H.R.MAHOOD

A New Intensity

INTEREST GROUP POLITICS IN AMERICA
A New Intensity

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PREFACE

It is a largely unappreciated fact of life that our politics are group-based. National policy making is increasingly monopolized by growing numbers and types of organized interests. Virtually all segments of our society have established associations or other types of organizations to articulate and represent their interests before selected governmental decision makers. This situation will undoubtedly continue well into the 1990s.

Paradoxically, political scientists have generally been lethargic about examining the interest group explosion and its meaning for our political system. The pioneering though polemical work of Arthur Bentley early in this century established no school or sustained interest in group-based politics. It was not until David Truman's restatement of the Bentleyian thesis of political groups that political scientists began to inquire into the contribution of organized interests to national politics. Given, of course, the variety of methodological approaches that were taken by such investigators as Robert Dahl, Harmon Zeigler, Robert Salisbury, Theodore Lowi, and Terry Moe, differing conclusions were inevitable. Some of these investigators noted positive contributions of groups to both our political system and its institutions, while others were quite critical and negative. Despite their controversial nature, these studies have contributed to a more accurate and complete assessment of the nature and political activities of organized interests.

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a surge of group formation and political activity, and Washington's officialdom found itself under increased pressure from a growing army of group spokesmen. This phenomenon, however, is not all that well chronicled or discussed in existing political science literature. Indeed, emphasis is frequently on such micro matters as types of group benefits, qualities of group leadership, organizational stability, etc.

What is needed is relatively more up-to-date accounting and analysis of the pressure group system in general. In this context, we need to become aware of new forces contributing to group formation, highlight some of the more visible and influential groups in today's national politics, explore new strategies and tactics currently in vogue among today's lobbying organizations and make note of the growing role of interest groups in national elections. These and related tasks can provide the basis for a relatively more accurate assessment of organized interests in the political life of our nation. The main purpose of this publication, then, is to refocus on this new generation of interest groups and lobbies presently not all that well analyzed or understood. Given the fact, too, that today's interest group universe is vast and complex, we also see our mission as one of separating out and identifying a number of general themes concerning organized interests and their activities. By doing so, we can better predict what the consequences are for our political system in general and national policy making specifically.

In order to perform the above-listed tasks, this book is organized into three parts. Part I (Chapters 1 through 4) is introductory and deals with a number of subjects such as the recent explosion of organized interests, some prevailing theories of interest groups, lobbyists and lobbying, various key interests in selected policy areas, various lobbying techniques and strategies, plus an in-depth analysis of political action committees (PACs). These data will provide the reader with both an awareness and an appreciation of the changing group universe as well as the growing influence of these organizations in contemporary national politics.

Part II (Chapters 5 through 7) discusses and illustrates the increasing interest group interaction with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. This section also draws attention to the changing nature of government itself, as well as to the changing focuses of policy making. Governmental decision making today is much more complex and atomized than it was in the late 1940s and the 1950s. Part III (Chapters 8 and 9) deals with the recent public interest group movement and provides a detailed look at some of the representative organizations resulting therefrom. The public interest movement is responsible for a greatly expanded national agenda. Finally, Chapter 9 summarizes a number of themes from earlier chapters and notes various consequences of group-based politics on our national politics. The recent transformation in our politics is largely the result of complex and highly interrelated organized interests. It is the aim of this book to help the student better understand this important change.

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CHAPTER ONE
THE GROUP BASIS OF POLITICS: *A New Era*

A PARTICIPATION REVOLUTION

The politics of modern America cannot be fully described or understood without appreciating the role of political interest groups. Indeed, since the nation's founding, interest groups have pervaded the American political scene. Recent years, though, have witnessed an escalation of both the kinds and the numbers of politically active groups. As one report notes,

> this [group] expansion takes the form of: (1) involvement of an increasing proportion of the population in political activity; (2) the development of new groups and of new consciousness on the part of old groups, and ethnic minorities; (3) the diversification of the political means and tactics which groups use to secure their ends; (4) an increasing expectation on the part of groups that government has the responsibility to meet their needs; and (5) an escalation in what they conceive those needs to be.[1]

Public officials have attested to the presence and heightened activities of organized interests. Former cabinet member Joseph Califano, for example, observes that

> Washington has become a city of political molecules, with fragmentation of power, and often authority and responsibility, among increasingly narrow, what's-in-it-for-me interest groups and their responsive counterparts in the executive and legislative branches. This is a basic—perhaps the basic—fact of political life.[2]

And Senator Edward Kennedy has proclaimed,

> The . . . problem is that the Senate and House are awash in a sea of special interest lobbying and special interest campaign contributions. . . . We're elected to represent all the people of our states and districts, and not those rich enough or powerful enough to have lobbyists holding megaphones constantly to our ears.[3]

An ever broadening range of organized interests—tobacco farmers, Vietnam veterans, feminists, right-to-lifers, gays, religious conservatives, nonsmokers, environmentalists, and endless others—are well organized and active within the nation's political system. Since the mid-1960s, then, there has been

> an explosion of interest group activity in Washington, either with national program perspectives or for the purpose of preserving existing programs;
>
> an increasing diversity of organizations, including those seeking benefits distinctly different from traditional ones;
>
> and both an expansion and diversification of lobbying and other political activities by organized interests.

