

Introduction

The Changing Nature of Interest Group Politics*

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From James Madison to Madison Avenue, political interests have played a central role in American politics. But this great continuity in our political experience has been matched by ambivalence toward interest groups from citizens, politicians, and scholars. James Madison's warnings of the dangers of faction echo in the rhetoric of reformers from Populists and Progressives near the turn of the century to the so-called public interest advocates of today.

If organized special interests are nothing new in American politics, can today's group politics nevertheless be seen as having changed fundamentally? Acknowledging that many important, continuing trends exist, we seek to place in perspective a broad series of changes in modern interest group politics. Among the most substantial of these developments are these:

- A great proliferation of interest groups since the early 1960s
- A centralization of group headquarters in Washington, DC, rather than New York City or elsewhere
- Major technological developments in information processing that promote more sophisticated, more timely, and more specialized communications strategies, such as grassroots lobbying and the message politics of issue-based campaigns
- The rise of single-issue groups
- Changes in campaign finance laws (1971, 1974) and the ensuing growth of political action committees (PACs) and, more recently, the sharp increases in soft money contributions to parties and issue advocacy campaign advertisements for individual candidates
- The increased formal penetration of political and economic interests into the bureaucracy (advisory committees), the presidency (White House group representatives), and the Congress (caucuses of members)

*This overview chapter remains unchanged from its revision circa 2000 of a piece first written in 1983. Thus references to the "health care debate" address the Clinton-era proposals, and some material does not reflect subsequent developments, especially for campaign finance.

- The continuing decline of political parties' ability to perform key electoral and policy-related activities, despite their capacity to funnel soft money to candidates
- The increased number, activity, and visibility of public interest groups, such as Common Cause and the Ralph Nader-inspired public interest research organizations
- The growth of activity and impact of institutions, including corporations, universities, state and local governments, and foreign interests
- A continuing rise in the amount and sophistication of group activity in state capitals, especially given the devolution of some federal programs and substantial increases in state budgets

All these developments have antecedents in earlier eras of American political life; there is little that is genuinely new under the interest group sun. Political action committees have replaced (or complemented) other forms of special interest campaign financing. Group-generated mail directed at Congress has been a tactic since at least the early 1900s.¹ Many organizations have long been centered in Washington, DC, members of Congress traditionally have represented local interests, and so on.

Still, the level of group activity, coupled with growing numbers of organized interests, distinguishes contemporary group politics from the politics of earlier eras. Group involvement trends lend credence to the fears of scholars such as political scientist Theodore Lowi and economist Mancur Olson, who have viewed interest-based politics as contributing to governmental stalemate and reduced accountability.² If accurate, these analyses point to a fundamentally different role for interest groups than those suggested by Madison and group theorists after him.

Only during the past thirty years, in the wake of Olson's path-breaking research, have scholars begun to examine realistically why people join and become active in groups.³ It is by no means self-evident that citizens should naturally become group members—quite the contrary in most cases. We are faced, then, with the paradoxical and complex question of why groups have proliferated when it can be economically unwise for people to join them.

Interest Groups in American Politics

Practical politicians and scholars alike generally agree that interest groups (also known as factions, organized interests, pressure groups, and special interests) are natural phenomena in a democratic regime—that is, individuals will band together to protect their interests.⁴ In Madison's words, "The causes of faction . . . are sown in the nature of man." But controversy continues as to whether groups and group politics are benign or malignant forces in American politics. "By a faction," Madison wrote, "I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting

to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”⁵

Although Madison rejected the remedy of direct controls over factions as “worse than the disease,” he saw the need to limit their negative effects by promoting competition among them and by devising an elaborate system of procedural “checks and balances” to reduce the potential power of any single, strong group, whether that interest represented a majority or minority position.

Hostility toward interest groups became more virulent in industrialized America, where the great concentrations of power far outstripped anything Madison might have imagined. In the early twentieth century many Progressives railed at various monopolistic “trusts” and intimate connections between interests and corrupt politicians. Later, in 1935, Hugo Black, then a senator and later a Supreme Court justice, painted a grim picture of group malevolence: “Contrary to tradition, against the public morals, and hostile to good government, the lobby has reached such a position of power that it threatens government itself. Its size, its power, its capacity for evil, its greed, trickery, deception and fraud condemn it to the death it deserves.”⁶

Similar suspicions are expressed today, especially in light of the increased role of money in electoral politics. The impact of groups on elections has grown steadily since the adoption of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 and its 1974 amendments—reform legislation originally intended to limit the impact of organized interests. Instead, such interests accelerated their spending on campaigns. Until the 1990s most concerns focused on PACs; indeed, direct PAC contributions to congressional candidates rose from less than \$23 million in 1975–1976 to nearly \$260 million in the 1999–2000 election cycle. The number of PACs has leveled off at about 4,000, and only a few are major players in electoral politics. Moreover, PACs encourage large numbers of contributors to pool their funds, a tactic that enhances Americans’ political participation.

More worrisome over the past decade have been the growing amount and impact of essentially unregulated money from organized interests. “Soft money” contributions to national political parties totaled nearly \$600 million in 2000, almost doubling the amount in the 1996 presidential year. Democrats received 98 percent more, and Republicans upped their totals by 81 percent. Even more troublesome may be issue advocacy advertising by organized interests, which does not fall under the expenditure limits and disclosure requirements of the Federal Election Commission. Thus in the 2000 campaign, the drug industry group called Citizens for Better Medicare spent more than \$40 million on advertisements designed to help congressional allies, both past and prospective.⁷ At the time, this group and many like it did not need to disclose where their funds came from. Nor was there any limit on the amount of expenditures, as long as they did not “expressly advocate” a preference for a

candidate (that is, use the words *vote for* and similar words) or coordinate efforts with a candidate or party committee.

By focusing on “hard money” activity (largely reported contributions to candidates), “the [Federal Election Commission] . . . could no longer restrain most of the financial activity that takes place in modern elections.”⁸ Such an environment has renewed calls for additional campaign finance reform. So far, however, Congress has resisted changing laws that regulate group activity in national elections, and public cynicism about special interest influence will likely continue.

Pluralism and Liberalism

Despite popular distrust of interest group politics, political scientists and other observers often have viewed groups in a positive light. This perspective draws on Madison’s *Federalist* writings but is tied more closely to the growth of the modern state. Political science scholars such as Arthur Bentley, about 1910, and David Truman, forty years later, placed groups at the heart of politics and policymaking in a complex, large, and increasingly specialized governmental system. The interest group becomes an element of continuity in a changing political world. Truman noted the “multiplicity of co-ordinate or nearly co-ordinate points of access to governmental decisions” and concluded that “the significance of these many points of access and of the complicated texture of relationships among them is great. This diversity assures various ways for interest groups to participate in the formation of policy, and this variety is a flexible, stabilizing element.”⁹

Derived from Truman’s work and that of other group-oriented scholars is the notion of the pluralist state, in which competition among interests, in and out of government, will produce policies roughly responsive to public desires and no single set of interests will dominate. Interest group scholar Carole Gorenwald summarizes:

Pluralist theory assumes that within the public arena there will be countervailing centers of power within governmental institutions and among outsiders. Competition is implicit in the notion that groups, as surrogates for individuals, will produce products representing the diversity of opinions that might have been possible in the individual decision days of democratic Athens.¹⁰

In many ways the pluralist vision of American politics corresponds to the realities of policy making and the distribution of policy outcomes, but a host of scholars, politicians, and other observers have roundly criticized this perspective. Two broad (although sometimes contradictory) critiques have special merit.

The first argues that some interests habitually lose in the policy process, while others habitually win. Without endorsing the contentions of elite theorists that a small number of interests and individuals conspire to dominate

societal policies, one can make a strong case that interests with more resources (money, access, information, and so forth) usually will obtain better results than interests that possess fewer assets and employ them less effectively. The small, cohesive, well-heeled defense industry, for example, does well year in and year out in policy making; marginal farmers and the urban poor produce a much less successful track record.¹¹ Based on continuing unequal results, critics of the pluralist model argue that interests are still represented unevenly and unfairly.

The second critique generally agrees that inequality of results remains an important aspect of group politics. But this perspective, most forcefully set out by Theodore Lowi, sees interests as generally succeeding in their goals of influencing government—to the point that government itself, in one form or another, provides a measure of protection to almost all societal interests. Everyone thus retains some vested interest in the structure of government and array of public policies. This does not mean that all interests get exactly what they want from governmental policies; rather, all interests get at least some rewards. From this point of view, the tobacco industry surely wishes to see its crop subsidies maintained, but the small farmer and the urban poor also have pet programs, such as guaranteed loans and food stamps.

