Minnesota," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 52 (October 22, 1994): 3032.

<sup>65</sup>"Challenger Hits Iowa's Smith with Incumbency, Earmarks," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 52 (September 10, 1994): 2533.

<sup>66</sup>Nicole Duran, "GOP: Gas Gimmick Is Illegal," *Roll Call*, September 5, 2006.

## Campaign Media

Two groups of activities are common to all full-scale campaigns. One is mass media advertising, which absorbs about 45 percent of a typical campaign budget.<sup>67</sup> The candidate's name and perhaps a short message are presented to voters via some combination of television, radio, newspaper advertisements, billboards, mass mailings, automated telephone calls, e-mails, and instant messaging. The choice of media is partly strategic and partly dictated by cost and available resources. About one-third of House campaigns, for example, do not use paid television.<sup>68</sup> In large metropolitan areas, it is inefficient and too expensive for candidates without extraordinarily ample funds. Candidates must pay for the audience they reach; at the extreme (the greater New York City media market), constituents may comprise less than 5 percent of the audience. The more efficiently television markets fit a district, the more likely House candidates are to use television advertising.<sup>69</sup> The spread of cable television has made access to television less expensive, but the lower cost reflects the small size of the audiences reached through this much more fragmented medium.

Despite high costs, House candidates with enough money buy broadcast television time even if it is very inefficient, for it may be the only way to reach many potential voters. So do parties and organizations spending independently of candidates' campaigns. The notion that television advertising is essential regardless of price is one important force driving up the cost of campaigning. In the hotly contested campaigns that attract the national parties' attention, multimillion-dollar broadcast campaigns that saturate the airwaves in the weeks leading up to the election are not uncommon. Radio advertising is also "wasteful" in large media markets, but the costs are much lower than those for TV, and radio audiences sort themselves out demographically for targeting, so campaigns often use radio ads where TV is beyond their means.

Senate campaigns are usually able to use television much more efficiently than House campaigns because constituencies are entire states, though cost and efficiency still vary considerably across states.<sup>70</sup> The use of television helps candidates who are not already well known (i.e., challengers) and can be added to the list of factors that make Senate campaigns so much more competitive, on the average, than House campaigns.

With enough money on both sides, a television campaign can take on the character of an ongoing debate, where "one day's set of TV ads for one candidate [is] followed soon after by his opponent's set of counterads, and the process [is] repeated several times in an intricate series of tactical moves."<sup>71</sup> There is no

<sup>67</sup>Morris and Gamache, *Handbook of Campaign Spending*, Tables 1-5 and 1-6.

<sup>68</sup>Herrnson, *Congressional Elections*, p. 183.

<sup>69</sup>Eddie N. Goldenberg and Michael W. Traugott, *Campaigning for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984), p. 120; and Stephen Ansolabehere, Alan Gerber, and James M. Snyder Jr., "Television Costs and Greater Congressional Campaign Spending: Cause and Effect or Coincidence?" (Manuscript, August 1999).

<sup>70</sup>Charles Stewart III and Mark Reynolds, "Television Markets and Senate Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 15 (1990): 495-523.

<sup>71</sup>Alan Ehrenhalt, "Technology, Strategy Bring New Campaign Era," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* 43 (December 7, 1985): 2559.

apparent limit to how much television advertising voters will tolerate. Back in 1984, Senator Jesse Helms's reelection campaign in North Carolina was on the air almost continuously for the eighteen months preceding the election; 150 different ads were produced for the campaign. His opponent, James Hunt, also saturated the airwaves, though for a shorter period.<sup>72</sup> Helms won, spending \$16.5 million to Hunt's \$9.5 million in what was up to then the most expensive Senate contest ever held. Twenty years later, John Thune won a narrow victory in South Dakota over Tom Daschle, then Democratic majority leader of the Senate, in a contest in which the candidates managed to spend more than \$34 million between them in a state with fewer than 502,000 registered voters. The total amounted to a record \$68 per voter. More than \$9 million was spent on broadcast ads in a state where airtime is relatively cheap.<sup>73</sup>

Well-funded House campaigns in districts with inefficient television coverage often rely heavily on direct mail, which can pinpoint the district's voters. House and Senate campaigns also use direct mail to send messages targeted to specific subgroups in the electorate. In a sample of hotly contested races in 2002, the candidates and parties combined to send an average of forty-four unique mail pieces during the campaign; voters reported receiving three or four pieces a day during the last week of the campaign. Some campaigns greatly exceeded these averages; in the contest for South Dakota's Senate seat, won by incumbent Democrat Tim Johnson by a margin of only 524 votes, some voters reported receiving as many as ten pieces of mail per day. A total of 174 unique direct-mail pieces were distributed during this race:

The blizzard of messages became intrusive and it was hard to break through the clutter and process all of the brief messages. The direct mail pieces were primarily visual, usually filled with distorted images of opponents, babies, or the candidate and his family. The messages lacked substance and most were brief enough to be read on the way to the trash can.<sup>74</sup>

The growing sophistication of both data processing and lists segmenting the voting population into distinct subgroups has greatly increased the efficiency with which direct-mail appeals can be targeted to specific audiences.<sup>75</sup> Improved databases and much cheaper technology have also led to increased use of the telephone to get out campaign messages and mobilize voters. "A telephone call, as unwelcome as it may be, cuts through . . . apathy and cynicism by forcing voters to listen to a political message," or so its practitioners claim.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 2563.

<sup>73</sup>Elizabeth Theiss Smith and Richard Braunstein, "The Nationalization of Local Politics in South Dakota," in *Dancing Without Partners: How Candidates, Parties, and Interest Groups Interact in the New Campaign Environment*, ed. David B. Magleby, J. Quin Monson, and Kelly D. Patterson (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, 2005), p. 246.

<sup>74</sup>James Meader and John Bart, "South Dakota: At-Large and Senate Race 2002," in *The Last Hurrah?* ed. Magleby and Monson p. 164.

<sup>75</sup>"We've Got Mail," *Campaigns & Elections* (June 1999), p. 22.

<sup>76</sup>John Jameson, Chris Glaze, and Gary Teal, "Effective Phone Contact Programs and the Importance of Good Data," *Campaigns & Elections* (July 1999), pp. 64–71.

Congressional candidates have also discovered the Internet. A study of the 2002 campaigns found that 70 percent maintained websites, and 55 percent sought to raise funds online (via credit card transactions). Most sites featured newsletters and action alerts, as well as information about the candidates.<sup>77</sup> Since then, campaign websites and Internet fundraising efforts have become virtually universal. They are a boon to researchers looking for a quick way to check out the candidates, but it is hard to gauge how effectively they serve the campaigns. Websites no doubt help to coordinate the candidate's active supporters, making it easy for them to keep in touch and send money, but the numbers involved are small. In a Pew survey of Internet usage in the 2010 elections, only 8 percent of respondents reported signing up for online updates from campaigns, 5 percent reported using the Internet to participate in campaign activities, and a mere 4 percent donated money online.<sup>78</sup> It is doubtful that campaign websites attract the uncommitted in sufficient numbers to affect the vote directly. In any case, as anyone who sifts through them soon learns, at least the truly flaky websites serve to expose some of the truly flaky candidates.