A major theme of this book is that along with the expansion of politically active groups there has been a significant transformation in their strategies of influence. Groups and governments are increasingly intermeshed, and their linkages more and more widespread.

In the pages that follow, interest group politics will be examined in greater detail. In the process, efforts will be made to draw a number of generalizations about the contributions of groups to national politics and the implications of their activities for our democratic institutions. In this way we can more accurately assess the role of groups in national policy making. Also, we can better comprehend the consequences of this heightened organizational activity for American politics in the years immediately ahead.

Several tasks must be completed, however, before we can more accurately evaluate the role of organized interests in national politics. These tasks will take up the remainder of this publication. Included among them are an examination of the factors in group formation, analyses of evolving strategies and tactics characteristic of today's pressure politics, an examination of interest group–political party interaction in present-day electoral politics, and the changing bases of government–interest group relationships in recent years.

DEFINING SOME TERMS

Before moving on to the main concerns of this chapter, we need to define some of our terms so that we can better understand the kinds of political organizations and politics that will be discussed in the remainder of the book. First, *interest groups* or *pressure groups* are defined primarily as membership organizations

with political goals. These organizations demonstrate a good deal of variety in their purposes, objectives, and levels of political influence. *Organized interests* consist of a number of cooperating organizations—consumers, environmentalists, farmers, veterans, and so forth—having a common goal. *Pressure politics,* frequently viewed negatively, are characterized by an array of conflicting organizations interacting with public officials. It involves both give and take of political influence.

Finally, what are "private" versus "public" interests? Chapter 8 will demonstrate that a number of organizations emerged in the late 1960s and the 1970s representing broadly held interests—consumers, environmentalists, law firms, and others. A *public interest group* is one that seeks a benefit enjoyable by society as a whole (a public good) and not just by the immediate membership—for example, lower taxes, open government, or more citizen participation in policy making. Benefits can be either substantive or procedural. A private organization, by contrast, seeks gratification principally for its own members (a private good).

In the rest of this chapter we will examine theories of group formation and the contributions groups make to national politics, analyze group benefits as factors in the formation and maintenance of, and look at interest group–political party relationships as they exist today. By doing so we will contribute to an analytical framework for better understanding the nature and consequences of our group-based politics.

EARLY COMMENTATORS ON GROUPS: MADISON AND TOCQUEVILLE

James Madison was the first political writer to perceive and analyze the interests of the "factions" emerging in the new nation. He defined these factions as follows:

> a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse or passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.[4]

Factions, in his view, were a disease common to all systems of popular government—a disease that wrought injustice, instability, and confusion and caused governments to perish.

Madison perceived two methods of "curing the mischiefs of faction"—removing their causes and controlling their effects. He viewed neither as a viable option for popular government. Eliminating the causes of faction would

be impossible, for the seeds "are sown in the nature of man." On the other hand, suppressing the effects of faction could destroy liberty—a remedy worse than the disease.

For Madison the answer lay within the framework of the new governmental system—a federal republic. Federalism could be a powerful antidote to "minority" factions and a key ingredient in the cure for "majority" factions. Though apprehensive about both, Madison was primarily concerned with controlling majority factions. Certain constitutional devices would enable government to suppress majority factions and protect its citizens' property and ultimately their political liberty. But how? Madison's argument was threefold.

First, he reasoned that the sheer number and variety of factions in a broadly constituted nation would make it "less probable" that a majority of the whole would seek to invade the rights of others. Additionally, the more factions, the more likely they would cancel each other out.

Second, federalism—a system whereby power is divided between the nation and the states—would result in "aggregate interests" being referred to national authorities and local interests being referred to state legislatures for solution. This delegation of power would prevent a "factious leader" in one state from spreading to others and eventually dominating the entire nation.

Finally, Madison contended that the most effective remedy for the ills of factions lay in a system of national checks and balances. Such safeguards would fragment power sufficiently to ensure that no single branch or level of government could be co-opted by those whose purposes were antithetical to the rights of all.