Lowi has labeled the proliferation of groups and their growing access to government “interest group liberalism.” He argues that this phenomenon is pathological for a democratic government:

Interest group liberal solutions to the problem of power [who will exercise it] provide the system with stability by spreading a sense of representation at the expense of genuine flexibility, at the expense of democratic forms, and ultimately at the expense of legitimacy.¹²

Interest group liberalism is pluralism, but it is sponsored pluralism, and the government is the chief sponsor. On the surface, it appears that the unequal results and interest group liberalism critiques of pluralism are at odds. Reconciliation, however, is relatively straightforward. Lowi does not suggest that all interests are effectively represented. Rather, there exists in many instances only the appearance of representation. Political scientist Murray Edelman pointed out that a single set of policies can provide two related types of rewards: tangible benefits for the few and symbolic reassurances for the many.¹³ Such a combination encourages groups to form, become active, and claim success.

The Climate for Group Proliferation

Substantial cleavages among citizens are essential for interest group development. American culture and the constitutional arrangements of the U.S. government have encouraged the emergence of multiple political interests. In the pre-Revolutionary period, sharp conflicts existed between commercial and landed interests, debtor and creditor classes, coastal residents and those in the

hinterlands, and citizens with either Tory or Whig political preferences. As the new nation developed, its vastness, characterized by geographical regions varying in climate, economic potential, culture, and tradition, contributed to a great heterogeneity. Open immigration policies further led to a diverse cultural mix with a wide variety of racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds represented among the populace. Symbolically, the notion of the United States as a “melting pot,” emphasizing group assimilation, has received much attention, but a more appropriate image may be a “tossed salad.”¹⁴

The Constitution also contributes to a favorable environment for group development. Guarantees of free speech, association, and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances are basic to group formation. Because political organization often parallels government structure, federalism and the separation of powers—principles embodied in the Constitution—have greatly influenced large numbers of interest groups in the United States.

The decentralized political power structure in the United States allows important decisions to be made at the national, state, or local levels. Within each level of government there are multiple points of access. For example, business-related policies such as taxes are acted on at each level, and interest groups may affect these policies in the legislative, executive, or judicial arenas. In the case of federated organizations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, state and local affiliates often act independently of the national organization. Numerous business organizations thus focus on the varied channels of access.

In addition, the decentralized political parties found in the United States are less unified and disciplined than parties in many other nations. The resulting power vacuum in the decision-making process offers great potential for alternative political organizations, such as interest groups, to influence policy. Even in an era of strong legislative parties (mid-1980s on), many opportunities for influence remain.

Finally, American cultural values may encourage group development. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the 1830s, values such as individualism and the need for personal achievement underlie the propensity of citizens to join groups. Moreover, the large number of access points—local, state, and national—contributes to Americans’ strong sense of political efficacy when compared with that expressed by citizens of other nations.¹⁵ Not only do Americans see themselves as joiners, but they tend to belong to more political groups than do people of other countries.¹⁶

Theories of Group Development

A climate favorable to group proliferation does little to explain how interest groups organize. Whatever interests are latent in society and however favorable the context for group development may be, groups do not arise spontaneously. Farmers and a landed interest existed long before farm organizations first

appeared; laborers and craftspeople were on the job before unions. In a simple society, even though distinct interests exist, there is little need for interest group formation. Farmers have no political or economic reason to organize when they work only for their families. Before the industrial revolution, workers were craftspeople who often labored in small family enterprises. Broad-based political organizations were not needed, although local guilds often existed to train apprentices and protect jobs.

David Truman has suggested that increasing societal complexity, characterized by economic specialization and social differentiation, is fundamental to group proliferation.¹⁷ In addition, technological changes and the increasing interdependence of economic sectors often create new interests and redefine old ones. Robert Salisbury's discussion of American farming is instructive:

The full-scale commercialization of agriculture, beginning largely with the Civil War, led to the differentiation of farmers into specialized interests, each increasingly different from the next. . . . The interdependence that accompanied the specialization process meant potential conflicts of interests or values both across the bargaining encounter and among the competing farmers themselves as each struggled to secure his own position.¹⁸

Many political scientists assume that an expansion of the interest group universe is a natural consequence of growing societal complexity. According to Truman, however, group formation "tends to occur in waves" and is greater in some periods than in others.¹⁹ Groups organize politically when the existing order is disturbed and certain interests are, in turn, helped or hurt.

It is not surprising, then, that economic interests develop both to improve their position and to protect existing advantages. The National Association of Manufacturers originally was created to further the expansion of business opportunities in foreign trade, but it became a more powerful organization largely in response to the rise of organized labor.²⁰ Mobilization of business interests since the 1960s often has resulted from threats posed by consumer advocates and environmentalists, as well as requirements imposed by the steadily growing role of the federal government.

Disturbances that trigger group formation need not be strictly economic or technological. Wars, for example, place extreme burdens on society, and lengthy conflicts lead to a growth of groups, whether based on support of (World War II) or opposition to (Vietnam) the conflict. Likewise, broad societal changes may disturb the status quo. The origin of the Ku Klux Klan, for example, was fear that increased numbers of ethnic and racial minorities threatened white, Christian America.

Truman's theory of group proliferation suggests that the interest group universe is inherently unstable. Groups formed from an imbalance of interests in one area induce a subsequent disequilibrium, which acts as a catalyst for

individuals to form groups as counterweights to the new perceptions of inequity. Group politics thus is characterized by successive waves of mobilization and countermobilization. The liberalism of one era may prompt the resurgence of conservative groups in the next. Similarly, periods of business domination often are followed by eras of reform group ascendancy. In the 1990s health care reform proposals raised the stakes for almost all segments of society. Interest group politicking reached historic proportions as would-be reformers, the medical community, and business interests sought to influence the direction of change in line with their own preferences. And given the complexity of health care policy making, the struggles among organized interests will surely continue for years.

Personal Motivations and Group Formation

Central to theories of group proliferation are the pluralist notions that elements of society possess common needs and share a group identity or consciousness and that these are sufficient conditions for the formation of effective political organizations. Although the perception of common needs may be necessary for political organization, whether it is sufficient for group formation and effectiveness is open to question. Historical evidence documents many instances in which groups have not emerged spontaneously, even when circumstances such as poverty or discrimination would seem, in retrospect, to have required it.

Mancur Olson effectively challenged many pluralist tenets in *The Logic of Collective Action*, first published in 1965. Basing his analysis on a model of the “rational economic man,” Olson posited that even individuals who have common interests are not inclined to join organizations that attempt to address their concerns. The major barrier to group participation is the “free rider” problem: “rational” individuals choose not to bear the participation costs (time, membership fees) because they can enjoy the group benefits (such as favorable legislation) without joining. Groups that pursue “collective” benefits, which accrue to all members of a class or segment of society regardless of membership status, will have great difficulty forming and surviving. According to Olson, it would be economically irrational for individual farmers to join a group seeking higher farm prices when benefits from price increases would be enjoyed by all farmers, even those who contribute nothing to the group. Similarly, it would be irrational for an individual environmentalist to become part of organized attempts to reduce air pollution, when all citizens, members of environmental groups or not, would reap the benefits of cleaner air. The free rider problem is especially serious for large groups because the larger the group, the less likely an individual will perceive his or her contribution as having any impact on group success.

For Olson, a key to group formation—and especially group survival—is “selective” benefits. These rewards—for example, travel discounts, informative

publications, and cheap insurance—go only to members. Organizations in the best positions to offer such benefits are those initially formed for some nonpolitical purpose and that ordinarily provide material benefits to their clientele. In the case of unions, for example, membership may be a condition of employment. For farmers, the American Farm Bureau Federation offers inexpensive insurance, which induces individuals to join even if they disagree with the group's goals. In professional circles, membership in professional societies may be a prerequisite for occupational advancement and opportunity.

Olson's notions have sparked several extensions of the rational man model, and a reasonably coherent body of incentive theory literature now exists.²¹ Incentive theorists view individuals as rational decision makers interested in making the most of their time and money by choosing to participate in groups that offer benefits greater than or equal to the costs they incur by participation. Three types of benefits are available. Olson, an economist, emphasized material benefits—tangible rewards of participation, such as income or services that have monetary value. Solidary benefits are the socially derived, intangible rewards created by the act of association, such as fun, camaraderie, status, or prestige. Finally, expressive (also known as purposive) benefits derive from advancing a particular cause or ideology.²² Groups formed on both sides of issues such as abortion or gun control illustrate the strength of such expressive incentives.

