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Is Canada Contracting "PAC Disease"? A Comparative Study of Canadian and American
Interest Groups

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ABSTRACT

Significant societal changes have changed the nature of political representation, moving it away from elite driven politics towards direct citizen action. These changes have led to an expansion of interest group activity throughout the industrialized democracies. In Canada, these changes have contributed to both a rise in interest group activity and a concurrent decline in political party membership. This has caused concerns amongst some scholars that Canada was headed towards the type of interest group domination prevalent in American politics. In this paper, similar groups in the two countries are examined and compared through case studies. The findings show that the institutional barriers in Canada have inhibited group development by closing off many of the avenues that have allowed US interest groups to become so powerful. It concludes that the institutional framework is such that space for greater group activity to can be made while still retaining the primacy of the political parties.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Interest groups and their role in the political process have long been a source of debate and controversy within political science. On the one hand, groups are seen as beneficial, as a means to ensuring that all viewpoints and interests are represented and considered within the political system. On the other they are seen as destructive, creating factions and allowing those with greater resources to prevail over the interests of the public at large. The debate over groups points to the question that is at the heart of democracy: how is a truly representative political system achieved?

Interest groups can be defined as simply any group with a set of shared norms, beliefs or values which are cohesive enough to form a common interest that is articulated to the rest of society. This broad definition is usually narrowed down in the study of politics to those groups that seek to influence government and public policy. A further differentiation is also made between interest groups and political parties, in that the former seek to influence public policy without seeking to hold formal state power. The broad category of interest groups can be divided into corporate/trade/union based pressure groups and citizen-based ideological or advocacy groups. Pressure groups designates those groups, mostly business and trade associations, which rely primarily but not exclusively on lobbying politicians and bureaucrats to achieve policy goals that are usually directly related to the immediate self-interest of the group members (Petracca 1992). Advocacy groups or ideological interest groups seek goals which transcend the immediate self-interest of their members and which reflect their shared political beliefs or ideology (Petracca, 1992). Advocacy groups are often organized around social issues. These issues tend to create polarized views that cut across party and ideological lines, and this encourages the parties to try to avoid dealing with them. This in turn forces advocacy groups to become heavily involved in the public debate and in elections in order to

influence political outcomes. While they may also use lobbying, their main function is to promote their views through political activities in an effort to influence public opinion. A type of advocacy group is the single-issue group, which focuses on one specific issue of public policy, such as gun control or abortion. This paper will focus on advocacy groups.

Advocacy groups were historically a relatively minor player in the Canadian political process. But there have been significant societal changes, in Canada and throughout the industrialized world, which have had a profound impact on the nature of politics. Contemporary society is much more complex than it was in the past. The old ethnic, religious and class cleavages have been replaced by a myriad of identities, values and affiliations. The dramatic increase in the size of the middle class has diminished the class-based politics of the past. The expansion of the role of government, especially with respect to social issues, has politicized almost every aspect of society. Technology, especially electronic media, has created a non-stop flow of information and ideas that has put all issues under a microscope and created a much better informed public.

These changes made it more difficult for parties to carry out the functions assigned to them by theorists. Like in almost all other industrialized nations, party membership and identification in Canada decreased significantly during the 1970's and 80's (Clarke and Kornberg, 1993). As membership declined, the parties became more leadership driven and less responsive to the demands of the rank and file. The increased complexity of politics meant that there were more competing interests and views for parties to try to reconcile. Parties were now faced with trying to appease as many different people as possible in order to secure election. The result was that groups, issues and interests within parties were played off one another, as the party elite desperately tried to find the middle ground that would capture the most voters. The promise of power became the main instrument in reconciling competing views. Cigler (1983) and others

argue that today's parties are simply electoral machines. They are staffed by professional politicians whose single-minded pursuit of power makes them unresponsive to the demands of the membership.

Advocacy groups have tried to fill the representational void left by the decline of political parties. The post-war era has seen a dramatic increase in both the number of groups and their political strength throughout the industrialized world. Groups represent a wide array of issues and interests, from broad social movement groups such as women and gays, who are involved in many issues, to single-issue groups such as pro-life and pro-choice organizations. There are now very few issues over which groups do not coalesce. The preponderance of organized groups has substantively altered the political process, especially in the way public policy is debated, formulated and implemented, as political institutions have had to try to come to terms with the increased role of interest groups. On the positive side, groups have helped ensure that policy makers are thoroughly informed and that proposals are widely debated before being implemented. But this situation has also caused governmental inertia and the balkanization of the political process whereby compromise and consensus become extremely difficult.

As a result of these social changes, the 1970's and '80s saw significant growth in the number of groups and the scope of their activities in Canada and led Paul Pross, a longtime observer of interest group activity, to wonder if Canada was catching "PAC disease" (1986:174). Pross believed that the increase in group activity might damage the political parties and increase the role of money in the political process (Pross, 1986). The 1988 election was a watershed event in the debate surrounding groups in Canada. For the first time, interest groups spent large sums of money on political advertisements. The pro-free trade groups spent about 3.2 million dollars, more than four times as much as the anti-free trade side (Hiebert, 1991: 20). The amount of money spent and the imbalance

between the two sides caused a great deal of controversy. Was the 1988 election a harbinger of US-style elections in which wealthy special interests would dominate the political debate? Or was 1988 merely an anomaly, since the Canadian institutional framework inhibited group development?

Hiebert (1991) argues that the 1988 election showed the need to limit third-party expenditures. She points out that the parties are subject to spending limits and that allowing groups unfettered spending undermines those limits. The goal of these limits was to minimize the impact of money on election campaigns and to allow for greater participation. Implicit in Hiebert's argument is the assumption that parties are the best means of representation and bringing issues forward. The 1992 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (RCERPF) agreed, concluding that only parties were able to offer broad-based representation and it recommended that limits on interest group electoral spending be reinstated. It also offered suggestions as to how the parties could be made more representative. The parties themselves also concur with this view. In 1999, Parliament passed Bill C-2, which imposed limits on election advertising by individuals and groups. This marked the third attempt by the parties to limit so-called third-party spending.¹

Tanguay and Kay (1998) contend that limiting third-party advertising is unnecessary. In their studies of both the 1993 and 1997 elections, they found that third-party advertising had no discernable impact on the results. The authors concluded that the parliamentary system created truly national elections, mitigating the impact of local conditions and the individual candidate and making it difficult for groups to make certain issues more salient in the minds of voters (Tanguay and Kay, 1998). Their conclusion is

¹ Bill C-2 was challenged in court by the National Citizens Coalition. The NCC's challenge was upheld in Alberta's Court of Queens Bench. The government appealed and lost in the Alberta Court of Appeal. An injunction by the Alberta court that Bill C-2 not be enforced during the 2000 campaign was then struck down by Supreme Court of Canada.

that the Canadian institutional framework strongly favors the parties and makes it unlikely groups will ever come to resemble those in the US.

Hiebert's conclusions seem to depend on a linear view of the relationship between parties and groups in which the strengthening of one necessarily weakens the other. Phillips (1996) believes this view is outdated and instead sees groups and parties as complementary. Phillips argues that the nature of representation has changed because politics has become more complex. She believes that a truly representative system must allow for the representation of group differences and this necessitates that parties, groups and social movements all play active roles. Relying exclusively on the parties, rather than facilitating widespread inclusion, will lead to the exclusion of certain people like the poor or minorities and will cause certain issues to be ignored (Phillips, 1996).

The oft-repeated adage is that interest groups articulate interests while parties aggregate them captures the essence of the difference between parties and groups but is somewhat simplistic. The main benefit that groups offer that parties often cannot is more effective representation of specific issues and viewpoints, particularly issues where public opinion is especially divided or polarized. In these circumstances, the ability of the parties to aggregate and reconcile diametrically opposed viewpoints is extremely limited. To those people with strong beliefs on particular issues, groups are a much better choice because they can be counted on to strongly advocate their cause. Groups have three advantages over parties when it comes to issue advocacy. First, they do not seek power, so they do not have to compromise their ideals. Second, the formation of the group and its resulting activities is seen as a necessary first step to organizing and mobilizing the existing supporters of a cause, for attracting new supporters and for achieving legislative results. The explosion of groups has created a situation in which an organized group is an essential first step. This is particularly true for groups who are going against the current

of public opinion or face a powerful opposing group. For example, Sarah Brady, the head of the US group Handgun Control, began the group after she became convinced that a formal organization of gun control advocates was needed to harness the widespread public support for stricter controls on handguns (Sugarman, 1992). This support had not translated into legislative success because it been effectively opposed by the NRA. By channeling and focusing this support through the group, the pro-gun control people were able to use many of the same tactics that the NRA used so effectively. Lastly, groups are perceived as being able to achieve results. Supporters believe that the group's public advocacy of its causes creates greater debate, influences public opinion and puts pressure on lawmakers.

The decline of the parties' ability to represent specific interests and viewpoints has not been the only factor in the rise of groups. What has become equally important to achieving specific policy results is the process of how decisions are made. The expansion of education and the information explosion brought about by electronic media has created citizens who are better informed than in the past and thus are no longer content to merely let others speak for them. The demand is for participation that goes far beyond casting a ballot every four or five years. This is exemplified by the return of populist rhetoric calling for referendums, recall petitions and decentralization of government services. It is further shown by the preponderance of talk shows and call-in news shows: twenty-five years ago it was rare to see an interactive news/political program whereas now almost all of them feature some sort of audience participation.

The parties have been slow to respond to the desire for greater participation. The focus on results, specifically electoral victories and legislative successes, makes widespread participation cumbersome. The desire for the appearance of unity, necessary for electoral success, somewhat limits debate and disagreement. Interest groups are not as

encumbered by these constraints. The membership, rather than the public, is the group's main constituency; therefore internal debate is a crucial component of the group's existence. While groups may still be elite-driven, their narrower focus and smaller active memberships give greater opportunities for those who want to participate to do so. Moreover, since most resources are derived from the membership, group leaders are usually more responsive to the rank and file. They also understand that the appeal of the group is often in the opportunity to be heard. Equality-seeking groups such as women's groups place a particular emphasis on participation and democratic decision-making (Phillips, 1996).

The ability of groups to effectively represent the views and objectives of their members is strongly influenced by the institutional framework in which they operate. The US political system is characterized by a decentralized government, strong regional representation and weak political parties. This environment has allowed American groups to have a large impact on both election campaigns, primarily through contributions and political advertising, as well as in the policy process through lobbying. In Canada, the parliamentary system centralized government power and consequently helped create strong national parties. The party discipline needed in a parliamentary system has helped insulate MPs from local and group pressures. Consequently, groups in Canada have been much less important in the electoral and legislative process than groups in the US.

While the institutional constraints have limited groups in Canada, the social and political changes detailed above indicate that groups may be becoming a much more important part of Canadian politics. The hypothesis of this paper is that groups in Canada are evolving to resemble those in the US. There are four main characteristics of American advocacy groups that allow them to effectively represent issues: activism, political sophistication, money and ability to publicize the groups and its issues. American groups

are politically active, involved in both the electoral and legislative process. They are politically sophisticated, meaning they are able to formulate strategies based on a thorough knowledge of the political process. American groups are well-financed and are able to effectively use their funds to aid their political objectives. Lastly, they are adept at publicizing themselves and their issues as a way of building support for the group and influencing public opinion. This paper will attempt to trace the development of Canadian groups by comparing them to those in the US using these criteria.

METHODOLOGY

There are two primary reasons why a US–Canada comparison is appropriate for this topic. Firstly, interest groups as a whole are an extremely important component of American politics, and advocacy groups specifically are very active in the US. In many ways the groups in the US embody the pluralist view of group politics and this makes them ideal for a comparative survey. Secondly, there has been considerable debate about whether the two nations are becoming more similar. Studies by Lipset (1990) and Thomas (1993) have emphasized the differences between the two nations, while others such as Card and Freeman (1993) and Reitz and Breton (1994) have highlighted important areas of convergence. The post-materialist changes mentioned above have affected both societies and created a more educated and diverse citizenry in both nations. Free trade and globalization have led to closer economic integration, and this has put pressure on Canada to adopt measures already present in the US - lower taxes, less regulation and scaled-down social programs. Another important development has been the availability of American mass media in Canada, which has given Canadians a firsthand view of American politics.

The method of comparison chosen was to undertake case studies of similar groups in both countries. If Canadian groups were adopting the tactics of those in the US, a study

of the development and activities of groups in the two countries would allow a good comparison of similarities and differences and the reasons for them. The first group chosen was the National Rifle Association (NRA) in the US. The NRA is arguably the most successful group in the US, as it has continually impeded gun control legislation that polls show a majority of the population support. Because of this success, the NRA is a good model for other advocacy groups. The Canadian counterpart, the National Firearms Association, seemed like a logical choice, especially since the Canadian government had instituted a new gun control initiative, Bill C-68, in 1995.

The next choice was the National Citizens Coalition, a conservative group that is one of the oldest and most active advocacy groups in Canada. The NCC is the one Canadian advocacy group with a long track record of involvement in election campaigns. The comparable US groups are the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) and its successor, the Conservative Victory Committee (CVC). These groups were selected because they had similar views and objectives to their Canadian counterparts, although there are important differences that will be discussed later. NCPAC was a pioneer in third-party advertising in the US, and this allows an examination of both groups at a similar stage of development. There is a wealth of secondary material on American groups, particularly the NRA and NCPAC. There is much less literature on groups in Canada, a telling fact on its own. For the Canadian case studies, interviews were conducted with the leaders of each group. Information was also gathered from the two group's websites and literature, as well as other secondary sources.

CHAPTER 2: THE CHANGING NATURE OF REPRESENTATION

Introduction

Why do people join groups? There are many reasons why the number of groups has increased so substantially over the last three decades. These reasons range from the direct, material benefits that groups provide to significant societal changes and value shifts that have changed the nature of political representation. These changes have radically altered the way citizens view the political process and their expectations about how public policy should be formulated.

Personal Rewards

Interest groups provide numerous benefits to their members. There are often material rewards, such as discounts on products. Interest groups, especially economic organizations, are good ways to network and make connections with others in similar lines of work. However, advocacy groups typically have less of these material rewards to offer than economic interest groups. Mancur Olsen (1965) theorized that groups whose goals extended beyond the material self-interest of their members, like advocacy groups, would invariably fail due to the “free rider” syndrome. The benefits sought by such groups, such as clean air or safer streets, were available to everyone, whether they joined the group or not. But Olsen failed to account for what Wilson (1973) called solidary and purposive benefits.² Solidary benefits are personal rewards such as friendships and praise from peers. Purposive benefits are the intrinsic value people receive when they are involved in an effort that they believe is important. Olsen’s theory also fails to account for how deeply people may value the good being sought. Advocacy group members in particular are likely to have strong views regarding specific issues and this makes them

² Cited in King and Walker, 1992: 397.

want to become actively involved and means they are likely very committed to helping the group achieve its objectives.

Groups, Political Parties and Participation

One of the key components of a healthy democracy is the level of citizen participation. Participation teaches citizens values such as tolerance and the importance of debate, which encourages them to look beyond self-interest and consider what is best for society at large. The term participation is broad enough to encompass everything from simply voting to seeking office. For the purposes of this paper, participation refers to the active involvement of individuals in the political process as members of a political organization. It assumes that individuals join parties and groups mainly because they believe their support and involvement will help achieve a set of desired outcomes.

Defenders of groups believe they allow broader, more direct participation than political parties because they are smaller, their focus is much narrower and because they are not trying to attain power. The smaller membership of groups, as opposed to that of the major political parties, allows for more direct democracy. Political parties, particularly the brokerage or catch-all parties that govern in most industrial nations, are larger and more structured and hierarchical, which in many cases leads to agendas being formulated by elites. While parties often attempt to draw together a wide spectrum of people, and thus a diversity of opinions, groups tend to attract people who already share common views. This commonality makes real participation and debate less risky, as it is far less likely that there will be the kind of deep divisions that threaten the group's existence. Political parties must try to present at least a somewhat unified front to the electorate, and this makes widespread participation more problematic.

Tesh (1984) and others see the absence of the pursuit of power as the greatest strength of interest groups – groups are organized around actual issues instead of the

distribution of power and this allows for greater internal democracy. Tesh found this to be particularly true for equality-seeking identity groups such as women or ethnic minorities. These groups see greater participation as one of their primary objectives, as real equality requires politically active and aware citizens. This emphasis on ideas rather than power may also provide significant psychological benefits to the individual. Groups are not perceived as wholly political, since they do not seek power, and this allows the individual to see his involvement as benign and civic minded, whereas outright political involvement has been tainted by widespread cynicism about politics.

Some scholars doubt that groups offer greater and better quality participation than political parties. Godwin (1988) maintains that most ideological and single-issue groups in the US offer only the illusion of broad participation, since decisions are made by full-time staffers with often little input from the membership. Technology has made organizing a group much easier. The rise of direct mail solicitation has created a plethora of organizations whose member's only real participation is periodically writing a cheque to the fundraisers. Far from inculcating democratic values, direct marketers frequently make aggressive and intemperate appeals that depend on fear and intolerance and portray every political argument as a pitched battle between right and wrong.

Another problem is who is participating. The majority of interest groups in both the US and Canada are business, corporate and trade organizations. Among advocacy groups, studies show that the most active members and the leadership are mainly educated and relatively affluent, with those of lower socioeconomic means noticeably absent (Verba, Nie, and Kim, 1978). Some critics argue that interest groups are simply the emperor's new clothes, disguising the same old elite-driven politics of the past. They point out that the interest groups that have been the most successful have generally been those with the most resources, especially money, available to them. This does not just

refer to business-based groups. Among citizen-based groups, Walker has shown that the most successful groups rely on outside patrons such as foundations or in Canada, the government, for financial support (King and Walker, 1992). This raises questions as to how representative interest groups really are. Because groups may not have access to the built-in channels of communication available to the parties- parliamentary debate, publicly funded or subsidized election campaigns, free media coverage, etc. - the increase in group participation is likely to heighten the role of money in politics as groups battle to have themselves heard over competing voices. The importance of money severely limits the ability of those outside of the establishment to be heard and thus may hinder widespread participation.

