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Influence of Political Parties on New Jersey Campaign Activity

The political landscape of municipal, gubernatorial, and federal elections are subject to a differing amount of influence from each candidate's respective political parties. Although the history of political party influence on campaign activity throughout the years has been generally decreasing, the particular case of the New Jersey Democratic party proves to be an outlier. The quantitative numbers spent on gubernatorial campaign financing, lobbying, interest groups, and digital media proves this case. Similarly, the state's Republican party, though to a lesser extent than the Democrats, also exert some influence over campaign activity as well, mostly regarding digital media, interest groups, lobbyists, and consulting services.

Evaluating the New Jersey Democratic party's expenditures on Phil Murphy's gubernatorial election campaigns reveals their extensive financial importance and impact on said campaigns. A press release available on Governor Phil Murphy's website reveals that his campaign raised over \$3.5 million by the fourth quarter of 2020, meaning that they not only completed but also surpassed their primary elections fundraising within a single quarter (murphy4nj.com, 2021). The campaign will also qualify for the maximum amount of \$4.6 million in matching funds given that the money raised in the fourth quarter are also eligible to "to be matched two-to-one under ELEC's New Jersey Gubernatorial Financing Program" (murphy4nj.com, 2021). Just how important finances are to the campaign is explicitly proven

with Campaign spokesperson Caitlin Mota: “At this point, the campaign will consist primarily of a fundraising operation” (nj4gov.com, 2021).

Perhaps evaluating the amount of money that the Democratic party allocates towards campaigns relative to the Republican party will make it easier to understand just how important finances are in Democratic campaigns. A report released by the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Committee in 2017 shows that out of the five Democratic and five Republican candidates that ran for 2017's primary elections, every Democratic candidate combined raised \$23,513,445 while every Republican candidate combined raised \$4,550,441.

Taking a closer look at the breakdown of the donors for Murphy's 2021 campaign also provides valuable insight as to how the party overall obtains its money for primary and general campaigns -- the primary source of funding. The following data was gathered from the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission. An abundance of the contributions fall between \$2,000 and \$4,900 per contributor. Less than 20 contributions were \$250 or less, and less than 10 contributions were under \$100. Many of the contributors themselves were corporations, PACs, or unions. Examples include Bayer Corporation, Constructors for Good Government Inc, Alkermes Inc. PAC, and Amalgamated Transit Union. Not every donation was from the state of New Jersey either. Other states that donations came from included California, Arizona, Connecticut, Washington D.C., Virginia, Texas, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Florida, South Dakota, and Utah. Again, comparing Murphy's finance sources to a Republican candidate may further contextualize the Democratic party's emphasis on money when it comes to its influence on campaign activity. For example, the data available on the Republican candidate Jack Ciattarelli by The New Jersey Election Law Enforcement shows that only three donations made to him were over \$4,000, and majority of donations are \$1,000 or less. The latest expense report from the New Jersey Election

Law Enforcement Commission provides a brief breakdown of what the fundraising money has been spent on: \$70k on Administration categorized as "other," \$67.5k on Legal and Accounting, \$64.5k on Personnel and Taxes, \$40.5k on Fundraising Expenses categorized as "other," \$11.7k on Food and Beverage for Fundraising, \$6.7k on Equipment, \$4.7k on Computer Accounting Consultant(s), \$371.45 on rent and utilities, and \$55.00 on Printing and Mailing.

To further demonstrate how important finances are for the Democratic party, it is also relevant to mention that Murphy's campaign selected an organization called Choose New Jersey to "manage a \$3 million ad campaign to promote the state as a destination for businesses," where "the \$3 million was added to the current budget by the governor's office" (Arco, 2019). The purpose of this is to create "a marketing program to highlight the benefits of doing business in the state ... and to encourage national and international business entities to relocate and expand in New Jersey (Arco, 2019). This allocation of funds for the purpose of generating an advertisement also shows that money in this campaign is inextricably linked to the role of media advertising in campaign activity for the Democratic Party.