E-mail is also now part of the campaign arsenal, although some care has to be taken to avoid irritating voters with unwanted spam. So is text messaging. For example, Rick Santorum, running (unsuccessfully) for reelection to his Pennsylvania Senate seat in 2006, encouraged attendees at a woman's outreach breakfast "to text 'LEADING' to a PA phone number to receive a return text message that read: 'From Keeping Women's Docs in PA to Allowing Parents the Freedom to Work from Home, Rick Santorum is Leading 4 Women. Look 4 Msgs with More Information.'" <sup>79</sup> Because cell phone users have to sign up to receive the messages, the medium is better suited to rallying the faithful than to attracting the undecided. The same holds for Facebook and Twitter.

Regardless of which combination of media is chosen, a fundamental goal is to get the candidate's name before the public. Although little else is certain about the effects of mass communications, it is well established that mass media coverage is positively related to public awareness of people, products, messages, and events. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the more nonincumbent candidates spend on a campaign, the more voters are likely to know who they are. Getting voters' attention is only one hurdle, of course, but clearing it is essential.

## Personal Campaigning

The second basic type of campaign activity centers around the candidate's personal contact with potential voters. Most politicians have faith in the personal touch; if they can just talk to people and get them to listen, they can win their support. There is some evidence behind this notion. Larry Pressler, who represented South Dakota in Congress from 1974 to 1996, won his first House election with a campaign that

<sup>77</sup>Phil Noble, "Internet and Campaign 2002 Analysis," at <http://lists.umn.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0211&L=do-wire&P=61> (accessed October 29, 2011).

<sup>78</sup>Aaron Smith, "The Internet Campaign 2010," Pew Internet, March 17, 2011, at <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/The-Internet-and-Campaign-2010/Summary.aspx>

<sup>79</sup>"Consultants Corner: Sending Out an SMS," *Hotline on Call*, July 14, 2006, at [http://hotlineblog.nationaljournal.com/archives/2006/07/consultants\\_cor\\_2.html](http://hotlineblog.nationaljournal.com/archives/2006/07/consultants_cor_2.html) (accessed July 2, 2007).

consisted largely of meeting people one-on-one. “I tried to shake 500 hard hands a day,” Pressler has said. “That is where you really take their hand and look at them and talk to them a bit. I succeeded in doing that seven days a week. I put in a lot of twelve-hour days, starting at a quarter to six in the morning at some plant in Sioux Falls or Madison.”<sup>80</sup> Pressler estimates that he shook 300–500 hands per day for about eighty days. “You would not believe the physical and mental effort this requires.”<sup>81</sup> Shaking one hand per minute, a candidate would have to work for more than eight hours without stop to reach 500 people.

The difficulty with this approach is that even the average House district now contains more than 700,000 people, and states can be much more populous than this. It is simply impossible to meet more than a small fraction of the electorate during a single campaign. But candidates often agree with Pressler that it is worth trying—especially challengers whose only advantage may be the time they can devote to one-on-one campaigning. Some go door-to-door, “shoe-leathering” the neighborhoods; in his first House campaign in 1990, candidate Rick Santorum rang 25,000 doorbells in his upset victory over the incumbent in Pennsylvania’s 18th District<sup>82</sup>; four years later, he won election to the Senate.

Many candidates greet the early shift at the factory gate, shaking hands, passing out leaflets, showing workers they care enough to get up as early as the workers must. Most will accept any opportunity to speak to a group, and it is not uncommon for candidates to show up wherever people congregate in sufficient numbers: shopping malls, community picnics, parades, sporting events, and the like. As Santorum proved, energetic grassroots campaigns of this sort are occasionally successful even in this high-tech era<sup>83</sup> and, because they offer about the only hope to unknown candidates not blessed with great personal wealth, they remain common.

Even lavishly funded campaigns use the personal touch when it is feasible, and with adequate research resources, the touch can be personal indeed. Tim Johnson’s successful campaign for reelection to the Senate in 2002

made an effort to personally visit as many households as [it] could. When either the candidate or campaign worker was going door to door, they carried nine different scripts that contained different issues. Before knocking on the door they already knew something about the occupant and selected the script designed for that demographic.<sup>84</sup>

Many of a candidate’s activities are designed to reach voters beyond those in the immediate audience by attracting the attention of the news media. Indeed, campaigns work so hard to get “free” media exposure that campaign professionals commonly refer to it as “earned” media.<sup>85</sup> The main reason for walking the length

<sup>80</sup>Alan L. Clem, “The Case of the Upstart Republican,” in *The Making of Congressmen: Seven Campaigns of 1974*, ed. Alan L. Clem (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press, 1976), p. 140.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1994*, p. 1119.

<sup>83</sup>Ehrenhalt, “House Freshmen,” pp. 37, 41.

<sup>84</sup>Meader and Bart, “South Dakota,” p. 165.

<sup>85</sup>Craig Varoga, “Lone Star Upset,” *Campaigns & Elections* (March 1995): 35.

of the state or pedaling across the district is that it makes news. Campaign events are designed not so much for the immediate audience as for the larger audience watching television, cruising the Internet, or reading the newspaper at home. The temptation to resort to gimmickry is not always resisted. Ronald Machtley began his successful campaign to replace Fernand St Germain accompanied by a “250-pound hog named Lester H. Pork (‘Les Pork’) to symbolize his opposition to St Germain’s big spending policies.”<sup>86</sup> In 2010, a cash-short Republican challenger in Massachusetts reaped reams of publicity by distributing his campaign message on a barf bag (“Sick of Congress? Then Vote Marty Lamb!”). Ray Lutz, far behind in his challenge to Republican Duncan Hunter, Jr., in California’s 52nd District, went on an eleven-day hunger strike. Its stated purpose was to compel Hunter to debate, but Lutz conceded that the tactic “got his name out there” and “from a publicity standpoint . . . worked pretty well.”<sup>87</sup>

Paid campaign ads may also be used to gain media exposure; one consultant recommends using “shock mailers” to provoke opponents into outraged responses, which then give the charges much wider publicity when the news media report the squabble.<sup>88</sup> A gentler tactic was used in Russ Feingold’s successful challenge to Wisconsin Senator Bob Kasten in 1992: humorous ads, including one featuring a mock personal endorsement by Elvis, that delighted the media. Kasten eventually countered with his own Elvis spot attacking Feingold on the issues.<sup>89</sup> Sometimes the attention garnered by an ad backfires: Christine O’Donnell, Republican Senate nominee from Delaware in 2010, began her initial TV ad by gently informing voters, “I’m not a witch,” inspiring parodies broadcast on Saturday Night Live and across the Internet on YouTube.<sup>90</sup>

A candidate’s time is a scarce resource, so an important function of a campaign organization is to arrange for it to be used effectively. An exhausting day of travel and meetings that results in few contacts with voters or little money raised is a campaign manager’s nightmare. Time wasted cannot be retrieved. The reality of campaigns is that candidates and their aides cannot tailor the social and political world to suit their needs; they have to be ready to exploit opportunities for meeting people and making news as they arise.

## CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

Along with letting voters know who the candidate is, a campaign is designed to persuade them to vote for him or her. Uncertainty dominates here, as well. There is no magic formula for appealing to voters; what works in one district or election year may not work in another. Nonetheless, according to campaign professionals,

<sup>86</sup>Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 1990*, p. 1087.

<sup>87</sup>Michele Clock, “Hunger Strike Ends at Day 11 for Congressional Hopeful,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 24, 2010, p. B1.

