

Unit 3

Interest Groups, Political Parties, and
the Media

Interest Groups

- Goal is to influence government and to promote a common interest
- Liberty v. Order: The government needs to balance the need for liberty against the value of an orderly society
 - By allowing people the freedom to join groups of differing opinions, **political factions are formed**

Interest Groups

- Argument in favor of interest groups
 - Interest groups prevent the concentration power
- Argument against
 - Not all groups have equal resources or equal access

Interest Groups

- Reasons for growth of interest groups
 - Americans have a propensity for joining groups
 - Based on ideas of Alexis de Tocqueville. He theorized that by banding together, Americans can create a society that is civil and just.
 - Economic developments / hardship
 - The Grange movement: the first political interest group worked toward providing governmental protection for American farmers

Interest Groups

- Governmental policies
 - As government grows, more interest groups form in response
- Diversity of Population
 - Social, racial, and economic disparity creates a desire to protect the interest of fringe groups
- Diffusion of power
 - The sharing of political power allows for multiple venues for influencing government thus creating a need for more interest groups

Interest Groups

– **Weakness of political parties**

- When the needs of the community are not being met by political parties, the people turn to interest groups to promote their interests

– Reform program (1970's)

- New regulations (Federal Election Campaign Acts & McCain-Feingold Bill) on campaign funding made it possible for more groups to form

– Conservative reaction to Liberal Activism

- Interest groups were predominately liberal in the 1960's & '70's. Conservative groups formed to create balance

Interest Groups

- Balance of Power
 - Nearly every interest group has a polar opposite
- Technology
 - New technology makes it easier to acquire the funds necessary to run an interest group and to gain access to politicians

Types of Interest Groups

- Traditional:
- Goal: promote the economic interests of its members
- Types:
 - Agricultural (Grange, American Farm Bureau Federation [nation's largest interest group])
 - Labor Unions
 - AFL-CIO American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
 - UAW United Auto Workers
 - Teamsters
 - Union membership has been on a steady decline in recent years

Types of Interest Groups

- Business Organizations (Chamber of Commerce, Nat. Ass. Of Manufacturers)
- Professional Organizations (AMA, ABA)
- Non Traditional / Protest
 - Goal: to protest the status of its members and to promote government action
 - Examples
 - NAACP National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
 - MALDEF Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
 - NOW National Organization of Women
 - ACT UP Aids Coalition to Unleash Power

Types of Interest Groups

- Single Issue
 - Goal: to get government action on one overriding issue
 - Examples
 - Right to Life League
 - National Abortion Rights Action League
 - NRA National Rifle Association
 - MADD Mothers Against Drunk Driving
 - NORML National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws
 - These groups create controversy and polarize the community; those in favor vs. those who oppose

Types of Interest Groups

- Public Interest
 - Goal: bring about policies that are good for society as a whole
 - Examples
 - Public Citizen (a Nader group): Promotes consumer advocacy
 - League of Women Voters: Encourages people to become informed, register to vote, and to vote
 - Environmental Groups (Sierra Club, Wilderness Society)
 - PI Groups are non-profit: As such they are exempt from taxes and cannot be involved in election campaigns

Types of Interest Groups

- Ideological
 - Goal: to convince government to implement policies that are consistent with their philosophies
 - Examples
 - Christian Coalition
 - American Way
 - Free Congress Foundation
 - ACLU American Civil Liberties Union
 - Various “think tanks” (Brookings Institute, Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute)

Types of Interest Groups

- Governmental
 - Goal: protect the interests of state and local governments
 - Examples
 - National League of Cities
 - National Association of Governors
- Political Action Committees (PAC's)
 - Will be covered in detail later

Interest Group Tactics

- The ways in which interest groups promote change in government
 - Mass media
 - Boycotts
 - **Litigation / Law Suits**
 - ***Amicus Curiae*** briefs
 - Legal challenges made on behalf of group members by interest groups to force a change in laws that discriminate. Examples include challenges on behalf of the disabled or minorities in civil rights cases
 - **Campaign contributions**
 - Endorsement of candidates
 - “Targeting” unfriendly candidates
 - Rating candidates on their support of issues “report cards”
 - Proposing initiatives, referendums, or recalls at the state and local levels
 - **Lobbying**
 - Mass mailing
 - New technology makes it possible to target specific segments of pop₁₄

Interest Groups

- Irrationality of joining an interest group
 - No single person will make much of a difference
 - Most people will gain the benefits of the interest groups lobbying efforts without having to join it
 - Free Rider problem
- Incentives to encourage membership
 - Material benefits: newsletters, t-shirts, subscription gifts (think holiday mailers)
 - Purposive benefits: because it feels good being part of something
 - Solidarity benefits: there is an advantage to joining, better health benefits, higher wages, etc.