A non-profit that is run by Phil Murphy's advisors launched a TV and digital ad in 2020 for the upcoming primaries which cost them \$1.25 million (Wildstein, 2020). This ad, featuring Murphy sitting in an empty baseball stadium, focuses on his priority of rebuilding the state's economy post Covid-19. He addresses income disparities based on socioeconomic status that were brought to light during the pandemic (Wildstein, 2020). Murphy's utilization of television ads has been primarily supported through New Direction NJ sponsorships, a non-profit advocacy organization which was created by many of his allies (Steinberg, 2020). This usage of media advertising is a pattern that can also be traced back to the 2019 election, in which the same non-profit of New Direction NJ allocated \$2 million on Murphy's television ads two weeks prior

to the primaries (Wildstein, 2020). These ads have been planned, crafted, and produced by Brad Lawrence and Steve DeMicco who are the nation's two most innovative and competent media consultants a part of the Democratic Party" (Steinberg, 2020). In an effort to emphasize just how important of a part digital media and advertising has had on Murphy's campaign, Steinberg also compared him to previous governor Tom Keen and believes that "both governors owe their political popularity and success largely to their proficiency with television" (Steinberg, 2020).

Given that the Republican party overall raises less money for its candidates than its Democratic counterpart, it is expected that they subsequently spend less on digital advertising. However, there is still effort being made by the GOP. For example, Republican candidate Brian Levine scheduled a "media day" for April 23, directly followed by a meet and greet with residents on Zoom (Brian Levine for Governor, 2021). However, no information is given about what exactly this entails. Similarly, Republican candidate Harsh Singh uploaded a YouTube video introducing himself and his platform in November of 2020. His media advertising seems to be primarily covered by his YouTube channel with 145 subscribers and thirty one total uploads. Historically, a greater effort in advertising by the GOP has been allocated more towards attack ads against any Democratic candidate. For example, the New Jersey Republican State Committee issued an attack ad against 11th District Assembly candidate Vin Gopal back in 2011. This attack ad took the form of a mailer circulated around that district, stating "Corrupt Political Bosses. Money Laundering. Fraud. It's Just Another Day At The Office For Vin Gopal" (Shinske, 2011). It implies that Gopal had a connection to former Assemblyman Joseph Vas's criminal activities, though none of this is factually proven to be true.

Given that interest groups exert most of their influence on legislation through lobbyists, a political party's usage of interest groups and lobbyists go hand in hand. To evaluate how this

applies to the Democratic party's influence on campaign activity through these two entities first requires to unpack the policies that Murphy supported as well as successfully enacted. He was able to implement the Millionaire's tax, a minimum wage increase, and an increase in aid for school districts and municipalities. His COVID-19 response also proved to be incredibly effective as he imposed strict social distancing guidelines, mask mandates, and business activity which led to the reduction of infections and death rates (Steinberg, 2020). The commercials he releases shows his support for paid family leave, lower healthcare costs, and property tax reduction (Steinberg, 2020). Upon evaluating the top interests groups in New Jersey based on the amount of money they spent in 2019, many seem to be relating to the working class, education, or healthcare. Thus their correlation or relationship with Murphy's most popular policies and legislation could lead one to logically conclude that interest groups do play a huge role in election campaigns. The groups that endorsed Murphy or showed support in some capacity include the New Jersey Education Association , New Jersey State Laborers, and New Jersey Hospital Association, Northeast Regional Council of Carpenters, Plumbers and Pipefitters, Communications Workers of America, and New Jersey Builders Association (Friedman, 2019).

The amount of money spent on lobbying further testifies to the increased importance of the practice. According to the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement, the amount of money the top ten New Jersey interest groups have spent in 2018 all drastically increased in 2019. A few have increased as far as double the amount they spent in 2018. In 2019 altogether, New Jersey lobbyists spent over \$100 million (O'Dea, 2020). Even on incredibly specific interests like marijuana alone, that has led to the spending of \$3.8 million dollars on issues such as expansion of medical marijuana, decriminalization, and legalization" (O'Dea, 2020).