<sup>88</sup>Eva Pusateri, “Shock Mailers That Jolt Your Audience,” *Campaigns & Elections* (May 1995): 41.

<sup>89</sup>Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 2000*, p. 1446.

<sup>90</sup>“Christine O’Donnell, TV AD: I’m Not A Witch”, NPR at <http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2010/10/05/130346290/christine-o-donnell-tv-ad-i-m-not-a-witch> (accessed May 4, 2011)

to be effective, every campaign needs to develop and project *some* consistent campaign theme. The theme explains why the candidate should be elected and why the opponent should not. It attempts to frame the choice—to establish what the election is *about*—in a way that underlines the candidate’s strengths and plays down the candidate’s weaknesses. The goal is not to change people’s political attitudes, but rather to define the choice so that a vote for the candidate is consistent with existing attitudes.<sup>91</sup> The available themes and approaches are often rather different for incumbents, challengers, and candidates for open seats, so it is best to consider these categories separately.

### Challengers’ Campaigns

Challengers certainly hope to convince people of their own virtues—at minimum, that they are qualified for the office—but they are not likely to get far without directly undermining support for the incumbent. The trick is to find some vulnerable point to attack, and challengers are happy to exploit whatever is available. There are inevitably at least a few members beset with scandal—moral or ethical lapses, felony convictions, signs of senility or alcoholism—that offer obvious targets, although a surprising number of incumbents with such liabilities manage to win reelection.<sup>92</sup> Democratic challengers to several Republicans defeated in 2006—including Richard Pombo (California 11th), J. D. Hayworth (Arizona 5th), and Senator Conrad Burns (Montana)—successfully exploited the incumbent’s close association with convicted influence-peddler Jack Abramoff. But William Jefferson, a Democrat representing Louisiana’s 2nd District, won reelection that year despite the discovery in his home freezer of \$90,000 in marked bills from a FBI sting operation; Jefferson was indicted eight months after the election on multiple corruption charges and lost his bid for reelection in 2008.<sup>93</sup> In 1992, the House Bank scandal provided ammunition to challengers of the more than 200 incumbents seeking reelection who had written unfunded checks on their House Bank accounts. Individual political failings—excessive junketing, lack of attention to the district or to legislative duties—also invite attack. The defeat of incumbent Walter Huddleston in Kentucky’s 1984 Senate race is widely attributed

<sup>91</sup>Joel Bradshaw, “Who Will Vote for You and Why: Designing Campaign Strategy and Theme,” in *Campaigns and Elections American Style*, 2nd ed., ed James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), pp. 37–56.

<sup>92</sup>For example, Robert Leggett won reelection to the 4th District of California in 1976, even after having been a principal subject of the “Koreagate” investigation and having it known publicly that he had fathered two children by an aide, had been supporting two households for years, and had even forged his wife’s name to the deed for the second house. For a more general analysis of the electoral effects of corruption charges, see John G. Peters and Susan Welch, “The Effects of Charges of Corruption on Voting Behavior in Congressional Elections,” *American Political Science Review* 74 (1980): 697–708; Susan Welch and John R. Hibbing, “The Effects of Charges of Corruption on Voting Behavior in Congressional Elections, 1982–1990,” *Journal of Politics* 59 (1997): 26–39; and Stephen C. Roberds, “Incumbent Scandals in U.S. House Elections” (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 15–17, 1999).

<sup>93</sup>“Louisiana Congressman Indicted in Bribery Probe.” CNN.com, June 5, 2007 at <http://forums.macrumors.com/archive/index.php/t-310055.html> (accessed October 29, 2011).

to a television ad that featured a pack of bloodhounds searching for him in places far from Washington, DC, and underlined the charge that Huddleston had neglected his duties. Congressional travel became a common target in the 1990s, as challengers used it to symbolize insulation of “career politicians” from lives of ordinary people. Any sign of neglecting the home folks is also a ripe target. This was a winning theme in Kay Hagan’s challenge to Republican Senator Elizabeth Dole in North Carolina; one early mailing from the state’s Democratic Party featured a “Where is Liddy Dole?” milk carton, reminding voters that she had spent only thirty-three days in the state during all of 2005 and 2006.<sup>94</sup>

Challengers also routinely try to show that incumbents are out of touch with district sentiments by attacking specific roll-call votes, the ideological or partisan pattern of votes, or a combination of the two. They also try to hang unpopular policies or politicians around their necks. Although cases are known in which a single “wrong” vote led to defeat, it is by no means easy to nail members with their voting records. Members are aware that they may be called to answer for any vote and on controversial issues take pains to cast an “explainable” vote.<sup>95</sup> That is, any vote likely to offend important groups in the member’s electoral coalition or in the district at large will be cast only if it can be supported by a plausible explanation, one that does not make the member look bad if it is questioned.

Normally, a few wrong votes do not seriously weaken an incumbent, although a string of them lends plausibility to the charge that a member is mismatched with the constituency and ought to be replaced. On occasion, challengers have been able to turn one or two key votes into potent symbols of the incumbent’s divided loyalties. House Democrats running for reelection in 2010 did significantly worse if they had supported Barack Obama’s health care reforms, economic stimulus package, clean energy bill, and financial reform legislation, particularly if they represented Republican-leaning districts.<sup>96</sup> The same was true for House Democrats in 1994; the more loyal they were to Bill Clinton and the party on key votes, the more electoral damage they suffered, and the more Republican the district’s voting patterns in presidential elections, the more severe the damage.<sup>97</sup>

Democratic challengers in 2006 and Republican challengers in 2010 also effectively used the strategy of tying the incumbent to a locally unpopular president; a number of their campaigns featured ads depicting the president in close proximity to the incumbent, sometimes digitally “morphing” one into the other, to suggest that the two were indistinguishable. Incumbents are also attacked for opposing locally popular presidents; several Republicans who voted

<sup>94</sup>Eric S. Heberlig, Peter L. Francia, and Steven H. Green, “The Conditional Party Teams of the 2008 North Carolina Federal Elections,” in *The Change Election: Money, Mobilization, and Persuasion in the 2008 Federal Elections*, ed. David B. Magleby (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011), p. 125.

<sup>95</sup>John Kingdon, *Congressmen’s Voting Decisions* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 46–53.

<sup>96</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, “The Republican Resurgence in 2010,” *Political Science Quarterly* 126 (Spring 2011): 48–51; David W. Brady, Morris P. Fiorina, and Arjun S. Wilkins, “The 2010 Congressional Elections: Why Did Political Science Forecasts Go Awry?” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, 2 (2011): 247–250.

<sup>97</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, “The 1994 Elections in Perspective,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111 (Summer 1996): 203–223.

to impeach Bill Clinton in 1998 despite representing districts he had won handily in 1996 paid the price in 2000.

General ideological or partisan attacks have been a mainstay of challengers' campaigns for decades. Incumbents are criticized for being too liberal or too conservative for the constituency or for their guilt by association with unpopular parties, causes, or leaders. This approach lost some of its punch in the 1960s and 1970s, as members strove to avoid ideological categorization or personal responsibility for party decisions when it would hurt them politically back home. By soliciting support as individuals rather than as representatives of a party or cause, they sought to undermine the force of such charges. As electoral politics took on a more ideological and partisan cast in the 1980s, incumbents—particularly Democrats—found it more difficult to sidestep attacks of this sort. Since then, the number of members representing districts where their party label suggests a poor ideological fit has dwindled (see Figure 2-3 in Chapter 2), but as the congressional parties have become increasingly polarized along ideological lines (see Chapter 7), charges of extremism continue to be plausible.

