The One Thing You Need To Know about Interest Groups

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Introduction

Few topics in American politics have a longer history of scholarly research than interest groups. Beginning in 1908 with Bentley's classic study of "social pressures," groups and their influence in government have both fascinated and perplexed several generations of scholars. One might think it an easy task, therefore, to produce a list of things that are known about interest groups and to select the one of most importance. The task is difficult for several reasons, not the least of which is the question of how do we know when we know something? If there is one thing that should be known about interest groups, it should, of course, be something we know.

One possible answer to this question—how do we know when we know something?—is that we know something when there is widespread scholarly agreement about it. Unfortunately, such agreement seldom exists for many of the important questions about interest groups and American government. For example, consider different scholarly conclusions about the amount of influence interest groups exert on public policy. Bentley's (1908) often-cited observation that "when the groups are stated, everything is stated" summarizes a view prevalent through the 1950s that all politics and policy could be explained in terms of interest group alliances and activities. This perspective began to crumble in the early 1960s, disintegrating eventually into a pronouncement by Heinz Eulau (1964) that lobbying is a "wasted profession." At one time, then, scholars considered institutions and actors other than groups to be inconsequential, and at a later time, scholars considered interest groups themselves to be inconsequential.

A second answer to the question—how do we know when we know something?—is that we know something when an empirical regularity exists and can be explained by a theory that is both logically consistent and empirically consistent. Unfortunately, empirical regularities are in short supply in political science, and even when they surface, explanations for them are often difficult to imagine, explicate, and test. Thus, some may think the attainment of scientific laws is unrealistic for political science, and probably even more think it is unrealistic for interest group research, which is thought to be plagued by confusion, contradiction, and lack of accumulation of knowledge (Baumgartner and Leech, 1996).

High standards, however, should never discourage efforts to meet them, even if those efforts occasionally fall on hard times. And so this paper is an effort to identify an empirical regularity together with a supporting theory in the field of interest group research. There will always be skeptics of scientific methods, and the purpose of this paper is certainly not to try and win them over. The purpose here is to see if any of the many things that have been discovered about interest groups over the past 100 years approaches the standards generally set forth for positive science (Riker, 1977). In short, what one knows about interest groups should ideally possess the following desiderata: (1) the existence of an empirical regularity—i.e., repeated observations of the same phenomenon over varied circumstances and an extended period of time, (2) an explanation for the phenomenon that is logically consistent (e.g., predictions of the regularity, and the predictions of the model more generally, should follow from the axioms), and (3) the model's predictions are not contradicted by existing empirical evidence.

The relation of groups to government and the production of policy is, I believe, the most compelling of the various things one might want to know about interest groups. Thus, I focus here on groups in government, as opposed to questions about the organization and maintenance of groups in the electorate. Moreover, I will not deal here with the question of group influence in the administrative and judicial arenas, both of which are clearly subject to appeals from organized interests. To date, political scientists have probably delineated most thoroughly the theoretical workings of the legislative branch, and thus it is primarily to the legislative branch that the following discussion is directed.

I begin by describing the traditional group approach to politics in the early 20th Century. In the course of reviewing some of this literature, I identify a potential regularity in the lobbying process first articulated by Lester Milbrath. I then discuss how a recent generation of scholars has revived the group approach to politics, although in a way that would probably not be recognizable to traditional group theorists. I argue that some of this new group theory provides a theoretical explanation for the regularity first proposed by Milbrath.

The Traditional Group Theory of Politics

What is variously called the "group theory," "group approach," or "group basis" of politics began generally with Bentley (1908). Although Bentley's peers considered his work unremarkable, subsequent generations of scholars resurrected him, not only as a pioneer of modern social science (Golembeiwski, 1960; Dowling, 1960; however, see Lavine (1995)), but also as the father of the group approach to politics.[1] The group

[1] Truman (1951), as far as I can determine, was principally responsible for resurrecting Bentley. Odegard (1928), Herring (1929), and Schattschneider (1935) do not make reference to Bentley's work; however, in

approach remained popular into the 1960s, at which time fascination with survey research, which featured individuals as the fundamental units of political analysis, together with debates about the measurement and conceptualization of power (e.g., Bachrach and Baratz, 1962), shifted scholarly attention elsewhere.[2]