Another argument in favor of group involvement is that they raise issues too detailed or specialized to be the concern of political parties, or issues that the parties try to ignore. The number of issues and their complexity has increased considerably, and it is difficult for politicians to fully understand and vigorously represent the myriad of concerns in today's political landscape. Groups are often organized by disenfranchised minorities who feel underrepresented by the parties. Parties seeking broad coalitions of supporters are unable or unwilling to represent small, recalcitrant minorities. Interest groups give voice to what Dahl (1971) called "intense minorities", those groups vitally affected by an issue that matters little to the majority.

At the same time, the rise of groups is often blamed for governmental inertia and gridlock. Almost every measure that comes before a legislative body will have groups on both sides of the issue. What frequently draws people to groups is their faithful adherence to their principles but this also means that it becomes exceedingly difficult to work out compromise solutions. Political parties need to attract and hold a broad coalition if they have hopes of governing and the preponderance of groups makes this task much more

difficult. Some groups, like the Christian Coalition within the Republican Party in the US, have been able to persuade parties to adopt policy platforms that have alienated some other supporters. The existence of factions and divisions within parties is not new. But interest groups represent a greater obstacle because they are highly organized and their members are often firmly committed to the group first and the party second.

Post-Materialism and Cognitive Mobilization

In his landmark study, Ronald Inglehart documented what he believed to be a dramatic shift in values throughout the industrialized nations, which he dubbed post-materialism. According to Inglehart, the relatively uninterrupted prosperity since the end of the Second World War, coupled with the explosion in the levels of post secondary education, had caused people to shift their priorities away from economic, class-based concerns towards quality of life issues such as the environment and personal freedoms. The shift in political priorities, coupled with the expansion of government into almost every area of society, greatly complicated politics and made the job of the large, broad-based political parties more difficult. Inglehart hypothesized that the change in priorities would lead to changes in the form of politics. There were now many more salient issues before the public and it was difficult for political parties to effectively represent all of them. The advent of a multitude of social issues lent itself to direct action by the citizenry (Inglehart, 1977).

Inglehart (1977: 339) found that this shift in political issue priorities was not the only change; the other was what he termed "cognitive mobilization". He concluded that over the years there had occurred a change in the balance of political skills between the public and the elite. The public was now much better informed about political issues than it had been in the past. He cited three causes for this change. The growth in post-secondary education created a better educated public that felt empowered to take a more

active role in political matters. Secondly, greater urbanization reduced the number of people who were physically isolated, thereby making information easier to disseminate. These two factors were reinforced by the permeation of electronic media. Television brought greater political information to everyone, including those with little formal education or who lived in outlying areas (Inglehart, 1977).

This increase in cognitive mobility has meant that citizens possess the skills and resources to become more politically self-sufficient and less reliant on cues from traditional sources of political authority (Dalton 1984). They are also more likely to have definite ideas on how to improve their societies and to be much more confident in asserting their viewpoints. Inglehart concluded that cognitive mobility led to a desire for greater and more meaningful participation by the public in the political process. Taking cognitive mobility together with the shift towards post-material values, Inglehart surmised that the nature of political participation had changed. There had been a shift from elite-directed to elite-directing behaviors. The public was no longer content with limited, indirect participation such as voting and party membership; instead it was demanding greater, more direct participation in the actual decision-making process (Dalton, 1984).

These value shifts are clearly apparent in both Canada and the US. Nevitte found that in both countries, confidence in institutions, particularly government, fell, while interest in politics increased (1996: 54-62). There was also widespread dissatisfaction with politicians and the current political process. These results seem to reinforce the notion that low voter turnout and declining party identification and membership are more the result of frustration with the existing political structure than widespread apathy. While the number of Canadians who said they were very interested in politics rose from 7 percent in 1981 to 20 percent in 1990 (Nevitte 1996: 52), those Canadians with strong

party identification declined from 31 percent in 1980 to only 13 percent in 1991 (Clarke and Kornberg, 1993). Those with no party identification went from 10 percent to 30 percent over the same time period (Clarke and Kornberg 1993). These results seem to support Inglehart's theory of cognitive mobilization and elite-challenging behaviors.

The shift in values in Canada is further supported by actual events over the last two decades. The advent of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, patterned after the US Bill of Rights, has resulted in an a surge of rights-based litigation as certain groups such as women and Aboriginals, frustrated by the lack of legislative progress, have sought to redress inequalities through the courts. The process of amending the Constitution has evolved from elite accommodation characterized by First Ministers meetings to a referendum on the Charlottetown Accord. Despite the fact that virtually the entire political elite supported the Charlottetown Accord, it was defeated in a national referendum. Perhaps most importantly, the 1993 election saw the fracturing of what had been a relatively stable three party system with two natural governing parties into a five party system in which one of those natural governing parties, the Conservatives, was almost completely destroyed.

When looking at these changes it is possible to see two forces at work. One is the post-material value shift that has occurred to some extent in all of the late-industrial Western democracies. These changes have mainly affected the political Left. Kitschelt calls this left-libertarianism (Kitschelt 1990). Left-libertarians reject the socialist paternalism and bureaucratic solutions of the old Left and the free market primacy of the new Right. They believe instead that groups and individuals should have the autonomy to define their economic, political and cultural institutions without interference from the marketplace or government bureaucracies. As such, Left-libertarians have an ambiguous view of the welfare state, valuing its protection from the free market but at the same time

demanding greater decentralization and consumer choice over its services (Kitschelt 1990).

At the same time there has also been the importation of numerous political ideas from the U.S. The Canadian Right has embraced the American Right's populism, calling for reforms such as more referendums and greater distribution of power to the provinces. These ideas are clearly derived from the desire for greater participation, decentralization and local autonomy. Greater economic integration through the FTA has put pressure on the Canadian economy to match the efficiency of its southern partner, which has led the Right to call for a taxation and regulatory structure patterned more on that of the US than on those in Europe. The mistrust of government, long an element in American conservatism, seems also to have now taken hold in the Canadian Right. The Canadian Alliance has captured most of the conservative vote with its anti-government, populist message.

The Changing Nature of Representation

Phillips (1996) believes that all of these changes have drastically altered the nature of representation. She argues that representation has changed in four ways and that these changes necessitate interest group participation. Firstly, the substance of politics has moved beyond the old left-right ideological division that was based mostly on class. The new politics is based on the construction of other identities, such as gender and ethnicity. Instead of focusing mainly on economic outcomes, these groups' primary goal is ensuring that they become part of the political discourse. Phillips calls them "not only equality-seeking but democracy-seeking" (Phillips, 1996: 455). While formal equality in terms of legal guarantees has gone a long way towards creating greater economic equality, these groups are now seeking more input into the political process, which they see as the final piece in realizing full equality. The accent of these groups is more often

on social issues, which by their nature are relatively indivisible, making it difficult to achieve compromise solutions. Because of this groups such as gays and pro-life movements frequently find themselves as outsiders in the formal party structures, since the perception is that taking a firm stance on these issues will alienate some voters either way. Thus, a politically active interest group is a logical means of seeking influence on these issues.

The second change concerns space: issues are both local and global at the same time. The shrinking of global distances through technology and greater trade and travel means that the concept of national sovereignty has shrunk and that interdependence has significantly increased. Deutsch (1952) pointed out that increased cross-border transactions encouraged greater similarities in values. The rise of the notion of universal human rights that should not be abrogated by any state has led to global coalitions of groups that can more effectively put pressure on supranational institutions and governments than any individual political party (Phillips, 1996). Many issues, such as pollution and trade policies, involve consequences that transcend national boundaries. These factors have caused the formation of international groups like Greenpeace and Amnesty International, whose aggregate global strength translates into significant local and national influence.

Third, the means of representation has changed as people are much less willing to let elites who are not part of their constituency speak for them. The shift is from *what* is being represented to *how* and by *whom* (Phillips, 1996). This is reflected in the attempt to localize power away from the center. Rosenau (1992: 256) describes this as a crisis of authority. Authority is simultaneously transferred in two directions – an upward shift towards transnational organizations and a downward shift towards sub-national groups. In the US, this has manifested itself with a resurgence in state's rights rhetoric and a

transfer in national programs, such as welfare, to the state level. In Canada, it is articulated in the calls for a renewed federalism whose central feature is the devolution of traditionally central government powers to the provincial level. National parties, which are hierarchical and broadly based, are generally not conducive to this desire for greater localization. The loss of centralized power diminishes the parties' strength and their ability to attract and hold members.

At the same time that power is being vertically re-located, it is being horizontally dispersed (Phillips, 1996). The expansion of the role of government and the politicization of the heretofore private has caused the location of politics to multiply. As Lowi (1969) and many others have detailed, the expansion of the bureaucracy - and the concomitant transfer of power to it and the executive, away from the legislative branch - has facilitated the rise of client groups. Previously private institutions such as companies and schools have been swept into the political battleground as equality-seeking groups have come to believe that these are the places that must be changed for real equality to be achieved. This dispersion has created a demand for more specialized knowledge and more local representation, which has further encouraged the creation of groups.

The sum of these changes is that it is much more difficult, if not impossible, for the traditional parties to fully represent the public. Phillips (1996: 457) concludes that the increased complexity of politics necessitates two fundamental changes in democracies. First, the opportunity for real, full participation must be made available to all individuals to ensure that all views and interests are represented. This requires the removal of obstacles that have excluded a large portion of the population, especially the poor, racial minorities and women. But in addition to this greater individual equality, the second imperative is that democracy must provide mechanisms for the representation of group differences. Phillips believes that balancing these two objectives requires a division of

labor between interest groups, social movements and parties. Groups will represent sectoral issues and interests, while parties will attempt to attract individuals by building coalitions, with social movements often acting as a bridge between the two (Phillips, 1996: 457).

The disagreement between the pluralists and the defenders of political parties is rooted in the same assumption: that parties and groups are in competition with each other, and that the strengthening of one necessarily weakens the other. Phillips (1996) suggests that this debate is rooted in certain misconceptions about interest groups. Firstly, Truman (1951) and many others have tried to show that interests exist *a priori* of those that represent them. Phillips thinks it is wholly simplistic to think that interest groups merely articulate existing interests. She points out that all but the narrowest economic interests are socially constructed and negotiated within the group beforehand. Just like within parties, the interaction with other group members forms one's political views. The competitive model has an abstract view of representation in that it sees it as merely input into policy formulation. It views the end result – achieving policy objectives – as more important than the act of participating itself (Phillips 1996).

Phillips believes that parties and groups complement each other, with both adding something positive to the democratic process. The focus on achieving state power means that parties are not responsive to the more complex, specialized and differentiated representation needed in today's society. This is not to say that interest groups have replaced parties as the main vehicle for political organization, merely that they offer a different kind of participation and representation. While this situation undoubtedly poses challenges for the political parties, Phillips argues that interest groups have helped the parties react to the new political environment. She points to the movement to strengthen

the Canadian parliament's representative capability by increasing the role of backbenchers through expansion of the committee system (Phillips, 1996:69).

Conclusion

Significant changes have occurred throughout industrial democracies that have altered the political process. The political parties have been unable to fully adapt to these changes, and membership and party identification have declined. Interest groups have stepped into this representational void and have taken over some of the functions and responsibilities of the parties. In Canada this has caused concerns that the party-centered system is in danger of being undermined by fractured, money-driven group politics. The efforts to stave off this situation have centered on limiting the ability of groups to fully participate in the political process. But if groups are able to effectively represent issues concerns and identities that the parties cannot, then this is not a real solution. The question that remains is to how to balance parties and groups so that a truly representative political system is achieved.

CHAPTER 3: US GROUPS

The United States is a federal system in which power has been partitioned between the national, state and local governments. The separation of powers within the national government has further dispersed authority. The executive and legislative branches are separate, with each branch able to block the initiatives of the other. The president must get someone to introduce his legislation into the Congress, while bills that pass through Congress can be vetoed by the president. The legislative branch is further divided into two houses, each of which contains several subcommittees that filter what bills come before the entire body. Thus a legislative initiative must go through a series of steps before being passed into law: from House subcommittee to the entire House to the relevant Senate subcommittee to the entire Senate. At each of these points the bill can be amended or defeated. If it passes the Senate it still faces the possibility of presidential veto, at which point it returns to the Congress to either modify it or to try to override the veto with a two-thirds majority. This legislative process creates an extremely decentralized government with many points of access, and therefore offers interest groups greater opportunities to influence the process.

This decentralized political structure has created decentralized, relatively weak political parties. American parties are far less unified, disciplined and ideologically cohesive than those in other nations. This creates an emphasis on individual candidates rather than party identification. Elections are candidate-driven, with organization and fundraising functions performed almost entirely by the candidate and his staff. This situation is compounded by having geographical units of representation, which ties the candidate closely to local issues and interests. As a result, party discipline within the Congress is weak, allowing members to vote individually and thus making them much more open to other influences.

The weakness of the parties is usually blamed for the strength of groups in the US. American interest groups are engaged in the full spectrum of electoral activities, everything from candidate training to the logistics of getting people to the polling booths. In essence, the electoral activities of interest groups in the US are much the same as those of the parties. The large amounts of money required in today's campaigns means that candidates must rely on interest group campaign money. These conditions encourage groups to become actively involved in the electoral process, especially through the use of their financial resources. The ability of groups to help candidates get elected naturally increases their ability to effectively lobby those lawmakers once they are in office.

Election Finance Regime

Part of the reason for the more recent growth in the number of interest groups active in American politics can be traced to the campaign finance laws. The 1974 Federal Election Commission Amendments (FECA), coupled with court decisions made afterwards, have caused groups to become the primary vehicle for funding political campaigns. The goal of the amendments was to sharply reduce the role of the large individual contributor. Towards that end the law established contribution and spending limits, detailed disclosure requirements, and a system of public financing for presidential elections. These aims were undermined by the courts and loopholes within the laws. Soon after the amendments were passed, the Supreme Court struck down the mandatory spending limits in *Buckley v. Valeo*. While the court upheld the individual contribution limits - \$1,000 per candidate/PAC/ party committee per election, up to a maximum of \$25,000 annually - these proved of limited effectiveness because of a major loophole - Political Action Committees (PACs). A PAC is a segregated campaign fund of a sponsoring labor or business organization or the campaign fund of a group formed for the primary purpose of giving money to candidates (Sabato 1990). PACs were not addressed

by the FECA amendments, and they proved to be a convenient way for corporations and unions, which are banned from directly contributing to federal candidates and parties, to make contributions. At the time of FECA, PACs were not a concern because of the spending limits. The PAC contribution limits are \$5,000 per election during the two-year election cycle to any individual candidate or party. (The primaries count as a separate election; therefore the limit is effectively \$10,000.) There is no limit on the aggregate amount that can be contributed by the PACs.

After the FECA amendments, groups, corporations and unions began setting up their own PACs. The number of PACs skyrocketed from around 600 in 1974 to more than 4500 in 1996 (Biersack and Herrmson, 1999: 4). Contributions have similarly increased, to the point where PAC contributions account for roughly half of all funds raised by congressional candidates (Biersack and Herrmson, 1999). Most PACs are affiliated with a business/trade/labor organization. The rest are "non-connected" ideological and single-issue PACs. Affiliated PACs contribute heavily to election campaigns, with the lion's share going to incumbents, especially those who sit on important committees (Sorauf, 1988, Biersack and Herrmson, 1999). These PACs are mainly ideologically indifferent and frequently donate to members from both parties. They try to choose candidates who are in close races or who sit on important committees. Sometimes they will even make a contribution to both candidates in the same contest. What they are trying to achieve is a working relationship. Affiliated PACs simply want representatives who are receptive to their concerns and the campaign contributions are merely seed money for the real battle behind the scenes, lobbying.

Affiliated PAC's are generally concerned with issues that attract little interest from the general public, such as business regulations and trade disputes with other countries. The relative obscurity of these issues means they have a low political cost and

therefore are likely to mean less to the representative, which makes it more likely that lobbying will produce results. Some see the large amount of affiliated PAC contributions as simply a raw attempt to influence legislators. However, the limits on individual PAC contributions are still relatively low and it is unlikely that legislative votes can be bought for so little. What the PACs are really purchasing is access. Justin Dat, a CEO, summed it up best when he said that “talking to politicians is fine, but with a little money they hear you better” (Sabato 1990: 46).

Three-quarters of PAC contributions go to incumbents, who are naturally in the best position to influence policy, and it is common for business/trade PACs to donate money to members of both parties (Biersack and Herrnson, 1999: 6). This has led some analysts to conclude that PAC money has led to a “permanent” congress. In 1990, the House re-election rate was ninety-six percent and all but one of the thirty-one senators up for re-election that year was returned (Biersack and Herrnson, 1999: 11). It is mainly PAC money that allows sitting members to build up the large “war chests” that dissuade viable candidates from running against them. Failing that, the incumbent will have significantly more money to spend during the campaign. The lone senator who was defeated in 1990 spent eight times as much money as his opponent (Biersack and Herrnson, 1999: 11). The irony is that it is usually the challenger who needs to be able to spend more because he or she will usually have lesser name recognition – this has been one of the strongest arguments against spending limits. This is especially true for primaries, since the existing party structure will usually be behind the incumbent. The presence of PAC money has also weakened the parties. With the ability to raise their own funds, representatives have less partisan loyalty and are more likely to act in ways that advance their own interests. This makes it increasingly difficult for party leaders to mobilize votes and may contribute to gridlock – the inability of either party to achieve its

policy goals because of the myriad of competing interests in the Congress and the White House.

There are issues - mainly macroeconomic issues such as tax policy - which sometimes encourage affiliated PACs to participate in public debate and to get involved in elections beyond contributions. The American Medical Association (AMA) vehemently opposed the Clinton health care reform package. The AMA ran a series of ads against the proposed reforms during the 1994 election and its political action committee, AMPAC, ran ads attacking several of the President's biggest supporters in the Congress (Gusmano 1999). While affiliated PACs have traditionally limited themselves to contributions and lobbying, they have become more active in election campaigns. The concern is that these groups' financial resources will allow them to dominate interests who are less well funded.

