

POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE BEHAVIOR IN THE ERA OF SOFT MONEY  
AND BIPARTISAN CAMPAIGN REFORM

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ABSTRACT

The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA, McCain-Feingold) banned the use of soft money in campaigns. The precursor to BCRA was The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 (FECA) which along with subsequent amendments in 1974, granted legal status to political action committees (PACs) In the years following FECA, political scientists paid close attention to the distribution of PAC contributions to political candidates. Research involving the US House found that member attributes including party, tenure, election percentage, ideological intensity, and committee assignment affect the dollar amount of PAC contributions made to representatives. Since BCRA marks the first major change in campaign finance law in over three decades, it is appropriate to reinvestigate distribution patterns and allocation levels of PAC contributions. Accordingly, this essay examines PAC contributions to House incumbents for the election cycles of 1998 through 2006. In terms of patterns of distribution, findings from analysis indicate that PAC behavior is largely the same as in previous research, and remains so after BCRA. Regarding allocation, results offer evidence that levels of contributions by different classifications of PACs have undergone dramatic changes and furthermore, contribution levels to House incumbents have changed significantly following the enactment of BCRA in the 2004 election cycle.