### Going Negative

Until the 1980s, harsh personal attacks on an opponent were considered a sign of desperation, ineffective, and likely to backfire. Challengers on the ropes sometimes resorted to them; incumbents ignored the attacks on the theory that reacting would only bring them unwarranted attention. They were most common in campaigns of “sure losers.”<sup>98</sup> No longer. Campaign professionals have become convinced that negative advertising works—although academic studies have yet to confirm this belief.<sup>99</sup> One Democratic consultant put it this way: “People say they hate negative campaigning. But it works. They hate it and remember it at the same time. The problem with positive is that you have to run it again and again to make it stick. With negative, the poll numbers will move in three or four days.”<sup>100</sup> *Campaigns & Elections*, which bills itself as “The Magazine for Political Professionals,” devoted several articles in its July 1995 issue to helpful hints on “going negative” (for example, “Attack Mail: The Silent Killer”).<sup>101</sup> Campaign professionals distinguish between accurate *comparative* ads that highlight differences between the candidates (fair) and strictly personal attacks of questionable accuracy or relevance (unfair), although voters may not always appreciate the distinction.

In close races where party organizations are heavily involved, a division of labor usually emerges: The candidate's campaign takes the high road, while the party does the dirty work. Commenting on the 2002 campaign in New Mexico's 2nd District, the Democrats' political director asserted that “the party's job was

<sup>98</sup>Goldenberg and Traugott, *Campaigning for Congress*, p. 123.

<sup>99</sup>Richard R. Lau and Gerald M. Pomper, *Negative Campaigning: An Analysis of Senate Elections* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), p. 91.

<sup>100</sup>Ehrenhalt, “New Campaign Era,” p. 2561.

<sup>101</sup>Richard Schlackman and Jamie “Buster” Douglas, “Attack Mail: The Silent Killer,” *Campaigns & Elections* (July 1995): 25.

to act ‘as the bad guy,’ so Democratic candidates could focus on a more positive message.” His Republican counterpart agreed: “negative advertising is the job of the party, leaving candidates to stay above the fray longer.”<sup>102</sup> Independent groups are even freer to sling mud; as the late Terry Dolan, whose National Conservative PAC pioneered independent campaigning in the early 1980s, observed in a moment of candor, “a group like ours could lie through its teeth and the candidate it helps stays clean.”<sup>103</sup> BCRA has reinforced this division of labor by requiring candidates to say on camera—in every ad their campaigns broadcast—that they authorized and approved it. Still, candidates are not above going negative themselves; Saxbe Chambliss’s successful Senate challenge of Georgia Democrat Max Cleland, who lost both legs and an arm in Vietnam, featured a television ad that followed footage of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein with an unflattering shot of Cleland and a voiceover claiming that he had “voted against the president’s vital homeland security efforts.”<sup>104</sup>

The logic, if not the civility, of attacking opponents is compelling in a system of candidate-centered electoral politics. If members of Congress win and hold office by eliciting trust and regard as individuals, then the way to undermine their support is to destroy their constituents’ trust and regard. Even national issues unfavorable to the incumbent’s party—bad economic news, scandals, failed policies, an unpopular president—need to be personalized to be used effectively to weaken an incumbent. When national issues are scarce or favor the other party, character assaults are about the only tactic readily available.<sup>105</sup>

National issues helpful to challengers did become available in the early 1990s, and they were quick to exploit them. Intense public dissatisfaction with Congress’s performance offered a potent theme to those challengers who could demonize the incumbent as a career politician guilty by association with the government’s failings. Demonizing *individual* incumbents, as opposed to the class of officeholders, is not easy, however. For years, members of Congress managed to avoid the fallout from the public’s routine dissatisfaction with Congress’s institutional performance. Rather than defend the place, they would join in the criticism: “Members of Congress run *for* Congress by running *against* Congress.”<sup>106</sup> They defended their own personal performances vigorously but not at all the collective actions of Congress.

The effectiveness of this strategy began to break down in 1990, when voters reacted to an unpopular October budget deal that cut programs and raised taxes by reducing their support for incumbents of both parties.<sup>107</sup> It was further undermined

<sup>102</sup>Lonna Rae Atkeson, Nancy Carrillo, and Margaret C. Toulouse, “The 2002 New Mexico Federal Races,” in *The Last Hurrah?* ed. Magleby and Monson, p. 276.

<sup>103</sup>Myra MacPherson, “The New Right Brigade,” *Washington Post*, August 10, 1980, p. F1.

<sup>104</sup>“Big Brother Lends a Hand,” <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/10/28/politics/main527101.shtml> (accessed May 15, 2003).

<sup>105</sup>Paul Taylor, “Accentuating the Negative,” *Washington Post* national weekly edition, October 20, 1986, p. 6.

<sup>106</sup>Fenno, *Home Style*, p. 168; emphasis is Fenno’s.

<sup>107</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, “Deficit Cutting Politics and Congressional Elections,” *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (1993): 390–396.

in 1992, when the House Bank scandal allowed challengers to connect members personally, through their record of bad checks, with congressional malfeasance.<sup>108</sup> It also failed conspicuously for Democrats in 1994, when Republicans succeeded in turning hostility to government into hostility to Democrats by depicting them as adherents of an intolerable status quo, exemplified by their unpopular president's "big government" solution to the health care system's shortcomings.<sup>109</sup> Nor did it work in 2006 or 2010, when the out-party succeeded in framing the choice in national terms—as a referendum on the performance of the president and the Congress—rendering the incumbents' emphasis on local service and political independence ineffective (see Chapter 6).<sup>110</sup>

In the search for campaign issues, then, challengers are necessarily opportunists. It is a matter of finding and exploiting the incumbent's mistakes—neglect of the district, personal lapses, and "bad" votes—or discovering a way to saddle the incumbent with personal responsibility for Congress's or the administration's shortcomings. A challenger cannot hope to win without reordering the campaign agenda. Incumbents thrive on campaigns that center around personal performance, experience, and services. Few members are vulnerable if they can persuade voters that this is what the contest is about; even losing incumbents usually get high marks on these dimensions. Challengers succeed only when they can frame issues in a way that makes these dimensions less relevant and other considerations more salient.

From this perspective, the burgeoning role of party committees and other institutional participants in congressional election politics takes on added importance. National campaign committees have helped their challengers by polling between elections to probe for soft spots in incumbents' support, tracking their votes to store up ammunition for the next election, attacking them between elections with negative advertising, and quickly spreading the word about successful innovations in strategy and tactics. Dozens of groups now rate roll-call votes, target incumbents opposing their views, advise favored challengers on tactics, and mobilize campaign volunteers—in addition, of course, to providing campaign money. All of these things add to the uncertainty and worry of incumbents; aware of the resources available to be mobilized against them, most act as if they were anything but safe.

### Incumbents' Campaigns

Incumbents pursue reelection throughout their terms in office, so their campaign strategies are visible in all their dealings with constituents. Naturally, they try to avoid mistakes that would give opponents campaign issues, but in an uncertain and complicated political world, in which the pressure for party loyalty is now

<sup>108</sup>Gary C. Jacobson and Michael A. Dimock, "Checking Out: The Effects of Bank Overdrafts on the 1992 House Elections," *American Journal of Political Science* 38 (1994): 601–624; see also Chapter 6.