Factors Influencing Interest Group Strength

- Size
 - Larger pools of members lead to more success in the groups causes
 - As a group gains a greater of number of members the less focused on an issue the group becomes
- Spread
 - Are the group members dispersed across the nation or are they concentrated?
- Cohesiveness
 - How committed to the cause is the group?
- Organizational Structure
- Leadership
- Resources

Lobbying

- Interest groups that attempt to influence the government by providing information (lobbying)
 - **Interest group lobbying is most effective on narrow, technical issues that are not publicized**
- **Functions of a Lobbyist**
 - Influence government (campaign contributions)
 - **Provide information to government officials**
 - Testify at (Congressional) hearings
 - Help write legislation
 - Often, the bulk of a new bill has been drafted by a lobbying group prior to going to Congress for final revision
 - Half-jokingly referred to as the “Third House of Congress”

Lobbying

- Regulations on Lobbying
 - 1946 Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act
- Provisions
 - Definition: a lobbyist as a person whose principle purpose is to influence legislation
 - Registration: all lobbyist are required to register
 - Disclosure: all information about the lobbyist is a matter of public record; employer, finances, legislation influenced, etc.
 - Publication: information must be published into Congressional Record every quarter (Freedom of Information Act)

Lobbying

- Loopholes in the FRLA
 - “Principle Purpose” is ambiguous
 - Disclosure statements were filed but never analyzed
 - No method of enforcing law
 - Few check the Congressional Record
 - The Act only covers lobbying to Congress, not the Executive Branch
- FECA (Federal Employees Compensation Act) tried to bring election activities into the open

Lobbying

- Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995
 - Expanded definition of a lobbyist to include part-time lobbyists
 - Also covers (and forces disclosure of) lobbying to the Executive Branch

Lobbying

- Argument in favor of lobbying:
 - **Lobbyists provide useful information to government officials**
 - Provide a means by which people can actively participate in government / someone represents the “little-guy”
 - **Provide a means of representation based on interest rather than geography**
 - **Serve as a “linking mechanism” between the people and their government**
 - Protected by 1st Amendment
 - The potential loss of liberty by banning lobbying is worse than the potential harm lobbyists due through their abuses Madison, *Federalist 10*

Lobbying

- Argument against lobbyists
 - The rich and powerful are over-represented
 - Average and poor people are under-represented
 - By safeguarding liberty, equality is sacrificed
 - Lobbying creates political polarization
 - This is especially true with controversial “single-issues”
 - Lobbying diffuses political power, making it more difficult for government to accomplish its goals
 - National interest is sacrificed for narrow interest

Political Action Committees

Political Action Committees

- PAC's: Groups whose purpose is to raise funds for candidates and to provide information on key issues
- Growth of PAC's
 - Steady increase in number of PAC's since 1974
 - Congress wanted to open up campaign contributions to the masses to stave off the “buying of politicians”
 - Impact of FECA
 - Individual contributions no more than \$2000
 - Individuals may contribute \$1000 to a PAC, with no limit on the number of PAC's they can contribute to
 - PAC's may contribute 2.5 (\$5000) times the amount an individual can with no limit to the number of separate donations

PAC's

- Growth of PAC's
 - Steady growth 1972, contributions totaled \$8.5 million, 2000, \$250 million
 - Office holders have received ever-increasing amounts of campaign contributions from PAC's, a key component to their reelection
 - 30% increase in PAC spending
 - PAC's give money to incumbents facing no opposition