Of the many scholars who contributed to group theory, or what came to be recognized as group theory—Garson (1974) provides an exhaustive review—the most prominent, aside from Bentley, were Herring, Schattschneider (in his earlier work), Odegard, Truman, and Latham. The fundamental tenet of the group approach is that the identification of group interests is sufficient for understanding public policy. Some of the most succinct statements of the approach are provided by the proponents themselves. Herring (1929, 242), for example, argued that groups, not political parties, are the "chief medium of carrying policies into effect." Schattshneider (1935, 4-5) asserted that "public policy is the result of 'effective demands' upon the government," and that "policies can be explained in terms of the processes by which pressures are shaped and modified." Odegard (1928, 104) contended that legislation is "more frequently determined by the pressure organizations that influence the politician than by the economic or political beliefs of the politician himself," and that "the history of any law carries with it, in large part, the history of the organized groups whose wishes and wills it embodies." Latham (1952, 390) noted that legislative votes on any issue represent "the balance of power

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the preface to *The Governmental Process*, a slight twist on Bentley's *The Process of Government*, Truman (p. *ix*) wrote: "As the title of this volume suggests, Bentley's attempt to 'fashion a tool' has been the principal bench mark for my thinking. In fact, my plans for this study grew out of my experience in teaching Bentley's work."

[2] Additionally, Schattschneider's (1960) *The Semisoverign People* stoked normative concerns about pluralism.

among the contending groups at the moment of voting," and that "public policy is actually the equilibrium reached in the group struggle at any given moment."

The group approach is sometimes compared to classical mechanics in physics where the movement of physical bodies is explained in terms of the forces acting upon them. Odegard (1958, 699) observed:

> Public policy and administration are regarded as vectors of group pressures—a kind of resultant in a parallelogram of group forces. Group pressure, group force, and above all group action are the dynamic and decisive factors. The governmental process is to be understood not in terms of reason or logic but solely in terms of Newton's laws of motion and inertia.

The analogy to mechanics evidently impressed even Milbrath (1963), who concluded from his seminal survey of Washington lobbyists that lobbyists "can do very little" to affect policy outcomes (p. 343).[3] Nevertheless, it was Milbrath (p. 345) who first noted a systematic tendency for interest group pressure in one direction to stimulate pressure in the other:

> An important factor attenuating the impact of lobbying on governmental decisions is the fact that nearly every vigorous push in one direction stimulates an opponent or coalition of opponents to push in the opposite direction. This natural self-balancing factor comes into play so often that it almost amounts to a law.

Milbrath, then, acknowledged the competitive nature of interest group lobbying, while at the same time rejecting the notion that interest groups are influential. Clearly, if groups always balance one another, then policy will never deviate from the status quo; consequently, when the status quo changes, it cannot be because of interest group pressures. Yet Milbrath's claim differs from what the group theorists asserted only in his conclusion that group pressures balance one another. The group theorists also saw the

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[3] Bauer, Pool, and Dexter's (1963) *American Business and Public Policy* appeared the same year as Milbrath's book, which further reinforced the notion that interest groups have little influence over policy outcomes.

policy process as a struggle among contending groups, but they assumed that one side always prevailed over the other. Stalemate was not something they observed or considered.

Milbrath's observation that lobbying occurs in both directions is consistent with what many other interest group scholars have observed. Various case studies of lobbying are replete with evidence of a tug-of-war among opposing groups. Peter Odegard's (1928) story of the Anti-Saloon League, for example, describes activities of the retail and wholesale liquor dealers in addition to the Anti-Saloon league. Bailey's (1950) study of the Unemployment Act of 1946 chronicles liberal and labor organizations on the one side and business groups on the other. Fritschler's (1975) classic study of tobacco regulation details the conflict among cigarette producers, advertisers, and medical organizations. Bosso's (1987) study of pesticides and politics describes the clash between environmental and agricultural groups. Similarly, Rothenberg (1992) analyzes activities of both supporters and opponents of the MX missile, and Hojnacki (1994) reports opposition lobbying across several issues from the 104th Congress. The list could go on.

