

# **Interest Groups and the 2008 Elections**

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## **Abstract:**

The 2008 election broke a number of records and set a lot of new precedents. Perhaps the most compelling is the sheer amount of money spent during the presidential campaign – over \$1 billion! A large chunk of that spending was done by interest groups. What I wanted to do in this study was to draw a correlation between the amount of money an interest group spends on the campaign and the amount of response they subsequently receive from the candidates. To do this, I examined over 70 campaign speeches by Barack Obama and John McCain, searching for key words and phrases summarizing the issue sets of various interest groups. The peculiar economic environment in 2008 made it difficult to control the study, but I ultimately found that groups spending six figures or more in support or opposition of a particular candidate typically receive the highest response, and I concluded based on these results that a six-figure expenditure amount is a good goal to which interest groups should strive.

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## CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION</b>		iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>		iv
<u>Section</u>		<u>Page</u>
I.	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
II.	<b>HYPOTHESIS</b>	4
	1. Independent Variables	4
	2. Dependent Variables	6
	3. Causal Model	7
	4. Hypothesis	7
III.	<b>METHODS</b>	8
	1. Spending Categories (independent variables)	8
	2. Measurements of Response (dependent variables)	13
	3. Potential Snares	19
IV.	<b>FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION</b>	22
	1. Results	22
	2. Is there a Threshold of Influence?	31
V.	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	34
VI.	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	38
VII.	<b>APPENDIX</b>	46

**DEDICATION**

To my grandmother, Elaine Moffett: thank you for your real and unconditional love, and for introducing me to this wonderful part of the country.

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## Section I

### INTRODUCTION

I want to investigate the marked effect that a select few interest groups and big spenders can have on an election, specifically, the 2008 general election for the president of the United States. The 2008 election was perhaps the most notable in American history for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it saw the election of Senator Barack Obama, the nation's first African-American president, and was hailed by some in the post-election aftermath as the capstone of America's long and arduous civil rights struggle<sup>1</sup>. The election also featured a serious female contender for the Democratic nomination, former First Lady Hillary Clinton, a female vice presidential nominee, Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, as well as the oldest person (72 years of age) to ever compete for the presidency, Senator John McCain of Arizona. Finally, following the trend of all other presidential elections, the 2008 election was more expensive than the one before it. However, 2008 shattered previous records; indeed, Obama and McCain alone spent more than \$1 billion combined – the first time a presidential campaign crossed the billion-dollar mark<sup>2</sup>. Obama alone spent over \$700 million, more than what both George W. Bush and John Kerry spent in 2004 combined.<sup>3</sup>

It is this last fact – the sheer dominance of money in electing people to public office – that has drawn me toward the study of interest group expenditures in the most recent presidential election. There is a wide array of definitions for the term “interest

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Nagourney. “Obama Elected President as Racial Barrier Falls.” *New York Times*, 4 November 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/05/us/politics/05elect.html>> (Accessed: 25 March 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Center for Responsive Politics. “Cost of ’08 Presidential Race Already Tops All Elections Prior to ’04.” 4 February 2008, <<http://www.opensecrets.org/news/2008/02/cost-of-08-presidential-race-a.html>> (Accessed: 26 March 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Robert G. Boatwright. “Campaign Finance in the 2008 Election,” in *The American Elections of 2008*, ed. Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier and Steven E. Schier (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2009) p. 145, table 8.2.

group,” but for the purposes of this study, I will use political scientist Clive Thomas’s broad definition. In his *Guide to U.S. and International Interest Groups*, Thomas defines “interest group” as follows: “An *interest group* is an association of individuals or organizations or a public or private institution that, on the basis of one or more shared concerns, attempts to influence public policy in its favor.”<sup>4</sup> This definition is particularly functional because it leaves no one out. It encompasses traditional membership groups, organizational and business groups (both for-profit and non-profit), and institutional interests, such as government agencies, think tanks, and universities. There will be no substantial group left unconsidered in this study; if the group’s influence on the election was noteworthy, it will not be discredited simply because of the nature of the group.

It is abundantly clear that campaigning is an expensive and grueling undertaking. It commands an extraordinary amount of time, effort, and most important, money. What I want to do in this study is bring to the surface a fairly commonsense point that is perhaps latent in the minds of observers of American presidential elections: the more money you spend promoting your issue set, the more likely that it will be salient in the campaign.

Before I could even vote, this fact was amply demonstrated to me. In the 2004 presidential election, interest groups on both sides of the political spectrum spent millions of dollars to run often-vicious campaigns against particular candidates. One such group, the now-infamous Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, spent over \$22 million – over \$2 million for three television advertisements alone – railing against Senator John Kerry’s military record<sup>5</sup>. The Swift Boaters were organized by “Vietnam veterans who

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<sup>4</sup> Clive S. Thomas. “Introduction: The Study of Interest Groups,” in *Research Guide to U.S. and International Interest Groups*, edited by Clive S. Thomas (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers 2004), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Center for Responsive Politics. “Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, 2004 Election Cycle.” 15 March 2010, <<http://www.opensecrets.org/527s/527events.php?id=61>> (Accessed: 25 March 2010).

profoundly resented Kerry's role in the antiwar movement... some of the men personally had served with Kerry in Vietnam."<sup>6</sup> The group focused on setting the record straight regarding Kerry's tour of duty, and they even went so far as to claim that Kerry's medals for service were fraudulent in the bestselling book *Unfit for Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry*. The group's claims started a media frenzy, which earned the group even more news recognition and left Mr. Kerry with the tough dilemma of whether or not to respond to the attacks. When he finally did, in September 2004, it was too late; polling distinctly showed that the Swift Boat campaign had severely damaged John Kerry's image with swing voters, and, Kerry's staffers admitted, may have ultimately cost him the election.<sup>7</sup>

This is why I have chosen interest group expenditures as my area of focus for this thesis. From groups with broad issue concerns like the economy, jobs, or environmental protection, to groups with more targeted campaigns like the Swift Boaters' character attack on John Kerry, it is clear to me that interest groups of all types can have a massive impact on an election outcome if they put forth the proper resources in an effective and targeted manner. The 2008 election, still fresh in the minds of most Americans, has raised a number of questions for me that this project will attempt to answer. Which groups exerted the most influence on the election? How did they make their influence known? Through monetary contributions? Advertisements? Direct endorsements? What was most effective? And how, if at all, did Barack Obama and John McCain respond?

By answering these questions, I hope to determine what I call a "threshold of influence," that is to say, what it takes (i.e., a certain limit for membership and spending)

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Halperin and John F. Harris. *The Way to Win: Taking the White House in 2008* (New York: Random House, Inc. 2006) p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-21.

for a particular interest group to elicit a response from the presidential candidates. As I will note in the methods section, such a task will not be easy and is fraught with potential snags.

## **Section II**

### **HYPOTHESIS**

#### **1. Independent Variables**

There are three key independent variables measured in this study. Using multiple variables should make it easier to draw a correlation between interest group influence and candidate response in the 2008 election (an admittedly difficult task).