Madison conceived of minority factions as small, scattered, loosely organized groups that represented particular interests as opposed to broad social or economic concerns. Because of their relatively specialized goals, he argued, minority factions would be incapable of dominating decision making in the national government:

> If a faction consists of less than a majority, relief is supplied by the republican principle, which enables the majority to defeat its sinister views by regular vote. It may clog the administration, it may convulse the society; but it will be unable to mask its violence under the forms of the constitution.[5]

History indicates that the Madisonian prescription for reducing the power of majority factions has worked in most cases. Minority factions, however, have proved to be much more of a political problem than Madison or his peers anticipated.

A generation later, Alexis de Tocqueville, a young Frenchman touring the United States, was struck by the great number of associations in the new nation as well as their local and nonideological character: "In no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully applied to a greater multitude of objects than in America."[6] The associations Tocqueville

was describing were not necessarily pressure groups; many sought to influence opinions or performed tasks such as distributing books, caring for the poor, or building hospitals. These groups often served as a substitute for or a supplement to governmental functions. They also performed numerous social functions as well.

Tocqueville saw in this proliferation of associations a check on excessive government growth. Many nonpolitical organizations, in his view, could perform various tasks and thereby reduce the need for more government. Nonetheless, Tocqueville correctly noted the continuing growth of political groups within the country: "At the head of any new undertaking, where in France you find government or in England some territorial magnate, in the United States you are sure to find association."[7]

Both Madison and Tocqueville recognized the principle of political organization, but their concern was whether existing governmental arrangements would successfully countervail group power over time. Theirs was a very different society—dominated by rural, agrarian interests, adhering strictly to laissez-faire economics, and characterized by a very limited franchise of relatively homogeneous voters.

THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF GROUP THEORY: BENTLEY AND TRUMAN

Analyzing and evaluating the activities of political interest groups and their contributions to American politics has been a growing preoccupation among social scientists in this century. In 1908, Arthur Bentley perceived the group as the basic element in all political activity:

> We shall have to take all these political groups, and get them stated with their meaning, with their value, with their representative quality. We shall have to get hold of political institutions, legislatures, courts, executive officers, and get them stated as groups and in terms of groups.[8]

For Bentley, groups were not mere sociological curiosities. Rather, they were the stuff of politics, and their influence was pervasive: "When the groups are adequately stated, everything is stated. When I say everything, I mean *everything*."[9] All public policy, according to Bentley, resulted from the continual interaction of competing interests within the political system.

Implicit in Bentley's theory of group-based politics is the concept of modern, democratic government based on competing groups. In focusing on the inevitability of warring factions, as James Madison had, Bentley stressed the virtue inherent in the struggle among the "plurality" of political groups: a balance is established and maintained within the political system. Government's

main responsibility, Bentley believed, is to arbitrate and guard the public's interests. One writer summarizes pluralist theory in the following terms:

> Pluralism 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 of individuals will [represent] the diversity of opinions that might have been possible in the individual decision days of democratic Athens.[10]

Bentley's novel approach to the study of politics and its emphasis on groups rather than on structures of government challenged the conventional wisdom of his day. As a result, the treatises of *The Process of Government* went largely unnoticed and unappreciated.

In the 1950s, David B. Truman resurrected Bentley's thesis of the group basis of politics. Truman's book *The Governmental Process* (1951) restates Bentley's position but utilizes a more analytical base. Like Bentley, Truman sees benefits in the political contributions of groups. In fact, he perceives groups as intrinsic to the political process:

> The behaviors that constitute the process of government cannot be adequately understood apart from groups, especially organized interest groups, groups which are operative at any point in time. Whether we look at an individual citizen, the executive secretary of a trade association, at a political party functionary, at a legislator, administrator, governor, or judge, we cannot describe his participation in the governmental institution, let alone account for it, except in terms of interests with which he affiliates and with which he is confronted.[11]

Groups emerge as the result of what Truman calls environmental disturbances or dislocations. Wars, immigration, depressions, or societal changes emanating from these or other disturbances strain the social equilibrium. Prevailing relationships—among business people, among workers' organizations, between group leaders and followers—are fundamentally disturbed and altered. The rise of new organizations and associations, according to Truman, is to be perceived as an effort to adjust the existing order, and especially those relationships between the private sector and government. For Truman and other proponents of *pluralism*—the view that what happens in American politics is determined primarily by varying combinations of organized interests having access to key policy-making centers—the inevitable expansion of government provides competing groups with the access and influence they need in order to exert countervailing pressures. Truman perceives political interest groups as a "balance wheel" that maintains needed equilibrium in an increasingly complex and fragmented political system. As he sees it,

> the significance among the multiplicity of coordinate points of access to government decisions and the complicated texture of relationships among them is great. This diversity assures various ways for interest groups to participate in the formulation of policy and this variety is a flexible, stabilizing element.[12]

Truman's theoretical contributions are important, not just because of his restatement of Bentley's thesis, but also because of his more orderly and detailed presentation of groups as positive forces in national policy making. A good portion of *The Governmental Process* is devoted to a discussion of the contributions groups make to our democratic process—moderation, stability, and increased public participation.