The examination of group members' motivations, and in particular the focus on nonmaterial incentives, allows for some reconciliation between the traditional group theorists' expectations of group development and the recent rational actor studies, which emphasize barriers to group formation. Nonmaterial incentives, such as fellowship and self-satisfaction, may encourage the proliferation of highly politicized groups and "have the potential for producing a more dynamic group context in which politics, political preferences, and group goals are more centrally determining factors than in material associations, linking political considerations more directly to associational size, structure, and internal processes."²³ Indeed, pure political benefits may attract members, and even collective benefits can prove decisive in inducing individuals to join large groups. Like elected officials, groups may find it possible to take credit for widely approved government actions, such as higher farm prices, stronger environmental regulations, or the protection of Social Security.²⁴

Finally, several studies indicate that the free rider problem may not be quite the obstacle to participation that it was once thought to be, especially in an affluent society. Albert Hirschman, for example, has argued that the costs and benefits of group activity are not always clear; in fact, some costs of participation for some individuals, such as time and effort expended, might be regarded as benefits (in terms of personal satisfaction) by others.²⁵ Other researchers have questioned whether individuals even engage in rational, cost-benefit thinking as they make membership decisions. Michael McCann noted

that “there seems to be a general threshold level of involvement below which free rider calculations pose few inhibitions for . . . commitment from moderately affluent citizen supporters.”²⁶ In short, individuals may join and participate in groups for reasons beyond narrow economic self-interest or the availability of selective benefits.²⁷

Contemporary Interest Group Politics

Several notable developments mark the modern age of interest group politics. Of primary importance is the large and growing number of active groups and other interests. The data here are sketchy, but one major study found that most current groups came into existence after World War II and that group formation has accelerated substantially since the early 1960s.²⁸ Also, since the 1960s groups have increasingly directed their attention toward the center of power in Washington, DC, as the scope of federal policy making has grown and groups seeking influence have determined to “hunt where the ducks are.” As a result, the 1960s and 1970s marked an explosion in the number of groups lobbying in Washington.

A second key change is evident in the composition of the interest group universe. Beginning in the late 1950s, political participation patterns underwent some significant transformations. Conventional activities such as voting declined, and political parties, the traditional aggregators and articulators of mass interests, became weaker. Yet at all levels of government, evidence of citizen involvement has been apparent, often in the form of new or revived groups. Particularly impressive has been the growth of citizens’ groups—those organized around an idea or cause (at times a single issue) with no occupational basis for membership. Fully 30 percent of such groups have formed since 1975, and in 1980 they made up more than one-fifth of all groups represented in Washington.²⁹

In fact, a participation revolution occurred in the country as many citizens became active in an increasing number of protest groups, citizens’ organizations, and special interest groups. These groups often comprise issue-oriented activists or individuals who seek collective material benefits. The free rider problem has proven not to be an insurmountable barrier to group formation, and many new interest groups do not use selective material benefits to gain support. Still, since the late 1970s, the number of these groups has remained relatively stable, and they are well established in representing consumers, environmentalists, and other public interest organizations.³⁰

Third, government itself has profoundly affected the growth and activity of interest groups. Early in this century, workers found organizing difficult because business and industry used government-backed injunctions to prevent strikes. By the 1930s, however, with the prohibition of injunctions in private labor disputes and the rights of collective bargaining established, most governmental actions

directly promoted the growth of labor unions. In more recent years, changes in campaign finance laws have led to an explosion in the number of political action committees, especially among business, industry, and issue-oriented groups. Laws facilitating group formation certainly have contributed to group proliferation, but government policy in a broader sense has been equally responsible.

Fourth, not only has the number of membership groups grown in recent decades, but a similar expansion has occurred in the political activity of many other interests, such as individual corporations, universities, churches, governmental units, foundations, and think tanks.³¹ Historically, most of these interests have been satisfied with representation by trade or professional associations. Since the mid-1960s, however, many have chosen to employ their own Washington, DC, representatives. From 1961 to 1982, for example, the number of corporations with Washington offices increased tenfold.³² The chief beneficiaries of this trend are Washington-based lawyers, lobbyists, and public relations firms. The number of attorneys in the nation's capital, taken as a rough indicator of lobbyist strength, tripled from 1973 to 1983, and the growth of public relations firms was likewise dramatic. The lobbying community of Washington is large, increasingly diverse, and part of the expansion of policy domain participation, whether in agriculture, the environment, or industrial development. Political scientist James Thurber has calculated that 91,000 lobbyists and people associated with lobbying were employed in the Washington, DC, area in the early 1990s.³³ As of 2001, the *Encyclopedia of Associations* listed approximately 22,200 organizations, up more than 50 percent since 1980 and almost 400 percent since 1955.³⁴ And this number does not include hundreds of corporations and other institutions (such as universities) that also are represented in Washington.

The Growth of Government

Although the government prompted the establishment of some agricultural interest groups in the nineteenth century, since the 1930s the federal government has become increasingly active as a spur to group formation. One major New Deal goal was to use government as an agent in balancing the relationships among contending forces in society, particularly between industry and labor. One objective was to create greater equality of opportunity, including the "guarantee of identical liberties to all individuals, especially with regard to their pursuit of economic success."³⁵ For example, the Wagner Act (1935), which established collective bargaining rights, attempted to equalize workers' rights with those of their employers. Some New Deal programs did have real redistributive qualities, but most, even Social Security, sought only to ensure minimum standards of citizen welfare. Workers were clearly better off, but "the kind of redistribution that took priority in the public philosophy of the New Deal was not of wealth, but a redistribution of power."³⁶

The Role of Public Policy The expansion of federal programs accelerated from 1960 to 1980; since then, costs have continued to increase, despite resistance to new programs. In what political scientist Hugh Heclo termed an “Age of Improvement,” the federal budget has grown rapidly (from nearly \$100 billion in 1961 to \$2.1 trillion in 2001) and has widened the sweep of federal regulations.³⁷ Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society—a multitude of federal initiatives in education, welfare, health care, civil rights, housing, and urban affairs—created a new array of federal responsibilities and program beneficiaries. The growth of many of these programs has continued, although that growth was slowed markedly by the Reagan and Bush administrations, as well as by the Republican capture of Congress in 1994. In the 1970s the federal government further expanded its activities in consumer affairs, environmental protection, and energy regulation. It also redefined some policies, such as affirmative action, to seek greater equality of results.

Many of the government policies adopted early in the Age of Improvement did not result from interest group activity by potential beneficiaries. Several targeted groups, such as the poor, were not effectively organized during the period of policy development. Initiatives typically came from elected officials responding to a variety of private and public sources, such as task forces of academics and policy professionals.³⁸

The proliferation of government activities led to a mushrooming of groups around the affected policy areas. Newly enacted programs provided benefit packages that encouraged interest group formation. Consider group activity in policy toward the aging. The radical Townsend Movement, based on age grievances, received much attention during the 1930s, but organized political activity focused on age-based concerns had virtually no influence in national politics. Social Security legislation won approval without the involvement of age-based interest groups. Four decades later, by 1978, roughly \$112 billion (approximately 24 percent of total federal expenditures) went to the elderly population, and it was projected that in fifty years the outlay would amount to 40 percent of the budget.³⁹ By the early 1990s, however, the elderly population already received one-third of federal outlays, and long-term projections had been revised upward. The existence of such massive benefits has spawned a variety of special interest groups and has encouraged other organizations, often formed for nonpolitical reasons, to redirect their attention to the politics of aging.

Across policy areas, two types of groups develop in response to governmental policy initiatives: recipients and service deliverers. In the sector devoted to policies affecting elderly individuals, recipient groups are mass-based organizations concerned with protecting—and if possible expanding—old-age benefits. The largest of these groups—indeed, the largest voluntary association represented in Washington—is the AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons).

The AARP is well over twice the size of the AFL-CIO and, after the Roman Catholic Church, is the nation's largest organization. In 1998 it counted 33 million members, an increase of 23 million in twenty years.⁴⁰ Approximately half of Americans ages fifty or older, or one-fifth of all voters, belong to the group, in part because membership is cheap—\$8 a year. Much of the organization's revenue comes from advertising in its bimonthly magazine, *Modern Maturity*. The organization's headquarters in Washington has its own zip code; a legislative/policy staff of 165; 28 registered, in-house lobbyists; and more than 1,200 staff members in the field. Charles Peters, editor of *Washington Monthly*, claimed that the "AARP is becoming the most dangerous lobby in America," given its vigorous defense of the elderly population's interests.⁴¹ At the same time, because the AARP represents such a wide array of individuals, it is often cautious and slow in its actions.

Federal program growth also has generated substantial growth among service delivery groups. In the health care sector, for example, these range from professional associations of doctors and nurses to hospital groups to the insurance industry to suppliers of drugs and medical equipment. Not only is there enhanced group activity, but hundreds of individual corporations have strengthened their lobbying capacities by opening Washington offices or hiring professional representatives from the capital's many lobbying firms.⁴²

Federal government policy toward the aging is probably typical of the tendency to "greatly increase the incentives for groups to form around the differential effects of these policies, each refusing to allow any other group to speak in its name."⁴³ The complexity of government decision making increases under such conditions, and priorities are hard to set. Particularly troublesome for decision makers concerned with national policy is the role played by service delivery groups. In the area of aging, some service groups are largely organizational middlemen concerned with their status as vendors for the elderly population. The trade associations, for example, are most interested in the conditions surrounding the payment of funds to elderly individuals. The major concern of the Gerontological Society, an organization of professionals, is to obtain funds for research on problems of elderly individuals.