<sup>109</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, "The 1994 Congressional Elections in Perspective," *Political Science Quarterly* 111 (1996): 203–223.

<sup>110</sup>Gary C. Jacobson, "Referendum: The 2006 Midterm Congressional Elections," *Political Science Quarterly* 122 (2007): 1–24.

higher than it has been in decades, that is not always possible. They therefore work to maintain the kind of relationship with constituents that will allow them to survive a damaging vote or contrary political tide. Fenno's insightful account of how House members do this, in fact, describes effective campaigning by any congressional candidate, incumbent or challenger.<sup>111</sup>

Fenno traveled extensively with eighteen House members as they made the rounds of their districts. He found that each member projected a personal *home style* that defined his relationship to the groups he relied on for political support. Home styles varied according to the character of the district and the personality of the individual member, but in one way or another, all members basically sought to inspire *trust* among their constituents. They did this by emphasizing their personal qualifications, including moral character, by identifying with their constituents ("I am one of you," they implied, "so you can trust me to make the right decisions—those you would make under the same circumstances"), and by working to develop bonds of empathy with the groups and individuals they met.

For most of the members Fenno watched, issues, policy, and partisanship were not prominent objects of discussion with constituents and were not used to elicit support. Even members who did display issue-oriented home styles used issues primarily to cement ties of trust; *how* they addressed the issues rather than the issues themselves was what mattered. Members used issues to show themselves to be the kind of people constituents would want in Washington.

Along with trust, members emphasized their *accessibility*. Constituents were reminded continually that lines of communication were open, that they had access to the member whenever they needed it. The payoffs are clear. Member who are trusted, accessible, and thought to be "one of us" will have much less trouble fending off personal attacks. Their explanations for controversial votes will be heard more sympathetically; institutional or partisan failures and even notorious ethical lapses may go unpunished.

This kind of relationship cannot be developed overnight, nor can it be maintained without continual reinforcement. Its importance is the reason that, as one congressman put it, "it's a personal franchise you hold, not a political franchise."<sup>112</sup> Nonincumbents may aspire to it, but they have little chance to achieve it in the brief period of a single election campaign. Those who have held other elective offices in the district or who are already familiar to district voters for other reasons—a previous campaign, family name, or celebrity status as an athlete, entertainer, or newscaster—have a head start.

The personal connection so important to Fenno's subjects is no doubt harder to cultivate now that districts contain a quarter million more constituents than when he did his research, but members continue to try.<sup>113</sup> In addition to keeping district connections in good repair, incumbents have now begun to deal with the growing threat of harsh personal and political attacks and well-financed challenges

<sup>111</sup>Fenno, *Home Style*, p. 55.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Richard F. Fenno Jr., *Congress at the Grassroots: Representational Change in the South, 1970–1998* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 129–140.

by campaigning preemptively. Incumbents have always raised and spent money reactively, in proportion to what their challengers raise and spend against them. They now spend increasing amounts of money preemptively in order to inoculate voters against anticipated attacks.

Both patterns are evident when incumbents' expenditures are regressed on challengers' expenditures in House elections from 1972 through 2010; the results are reported in Table 4-3. For comparison, the dollar figures have been adjusted for inflation (2010 = 1.00). First, look at the intercept, which indicates how much, on average, an incumbent would spend if the challenger spent nothing at all. It has increased dramatically, from \$170,900 to \$1,249,600 (in 2010 dollars) between 1972 and 2010; the average increase from one election to the next is about 12 percent. House incumbents have been raising and spending increasing sums of money, regardless of the kinds of challenges they face; the growing practice among safe incumbents of raising money to pass along to the party and other candidates explains only part of this growth. Second, the regression coefficients (slopes) vary

**TABLE 4-3**

**Incumbents' Expenditures as a Function of Challengers' Expenditures  
in House Elections, 1972–2010**

Year	Number of Cases	Intercept		Regression Coefficient: Challenger's Expenditures		R <sup>2</sup>
1972	319	170.9	(11.5)	.56	(.04)	.34
1974	323	169.4	(12.2)	.63	(.04)	.41
1976	332	217.6	(12.4)	.55	(.04)	.36
1978	312	283.4	(15.6)	.50	(.04)	.38
1980	338	274.5	(22.4)	.74	(.05)	.41
1982	315	414.2	(21.5)	.58	(.05)	.33
1984	341	463.7	(20.9)	.63	(.04)	.39
1986	319	552.3	(31.7)	.73	(.07)	.27
1988	328	520.0	(27.0)	.79	(.06)	.33
1990	320	606.2	(24.6)	.70	(.07)	.24
1992	312	709.1	(34.4)	.82	(.08)	.23
1994	336	653.0	(31.1)	.64	(.06)	.23
1996	358	642.0	(35.0)	.86	(.06)	.40
1998	306	800.7	(46.7)	.46	(.06)	.14
2000	336	787.8	(44.2)	.89	(.05)	.56
2002	302	1,025.4	(43.9)	.41	(.04)	.29
2004	333	963.0	(40.0)	.91	(.06)	.39
2006	343	1,028.9	(42.5)	.91	(.04)	.57
2008	344	1,145.0	(44.6)	.60	(.04)	.37
2010	316	1,249.6	(69.4)	.67	(.06)	.31

*Note:* Expenditures are in thousands of dollars, adjusted for inflation (2010 = 1.00); standard errors are in parentheses; all coefficients are significant beyond  $p < .001$ .

but average around 0.68, indicating that, on top of their initial level of spending, an incumbent typically matches a little more than two-thirds of the challenger's spending.

The same campaign professionals who promote negative campaigns recommend a preemptive strategy to cope with them. "Inoculation and preemption are what win campaigns," according to one Republican consultant. Said another, "If you know what your negatives are and you know where you are vulnerable, you can preempt it."<sup>114</sup> Hence, for example, Republican Senator James Abdnor of South Dakota, expecting to be challenged by the state's governor for renomination on grounds of ineffectiveness, began broadcasting ads in November 1985 that had prominent Republican senators bearing witness to his effectiveness. Another Republican thought to be in trouble for the 1986 election, Senator Paula Hawkins of Florida, also began airing commercials in 1985. A year before the election she had already spent \$750,000 on media advertising alone.<sup>115</sup> Both these attempts at preemption failed, however; evidently, the candidates' real weaknesses could not be masked by rhetoric. More successful was Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy, who ran an ad warning his Vermont constituents, "Oh boy, it's going to get knee deep around here. Dick Snelling has hired some famous dirty tricksters to foul the airwaves with a big-bucks, political smear campaign.... Do we really have to go through this in quiet, sensible, beautiful Vermont?"<sup>116</sup>

Although incumbents, at least in the House, engage more or less continuously in activities aimed at assuring reelection—including, now, preemptive campaigning—their real campaigns start when it becomes clear who the challenger will be in the primary or general election or both. Different challengers present different problems and inspire different campaign strategies. Inept, obscure, or underfinanced opponents can be dealt with via routine maintenance of ties with groups in the electoral coalition, and they can otherwise be ignored. Senator Daniel Inouye, for example, had little reason to mention his 1998 opponent, Crystal Young, who spent no money on the campaign but got some publicity when she "alleged that actress Shirley McLaine implanted electromagnetic needles in her."<sup>117</sup> And Senator Jim De Mint could ignore his 2010 challenger Alvin Greene, an unemployed veteran who raised no money and was under indictment on an obscenity charge.<sup>118</sup>

Ignoring the opposition is a standard tactic of incumbents who feel relatively secure: Why give an unknown opponent free publicity? More serious opponents compel more vigorous campaigns, with the strategy adapted to the relative strengths and weaknesses of both candidates. Incumbents also adjust to opponents' campaign tactics once their effectiveness has been demonstrated. For example, counterattack or, better yet, preemptive assaults on the challenger's character and credibility has replaced the older practice of ignoring personal attacks. Expecting

<sup>114</sup>Ehrenhalt, "New Campaign Era," p. 2563.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., pp. 2563–2564.

