

PS21A - SPRING 2020

PLURALISM & INTEREST GROUP POWER



ARGUMENT:

INTEREST GROUPS HAVE A MORE NEGATIVE CONNOTATION THAN THEY DESERVE.

AT **WORST** THEY ARE A NECESSARY EVIL.

AT **BEST** THEY ARE A VALUABLE DEMOCRATIC CONDUIT.

REGARDLESS OF YOUR IDEOLOGY OR PARTICULAR VIEWS, THEY FULFILL A CORE ROLE IN OUR DEMOCRACY.

YOU PROBABLY **LOVE** SOME AND **HATE** SOME.

THERE'S A LONG HISTORY OF
HATING **LOBBYISTS**...

"Men of unwholesome skins, greasy garments, brutish manners, filthy minds, and sickening conversation; men who so reeked and drizzled with henbane tobacco and cockatrice whisky that a moderate drinker or smoker would recoil from them as from a cesspool; men whose stupid, shameless boasting of their briberies were enough to warn away from them all but the elect of Satan . . . [and] decayed statesmen, who were now, indeed, nothing but unfragrant corpses, breeding all manner of vermin and miasma."

—JOHN WILLIAM DE FOREST (1875)

REMEMBER **FACTIONS**?

Madison is skeptical of them in Federalist #10, yet argues we can't sacrifice liberty to remove causes

1st Amendment gives interest groups the right to form

We have to allow people to organize around causes

So, he argues for controlling their effects. How?

representative democracy

expanding the sphere

WHY DOES THIS CONTROL THE EFFECTS OF **FACTION**?

The more diverse, more plural a society is, the harder it is for one faction to dominate

pluralism (n.): all social interests freely compete with one another for influence over the government's policy decisions

Similar to Federalist #51, let competition check any power of any one group

Those groups that are most *powerful* will win out.

"The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings
with a strong upper-class accent."

—E.E. SCHATTSCHEIDER (1960)
THE SEMI-SOVEREIGN PEOPLE:
A REALIST'S VIEW OF DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

HISTORICAL & LOGICAL ORIGINS OF INTEREST GROUPS

Interest groups predate the constitution, even growing under British rule.

Those who want particular policies organize to influence legislators, build coalitions, and shift policy.

MANY EARLY INTEREST GROUPS WERE **PUBLIC INTEREST**, BUT QUICKLY DIVERSIFIED

For example:

American Anti-Slavery Society (1833)

National Trades' Union (1834)

American Temperance Union (1836)

As westward expansion occurred and business grew, so did groups aligned with those causes

Worries about **business interests** are not new (1889):



EVEN THEN, PEOPLE WONDERED WHY
BUSINESS INTERESTS OFTEN DOMINATED.

REMEMBER **COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEMS**?

UNDERMINING *PLURALISM*: COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEMS

Key work: Mancur Olson (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action*

Organization takes **work**

Small groups are easier to organize

Big stakes = easier to organize

Free riding is the norm, not the exception

How to overcome? Moral or selective incentives

- lifelong membership in the Sierra Club and your local chapter
- personalized Life Membership card
- Life Member pin
- special Life Member Certificate with an Ansel Adams image
- subscription to *Sierra Magazine*
- members-only worldwide eco-travel opportunities
- discounts on Sierra Club merchandise
- semiannual Life Member newsletter
- semiannual Insider updates from the club's conservation director.

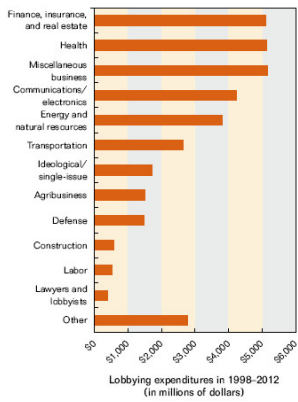
- State of American Business 2016 report
- How They Voted congressional voting record
- US Chamber of Commerce member webstickers and store decal
- Customizable legal documents through Rocket Lawyer
- A full member packet and resource guide
- Access to policy-making committees and councils
- Access to networking opportunities & professional development courses



Normal Lane
Client Service

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

1960 -> 1990 = tripled
 2000 -> 2005 = doubled
 168 CA Gov groups have DC reps
 Old conception: **iron triangles**
 Modern conception: **issue networks**
 Easier organization?
 internet, etc.



INTERESTS ARE UBIQUITOUS IN ANY OF THESE AREAS.
 WANT TO CHANGE HEALTHCARE?

Stakeholders:

- Doctors' associations
- Hospital associations
- Insurance companies
- Medical device manufacturers
- Pharmaceutical companies
- Medical Attorneys
- DHHS & the Bureaucracy
- AARP
- Patients?

WHAT ARE THEY FIGHTING OVER?

Particularized benefits (private interests)

Typically what the moniker "special" is used for

But: particularized benefits might go to disadvantaged groups

Collective goods (public interests)

Clean air, water, etc.