Middleman organizations do not usually evaluate government programs according to the criteria used by recipient groups; rather, what is important to them is the relationship between the program and the well-being of their organizations. Because many service delivery groups offer their members vitally important selective material incentives (financial advantages and job opportunities), they are usually far better organized than most recipient groups (the elderly population in this case, the AARP notwithstanding). As a result, service groups sometimes speak for the recipients. This is particularly true when recipient groups represent disadvantaged people, such as poor or mentally ill populations.

Middleman groups have accounted for a large share of total group growth since 1960, and many of them are state and local government organizations.

Since the late 1950s the federal government has grown in expenditures and regulations more than in personnel. Employment in the federal government has risen only 20 percent since 1955, whereas that of states and localities has climbed more than 250 percent. Contemporary federal activism largely involves overseeing and regulating state and local governmental units, which seek funding for a wide range of purposes. The intergovernmental lobby, which includes the National League of Cities, the International City Manager Association, the National Association of Counties, the National Governors' Association, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and more, has grown to become one of the most important lobbies in Washington. In addition, many local officials, such as transportation or public works directors, are represented by groups, and even single cities and state boards of regents have established Washington offices.

Direct Intervention by Government Not only do public policies contribute to group proliferation, but government often directly intervenes in group creation. This is not an entirely new activity. In the early twentieth century officials in the Department of Agriculture encouraged the formation of the American Farm Bureau Federation, and officials in the Commerce Department did the same for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Since the 1960s the federal government has been especially active in providing start-up funds and in sponsoring groups. One study found that government agencies have concentrated on sponsoring organizations of public service professions:

Federal agencies have an interest in encouraging coordination among the elements of these complex service delivery systems and in improving the diffusion of new ideas and techniques. Groups like the American Public Transit Association or the American Council on Education . . . serve as centers of professional development and informal channels for administrative coordination in an otherwise unwieldy governmental system.⁴⁴

Government sponsorship also helps explain the recent rise of citizens' groups. Most federal domestic legislation has included provisions requiring some citizen participation, which has spurred the development of various citizen action groups, including grassroots neighborhood associations, environmental action councils, legal defense coalitions, health care organizations, and senior citizens' groups. Such group sponsorship evolved for two reasons:

First, there is the ever-present danger that administrative agencies may exceed or abuse their discretionary power. In this sense, the regulators need regulating. Although legislatures have responsibility for doing this . . . the administrative bureaucracy has grown too large for them to monitor. Therefore, citizen participation has developed as an alternative means of monitoring government agencies. Second, government agencies are not entirely comfortable with their discretionary power. . . . [T]o reduce the

potential of unpopular or questionable decisions, agencies frequently use citizen participation as a means for improving, justifying, and developing support for their decisions.⁴⁵

Citizens' groups thus have two sometimes inconsistent missions: to oversee an agency and to act as an advocate for the groups' programs.

Government funding of citizens' groups takes numerous forms. Several federal agencies—including the Federal Trade Commission, Food and Drug Administration, and Environmental Protection Agency—have reimbursed groups for participation in agency proceedings.⁴⁶ At other times the government makes available seed money or outright grants. Interest group scholar Jack Walker found that 89 percent of citizens' groups received outside funding in their initial stages of development.⁴⁷ Not all the money was from federal sources, but much did come from government grants or contracts. Government can also take away, however, and the Reagan administration made a major effort to “defund” left-leaning interests, especially citizens' groups. But once established, groups have strong instincts for survival. Indeed, the Reagan administration provided an attractive target for many citizens' groups in their recruiting efforts. This dance of defunding took place again, in 1995, after Republicans won control of the House of Representatives.

Citizens' groups, numbering in the thousands, continually confront the free rider problem because they are largely concerned with collective goods and rarely can offer the selective material incentives so important for expanding and maintaining membership. With government funding, however, the development of a stable group membership is not crucial. Many groups are essentially staff organizations with little or no membership base. In the world of interest group politics, resources are often more important than members.

Unintended Intervention Government policies contribute to group formation in many unintended ways as well. Policy failures can impel groups to form, as happened with the rise of the American Agriculture Movement in the wake of the Nixon administration's grain export policies. An important factor in the establishment of the Moral Majority was the perceived harassment of church-run schools by government officials. As for abortion, the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* played a major role in the mobilization of antiabortion rights groups. And the 1989 *Webster* decision, which limited the availability of legal abortions, did the same for abortion rights groups. Even the lack of federal funding can play a role. The rise in the incidence of prostate cancer, coupled with a modest budget for research, helped lead to the formation of the National Prostate Cancer Coalition. This group has pressed the government to increase funding on prostate cancer toward levels that are spent on AIDs and breast cancer, given that the three diseases kill about the same number of individuals each year.

Finally, the expansion of government activity often inadvertently contributes to group development and the resulting complexity of politics. The development of the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (BASS) is a good example. From the late 1940s through the 1960s the Army Corps of Engineers dammed enough southern and midwestern streams to create a host of lakes, thereby providing an inviting habitat for largemouth bass. Anglers arrived in droves to catch their limits, and the fishing industry responded by creating expensive boats filled with specialized and esoteric equipment. The number and affluence of bass aficionados did not escape the attention of Ray Scott, an enterprising soul who began BASS in 1967. In the early 1990s, with its membership approaching 1 million (up from 400,000 in 1982), BASS remained privately organized, offering its members selective benefits such as a slick magazine filled with tips on how to catch their favorite fish, packages of lures and line in return for joining or renewing their memberships, instant information about fishing hot spots, and boat owners' insurance. BASS also provided a number of solidary benefits, such as the camaraderie of fishing with fellow members in specially sanctioned fishing tournaments and the vicarious excitement of fishing with "BASS pros" whose financial livelihood revolved around competitive tournament fishing. The organization is an excellent example of Robert Salisbury's exchange theory approach to interest groups, because it provides benefits to both members and organizers in a "mutually satisfactory exchange."⁴⁸

In fact, "members" may be a misnomer, in that the nominal members have no effective role in group decision making. In 1993 a federal district judge dismissed a \$75 million suit filed against Scott by some BASS members. The judge reasoned that the organization was and always had been a for-profit corporation; its "members" thus had no standing to sue.

Although Scott sold the organization to a private corporation in 1986 (the ultimate expression of entrepreneurial success), he remained active in much of its work and wrote a column for the monthly publication, *BassMaster*. Never denying that the organization was anything but a profit-making entity, Scott stated, "Every time I see one of those BASS stickers I get a lump, right in my wallet."⁴⁹

Like most groups, BASS did not originate as a political organization, and for the most part it remains an organization for anglers, with 600,000 members, even in the wake of its 2001 acquisition by the ESPN television network.⁵⁰ Yet BASS has entered politics. *BassMaster* has published political commentary, and in 1980, 1988, and 1992 it endorsed George H. W. Bush for president. It also has called for easing travel restrictions to Cuba, where world-record catches may lurk.

Most groups claim that access is their major goal within the lobbying process, and here BASS has succeeded beyond its wildest dreams. Former president George H. W. Bush has been a life member of BASS since 1978 and

has claimed that *BassMaster* is his favorite magazine. Scott used his relationship with Bush to lobby for the fishing community in general and BASS in particular. In March 1989 Scott visited the White House and, during a horse-shoe match with President Bush, indicated his concern about rumors that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) planned to limit the disbursement of \$100 million in trust funds for fishery management projects. The next morning Bush informed Scott that “all of our monies are secure from OMB or anyone else.”⁵¹

BASS increased its political activities by sponsoring Voice of the Environment, which lobbies on water quality issues, and filing class-action lawsuits on behalf of anglers against environmental polluters. Although the organization can point to a number of conservation and environmental activities, it is distrusted by much of the mainstream environmental movement. BASS’s connections to the boating industry often put it at odds with groups seeking to preserve a pristine natural environment or elite angling organizations whose members fish for trout in free-flowing streams rather than for the bass behind federally funded dams.

Indeed, regardless of Scott’s entrepreneurial skills, there would probably be no BASS if it were not for the federal government and the Army Corps of Engineers. Fifty years of dam building by the Corps and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation have altered the nature of fish populations. Damming of rivers and streams has reduced the quality of fishing for cold-water species such as trout and pike and enhanced the habitat for largemouth bass, a game fish that can tolerate the warmer waters and mud bottoms of man-made lakes. Finally, because many of these lakes are located close to cities, the government has made bass fishing accessible to a large number of anglers.

From angling to air traffic control, the federal government has affected, and sometimes dominated, group formation. But many other forces have contributed to group proliferation, often in concert with increased public sector involvement.

The Decline of Political Parties

In a diverse political culture characterized by divided power, political parties emerged early in our history as instruments to structure conflict and facilitate mass participation. Parties function as intermediaries between the public and formal government institutions, as they reduce and combine citizen demands into a manageable number of issues and enable the system to focus on society’s most important problems.