Non-affiliated (ideological) PACs behave differently than affiliated (business/trade) PACs. The goal is to create policy change by changing the policymakers and by influencing popular opinion. Ideological PACs will use their resources in ways that best promote the group's views. Since the 1980s, these groups have moved away from merely making monetary contributions and have become more actively involved in election campaigns. They have done this mainly through independent expenditures and by mobilizing grassroots support. Rather than merely contributing small amounts to various candidates, ideological and single-issue PACs are concentrating their resources on a limited number of contests and using third-party advertising to not only support their chosen candidate, but to advertise the group's views. Ideological PACs are very willing to back challengers and to involve themselves in contests where there is little chance for success. They view money spent on losing efforts today as an investment in tomorrow's fundraising.

When it comes to contributions, ideological PACs are much more selective than affiliated PACs. The most important element these groups look for is whether a candidate supports their views. As such, ideological PACs are far more likely to donate to challengers, even those with limited prospects for being elected. The goal of donations is to help like-minded candidates. Although these groups try to gain influence with representatives, this is a secondary concern. Ideological PACs are mainly concerned with issues on which candidates must formulate and express some sort of public position. For these types of issues lobbying is less effective and thus contributions are used to influence electoral outcomes more than to facilitate lobbying.

In order to help their candidate further, ideological groups often get involved in the campaign. Groups will help the candidate with fundraising, polling, recruiting volunteers, etc. The groups are adept in carrying out these functions in ways that not only help the candidate but also increase the group's stature with the candidate and the public at large. A good example is bundling, whereby groups get their members to make individual contributions and then physically present all of them to the candidate. A group can offer much more to a campaign than just money; it also has its human capital, equipment and political expertise. Support from a group can create a pool of potential volunteers from the local group membership and these volunteers are often already well versed in campaign tactics and functions. Because they have been involved in so many campaigns, the leaders of a group are very politically knowledgeable, often more so than the candidate and his advisors. Thus, their advice and information is usually extremely beneficial. In short, utilizing all of these resources is an invaluable help to a candidate's campaign.

Independent Expenditures (Third-Party Advertising)

Initially, the 1974 FECA amendments limited independent expenditures to \$1000 per individual/ group. In the *Buckley* decision, the Supreme Court overturned this limit on the grounds that it inhibited free speech. This decision did not mean that a PAC could raise and spend as much as it wanted on ads. All independent expenditures must come from the PAC's pool of individual contributions, which are subject to the \$1000 per PAC or candidate/\$25000 annual aggregate limit (FEC). Independent expenditures have grown tremendously since the early 1980's, to the point where some ideological groups now spend as much or more on their own ads as they do on contributions. For example, the League of Conservation Voters, an environmental group, spent more than ten times as much money on independent expenditures as on contributions in the 1996 election³ (FEC).

In addition to independent expenditures, more groups are raising "soft money" and spending it on issue advocacy campaigns. Soft money refers to money raised outside the FECA parameters which can only be spent on political communications that focus entirely on issues and do not advocate support or opposition to specific parties or candidates (FEC). Groups such as the Campaign for Working Families, a conservative group, and the Sierra Club, an environmental group, ran issue advocacy campaigns during the 1996 election. The Sierra Club spent \$3.5 million on a voter education project (Cantor 1999). Pamphlets highlighting the environmental positions of the candidates in 35 House and Senate contests were sent out to voters in those districts who were identified as having environmental sympathies. The pamphlets did not advocate support for any specific candidate, but by identifying those candidates with poor environmental records, the Sierra Club obviously hoped that voters would draw the "correct"

³ The LCV spent \$580,000 independently; its contributions to candidates totaled about \$55,000. (FEC)

conclusions as to whom they should support (Cantor 1999). This example illustrates the advantages of soft money campaigns. The money raised and spent is not subject to limits, and the ads, pamphlets, etc., can be couched in such a way that the message delivered is every bit as partisan as other political communications.

The benefits of third-party spending are obvious: the group has complete control over the message, the ad simultaneously advertises the group itself and supports its chosen candidate. But the effectiveness of ads in gaining support for candidates has been hotly debated. The overwhelming majority are negative or "attack" ads that criticize the positions, statements and voting records of the other candidate (Bates, 1988). Some studies show that negative ads have succeeded in increasing negative perceptions of the candidate amongst voters (Finkelstein, 1982)⁴. But there is also the possibility that the ads repel as many voters as they attract. Furthermore, a series of attack ads is sure to draw a response from another group or the candidate or both. Whatever potential advantage that existed is soon lost in a sea of accusations and counteraccusations.

Defenders claim that independent ads have added to the public debate and educated voters on certain issues. But interest group dominance over their specific issues seems also to have harmed the democratic process. The competition between groups for support has become so intense that it has led to political irresponsibility. Sabato (1990), Godwin (1988) and others have shown that third-party advertisements and mail-out pamphlets frequently contain distortions, exaggerations and complete falsehoods. Terry Dolan, the former head of the National Conservative PAC was quoted as saying "A group like us can lie through its teeth, and the candidate it helps stays clean" (Godwin 1988: 93). These tactics force candidates to spend their own campaign funds to set the record straight and often encourage them to mount negative ad campaigns themselves. The

⁴ Quoted in Sabato, 1990: 103.

increase in third-party advertising not only receives much of the blame for rising campaign costs, but it is also frequently cited as the primary cause of the extreme negativity present in today's political debate. This poisonous atmosphere has eroded the voter's trust and confidence in the political system. Opinion polls have consistently shown that the public is turned off by the negativity present in political campaigns (Bates, 1988).

But what is clear is that the groups themselves believe their ads are effective, if in no other way than attracting attention to the group and its cause. Controversial ads, such as the infamous Willie Horton ads that assailed Michael Dukakis' furlough program in 1988, draw large-scale mainstream media coverage and thus provide mountains of publicity for the group. This in turn greatly benefits fundraising and membership rolls, as like-minded individuals become aware of the group and its views. The short-term success of the candidate's campaign is secondary to the long-term goal of influencing public opinion and promoting the group and its views.

Summary

In sum, we see that American interest groups are an important and controversial player in the electoral process. The ability of groups to use their resources to influence election campaigns has caused candidates to rely on them even more, to the point where in some cases they become more like partners rather than supporters. As candidates have become ever more reliant on groups to help them win elections, the party structure has further weakened, in turn increasing the role of interest groups. This is primarily evidenced by the lack of political will to reform the election finance system in a way that inhibits interest groups. The current elected officials are understandably reluctant to overturn a system that has played a large role in putting them in office.

Introduction to the Case Studies

We have seen the overall importance of groups in American politics. The next section will present two case studies that will detail how US groups work to achieve their political objectives. The first case, the National Rifle Association (NRA), is perhaps the best known and most successful interest group in the US. The second case is the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), one of the pioneers in third-party advertising, and its descendent, the Conservative Victory Committee (CVC).

CASE STUDY 1: The National Rifle Association

Background

The NRA was founded in 1871 by William Church, General Ambrose Burnside, and General George Wingate. Its goals were relatively modest: to improve the marksmanship and the military preparedness of the National Guard and state militias. Throughout its first seventy-five years, the NRA focused its efforts on building shooting ranges and teaching marksmanship. The organization was almost wholly dependent on the federal government for its funds, a circumstance that left the group teetering on the verge of extinction on several occasions (Davidson, 1993).

The return of millions of servicemen following the end of World War II led to a threefold increase in membership (Davidson, 1993). These new members caused a shift in the NRA's priorities. The veterans were far more interested in hunting than target shooting, and as a result the NRA began to shift its attention to programs that served hunters. According to Davidson (1993) this change represented the key to the metamorphosis of the NRA from a small, quasi-military group dedicated to military preparedness to a truly national group concerned with the needs of all gun owners and sportsmen. From this point forward, the group would become the definitive voice for gun rights in America.

This newfound purpose did not immediately politicize the organization. Although the NRA was fervently opposed to gun control initiatives, the lack of any significant gun control legislation made fighting such efforts a very low priority. But in 1934 Congress introduced the National Firearms Act, a sweeping piece of legislation that banned or regulated a wide variety of firearms. The NRA mounted a massive letter-writing campaign and succeeded in narrowing the scope of the Act considerably. From that point on, the NRA slowly began devoting increasing amounts of resources to lobbying against gun control legislation before they gathered much steam, or failing that, to have the legislation reworked until it was acceptable to the NRA (Davidson, 1993).

In 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated. Lee Harvey Oswald had ordered his rifle from an advertisement in the NRA's own magazine, *American Rifleman*. The public outcry after the assassination led Congress to introduce the Gun Control Act. The NRA became divided over the GCA. Its own president, General Franklin Orth, came out in favor of the act. This infuriated many NRA members who opposed any attempt to restrict their ability to purchase guns. Although Orth succeeded in watering down the original legislation, his acquiescence in allowing any restrictive gun-control measure was never forgotten. This was the first sign of a split within the organization, with the hard-liners who opposed all gun control efforts on the one side and the more moderate members who were willing to allow limited restrictions on the other (Davidson, 1993).

This division came to head in 1977 at the NRA's annual convention in Cincinnati. The hard-liners, led by Harlon Carter, engineered a revolt and ousted the existing, mainly moderate, executive. From that point on, there was a pronounced shift in the activities of the NRA. The primary mission was to defeat any and all gun control measures. This meant that the NRA would quickly begin shifting most of its resources into political activities, and that hunter training and shooting contests became secondary. The NRA

would now become a full-fledged political interest group and its membership quickly went from about 1 million in 1977 to 2.6 million by 1983 (Davidson, 1993: 157).

The Five Levels of Electoral Involvement

The NRA is the epitome of the single-issue interest group. Its criteria for supporting a candidate are simple: the candidate must oppose all gun control legislation (Patterson 1999). This means that it supports candidates of both parties, although the overwhelming majority are Republican. The NRA focuses most of its resources on congressional elections, limiting its involvement in presidential elections. There are several reasons for this. First, the nature of the Presidency means that the election will feature a wide variety of issues, and that a single, relatively minor issue like gun control will likely have a minimal impact on the outcome. Secondly, the House and Senate have a greater, more immediate impact on gun control legislation. As long as the NRA has a majority in the Congress, it can defeat any legislation it opposes. However, the group will become heavily involved in a presidential campaign if one of the candidates is a very strong supporter or opponent of gun rights. Ronald Reagan received the NRA's presidential endorsement in 1980 and the group spent considerable sums on his behalf in 1980 and 1984. Conversely, the NRA found Michael Dukakis so distasteful that it actively supported George Bush in 1988, even though many members doubted his pro-gun commitment (Patterson, 1999).

The leadership of the NRA actively seeks the opinions of its members. Members are encouraged to voice their concerns or ideas to the national office. In addition, the group conducts frequent opinion polls, usually a mail-in questionnaire in one of its magazines. At election time, decisions about which candidates to support are made with the input of the district offices. The NRA has volunteer coordinators in every congressional district who gather information on candidates and pass it on to the national

office (Patterson 1999). Members frequently lobby for candidates in their area to get some financial support and this sometimes leads to conflicts between the national office and local members. Such instances are rare since the criteria for NRA support are so straightforward – opposition to all gun control measures.

The cooperation between the national office and local representatives is both necessary and very beneficial. Almost all of the money raised for the NRA's PAC, the Political Victory Fund (PVF), comes from its members, most of it in small amounts from direct mail solicitations (Patterson 1999). The reliance on many small member donations means that the national office cannot afford to be out of touch with the membership or it will not be able to raise the necessary funds. The involvement of members in political decision-making means that the NRA has the ability to quickly and impressively mobilize its membership. During key votes in the Congress, it is common for representatives to be deluged with thousands of letters and phone calls from NRA members. It is this grassroots strength, coupled with its financial resources, that gives the NRA its political firepower.

The NRA has five graduated levels of electoral participation. The lowest is simply assigning candidates a grade from A to F. The grades appear in its magazine, *American Rifleman*, which is sent to all members (Patterson 1999). Generally, an A is only given to the representatives who do the group's legislative work; an F grade is given to candidates favoring legislation restricting gun ownership (Patterson 1999). Sometimes one single vote is enough to send a candidate from an A to an F. Rep. Brian Bilbray (R-CA) received an A in 1994 and voted with the NRA on four House votes. But he voted against the bill to repeal the assault weapons ban and was subsequently given an F in 1996 (Patterson, 1999).

The second level is endorsing a candidate. An endorsement is better than a grade because it informs the membership as to which candidates actively support the NRA's objectives (Patterson 1999). This helps mobilize local members to work for the candidate and can attract additional contributions and resources. While the NRA will endorse a candidate in many congressional contests, it is very stingy in granting an endorsement in presidential elections – only three times in its entire history has it done so. In 1996, it did not endorse Bill Clinton or Bob Dole, even though Dole had usually voted with the NRA. But he also voted against repealing the assault weapons ban and made noises about other gun control initiatives he might support. Surveys taken by the NRA showed that the membership did not want to endorse Dole, despite their contempt for President Clinton (Patterson 1999).

Giving money to a candidate is the third level of involvement. The decisions on how to distribute funds involve both macro- and microelectoral considerations. The NRA naturally seeks to spend its money in a way that will maximize its objective – electing a pro-gun majority in the House and Senate. Usually the first priority is to protect and reward friendly incumbents in both chambers. Thus, a majority of the campaign contributions go to incumbents. Most of this money – 84 percent in 1996 - goes to Republicans (Patterson 1999). Contributions to House candidates always far exceed those to Senate candidates. This is explained mainly by the fact that all 435 House seats are contested each election, as opposed to only 33 Senate seats. But it also reflects the NRA's belief that it has greater impact on the more local House contests, especially in predominantly rural districts, than on the statewide Senate elections. But the NRA will adjust its strategies as circumstances warrant. In 1994, the NRA believed that several of its opponents in the Senate were vulnerable and as such spent more on Senate contests than it normally would (Patterson 1999). In 1996, a desire to protect the many first-term

Republican Representatives led the NRA to re-concentrate the lion's share of its resources on the House (Patterson 1999).

When the NRA looks at contributing to a candidate, there are a number of considerations. Foremost is that the candidate must support the organization's objectives. The NRA will not use its members' money to support candidates who favor any gun control. The next consideration is whether the candidate can win. The PVF committee spends considerable time and effort researching each contest by combing through local newspapers and political newsletters, canvassing local members and consulting other lobbying groups. Like most ideological groups, the NRA is very willing to contribute to challengers. Frequently, it will contribute to challengers who have little chance of winning, especially if it is in a race with an incumbent who is a high profile supporter of gun control. The NRA believes it is important to actively support those who seek its support and are in step with its legislative agenda (Patterson 1999).

But for the most part contribution decisions are infused with a healthy dose of pragmatism. The NRA, like all ideological groups, tries to use its campaign contributions in ways that will maximize their impact on both the outcome and the candidate. This means that most contributions go to competitive contests (Patterson. 1999). Safe incumbents whom the group supports will still get a donation, but it will usually be less than the maximum. The desire to maximize the impact of contributions also means that the timing of the donation becomes important. An early donation to an under-funded challenger can kickstart the candidate's fundraising efforts and give the campaign some momentum. Conversely, a later donation at a critical juncture will more likely be remembered by the candidate when the NRA's lobbyists come calling. Overall the NRA tries to retain maximum flexibility so it can move resources to close races where they can have the most impact. This also allows it to adjust to the inevitable shifts in a campaign.

Frequently, a candidate will seek the group's support and then backpedal when confronted by the media and gun control groups. By waiting until later in the campaign, the NRA minimizes its risk of backing someone who is not a "true believer" (Patterson, 1999).

The fourth level of involvement is in-kind contributions. This may involve hosting a fundraising event, supplying volunteers, and donating materials such as posters and bumper stickers. The main benefit of in-kind contributions is that they allow the PAC to control how their money is spent. The NRA usually reserves in-kind contributions for those candidates it rates as its strongest supporters. The most common form is hosting an event featuring someone high up in the organization, such as Wayne LaPierre (Executive Vice President) or Charlton Heston (President). This type of event is guaranteed to generate significant media coverage, and by having members of the executive appear with the candidate, can also energize local members to work for or donate to the campaign. For these reasons, this type of event is considered by the candidate as much more valuable than a mere monetary contribution (Patterson, 1999).

Independent expenditures, such as radio, print and television advertisements, represent the highest level of involvement. The NRA's independent expenditures have grown dramatically since the 1980's, to the point where in 1996 they exceeded the total amount of campaign contributions (Patterson 1999). The NRA believes there are many benefits from independent expenditures. First, there is no spending limit. The NRA can spend as much as it feels is necessary to support its candidate, as long as the funds come from PAC contributions. Secondly, the advertisements have the dual effect of promoting the NRA and its views. Although membership has consistently hovered between 2.5 and 3 million members, it is estimated that some 30 million Americans own firearms (Sugarman, 1992). The NRA's advertisements allow it to educate gun-owning non-

members about issues, candidates and the organization itself. Another benefit is that the group has complete control over the message. This sometimes leads to friction between the NRA and the candidate it is trying to help. For example, in 1996 the group ran radio ads attacking Walt Minnick, who was running for an Idaho Senate seat against incumbent Larry Craig, a longtime NRA supporter. Minnick announced that he was pulling his negative ads, and challenged Craig to do the same. Craig called the NRA and asked the group to change its ads, but was told that the NRA could not even discuss the matter, since the ads were supposed to remain independent (Patterson 1999).

The strategy for independent expenditures is similar to that for contributions. But generally, independent expenditures are reserved for those candidates who are the strongest supporters of gun rights. The NRA will sometimes run ads criticizing a candidate – as it did in 1996 when it ran commercials attacking President Clinton – even if the candidate’s opponent is not one the group supports. In these cases, the effort is designed more to erode support for the targeted candidate than to help his opponent (Patterson, 1999).

Legislative Results

Do the NRA’s electoral activities translate into legislative results? There have been four major gun-control initiatives since the early 1980’s: plastic guns, “cop killer” bullets, assault rifles and the handgun waiting period. In each case the NRA opposed the restrictions proposed by lawmakers on the principle that any gun-control efforts were ill conceived and would eventually lead to the elimination of private gun ownership.

