

PAC Myths

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Myth #1 PACs are evil mechanisms of “special interest groups.”

There is nothing novel about PACs. They have been in existence since the end of George Washington’s Presidency. PACs are simply people joining together to support and strengthen a common interest. Our right to associate freely with others of similar ideals is guaranteed in the 1st Amendment of the Constitution.

This “evil” image is the result of negative press attention and criticism of groups such as Common Cause who engage in “PAC bashing”, using PACs as the scapegoat in their crusade for reform.

Myth #2 PAC “special interest money” is controlling elections.

In reality, only two-fifths of all campaign funds come from interest group PACs. Individual donors contributing small amounts and the national parties make up the majority of campaign giving.

Keep in mind that PACs are individual contributors who have pooled their resources to gain a stronger presence.

Myth #3 PACs are monolithic

PAC critics argue that enormous sums of money are contributed by PACs. Even if PAC money held the majority in campaign funding, PACs are sponsored by a great number of groups with diverse interests and concerns. Virtually every kind of labor, business, ideology and social concern is represented by a PAC.

As long as many interest groups are active in the political system, they will check one another, and one or several groups cannot come to dominate the entire system.

The Federal Election Commission strictly regulates PAC activity and limits the amount of money a PAC can contribute to a candidate in each election.

Myth #4 PACs support incumbents.

PACs support incumbents but so do individual contributors. Both PACs and individuals make decisions in their own self-interest, and since most incumbents win reelection, they naturally support them.

But, PACs are usually the first to back worthy challengers with the important seed money they need to take on an entrenched incumbent.

Myth #5 PACs fuel the money chase in politics.

We spend less on politics today than large companies spend on advertising their products. Studies have shown we are not spending enough to educate the public on the politics and issues of our country today. One poll has shown that more Americans know of television’s “Judge Wapner” or “Judge Judy” than our own Supreme Court Chief Justice Renquist.

Television advertising costs have increased vastly over the last decade and in Congressional campaigns today, between a third and a half of every dollar raised is devoted to producing and airing campaign commercials. PACs can be commended for helping to fund the very necessary communication between candidates and voters.

PACs provide resources to people who would not be involved in politics individually. Citizens are more inclined to vote if they make a financial commitment to a candidate’s campaign or a political fund.

Myth #6 PAC money buys votes.

Almost all the impartial political science studies of this subject strongly suggest that legislators cast their votes on the basis of party affiliation, ideological orientation, and most of all, the needs and desires of their constituents.

The contest between PAC money and votes in the home district is an easy one for legislators to resolve since only votes in the district can deliver reelection to the legislator