Publication of *The Governmental Process* stimulated a pluralism-elitism debate over the political efficacy of organized groups in our political system (see Box 1-1). The debate persists to this day, for we cannot prove that our politics are either pluralistic or elitist. As we will see, political influence in one set of circumstances does not necessarily carry over into others. Public officials may respond to business pressures concerning foreign trade but not necessarily to those dealing with the environment. Ethnic or racial groups may be influential in public-housing issues but not in agricultural policies. As David Gerson asserts,

> American politics are neither the marketplace of group theory nor the conspiracy of simple elite theories. If America is elitist it is elitist in a pluralistic way, or if pluralistic, then pluralistic in a way that benefits an elite.[13]

BOX 1-1

Pluralism

According to pluralist thought, today's society consists of innumerable groups whose members share common economic, social, religious, racial, ideological, and/or cultural interests. Inevitably, many of these groups organize in order to better influence public policies important to their concerns. Implicit in this arrangement is "government by the people." Democracy is both perpetuated and enhanced by the political activities of all these associations, which represent millions of individuals. The major mechanisms of pluralist democracy are political interest groups and a decentralized governmental structure. Interest groups, reflecting as they do the opinions and aspirations of major segments of our society, serve as surrogates before and linkages to major policy-making bodies and numerous public officials.

A decentralized governmental structure provides ready access for groups to public-policy makers—legislators, jurists, administrators. In these circumstances, public authority is shared by a host of personnel with overlapping authority. Competing interests thus have multiple points of access at which to present their claims. Groups are free to choose the most efficacious level at which to press their claims: national, state, or local. Watchwords of today's pluralism are *access, political decentralization,* and *divided public authority.*

The major consequence of political pluralism, according to its supporters, is a more democratic America. Public policies are largely the result of and in line with the preferences and interests of a majority of the nation's citizens. Political power is limited because most citizens are members of overlapping and frequently conflicting groups or organizations—family, church, occupational, racial, and so on. These interests check each other, and none is consistently dominant. Also, all groups and

associations are subject to the constraints of prevailing social values and attitudes. In addition to Truman, other contributors to pluralist thought are Robert Dahl *(Who Governs?)* and Earl Latham *(The Group Basis of Politics).*

Elitism

In sharp contrast with pluralism, elitism downplays the importance of organized interests in American politics. Rather, it emphasizes a "power elite" that dominates most public-policy making—corporation presidents, affluent families, cabinet secretaries, senior members of Congress, and others. These individuals run the ship of state and influence both the direction and content of public policy—the maintenance of the capitalist system, foreign policy initiatives toward the Soviet Union, and the level of taxes individuals and corporations pay.

The classic treatise on elite theory is C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite.* Mills perceived that distribution of power in America pyramid-shaped. At the very top is the elite—top-ranking military leaders, corporation executives, the very affluent, and national political figures and celebrities. Below is a middle layer of power brokers that include senior members of Congress, state and local officials, some regional personnel, and a few interest groups. At the bottom of the pyramid are the powerless masses. According to Mills, elites perpetuate the powerlessness of the masses by controlling and manipulating the mass media. Characteristically, the masses are politically apathetic and cynical. Their concerns are immediate and personal. The politically important interest groups, such as labor unions and professional associations, are dominated by their own internal elites. Government, in these circumstances, serves the interests of the power elite. A governmental decision, therefore, to develop a new fighter bomber emanates not from within government but from interaction within the power elite—top Pentagon brass, certain senior members of Congress, and those defense contractors, such as McDonnell Douglas, Boeing, and General Dynamic, that have an economic stake in such a decision.

In sum, elite theorists maintain that only a few organized interests are politically important, and these are subject to their own internal elites. The large majority of existing interest groups, then, are relatively impotent or else serve as surrogates for the power elite.

Gerson goes on to argue that our political system is *elitist* with respect to goals, but *pluralistic* with respect to means. Elites set or limit the agenda of our politics because they dominate our public institutions and a number of our interest groups. Nonetheless, Gerson notes, groups struggle with one another over how government will pursue various parts of the national agenda. (See Box 1-1 and Fig. 1-1.)

But we need to explore other dimensions of group politics before making definitive judgments about the role of organized interests in national policy making. Therefore, in the balance of this chapter we turn to the concepts of group establishment, benefits, and group-party relationships. Examination of these phenomena will help us more accurately assess the expanding role of groups in electoral politics.