In 1984, the FBI found out that the Glock-17, a semi-automatic pistol made mostly of plastic, could pass through airport security undetected. The Reagan Administration, together with its House allies, quickly introduced legislation to ban plastic guns. The NRA maintained that the proposed legislation would ban many

handguns that contained some plastic parts. In 1987, the NRA persuaded the Reagan administration to withdraw its proposed legislation, but this victory was short-lived (Davidson, 1993). During the 1988 presidential election, George Bush, also a longtime NRA supporter, came out in favor of banning plastic guns that could evade detection. A bill was introduced into the Senate, and with public opinion decidedly against it, the NRA had to compromise. The law that passed banned handguns that had did not contain at least 3.7 ounces of steel, less than half the amount that the FBI wanted.

In 1985, a controversy arose over armor-piercing bullets that had been developed for use by police forces. The police found them to be so effective at piercing metal that they were deemed too dangerous. But then it was reported that the bullets could penetrate the bulletproof vests worn by police officers and sales of these so-called "cop-killer" bullets soared. Congress, reacting to widespread public concern, introduced legislation to ban the sale of armor-piercing bullets. The NRA claimed that the armor-piercing bullet legislation would ban several types of bullets used by hunters. The Reagan Administration was caught between two of its staunchest allies, the NRA and law enforcement officers. In an indication of the NRA's clout, the Administration secretly asked the group to draw up its own legislation on armor piercing bullets. When its bill came before the House, where it passed easily, the NRA feigned indifference. for it did not want to be seen as compromising at all. The resultant bill banned only a few of the bullets capable of penetrating police vests (Davidson, 1993).

The 1990s were dominated by two issues: a ban on assault rifles and the Brady bill, which sought to impose a mandatory waiting period for handgun purchasers. Assault weapons were used in several massacres, including one at an elementary school in California. Assault rifles were semi-automatic, which meant that they fired a bullet each time the trigger was compressed, but they could easily be converted to fully automatic,

which allowed them to fire a constant stream of bullets as long as the trigger was compressed. Either way, these guns were extremely lethal in the hands of a person intent on committing mayhem.

In 1990 a bill was introduced into the Senate banning certain types of assault rifles. The bill had the backing of the Bush administration and was introduced into the Senate by Dennis Deconcini (R-Az), who had been an NRA “one hundred percenter”, meaning he had never voted against the group. The NRA went all out to defeat the measure, telling its members that this was the penultimate challenge of their gun rights. The bill was passed by the narrowest of margins, fifty-one to forty-nine, as several other high-profile NRA supporters voted against the group. It was the first time the NRA had clearly been defeated in a legislative battle (Davidson 1993).

The first time the Brady bill came before the House in 1988, it was soundly defeated. Thanks largely to the efforts of Jim and Sarah Brady, the idea of a mandatory waiting period gained support. Jim Brady had been disabled after being wounded in the attempted assassination of President Reagan in 1981. He was a well-liked and sympathetic figure, so much so that by 1991 President Bush and former Presidents Ford, Nixon, Carter and even Reagan publicly supported the Brady’s initiative. The NRA became increasingly desperate, sending undecided representatives samples of the kind of negative attack ads that it would run against them and promising to spend money to support them if they voted against Brady (Davidson 1993). This carrot-stick approach won the group few friends in the Congress, even amongst its supporters, or in the media, as several publications characterized the NRA’s tactics as blatant intimidation (Davidson 1993). In the end, an amended Brady bill mandating a five day waiting period and a background check for prospective gun buyers narrowly passed both the House and the Senate and was signed into law by President Bush.

With both the plastic gun and armor-piercing bullets, the NRA claimed victory, despite the fact that it had broken its cardinal rule of never compromising. Yet the NRA could legitimately claim to have won because in each case it succeeded in significantly narrowing the scope of the legislation, despite widespread opposition to its efforts. The assault weapons bill never made it through the House. In 1993, President Clinton reintroduced it as part of his Anti-Crime bill and it subsequently passed through both chambers. But after the 1994 elections, in which Republicans gained control of both the House and Senate, the assault weapons ban was repealed. The Brady bill has in reality had a limited impact, as the logistics of enforcing its requirements have proven to be extremely problematic.

All four of these legislative battles illustrate the NRA's political might. In each case there was widespread public support for the measures. For example, polls taken in 1991 when the Brady battle was in full swing, showed that almost 70 percent of the public supported a mandatory waiting period (Davidson 1993). But in all four examples, the NRA succeeded in initially narrowing the scope of the legislation – the armor-piercing bullets, plastic gun and assault rifle laws each banned fewer items than when they were initially proposed, while the waiting period in the Brady Bill was reduced from an initial fourteen days to five days. With both the bullets and the plastic guns, the NRA was brought in by elected officials to help come up with compromise legislation.

The assault weapons ban was still a bitter defeat for the NRA and it encouraged the group to put more of its electoral resources towards changing the composition of the House and the Senate by supporting pro-gun challengers in the 1994 election. The NRA was a strong supporter of most of the Republican "freshman class" of 1994, when the Republicans won a majority in both the House and the Senate. The group's efforts were rewarded when the new Congress immediately repealed the assault weapons ban during

its first one hundred days. The Brady bill represented the only real loss amongst the four examples. Yet even though Brady was on its third incarnation and was significantly watered down from the original bill, it still took the political weight of the sitting president, Bush, and former President Reagan to finally push Brady through.

The victories the NRA achieved did have a price. The group alienated its long time allies in law enforcement and the Bush administration and others in the Republican Party, which had been its traditional base of support. It even angered some of its own members. Perhaps most importantly, its reputation in the eyes of the public was at its lowest point. The popular image of the NRA is a group of fanatics who care little about the safety of police officers and the public at large. For its part the group felt betrayed by the Bush Administration and its former friends in the Senate such as Deconcini and Lloyd Bentsen. Despite the fact that these representatives favored gun rights, the NRA attacked them in the next election with the same fervor it had for its hardcore opponents. These battles have made the NRA determined not to compromise for the sake of maintaining a good working relationship with politicians. Anyone who supports any sort of gun-control measure is an opponent, and the NRA will try to make them pay for their opposition at election time (Davidson 1993).

Summary

This case study shows that there are two main reasons that the NRA ranks among the most successful interest groups in the US. First, because campaigns are financed privately, the group is able to use its money to help elect pro-gun representatives in the House and Senate. Secondly, the NRA membership is extremely dedicated. This also helps elect sympathetic candidates, because NRA members are believed to vote primarily on the basis of the candidates position on firearms – at least in congressional elections (Patterson, 1999). The NRA also mobilizes the membership to aid its lobbying efforts.

The message to the representative is clear: voting against the NRA will cost you in the next election. These two tactics have enabled the NRA to stave off most major gun control initiatives over the past two decades.

CASE STUDY 2: National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC)- Conservative Victory Committee (CVC)

NCPAC

The National Conservative PAC was founded in 1975 by conservative activists Terry Dolan, Charles Black and Roger Stone, as well as Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC). The group also relied heavily on direct mail specialist Richard Viguerie and pollster Arthur Finkelstein, both well-known for their expertise. According to Dolan, NCPAC's chairman, its purpose was to "promote conservative values and candidates and to counter the liberal bias of the mainstream media" (Sabato 1990: 97). The group strongly favored what has been dubbed a "family values" agenda – it opposed abortion, gay rights and the Equal Rights Amendment and favored school prayer and a tough stance on crime, including support for the death penalty (Sabato, 1990). NCPAC was strongly anti-Soviet and believed that a strong military was the only effective deterrent to Soviet aggression. In economic matters, NCPAC was pro-business and fiscally conservative, favoring minimal government intervention in the economy (Sabato 1990). The PAC became defunct in 1991.

NCPAC first received national attention in 1980 when it mounted the first large-scale independent expenditure campaign. The group set out to oust liberal Democratic Senators Birch Bayh (Indiana), Frank Church (Idaho), Alan Cranston (California), John Culver (Iowa), Thomas Eagleton (Missouri) and George McGovern (North Dakota). NCPAC spent 1.2 million dollars attacking the six and four – Bayh, Church, Culver and McGovern - were defeated (Jacobson 1984: 54). NCPAC moved quickly to take credit

for the four losses, although how much impact they really had is unclear. According to Sabato (1990), all four faced a difficult battle before NCPAC's involvement. In the same election, NCPAC ran an ad featuring sound bites of President Carter in his 1976 debates with Gerald Ford in which he promised to reduce inflation and unemployment and then compared them to what inflation and unemployment actually were. The ad was hailed by many experts as devastatingly effective and would become a model for other independent spending campaigns (Sabato, 1990).

NCPAC was one of the pioneers in large-scale direct mail fundraising. Like most direct-mail organizations, NCPAC believed that its mailings were an important form of advertising for the group and as such put considerable effort and expense into their creation. In his book, *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead*, Viguerie, citing the bias of mainstream media, called direct mail "our TV, radio, daily newspaper and weekly magazine...it allows organizations or causes not part of the mainstream to get funding."⁵ Viguerie's approach to direct mail was controversial, as each appeal was couched in extreme rhetoric that was intended to provoke fear and outrage in its recipients. One of the first mailings sent out by NCPAC stated that "Your tax dollars are being used to pay for grade school classes that teach our children that cannibalism, wife-swapping and the murder of infants and the elderly are acceptable behavior" (Godwin 1988: 93).

A further criticism leveled at NCPAC was that its mailings frequently contained inaccuracies and misrepresentations. In its fundraising communications alone, NCPAC committed fifteen major errors, accusing representatives of votes they did not cast (Sabato, 1990: 100). This does not even include the numerous misrepresentations made, such as when NCPAC accused Senator Frank Church (D-Id) of working to have nuclear

⁵ Quoted in Godwin 1988: 91.

missiles removed from his home state of Idaho. In fact, Church had wanted the missiles to be replaced by newer models (Sabato, 1990: 101).

Dolan and Viguerie were also been accused of using NCPAC for personal benefit. While NCPAC was consistently one of the ten largest PACs in terms of receipts, just over half the funds raised were used for political campaigns (Godwin 1988). From 1975 to 1982, NCPAC raised 17.7 million dollars, of which 4.4 million dollars went to Viguerie's direct mail company and another 2.1 million dollars to individuals and firms who were closely linked to Dolan (Sabato 1990). In Dolan's defense, Herbert Alexander (1983: 111) found that administrative costs for PACs average roughly 43 percent, making NCPAC fairly average. Dolan denied any abuse, claiming that all of the expenses were legitimate and further that his friends gave him cut-rate prices (Sabato 1990).

The initial independent expenditure campaigns launched by NCPAC were almost always negative. NCPAC would come into a state or district a year before the election and saturate it with negative ads that set the agenda for the campaign and usually increased the incumbent's "negatives." Dolan believed that this strategy was tremendously effective at undermining an incumbent's support. Survey data by NCPAC's Finkelstein (1982) and also those by Tarrance (1982) back up this claim somewhat.⁶ They showed that the attack ads had at least a moderate impact on voter decisions in the Senate races NCPAC targeted in both 1980 and 1982 and that even in races where the incumbent won, his/her negative ratings were significantly higher than previously. The attack ads were also an excellent way to attract media attention to NCPAC. However, the increased scrutiny frequently caused the group some embarrassment. As with the mailings, NCPAC was often found to have its facts wrong. It accused several Senators of voting for a congressional pay raise when in fact they had not

⁶ Tarrance referenced in Godwin 1988: 93

(Sabato, 1990). NCPAC ran ads claiming that Senators Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.) and John Melcher (D-Mont.) were pro-abortion when they were not (Sabato, 1990). In some cases NCPAC corrected the errors but only after the false charges had been widely publicized. According to statements made by Dolan himself, much of this misrepresentation and exaggeration seemed far from accidental. In an oft-quoted statement, Dolan said "A group like ours can lie through its teeth and the candidate it helps stays clean"(Sabato 1990). The challenger – the candidate NCPAC supports - gets the best of both worlds by benefiting from the incumbent's decline while maintaining his distance from NCPAC and the fallout from its attacks. The incumbent must then spent money to set the record straight.

It did not take long for such tactics to catch up with NCPAC. In 1982, it targeted more than a dozen House and Senate incumbents and only one, Senator Howard Cannon (R-Nev.), lost. Cannon was under investigation for accepting a bribe at the time (Sabato, 1990). Incumbents quickly learned how to deal with NCPAC's attacks, portraying the group as an outside, big money special interest that distorted the truth. Incumbents played themselves as victims, helping to create a backlash against NCPAC's negativism. Because of the group's reputation for inaccuracies, some local television and radio stations refused to run NCPAC's ads after the Democratic National Committee threatened libel suits against stations that aired false information (Sabato, 1990). NCPAC and its tactics were not always popular with the candidates it sought to support. Many in the Republican Party believed that NCPAC was doing more harm than good and sought to distance themselves from the group. The lukewarm response of the Republican establishment encouraged Dolan to briefly flirt with the idea of turning NCPAC into a political party (Sabato, 1990).

These events caused NCPAC to make changes for the 1984 elections. Dolan claimed that the group would run more positive ads and check its facts more vigorously (Sabato 1990). It began running ads that highlighted favored incumbents voting records and congratulated the voters of that area for "electing a winner" (Sabato 1990). But this did not mean that NCPAC was abandoning attack ads. Finkelstein's polling data led him to devise a new strategy in which NCPAC limited its attacks to the very early stages, creating doubts about the candidate and setting the agenda for the campaign. NCPAC would do nothing for the rest of the campaign until the final days, when another flurry of attack ads would be launched without leaving enough time for a backlash to build (Sabato, 1990).

NCPAC saw little value in making contributions to candidates and as a result proportionately little of its money was spent this way. In the 1981-82 election cycle, NCPAC raised 10 million dollars, of which only \$300,000 was spent on campaign contributions (FEC). This was less than one-tenth the amount spent on independent advertising (Sabato 1990). The \$10,000 contribution limit paled in comparison to the millions NCPAC could spend on independent advertising campaigns. Furthermore, since the group did not actively lobby the Congress, there was no need to donate seed money for access. Most of the contributions went to challengers early in election cycle to help them get their campaigns started (FEC).

The 1984 elections saw NCPAC focus more on the presidential election than on congressional races. Beginning in February during the New Hampshire primary, NCPAC spent 2 million dollars on ads attacking President Reagan's opponent, Walter Mondale (Sabato 1990). In keeping with its promise to be more positive, the group spent considerable sums praising Reagan as well. NCPAC produced a twenty-five minute film entitled *Ronald Reagan's America* and aired it on television stations across the nation at

crucial points in the campaign (Sabato, 1990). For the first time it also sought to mobilize grassroots support. It organized “American Heroes for Reagan” rallies to sign up volunteers and donors and formed a “Blacks for Reagan” committee in an effort to increase support in what was for the President a weak constituency. All told, NCPAC independently spent about 14 million dollars for Reagan, and 19.3 million dollars in total, during the 1983-84 election cycle. (Sabato 1990) Another race that NCPAC was heavily involved in was Senator Jesse Helm’s re-election bid in North Carolina. Helms narrowly defeated Democrat Jim Hunt in a race in which a then-record 26 million dollars was spent by candidates and PACs (Sabato 1990). NCPAC engaged in a war of ads with the Progressive Political Action Committee (PROPAC), a liberal group that sprang up as a response to NCPAC.

NCPAC had borrowed money to finance much of its activities in the 1984 election. Because of the Reagan landslide and the Republican gains in Congress, it became difficult for conservative groups to raise funds. By 1986-87, NCPAC’s fundraising had taken a major downturn and NCPAC was heavily in debt. Dolan became ill and died in 1987, and leadership of the group passed to Brent Bozell, who had worked for NCPAC since 1980 in various capacities. Surveying the financial wreckage around him, Bozell quickly decided that it was time to start over. In October of 1987, he resigned from NCPAC and founded the Conservative Victory Committee (CVC). NCPAC went on for a few years but did very little before officially becoming defunct in 1991.

Conservative Victory Committee (CVC)

Bozell’s experience at NCPAC made him committed to running the CVC as a low cost operation with little reliance on direct mail for fundraising. Towards that end, he created the Media Research Center, a tax-exempt foundation dedicated to “exposing the leftist bias in our national media” (Shaiko 1994). Technically, the Media Research Center

and the CVC are separate organizations; in reality they share the same office space and the same leadership staff. In addition, most of the Board of Trustees of the Media Research Center are major contributors to the CVC. Between 1987 and 1992, these individuals contributed more than one-quarter million dollars to the CVC (Shaiko 1994).

While the CVC did use direct mail during the period 1987-89, Bozell's concerns about the administrative costs of this type of fundraising has meant that the CVC depends on a limited number of large donors. In 1991-92, the percentage of receipts coming from donors who gave at least \$1000 was 73.6 percent. (FEC). The average donation amongst those who gave at least \$1000 was \$4076 (FEC). Fewer than ten thousand individuals gave money to the CVC in the period from 1987 to 1993 (Shaiko 1994). While this reliance on large donors has inhibited growth- the CVC typically raises between 300 thousand and 500 thousand dollars per year (FEC) – it has also left it in good financial shape and relatively debt free (Shaiko, 1994).

In 1991, the CVC combined with another conservative group, Citizens United, to make a TV ad that attacked the integrity of Senators Ted Kennedy, Joe Biden and Alan Cranston during the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings. The two organizations spent only \$100,000 on the ad, including a mere \$40,000 for airtime (Shaiko 1994). For two weeks the ad was run repeatedly, for free, on all of the major media outlets as part of the news about the hearings. Yet neither group had the direct mail machinery in place to take advantage of this publicity bonanza.

Unlike NCPAC, whose contact with its donors was limited to direct mail solicitations, the CVC is closely linked to its donor base. The group sends out monthly updates, and suggestions by supporters about what candidates to support are accepted and frequently incorporated into the allocation of funds. Naturally there are disagreements. Bozell cites one example of a donor who was pro-choice and wanted money given to a

pro-choice candidate. Bozell refused and encouraged the donor to give his money to another organization. Bozell stresses that accountability to its donors is extremely important to the CVC. Donors want to know what they get for their money. The reliance on a relatively small number of large donors means that Bozell works extremely hard to see that their concerns are addressed. Beyond the formal communications, Bozell contacts many donors individually, which not only helps him gather information but allows donors to give him feedback directly (Shaiko, 1994).

