

Professional lobbyists: Pragmatic operatives or just another partisan resource?

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The thousands of professional lobbyists working in Washington, DC on issues tend to be professional partisans who mobilize resources for one preferred political party exclusively. So finds a new study which counters the common expectation that lobbyists play both sides of the political field regardless of which party is in the ascendancy.

The research is presented in an article authored by political scientists Gregory Koger (University of Miami) and Jennifer Nicoll Victor (University of Pittsburgh) that is entitled "Polarized Agents: Campaign Contributions by Lobbyists" and which appears in the July issue of *PS: Political Science & Politics*, a journal of the American Political Science Association. The article is available in its entirety online at http://www.apsanet.org/content_65487.cfm.

"Although many lobbyists have backgrounds in partisan politics," note the authors, "they may have incentives to give money to candidates from both parties. This article finds that professional lobbyists tend to make personal contributions to their preferred party exclusively." Moreover, the extent of partisanship among lobbyists is somewhat surprising as "while our stereotypes (and prior research) of lobbyists do not preclude partisan loyalties, they do not predict partisanship either."

Koger and Victor gauged the partisan leanings of over 1,200 lobbyists in Washington, DC by measuring how they allocated more than 20,000 campaign donations between Republican and Democratic politicians during the 2006 election cycle. They assessed the results across three

major dimensions: donations to Democratic candidates, organizations, or PACs; donations to incumbent members of Congress; and donations by lobbying firms.

The authors found that "the donation behavior of individual lobbyists appears to be quite partisan," with about 29% of all lobbyists giving almost nothing to Democrats while another 28% gave almost nothing to Republicans. Similarly, when it came to incumbent members of Congress "about 43% of lobbyists who made five or more donations gave 95% or more of their money to Republican members, with an equal proportion loyal to Democratic members." Only 6.3% of lobbyists gave at least 40% of their donations to both parties. Finally, while lobbying firms appear more balanced in their donations and employ both Republicans and Democrats, over 40% of firms were found to employ a set of lobbyists who give 90-100% to one party or another.

"Lobbyists are often depicted as the ultimate insiders of the Washington 'game' [but]...we have found a pattern of stark polarization in lobbyists' donations, observe Koger and Victor. They conclude by noting that "the broader implication is that lobbyists do not shed their partisan loyalties when they hang up their shingles," and in the post-Abramoff era, "it is easy to see why politicians take a great interest in who is hired to talk to them, since they clearly see lobbyists as resources for one party or another."

Source: American Political Science Association

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