The first variable factored into this study is the total amount of independent expenditures used by each group included. “Independent expenditures” are funds spent in order to:

...expressly advocate the election or defeat of specific candidates [that is] aimed at the electorate as a whole. Under federal rules, these expenditures must be made completely independent of the candidates, with no coordination, and they can only be made by the organization's PAC [Political Action Committee].<sup>8</sup>

PACs are “organizations set up to raise and distribute funds to candidates,” and the amount that donors can contribute to such funds is subject to federal limits under the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) of 2002.<sup>9</sup> Luckily for this study, the amount of money PACs spent directly advocating the election or defeat of particular candidates is

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<sup>8</sup> Center For Responsive Politics, “About Compliance Funds.” <[http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/whatis\\_pop.php](http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/whatis_pop.php)> (Accessed: 25 March 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., Thomas, p. 147.



readily accessible online via the Federal Election Commission (FEC) Web site. In this respect, the correlation between independent expenditures and candidate response can be more accurately ascertained. However, the same does not hold for the vast amounts of money spent by interest groups on issue advocacy efforts, in other words, advertisements and other campaigns focused on agenda-building and, perhaps tenuously, not the outcome of a specific election. In its 2007 *FEC v. Wisconsin Right to Life* decision, the Supreme Court upheld the right of so-called 527 organizations – tax-exempt groups that are allowed to raise and spend as much as they want to influence an election – to engage in “unlimited campaign activity.”<sup>10</sup> The effect of this spending, although almost certainly a factor in shaping the campaign trail, is unfortunately impossible to include in this study, since money spent on issue advocacy is not reported to the FEC.

The second independent variable included in the study, related to the first, is the activity of the interest groups – targeted advertisements, mostly – conducted by using the expenditures previously mentioned. There is a complete and healthy timeline of the actions of certain interest groups in the 2008 presidential election available online (through resources like the Center for Responsive Politics).

Finally, this study also includes the total membership of the interest groups in question. This is important in order to avoid the error I would be making by ignoring this obvious influence. It would be foolish to argue, for example, that the Utility Workers Union of America, with 50,000 members<sup>11</sup>, and the Service Employees International

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen K. Medvic, “Outside Voices: 527s, Political Parties, and Other Non-Candidate Groups,” in *Campaigning for President 2008: Strategies and Tactics, New Voices and New Techniques*, ed. Dennis W. Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2009) p. 190.

<sup>11</sup> Utility Workers Union of America, “Who We Are.” 2008, <<http://www.uwua.net/who-we-are/>> (Accessed: 26 March 2010).

Union (SEIU), with over 2.2 million members<sup>12</sup>, exerted the same amount of influence on the 2008 campaign (although they both did indeed make contributions). As my causal model will show, I intend to correlate the size of a group's membership (along with the other two variables) with the amount of attention that group's issue set receives from the candidates.

## **2. Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable in this study will be the extent of a candidate's response, if any, to the targeted activities of the interest groups included. This is admittedly difficult to quantify, and I will discuss the difficulties involved with this variable in the methods section that follows. However, there are a number of complete, day-by-day timelines of the campaign on the internet. There are entire databases of every single campaign speech delivered by Barack Obama and John McCain in the general election. I will use these resources to measure, as accurately as possible, the response of the candidates to the activities of certain interest groups in speeches, advertisements, targeted campaign events, and so forth. With any luck, it will be possible to cross-reference the speeches and the key issue sets from each group to see just how much the candidates actually do take their agendas into account.

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<sup>12</sup> Service Employees International Union, "Our Union." 2010, <<http://www.seiu.org/our-union/index.php>> (Accessed: 26 March 2010).

### 3. Causal Model

The following causal model demonstrates my initial hypothesis, which argues that there is a distinct positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables previously noted:

#### Figure 1.1 Causal Model

- *If “threshold of influence” is sufficiently crossed → the following causal relationship holds true:*
  - o *As Independent Expenditures ↑, Activity in the Campaign ↑, and Group Membership ↑ → Candidate responses ↑*

It seems like a commonsense point to say that the larger, more active, and more endowed an interest group is, the more likely it will garner attention during the campaign. However, the point of this study is to confirm this causal relationship with data. My instincts lead me to believe that before a certain threshold is reached the small contributions and actions of groups of lesser-significance do not elicit much attention from the candidates. When that threshold – whatever it may be – is crossed, I hypothesize that the data should show that the responses of the candidates to a particular group’s issue set increases markedly.

### 4. Hypothesis

Thus my initial hypothesis is that the more members and money a group has at its disposal (coupled with an active use of these resources), the more likely it is that their issue set will be duly noted by the candidates on the campaign trail. I further hypothesize that unless a group surpasses a certain threshold of influence, its issue set will not be nearly as recognized as those groups that did indeed cross the threshold.

### **Section III**

#### **METHODS**

##### **1. Spending Categories (independent variables)**

To facilitate the discovery of the threshold of influence, I have broken down the independent expenditures of various notable interest groups in the 2008 presidential election into three categories of spending: high, mid-range, and low. Groups are further classified into for Obama, against Obama, for McCain, and against McCain. Categorization will allow cross-referencing group expenditures with the actions of the candidates on the campaign trail to see if they yield significant differences.

The first spending category is the “Big Fish,” in other words, those interest groups whose independent expenditures in the 2008 presidential election exceeded \$1,000,000. Although this distinction may seem arbitrary, it actually makes sense for one main reason: groups spending such enormous, seven-figure amounts are quite rare. A cursory glance over the independent expenditures list published by FEC clearly demonstrates this fact. I intend to show that the Big Fish – like SEIU, Planned Parenthood, and the National Rifle Association (NRA) – are the groups truly able to drive the tone of the campaign.

Far more prevalent on FEC’s list are the “Six-Figure PACs (6-PACs),” that is, the groups whose independent expenditures in the 2008 presidential election were of a six-figure nature – between \$100,000 and \$999,999. I expect that the data in this study will show the 6-PACs’ influence to be inferior to that of the Big Fish, but noticeably greater than the smallest group of spenders.

Finally, for the purposes of this study, the smallest spending category will be called the “Small Fries.” Expectedly so, these groups constitute the bulk of FEC’s

published list. Their total independent expenditures range anywhere from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands of dollars; any group spending less than \$100,000 lies within this group. I expect that the data will show this group to garner the least attention from the candidates, in part because of the nature of the groups themselves. Often times, the Small Fries are start-up organization staffed by volunteers with tiny budgets and narrow issue sets. A good example is the American Nurses Association (ANA) PAC. ANA, which spent a total of \$50,287.48<sup>13</sup> in 2008, represents a specific constituency and advocates a narrow issue set: better working conditions for nurses, funding for hospitals, and healthcare reform<sup>14</sup>. Since there are so many issues for the candidates to address, the likelihood that the ANA's focus on the nursing profession will be of major concern on the campaign trail is quite low.

The following is a complete breakdown – for and against both Barack Obama and John McCain – of the three spending categories. It is worth noting that the Republican or Democratic National Committees are not included because they are the fundraising arms of the parties seeking to elect candidates to office under their party label and are thus outside the scope of our previous definition of *interest group*. Also, for brevity's sake, the number of groups in each category is limited to five (or less), except where particular group interests noticeably converge (for example, the Sierra Club and Defenders of Wildlife are studied in conjunction). Every attempt was made in the selection of the groups to include diverse issue sets – everything from liberal groups advocating for

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<sup>13</sup> Federal Election Commission. "Independent Expenditures Supporting/Opposing 2008 Presidential Campaigns by Candidate Through November 6, 2008." <<http://www.fec.gov/press/press2008/2008indexp/2008iebycommittee.pdf>> (Accessed: 11 March 2010).