But the bulk of the political decision-making is done by Bozell. His connections throughout the conservative and PAC community enable him to gather information about races across the country, which minimizes the need for paid researchers. Since its funds are relatively limited, the CVC concentrates its resources on a limited number of contests. There are four basic criteria for support. First, Bozell looks for strongly conservative candidates. Secondly, he decides whether the race is winnable. Once these two criteria are met Bozell examines if the candidate needs the money. This last one usually disqualifies most incumbents. The last criteria is the candidates ability to raise money from other sources. But Bozell emphasizes that the CVC believes in getting into a race early, which means that this consideration is often the least important. Bozell states that he is not concerned with success rates and that only about 10 percent of the candidates the group backs are successful (Shaiko 1994).

Like NCPAC, the CVC prefers to spend its money independently rather than contribute it directly to candidates. The 1992 election was an exception, as almost all of the funds spent – a mere \$95,000 – went to contributions (Shaiko, 1994). Bozell stated that there were several reasons for this. Because of his work on Pat Buchanans's presidential campaign, Bozell had less time for fundraising and as a result the CVC's receipts were down significantly from previous years. Also, there were fewer close races

with either candidates they strongly supported or opposed. Lastly, the CVC had almost no interest in the presidential election after President Bush secured the G.O.P. nomination. Both Bozell and most of the CVC's donors refused to support Bush after he broke his tax pledge. In the 1987-88 election cycle, the CVC spent more than \$400,000 of which only \$84,000 was contributed to candidates (Shaiko 1994). Like all ideological groups, independent spending serves a dual purpose for the CVC. Not only is it meant to help the candidate it is for, it serves as an advertisement for the group and its views. While Bozell believes that negative ads are effective, he has been careful not to replicate the attack strategy of NCPAC and states that the CVC tries to run as many positive ads as negative ones (Shaiko, 1994).

The CVC has had some involvement in presidential elections. The CVC has shown that it is certainly not tied to the Republican Party establishment, as it has twice backed the non-establishment candidate. In the 1988 GOP presidential primaries, the CVC backed Jack Kemp until George Bush clinched the nomination. In the general election, the CVC independently spent \$250,000 against Michael Dukakis, despite the fact that Bozell had serious doubts about George Bush's conservative convictions (Shaiko 1994). These doubts proved well founded when Bush reneged on many of the promises he had made. The CVC and Bozell supported Pat Buchanan in the 1992 primaries, although the group only gave a small in-kind contribution. In the 1992 general election, the CVC stayed on the sidelines (Shaiko 1994).

As mentioned above, the CVC has a history of backing challengers. In the 1991-92 election cycle, \$82,000 of the \$95,000 donated went to challengers and open seat candidates (FEC). Following the lead of other PACs, the CVC had candidates sign a pledge saying that they would support a line-item veto, a balanced budget amendment, etc., before they would receive financial support. Fifty candidates, all Republicans,

signed the pledge and received support, only five of whom were incumbents. Of the forty-five non-incumbents, eleven were victorious. On a macro-electoral basis, the CVC has no preference between Senate, House and presidential contests. Decisions are made on a race by race basis, taking into account candidates, competitiveness and funds available. In 1991-92, forty-one of the candidates supported were running for the House. This was a pragmatic decision based on the limited resources available to the CVC in 1992. In 1987-88 the group spent nearly \$300,000 independently against Democratic Senate candidates (Shaiko, 1994). As proof of the close relationship between the CVC and its donors, many of the candidates were in districts in Texas and around the Washington, DC area. This reflects Bozell's Texas origins and the fact that many of the CVC's donors come from Texas and the Capital Beltway (Shaiko, 1994).

By 1995 Bozell was spending more and more of his time working in the Media Research Center. He was also writing columns for several publications and frequently appearing on television programs such as CNN's Crossfire. This left little time for fundraising for the CVC. The Republican victory in 1994, coupled with the proliferation in the number of conservative PACs- in 1996 there were 25 (FEC) – made fundraising more challenging than ever. Bozell decided to focus his energies on the Media Research Center. The CVC, while still operating, raised and spent less than \$10,000 in both the 1996 and 1998 election cycles (FEC).

Summary

NCPAC was a pioneer in direct-mail fundraising and independent expenditures. It was able to raise and spend large sums of money to effectively draw attention to itself and its views. Although it seemed its tactics were at least somewhat effective initially in the 1980 election – four of the six senators targeted lost - its results in subsequent elections were disappointing. The public became used to third-party advertising and

learned to take its claims with a grain of salt, especially after groups like NCPAC were found to have made numerous misrepresentations in its ads. Candidates learned how to combat the group's attack ads and the public began to weary of all the negativity and mudslinging. The Reagan victories in 1980 and 1984 lessened conservative anxiety and made fundraising more difficult. All of these factors contributed to NCPAC's decline. Its successor, the CVC, was a much smaller undertaking and yet also suffered from some of the same difficulties. But it would be a mistake to characterize these groups as failures. The shift to the right in American politics, particularly within the Republican party, probably owes at least a small debt to groups like NCPAC, which were able to effectively advocate conservative views at a time when they believed they were essentially shut out of the political discourse.

CHAPTER 4: CANADIAN GROUPS

Compared to the US, interest groups have played a relatively small role in Canadian politics. The political parties have traditionally been the only viable vehicle for bringing issues forward. The parliamentary system and its fusion of the legislative and executive functions created strong national parties. Power was concentrated mainly within the Prime Minister and his advisors, and the upper levels of the bureaucracy. Party discipline forced differences to be worked out in the backrooms among the party elite. The most effective way to achieve policy goals was to penetrate the party power structure.

The nature of federalism also inhibited the rise of interest groups. Regional concerns were difficult to address since the parties had to cater to the large majorities in Ontario and Quebec. This fostered strong regional identities, which were represented primarily by the provincial governments rather than by federal representatives. Canadian federalism was characterized by a system of elite accommodation between the premiers and the central government: nowhere was this more apparent than in constitutional matters. The strong regionalism prevented the formation of a set of pan-Canadian values, and elite accommodation effectively froze out ordinary citizens and interest groups.

But over the last thirty or so years there have been significant changes that have given groups more room to operate. Meisel (1991) and others have argued that the Canadian party system is in a state of protracted decay and is increasingly unable to perform the functions ascribed to it by theorists. The decline in party membership and identification has sapped some of the parties unquestioned legitimacy and forced the elite to become more responsive to the rank and file. Initiatives to enhance the representative function of Parliament, such as the creation of multiparty committees, have further weakened the party elite's power. The transfer of power from the federal government to

the provinces, and the transfer within the central government of power away from the legislature to the bureaucracy, have created more access points and more opportunities for groups to exercise some influence (Pross, 1986). Finally, the advent of the Charter has transferred power and authority away from the executive/legislative branch and given it to the courts, an arena more favorable to interest group involvement.

Electoral Finance Regime

The Election Expense Act of 1974 has been quite successful at both minimizing the role of money in election campaigns and curbing opportunities for influence peddling. The Election Expense Act had two major provisions. The first was that a substantial part of the cost of election campaigns would be publicly financed through tax credits to contributors and the reimbursement of "election expenses" to parties and candidates. This was accompanied by spending limits that capped the amount that parties and candidates could spend on election expenses. The goal of these changes was to eliminate the parties' reliance on large contributors. It was hoped that the substantial tax credits, up to \$500, would encourage more individuals to contribute and lead to a situation in which most campaign monies came from small, individual donations (Stanbury, 1991).

Although the system in Canada has been significantly more successful than the one in the U.S., there are gaps which are increasingly being exploited. The definition of "election expenses" is imprecise enough to create little gaps that allow parties and candidates to circumvent the spending limits. Also, the Act does not regulate the financing of party leadership campaigns, even though they are partly financed with public money. Donations to the candidate can be routed through the party, thereby making the donor eligible for a tax receipt. But the tax credit is irrelevant to large contributors. Therefore, donors can make unlimited contributions directly to candidates and these amounts are not subject to any government reporting requirements (the parties do have

their own guidelines for leadership campaigns but they vary considerably). Money raised and spent to obtain a riding nomination and the post-nomination, pre-writ of election period are also similarly ignored (Stanbury 1991).

Another way the government has tried to control political spending is by restricting the amount of media access that can be bought and by requiring that free time be made available during the campaign. No electronic media airtime or print space in newspapers and magazines can be bought prior to the 29th day before polling day. During this four week period, 6.5 hours of prime airtime is to be made available for purchase by registered parties (Stanbury, 1991). Networks are also required to make available free time to registered parties. Both paid and free time are to be allocated in proportion to the party's popular vote in the previous election. These measures have helped keep expenditures down since they restrain the media free-for-all that characterizes American campaigns. Some argue these restrictions are too severe and that they prevent the electorate from getting all the information they need to make an educated choice at the ballot box. Also, the allocation of airtime based on the results of the previous election is once again to the distinct advantage of the established parties. The formula used meant that in 1993 the Reform Party was only allocated 17 minutes of airtime (Stanbury, 1991).

These measures have been successful enough that they have significantly reduced the incentive for special interests to make large contributions. The largest donations are rarely commensurate with a firm's size. Stanbury (1991) calculated that the 500 largest non-financial companies in Canada (FP 500) accounted for 68% of all corporate assets but made up less than 20% of all business contributions. Part of the explanation for this may be that the political system has created a situation in which interests see less value in using their money for political gain. Elections are party-centered and national, minimizing the ability for contributors to use their money to obtain influence. Because of

the spending limits, the free media time, etc. Canadian campaigns are much less expensive than in the US, allowing the parties to be less money driven.

The goal of having the parties less reliant on large contributors has been only partly realized. The number of small individual donations has not grown appreciably throughout the last 20 years, and both the Liberals and Conservatives have still received the majority of their funds from large contributors, mainly corporations (Stanbury, 1991). As election costs have escalated, parties have raised larger amounts for each succeeding election, with most of the additional dollars coming from large donors.

There also seems to be a different attitude amongst Canadian business and the public towards campaign donations than there is in the US. Many businesses are reluctant to make substantial political contributions because they are afraid that this will generate a negative reaction from the public. Canadian companies seem eager to avoid being seen as trying to use their wealth to obtain favorable treatment (Stanbury 1991). It also appears that companies are reluctant to offend the other parties by supporting their opponents, especially if the parties are not that different ideologically. Most of the firms that Stanbury studied in the FP500 tended to make contributions to both free enterprise parties, the Liberals and PCs (1991: 46). Companies want to be able to deal effectively with whichever party forms the government and do not want to be seen as partisan by the government or the public.

On the other hand, trade unions have long been an important source of funds for the NDP. Many unions pay annual affiliation dues to the party based on the number of members, as well as contributing cash and in-kind labor (e.g. volunteers paid by a union) during elections (Stanbury, 1991). The use of union dues for political support has been challenged in the courts, and as a result unions have moved to differentiate political funds and to make contributions voluntary. The union's financial support of the NDP has

allowed them to exercise considerable influence over policy and even political strategy within the party (Stanbury, 1991). The unions' close affiliation with the NDP is a unique situation in Canadian politics; no other interest groups have been so closely tied to a single party for such a long period of time.

Interest groups other than corporations and unions have not been significant contributors to election campaigns. Most of these groups lack the financial resources to make significant contributions. Some groups receive funding from the federal government and are reluctant to risk annoying any of the parties and endangering future funding. Perhaps most importantly, the election finance system makes contributions less important. Unless a group is in a position to make very large donations, it seems of little value to for it to spend its money on contributions. The view is that donations do little to advance a group's aims and that resources should be used elsewhere, such as on third-party advertising or legal challenges.

Third-Party Advertising

Third-party expenditures have become a serious complication to the existing structure. The Election Expense Act allowed third parties to make expenditures if they were for the purpose of promoting support for issues of public policy and only if they were done in "good faith"- not in collusion with any party or candidate. It became quickly apparent that this meant that almost any third-party expenditure could be successfully defended. In 1980 the Chief Election Officer claimed that the good faith defense was so broadly interpreted as to be meaningless and that this was undermining spending limits on parties and candidates. In 1983, parliament unanimously passed Bill C-169, which banned third parties from making expenditures that directly promoted or opposed candidates or parties. This was quickly challenged in Alberta court by the National Citizens Coalition. The judge found that the law violated the section 2 freedom

of expression guarantee of the Charter. Although the decision only applied to Alberta, the federal government decided not to enforce Bill C-169 in the rest of the country. The effects of this ruling were seen most clearly in 1988. During the election campaign, pro- and anti-free trade groups spent almost \$4 million advertising their views (Hiebert, 1991:20). Four times as much money was spent in support of the Free Trade Agreement as was spent opposing it (Hiebert, 1991:20). This was clearly a huge advantage for the Conservatives and according to one study, the ads convinced many who were undecided late in the campaign to vote for the Conservatives (Johnson, 1990). In 1993, Parliament brought in Bill C-114, which sought to impose a \$1,000 spending limit on third parties. The NCC also challenged this in Alberta court and again the decision went against the government. In 1999, the government tried once more with Bill C-2, which placed a \$3000 limit per riding, to a maximum \$150,000 total per election campaign. The NCC has also challenged this law.

Hiebert (1991) makes a persuasive argument that allowing interest groups to spend as much as they want is unfair to political parties, which are constrained by spending limits. She rightly points out that the system of public funding and spending limits for parties and candidates was created to mitigate the role of money in election campaigns and allow for greater participation. Allowing unlimited third-party spending diminishes the effectiveness of those spending limits and allows those interests with money to wield disproportionate influence. Hiebert cites the free trade debate during the 1988 election as a good example. The pro-free trade side spent four times as much as those groups against and this was all to the benefit of the Conservatives, who negotiated the FTA (Hiebert, 1991).

But there is considerable doubt about the value of third-party advertising and whether it really helps those intended to help. Tanguay and Kay (1998) have conducted

empirical studies on the impact of third-party advertising on election results. Their studies showed that in ridings where interest groups conducted an advertising campaign against a candidate, he or she did no worse, and often better, than the average candidate in that province when one took into account the party's "swing vote" – how much the vote changed for the average candidate for that party from the previous election. The authors concluded that interest group third-party advertising has had little impact on Canadian election results. The parliamentary system, with its concentration of power, strengthens the parties. This causes elections to be truly "national" and mitigates the impact of the individual candidate and local conditions -although region is still a very significant consideration. Because all candidates essentially run under the same party platform, it is difficult to make specific issues more salient than others in the minds of voters. Finally, because Canada currently has five parties, there is often more than one party supporting or opposing the same thing. It is therefore likely that any benefit from a third-party campaign will be dispersed, making it more difficult to see results (Tanguay and Kay, 1998).

Subsequent elections have seen more interest groups conduct advertising campaigns, but no election has seen the level of spending as in 1988. The 1997 election saw groups such as the Canadian Police Association, the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, the NCC and Campaign Life all conduct third-party advertising campaigns. Although third-party spending is still a small portion of overall election spending, it makes up a considerable percentage, nearly a fifth, of the total spent on political advertising (Hiebert 1998).

Summary

While groups in Canada have had a limited impact on electoral politics, they have become more active over the last twenty years. But there are signs that they may be ready

to play a larger role. The decline of the parties, in particular the ability of the party elite to impose decisions, has created openings that groups might be able to exploit. Pross (1986) found that MPs gave a very high priority to constituency and regional concerns when party discipline was relaxed. Since some social issues, such as abortion and capital punishment, have gone to free votes in the House, there is some opportunity for groups to be effective even if they have little support within the ruling party. The leakages in the election finance system also may create more opportunities for moneyed interests to use their resources to influence the political process.

Introduction to Case Studies

In the next section will examine two case studies of groups that are similar to the American groups examined in the previous chapter. The first case study is the National Firearms Association (NFA), a gun rights group. Unlike the NRA, the NFA does not oppose all gun control efforts. The NFA favors what it calls "sensible gun control" and opposes the Liberal government's Bill C-68, which mandates that all firearms be registered (www.nfa.ca). The second is the National Citizens Coalition (NCC), a conservative group ideologically similar to NCPAC and the CVC. The NCC is also similar to NCPAC in that it was one of the first Canadian groups to run large-scale third-party ad campaigns.

CASE STUDY 1: The National Firearms Association

Background

The NFA was founded in 1984 in response to what many gun owners believed was a growing desire on the part of the Canadian government to implement strict gun control laws. Its mission is the promotion and protection of all recreational firearms activities and to educate all gun owners on responsible firearms use (NFA pamphlet). The group has grown considerably over the last few years due to its strong and vocal

opposition to Bill C-68, the national gun registry law. The president of the NFA, David Tomlinson, states that the NFA is in favor of practical and effective gun control. Towards this end, the NFA favors firearms legislation that ensures that all gun owners are sufficiently trained in the proper use of firearms and that keeps firearms out of the hands of those who have shown themselves to be potentially dangerous (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

Initially, the NFA had few members and almost no resources. It was difficult to recruit members with no concrete threat from the government. But by 1988 the idea of a national gun registration program was being discussed by all three major parties. In the 1988 election, the NFA supported the Conservatives, who they believed were less hostile than the Liberals and the NDP. However, the NFA also supported the Reform Party in every riding in which they ran a candidate. Although Tomlinson said that Reform was "no great friend of the firearms community initially", the group quickly realized that this new party offered them the best chance of staving off the new gun laws. NFA members were involved with Reform from very early on. Although the party was already fairly established in the west, its weakness in central and eastern Canada severely limited its chances of forming the government. The NFA began urging its members west of Manitoba to join Reform and to sell memberships to other gun owners. Many gun owners joined the party, and thus the NFA played a significant role in creating a Reform presence in eastern Canada, especially in Ontario (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

The Montreal Massacre in December 1989 created even more momentum for those in favor of a new gun law. When Kim Campbell took over as Prime Minister in 1993, her government introduced a bill similar to Bill C-68. This was a boon to the NFA, which saw its membership rolls swell. In the 1993 election, the NFA put its full efforts behind the Reform Party, urging its members to vote and work for the party because it

was the only party that supported gun rights. While the leadership's suggestion was for the most part followed in Western Canada, it was not adhered to by many in the East. Tomlinson still believes Reform could have done much better in 1993 had the Ontario firearms community not split its vote between Reform and the Conservatives (Tomlinson interview, 2000).⁷

It would quickly become apparent that the Liberals were intent on passing legislation similar to that of the Campbell government. When Bill C-68 was introduced, the NFA was prepared. The group prepared a massive book of objections and included its own gun control proposals. The NFA was invited to appear at the parliamentary hearings but felt it was ignored. It boycotted the final hearing because, in Tomlinson's words, "the final bill was so faulty that it served our interests more to let it go through without corrections"(Tomlinson interview 2000). The committee did propose about fifty changes, none of which were implemented. The bill was passed as written and became law in 1995.

