Introduction to the American Political Process

Interest Groups

Interest Groups: Definitions and Myths

- Definition:
  - An organized body of individuals who share some political goals and try to influence a public policy decision
  - Lobbyists, special interests, factions.
  - Why is “Special Interest” a dirty word?
    - The prevalence of conflict

Interest Group Formation

- Some interests are organized, others unorganized. Why?
- Olson: Collective action problem
  - Collective goods vs. selective benefits
    - Excludability
  - Individual vs. collective interests
  - Free-rider problem
    - Size
    - Selective Incentives

Group Formation

- How do groups form?
  - The importance of leadership
  - Entrepreneurs
  - Social movements
    - Tipping points
  - Potential problems

Resources

- Diversity of resources
  - Group characteristics
    - Numbers: AARP
  - Cohesion: ACT-UP vs. TAG
  - Information and Expertise
  - Social Status
Interest Group Strategies

- Resources determine strategy
- Direct action strategies
  - Legal Strategies
    - 1930s-1950s: NAACP Legal Defense Fund
    - 1990s: Tobacco
    - Limits: Galanter and Kritzer
  - Agency Contact
  - Contacting Representatives -- Lobbying

Top Twenty PACs in Contributions to Federal Candidates, 1997–1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>PAC Name</th>
<th>Contributions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Realtors Political Action Committee</td>
<td>$2,474,133</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Association of Trial Lawyers of America Political Action Committee</td>
<td>$2,428,860</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>American Federation of State, County &amp; Municipal Employees - PEOPLE</td>
<td>$2,374,590</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>American Medical Association Political Action Committee</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Democratic Republican Independent Voter Education Committee</td>
<td>$2,153,290</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Dealers Election Action Committee of the National Automobile Dealers Association</td>
<td>$2,107,400</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>UAW-V-CAP (UAW Voluntary Community Action Program)</td>
<td>$1,915,800</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Committee on Political Education</td>
<td>$1,884,470</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>National Education Association Political Action Committee</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Build Political Action Committee of the National Association of Home Builders</td>
<td>$1,807,240</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Committee on Loan Carriection Political Education (Justice for Americans Political Action Fund)</td>
<td>$1,790,496</td>
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<td>Machinists Non-partisan Political League</td>
<td>$1,657,300</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>NRA Political Victory Funders Association Political Action Committee</td>
<td>$1,653,211</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>United Food &amp; Commercial Workers, Active Racketeer</td>
<td>$1,507,495</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>United Food &amp; Commercial Workers, Active Racketeer</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>American Federation of Teachers Committee on Political Education</td>
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<td>Laborers Political League-laborers International Union</td>
<td>$1,445,850</td>
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<td>Carpenters Legislative Improvement Committee, United Brotherhood of Carpenters &amp; Joiners of America</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>National Association of Life Underwriters Political Action Committee</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>National Beer Wholesalers</td>
<td>$1,301,719</td>
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What do Lobbyists Do?

- 99% Testify at Hearings
- 92% Present research results or technical information
- 85% Help draft legislation
- 58% Make financial contributions to candidates
- 24% Contribute work or personnel to electoral campaigns

Interest Group Strategies (cont.)

- Grassroots Lobbying
  - "Outsider strategy"
  - Work through constituents
  - Advantages and disadvantages

Interest Groups and Bias

- Membership bias
- Organized and unorganized interests
Conclusions

- What is the place of Interest groups in America?
  - Multiplicity of interests
  - Interest groups channel interests and preferences
  - Intensity vs. Equality