<sup>14</sup> American Nurses Association PAC. "Health System Reform." <<http://www.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/HealthcareandPolicyIssues/HealthSystemReform.aspx>> (Accessed: 25 March 2010).

women's rights, to conservative groups promoting a pro-life agenda, to groups dealing exclusively with the economy. Furthermore, individual donors making independent expenditures were not included because they were not part of a legitimate interest group. Although the possibility that some significant groups were passed over, this study includes a wide enough array of groups representing all issue sets to make an informed comparison of their influence. All expenditure amounts are taken from FEC, and all membership estimates, when available, are taken from the Web sites of the respective interest groups.

**Table 1.1 Big Fish (for Obama)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	\$29,920,156.91	2.2 million
2. United Auto Workers (UAW)	\$4,437,482.84	1.1 million
3. MoveOn.org Political Action	\$4,255,538.43	5 million
4. Advancing Wisconsin Inc. Progressive Future Inc.	\$2,096,725.11 \$1,440,886.14	N/A N/A
5. American Federation of Teachers (AFT)	\$1,997,375.00	1.4 million

**Table 1.2 Big Fish (against Obama)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. National Rifle Association (NRA) Political Victory Fund	\$6,705,049.24	4 million
2. The National Republican Trust PAC	\$6,592,924.65	N/A
3. Let Freedom Ring Inc.	\$3,038,374.00	N/A
4. American Issues Project	\$2,878,872.75	N/A

**Table 1.3 6-PACs (for Obama)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. United Food & Commercial Workers International Union	\$621,566.00	1.3 million
Unite Here! Tip Campaign	\$322,969.09	265,000
2. NARAL Pro-Choice America	\$554,537.09	1 million
Planned Parenthood Action Fund	\$424,812.29	N/A
EMILY's List	\$186,931.00	100,000
3. League of Conservation Voters Action Fund	\$525,956.32	N/A
Sierra Club Political Committee	\$414,435.31	1.3 million
Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund	\$161,769.19	1 million
Environment America Inc.	\$110,515.25	N/A
4. International Association of Firefighters PAC	\$486,676.05	297,000
5. Alliance for Retired Americans Political Action Fund	\$139,057.80	4 million

**Table 1.4 6-PACs (against Obama)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. Life and Liberty PAC	\$796,550.96	N/A
2. Our Country Deserves Better PAC	\$548,708.21	N/A
3. Family Research Council PAC	\$120,845.00	N/A
4. Minuteman PAC	\$115,604.82	N/A

**Table 1.5 Small Fries (for Obama)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. NEA Fund for Children and Public Education	\$99,328.37	3.2 million
2. Human Rights Campaign PAC	\$85,643.97	725,000
3. Feminist Majority	\$58,121.51	N/A
4. United Steelworkers PAC	\$53,201.51	1.2 million
Utility Workers Union of America COPE	\$18,303.90	50,000

**Table 1.6 Small Fries (against Obama)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. RightMarch.com PAC	\$56,701.74	N/A
2. Focus on the Family Action	\$22,490.80	N/A
3. Susan B. Anthony List Candidate Fund	\$16,174.50	145,000
National Right to Life PAC	\$15,920.20	N/A
4. Americans in Contact PAC	\$11,507.51	N/A

**Table 1.7 Big Fish (for McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. National Right to Life PAC	\$4,426,256.11	N/A
2. National Campaign Fund (ExposeObama.com)	\$1,081,243.58	N/A

**Table 1.8 Big Fish (against McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	\$3,163,276.29	2.2 million
2. American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees	\$2,281,051.50	1.6 million
3. Planned Parenthood Action Fund	\$1,768,645.88	N/A
4. MoveOn.org Political Action	\$1,157,446.03	5 million

**Table 1.9 6-PACs (for McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. Focus on the Family Action	\$670,069.01	N/A
2. Let Freedom Ring Inc.	\$323,333.91	N/A
3. National Rifle Association (NRA) Political Victory Fund	\$239,328.94	4 million
4. Our Country Deserves Better PAC	\$186,972.74	N/A



**Table 1.10 6-PACs (against McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund	\$859,471.67	1 million
League of Conservation Voters Inc.	\$454,512.19	N/A
Sierra Club Political Committee	\$453,852.00	1.3 million
2. VoteVets.org Action Fund	\$519,297.18	100,000
3. United Auto Workers (UAW)	\$423,087.74	1.1 million
4. Citizens United Political Victory Fund	\$100,000.00	N/A

**Table 1.11 Small Fries (for McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. Susan B. Anthony List Candidate Fund	\$98,001.12	145,000
2. Council for Citizens Against Government Waste PAC	\$77,540.20	1 million
3. Republican Majority Campaign	\$57,154.00	N/A

**Table 1.12 Small Fries (against McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Membership
1. Progressive Future Inc.	\$55,436.56	N/A
2. EMILY's List	\$29,440.87	100,000
3. TruthandHope.org	\$27,658.99	N/A
4. Brave New PAC	\$25,131.00	N/A
5. Human Rights Campaign PAC	\$21,205.96	725,000

## 2. Measurements of Response (dependent variables)

To measure the response of the candidates to the expenditures of the interest groups in this study, I will examine speech transcripts from Barack Obama and John McCain during the general election period, mainly the period from June to November, when Hillary Clinton dropped out of the race and it was clear that there were only two

remaining nominees.<sup>15</sup> The reason for this is simple: this is the period in which interest group activity substantially spikes, specifically in the area of advertisements. The 2008 election cycle was no exception in this regard.<sup>16</sup> In order to create as complete a record as possible, this study draws from all the resources available online; non-profit organizations like ProCon.org keep extensive databases of 2008 campaign speeches.

Measuring the influence of the interest groups in this study is done by cataloguing the prevalence of their issue sets in the speech transcripts of each candidate. By examining the various Web sites these groups maintain, most commonly in their “About Our Organization” or comparable sections, I have created lists of key words and phrases for each of them. These key words, ranging from “healthcare” to “illegal aliens,” are the prime indicators of the issue sets for each group. And when the candidates devote time to them in their speeches, it is safe to say that the membership of these groups is pleased. By correlating interest group expenditures with the total amount of recognition each group’s issue sets receive in the transcripts from the candidates’ speeches, a strong argument can be made for the threshold of influence.

The following is a list of the key words and phrases pinpointed in the speech transcripts. These word lists come from the Web sites for each group, most of which have sections in which they discuss the issues they promote<sup>17</sup>:

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<sup>15</sup> Kate Snow, Eloise Harper, and Ed O’Keefe. “Clinton’s Historic Bid Falls Short.” *ABC News*, 4 June 2008. <<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=4705151&page=1>> (Accessed: 28 March 2010)

<sup>16</sup> Jim Rutenberg and Michael Luo, “Interest Groups Step Up Efforts in a Tight Race.” *New York Times*, 16 September 2008. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/16/us/politics/16group.html>> (Accessed: 26 March 2010).

<sup>17</sup> I have included at the end of this thesis a special list for each group’s Web site from which I derived these key word lists. Included in each key word list, aside from words that encompass a group’s issue set, are the proper names for each interest group.