The NFA claims it has approximately 100,000 members nationwide, with the majority in the western provinces. The group has a national executive, headquartered in Alberta, and provincial executives in each province. Tomlinson describes the organization as "very integrated yet very democratic. We don't tell our members what to do," There is a great deal of two-way communication between the national and provincial executives and between both administrative levels and the local members. In addition, the NFA is loosely aligned with gun clubs and other firearms organizations, such as the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. These alliances are an important source of information to the national and provincial executives and there is frequent overlap in

⁷ David Tomlinson, the President of the NFA, was interviewed for this paper in March 2000. At the time, the Canadian Alliance Party was still formally known as the Reform Party and was referred to as such.

membership between the NFA and these other organizations (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

Almost all of the NFA's funds come from membership dues and small contributions. The largest contribution the group has ever received was \$10,000, when the NFA was first being formed. The group does not specifically raise money for political activities; any money spent during elections comes from the general operating budget. Although the group is in sound financial shape, it is restricted in terms of the types of activities it can engage in by its limited funds. Tomlinson believes money plays a relatively small role in Canadian politics and that the NFA's strengths – membership, political expertise, organization – are far more important (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

Political Strategy and Tactics

The NFA's political activities are naturally focused on firearms legislation, specifically on its opposition to Bill C-68. The NFA's primary goal is to replace Bill C-68 with more practical and less intrusive legislation (Tomlinson Interview, 2000). Before each election campaign the NFA evaluates each of the political parties. The executive gathers as much information as possible from its local members, from the media and from its conversations with politicians. Based on this the executive makes a recommendation to NFA members as to which party is most favorable to the firearms community (Tomlinson interview, 2000). Of the major parties, only the Reform Party has included the total reworking of Bill C-68 among its main policy initiatives.⁸

The NFA relies on a grassroots strategy that attempts to influence the political process from inside political parties. The weakness of Canadian parties in terms of membership provides the NFA an opportunity to use its grassroots strength. Tomlinson points out that most party riding associations in Canada have between zero and ninety

⁸ The Progressive Conservative Party also opposes Bill C-68

members. If the NFA has twenty members in a riding and half of them join a party, this is often enough to gain control of the riding association. The group publishes a booklet entitled *Party Time!* that educates members on party processes and regulations. It instructs members on how to combat tactics by the party designed to prevent them from joining and becoming the majority within the riding association. For instance, the booklet states that if the local riding association refuses to process any more memberships, the NFA members should “arrange for as much publicity as possible for this undemocratic behavior” and then “bypass them (local riding officers) and send the applications to the party’s provincial headquarters” (NFA *Party Time!*). The booklet also contains a sample set of riding association bylaws that the NFA recommends that the members pass when they become a majority within the riding association. Thus far the Reform Party has shown itself to be the most amenable to the firearms community and as such most NFA members are members of that party. However there have been efforts to join other parties, especially the Liberals. These efforts have mostly been designed to embarrass and inconvenience the party rather than to influence the party’s policies. For example, Tomlinson claims members of one gun club in Ontario joined the local Liberal riding association, became the majority and donated the entire bank account to a battered women’s shelter (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

Once the executive has determined which party(s) are worthy of the support, the NFA then encourages members to join that party and become active - become workers, make donations, etc, - in short to engage in all of the functions that devoted members of a political party participate in. Tomlinson stresses that each member and local group is free to disregard the executive’s recommendation and join a different party and that all involvement is on an individual basis. Tomlinson himself is a member of the Reform Party but he maintains that he is merely participating as an ordinary citizen, not as an

officer of the NFA. Nevertheless, the concerted effort by the NFA to takeover riding associations has caused the group to be viewed with suspicion and disdain by those in the party establishments, even within the Reform Party. Tomlinson admits that some in the Reform Party believe that the NFA is trying to “hijack it and turn it into a single issue party”, an accusation he terms “silly” (Tomlinson interview, 2000). The NFA conducted a survey and determined that 50 percent of its members were members of a party, and that most were members of Reform. Having a large number of NFA members within the party gives it a great deal of influence and understandably makes some party leaders nervous.

Tomlinson believes that the only way to get elected officials to listen to the group’s concerns is to make the group valuable to them. This is why the NFA places such emphasis on becoming party members. The group believes that it is extremely difficult to exercise any influence outside the party structures. Tomlinson stated that the NFA has learned a lot from former US Republican House Leader Newt Gingrich. Under Gingrich’s leadership, the Republican Party captured a majority in both the Senate and the House. Gingrich approached groups like the Christian Coalition and the NRA and formulated a policy agenda that was acceptable to the groups. In exchange Gingrich demanded that the group leadership fully mobilize their members to support the Republican Party. Tomlinson calls this “twenty-first century politics. If you can give them something valuable, they’ll help you. You won’t get everything you want, but something is much better than nothing” (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

The NFA’s main bargaining chip is a direct, influential line of communication to its membership. If a party works with the group, the NFA will use its internal communication channels to influence members to join, donate to and work for that party. Tomlinson stresses that the executive works very hard to educate its membership

politically. In addition to *Party Time!*, the NFA regularly sends its members pamphlets updating them on various political and legal developments. The NFA also regularly attends gun shows where it also distributes these and other promotional materials. As a result, he believes that the entire firearms community looks to the NFA for leadership on the gun control issue. Tomlinson believes that if the NFA leadership suggests that members support a given party, it is very likely the suggestion will be followed (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

This strategy was used in provincial elections in Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan. In the 1994 Manitoba election, the firearms community decided that the ruling Conservatives were the party that was most likely to support challenging the federal government on Bill C-68. They approached the government and proposed an alliance: the firearms community would work to re-elect the government in exchange for support from the government on Bill C-68. The government agreed and issued several strong statements outlining its opposition to the federal law. These statements were passed through the internal communications network of the firearms community to gun owners throughout the province. A similar deal was made with the Conservatives in Ontario. The Liberal leader, Lynn McLeod had talked about setting up "gun-free zones" by using a clause in Bill C-68 that allowed the revocation of gun licenses "for any good and sufficient reason." This was again communicated to the firearms community by the NFA and local gun groups. In Saskatchewan, the ruling NDP had already voiced its opposition to Bill C-68. The firearms community thus formed an alliance with the Saskatchewan NDP, a clear indication of its pragmatism and flexibility. In all of these cases the firearms community's chosen party won, although how much effect they had is unknown. The NFA believes that gun owners vote as a single-issue block and feel that they played a large role in all three victories (*Point Blank*, August 1995).

The NFA's goal in the 1997 federal election was the defeat of the Liberal government, which had passed Bill C-68. The NFA urged its members to support the Reform Party. Although both the New Democratic Party and the Progressive Conservatives had talked about changing Bill C-68, the Reform Party was the strongest supporter of the firearms community and the NFA believed, had the best chance of unseating the Liberals. In the June 1997 issue of the NFA's newsletter *Point Blank*, Tomlinson urged members to either vote for Reform or, if the Reform candidate had little chance of winning, to unite behind the party that had the best chance of defeating the Liberals in that riding. He reminded members, especially those in Ontario, that in 1993 the failure to vote as a single block and the resultant splitting of the vote between Reform and the PCs had led to the Liberal victory.

The NFA's direct involvement in the 1997 campaign was limited to one simple yet clever tactic. In the spring of 1997, the NFA commissioned the creation of an attention-grabbing lime-green sign that read "Remember Bill C-68 when you vote." The NFA's logo was prominently placed at the bottom. The sign was designed and produced by an NFA member, and the group paid for his expenses as well as the production of 1000 signs. The NFA then distributed the signs throughout the country, giving them to provincial executives and gun clubs. Once the signs were in circulation, the NFA was swamped by requests for more of them. The NFA sold the signs, at cost, to whoever asked for them. By the end of the campaign, the NFA estimated that more than 100,000 of the signs had been distributed. The net cost to the group of this effort was virtually nil (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

Tomlinson believes that the sign campaign was extremely effective. "Every time a Liberal candidate went to a rally or gave a speech or got off a bus, there were half a dozen people waving the signs. The TV cameras usually picked them up, too." While this

effort was aimed at the Liberals in general, and not targeted at specific candidates, the NFA did urge its members to be very visible and active in any riding in which a high profile Liberal was running. The main purpose of this was to increase media exposure rather than specifically trying to defeat Liberal candidates. As with most ideological or advocacy groups, the NFA's activities are often planned with an eye towards obtaining publicity. The sign campaign not only increased awareness of the issue of the new gun law, it also heightened the profile of the NFA. To Liberal politicians, it appeared as though the NFA had organized and paid for the sign campaign, a perception which might have earned the NFA greater respect from the government (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

The NFA does not engage in paid political advertising. The reasons for this are cost and audience. The NFA believes communications specifically targeted at the firearms community are far more effective. Tomlinson states unequivocally that "public opinion doesn't matter." He points out that polls have consistently shown that a majority of Canadians support tough gun control laws. But it is just one issue amongst many to supporters and it plays a relatively minor role in their voting choice. A recent *Maclean's* poll showed that even though 77 percent favor tighter gun laws, only 1 percent think gun control is a major issue that needs to be dealt with (*Maclean's*, June 1999). Therefore, it is much more productive for the NFA to concentrate its communications on gun owners. The NFA estimates that there are 7 million firearms owners in Canada and Tomlinson believes that almost all oppose Bill C-68. (The federal government puts the number of gun owners at 3 million.) He further believes that the issue of Bill C-68 has a powerful impact on gun owners. "If you want to make somebody absolutely furious, attack his hobby." Although there is no statistical evidence, Tomlinson believes that most gun owners make their voting choice based on this issue (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

Because of party discipline, the NFA considers individual candidates relatively unimportant. Nevertheless, the NFA will use its strength in the riding association to influence candidate selection, and it has advised its members to put pressure on Liberal MPs to oppose Bill C-68. The group organized a letter writing campaign and asked all of its members in Liberal ridings to write to their MP and voice their opposition to Bill C-68. Tomlinson believes constituent letters have a profound effect on politicians. "Politicians believe that for every letter they get, there are another ten people who feel the same way who haven't bothered to write to them. If they get a couple hundred letters, it makes them very nervous." It was hoped that the letters might turn some MPs against Bill C-68 and create a division in the caucus. Thus far there has been little indication of this but the NFA plans to keep pressuring Liberal MPs, especially those from predominately rural ridings (Tomlinson interview, 2000).

Summary

The NFA has a very specific goal, the elimination of Bill C-68. The group's political strategy revolves around using its substantial membership to build a constituency within a political party. This grassroots strategy has two parts. First, the group offers its help during election campaigns to the party that best represents its viewpoint. The group's leadership endorses the party to its members and uses its communication channels to distribute the party's literature to its members. This gains the party not only votes but also possibly helps it with fundraising and getting volunteers to work on the campaigns.

The second component is that the NFA encourages its members to join parties so that the group will have more influence on them. The group asks its members to become active participants in parties, instructing them on how to gain power within the riding association. This tactic is primarily a hedge against the first component; if the favored

party becomes hostile to the groups views because of political expediency, the NFA will be able to exert influence or at least make itself a nuisance through its power at the local riding association level.

CASE STUDY 2: National Citizens Coalition

Background

The National Citizens Coalition (NCC) was founded in 1967 by Colin Brown, an insurance executive from London, Ontario, and was one of Canada's first advocacy groups. The NCC's views are summed up in its motto of "more freedom through less government." The group calls itself "Canada's foremost organization for the defense of our basic political and economic freedoms" and states that it promotes "free markets, individual freedom and responsibility under limited government, and a strong defence" (www.citizenscoalition.org). The NCC claims to have 45,000 members, with roughly half residing in Alberta and British Columbia, and its budget has been estimated at \$3 million (Ovendon, 1997). NCC is active in both federal and provincial elections and also uses its resources to help individuals challenge government and union activities in the courts. The group claims to be entirely non-partisan and does not engage in direct lobbying activities.

The NCC began when Brown took out a full-page ad in the *Globe and Mail* to attack the Liberal government's national medicare scheme. Brown's efforts soon attracted the attention of political heavyweights such as Earnest Manning, the former Social Credit premier of Alberta and later a Senator, and John Robarts, the former Tory premier of Ontario. These individuals encouraged Brown to create a formal organization to espouse their shared, strongly conservative views. Both Manning and Robarts were on the founding board of directors and were joined by other notable political figures such as Robert Thompson, the head of the national Social Credit party, and Eric Kipping, a former cabinet minister in New Brunswick (Fillmore, 1986).

The NCC's first major success came in 1970, when it took out \$23,000 worth of ads criticizing Liberal Finance Minister Edgar Benson's proposal to increase taxes on high income earners. As a result of the ads, some 200,000 letters of protest were sent to the minister's office (Fillmore 1986). The government was surprised at the reaction and the measure was quickly shelved. This effort gave a considerable boost to the NCC's fundraising efforts and attracted more members. In 1975, the NCC was large enough that Brown decided to make the NCC a non-profit corporation.

In the 1980 election, the NCC ran ads attacking the Clark government on several issues, most notably the acceptance of Vietnamese boat people into Canada. Clark had pledged to allow 50,000 refugees; the NCC ads claimed that the sponsorship provision allowed each refugee to bring fifteen people with him, which meant that the real number of immigrants was around 750,000. Officially, the NCC opposed the pledge on the grounds that this would be too much of a financial burden. The government claimed that the NCC misrepresented the number of potential sponsorships, which in actuality was around 40,000. Nevertheless, the public outcry forced the Clark government to back down from its initial pledge. After the election several Tories claimed that the NCC's ads had contributed to their defeat (Fillmore 1986).

In 1984 the NCC challenged a federal election law in court. All three major parties – the Conservatives, Liberals and NDP- voted for Bill C-169, which removed the good faith provision from the Canada Elections Act. This meant that third-party advertising that promoted or attacked candidates or parties was illegal. The NCC ran ads attacking the law in major newspapers across the country and also sued the government in the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench. Justice Donald Medhurst upheld the group's challenge, ruling that the government had failed to show that third party spending was harmful and thus it could not

rely on the Section 1 “reasonable limits” clause in the Charter. Although the ruling only applied to Alberta, the government decided not to enforce the law anywhere else.

By the mid-1980’s, the NCC was claiming 30,000 supporters and had the financial resources to increase its activities. Donations almost doubled from 1983 to 1984, topping \$1 million (Fillmore, 1986). Two issues dominated most of the groups attention, the National Energy Program (NEP) and the Canada Health Act. After the dramatic rise in oil prices, the Liberal government created the NEP to mitigate the impact of high prices by establishing a “Canada oil price.” The NCC reportedly spent approximately \$700,000 on ads criticizing the NEP between 1982 and the 1984 election (Fillmore 1986). The ads consistently made the claim that the NEP had scared away billions of investment dollars and forced numerous small, independent oil companies into bankruptcy. The campaign was very popular in Alberta, specifically within the oil business community. Membership and contributions from Alberta increased dramatically, to the point where an office was opened in Calgary in 1984. Brown, long an opponent of socialized health care, strongly objected to the Canada Health Act of 1982, which sought to establish national health care standards. The NCC’s ads asked readers “How would you like your open-heart surgery done by a civil servant? Or how would you like your baby delivered by the same people who deliver the mail?” In a 1984 fundraising letter Brown claimed that “more people would die because of the new Act” and ended the letter with a plea for funds (Braid and Sharpe, 1992).

The 1984 election brought renewed hope to the NCC. Pierre Trudeau resigned and was replaced by John Turner, and Brian Mulroney had earlier replaced Joe Clark as Tory leader. The NCC initially believed that Mulroney was someone who shared many of their views and geared their efforts to help the Conservatives. Most of the NCC’s advertising in the 1984 election was issue oriented. Although the NEP and the Canada Health Act were

clearly associated with the previous Liberal government, the NCC did not attack the Liberal party, or any of its key members directly (Tanguay and Kay 1998). This may have been because, despite its court victory, the NCC was still unsure of the legal status of such ads. During the campaign, the NCC ran anti-NEP ads in Ontario, where support for the program had been high. Alberta Tory MP Blaine Thacker said the groups ads were "invaluable" in helping erode support for the NEP in Ontario and helped pave the way for the Conservative victory (Fillmore 1986). Another of its main efforts in 1984 was a voter's guide that compared the policy positions of the parties on key issues (Tanguay and Kay, 1998). The 1984 election represented an unprecedented level of involvement for the NCC.

The NCC quickly grew disenchanted with the Mulroney government. It took two years to dismantle the hated NEP and left other Liberal policies, such as the Canada Health Act, relatively untouched. David Somerville, who had been the group's vice president since 1978, succeeded Brown in 1987. Somerville decided to focus the group's resources in the 1988 election on attacking Ed Broadbent and the NDP. The NCC ran some 3500 radio, television and newspaper ads calling Broadbent "very, very scary." It also sent out 300,000 letters criticizing Broadbent and the NDP's policies. The total cost of this campaign was estimated at \$850,000 (Hiebert, 1991). The campaign was cut short half way through the election for two reasons. First, there was a significant backlash against the campaign, as many Canadians thought the ads were unfair and went too far in their attacks on a politician generally given high marks for integrity (Hiebert, 1991). Secondly, free trade emerged as the seminal issue of the election. The NCC, like everyone else, was surprised at this development and it quickly changed its focus to the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The NCC took out pro free-trade ads, although some of these ads also attacked Broadbent's "scary socialism" and Turner's integrity (Tanguay and Kay, 1998)

Mulroney was returned to office in 1988, but by this time the NCC was extremely disenchanted with the Conservatives. The new Reform Party attracted the attention of both the NCC board and the group's supporters. Ideologically, Reform was on the same page as the NCC. Somerville stated that "the Reform Party has cribbed probably two-thirds of our policy book" and that at Reform's 1987 founding convention "one-third to one-half of the delegates were NCC supporters"(Braid and Sharpe, 1992). Several NCC board members, such as Eric Kipping and Stan Waters, became major players within Reform. Although there was significant personnel overlap, the NCC kept its official distance. For instance, Somerville only attended Reform conventions as an "observer" and never took out a membership in the party (Braid and Sharpe, 1992).