<sup>116</sup>Taylor, "Accentuating the Negative," p. 6.

<sup>117</sup>Barone and Ujifusa, *Almanac of American Politics 2000*, p. 497.

<sup>118</sup>Katherine Q. Seelye, "Final Days of an Unlikely Run for Senate," *New York Times*, October 30, 2010.

to be on the defensive because of adverse national conditions in 2006, many Republican incumbents followed this strategy. Those who did so had plenty of help and encouragement from their party. As early as the summer of 2005, the NRCC began investigating prospective Democratic challengers, looking for anything that could be used to discredit them: Unpaid student loans, bankruptcies, op-ed pieces written in college advocating legalized pot, defending criminals in court, or tax delinquencies; anything from a challenger's past that could be portrayed as unsavory was collected and catalogued. Indeed, in an era of Google, Facebook, and YouTube, prospective candidates are on notice that no youthful indiscretion is safe from wide public exposure. Representative Thomas Reynolds (New York–26), the NRCC's chair, boasted that “these candidates have been out there doing other things—they have never seen anything like this before. We haven't even begun to unload this freight train.”<sup>119</sup> An example that went awry:

In New York, the NRCC ran an ad accusing Democratic House candidate Michael A. Arcuri, a district attorney, of using taxpayer dollars for phone sex. “Hi, sexy,” a dancing woman purrs. “You've reached the live, one-on-one fantasy line.” It turns out that one of Arcuri's aides had tried to call the state Division of Criminal Justice, which had a number that was almost identical to that of a porn line. The misdial cost taxpayers \$1.25.<sup>120</sup>

Incumbents also adapt their strategies to the president's current standing with the public. Many Democrats who had been happy to link themselves with their party and Bill Clinton in 1992 sought to declare their independence in 1994. Similarly, many Republicans who had celebrated their connection with George Bush in 2002, when his approval ratings were in the mid-60s, emphasized their differences with the president and avoided appearing with him at campaign events in 2006, when his ratings were about 25 points lower.

Common to most incumbents' campaigns are an emphasis on the value of experience and seniority (for the capacity it gives members to serve the district more effectively) and reminders of the things that the member has done over the years for constituents. When the *insider* image these accomplishments evoked became a potential liability in the early 1990s, some switched to emphasizing their status as *outsiders* opposed to the status quo by advocating term limits, balanced budgets amendments, and the end to congressional perks. This was a favorite (and uniformly successful) tack taken by Republican incumbents in 1994. In special circumstances, special ploys may be necessary. Senator Milton Young, running for reelection to the Senate from North Dakota in 1974 at the age of seventy-six, countered suggestions that he was getting too old by running a TV spot showing him splitting a block of wood with a karate chop.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup>Adam Nagourney, “The Theme of the Ads: Don't Be Nice,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2006, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/27/us/politics/27ads.html?ex=1317009600&cen=5b29b3a6fe35f5cc&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss> (accessed July 3, 2007).

<sup>120</sup>Michael Grunwald, “The Year of Playing Dirtier: Negative Ads Get Positively Surreal,” *Washington Post*, October 27, 2006, A1.

<sup>121</sup>Michael Barone, Grant Ujifusa, and Douglas Matthews, *The Almanac of American Politics 1980* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), p. 669.

Despite the knowledge members acquire of their constituencies, uncertainty plagues incumbents as well as nonincumbents. Each election may present a new challenge and a new set of electoral variables. Because incumbents are not sure which of their actions got them elected previously, they cannot be sure what combination of campaign activities will serve them in altered circumstances. Although in a normal election year most members are reelected easily (at least in the House), most of them have had close calls at one time or another, and all have vivid memories of seemingly entrenched colleagues who suffered sudden massive vote losses and unexpected defeats.

Because of uncertainty, members tend to exaggerate electoral threats and overreact to them. They are inspired by worst-case scenarios—what would they have to do to win if everything went wrong?—rather than objective probabilities. Hence, some members conduct full-scale campaigns even though the opposition is nowhere to be seen. The desire to win decisively enough to discourage future opposition also leads many incumbents to campaign a good deal harder than would seem objectively necessary. The sense of uncertainty and risk felt by incumbents has grown in recent years, along with the money, professional talent, and technology potentially available to their opponents. The specter of fickle electorates, combined with active organizations ready to mobilize extensive campaign resources against them should they show signs of vulnerability, undermines whatever confidence comfortable reelection margins might otherwise inspire. The electoral shake-ups of the early 1990s and of 2006–2010 are a reminder that they are wise to take nothing for granted.

### Candidates for Open Seats

Candidates for open seats face somewhat different electoral situations because none of the contestants is an incumbent or a challenger with the accompanying advantages or disadvantages. They are much more likely to face difficult primary contests because the opportunity offered to ambitious politicians by an open seat attracts more and better-qualified candidates. Indeed, the primary is often a more difficult hurdle than the general election.<sup>122</sup>

Both candidates are likely to have some experience in elective office and, therefore, some familiarity with at least a part of the constituency and some useful relationships with electorally important segments of it (recall Table 3-4). Both are likely to have adequate campaign resources because contests for open seats are expected to be competitive; the best chance by far to take a seat from the opposing party occurs when no incumbent is involved. As a consequence, candidates for open seats are typically better known and better liked than challengers—but not as well as incumbents.<sup>123</sup> No particular pattern of campaign strategy is typical of candidates for open seats other than a highly variable mixture of the approaches

<sup>122</sup>Harvey Schantz, “Contested and Uncontested Primaries for the U.S. House,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 5 (1980): 550; and Jeffrey S. Banks and D. Roderick Kiewiet, “Explaining Patterns of Candidate Competition in Congressional Elections,” *American Journal of Political Science* 33 (1989): 997–1015.

<sup>123</sup>The evidence is in Chapter 5.

used by incumbents and challengers that coincides with the electoral position between the two.

Because candidates competing for open seats are normally much more closely balanced in skills and resources than are challengers and incumbents, the outcome is more strongly influenced by partisan trends, both local and national. Without the pull of incumbency, votes are cast more consistently along party lines, so election results reflect state or district partisanship more consistently. Presidential coattails (discussed in detail in Chapter 6) are stronger; that is, voters are more likely to cast congressional votes consistent with their presidential votes, so the fates of candidates for open seats are tied more closely to the top of the ticket in presidential election years.<sup>124</sup> Open seats also register partisan tides more strongly; in years with big swings, such as 1974, 2006, and 2008 (pro-Democratic) or 1980, 1994, and 2010 (pro-Republican), a disproportionate share of the winning party's gains come from open seats.<sup>125</sup>

## SENATE CAMPAIGNS

As we observed in Chapter 3, Senate elections are, on average, considerably more competitive than House elections. Senate incumbents win less consistently and by narrower margins than do House incumbents. Nearly every state is potentially winnable by either party. Thirty-eight states have chosen senators from both parties in elections since 1990, and all the remaining states have elected governors of the party opposite their senators' during this time. Greater partisan balance by itself makes Senate elections more competitive than House elections, but it also creates a strategic electoral environment that enhances competition in several ways.