The party performs its mediating function primarily through coalition building—“the process of constructing majorities from the broad sentiments and interests that can be found to bridge the narrower needs and hopes of separate individuals and communities.”⁵² The New Deal coalition, forged in

the 1930s, illustrates how this works. Socioeconomic divisions dominated politics from the 1930s through the 1960s. Less affluent citizens tended to support government provisions for social and economic security and the regulation of private enterprise. Those economically better off usually took the opposite position. The Democratic coalition, by and large, represented disadvantaged urban workers, Catholics, Jews, Italians, Eastern Europeans, and African Americans. On a variety of issues, southerners joined the coalition, along with a smattering of academics and urban liberals. The Republicans were concentrated in the rural and suburban areas outside the South; the party was made up of established ethnic groups, businesspeople, and farmers and was largely Protestant. Party organizations dominated electoral politics through the New Deal period, and interest group influence was felt primarily through the party apparatus.

Patterns of partisan conflict are never permanent, however, and since the 1940s social forces have contributed to the creation of new interests and the redefinition of old ones. This has destroyed the New Deal coalition without putting a new partisan structure in its place and has provided opportunities for the creation of large numbers of political groups—many that are narrowly focused and opposed to the bargaining and compromise patterns of coalition politics. The changes of recent decades reflect the societal transformation that scholars have labeled the “postindustrial society.” Postindustrial society is centered on several interrelated developments:

affluence, advanced technological development, the central importance of knowledge, national communication processes, the growing prominence and independence of the culture, new occupational structures, and with them new life styles and expectations, which is to say new social classes and new centers of power.⁵³

At the base is the role of affluence. From 1947 to 1972 median family income doubled, even after controlling for the effects of inflation. During that same period the percentage of families earning \$10,000 or more, in constant dollars, grew from 15 percent to 60 percent of the population.⁵⁴ A large proportion of the population began to enjoy substantial discretionary income and moved beyond subsistence.

The consequences of spreading abundance did not reduce conflict, as some observers had predicted.⁵⁵ Instead, conflict heightened, because affluence increased dissatisfaction by contributing to a “mentality of demand, a vastly expanded set of expectations concerning what is one’s due, a diminished tolerance of conditions less than ideal.”⁵⁶ By the 1960s the democratizing impact of affluence had become apparent, as an extraordinary number of people enrolled in institutions of higher education. It is not surprising that the government was under tremendous pressure to satisfy expectations, and it too contributed to

increasing demands both in rhetoric and through many of its own Age of Improvement initiatives.

With the rise in individual expectations, class divisions and conflicts were drastically transformed. Political scholar Walter Dean Burnham noted that the New Deal's class structure changed, and by the late 1960s the industrial class pattern of upper, middle, and working class had been "supplanted by one which is relevant to a system dominated by advanced postindustrial technology." At the top of the new class structure was a "professional-managerial-technical elite . . . closely connected with the university and research centers and significant parts of it have been drawn—both out of ideology and interest—to the federal government's social activism." This growing group tended to be cosmopolitan and more socially permissive than the rest of society. The spread of affluence in postindustrial society was uneven, however, and certain groups were disadvantaged by the changes. At the bottom of the new class structure were those "whose economic functions had been undermined or terminated by the technical revolution of the past generation . . . people, black and white, who tend to be in hard core poverty areas."⁵⁷ The focus of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty was to be on this class.

The traditional political party system found it difficult to deal effectively with citizens' high expectations and a changing class structure. The economic, ethnic, and ideological positions that had developed during the New Deal became less relevant to parties, elections, and voter preferences. The strains were particularly evident among working-class Democrats. New Deal policies had been particularly beneficial to the white working class, enabling that group to earn incomes and adopt lifestyles that resembled those of the middle class. And although Age of Improvement policies initiated by Democratic politicians often benefited whites as well as minorities, many white workers viewed these policies as attempts to aid lower-class blacks at the expense of whites. By the late 1960s the white working class had taken on trappings of the middle class and conservatism, both economically and culturally.

At the same time, such New Deal divisions as ethnicity also had lost their cutting edge because of social and geographic mobility. As political scientist Michael Dawson observes,

It does not seem inaccurate to portray the current situation as one in which the basic coalitions and many of the political symbols and relationships, which were developed around one set of political issues and problems, are confronted with new issues and new cleavages for which these traditional relationships and associations are not particularly relevant. Given these conditions, the widespread confusion, frustration, and mistrust are not surprising.⁵⁸

Various conditions led to the party system's inability to realign—build coalitions of groups to address new concerns to adapt to changing societal divisions.

For example, consider the difficulty of building coalitions around the kinds of issues that have emerged over the past fifteen or twenty years.

Valence issues—general evaluations of the goodness or badness of the times—have become important, especially when related to the cost of living. Yet most such issues do not divide the country politically. Everyone is against inflation and crime. A second set of increasingly important issues are those that are highly emotional, cultural, or moral in character, such as abortion, euthanasia, AIDS, the death penalty, and drug laws. These subjects divide the electorate but elicit intense feelings from only a relatively few citizens. Opinion on such issues often is unrelated to traditional group identifications. Moreover, public opinion is generally disorganized or in disarray—that is, opinions often are unrelated or weakly related to one another on major issues, further retarding efforts to build coalitions.

There is some question about whether parties retain the capacity to shape political debate even on issues that lend themselves to coalition building. Although the decline of political parties began well before the 1960s, the weakening of the party organization has accelerated in the postindustrial age. The emergence of a highly educated electorate, less dependent on party as an electoral cue, has produced a body of citizens that seeks out independent sources of information. Technological developments—such as television, computer-based direct mail, and political polling—have enabled candidates to virtually bypass political parties in their quest for public office. The rise of political consultants has reduced even further the need for party expertise in running for office. The recruitment function of parties also has been largely lost to the mass media, as journalists now “act out the part of talent scouts, conveying the judgment that some contenders are promising, while dismissing others as of no real talent.”⁵⁹

Considerable evidence suggests that parties have adapted to this new political environment, but party organizations no longer dominate the electoral process. In an era of candidate-centered politics, parties are less mobilizers of a diverse electorate than service vendors to ambitious individual candidates. The weakness of political parties has helped to create a vacuum in electoral politics since 1960, and in recent years interest groups have moved aggressively to fill it. Indeed, in the 2000 election, many interests bypassed the parties—and even the candidates’ organizations—to advertise directly on behalf of particular candidates, all the while articulating their own positions on key issues such as Medicare, drug pricing, term limits, Social Security, and gun control. Simultaneously, organized interests such as labor, environmentalists, antiabortion rights groups, and some corporations have worked closely with parties both by contributing soft money and by implicitly coordinating the corporation’s campaign activities with those of the parties.

The Growth of Interest Groups

Although it may be premature to formulate a theory that accounts for growth spurts, we can identify several factors fundamental to group proliferation in contemporary politics.⁶⁰ Rapid social and economic changes, powerful catalysts for group formation, have created new interests (for example, the recreation industry) and redefined traditional ones (for example, higher education). The spread of affluence and education, coupled with advanced communication technologies, further contributes to the translation of interests into formal group organizations. Postindustrial changes have generated many new interests, particularly among occupational and professional groups in the scientific and technological arenas. For instance, genetic-engineering associations have sprung up in the wake of recent DNA discoveries, to say nothing of the growing clout and sophistication of the computer industry, from Microsoft on down.

Perhaps more important, postindustrial changes have altered the pattern of conflict in society and created an intensely emotional setting in which groups rise or fall in status. Ascending groups, such as members of the new professional-managerial-technical elite, have both benefited from and supported government activism; they represent the new cultural liberalism—politically cosmopolitan and socially permissive. At the same time, rising expectations and feelings of entitlement have increased pressures on government by aspiring groups and the disadvantaged. The 1960s and early 1970s witnessed wave after wave of group mobilization based on causes ranging from civil rights to women's issues to the environment to consumer protection.

Threat as Motivation Abrupt changes and alterations in status, however, threaten many citizens. Middle America, perceiving itself as downwardly mobile, has grown alienated from the social, economic, and cultural dominance of the postindustrial elites, on one hand, and resentful of government attempts to aid minorities and other aspiring groups on the other. The conditions of a modern, technologically based culture also are disturbing to more traditional elements in society. Industrialization and urbanization can uproot people, cutting them loose from familiar life patterns and values and depriving them of meaningful personal associations. Fundamentalist elements feel threatened by various technological advances (such as use of fetal tissue for medical research) as well as by the more general secular liberalism and moral permissiveness of contemporary life. In the 1990s the growth of the Christian Coalition, both nationally and locally, profoundly affected both electoral and legislative politics by mobilizing citizens and activists. In addition, the growth of bureaucracy, in and out of government, antagonizes everyone at one time or another.

Elites feel postindustrial threats as well. The nuclear arms race and its potential for mass destruction fostered the revived peace movement of the 1980s and its goal of a freeze on nuclear weapons. In addition, the excesses and

errors of technology, such as oil spills and toxic waste disposal, have led to group formation among some of the most advantaged and ascending elements of society.