- **Advancing Wisconsin Inc.:**
  - *Advancing Wisconsin, canvass, mobilize, register, get out the vote (GOTV), climate change, renewable energy, sustainability, grassroots, progressive, universal healthcare, healthcare, civil rights*
- **Alliance for Retired Americans Political Action Fund**
  - *Alliance for Retired Americans, retired, retiree, retirement, elderly, seniors, senior citizens, healthcare, Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, prescription drugs, pensions, insurance, long-term care*
- **American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees**
  - *American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees, jobs, economy, workers, employees, small business, labor, outsourcing, workplace safety, pensions, insurance, retirement, universal healthcare, public option, tax cuts, Social Security privatization*
- **American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**
  - *American Federation of Teachers, schools, teachers, education, nurses, higher education, college, university, professors, jobs*
- **American Issues Project**
  - *American Issues Project, corruption, Jeremiah Wright, William Ayers<sup>18</sup>*
- **Americans in Contact PAC**
  - *Americans in Contact PAC, fiscal responsibility, government waste, tax cuts, conservative, pro-life, Christian, God, grassroots, mobilize, register, get out the vote (GOTV)*
- **Brave New PAC**
  - *Brave New PAC, civil rights, social justice, gay rights, gay marriage, repeal Don't Ask Don't Tell, immigration rights, war in Iraq, government accountability, wasteful spending*
- **Citizens United Political Victory Fund**
  - *Citizens United Political Victory Fund, conservative, fiscal responsibility, reducing size of government, cut spending, tax cuts, family values, war on terror, terrorism, national security*
- **Council for Citizens Against Government Waste PAC**
  - *Council for Citizens Against Government Waste, excess spending, pork-barrel, government waste, earmarks, privatization, capitalism, free enterprise, Social Security, deregulation, war on terror, homeland security, deficit, economy, recession, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac*
- **Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund**
  - *Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund, climate change, environment, global warming, conservation, clean energy, green, sustainability, endangered species, animal rights, deforestation*

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<sup>18</sup> AIP does not maintain a Web site. However, their ads linking Barack Obama to William Ayers received substantial media attention during the campaign. For instance: Matthew Mosk, "FEC Complaint Filed Against Group That Ran Ayers Ad." *The Washington Post*, 10 October 2008, <[http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/10/10/fec\\_complaint\\_filed\\_against\\_gr.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/10/10/fec_complaint_filed_against_gr.html)> (Accessed: 28 March 2010).

- **EMILY's List**
  - *EMILY's List, pro-choice, women's rights, abortion, safe sex education, condoms, pregnancy, civil rights, social justice, diversity, right to choose*
- **Environment America Inc.**
  - *Environment America Inc., climate change, global warming, clean energy, conservation, parks, green, sustainability, pollution, deforestation, clean water, clean air, environment*
- **Family Research Council PAC**
  - *Family Research Council PAC, family values, traditional values, pro-family, pro-life, abortion, abstinence, Christians, morals, God*
- **Feminist Majority**
  - *Feminist Majority, women's rights, feminism, gender equality, civil rights, social justice, pro-choice, abortion, gay lesbian bisexual transgender rights (LGBT), gay marriage, safe sex education*
- **Focus on the Family Action**
  - *Focus on the Family Action, abstinence, pro-life, traditional values, family values, abortion, gambling, pornography, homosexuality, sanctity of marriage, sanctity of life*
- **Human Rights Campaign PAC**
  - *Human Rights Campaign PAC, gay lesbian bisexual transgender rights (LGBT), hate crimes, HIV/AIDS, repeal Don't Ask Don't Tell, social justice, civil rights*
- **International Association of Firefighters PAC**
  - *International Association of Firefighters PAC, firefighters, firemen, jobs, workers, pensions, workplace safety, retirement, insurance, healthcare, labor, unions*
- **League of Conservation Voters Action Fund**
  - *League of Conservation Voters Action Fund, climate change, global warming, clean energy, renewable energy, sustainability, green, conservation, environment*
- **Let Freedom Ring Inc.**
  - *Let Freedom Ring Inc., conservatism, fiscal responsibility, free enterprise, capitalism, Social Security privatization, pro-life, family values, traditional values, religious liberty*
- **Life and Liberty PAC**
  - *Life and Liberty PAC, pro-life, sanctity of life, abortion, abstinence, religious liberty, Christians, God, traditional values, family values*
- **Minuteman PAC**
  - *Minuteman PAC, illegal aliens, illegal immigration, sovereign borders, border security, terrorism, war on terror, national security*
- **MoveOn.org Political Action**
  - *MoveOn.org Political Action, progressive, stop the war, bring troops home, war in Iraq, threat from Iran, universal healthcare, insurance, social justice, civil rights, pro-choice, right to choose, anti-war, civil liberties, climate change, global warming, clean energy, sustainability, oil dependence, campaign finance reform, failed Bush policies*

- **NARAL Pro-Choice America**
  - *NARAL Pro-Choice America, pro-choice, abortion, safe sex education, condoms, pregnancy, women's rights, gender equality, right to choose*
- **National Campaign Fund (ExposeObama.com)**
  - *National Campaign Fund, Jeremiah Wright, border security, pro-life, creationism, abortion, anti-gay, traditional values, family values, fiscal conservatism, fiscal responsibility, tax cuts, Social Security privatization, war on terror, terrorism, Iraq, Afghanistan, support our troops, veterans*
- **The National Republican Trust PAC**
  - *The National Republican Trust PAC, limited government, fiscal conservatism, fiscal responsibility, capitalism, free enterprise, national defense, national security, family values, traditional values, moral values*
- **National Rifle Association (NRA) Political Victory Fund**
  - *National Rifle Association, NRA, 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights, guns, gun safety, hunting, conceal carry, permits, support our troops*
- **National Right to Life PAC**
  - *National Right to Life PAC, pro-life, life at conception, sanctity of life, abortion, abstinence, Christians, God, moral values, traditional values, family values*
- **NEA Fund for Children and Public Education**
  - *NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, NEA, teachers, schools, public schools, education, K-12, testing, repeal No Child Left Behind, recruit teachers, college preparation, equal opportunity*
- **Our Country Deserves Better PAC**
  - *Our Country Deserves Better PAC, fiscal conservatism, fiscal responsibility, cut taxes, small government, national defense, war on terror, terrorism, traditional values, family values*
- **Planned Parenthood Action Fund**
  - *Planned Parenthood Action Fund, pro-choice, abortion, safe sex education, condoms, family planning, right to choose, women's rights*
- **Progressive Future Inc.**
  - *Progressive Future Inc., progressive, grassroots, community organizing, voter registration, get out the vote (GOTV), mobilize, universal healthcare, pro-choice, women's rights, abortion, right to choose, end the war, war in Iraq, clean energy, renewable energy, climate change, global warming, conservation*
- **Republican Majority Campaign**
  - *Republican Majority Campaign, mobilize, register, get out the vote (GOTV), limited government, fiscal conservatism, fiscal responsibility, cut taxes, national defense, national security*
- **RightMarch.com PAC**
  - *RightMarch.com PAC, patriotic, patriotism, traditional values, family values, fiscal conservatism, fiscal responsibility, grassroots, mobilize, get out the vote (GOTV), registration*

