Hard Money, Soft Money and Lobbying Expenditures:
The Emergence and Growth of American Indian Campaign Contributions
Richard Witmer
Grinnell College
Frederick Boehmke
University of Iowa

Summary
- Indian gaming has become a $14 billion a year industry.
- What are the political consequences of rapid resource accumulation for Indian nations?
- Analyze choice of political expenditures by tribe.

Compacting Activity

What Determines Compacting?
- Study number of compacts each state signs each year.
- Number of Indian nations in a state.
- Commercial casino gaming; religious opposition.
- Use of the initiative process.
- Diffusion pressures between states.

Expansion of Gaming and Expenditures

Theoretical Approach(es)
- Political Incorporation
  – The process through which unrepresented minority groups enter the political process.
- Interest Groups
  – Tribes choose to behave like organized interests or sovereign nations.
Political Incorporation

- Indian Nations and Indian People have limited options for political incorporation.
- Some success in voting/supporting candidates for office.
- Limited success running for office or holding government jobs.
- Substitute campaign contributions for traditional means of incorporation?

Why do American Indians Give?

- Influence votes and legislative behavior.
- Support past behavior/ideological agenda.
- Obtain access to key legislators:
  - Indian Affairs Committee, party leaders.
- Affect electoral outcomes:
  - South Dakota, California, Washington.

Indian Nations as Interest Groups

- Lobby federal government for almost all issues.
- Gaming agreements negotiated with states.
- Observe all potential organized interests in sector.
  - All Federally recognized groups.
  - Do not have to worry about selection issues.

FEC Regulations

- Tribes are considered persons, but not individuals.
  - They are subject to individual limits on contributions per candidate.
  - They are not subject to individual limits on aggregate contributions.
  - Can engage in candidate and issue advocacy without restrictions.

Political Expenditures


Total Tribal Political Expenditures

- Hard
- Soft
- Lobbying

Election Cycle

- 1992
- 1994
- 1996
- 1998
- 2000
- 2002

$0.00 $5,000,000.00 $10,000,000.00 $15,000,000.00 $20,000,000.00 $25,000,000.00

$0.00 $5,000,000.00 $10,000,000.00 $15,000,000.00 $20,000,000.00 $25,000,000.00

Top Contributors (2002)

1. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians: $536,250 (66% to Dems).
2. Ho-Chunk Nation: $514,000 (all soft to Dems).

Factors that (Might) Influence Expenditures

1. Tribal characteristics.
   a. Gaming and gaming amendments.
   b. Income, education, economic indicators, size.
2. State characteristics.
   a. Political influence: number of tribes, American Indian population.
   b. Gaming in the state: commercial gaming, other Indian nations with gaming.

Empirical Findings

- Effect of resources:
  - Gaming has impact on all three expenditures.
  - Amendments only affect lobbying.
  - Income per capita affects all three.
- State characteristics:
  - Native American population affects all three.
  - Commercial casino gaming affects lobbying.
Motivations for Giving

- Do Indian nation contributions to Senators suggest access or influence strategy?
- How do they compare to patterns by other groups (business/labor/trade associations)?

Patterns of Giving

- Around 10-17 Senators receive contributions per election cycle.
- Average contribution is about $5000.
- $500,000 total given to Senators in 2002.
  - $16,000 to Maria Cantwell (D-WA).
  - $18,000 to Harkin.

Findings for Senate Contributions

- Ideology: give less to Republicans.
- Access: give more to Indian Affairs members and party leadership.
- Elections: no effect of margin of victory.
- Resources: more contributions to Senators from states with more Indian gaming.
- Representation: more contributions to Senators from states with more Native Americans.

Future Work

- State level contributions.
- State level lobbying.
- Consequences of expenditures for policy and outcomes.
- Dyadic analysis of contributions.
- What is effect of BCRA on tribal political expenditures?

Indians and the BCRA

- Soft money is the overwhelming choice.
  - But currently outlawed at Federal level.
- Hard money is small part of contributions.
  - But limits have increased for tribes.
- Can continue issue advocacy, even before elections.
- Can give soft money to state party organizations.

Contributions and Lobbying in the States

- $20m contributed in CA in 2000; $7.6m in 2002.
- Agua Caliente Band gave $1.9m in 2002.
- $770,000 spent on lobbying in 2000; $2.3m in 2002; about 20 tribes hired lobbying firms.
- About $65m spent on initiative in 2000
  - Prop 1A.
State Lobbying Registrations

- 111 Native American groups registered in 1997.
  - Only 14 of them were also registered in 1990.
  - 20 in CA; 21 in NM; 26 total states.
- 134 registered in 1999.
  - 26 in CA; 2 in IA.
- 180 different groups between 1997-1999.

Conclusions

- Indian nations provide a unique perspective on interest group lobbying.
- Gaming has been crucial in creating the opportunity for tribal political activity.
- Political contributions driven by similar factors.