In 1993 parliament again tried to limit the influence of interest groups by passing Bill C-114, which limited the amount groups could spend on attacking or supporting candidates to \$1000. Once again the NCC took the government to Alberta's Court of Queens Bench. The court struck down the law as a violation of Charter sections 2(b), 2(d) and 3. The government again decided not to enforce the law anywhere else. It did appeal the decision, however, and in June 1996 the Alberta Court of Appeal upheld the lower court ruling.

By the time of the 1993 election it was clear that Reform would play a significant role. But like in 1984, the NCC concentrated on issue advocacy, specifically criticizing the GST and the deficit, rather than directly supporting parties and candidates. It did launch an \$80,000 late-campaign blitz warning voters that a Liberal government meant a return to the failed tax-and-spend policies of the past. The NCC also spent around \$50,000 targeting Jim Hawkes, the Tory MP for Calgary West (Tanguay and Kay, 1998). Hawkes had been the chair of the all-party parliamentary committee that had drawn up Bill C-114. The ads attacked Hawkes for supporting C-114, the GST and the MP pensions. Hawkes was beaten

by Reform's Steven Harper, his former assistant and a NCC member who in 1997 became the group's president.

The NCC's donations continued to rise to point where it was reportedly receiving \$2.5-3 million annually (Ovendon 1997). (The NCC does not publicly release its financial details or the names of its contributors.) In 1996, the group embarked on another high profile campaign against Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps. Copps had resigned her seat after opposition MP's claimed she had reneged on her promise to quit if the government did not rescind the GST. Copps ran in the by-election for her old seat in Hamilton. The NCC spent \$150,000 on ads attacking Copps, and received much media attention in the process (Ovendon, 1997). Copps won anyway, albeit by a much narrower margin than in 1993.

The NCC received even more attention during the 1997 election for Operation Pork Chop. The NCC targeted 40 first time MPs –39 Liberals and 1 Reform - who had opted into the pension plan. The group claimed that by not re-electing these members, Canadian taxpayers would save millions of dollars. The ads featured a picture of the MP above pigs drinking champagne in a trough full of dollar bills. Liberal Anne McClellan, an Edmonton MP targeted by Operation Pork Chop, called the ads "very ugly and very unfair" and demanded that the NCC reveal its donors (Ovendon 1997). McClellan managed to retain her seat, but fellow Edmonton MP Judy Bethel lost and blamed the NCC's campaign for her defeat. In all, nine of the forty members were defeated, and the NCC was quick to take credit.

In the mid-1990's the NCC became more involved in provincial politics. In 1995 it spent over \$100,000 on a multi media advertising campaign that hoped to "wipe the (Ontario) NDP off the electoral map"(NCC news release, May 1, 1995). What received the most attention were billboards the NCC purchased which read "Bye-bye Bob Rae –

Socialism didn't work." The Rae government was badly beaten in the election. The NCC was also active in the British Columbia and Saskatchewan elections, attacking the NDP governments in both provinces. In BC, the NCC has had an ongoing feud with Premier Glen Clark and his NDP government. The group was involved in two lawsuits against the government. In 1997, the BC government passed a law similar to C-114, limiting the amount individuals and groups could spend to \$5,000. The NCC, along with an organization called HELP BC, has paid the legal costs for Garry Nixon, who filed the suit. (HELP BC merged with the NCC in 1999 and David Stockell, the group's head, became NCC vice-president for British Columbia.) The NCC also has supported a suit by three BC residents who are trying to have the results of the 1997 election overturned on the grounds that the NDP committed electoral fraud because, the plaintiffs allege, it lied about having balanced the budget.

Political Strategy and Tactics

The NCC is formally structured as a non-profit corporation. Decision-making within the organization is done almost entirely by senior management in consultation with the board of directors. This seems to imply that member participation is minimal, but Harper points out that members participate through fundraising. "They have the power to fund or not to fund a campaign. We've had proposed campaigns that didn't go anywhere". Fundraising is done on a cause-by-cause basis and money spent on advertising is strictly segregated from operating expenses. Harper feels that this is not only ethically proper but that it helps the leadership stay in touch with the views of its membership. The NCC also makes other efforts to get its members involved, such as encouraging them to contact the leadership with suggestions or concerns and by surveying the group's members annually on a variety of topics (Harper interview, 2000).

Like most advocacy groups, the specific tactics the group will use are decided upon by the leadership. This is necessary so that the NCC can retain the flexibility required to mount effective campaigns and maximize its available resources. The necessity of being able to adjust strategies in short time frames makes widespread participation unfeasible. The NCC formulates a skeletal plan prior to an election that proposes a general campaign idea or goal. Harper said a good example was the 1995 Ontario election. "We proposed to our members a campaign against Bob Rae and they supported it financially. But the particulars were decided quite late" (Harper interview, 2000).

The NCC engages in two primary activities, issue advocacy and litigation. The goal of issue advocacy is to get the issues the group feels strongly about before the public. The main vehicle for achieving this is election advertising. It is during an election that the public is most receptive to political communications. However, the NCC also does considerable advertising during non-election periods. The advantage of this is that the NCC often has the field to itself as there is far less political communication outside of elections. However, Harper believes that non-election advertising is only effective if a group can achieve a level of name recognition during an election. "If you can't do election campaigning, then people won't pay attention to your non-election ads – that's why we've consistently opposed campaign ad restrictions" (Harper interview, 2000).

The NCC sees using the courts as another way of publicizing its issues and as a way to achieve tangible change to policies and laws. The group has twice successfully opposed the government's efforts to impose restrictions on third-party spending and has used a court challenge to draw attention to how unions were using membership dues. The Charter has provided a means for interest groups to achieve their goals outside of the ordinary political channels; in a sense the courts offer a short cut around the often long and

frustrating political process. Harper believes that litigation will likely remain an important component of the NCC's strategy (Harper interview, 2000).

The NCC's electoral involvement is almost exclusively limited to its advertising. It does not make political contributions nor does it try to mobilize its membership to join or work for political parties. The main reason for this is that the NCC wishes to remain independent of the parties. Harper states flatly that "being too close to a party destroys the integrity of an advocacy group." He believes that people are attracted to advocacy groups because they do not sacrifice their ideals to get elected. "Groups that work closely with a party will either have to change their goals or eventually leave that party or else the party will effectively become the group." Harper says that he gave up his Reform Party membership when he became president of the NCC (Harper interview, 2000).

The NCC does make endorsements based on the parties' policy platforms. The group has not prepared a voter guide since the 1984 election, but is considering doing so in the future. Harper states that the cost and logistical problems of distributing the guide to the public are causes for concern. The group does frequently commission public opinion polls and does publicize the results in its ads. The main objective of these polls is to provide ammunition for the group's ads. If it can cite a poll to back its viewpoint, this naturally makes the ad more effective. But the polls are also an important source of information to the group and are considered when determining strategy in upcoming campaigns (Harper interview, 2000).

The NCC has run ads on a wide spectrum of issues. Most of its ads are in newspapers, and it usually tries to run them in the major dailies. The NCC also makes extensive use of billboards and radio. Television is used far less frequently because airtime and production costs are relatively high compared to other mediums. The group creates virtually all its ads in-house. It puts a large emphasis on coming up with creative,

humorous ads, such as pigs drinking champagne in Operation Pork Chop, and memorable catchphrases, such as the “Bye-bye Bob Rae” used in Ontario in 1995. Because many of its ads are negative, the NCC tries to use humor to soften the effect without losing the message. Harper believes negative ads are extremely effective if they are well done and if they emphasize the right issues. For example, he felt Operation Pork Chop was successful because the ads were funny and because the public has no tolerance for the ridiculously generous MP pensions. He defended the ads portrayal of MPs as pigs. “What tends to engage people in issues are personalities; that’s why the linkage to candidates is important” (Harper interview, 2000).

When it comes to targeting individual MPs, Harper maintains that issues are still the main focus. The MPs attacked in Operation Pork Chop were chosen entirely because of the pension issue- those first-time MPs who opted into the pension plan and thus would be eligible if they won a second term. Harper stated that all campaigns have a national objective, whether they focus on individuals or not. “The primary goal of the NCC is to influence public opinion, not the views of the political parties and government officials. Targeting is just a tactic. The goal of Pork Chop was to publicize the pension issue. In reality, the ability to target is extremely limited under our system” (Harper interview, 2000).

Harper admits that the success of the NCC’s campaigns is hard to judge. The first measure is whether it was supported by the membership. Media coverage is also an important yardstick. The goal of all of the NCC’s political advertising is to set an agenda by getting its issues in front of the public and creating a debate. The group views this as a long-term process, which makes immediate results less important. The NCC’s political activities also serve the dual purpose of promoting the group itself; the growth in membership and donations is a good indication of the group’s success over the last thirty

years. The ultimate goal is to effect a change on public policy. But Harper believes that the group cannot really take credit for the end result because by then many others have been involved. The primary measure of success for an advocacy group is how effective it is at influencing public opinion, which is obviously extremely difficult to determine (Harper interview, 2000).

Summary

In a relatively short period of time, the NCC has grown from a one-man operation to the foremost advocacy group in Canada. Much like US groups, the NCC has been able to raise substantial amounts of money for its political activities. These resources have been used almost entirely on political advertising and court challenges. It is extremely difficult to quantify what results it has achieved through its ad campaigns. Some of its ads have generated a lot of publicity, and this has naturally helped promote the group and its views. But if its goal is to convince the public to adopt its conservative values, it is much harder to measure any successes. The NCC can be judged to have been successful if only because it has grown over the years and its members have continued to fund its activities. In the end, the ultimate measure of a group's effectiveness is whether it satisfies the expectations of its own members.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

Introduction

This section will analyze and compare the results of the case studies. The two sets of groups will be compared using the four criteria for effective representation- activism, money, political sophistication and publicity. This will help to answer questions that are central to the hypothesis of this paper. Are Canadian groups becoming more like those in the US? Are there similarities in the development of groups on Canada that indicate that they may yet come to resemble their American counterparts?

NRA – NFA Comparison

The Four Criteria for Effective Issue Representation

In terms of political activism, the groups are quite comparable. The NFA is politically active through its efforts to gain a voice within political parties and it has participated, albeit in a limited way, in election campaigns. But it is to be expected that groups that have a specific legislative goal - the replacement of Bill C-68 in this case - would participate substantially in politics. The difference between the NFA and the NRA comes in the breadth of their involvement. The NRA is very active in a full range of political activities and is heavily involved in election campaigns through contributions, political advertising and grassroots mobilization. The NFA's participation has essentially been limited to directing its members to join the political parties.

The NFA has very limited financial resources and thus cannot use money in ways that advance its cause. The NRA has a large budget for political activities and raises funds explicitly for political activities. It contributes a lot of money to campaigns and is able fund large political advertising campaigns. The NRA's money is used as a carrot/stick for candidates. The group financially helps those candidates who support its views, which increases the likelihood of like-minded representatives being elected. Once

in office, the group lets those it has helped know that a vote against the group will not only mean the loss of future aid but also that the representative will likely be targeted by the group and that it will spent heavily to defeat him or her. The threat of being targeted works almost equally well on representatives whom the group has not supported as well. Unlike corporate donors, the NRA is not planting seed money for its lobbyists. It uses its financial strength as a lobbying weapon.

The NFA has done a poor job at publicizing itself and its issues. The group does not believe political advertising is effective and it has not utilized the media to build support for its views. As such, it is still viewed as an extremist, fringe group, and is usually excluded when debate over Bill C-68 occurs. The recent Supreme Court challenge of the law garnered some media coverage but little was focused on the NFA. Although there are according to varying estimates 3-7 million gun owners in Canada, the issue of Bill C-68 is relatively settled in the public's eye. The NRA effectively uses the media to advertise itself and its views. There is rarely any forum concerning the issue of gun control that does not include a representative of the group. The NRA is always asked for its views by the media and legislators when a new initiative is proposed.

The NFA has a coherent political strategy, which indicates a level of political sophistication. However, it has not been able to put any real pressure on the Liberal government to change the gun law or to create much debate or influence public opinion. The NRA is extremely politically sophisticated. It knows how to raise money from its supporters and how to use it to impact elections and legislative initiatives. It has a strategy and is able to adjust to changing conditions. Its ads are sophisticated and designed to elicit strong responses from those who see them. Perhaps most importantly, the group is highly proficient at mobilizing its members to put pressure on elected representatives.

In each of the four criteria, the NFA lags far behind the NRA. The two worst areas for the NFA are money and publicity. The ability to use money to influence lawmakers and public opinion by advertising the group and its views are crucial components of the NRA's success. There is little indication that the NFA resembles the NRA at an earlier stage of development. If this were the case, there would at least be some progress in both of these areas. Instead, the NFA has chosen to ignore public opinion and tie its efforts to a political party.

The Impact of Institutions on Group Behavior

There are several reasons the NRA has been very successful at defeating gun control initiatives. A large part is attributable to the importance of private money in US elections. The reliance on groups for fundraising forces elected officials to, at the very least, listen to a group's views. The ability of groups to use money to influence representatives is the biggest advantage that the US system gives to groups. Contributions, fundraising events and independent expenditures are used to help elect pro-gun representatives and maintain influence once they are in office. The US system gives well-financed interests a distinct advantage that is mostly unavailable in Canada.

But the NRA's ability to combat gun control legislation is a product of more than just money. The localized congressional elections allow groups with large membership bases to use its members as a resource. Like in Canada, the parties are much stronger at a macro-national level than they are locally and the local elections give greater weight to individual issues than national elections. The lack of party discipline means that representatives are on their own and are more tied to their local constituencies. In local, candidate-centered elections, individual issues can gain an exaggerated importance, a situation far less likely in national, party-centered elections. This allows the NRA to exert great influence on members from areas where gun ownership is high – mostly

predominantly rural states like Arizona and Vermont. Representatives know that NRA members usually vote based on the gun control issue. The NRA has used its large, zealous membership to help elect pro-gun politicians and to put pressure on representatives to vote for the group's agenda. Although money does play a large role in the NRA's success, its grassroots strength and ability to mobilize its members is an equally effective weapon.

The NRA illustrates how the US system benefits group involvement and allows them to provide more effective issue representation than political parties. The NRA uses its funds and its members as a carrot/stick. It uses these resources to help elect as many pro-gun members as possible. Once these members are in the Congress, the NRA uses the influence it has gained by providing support during the campaign to pressure the representative to vote the way the group wants. The elected representatives face a difficult choice. If they betray the NRA, they know not only that they will lose the group's financial support but also that they will be targeted for defeat by the group in the next election. This will likely cost the representative a significant number of votes. The NRA reminds the representative of this by urging its members to write to their members during gun issue votes. A large stack of angry letters from constituents is a very effective reminder of the costs of going against the NRA. The group is a tough and skilled political infighter. It generally refuses to compromise on even minor points. It is very thorough when it comes to rewarding its supporters and punishing those who oppose it. These tactics have earned the group widespread hostility within the political community, the media and the public at large. But they have also maintained the support of their members.

Some of the NRA's success is attributable to the gun culture of the US. Guns have long been part of American folklore and its frontier mythology. Americans have a much

more permissive attitude towards guns than citizens of other countries do. While the NRA has influenced these attitudes, they existed long before the group became an important political player. Still, it is remarkable that a nation with as much gun violence as the US has not sought to redress this problem through some sort of gun-control measures. Whether one believes that these measures are a proper response or not, this has been the standard reaction in other countries such as Britain and Australia, where mass shootings led governments to immediately pass further gun restrictions. That the US has recently seen numerous such incidents without new laws being passed is at least in part a testament to the ability of the NRA to discredit gun control initiatives in the minds of a large portion of the public.

The NFA is operating under much less favorable conditions than the NRA. Canada has never had the gun culture that the US has had and support for gun control is much higher. The parliamentary system and the stronger, more disciplined national parties system means elections are party-centered and national in scope and that individual members are more insulated against local pressure on specific issues. National elections make single-issue voting, which would benefit groups like the NFA, much less prevalent. Canadian elections are less costly and a good portion of the cost is financed by tax revenues. This minimizes the ability of groups to use money to influence lawmakers. It is very significant that the NFA has not even tried to mount a major political fundraising campaign.

The NFA has tried to adjust to these circumstances by aligning itself with the Reform/Canadian Alliance party. But by doing so, it has tied its fortunes to that party and limited the role it can play in the entire political process. Its close relationship with the Alliance effectively eliminates it from holding any influence over any of the other parties, especially the governing Liberals. Contrast this with the NRA, which although most of its

supporters are Republicans, keeps a formal distance from the party so that it can attract the support of Democrats who support the group's agenda. By working so closely within a political party, the NFA is offering little that that party cannot. To a certain extent, joining the NFA offers little more representation to gun owners than joining the Alliance. The NFA's close ties to the Alliance prevent it from fully becoming a good representative of its membership and its views. If the Alliance never captures enough votes to form the government, the NFA's goal of replacing Bill C-68 will not be realized. If the day comes when the Canadian Alliance is in position to get rid of Bill 68, it is likely to get most of the credit from gun owners and the role of the NFA will be minimized, limiting its effectiveness in any future battles.

The Reform/Canadian Alliance party has been supportive of the NFA's stance on Bill C-68 and has adopted the group's alternative legislation proposals into its policy platform. But since the public seems to support - or is indifferent to - the government's registration program, it is possible that this situation could change. The Alliance might feel compelled to change its position on Bill C-68 in order to attract support. If this happens, the group will likely try to use its position within the party to prevent this. This could lead to a messy confrontation between the party and the group. In this situation it is likely that the NFA will eventually be forced out of the party or that it will have to compromise its goals in order to retain any influence.