A particularly unique case of lobbyist Pete Cammarano shows is a specific example of how a lobbyist plays into the campaign activity of certain candidates. Cammarano became a lobbyist in 2006, amassing an impressive roster of highly reputable clients in technology, utilities, gambling, health care, and marijuana and his firm "became the fifth-largest lobbying shop in the state" (Nash, 2018). He took a particular interest in legalizing marijuana. His motivations seemed to stem from genuine concern over social issues, as the driving factor behind this stance was the fact that Black marijuana users and dealers were far more disproportionately arrested and incarcerated for marijuana than whites. Keeping this mind, he served as Murphy's liaison to legislation makers as well as served as his top political adviser in 2018. He also had the power of managing almost 130 gubernatorial staffers. Because of this, Cammarano wielded an enormous amount of influence in Trenton, where he was not just any other chief of staff, but one that held the ability to influence marijuana legislation on a statewide scale. Thus, he was an integral part of the Murphy administration's success given his extensive amount of experience and power. His "knowledge of the levers of power in Trenton is unmatched by anyone" (Nash 2018). These findings demonstrate that lobbyists have always and will continue to exert an overwhelming amount of influence in campaign activity and legislation.

The methods that lobbyists from all political parties utilize to achieve their goals also sheds light on the growing importance of digital media and media advertising, not just for the gubernatorial candidates themselves. Jeffrey Brindle stated to the NJ spotlight that "the days when lobbyists dependent mostly on buttonholing legislators in the state house hallways are long over." Instead, they have increasingly relied more and more on "television, radio, digital, billboards, and other advertising methods" as a way to "seek to mobilize grassroots support for or

against bills." And while this can be an effective strategy, it also costs money, which is what Brindle attributes the massive spike in lobbyist spending to.

One striking example of the increased use of digital media within political parties is the ACLU of New Jersey combined usage of an Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook account. A left-wing human and civil rights interest group covering a spectrum of topics like abortion, racial justice, prisons, immigration, and LGBTQ+ rights, the ACLU utilizes daily tweets, infographics, and videos to promote messages and present research regarding such topics. Such methods of interest groups using social media platforms may arguably be one of the most efficient ways of garnering attention from as many people as possible within the shortest amount of time. The statistics regarding United States social media among its population speaks for itself. Eighty-three percent of Americans over thirteen years old are active on one or more social media accounts, with an average usage time of 2 hours and 24 minutes (Dean, 2021). According to research from Pew Research published in January of 2021, eighty-six percent of Americans receive their news primarily from social media platforms.

The ACLU of New Jersey also serves as another example of an interest group whose public viewpoints play an important role in shaping the way the public thinks about certain legislative issues and therefore makes them aware of how candidates from various political parties respond to said issues. In the beginning of April, they published the results of a poll to their Instagram account revealing that "2/3 of New Jersey voters support the Reproductive Freedom Act," citing the source Change Research. Similarly, in October of 2020, they made a post informing voters of as well as promoting bill S2480/A4171, which would allocate funds to immigrants in New Jersey that have been denied economic relief. They then supported their

stance by citing 63% of voters agree to the bill as well, according to a poll conducted by them. However, bias may be present as the ACLU generally attracts more left-leaning citizens.

Gun rights interest groups leverage a similar type of power in influencing candidates' campaigns. Evaluating data from 2007-2013 published on NJ.com in 2019 reveals that organizations like the National Shooting Sports Foundation Inc., Association of New Jersey Rifle and Pistol Clubs, and the National Rifle Association donated a few hundred to a thousand dollars to Republican lobbyists for the cause of pro-gun rights (Astudillo, 2019). Perhaps contributions to and from interest groups and lobbyists like these can explain that although gun control legislation was passed throughout the New Jersey legislature, they ultimately were not passed by former Chris Christie when he was governor. Gun advocate groups continue to leverage influence on legislation even after a candidate's election. After Murphy's election and the successful passing of a bill that imposed stricter gun control measures, the state of New Jersey was sued by the Association of New Jersey Rifle & Pistol Clubs and the National Rifle Association at the end of 202 for a law that "denies law-abiding gun owners the right to a concealed carry permit" (NRA-ILA, 2020). The successful passing of strict gun laws in the first place in recent years during Murphy's administration may be attributed to the fact that gun rights interest groups barely have any digital media presence, unlike powerhouse organizations like the ACLU. And if they do exist somewhere online, they hardly garner enough attention and traction to influence New Jersey voters on a massive scale. For example, the ANJRPC does not have an Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter page that they otherwise could take advantage of to share legislative news relating to pro-gun rights.