PAC's

- PAC Strategies
 - Campaign Contributions (who gets the money?)
 - **Incumbents**
 - Winners
 - Those sharing a similar philosophy as the group
 - Those who are likely to grant access
 - People in positions of influence
 - Party leaders, committee chairs
 - **PAC money makes up the greatest percentage of Congressional campaign funds**
 - Voter Education Projects
 - Mailers, fliers, commercials
 - Independent expenditures (soft money, campaign ads)
 - Bundling
 - contributions from separate contributors are bundled together and given to the candidate at the same time (very influential)

PAC's

- Who has PAC's
 - **Corporations**
 - **50% of all PAC's are run by corporations and the number is growing**
 - Ideological Organizations
 - 25% are groups that support a particular cause
 - Professional / Trade / Health Associations
 - 15%
 - Labor Unions
 - 10%
 - **Upper / Upper-Middle Classes are overrepresented while the poor are underrepresented**

PAC's

- Dangers of PAC's
 - Ethical concerns
 - PAC's have special access to politicians
 - Increases campaign costs
 - Overrepresentation for the wealthy
 - Poor are underrepresented
 - Gives further incumbency advantage
- Defense of PAC's
 - PAC's provides the average person a venue to participate in government
 - Without PAC's the wealthy would have a greater advantage in running for office
 - Protected by 1st Amendment
 - Contributions are nonpartisan
 - No evidence that contributions influence voting behavior of politicians
 - PAC's provide political education
 - Political funding is diversified, many interests are represented

Political Parties

Functions of Political Parties

- Nominate Candidates
 - **Nominate candidates through primary elections**
 - **Growth of primaries has weakened the power of the party leaders**
 - **Candidates play an ever-increasing role in their political careers**
- Raise / spend campaign funds
- Register voters
- Simplify decisions for voters
 - Provide “cheat-sheets” for voters, short synopsis of issues so voters will be more likely to turn out and vote
 - Responsible for much of the campaign “mud-slinging” (personal attacks)

Functions of Political Parties

- Unify diverse interests
 - In order to appeal to majority, political parties must take a moderate view that demonstrates “flexibility” on issues
 - No strong stands on issues
- Act as a moderating influence on government
 - Choose candidates that are acceptable to the masses
 - Fringe candidates weaken the party at the polls
- Reduce diffusion of power in government
 - In theory parties are forced to work together to overcome separation of powers
 - In practice parties rarely work together, divided along party lines
- Provide patronage
 - In theory the will of the people will be carried out

Functions of Political Parties

- Inform the public
 - Provides a public forum for the people to meet the candidates
 - Again, in an effort to appeal to the masses, rarely does the public gain a true insight into who a candidate is and what he / she truly stands for
- Provide “**loyal opposition**”
 - Remain faithful to the government while opposing its policies
- Agents of **political socialization**
 - Teach the values of political participation (Americanism)
- **Provide a link between the people and government**

