

judge that the religious right controls two-thirds of the state party organizations.

Party activism today is ideologically motivated to a much greater extent than in the past. The demise of the spoils system, public sector unionization, conflict-of-interest laws, changes in our political culture, and other factors have cumulated to diminish the material rewards for party activism and the associated incentive to compromise abstract principles in order to maintain material benefits. Today's activists are more ideologically motivated, and whatever the sample studied—state convention delegates, national convention delegates, financial contributors, campaign activists (see Figure 11-4), or candidates themselves—those so motivated come disproportionately from the extremes of the opinion distribution.<sup>33</sup>

The situation is similar with interest groups. At one time groups were viewed as moderating influences in politics.<sup>34</sup> Because people had multiple memberships they were subject to cross-pressures that led them to moderate their stands. On some important issues groups were so heterogeneous internally that they could not take clear positions or exert political influence.<sup>35</sup> Contrast those stylized facts with the contemporary ones. The economic groups formed in the previous generation are more focused and specialized than the older groups people joined before that. They represent single industries, not large sectors. Moreover, there has been a proliferation of "single-issue groups." In the 1960s the NRA was everyone's example of the latter; today, people have their choice of hundreds, many involving matters far more esoteric than guns. Scholars today are more likely to view interest groups as a divisive force in politics, not a moderating one.

If the polarization of political activists were purely a partisan phenomenon or one limited to the national political level, devotees of civic engagement might dismiss it as an exception to the axiom that the more civic engagement the better. Voting in a primary or attending a pro-choice rally may not be the best examples of what they mean by civic engagement. But anyone who has followed a variety of nonpartisan community conflicts in recent years—sex education, land use, leash laws, the organization of

33. On state delegates see McCann (1996). On national delegates see Miller and Jennings (1986). On contributors see Brown, Powell, and Wilcox (1995). On candidates see Erikson (1990).

34. The locus classicus is Truman (1958).

35. As discussed by Bauer, Poole, and Dexter (1968) in the context of trade legislation.