

Introduction to American Politics

Week 9: Pluralism & Interest Groups

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Attendance



Outline

- Kernell et al. (Ch. 13)
- Olson, Schattschneider, Victor (Kernell & Smith)
- NRA video (if time)
- Wrap-up

Section 1

Discussion

Interest Groups (IGs), Lobbying & Pluralism

- Double-edged swords → inevitable and essential, but continually cause problems for democracy
 - Good for *individuals* → helps solve collective action problem and achieve goals
 - Good for *governments* → helps solve information deficit
 - Bad because they breed suspicion about special interests winning out over the public interest
- Organized interests are as American as apple pie, and have existed and flourished since before the Revolutionary War
- Pluralism (Truman, Schattschneider, **Olson**)
- Interest groups today are both *fragmented* and *specialized*

What do IGs do?

- Day-to-day activities consist largely of those that simply organize and keep the group moving along
- Insider tactics:
 - Exchanging and presenting information
 - Obtaining and maintaining access
- Outsider tactics:
 - Mass media
 - Demonstrations
 - Contact campaigns
- Litigation
 - Lawsuits
 - *Amicus curiae* briefs
- Attempt to influence elections (sometimes, though relatively rarely through PACs)

Schattschneider: “The Scope and Bias...”

- Argued against the “Madisonian” view of interests
- Moneyed interests came to dominate politics:
 - Government actions have become limited in scope
 - Policymakers themselves have come to be pressured in “biased” ways
- Organizing (into groups) is *itself* a form of **mobilization of bias** → but, participation in organizations is more likely in the upper socioeconomic strata (“upper class bias”)
- While this may be problematic, the mobilization of *all* interests would result in a stalemate

Victor: “Gridlock Lobbying...”

- Presents a simple legislative “spatial” model of strategy adjustments by lobbyists in response to the policy preferences of legislators and presidents to create policy
- Because the legislative process is characterized by uncertainty, many MCs turn to interest groups for **information**
- Remember that this is a *formal* model, meaning that there are almost certainly exceptions (Victor is trying to *generalize*)
- Finds that (1) spatial context of a particular bill and (2) groups’ preferences over proposed legislation influence lobbying behavior

Section 2

Outro

Outro

- **Midterm grades will be released this week**
- I'll hold my normal office hours today (12:30-1:30pm in Monroe 450)

Attendance