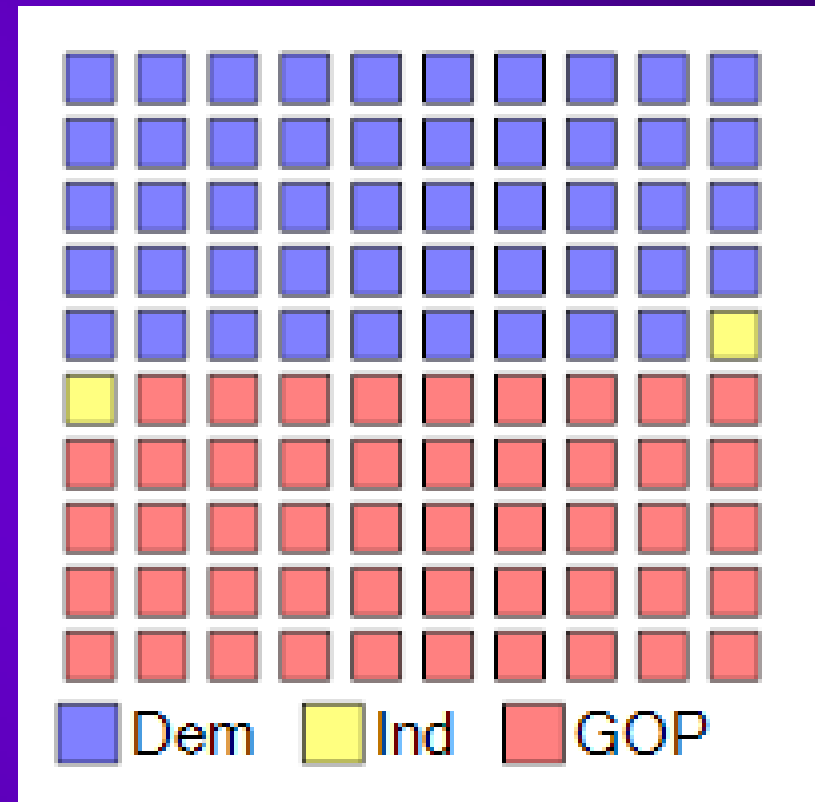
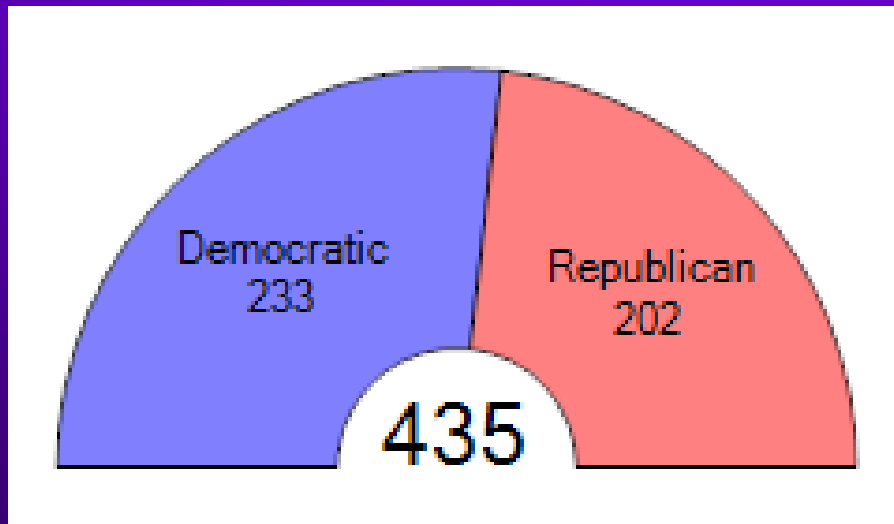
Rise of Political Parties

- Origins
 - Framers feared the development of political parties
 - Dangers of **factions** talked about in Madison’s Federalist 10
 - Washington worried about “baneful effects of the spirit of party”
 - Parties became necessary to get things done, compromise was needed to overcome separation of power
 - Historical development (6 Party Systems in US History)
 - Review #'s 1-4
 - 5- **FDR’s Grand Coalition: brought together people from differing backgrounds**
 - 6- Era of Divided Government (present day)

Rise of Political Parties

- Era of Divided Government (1968-Present)
 - Split ticket voting is common
 - Divided government
 - President and Congress from different parties
 - Voters becoming more independent / parties grow weaker
 - Election victory is by the narrowest of margins
- Relative Party Strengths
 - National Government
 - President: Republican
 - House: Democrats 233, Republicans 202, Independent 0
 - Senate: Democrats 49, Republicans, 49, Independent 2
 - State Government
 - Governors: Democrats 27, Republicans 23
 - State Legislatures: Democrats 21, Republicans 15, Split 13

Relative Party Strength



Rise of Political Parties

- Third Parties

- Types

- Doctrinal: hold a general philosophy (Communism, socialism, etc.)
 - Issue-Oriented: centered around a key issue (environmentalism, prohibition, etc.)
 - Personality Based: centered around a particularly charismatic leader (Perot's Reform Party, Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party)

- Contributions

- Raises issues that forces the other parties to address (tax-reform)
 - Provides a voice for the fringe element of society
 - Serves as a safety valve for society, prevents total disillusionment

Rise of Political Parties

– Effects of Third Parties

- Rarely win elections
- Strongly influence Presidential election
 - Siphon off votes to other candidates

– Obstacles

- Public has a tradition of only two-parties
- **The nature of the “winner-takes-all” election process is more conducive to two-party system than multi-party system**
- **Electoral System makes it difficult for a 3rd candidate to truly be in the running**
- Hard to get candidates on the ballot
- Difficulty in raising enough money to run a successful campaign
- Lack of media coverage
- Often excluded from television debates