First, Senate incumbents are usually faced with formidable opponents.<sup>126</sup> About two-thirds of Senate challengers in recent elections had previously held elective office. Even the amateurs often have impressive resumés; among the successful first-time candidates have been two former astronauts (John Glenn and Harrison Schmitt), a former basketball star (Bill Bradley), a lawyer-turned-actor (Fred Thompson), and several prominent multimillionaire businessmen.

Formidable challengers attract campaign resources. Senate campaigns in general attract proportionately greater contributions because the donations are, in a sense, more cost-effective, especially in smaller states.<sup>127</sup> Senate contests are usually closer, so campaign resources are more likely to affect the outcome.

<sup>124</sup>Jeffrey Mondak, "Presidential Coattails in Open Seats: The District-Level Impact of Heuristic Processing," *American Politics Quarterly* 21 (1993): 307–319; and Gregory H. Flemming, "Presidential Coattails in Open Seat Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 20 (1995): 197–211.

<sup>125</sup>See Ronald Keith Gaddie, "Congressional Seat Swings: Revisiting Exposure in House Elections," *Political Research Quarterly* 50 (1997): 699–710.

<sup>126</sup>Peverill Squire, "Challenger Quality and Voting Behavior in U.S. Senate Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 17 (1992): 247–264; and David Lublin, "Quality, Not Quantity: Strategic Politicians in U.S. Senate Elections," *Journal of Politics* 56 (1994): 228–241.

<sup>127</sup>David Magleby, "More Bang for the Buck: Campaign Spending in Small-State U.S. Senate Elections" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Salt Lake City, March 30–April 1, 1989).

Parties and groups with particular policy agendas are aware that, when it comes to passing legislation, one senator is worth 4.35 representatives. A party has to defeat far fewer incumbents to take over the Senate than to take over the House. It makes strategic sense for campaign contributors to focus on the Senate, and that is what they have done. The campaign finance laws also make it easier for national party organizations to participate extensively in Senate contests. Thus, Senate challengers are much more likely than House challengers to enjoy adequately funded campaigns.

Senate challengers can also use their campaign resources more effectively than House challengers. Most Senate constituencies have the size and structure to make television advertising cost-efficient. Resources are usually sufficient to justify using campaign professionals and the technical paraphernalia of modern campaigns: computers, micro-targeting data, polls, direct-mail advertising and solicitation, and so forth. The news media are much more interested in Senate campaigns, so much more free attention and publicity is bestowed on Senate candidates than on their House counterparts.<sup>128</sup> It is little wonder that Senate challengers and other nonincumbents are much better known by voters than are House challengers.<sup>129</sup>

Furthermore, Senate incumbents find it much more difficult to develop and maintain the kind of personal relationships with constituents that Fenno observed among House incumbents. The reason is obvious. Senate districts—states—are, with seven exceptions (the states with a single representative), more populous than congressional districts, often very much so. The opportunities for personal contacts with constituents and attention to individual problems are proportionately fewer. It also follows that the larger the state, the more difficult it is for a senator to cultivate firm ties to constituents. The larger Senate staffs cannot make up the difference.<sup>130</sup>

Senators' activities in Washington are also more conspicuous than those of representatives. Action in the Senate is more visible than action in the House; the Senate has fewer members and they are given more attention by the news media.<sup>131</sup> Senators are thus more likely than representatives to be associated

<sup>128</sup>Kim Fridken Kahn, "Senate Elections and the News: Examining Campaign Coverage," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 16 (1991): 349–374.

<sup>129</sup>John R. Alford and John R. Hibbing, "The Disparate Electoral Security of House and Senate Incumbents" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, August 31–September 3, 1989), pp. 17–19; see also Table 5–3.

<sup>130</sup>Gary C. Jacobson and Raymond E. Wolfinger, "Information and Voting in California Senate Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 14 (1989): 518–519; John R. Hibbing and John R. Alford, "Constituency Population and Representation in the United States Senate," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 15 (1990): 581–598; and Bruce I. Oppenheimer and Frances Sandstrum, "The Effect of State Population on Senate Elections" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 6–8, 1995). However, one careful study found little difference in the level of regard voters have for senators compared to representatives and little disadvantage for senators from large states compared to senators from small states. See Jonathan Krasno, *Challengers, Competition, and Reelection: Comparing Senate and House Elections* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), Chapter 3.

<sup>131</sup>Timothy Cook, "House Members as Newsmakers: The Effects of Televising Congress," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 9 (1986): 211.

with controversial and divisive issues.<sup>132</sup> Senators do not have the pressure of a two-year election cycle to keep them attuned to the folks back home. Electoral coalitions may fall into disrepair, and a careless senator may discover that he or she must begin almost from scratch when reelection time rolls around.

Lavishly funded and professionally run Senate campaigns have been the proving ground for the latest innovations in campaign tactics and techniques. One development is interactive campaigning, in which the campaign themes and messages of each candidate are rapidly altered in response to what the opposition is saying and, more importantly, to what their tracking polls tell them about the effectiveness of both campaigns. Polling technology is the key. In the words of a Democratic consultant, “It’s relatively simple and not very expensive now to sample public opinion. In the last month of a campaign, both sides will poll nightly, test how that day’s media and campaigning has played, and trace the results.”<sup>133</sup> Instead of planning and executing a single strategy over the course of an entire campaign, *strategic flexibility* is now the catchphrase. Observed another consultant, “When candidates come in here now, their first questions to me are: Can you respond quickly? Can you attack quickly? Can you do a fast turnaround?”<sup>134</sup> With enough money, turnaround can be fast indeed. In California’s 1994 Senate campaign, Dianne Feinstein saw her campaign ads answered within twenty-four hours by new commercials produced and distributed statewide by Michael Huffington’s lavishly funded campaign team.<sup>135</sup>

## MANIPULATING TURNOUT

The advent of multimillion-dollar media campaigns has not made organized, grassroots-level efforts to get out the vote any less crucial. In fact, campaigns that deluge voters with broadcast ads, mailings, and phone calls may just turn them off. Reviewing the 2002 South Dakota Senate campaign, in which candidates, parties, and interest groups spent some \$24 million in a state with fewer than 476,000 registered voters, Meader and Bart concluded that “in the end, most voters probably tuned out the commercials, turned off the phone, and placed all the mail in the trash,” citing as an example “one woman [who] wrote and explained that she started to watch public television and stopped answering the phone in the evening.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, the effort to mobilize potential supporters to vote either through absentee ballots (increasingly common) or at the polls on election day may be essential to offset voters’ inclination to withdraw from the barrage of conflicting, often mean-spirited messages showered on them in competitive races.

<sup>132</sup>Barbara Sinclair, “Washington Behavior and Home-State Reputation: The Impact of National Prominence on Senators’ Visibility and Likability,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 15 (1990): 486–490.