- **Service Employees International Union (SEIU)**
  - *Service Employees International Union, SEIU, jobs, American jobs, job security, job creation, work, workers, outsourcing, universal healthcare, healthcare, insurance, pensions, retirement, economy, growth, cafeteria workers, labor, laborers, janitors, low-income families*
- **Sierra Club Political Committee**
  - *Sierra Club Political Committee, save the planet, climate change, global warming, environment, conservation, clean energy, renewable energy, green, sustainability, pollution, deforestation*
- **Susan B. Anthony Candidate List Fund**
  - *Susan B. Anthony Candidate List Fund, pro-life, abortion, abstinence, sanctity of life, life at conception, traditional values, family values*
- **TruthandHope.org**
  - *TruthandHope.org, social justice, equality, civil rights, gay lesbian bisexual transgender rights (LGBT), repeal Proposition 8, repeal Don't Ask Don't Tell, end the war, war in Iraq, bring troops home, failed Bush policies*
- **Unite Here! Tip Campaign**
  - *Unite Here! Tip Campaign, jobs, job creation, American jobs, job security, job safety, workers, labor, laborers, outsourcing, foodservice, hotel workers, airport workers, gaming industry, textile workers, fair wage, pensions, retirement, healthcare, insurance*
- **United Auto Workers (UAW)**
  - *United Auto Workers, UAW, factory workers, jobs, job security, job safety, job creation, American jobs, outsourcing, automobile industry, cars, healthcare, pensions, retirement, insurance, labor, Detroit*
- **United Food & Commercial Workers International Union**
  - *United Food & Commercial Workers International Union, jobs, workers, job creation, job safety, job security, American jobs, outsourcing, immigration reform, foodservice, grocery workers, commercial industry, labor standards, fair wages, healthcare, insurance, pensions, retirement, financial reform*
- **United Steelworkers PAC**
  - *United Steelworkers PAC, workers, jobs, job safety, job security, job creation, American jobs, outsourcing, steelworkers, pensions, retirement, healthcare, insurance*
- **Utility Workers Union of America COPE**
  - *Utility Workers Union of America COPE, workers, jobs, job safety, job security, job creation, American jobs, outsourcing, utility workers, pensions, retirement, healthcare, insurance*
- **VoteVets.org Action Fund**
  - *VoteVets.org Action Fund, soldiers, support our troops, winning war on terror, military readiness, military equipment, body armor, war in Iraq, threat from Iran, dependence on oil, clean energy, renewable energy, sustainability, veterans affairs, healthcare, insurance, retirement*

Now, I am fully aware of the limitations of my study's focus on merely speech transcripts, and to correct for this, I will also touch on some other notable phenomena (for instance, candidate responses to endorsements and specific advertisements or press releases aimed at responding to the charges of particular interest groups). But as I discuss in my section on potential snares to the success of this thesis, such limitations are simply inherent in the study of interest group influence.

### **3. Potential Snares (problems with drawing the correlation)**

The task of researching interest groups, as Clive S. Thomas notes in his book, is littered with places where a study can go awry. I am transparent in this thesis about these potential snares, and will discuss them in this section. However, it is worth noting that the goal of this study is not to definitively prove that interest groups are driving what candidates say in presidential elections; it is merely pointing out a correlation. How strong that correlation is, which depends largely on how significant a role these potential snares play, remains to be seen.

The first problem inherent to the study is properly defining *interest group*. The definition employed in the introduction of this thesis is sufficiently broad that no influential group will be omitted simply because of the nature of its organization. The only groups on the FEC expenditure list omitted from this study are the RNC and DNC, and that is only because they act under the auspices of a political party seeking more than just to “influence public policy in its favor;” the parties’ goal is to elect candidates to office under their label.

The second potential snag is the unfortunate fact that differing approaches and methods studying the very same topic may arrive at divergent conclusions. It is entirely

possible, for example, that my study of expenditures vs. candidate responses demonstrates the influence of the Big Fish on the 2008 election while another study argues the exact opposite. Endless interpretations of the 2008 election are possible.

A third issue arises in trying to identify enough variables to explain the phenomena being studied. As Thomas states in his *Guide*, “problems in identifying the numerous variables in certain situations is [sic] a major barrier to definitive studies of interest groups.”<sup>19</sup> The 2008 election is no exception. The economic downturn, for example, is likely the explanation for the prevalence of discussion about jobs and the economy along the campaign trail. In October 2008, 75 percent of Americans identified the economy as the most significant issue facing the country, pushing other issues (like abortion and gay marriage) to the fringes. This occurred to the chagrin of many groups, and it demonstrates that “there are constraints on the ability of interest groups to increase the salience of post-material issues in elections.”<sup>20</sup> So when groups like labor unions register high candidate responses, it cannot be ignored that the economic climate in 2008 is an important factor. A related problem is the difficulty of creating a control mechanism in order to measure the variables. In fact, this is practically impossible to do, since, as the previous example illustrates, elections do not occur in a vacuum.

Last, there are a few potential problems involved with my particular method of examining speech transcripts for key words and phrases. For one, there is the problem of multicollinearity: the possibility that the issue sets of the Big Fish and the Small Fries could converge. For example, Barack Obama’s response to the issue set of the American Federation of Teachers (a Big Fish that spent almost \$2 million to elect him) is probably

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<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., Thomas, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> David C. Kimball, “Interest Groups in the 2008 Election: The Barking Dog That Didn’t Bite,” *The Forum*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2008): 4.



going to be very similar to his response to the issue set of the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education (a Small Fry that spent just \$99,328.37). However, I contend that this is an uncommon example; I believe that, on the whole, the issue sets of the small groups are more targeted and narrow, which limits the number of key words and phrases attributable to them. This should mitigate the problem of convergent issue sets enough to observe a significant difference and ultimately determine a threshold of influence. Furthermore, it is possible that a particular key word list may not encompass enough of a group's ideology, but it should be noted again that the word lists were derived from the published Web sites of each group; I am simply using what is available. Another potential snare exists in obtaining accurate information on subjects that are highly politically sensitive (for example, abortion). It is likely difficult for candidates to talk at-length about such contentious issues without sacrificing potential moderate swing voters, so the attention that they devote to discussing these issues might be artificially low for that reason. They may even talk around the issues, avoiding the key words altogether. Finally, and this is probably where the study requires the most caution, candidate responses must be taken in context. For example, it should not be counted in favor of a group like EMILY's List – a left-wing, pro-choice women's rights group – if John McCain delivers a speech railing against abortion. Rather, taking the word 'abortion' in a pro-life context, the credit for the speech should go to a group like the National Right to Life Campaign.

Ultimately, it is difficult to determine causality in this study. Any conclusions drawn will be probabilistic; in other words, I “can only argue that certain outcomes are more likely than others in the presence of certain variables . . . we will never know a

causal inference for certain.”<sup>21</sup> But coupled with statistics that draw a strong correlation, I am confident that the latent, commonsense view that money drives the tone of the campaign can be more legitimately held and defended thanks in very small part to this study.

## **Section IV**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **1. Results**

After examining 77 speeches (47 by Barack Obama, 30 by John McCain) during the general election period from June to November 2008, I have compiled a complete list of the candidates’ responses to the various interest groups in this study along the campaign trail. The following tables break down the candidates’ responses to the issue sets of each group, separated by spending category. Total candidate responses refer to the overall number of times a candidate mentioned one of the key words or phrases included in a particular group’s issue set. For example, tables 2.1 through 2.6 refer only to Obama’s speeches, and tables 2.7 through 2.12 refer only to McCain’s. A full table of responses is included in the appendix, which breaks down, speech-by-speech, the exact number of times each group’s issue set was mentioned, in the proper context, on a given day during the campaign.