Party Weaknesses

- Lack of strong rank-and-file members / limited grass roots organization
 - Open to anyone who wants to join
 - No annual dues
 - Active only during election time
 - American view of politics, “I’ll watch”
 - Small percentage are truly active
 - **Increase in the number of independents**

Party Weaknesses

- Tension between party regulars and issue purists / candidate loyalists
 - Party regulars
 - Lower / middle class background
 - Tend to be older
 - Have less education
 - More pragmatic
 - Supportive of all the parties candidates and positions
 - *The type of person votes for the person based on party affiliation more so than voting for “the man”*
 - Issue purists / candidate loyalists
 - Middle / upper class background
 - Tend to be younger
 - Have higher levels of education
 - More ideological
 - More selective in support of candidates and positions
 - *The type of person who votes for the person or the issue rather than just voting the party ticket*

Party Weaknesses

- Not responsive enough to social reform
 - Don't wish to alienate the middle and upper classes
 - Those with little to fear may take action as a means of gaining public support
 - Party passiveness
 - Refusal to take a stand on an issue until there is no other choice
 - Parties are slow to respond to changing situations
 - Parties favor the status quo



Party Weaknesses

- Parties have lost their traditional functions
 - The nomination of candidates
 - Now handled by **primary elections / caucuses**
 - Funding of campaigns
 - Candidates are taking their campaigns into their own hands by hiring professional campaign staff and campaign managers (more effective with less rules / restrictions)
 - Unifying government
 - The government is more divided than ever
 - Conflict within the party weakens party power
 - Providing patronage
 - More of the day-to-day tasks of government are done by civil servants

Party Weaknesses



Howard Dean, DNC



Mel Martinez, RNC

- **Parties are decentralized**
 - **Organized using the Federal model**
 1. **National convention**
 2. **National committee**
 3. **State committee**
 4. **Local committee**
 - Neither of the National Committees have any real power over the state and local committees
 - **Power Structure**
 - Presidential Election (National Convention)
 - Non-election year (National Committee)
 - Lack of local (grassroots) organization

Impact of Parties on Government

- Congress
 - Majority party controls all committees
 - Majority party has chairmen on all committees
 - Minority party has a “ranking member” on each committee
 - The ranking member often becomes the chairman when party control changes
 - *Another advantage of incumbency*
 - *The longer you serve on a committee, the more likely you are to head it up*
 - Majority party control key leadership positions
 - Staffers are partisan (work for the party members)



Impact of Parties on Government

- Executive Branch
 - Executive appointments to the White House Office of Administration are nearly all partisan (a reward for campaign supporters)
 - Regulated by the Hatch Act 1939
 - Denies Federal employees from participating in political campaigns using public funds
 - Other appointments to other top positions are “political appointees”
 - The creation of the Civil Service System has reduced party influence over the bureaucracy



Impact of Parties on Government



- Judicial Branch
 - Nearly all appointments are partisan
- State and Local Governments
 - Most state government positions are partisan
 - Many local government positions are nonpartisan
 - School boards
 - City councils

Political Party Reform

- Historical Abuses of Power
 - Nominations were controlled by bosses and caucuses
 - Politicians used the political machine for their own personal gain (Tweed, Daley, etc.)
 - Exclusion of the young, poor, and minorities
- Progressive Reforms
 - **Direct primary elections**
 - Nonpartisan elections at state and local levels
 - Expansion of the civil service
 - The use of initiatives, referendums, and recall elections
 - **17th Amendment**



Political Party Reform

- Other weakening factors
 - Candidate centered campaigns
 - Federal Election Campaign Act 1974 made this possible
 - Increased use of campaign consultants (managers)
 - Public disenchantment with political parties (distrust of government)
 - Growth of interest groups
 - Increased dependence on mass media
 - Candidates deliver message through media rather than through the political party

Political Party Reform

- Dealignment Theory
 - A trend in which a large portion of the electorate abandons its previous party affiliation
- Realignment Theory
 - A dramatic change in politics which is caused by changing the rules of elections
 - Examples include changes in campaign financing or voter eligibility laws
- Reforms of the Democratic Party
 - McGovern-Fraser Commission
 - During the 1968 national convention, the Democratic party adopted new guidelines for its Presidential nomination process
 - The selection of delegates would be conducted in the open rather than in secret
 - Affirmative action rules would be applied to include the previously disenfranchised

Political Party Reform

- Results of reforms
 - The Democratic party begins to favor a more moderate candidates
 - Moderate delegates would have a better chance of winning
 - Brought about an end to extreme politics
 - Created *Super Tuesday*
 - During a Presidential election year, the majority of the Southern states hold their primary elections on the same day
 - This election is a strong indicator of who will earn the party nomination
 - Developed concept of the Super Delegate
 - Delegates to the national convention that are appointed by the party rather than earning their nomination through the primary election or caucus

Mass Media

Shapers of public opinion

Who are the Mass Media?

