

Entrepreneurship in the sphere of power: A multilevel analysis of institutional political interactions in the United States

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: Interdisciplinary Scope: United States</p> <p>Received: 13 March 2025 Revised: ----- Accepted: 17 March 2025 Published online: 26 March 2025</p> <p>Keywords: corporate influence, lobbying, political entrepreneurship, power.</p>	<p>Despite extensive research on the relationship between political entrepreneurship and power, the impact of the political context on corporate activities has not been fully explored. Large corporations play a crucial role in managing political and economic opportunities through coercive power (lobbying and financial contributions), persuasive power (policy formulation), and authoritative power (market position consolidation). This study employs analysis of variance (ANOVA) on data from publicly traded U.S. companies from 2001 to 2019 to examine the impact of different levels of power (industry, corporation, executives) on corporate actions (lobbying expenditures and campaign contributions) and government actions (government contracts). The samples were categorized based on the control of key branches of government by Democrats or Republicans. The results revealed that the corporate level explained the most variance, followed by the industry level and then the executive level. However, the influence of power significantly varied with political changes throughout the study period. The findings of this study have important implications for future research on the role of power in shaping corporate opportunities and theorizing political entrepreneurship. They contribute to a better understanding of how persuasive and authoritative powers operate in corporate influence under changing political contexts.</p>

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Political entrepreneurship involves the strategic use of corporate power to shape public policies, influence regulatory frameworks, and guide institutional developments toward favorable market conditions. While numerous studies have examined corporate-political interactions, there remains insufficient exploration of how divergent political contexts—especially shifts in partisan control—affect the strategic actions of corporations. Existing research often centers on three forms of corporate power: coercive (such as direct lobbying and financial contributions), persuasive (including agenda-setting and public opinion shaping), and authoritative (grounded in market dominance and established legitimacy). These studies, however, have tended to analyze each form of power individually or have not comprehensively investigated how power operates across multiple levels (industry, firm, and executive).

Moreover, prior scholarship has seldom accounted for the dynamic nature of political leadership changes, in which conservative or liberal administrations enact differing policy agendas that can dramatically alter the regulatory and competitive landscapes. For instance, a firm operating under a conservative administration might employ aggressive lobbying to capitalize on deregulation, while the same firm under a liberal administration might invest more in corporate social responsibility to gain legitimacy. This variability underscores the need for a more integrated framework that examines how corporations simultaneously manage power at multiple levels in response to fluid political conditions. By addressing this gap, the present study offers new insights into the adaptive, multi-level strategies corporations deploy when facing evolving partisan environments in the United States.

Aims

The central aim of this research is to investigate how varying political contexts, specifically changes in Democrat and Republican control of the executive and legislative branches, shape the interplay between coercive, persuasive, and authoritative power within organizations. The study focuses on three organizational levels—industry, corporate, and executive—to assess their relative influence on corporate political entrepreneurship.

First, it explores whether industries subject to stringent regulations are more inclined to adopt coercive and persuasive approaches to mitigate external pressures. Second, at the corporate level, it examines how firm-specific resources, strategic orientations, and market positions drive lobbying expenditures, campaign contributions, and interactions with government agencies. Third, at the executive level, it considers how personal networks, reputations, and ideological alignments enhance or constrain a firm's political influence. By synthesizing these dimensions, the research seeks to clarify the mechanisms through which political leadership changes precipitate

shifts in corporate strategic behavior, thereby deepening theoretical understanding and generating practical guidelines for navigating complex political landscapes.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design, centering on Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) to address the nested structure of corporate data across industries and over time. Data were drawn from multiple public sources, notably OpenSecrets.org and USASpending.gov, to capture lobbying expenditures, campaign contributions, and federal contract allocations for publicly traded U.S. companies from 2001 to 2019. The sampling process excluded financial institutions, government-owned entities, and firms with incomplete data, ensuring the final dataset was both comprehensive and consistent.

A critical step in data preparation involved matching corporate identifiers across databases. Company names, SIC codes, and standardized firm-level identifiers (such as gvkey) were used to ensure that lobbying and contract transactions were accurately attributed to the correct entities. This matching process prevented duplication and missing records, ultimately yielding a stable panel of firms.

Political context was determined by mapping each observation year to partisan control of the executive (presidential) and legislative (congressional) branches, differentiating periods of unified versus divided government. The HLM approach then disentangled the proportion of variance explained at each level (industry, firm, and executive), enabling a more precise evaluation of which factors are most influential in shaping corporate political actions under different administrations.

Findings

The results highlight that firm-level characteristics account for the largest share of the variance—approximately 56%—in corporate political entrepreneurship. These characteristics include the size of a firm's financial resources, strategic orientation, and market position, underscoring the centrality of firm-specific attributes. Industry-level factors explain about 13% of the variance, with more heavily regulated sectors (e.g., pharmaceuticals and defense) exhibiting heightened political engagement in the form of lobbying and campaign contributions. This pattern underscores the importance of coercive power in regulatory-intense industries, where firms proactively influence policy to mitigate constraints and bolster competitive advantage.

Executive-level determinants—contributing around 9%—reflect the role of leadership networks, reputations, and ideological leanings. Chief executives who share political affinities with prevailing administrations appear more adept at securing government contracts or swaying policy outcomes. Notably, the study finds that Republican administrations are

associated with increased corporate lobbying activities and campaign contributions, implying that firms systematically tailor their engagement strategies to exploit deregulation-oriented policies and potentially reduced governmental oversight. Meanwhile, Democratic control tends to prompt firms to prioritize messaging that aligns with social or environmental agendas. Overall, the results underscore the fluidity of corporate political strategies in response to alternating conservative and liberal political leadership.

Conclusion

In synthesizing these findings, this research underscores the multifaceted nature of political entrepreneurship, highlighting how corporations orchestrate coercive, persuasive, and authoritative power across industry, firm, and executive levels. The demonstrated interplay between internal resources and external political shifts expands current theoretical perspectives, revealing that firm-specific factors remain paramount, yet industry-wide regulations and individual executive attributes also shape outcomes in meaningful ways. Furthermore, the study illustrates how corporate strategies can pivot notably under Republican versus Democratic administrations, lending empirical support to institutional theory's contention that organizations adapt to—and potentially seek to influence—shifting political environments.

Beyond theoretical contributions, practical implications arise for corporate leaders and policymakers. Managers must monitor evolving political power structures and refine resource allocation to lobbying, public messaging, or market-building initiatives accordingly. Policymakers, for their part, may consider the cyclical nature of political influence and develop more transparent frameworks to ensure balanced representation of public interests. Future research should further refine these insights by examining longitudinal patterns within specific high-stakes industries, as well as extending the scope to other political systems with multiparty governance. In doing so, scholars and practitioners will obtain a fuller picture of how corporate political entrepreneurship unfolds amid varying institutional and political contexts.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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