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<sup>21</sup> Op. cit., Thomas, p. 396.

**Table 2.1 Big Fish (for Obama)**

<b>Interest Group</b>	<b>Total Candidate Responses</b>
1. Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	1,434
2. United Auto Workers (UAW)	1,135
3. MoveOn.org Political Action	471
4. Advancing Wisconsin Inc.	226
5. Progressive Future Inc.	273
6. American Federation of Teachers (AFT)	1,054
<b><i>TOTALS</i></b>	<b><i>4,593</i></b>

**Table 2.2 Big Fish (against Obama)**

<b>Interest Group</b>	<b>Total Candidate Responses</b>
1. National Rifle Association (NRA) Political Victory Fund	4
2. The National Republican Trust PAC	32
3. Let Freedom Ring Inc.	9
4. American Issues Project	3
<b><i>TOTALS</i></b>	<b><i>48</i></b>

**Table 2.3 6-PACs (for Obama)**

<b>Interest Group</b>	<b>Total Candidate Responses</b>
1. United Food & Commercial Workers International Union	1,140
2. Unite Here! Tip Campaign	1,137
3. NARAL Pro-Choice America	10
4. Planned Parenthood Action Fund	10
5. EMILY's List	33
6. League of Conservation Voters Action Fund	98
7. Sierra Club Political Committee	102
8. Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund	98
9. Environment America Inc.	102
10. International Association of Firefighters PAC	1,140
11. Alliance for Retired Americans Political Action Fund	346
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>4,216</b>

**Table 2.4 6-PACs (against Obama)**

<b>Interest Group</b>	<b>Total Candidate Responses</b>
1. Life and Liberty PAC	36
2. Our Country Deserves Better PAC	60
3. Family Research Council PAC	34
4. Minuteman PAC	45
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>175</b>

**Table 2.5 Small Fries (for Obama)**

Interest Group	Total Candidate Responses
1. NEA Fund for Children and Public Education	148
2. Human Rights Campaign PAC	30
3. Feminist Majority	42
4. United Steelworkers PAC	1,135
5. Utility Workers Union of America COPE	1,135
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,490</b>

**Table 2.6 Small Fries (against Obama)**

Interest Group	Total Candidate Responses
1. RightMarch.com PAC	51
2. Focus on the Family Action	35
3. Susan B. Anthony List Candidate Fund	3
4. National Right to Life PAC	34
5. Americans in Contact PAC	79
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>202</b>

**Table 2.7 Big Fish (for McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Candidate Responses
1. National Right to Life PAC	15
2. National Campaign Fund (ExposeObama.com)	262
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>277</b>

**Table 2.8 Big Fish (against McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Candidate Responses
1. Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	533
2. American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees	577
3. Planned Parenthood Action Fund	0
4. MoveOn.org Political Action	119
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,229</b>

**Table 2.9 6-PACs (for McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Candidate Responses
1. Focus on the Family Action	1
2. Let Freedom Ring Inc.	12
3. National Rifle Association (NRA) Political Victory Fund	27
4. Our Country Deserves Better PAC	55
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>95</b>

**Table 2.10 6-PACs (against McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Candidate Responses
1. Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund	57
2. League of Conservation Voters Inc.	57
3. Sierra Club Political Committee	57
4. VoteVets.org Action Fund	357
5. United Auto Workers (UAW)	371
6. Citizens United Political Victory Fund	61
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>961</b>

**Table 2.11 Small Fries (for McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Candidate Responses
1. Susan B. Anthony List Candidate Fund	0
2. Council for Citizens Against Government Waste PAC	212
3. Republican Majority Campaign	27
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>239</b>

**Table 2.12 Small Fries (against McCain)**

Interest Group	Total Candidate Responses
1. Progressive Future Inc.	35
2. EMILY's List	5
3. TruthandHope.org	13
4. Brave New PAC	19
5. Human Rights Campaign PAC	5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>77</b>

The first noteworthy aspect of the results is the sheer dominance of occupational interest group issue sets in the 2008 presidential campaign. The issue sets of groups like the SEIU, UAW, American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees, United Steelworkers, and Utility Workers Union of America earned the most responses from the candidates by far. These groups, which have issue sets that are composed largely of key words like “jobs,” “job creation,” “outsourcing,” “economy,” “healthcare,” and “retirement,” are concerned primarily with the economy. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the candidates devoted so much time to talking about their chief issues given the bleak economic climate in 2008. The economic downturn was so considerable, David C. Kimball argues, that outside of the labor unions and occupational groups, interest groups

were simply unable to shape the campaign agenda. This is in stark contrast to the 2004 election, when the economy was relatively healthy and social issues could take center stage. States like Massachusetts, California, and Oregon began authorizing same-sex marriages, which allowed cultural groups to seize the opportunity to mobilize conservative voters against these developments. In 2004, the “critical context . . . was a relatively wide-open issue environment;” indeed, 25 percent of voters named the war in Iraq as the major concern facing the country, 14 percent noted moral values, 12 percent mentioned the economy, 9 percent said terrorism, 2 percent healthcare, and over 30 percent named a smattering of other issues.<sup>22</sup> Compare that to the 75 percent of voters in 2008 naming the economy as the key issue facing the country and it should be clear why the issue sets of the labor unions and occupational groups were so prevalent on the campaign trail.

It is also worthwhile to note the discrepancy between the number of groups for or against Obama and the number of groups for or against McCain. There are ten Big Fish groups spending vast amounts of money because of Obama’s nomination for president, six of which support him (\$44,148,164.43), and four of which oppose him (\$19,215,220.64). In contrast, there are just six Big Fish involved in McCain’s campaign spending far smaller amounts, two in support of him (\$5,507,499.69), and four in opposition to him (\$8,370,419.70). Overall, FEC’s independent expenditure list shows 156 total groups involved with Obama campaign, and just 63 involved with McCain. This is significant because campaigns are not cheap to run. Every little expense adds up, and interest group expenditures go a long way to cover the difference. Take, for instance, the SEIU’s involvement with the Obama campaign. Typical examples of the group’s

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<sup>22</sup> Op. cit., Kimball, pp. 3-4.



expenditures in 2008 include a \$1,441.32 travel expense from Enterprise Rent-a-Car on October 3, or a \$1,346.70 catering bill from Boston Market on October 24.<sup>23</sup> These are the logistical issues involved with campaigning to which much of the voting public is oblivious. Interest groups, on the other hand, are keenly aware of them. And they are willing and able to cover the costs in hopes that the candidates' responses to their issue sets (and, if elected, subsequent policy gains) are substantial.

Furthermore, it is hard to justify my initial point that group membership plays a significant factor based on the results of my study. Groups like SEIU and MoveOn.org, with millions of members in their ranks, certainly commanded a large share of the candidates' responses. However, groups with equally monstrous memberships, like the NRA and the Sierra Club, did not garner such large responses. This is not to say that total group membership is not a factor in interest group influence, only that my method did not prove valuable for demonstrating it.