The growth of the animal rights movement since the mid-1980s illustrates interest groups' potential for enhanced participation and influence. Although traditional animal protection organizations such as the Humane Society have existed for decades, the 1990s spawned a host of pro-animal offspring, such as People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Progressive Animal Welfare Society, Committee to Abolish Sport Hunting, and the Animal Rights Network. Reminiscent of the 1960s, there is even the Animal Liberation Front, an extremist group that engages in direct actions that sometimes include violence.⁶¹ Membership in the organizations that make up the animal rights movement increased rapidly; founded in 1980, PETA grew from 20,000 members in 1984 to 370,000 by 1994 and 600,000 in 2001. One 1991 estimate placed the number of animal rights organizations at 400, representing approximately 10 million members.⁶²

One major goal of these groups is to stop, or greatly retard, scientific experimentation on animals. Using a mix of protest, lobbying, and litigation, the movement contributed to the closing of several animal labs, including the Defense Department's Wound Laboratory and a University of Pennsylvania facility involved in research on head injuries. In 1988 the animal rights group Trans-Species forced the Cornell University Medical College to give up a \$600,000 grant, which left unfinished a fourteen-year research project in which cats were fed barbiturates.⁶³

As the most visible of the animal rights groups, PETA embarked on an intensive campaign in the early 1990s to influence children's attitudes and values toward society's treatment of animals. Using a seven-foot mascot, Chris P. Carrot, to spread its message, PETA organizers sought to visit public schools throughout the Midwest. Although some of PETA's message is noncontroversial (for example, children should eat their vegetables), the organization also argues aggressively against consuming meat. Chris P. Carrot thus carries a placard stating, "Eat your veggies, not your friends." More prosaically, PETA produces publications denouncing hunting, trapping, and other practices that abuse animals; PETA's Kids Can Save Animals even encourages students to

call the toll-free numbers of department stores to protest furs and animal-test cosmetics, to call sponsors and object to rodeos, circulate petitions for "violence-free" schools that do not use frog corpses for biology lab, and to boycott zoos and aquariums, and marine parks.⁶⁴

It is not surprising that PETA protests have spawned countermobilizations, for example, an anti-animal rights movement. In the forefront of such actions are organizations that support hunting as a sport. They must contend with a public that has become increasingly hostile to hunting; a 1993 survey reported that 54

percent of Americans were opposed to hunting, with the youngest respondents (ages eighteen to twenty-nine) expressing the most negative sentiments.⁶⁵ In addition, farm and medical groups have mobilized against the animal rights movements, and a number of new organizations have been formed. Such groups range from the incurably ill for Animal Research (iiFAR), representing those who hope for medical breakthroughs in biomedical research, to the Foundation for Animal Health, organized by the American Medical Association in hopes of diverting funds away from animal rights groups.

The most visible group in the animal rights countermobilization, Putting People First (PPF), claimed more than 35,000 members and 100 local chapters within one year of its formation. PPF counted hunting clubs, trapping associations, rodeos, zoos, circuses, veterinary hospitals, kennels and stables, and carriage horse companies among its membership. Taking a page from animal rights' public relations activities, PPF has begun a Hunters for the Hungry campaign that has provided 160,000 pounds of venison to economically disadvantaged families in the South. To PPF, the animal rights movement has declared war on much of America and is "seeking to destroy a way of life—to tell us we can no longer believe in the JudeoChristian principles this country was founded on. They insist every form of life is equal: humans and dogs and slugs and cockroaches." PPF leaders see the organization as speaking for "the average American who eats meat and drinks milk, benefits from medical research, wears leather, wool, and fur, hunts and fishes, and owns a pet and goes to the zoo."⁶⁶

The intensity of conflict between the animal rights advocates and their opponents typifies the deep cultural divisions of the postindustrial era. Similar differences affect many other key issues, from gun control to education (school choice) to immigration policy. Moreover, many of these conflicts do not lend themselves to compromise, whether because of vast policy differences or group leaders' desire to keep "hot" issues alive as a way to increase membership.

Affluent Members and Sponsors Although postindustrial conflicts generate the issues for group development, the spread of affluence also systematically contributes to group formation and maintenance. In fact, affluence creates a large potential for "checkbook" membership. Issue-based groups have done especially well. Membership in such groups as PETA and Common Cause might once have been a luxury, but the growth in discretionary income has placed the cost of modest dues within reach of most citizens. For a \$15 to \$25 membership fee, people can make an "expressive" statement without incurring other organizational obligations. Increasing education also has been a factor in that "organizations become more numerous as ideas become more important."⁶⁷

Reform groups and citizens' groups depend heavily on the educated white middle class for their membership and financial base. A Common Cause poll, for example, found that members' mean family income was

\$17,000 above the national average and that 43 percent of members had an advanced degree.⁶⁸ Animal rights groups display a similar membership profile, although they are disproportionately composed of college-educated, urban, professional women.⁶⁹ Other expressive groups, including those on the political right, have been aided as well by the increased wealth of constituents and the community activism that result from education and occupational advancement.

Groups can overcome the free rider problem by finding a sponsor who will support the organization and reduce its reliance on membership contributions. During the 1960s and 1970s private sources (often foundations) backed groups. Jeffrey Berry's 1977 study of eighty-three public interest organizations found that at least one-third received more than half their funds from private foundations, and one in ten received more than 90 percent of their operating expenses from such sources.⁷⁰ Jack Walker's 1981 study of Washington-based interest groups confirmed many of Berry's earlier findings, indicating that foundation support and individual grants provide 30 percent of all citizens' group funding.⁷¹ Such patterns produce many staff organizations with no members, raising major questions about the representativeness of the new interest group universe. Finally, groups themselves can sponsor other groups. The National Council of Senior Citizens (NCSC), for example, was founded by the AFL-CIO, which helped recruit members from the ranks of organized labor and still pays part of NCSC's expenses.

Patrons often are more than just passive sponsors who respond to group requests for funds. In many cases group mobilization comes from the top down, rather than the reverse. The patron—whether an individual such as General Motors' heir Stewart Mott or the peripatetic conservative Richard Mellon Scaife, an institution, another group, or a government entity—may initiate group development to the point of seeking entrepreneurs and providing a forum for group pronouncements.

Postindustrial affluence and the spread of education also have contributed to group formation and maintenance through the development of a large pool of potential group organizers. This group tends to be young, well educated, from the middle class, and caught up in a movement for change and inspired by ideas or doctrine. The 1960s was a period of opportunity for entrepreneurs, as college enrollments skyrocketed and powerful forces such as civil rights and the antiwar movement contributed to an idea orientation in both education and politics. Communications-based professions—from religion to law to university teaching—attracted social activists, many of whom became involved in forming groups. The government itself became a major source of what James Q. Wilson called "organizing cadres." Government employees of the local Community Action Agencies of the War on Poverty and personnel from Volunteers in Service to America were active in forming voluntary associations, some created to oppose government actions.⁷²

Technological Opportunities Compounding the effects of the growing number of increasingly active groups are changes in what organizations can do, largely as a result of contemporary technology. On a grand scale, technological change produces new interests, such as cable television and the silicon chip industry, which organize to protect themselves as interests historically have done. Beyond this, communications breakthroughs make group politics much more visible than in the past. Civil rights activists in the South understood this, as did many protesters against the Vietnam War. Of equal importance, however, is the fact that much of what contemporary interest groups do derives directly from developments in information-related technology. Many group activities, whether fund-raising or grassroots lobbying or sampling members' opinions, rely heavily on computer-based operations that can target and send messages and process the responses.

Although satellite television links and survey research are important tools, the technology of direct mail has had by far the greatest impact on interest group politics. With a minimum initial investment and a reasonably good list of potential contributors, any individual can become a group entrepreneur. These activists literally create organizations, often based on emotion-laden appeals about specific issues, from Sarah Brady's Handgun Control to Randall Terry's Operation Rescue.⁷³ To the extent that an entrepreneur can attract members and continue to pay the costs of direct mail, he or she can claim—with substantial legitimacy—to articulate the organization's positions on the issues, positions probably defined initially by the entrepreneur.

In addition to helping entrepreneurs develop organizations that require few (if any) active members, information technology also allows many organizations to exert considerable pressure on elected officials. Washington-based interests are increasingly turning to grassroots techniques to influence legislators. Indeed, after the mid-1980s these tactics had become the norm in many lobbying efforts, to the point that they were sometimes discounted as routine and "manufactured" by groups and consultants.

Communications technology is widely available but expensive. In the health care debate, most mobilized opinion has come from the best-financed interests, such as insurance companies, the drug industry, and the medical profession. Money remains the mother's milk of politics. Indeed, one of the major impacts of technology may be to inflate the costs of political action, whether for candidates engaged in increasingly expensive election campaigns or in public lobbying efforts that employ specifically targeted advertisements and highly sophisticated grassroots efforts.

Group Impact on Policy and Process

Assessing the policy impact of interest group actions has never been an easy task. We may, however, gain some insights by looking at two different levels of

analysis: a broad, societal overview and a middle-range search for relatively specific patterns of influence (for example, the role of direct mail or political action committee funding). Considering impact at the level of individual lobbying efforts is also possible, but here even the best work relies heavily on nuance and individualistic explanations.