- Major (traditional) media
 - Newspapers
 - Television
 - Magazines
 - There is a trend towards the consolidation of media companies
 - There are very few independent media groups anymore
- New media
 - Internet
 - Cable news
 - Talk radio
 - Characteristics

The Media and Public Opinion

- Does the media influence public opinion?
 - Yes
 - TV provides a human element of candidates and their causes
 - Sets national agenda
 - Media serves as a linking mechanism between the public and the government
 - No
 - Majority of the public has little interest in the news
 - Viewers tend to choose news programs that agree with their existing attitudes / opinions
 - Viewers impose their own meaning to the news (not likely to change their opinions if the story disagrees with their preconceived notions)
 - Family serves as a greater influence over voter behavior

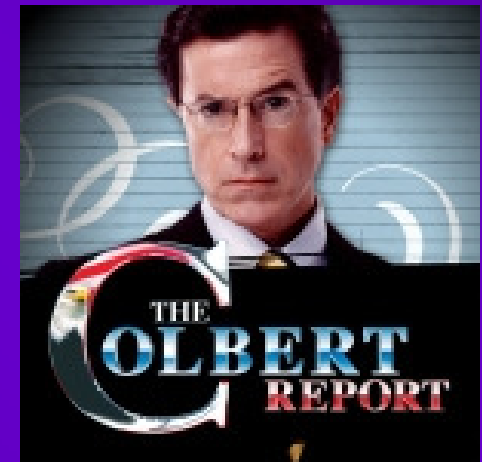
The Media and Public Opinion



- Impact of newspapers
 - Public perception is that newspapers have a liberal bias
 - Reality, most publishers tend to be Republican
 - Both liberals and conservatives complain about bias
 - Conservatives view papers as liberal with a marked hostility towards middle-class values
 - Liberals claim that the publishers are conservative and therefore more concerned with economic issues rather than social problems
 - Lack of competition
 - Most cities have only one major newspaper
 - **Election coverage focuses on the day-to-day activities rather than the big issues**

The Media and Public Opinion

- Impact of television
 - #1 method of getting news
 - TV news focuses on quantity of news not quality
 - Growing dependence on the sound bite
 - Concerns that TV has aligned with big government
 - Gives the President a larger forum to reach the people without going through journalists
 - There are fewer Presidential press conferences than before
 - The White House holds its own press conferences in such a way as to manipulate the press
 - Growing cynicism
 - Lack of competition (fewer news stations)
 - Leading to the decline in party power



Effects of Media on Politics



- Represents a symbiotic relationship between the government and the press
 - Journalists need politicians to inform and entertain their audiences
 - Politicians need media exposure
- Roles of Media
 - **Gatekeeper: sets national agenda**
 - Scorekeeper: helps track progress of politicians (**horse race**)
 - Watchdog: scrutinize politicians, report on political shenanigans

Effects of Media on Politics

- Nature of Media Influence
 - Most influential during agenda setting phase
 - Help to build candidate images
 - Provides a means for politicians to get public attention
 - Provide a link between the government and the people
 - Past: people – parties – government
 - Now: people – media – government
 - Contribute to increase in the cost of campaigns
 - Contribute to candidate centered campaigns
 - Increase the need for campaign consultants

Effects of Media on Politics

- White House Manipulation of Media
 - The President has no trouble getting media coverage
 - The media is ready to give the President
 - Photo opportunities
 - Sound bites
 - Provide spin control
 - Willing to cover staged events
 - The media tends to cover Congress in a negative light
 - The Supreme Court receives the least amount of press coverage
 - Media is most influential
 - In primary elections rather than general elections
 - On undecided voters