Finally, I would like to point out a couple special cases since measuring campaign speeches alone is not foolproof. The first case deserving attention is the endorsement of Barack Obama by MoveOn.org. The candidate response numbers for MoveOn (471 by Obama) might not reflect it, but MoveOn's enormous budget and support base did not go ignored by the Obama campaign. In fact, when MoveOn announced in February 2008 that it was endorsing Obama, he responded with a personalized reply, saying:

In just a few years, the members of MoveOn have once again demonstrated that real change comes not from the top-down, but from the bottom-up. From their principled opposition to the Iraq war – a war I also opposed from the start – to their strong support for a number of progressive causes, MoveOn shows what Americans can achieve when we come together in a grassroots movement for change. I thank them for their support and look

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<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., FEC.

forward to working with their members in the weeks and months ahead.<sup>24</sup>

So, while the economy dominated the issue agenda in 2008 and deflated MoveOn's candidate response numbers, this does not necessarily mean that MoveOn's influence in the election was not substantial. On the contrary, as this endorsement and Obama's response demonstrate, it most certainly was.

Another interesting case is the series of advertisements run by the American Issues Project (AIP), a Big Fish group opposing Barack Obama. AIP's main thrust during the campaign was to paint Obama as sympathetic to former Weather Underground terrorist William Ayers, claiming in some of its advertisements that Obama "launched his political career in Ayers' basement," and asking questions like "Why would Barack Obama be friends with someone who bombed the U.S. Capitol, and is proud of it?"<sup>25</sup> These are serious allegations that proliferated quickly throughout the national media, and although the candidate response results show an relatively low response from Barack Obama, this does not mean that AIP's attacks were not rebutted by his campaign. In fact, in an interview with ABC News' Charles Gibson, Obama specifically addressed his relationship with Ayers:

This is a guy who engaged in some despicable acts 40 years ago when I was eight years old. By the time I met him, 10 or 15 years ago, he was a college professor of education at the University of Illinois . . . And the notion that somehow he has been involved in my campaign, that he is an advisor of mine, that . . . I've 'palled

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<sup>24</sup> MoveOn.org. "MoveOn Endorsement Throws Progressive Weight Behind Barack Obama." 1 February 2008, <<http://moveon.org/press/pr/obamaendorsementrelease.html>> (Accessed: 22 April 2010).

<sup>25</sup> YouTube.com. "Meet Barack's TERRORIST Friend." 4 October 2008, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptuohzeHEsE>> (Accessed: 22 April 2010).

around with a terrorist', all these statements are made simply to score cheap political points.<sup>26</sup>

The point in noting these special cases is that the candidate response results are not an ironclad measure of interest group influence in the 2008 presidential election. My method is certainly not infallible; as these cases demonstrate, a lot of campaign activity occurs outside of the scheduled speeches along the campaign trail. But this study does point out significant differences in the level of influence among the Big Fish, 6-PACs, and Small Fries.

## **2. Is there a Threshold of Influence?**

Despite the haziness of interest group influence in the 2008 election given the economic climate at the time, my answer to this question is yes. There is a marked difference, as I originally predicted, between the candidates' response to the issues sets of the Big Fish and the 6-PACs and their response to the Small Fries. The following two figures demonstrate the clarity of the threshold of influence:

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<sup>26</sup> Katie Escherich and Lauren Sher, "Obama: McCain Scoring 'Cheap Political Points'." *ABC News*, 8 October 2008. <<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=5985237&page=1>> (Accessed: 22 April 2010).

Figure 2.1

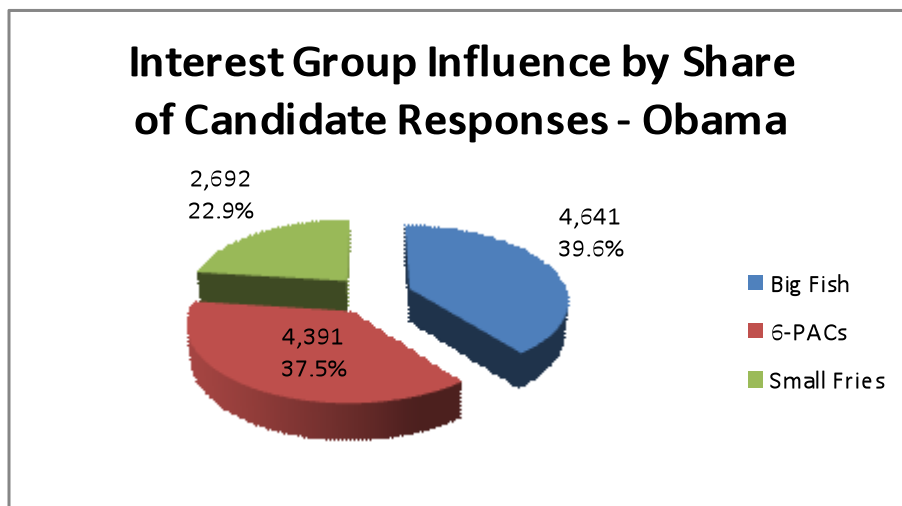
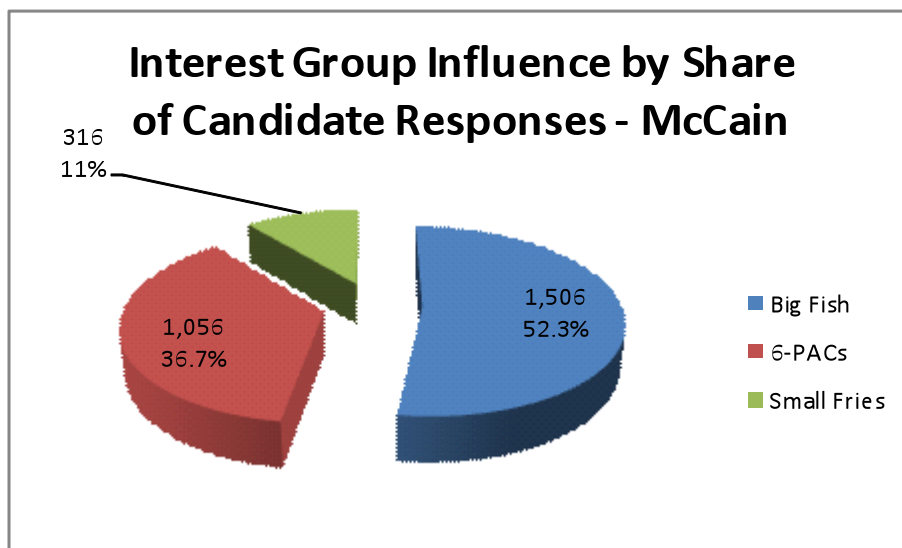


Figure 2.2



In both cases, it is plain to see that the Small Fries, represented in green, took the smallest share of the candidates' response by quite a large margin. In Obama's case, Small Fry issue sets commanded just 22.9 percent of his total responses. Small Fries commanded even less of a presence in McCain's campaign, garnering only 11 percent of his responses. Thus, my original hypothesis is intact – the more money a group dedicates to a candidate, the more likely it is that he or she will give attention to the group's issue

set. The threshold of influence seems to stand distinctly between the 6-PACs and the Small Fries. In other words, a good expenditure goal for up-and-coming interest groups seeking to have their issues mentioned during the campaign is \$100,000 or more. It simply cannot be ignored that six-figure (or higher) expenditure totals, on the whole, earned the biggest share of the candidates' response.