Although the public often views lobbying and special interest campaigning with distrust, political scientists have not produced much evidence to support this perspective. Academic studies of interest groups have demonstrated few conclusive links between campaign or lobbying efforts and actual patterns of influence. This does not mean that such patterns or individual instances do not exist. Rather, the question of determining impact is exceedingly difficult to answer. The difficulty is, in fact, compounded by groups' claims of impact and decision makers' equally vociferous claims of freedom from any outside influence.

The major studies of lobbying in the 1960s generated a most benign view of this activity. Lester Milbrath painted a Boy Scout-like picture of Washington lobbyists, depicting them as patient contributors to policymaking.⁷⁴ Rarely stepping over the limits of propriety, lobbyists had only a marginal impact at best. Similarly, Raymond Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis Dexter's lengthy analysis of foreign trade policy, published in 1963, found the business community to be largely incapable of influencing Congress in its lobbying attempts.⁷⁵ Given the many internal divisions within the private sector over trade matters, this was not an ideal issue to illustrate business cooperation, but the research stood as the central work on lobbying for more than a decade—ironically, in the very period when groups proliferated and became more sophisticated in their tactics. Lewis Dexter, in his 1969 treatment of Washington representatives as an emerging professional group, suggested that lobbyists would play an increasingly important role in complex policymaking, but he provided few details.⁷⁶

The picture of benevolent lobbyists who seek to engender trust and convey information, although accurate in a limited way, does not provide a complete account of the options open to any interest group that seeks to exert influence. Lyndon Johnson's long-term relationship with the Texas-based construction firm of Brown & Root illustrates the depth of some ties between private interests and public officeholders. The Washington representative for Brown & Root claimed that he never went to Capitol Hill for any legislative help because "people would resent political influence."⁷⁷ But Johnson, first as a representative and later as a senator, systematically dealt directly with the top management (the Brown family) and aided the firm by passing along crucial information and watching over key government-sponsored construction projects.

[The link between Johnson and Brown & Root] was, indeed, a partnership, the campaign contributions, the congressional look-out, the contracts, the

appropriations, the telegrams, the investment advice, the gifts and the hunts and the free airplane rides—it was an alliance of mutual reinforcement between a politician and a corporation. If Lyndon was Brown & Root's kept politician, Brown & Root was Lyndon's kept corporation. Whether he concluded that they were public-spirited partners or corrupt ones, "political allies" or cooperating predators, in its dimensions and its implications for the structure of society, their arrangement was a new phenomenon on its way to becoming the new pattern for American society.⁷⁸

Entering the twenty-first century, one could legitimately substitute Senator Trent Lott's (R-MS) name for Johnson's and that of defense and shipbuilding giant Northrup Grumman for Brown & Root; the basic set of links were very similar. Any number of events, such as the 1980s savings-and-loan scandal, show that legislators can be easily approached with unethical and illegal propositions; such access is one price of an open system. In addition, the growth of interest representation has raised long-term questions about the ethics of former government officials acting as lobbyists. Despite some modest reforms, many executive branch officials, members of Congress, and high-level bureaucrats leave office and eventually return to lobby their friends and associates. Access is still important, and its price is often high.

Contemporary Practices

Modern lobbying emphasizes information, often on complex and difficult subjects. Determining actual influence is, as one lobbyist noted, "like finding a black cat in the coal bin at midnight," but we can make some assessments about the impact of group proliferation and increased activity.⁷⁹

First, more groups are engaged in more forms of lobbying than ever before—both classic forms, such as offering legislative testimony, and newer forms, such as mounting computer-based direct mail campaigns to stir up grassroots support.⁸⁰ As the number of new groups rises and existing groups become more active, the pressure on decision makers—especially legislators—mounts at a corresponding rate. Thus a second general point can be made: congressional reforms that opened up the legislative process during the 1970s have provided a much larger number of access points for today's lobbyists. Most committee (and subcommittee) sessions, including the markups at which legislation is written, remain open to the public, as do many conference committee meetings. More roll call votes are taken, and congressional floor action is televised. Thus interests can monitor individual members of Congress as never before. This does nothing, however, to facilitate disinterested decision making or foster graceful compromises on most issues.

In fact, monitoring the legions of Washington policy actors has become the central activity of many groups. As Robert Salisbury has observed, "Before [organized interests] can advocate a policy, they must determine what position

they wish to embrace. Before they do this, they must find out not only what technical policy analysis can tell them but what relevant others, inside and outside the government, are thinking and planning."⁸¹ Given the volume of policymaking, just keeping up can be a major undertaking.

The government itself has encouraged many interests to organize and articulate their demands. The rise of group activity thus leads us to another level of analysis: the impact of contemporary interest group politics on society. Harking back to Lowi's description of interest group liberalism, we see the eventual result to be an immobilized society, trapped by its willingness to allow interests to help fashion self-serving policies that embody no firm criteria of success or failure. For example, even in the midst of the savings-and-loan debacle, the government continued to offer guarantees to various sectors, based not on future promise but on past bargains and continuing pressures.

The notion advanced by Olson that some such group-related stagnation affects all stable democracies makes the prognosis all the more serious. In summary form, Olson argued that the longer societies are politically stable, the more interest groups they develop; the more interest groups they develop, the worse they work economically.⁸² The United Automobile Workers' protectionist leanings, the American Medical Association's fight against intervention by the Federal Trade Commission into physicians' business affairs, and the insurance industry's successful prevention of FTC investigations all illustrate the possible link between self-centered group action and poor economic performance—that is, higher automobile prices, doctors' fees, and insurance premiums for no better product or service.

In particular, the politics of Social Security demonstrate the difficulties posed by a highly mobilized, highly representative set of interests. Virtually everyone agrees that the Social Security system requires serious reform; at the same time, many groups of elderly citizens (with the AARP being among the most moderate) have resisted changes that might reduce their benefits over time. Moreover, many groups outside the traditional Social Security policy community have argued for the system's privatization, either partial or total. The system will have to be modified to maintain its viability, but groups will continue to frame the debate in ways that benefit their interests, perhaps at the expense of the general good.

Conclusion

The ultimate consequences of the growing number of organized interests, their expanding activities in Washington, DC, and in state capitals, and the growth of citizens' groups remain unclear. From one perspective, such changes have made politics more representative than ever. Although most occupation-based groups traditionally have been well organized in American politics, many other

interests have not been. Population groupings such as African Americans, Hispanics, and women have mobilized since the 1950s and 1960s. Likewise, animals and the unborn are well represented in the interest group arena, as is the broader “public interest,” however defined.

Broadening the base of interest group participation may have opened the political process, thus curbing the influence of special interests. For example, agricultural policymaking in the postwar era was largely the prerogative of a tight “iron triangle” composed of congressional committee members from farm states, government officials representing the agriculture bureaucracy, and major agriculture groups such as the American Farm Bureau. Activity in the 1970s by consumer and environmental interest groups changed agricultural politics, making it more visible and lengthening the agenda to consider such questions as how farm subsidies affect consumer purchasing power and how fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides affect public health.

From another perspective, more interest groups and more openness do not necessarily mean better policies or ones that genuinely represent the national interest. Government may be unable to process demands effectively, and openness may result in complexity. Moreover, the content of demands may be ambiguous and priorities difficult to set.

Finally, elected leaders may find it practically impossible to build the kinds of political coalitions necessary to govern effectively, especially in an era of partisan parity and the unrelenting demands of the permanent campaign, which requires continual fund-raising from organized interests.

This second perspective suggests that the American constitutional system is extraordinarily susceptible to the excesses of minority faction—in an ironic way a potential victim of the Madisonian solution of dealing with the tyranny of the majority. Decentralized government, especially one that wields considerable power, provides no adequate controls over the excessive demands of interest group politics. Decision makers feel obliged to respond to many of these demands, and “the cumulative effect of this pressure has been the relentless and extraordinary rise of government spending and inflationary deficits, as well as the frustration of efforts to enact effective national policies on most major issues.”⁸³

In sum, the problem of contemporary interest group politics is one of representation. For particular interests, especially those that are well defined and adequately funded, the government is responsive to the issues of their greatest concern. But representation is not just a matter of responding to specific interests or citizens; the government also must respond to the collective needs of a society, and here the success of individual interests reduces the possibility of overall responsiveness. The very vibrancy and success of contemporary groups contribute to a society that finds it increasingly difficult to formulate solutions to complex policy questions.