Another essential aspect of political parties in campaign activity is their utilization of consulting groups and services, where they implement and execute a campaign message and

strategies based on constituent research such as polling data. A noteworthy example for the Democratic party is the consulting group Scarlet Oak Strategies. According to their website, their leader Mike Muller has accumulated 25 years of experience working with New Jersey electoral and advocacy campaigns dealing with issues like "healthcare, financial services, and international issues." One selling point of their service is similar to the benefits of hiring a lobbyist--understanding the navigation of the intricacies of the New Jersey's government. In addition, they state that they are able to select target audiences specific to a candidate's campaign based on years of analytical data, and their strategic planning has been proven successful as they have achieved winning advocacy and electoral campaigns. Groups they've worked with include the New Jersey Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee, NJ Senate Democratic Majority, Monmouth County Democrats, The Voice of Working Families in the Garden State, and the Burlington County Democratic Committee. This consulting group also utilizes lobbyists, another piece of evidence supporting the massive influence lobbyists have in campaign activity.

If one wants to look at a specific consulting service that directly ties to one of the New Jersey gubernatorial candidates, it is worthy to evaluate Democratic political Consultant Steve DeMicco. He has formerly consulted for the New Start New Jew Jersey, which was founded by Phil Murphy. He helped the group's mission of growing the state's economy and improving its citizens' quality of life. Named as Ballotpedia's top consulting political influencer in New Jersey in 2015, his top strategies for consulting for the Democratic party includes conducting surveys on activists and journalists that fall across the political spectrum and having a deep knowledge of local politics and professional staff. He is a consultant who, through his superior strategies and knowledge, helps elect candidates, influence ideological changes among politicians and the public, and is referred to during policy proposals.

In terms of Republican consulting services, though there are no known direct connections between consultants and current gubernatorial candidates, they still are just as active and Democratic ones and perform the same type of job for campaigns. For example, Chris Russell of Chris Russell Consulting is a strategic advisor for numerous Republican members of Congress, Republican organizations, the New Jersey state legislature, and local municipalities in New Jersey. He has directly served as a consultant on the campaigns of Republican Congressman Tom MacArthur, former Republican Congressman John Runyan, State Representatives Sam Fiocchi and Donna Simon, and Republican Executive Councilor Joseph Kenney. Amanda Glass is another consultant who has leveraged significant assistance in New Jersey campaign activity. Though she has not been a consultant for anyone in a gubernatorial election, she managed the New Jersey Senate Minority Leader Leonard Lance's campaign for the state's Congress in 2008. Her work led to Lance's victory in the primary election out of seven candidates as well as his victory in the general elections. Bill Hildebrand of Mercury Consulting has also contributed greatly to New Jersey Republican elections through designing "winning campaign strategies with data-driven advocacy, direct advertising and grassroots mobilization efforts" (Mercury, 2021). He has directly influenced political campaign activity by managing direct mail expenditures for ballot referendums, super PACs, non-profits, and party committees.

The influence of political parties on municipal, gubernatorial, and federal elections are based on a variety of factors from finances, to lobbying, to interest groups, and to digital media. Although the general trend of political party influence on campaign activity throughout the years has been decreasing, the case of the New Jersey Democratic and Republican parties shows that despite these trends, campaign activity continues to rely heavily on them. The data showing

money allocated towards campaign financing, lobbying, interest groups, and digital media proves this to be true.

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