It is also pertinent to note that it is very difficult, based on the results, to find a significant difference between the 6-PACs and the Big Fish. In McCain's case, the Big Fish earned 52.3 percent of his response, with the 6-PACs not far behind at 36.7 percent. The line is even blurrier in Obama's case, where the Big Fish earned 39.6 percent of his response, and the 6-PACs earned 37.5 percent. I cannot offer advice to groups concerned with how much to spend beyond the threshold of influence. Since my case study of the 2008 election was so hampered by the massive effect of the economic downturn, it would be a mistake for me to claim that any group advocating any cause could gain recognition simply by spending the right amount. The empirical evidence of 2008 clearly rejects this. The environment of the country has a marked impact on the election, and interest group leaders would be wise to take this fact into consideration before investing massive amounts of money for or against a campaign.

## Section V

### CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I was trying to put some data behind the practical wisdom of just about any American voter: that money drives the agenda of presidential campaigns. By studying the 2008 presidential election, I hoped to determine what it takes for an interest group to earn recognition by the national candidates. My formula was simple: as a group spends more, becomes more active, and recruits more members, its recognition by candidates during the campaign will increase.

The 2008 election demonstrated that the formula was not quite so simple. The importance of the environment of the country – in last election’s case, the economy – was clear to see. While the money and support behind the economically-focused labor unions contributing to the 2008 elections was indeed substantial, it should not be ignored that their share of the candidates’ responses may be a bit inflated due to the circumstances. Furthermore, I could not demonstrate, given the election’s peculiar climate, the effect of group membership on candidate response during the campaign. For this reason, I offer a revised causal model, based on what this study has demonstrated:

#### **Figure 3.1    Revised Causal Model**

- *If 6-PAC status is attained (\$100,000 in expenditures) → the following causal relationship holds true:*
  - o *As Independent Expenditures ↑, and Activity in the Campaign ↑ →  
Candidate responses ↑*

To interest group leaders: amass as large a budget as you can. Shoot to attain and surpass 6-PAC status. Aim for a six-figure expenditure level during the campaign. Campaigns are expensive, and the more your expenditures dampen the costs incurred by the candidates, the more likely it is that they will recognize your issue sets. But pay heed to the environment of the country. Is the climate ripe for a discussion about social issues? Will gay marriage or abortion really be discussable in an election year when all anyone wants to talk about is how to stem the bleeding during an economic crisis? Be smart. Use your money wisely. And when the time is right, I contend that enough money and activity in the campaign will get your issue set properly noticed by the candidates.

**Table 3.1 Final Breakdown of all Obama groups**

Spending Level	Interest Group	Membership	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Candidate Responses	
Big Fish (for)	1. Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	2.2 million	\$29,920,156.91	1,434	
	2. United Auto Workers (UAW)	1.1 million	\$4,437,482.84	1,135	
	3. MoveOn.org Political Action	5 million	\$4,255,538.43	471	
	4. Advancing Wisconsin Inc. Progressive Future Inc.	N/A N/A	\$2,096,725.11 \$1,440,886.14	226 273	
	5. American Federation of Teachers (AFT)	1.4 million	\$1,997,375.00	1,054	
Big Fish (against)	1. National Rifle Association (NRA) Political Victory Fund	4 million	\$6,705,049.24	4	
	2. The National Republican Trust PAC	N/A	\$6,592,924.65	32	
	3. Let Freedom Ring Inc.	N/A	\$3,038,374.00	9	
	4. American Issues Project	N/A	\$2,878,872.75	3	
6-PACs (for)	1. United Food & Commercial Workers International Union Unite Here! Tip Campaign	1.3 million 265,000	\$621,566.00 \$322,969.09	1,140 1,137	
	2. NARAL Pro-Choice America Planned Parenthood Action Fund EMILY's List	1 million N/A 100,000	\$554,537.09 \$424,812.29 \$186,931.00	10 10 33	
	3. League of Conservation Voters Action Fund Sierra Club Political Committee Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund Environment America Inc.	N/A 1.3 million 1 million N/A	\$525,956.32 \$414,435.31 \$161,769.19 \$110,515.25	98 102 98 102	
	4. International Association of Firefighters PAC	297,000	\$486,676.05	1,140	
	5. Alliance for Retired Americans Political Action Fund	4 million	\$139,057.80	346	
	6-PACs (against)	1. Life and Liberty PAC	N/A	\$796,550.96	36
		2. Our Country Deserves Better PAC	N/A	\$548,708.21	60
		3. Family Research Council PAC	N/A	\$120,845.00	34
		4. Minuteman PAC	N/A	\$115,604.82	45
	Small Fries (for)	1. NEA Fund for Children and Public Education	3.2 million	\$99,328.37	148
2. Human Rights Campaign PAC		725,000	\$85,643.97	30	
3. Feminist Majority		N/A	\$58,121.51	42	
4. United Steelworkers PAC Utility Workers Union of America COPE		1.2 million 50,000	\$53,201.51 \$18,303.90	1,135 1,135	
Small Fries (against)	1. RightMarch.com PAC	N/A	\$56,701.74	51	
	2. Focus on the Family Action	N/A	\$22,490.80	35	
	3. Susan B. Anthony List Candidate Fund National Right to Life PAC	145,000 N/A	\$16,174.50 \$15,920.20	3 34	
	4. Americans in Contact PAC	N/A	\$11,507.51	79	



**Table 3.2 Final Breakdown of all McCain groups**

Spending Level	Interest Group	Membership	Total Independent Expenditures	Total Candidate Responses
Big Fish (for)	1. National Right to Life PAC	N/A	\$4,426,256.11	15
	2. National Campaign Fund (ExposeObama.com)	N/A	\$1,081,243.58	262
Big Fish (against)	1. Service Employees International Union (SEIU)	2.2 million	\$3,163,276.29	533
	2. American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees	1.6 million	\$2,281,051.50	577
	3. Planned Parenthood Action Fund	N/A	\$1,768,645.88	0
	4. MoveOn.org Political Action	5 million	\$1,157,446.03	119
6-PACs (for)	1. Focus on the Family Action	N/A	\$670,069.01	1
	2. Let Freedom Ring Inc.		\$323,333.91	12
	3. National Rifle Association (NRA) Political Victory Fund	N/A	\$239,328.94	27
	4. Our Country Deserves Better PAC	4 million	\$186,972.74	55
6-PACs (against)	1. Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund	1 million	\$859,471.67	57
	League of Conservation Voters Inc.	N/A	\$454,512.19	57
	Sierra Club Political Committee	1.3 million	\$453,852.00	57
	2. VoteVets.org Action Fund	100,000	\$519,297.18	357
	3. United Auto Workers (UAW)	1.1 million	\$423,087.74	371
Small Fries (for)	4. Citizens United Political Victory Fund	N/A	\$100,000.00	61
	1. Susan B. Anthony List Candidate Fund	145,000	\$98,001.12	0
	2. Council for Citizens Against Government Waste PAC	1 million	\$77,540.20	212
Small Fries (against)	3. Republican Majority Campaign	N/A	\$57,154.00	27
	1. Progressive Future Inc.	N/A	\$55,436.56	35
	2. EMILY's List	100,000	\$29,440.87	5
	3. TruthandHope.org	N/A	\$27,658.99	13
	4. Brave New PAC	N/A	\$25,131.00	19
	5. Human Rights Campaign PAC	725,000	\$21,205.96	5

## Section VI

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