The NFA leadership believes that public opinion is irrelevant in the Canadian political process and as such is uninterested in taking its views to the public. By dismissing the importance of public opinion, the NFA is not building support for its policy goals, making it likely that any gains it achieves are only temporary. The NFA has made little effort to publicize the problems with Bill C-68, which might have helped put pressure on the Liberals to at least listen to the group's concerns. Instead, Bill C-68 was

implemented with minimal public debate. In contrast, the NRA has played a large role in calling into question the effectiveness and fairness of gun control legislation amongst a large segment of the American public, and this has helped the group fight legislative efforts. Again, the NFA is acting more like a business pressure group than an advocacy group. Ignoring public opinion for what is a very public issue seems like a dubious strategy at best.

Conclusion

Overall, the NRA is a far more effective representative of its constituents than the NFA. This is shown clearly in the results. The NRA has consistently been able to impede gun control legislation that polls show the majority of Americans support. The attempts to ban plastic guns, armor-piercing bullets and assault rifles are all examples of the NRA's ability to defeat or water down legislation that was widely supported by the general public. Not only has it successfully pressured elected representatives, it has also impacted public opinion. The NRA has been able to erode public support for gun control measures, which it characterizes as intrusive and ineffective, by promoting its views in the media. The NFA, on the other hand, has not been able to budge the Liberal government on Bill C-68 and has not been able to impact public support for the legislation. While it has helped write the alternative legislation that the Canadian Alliance is proposing, this has had little impact on public opinion and will not come to fruition unless the Alliance wins an election.

NCC-NCPAC Comparison

The Four Criteria for Effective Issue Representation

The NCC is active in both provincial and federal politics and both during elections and at other times. It has participated primarily through its political advertising, although it has also been involved in several important court challenges. The NCC today

is very similar to NCPAC during the 1980s, when it spend huge sums on third-party advertising campaigns. The NCC has been the one advocacy group in Canada that has been able to raise large amounts of money. But NCPAC's fundraising declined and the group borrowed heavily to fund its activities. The financial problems encountered by NCPAC convinced Bozell to abandon direct-mail and instead make the CVC focus on raising its funds from a limited pool of large and loyal donors. This is similar to how the NCC raises its money, but the NCC has a much larger pool of donors to draw from and has been able to raise proportionately more money.

The NCC has succeeded in publicizing itself and its views. While campaigns such as Operation Pork Chop may not have succeeded in terms of electoral results, they have increased the group's public profile. The appointment of Harper, a former MP, as president has also added to the group's credibility and public image. The NCC has gained a level of notoriety, especially from those opposed to its views, and is usually singled out when the issue of big dollar third-party spending is discussed. This is comparable to the stir caused by NCPAC when it first appeared on the US scene in 1980. NCPAC's big spending and attack ads drew the ire of liberals and got widespread media attention.

The NCC is run by experienced political hands who have a high level of political sophistication. Its ads are for the most part memorable and attention grabbing and the group knows how to generate media exposure and how to sell its issues. The leadership has managed the group with a long-term approach and the group has grown steadily since its inception. NCPAC was an innovator in that it was a pioneer in both direct-mail fundraising and large-scale attack ad campaigns. But the leadership made several strategic errors - overspending, making false claims in its ads, focusing on short-term electoral results - which contributed to the group's demise.

The comparison shows that the NCC is very similar to its American counterparts and also that it has avoided some of the pitfalls that damaged the US groups. Both of the American groups studied had several problems that prevented them from being an effective advocacy group over the long term. The US groups studied here existed mainly on the efforts of one individual or a small group of individuals, who made all the important decisions. The only real participation that people had in NCPAC and CVC was through their making a donation. The reliance on either direct-mail marketing or a limited number of large contributors for fundraising not only creates a precarious financial situation but it precludes the group from achieving a stable, active and committed membership.

The demise of both NCPAC and the CVC points out some of the flaws in the PAC system. It is relatively easy to set up a PAC in the US. This allows people to use PACs for their own objectives and also facilitates the proliferation of similar groups to the point where there is simply not enough support for all of them to survive. While both groups in the US initially were able to raise large amounts of money, fundraising soon declined. The decline of NCPAC coincided with the success of the Reagan-Bush era, which moved the entire political spectrum in the US to the right. Because so much of the conservative groups fundraising hinged on fear of the liberal side imposing its agenda, it was much harder for conservatives to raise money after they had won the battles of the 1980's.

The NCC has avoided these problems and has grown steadily over the past three decades. One of the major differences between the American groups examined here and the NCC is how they raise money. The NCC does not use direct-mail advertising. It canvases its own members only and raises money on a campaign by campaign basis. This ensures that the group is financially healthy and that the leadership is in tune with the

views of its members/contributors. The way the NCC raises money is in a way a form of participation – members choose what activities they want to support. As long as its members are satisfied that the group represents their views, the leadership can claim that it has been successful.

Third-Party Advertising

The NCC's political strategy is focused on using political advertising and the media to influence public opinion. Essentially, there are two measures for the effectiveness of this strategy. The first is the actual results achieved on election day. The group has run major ad campaigns in each of the last four elections. In 1984, the group focused its efforts on issues such as the National Energy Program and did not try to defeat or elect any candidates. In 1988, the NCC began with a campaign that attempted to discredit NDP leader Ed Broadbent before switching its attention to the free trade issue. In the case of both the NEP and free trade the NCC was on the winning side, although what role it played in Liberal losses in 1984 and 1988 is strictly conjecture. Tanguay and Kay (1993: 95) found that in the 41 ridings targeted in the anti-Broadbent campaign, the NDP actually performed on average 1.8 percent better than in the 19 remaining ridings not targeted in those provinces. In 1993, the NCC initially focused on issues like the deficit and the GST, which obliquely was an attack on the Conservatives. When it became apparent later on that a Liberal victory was likely, the group conducted a late-campaign ad blitz warning voters not to elect a Liberal government. The Liberals won a sizeable majority, while the Conservatives were almost wiped out. Operation Pork Chop was the group's most ambitious campaign to date. Forty MPs (39 Liberal, 1 Reform) were targeted and only eight were not returned to Parliament. While the NCC called this a victory, Tanguay and Kay (1998) found that 37 of the 40 MP's actually improved their performance over the previous election when compared to their party's swing vote – the

average increase or decrease over 1993 for that party in that province. This record seems to reinforce the point that the national elections in Canada make it difficult for advocacy groups to get voters to focus on individual issues.

NCPAC's results in this area were similarly ambiguous. The group claimed credit for the defeat of four senators in 1980, but it is hard to say just how much influence its attacks had on the end result. According to Sabato (1990), all four faced difficult battles to be re-elected before NCPAC became involved. In 1982, only one of the twelve targeted incumbents lost, and he was under indictment for fraud (Godwin, 1988). NCPAC's own polling data showed that its negative ads were able to erode an incumbent's support, at least in the initial stages of the campaign (Sabato 1990). But it also showed that the negativity of its campaigns often resulted in a backlash against the group and its favored candidate (Sabato 1990). Further, NCPAC's credibility suffered when it was shown that many of its claims were exaggerated or even false and this also served to decrease the effectiveness of their ads.

The second measure is the level of publicity generated by the ads. Because it is difficult to target individual candidates in a national, party-centered election system, the NCC has tied its attacks on candidates and parties to a specific issue. Thus, even if the targeted candidate wins, the group believes it has at least created a public debate. In the anti-NDP campaign, the issue was the party's "socialist" intervention in the economy. With Operation Pork Chop, it was MP pensions. The pension issue was a relatively easy mark in that it was not that difficult to create widespread public outrage at the extremely generous MP pensions. The anti-Broadbent ads were more problematic as polls at the time showed that the public held Broadbent in high regard personally, even if they did not agree with many of his party's positions (Tanguay and Kay, 1993). This probably limited

the impact of the NCC's intended message that an NDP government would damage the economy.

The question is did the NCC's ad campaigns succeed in raising the public profile of the group and its issues? The ultimate goal of the NCC's ads is to get a majority of the public to agree with its views – for example, that government intervention in the economy is harmful. There is simply no objective way to measure how effective they have been in this respect. Obviously, the mere act of running the ads achieves a certain level of exposure. The group correctly takes the position that this objective must be viewed over the long-term. The NCC has for the most part concentrated on print media, and this has limited its audience, since so much of political debate is concentrated on electronic media. This may explain why it has not ingrained itself into political discourse like the NRA has in the US. Despite the publicity generated by some of its campaigns and legal challenges, the NCC is still a relatively obscure group - the majority of Canadians have probably never heard of it.

NCPAC initially generated a lot of publicity for itself and conservative causes because it was a pioneer in third-party advertising in the US and because its ads were so negative. Publicity is particularly important to the American conservative community, many of whom believe that the mainstream media's liberal bias has caused it to ignore or misrepresent conservative viewpoints. In this way NCPAC probably played at least a small role in the success the conservative movement in the US enjoyed throughout the 1980's. Groups such as NCPAC were seen as one of the few outlets available to conservatives for getting their views out to the public. This same reasoning probably applies to the NCC as well. At a minimum, the group has been able to attract attention to itself and its causes because it has essentially been the only group that has consistently run large-scale ad campaigns in Canada.

Conclusion

A comparison with the US groups shows that the NCC is very similar to its American counterparts, and in certain ways is better off. Both of the American groups studied had several problems that prevented them from being an effective advocacy group over the long term. Bad financial management, lack of any real participation and the use of the group as a forum for personal ambitions by leaders made them less effective than they could have been and contributed heavily to their short life spans. NCPAC's reliance on direct-mail solicitations and its overspending drove the PAC into bankruptcy. The CVC, essentially run entirely by Brent Bozell, became defunct after Bozell became a media figure and found bigger and better jobs. The NCC has avoided these problems and has grown steadily over the past three decades. But the Canadian political structure has still minimized the impact the group has had on Canadian politics. The NCC has had limited success in defeating candidates in elections. It has effectively marketed its views, but it is difficult to tell if its ads have impacted public opinion in any significant way. Its biggest achievement is that it has maintained the support of its members, something the US groups studied here were unable to do.

Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

This paper posed the idea that interest groups in Canada were in the process of growing and evolving to the point where they would come to resemble the powerful, influential groups in the US. There were two reasons behind this hypothesis. The profound social changes that had taken place throughout the industrialized world in the post-war era had created circumstances that favored group politics. Secondly, groups provided more effective issue representation than traditional political parties, especially for those with strong views on specific issues. Based on this line of thought, American groups were considered a barometer. The US political system, with its careful division of powers and Bill of Rights, emphasizes representation over effectiveness of government (Wilson, 1982: 75). The US structure has created a situation in which groups are too strong and this has hindered the ability of the government to function effectively. Problems such as gridlock and pork-barreling can be blamed to a large extent on the weakness of the parties and the strength of groups. The reliance on interest groups in campaigns, especially with respect to campaign finance, has created doubts about the integrity of the entire political system.

In Canada all of the three major group activities – contributions, third-party advertising and grassroots activities - are to at least some extent limited by the political structure. The single biggest reason for the power of interest groups in the US is the campaign finance system. By allowing unlimited spending, the US system encourages candidates to raise as much money as possible. Since there is no provision for public financing (except for presidential contests), much of the money comes from PACs. The importance of money in campaigns and the reliance on groups to provide it forces politicians in the US to work with groups. This open system naturally makes it easier for groups to raise funds from their members, who see that their donations have a direct

impact. In Canada, a significant portion of the cost of campaigns is financed by tax dollars and candidates and parties are subject to spending limits. This has lessened the importance of fundraising for candidates and effectively eliminated contributions as a tool for obtaining influence. Issue and ideological groups for the most part have not made contributions. Amongst corporations, there is less tendency to view contributions as a necessary means of achieving influence and access. While the Canadian election finance system has some flaws, such as the exclusion of leadership contests from the regulatory structure, it has succeeded in minimizing the influence of money on politics, and this has inhibited groups from becoming larger players in the political process.

The 1988 election and the large amount of money spent by the pro-free trade side caused concerns among some scholars in Canada that wealthy interest groups would become more involved in election campaigns through third-party spending. Hiebert (1991) argues that it is unfair for groups to be able to spend freely during elections while parties and candidates are constrained by spending limits. The parties seemed to share this view: Bill C-2 represents the third attempt by the government to limit third-party advertising. Subsequent elections have not borne out this fear. The 1988 election was an anomaly because it centered on a single issue, the Free Trade Agreement, and this encouraged groups with a lot at stake to become involved at an unprecedented level. Although some groups have since run third-party campaigns, there has been nowhere near the amount of spending as in 1988, mainly because very few interest groups in Canada have the resources to run large-scale ad campaigns. The NCC was by far the biggest individual spender in both 1993 and 1997. If the NCC's spending is ignored, the total amount spent in 1993 and 1997 is a tiny proportion of the overall amount spent during the elections (Tanguay and Kay, 1998).

There is also the matter of whether these ad campaigns are at all effective in the Canadian context. Tanguay and Kay (1998) argue that they are not, and their findings lend some support to this conclusion. They point out that the multi-party, party-centered national elections make it difficult for third parties to concentrate their resources and “cherry-pick” individual candidates. Without this ability, candidates have less reason to fear the impact of third parties, and are thus less likely to change their policy views in the group’s direction. It also means that groups have a much harder time achieving tangible results that they can use to recruit new members and raise funds. Tanguay and Kay point out that the big difference between Canada and the US is that in the American two-party system eroding support for one candidate helps the other candidate. In Canada’s current five party setup this is not the case. This limits the effectiveness of negative advertising and may explain why Canadian campaigns feature far fewer attack ads than US campaigns.

While third-party advertising surely must have some effect, it is almost impossible to empirically determine how much impact it has on voting decisions. The political climate has quickly adjusted to large third-party advertising campaigns. Candidates have responded to the attacks and portrayed themselves as victims of moneyed, outside interest groups. As the negativity increased, the public has tired of all the charges and counter-charges and third-party ad campaigns have become less effective than they were initially. Third-party advertising is just one more source of information for voters. It must compete to be heard amongst the parties’ own communications, news programs, editorials, peers, family, etc. The public is sophisticated enough to know that such ads represent opinions from organizations that often have vested interests in certain policy matters. In this sense third-party advertising suffers the same difficulty that the

parties own communications have – the public likely discounts information received from sources that it believes are biased.

One of the proposed reasons that groups in Canada would take over a larger role in politics was that groups offered greater opportunities for real participation than the political parties. The case studies examined here show mixed results. With the conservative groups in both countries, participation is essentially limited to making donations. The groups do little to encourage their supporters to become more actively involved in the political process in general or with the decision-making process within the groups themselves. NCPAC and the CVC were both run entirely by a small group of individuals with almost no input from supporters. The manner in which the NCC raises money gives its members greater say over how that money is spent. But what primarily attracts the NCC's supporters are the group's ideas rather than the opportunity to personally participate. On the other hand, both the NRA and the NFA have made effective use of their members' willingness to become actively involved to put direct pressure on politicians. Mobilizing their supporters is a key element of the NRA's ability to influence lawmakers during campaigns and during crucial votes in the Congress. With no financial resources, the NFA has to rely on its members becoming active within the political parties as the only way to influence the process.

But grassroots activities are also rendered less effective in the Canadian system. Again, national elections mean that the parties need not be as swayed by vocal minorities. The NRA uses its members very effectively on representatives in the House and Senate, who, because they are essentially on their own, can be intimidated by hundreds of letters from the group's members. The numbers required to do this at a national level are much higher. The NFA, claiming 100,000 members, has been mostly ignored by the Liberal government. National elections force voters to view the candidate's issue positions as a

basket of goods and therefore single-issue voting is less prevalent. This limits the ability of groups to focus debate on their particular issue.

In summary, the case studies show little indication that there is convergence between group behavior in Canada with that of the US. The cases demonstrate that the institutional differences have forced groups in Canada to behave differently than in the US. The NFA has tied itself to a political party, believing that strength within the parties is the only way to achieve their policy aims. While some groups in the US, notably the Christian Coalition's attempt to force the Republican Party to adopt its views on social issues, also to some degree employ this strategy, most groups have kept a formal distance from the parties. The NFA's partnership with the Alliance precludes it from having much influence with the other parties. The group has also disengaged itself from the public debate surrounding its issue, and thus is not building a constituency for its views. The NCC comes closest to being a US-style group in that it has been the one group in Canada that has raised and spent large sums for political purposes. But the group is unable to use money to directly influence lawmakers, as groups in the US can. The NCC instead has concentrated all of its efforts on court challenges and third-party advertising. Although it has spent millions of dollars in ad campaigns, it has achieved little tangible results in terms of electoral results. Neither Canadian group has had any direct success in achieving specific policy goals. Contrast this with the NRA, which has successfully blocked or watered down every major piece of gun control legislation that federal lawmakers have tried to pass.

The conclusion is then that institutional barriers have prevented Canadian groups from becoming more important in the political process despite societal changes that have encouraged or even necessitated greater group involvement. The logical question seems to be whether this is a healthy situation. The nature of political representation has been

drastically altered by the belief that a fully functioning democracy requires that everyone be able to meaningfully participate. To go back to Wilson's observation at the beginning of this section, it is worth asking if the Canadian political system sacrifices too much representation for the sake of effectiveness. The parliamentary system centralizes power within the national parties. In order to win elections and then govern effectively, the parties must try to reconcile many competing interests. The search for compromise and consensus needed to do this is often seen as a lack of conviction by the public. If consensus cannot be achieved, recalcitrant minorities must be subdued or ignored, causing further alienation. In short, the parties often must choose between effectiveness and representation, and self-interest naturally inclines them to favor the former.

Allowing interest groups more room to participate could help restore balance between effectiveness and representation. Phillips conception of a division of labor between groups and parties, detailed in the first chapter, is a good theoretical model for achieving this balance. Some of the institutional reforms that have been suggested, such as a Triple E senate and proportional representation, would improve representation and likely create more space for groups to operate. At the very least groups should be allowed to participate fully in election campaigns. The established parties have for the most part been hostile to these changes and to any others that seem to threaten their primacy. The cases studied here show that this fear is misguided, for dramatic institutional changes would have to take place before groups in Canada could come to resemble those in the US.

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