Notes

1. Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney, "More of the Same: Washington Pressure Group Activity in a Decade of Change," *Journal of Politics* 45, no. 2 (1983): 351–77. For an earlier era, see Margaret S. Thompson, *The Spider's Web* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1985).
2. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1979); Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1982).
3. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1971); Robert Salisbury, "An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (1969): 1–32; and Terry M. Moe, *The Organization of Interests* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980).
4. David Truman's widely used definition of *interest group* is "any group that, on the basis of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behavior that are implied by the shared attitudes." David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 33.
5. James Madison, "Federalist 10," in *The Federalist Papers*, 2nd ed., ed. Roy P. Fairfield (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1981), 16.
6. Quoted in L. Harmon Ziegler and Wayne Peak, *Interest Groups in American Society*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 35.
7. Michael Trister, "The Rise and Reform of Stealth PACs," *The American Prospect* 11 (November 30, 2000): 32–35. Available at http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=the_rise_and_reform_of_stealth_pacs.
8. Anthony Corrado, "Financing the 2000 Elections," in *The Election of 2000*, ed. Gerald Pomper (New York: Chatham House, 2001), x.
9. Truman, *Governmental Process*, 519.
10. Carole Greenwald, *Group Power* (New York: Praeger, 1977), 305.
11. Leslie Wayne, "800-Pound Guests at the Pentagon," *New York Times*, March 15, 1998.
12. Lowi, *End of Liberalism*, 62.
13. Murray Edelman, *The Politics of Symbolic Action* (Chicago: Markham, 1971).
14. Theodore J. Lowi, *Incomplete Conquest: Governing America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976), 47.
15. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), chaps. 8 and 10.
16. Almond and Verba, *Civic Culture*, 246–47.
17. Truman, *Governmental Process*, 57.
18. Salisbury, "Exchange Theory of Interest Groups," 3–4.
19. Truman, *Governmental Process*, 59.
20. James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 154.
21. Major works include Olson, *Logic of Collective Action*; Peter B. Clark and James Q. Wilson, "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1961): 126–66; Wilson, *Political Organizations*; Terry M. Moe, "A Calculus of Group Membership," *American Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 4 (1980): 593–632; and Moe, *Organization of Interests*. The notion of group organizers as political entrepreneurs is best represented by Salisbury, "Exchange Theory of Interest Groups," 1–15.
22. See Clark and Wilson, "Incentive Systems," 129–66; Wilson, *Political Organizations*, 30–51. In recent years researchers have preferred the term *expressive* to *purposive*,

- because, as Salisbury notes, *purposive* includes what we call collective material benefits. *Material*, *solidary*, and *expressive* would seem to be mutually exclusive conceptual categories. See Salisbury, "Exchange Theory of Interest Groups," 16–17.
23. Moe, *Organization of Interests*, 144.
 24. John Mark Hansen, "The Political Economy of Group Membership," *American Political Science Review* 79, no. 1 (1985): 79–96.
 25. Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1982).
 26. Michael W. McCann, "Public Interest Liberalism and the Modern Regulatory State," *Polity* 21 (Winter 1988): 385.
 27. See, for example, Kenneth Godwin and Robert Cameron Mitchell, "Rational Models, Collective Goods, and Nonelectoral Political Behavior," *Western Political Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1982): 161–80; Lawrence S. Rothenberg, "Choosing among Public Interest Groups: Membership, Activism and Retention in Political Organizations," *American Political Science Review* 82 (December 1988): 1129–52.
 28. Jack L. Walker, "The Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups in America," *American Political Science Review* 77 (June 1983): 390–406. For a conservative critique of this trend, see James T. Bennett and Thomas DiLorenzo, *Destroying Democracy* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1986). See also many of the articles in Mark P. Petracca, ed., *The Politics of Interests* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992).
 29. Walker, "Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups," 395.
 30. Robert H. Salisbury, "Interest Representation and the Dominance of Institutions," *American Political Science Review* 78 (March 1984): 64–77.
 31. See Jeffrey Berry, *The New Liberalism: The Power of Citizen Groups* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999).
 32. Gregory Colgate, ed., *National Trade and Professional Associations of the United States, 1982* (Washington, DC: Columbia Books, 1984).
 33. Cited in Kevin Phillips, *Arrogant Capital* (Boston: Back Bay/Little, Brown, 1995), 43.
 34. *Encyclopedia of Associations*, <http://library.dialog.com/bluesheets/html/bl0114.html>, December 5, 2001.
 35. Samuel H. Beer, "In Search of a New Public Philosophy," in *The New American Political System*, ed. Anthony King (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 12.
 36. Beer, "In Search of a New Public Philosophy," 10.
 37. Hugh Hecló, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment," in *The New American Political System*, ed. Anthony King (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 89.
 38. Beer, "In Search of a New Public Philosophy," 16.
 39. Allan J. Cigler and Cheryl Swanson, "Politics and Older Americans," in *The Dynamics of Aging*, ed. Forrest J. Berghorn, Donna E. Schafer, and Associates (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981), 171.
 40. The AARP offers free memberships to spouses, which artificially enlarges its ranks, but it remains—by any count—a huge group. See John Tierney's articles: "Old Money, New Power," *New York Times Magazine*, October 23, 1988: 17; "The Big Gray Money Machine," *Newsweek*, August 15, 1988: 47.
 41. Tierney, "Old Money, New Power," 17; Tierney, "The Big Gray Money Machine," 47.
 42. Tierney, "Old Money, New Power."
 43. Hecló, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment," 96.
 44. Walker, "Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups," 401.

45. Stuart Langton, "Citizen Participation in America: Current Reflections on the State of the Art," in *Citizen Participation in America*, ed. Stuart Langton (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1978), 7.
46. Langton, "Citizen Participation in America," 4.
47. Walker, "Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups," 398.
48. Salisbury, "Exchange Theory of Interest Groups," 25.
49. Quoted in Ted Williams, "River Retrieval," *Fly Rod and Reel* 15 (January–February 1994): 17.
50. The April 2001 ESPN purchase both enhanced and limited the potential political clout of BASS. It lost much of its independent political identity, but it might well have benefited from its position within the ABC-Disney corporate family.
51. Ray Scott, "Presidential Promises," *BassMaster*, May 1989, 7.
52. David S. Broder, "Introduction," in *Emerging Coalitions in American Politics*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1978), 3.
53. Everett Carl Ladd Jr., *Transformations of the American Party System: Political Coalitions from the New Deal to the 1970s*, 2nd ed. With Charles D. Hadley. (New York: Norton, 1978), 182.
54. Ladd Jr., *Transformations of the American Party System*, 196.
55. See, for example, Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: Free Press, 1960).
56. Ladd Jr., *Transformations of the American Party System*, 203.
57. For all three quotes in this paragraph, Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970), 139.
58. Richard E. Dawson, *Public Opinion and Contemporary Disarray* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 194.
59. Everett Carl Ladd Jr., *Where Have All the Voters Gone?* 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1982), 57.
60. But see Virginia Gray and David Lowery, *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996).
61. Kevin Kasowski, "Showdown on the Hunting Ground," *Outdoor America* 51 (Winter 1986): 9.
62. Lauristan R. King and Kimberly Stephens, "Politics and the Animal Rights Movement" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, Tampa, FL, November 7–9, 1991).
63. Sara Lyall, "Scientist Gives up Grant to Do Research on Cats," *New York Times*, November 21, 1988.
64. John Balzar, quoted in Kit Harrison, "Animal 'Rightists' Target Children," *Sports Afield* 211 (June 1994): 12.
65. "Americans Divided on Animal Rights," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1993. This national survey of 1,612 adults also found that 50 percent opposed the wearing of fur.
66. Phil McCombs, "Attack of the Omnivore," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1992.
67. Wilson, *Political Organizations*, 201.
68. Andrew S. McFarland, *Common Cause* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1984), 48–49.
69. King and Stephens, "Politics and the Animal Rights Movement," 15.
70. Jeffrey M. Berry, *Lobbying for the People* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1977), 72.
71. Walker, "Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups," 400.
72. Wilson, *Political Organizations*, 203.
73. Sarah Brady, wife of former White House press secretary James Brady, organized Handgun Control after her husband was wounded in John Hinckley's 1981 attack on Ronald Reagan. Randall Terry formed Operation Rescue, which seeks to shut

down abortion clinics through direct action (for example, blocking entrances), after concluding that other antiabortion rights groups were not effective in halting abortions.

74. Lester Milbrath, *The Washington Lobbyists* (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1963).
75. Raymond Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy* (New York: Atherton, 1963).
76. Lewis A. Dexter, *How Organizations Are Represented in Washington* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), chap. 9.
77. See Ronnie Dugger, *The Politician* (New York: Norton, 1982), 273; Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York: Knopf, 1982) and *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (New York: Knopf, 1990).
78. Dugger, *Politician*, 286.
79. Quoted in Burdett A. Loomis, "A New Era: Groups and the Grass Roots," in *Interest Group Politics*, 2nd ed., ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett A. Loomis (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1983), 184.
80. Schlozman and Tierney, "More of the Same," 18.
81. Robert H. Salisbury, "The Paradox of Interest Groups in Washington—More Groups and Less Clout," in *The New American Political System*, 2nd ed., ed. Anthony King (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1990), 225–26.
82. For an expansion of this argument, see Jonathan Rauch, *Democlerosis* (New York: New York Times Books, 1994).
83. Everett Carll Ladd Jr., "How to Tame the Special Interest Groups," *Fortune*, October 1980, 6.

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