<sup>133</sup>Ehrenhalt, “New Campaign Era,” p. 2560.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup>David Leshner, “TV Blitz Fueled by a Fortune,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>136</sup>Meader and Bart, “South Dakota,” p. 170.

For years, labor unions led the effort to get out the Democratic vote in many areas and were responsible for the Democrat's traditional superiority in this area. But Republicans have now caught up. In elections since 2002, the RNC has financed extensive preelection drives to mobilize voters in key contests, using thousands of volunteers and paid workers. In 2006, it spent \$30 million on the effort, which included, according to its organizer, "35 million live calls and door knocks with one-third of that (13 million) in the last 96 hours."<sup>137</sup> Such campaigns can be effective; Gerber and Green's experimental study indicates that face-to-face mobilization can raise turnout by as much as 9 percentage points, although telephone and direct mail have little apparent effect.<sup>138</sup> Both parties and their interest group allies now mount extensive mobilization drives wherever tight competition makes them necessary. With the increase in early and absentee voting, these efforts now take place over weeks rather than days; in Colorado in 2006, for example, 67 percent of the voters targeted by the Democratic Party had already cast their ballots before the polls opened on election day.<sup>139</sup>

For purposes of winning an election, however, reducing the other side's vote by a given number is as valuable as raising one's own by the same number. Thus, campaigns have an incentive to discourage the turnout of voters who would, if they participated, vote for the opposition. Because voting, as a duty and a right, is such a potent symbol of democracy, campaigns rarely admit openly to trying to keep people from the polls. Nonetheless, Republican activists are regularly accused of trying to dampen turnout in minority neighborhoods, which tend to be overwhelmingly Democratic. For example, an unsigned flyer appeared in minority neighborhoods in Baltimore in 2002 reading, "URGENT NOTICE. Come out to vote on November 6th. Before you come to vote make sure you pay your parking tickets, motor vehicle tickets, overdue rent and most important any warrants"<sup>140</sup> The election was actually on November 5. No one took credit but it is not hard to guess which party's allies put out the flyer. More publicly, Republican donors financed a "Don't Vote" campaign in Nevada in 2010 urging Latinos to stay home to punish Democrats for failing to deliver on immigration reform.<sup>141</sup>

Negative ads are also used to depress opposition turnout; voters who could never be attracted to a candidate may nonetheless be induced stay home if the

<sup>137</sup>Magleby and Patterson, *War Games*, p. 34.

<sup>138</sup>Alan S. Gerber and Donald P. Green, "The Effects of Personal Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment," *American Political Science Review* 94 (September 2000): 653–663.

<sup>139</sup>Kyle L. Saunders and Robert J. Duffy, "Volatility and Volition: The Pendulum Swings High and Hard in Colorado's Seventh District," in *The Battle for Congress: Iraq, Scandal, and Campaign Finance in the 2006 Election*, ed. David B. Magleby and Kelly Patterson (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), p. 72.

<sup>140</sup>Howard Tibit and Tim Craig, "Allegations Fly as Election Day Nears," <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/elections/bal-te.md.turnout04nov04,0,732693.story?coll=bal-election-governor> (accessed May 16, 2003).

<sup>141</sup>The organization's statement may be found at <http://www.latinosforreform.com/> (accessed November 29, 2010).

alternative is discredited. The dirty work is most often done by supposedly independent groups conducting “voter education” campaigns and thus immune from Federal Election Commission (FEC) reporting requirements. In 2002, one such organization, calling itself the Council for Better Government, ran ads on urban radio stations accusing Democrats of taking African American voters for granted and making such accusations as “Each year the abortion mills diminish the human capital of our community by another 400,000 souls. The Democratic Party supports these liberal abortion laws that are decimating our people.”<sup>142</sup>

It is not clear, however, that negative campaigns actually depress turnout; they may even enhance it.<sup>143</sup> The intensely polarized and competitive electoral environments that encourage campaigns to go negative also excite voters and spur efforts to mobilize them. The 2006 campaigns, conducted in what has been characterized as “the most toxic midterm campaign environment in memory,”<sup>144</sup> featured an abundance of scurrilous and often dishonest attack ads from both sides. Yet turnout was the highest for any midterm since 1982 and the second highest since eighteen-year-olds got the vote. The 2010 campaigns were at least as nasty and turnout was, by a small margin, even higher (see Figure 5-1).

Another ploy to drain votes from the rival party is to run a spurious third-party candidacy designed to attract some of its more gullible supporters. In 2002, the campaign manager for the incumbent Democrat running in Minnesota’s 2nd District arranged for a liberal activist to run as the candidate of previously nonexistent “No New Taxes” party, named for a favorite Republican campaign theme.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, Democratic incumbent John Adler’s campaign in New Jersey’s 3rd District sought to stem the Republican tide in 2010 by running an accomplice under the Tea Party label.<sup>146</sup> In both cases the ploy was exposed and the perpetrator lost.

## CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Congressional election practices have undergone a period of rapid development, as organizational, technical, and financial innovations have turned the closest contests into remarkably extravagant affairs. The emergence of evenly matched, strongly polarized national parties has put control of Congress up for grabs in every election since 1994, raising the stakes in competitive races. Campaigns in such contests are no longer controlled or even dominated by the candidates and their organizations; the national parties and outside interest groups, with their

<sup>142</sup>Jay Barth and Janine Parry, “Provincialism, Populism, and Politics: Campaign Spending and the 2002 U.S. Senate Race in Arkansas,” in *The Last Hurrah?* ed. Magleby and Monson, p. 61.

<sup>143</sup>Lau and Pomper, *Negative Campaigning*, pp. 76–85.

<sup>144</sup>Nigourney, “Theme of Campaign Ads,” *New York Times*, September 27, 2006.

<sup>145</sup>John S. Schockley, “The Three-peat in the 2nd Congressional District in Minnesota,” in *Running on Empty? Political Discourse in Congressional Elections*, ed. L. Sandy Maisel and Darrell M. West (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), pp. 42–43.

<sup>146</sup>Richard Perez-Pena, “Sham Candidacy Is Charged in House Race,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2010.

own resources and agendas, strongly influence the tone and content of campaigns. From an incumbent's perspective, the value of scaring off serious opposition has never been higher, since abundant, centrally disposed resources are available to be mobilized against them quickly on any sign of vulnerability. New techniques and tactics may hold unpleasant surprises, and strategies for coping with them are still unsure. Sharpened sensitivity to the electoral implications of their activities in office is a natural result; so too is intensified partisan animosity on the Hill. Both of these developments have, as we shall see in Chapter 7, important effects on how the House and Senate work as legislative institutions.

That said, it is also important to emphasize that the large majority of incumbents in the House, and many Senate incumbents, escape serious competition altogether and so win by quite comfortable margins. The impressive new technology for probing electorates, along with the growing cost of competitive campaigns and the growing number of seats securely in one party's hands, has led to a sharp bifurcation of effort. Electoral resources (including high-quality candidates) are increasingly concentrated in a small subset of House districts and in selected Senate races, making life more difficult for those incumbents who appear sufficiently vulnerable to invite an all-out challenge. But those who avoid becoming targets face increasingly feeble opposition because promising challengers have little incentive to incur the growing cost in money, time, privacy, and family life of conducting a serious challenge unless the prospects for victory are very good.