Despite these many examples, there are important exceptions to the notion that there is always lobbying by organizations on both sides of an issue. In some cases, interest group activity in one direction does not always stimulate activity in the opposite direction. Schattschneider (1935, 114), for example, observed that in the making of tariff policy, "The most conspicuous characteristic of the opposition was its extreme prostration combined with a certain inclination to vanish." Schattschneider noted that Congress tended to avoid instituting tariffs in situations that would adversely affect downstream producers. More generally, Wilson (1995) suggests that the degree and nature of interest group conflict is a function of the divisibility of the issue. Conflict moves from protest to bargaining and becomes less intense, Wilson claims, as issues move from zero-sum to positive sum. Thus, on the types of issues where interest groups benefit from particularistic or distributive policies, groups typically will not oppose one another.

Aside from this exception to competitive, or oppositional, lobbying, Milbrath seemingly identified an important empirical regularity when he asserted that "nearly every vigorous push in one direction stimulates an opponent or coalition of opponents to push in the opposite direction."[4] Whether these opposing forces are "naturally self-balancing" is another matter, and one that is not so easily determined empirically. Milbrath's claim is noteworthy not just because it may describe a significant tendency, but also because it raises the possibility that interest groups attempt strategically to counter one another's influence. Milbrath, of course, did not conceive of interest groups as strategic actors—lobbyists communicated only with legislators who agree with their point of view—and thus if groups lobbied on both sides of the issue it was only because legislators took opposing positions.

The New Group Theory of Politics

Despite the demise of the traditional group approach to politics, scholars continue to be intrigued by the notion that policy outcomes might be a function of interest group lobbying and competition. Thus, beginning in the early 1990s, there has been something of a revival in the group approach to politics. An important feature of contemporary research on the influence of groups in the policy process is that both lobbyists and

[4] Wilson (1995) argues that groups can be in competition with one another (over members, for example) but not oppose one another. Nevertheless, my use of the term competitive in this essay is meant to imply that groups oppose one another over a policy or set of policies.

legislators are strategic actors. In other words, both lobbyists and legislators are presumed to have explicit goals, there are well-defined payoffs for these actors corresponding to different outcomes, and it is assumed that lobbyists and legislators will choose actions that maximize their payoffs. The assumption of strategic behavior is a profound difference between the work of contemporary group theorists and traditional group theorists. Legislators are no longer automatons, responding mechanically to group pressures, and lobbyists are no longer prevented from communicating with legislators who do not a priori agree with them.

The past fifteen years have witnessed a proliferation in formal models of lobbying. These can be classified roughly as informational models and contribution models (e.g., Baron, 2006; Grossman and Helpman, 2001). Informational models assume that interest groups have specialized information that legislators do not, and that groups strategically use their informational advantage to try and persuade legislators. The strategic transmission of information from groups to legislators could involve information about how policies map into outcomes, or about how legislators' actions map into electoral support. Contribution, or resource-based, models assume that interest groups possess scarce resources that legislators need to achieve their political goals. These resources could be of electoral value—e.g., endorsements, campaign contributions, campaign volunteers—or they could be of legislative value—drafting legislative proposals, constructing policy arguments, and so forth (e.g., Hall and Deardorff, 2006).

Within these two broad classes of lobbying models, there is considerable variation in assumptions and approaches. From the informational perspective, Potters and Van Winden (1992) and Ainsworth (1993) introduced models of costly signaling by a single lobbyist to a single legislator. Kollman (1998) adapted this basic setup to "outside lobbying," or mobilizing citizens to contact policymakers. Austen-Smith and Wright (1992) extended this basic framework to two competing interest groups and a single legislator. Different interpretations can be given to the type of information transmitted by lobbyists in these models. Lobbyists could convey information about the preferences of constituents and their likely electoral behavior, or information about the policy consequences of a legislative proposal. In all of these models, however, groups must pay a cost to acquire the expertise that legislators value.

Another set of informational models treats lobbying messages as costless. Austen-Smith (1993), for example, introduced a lobbyist into a standard informational game between a legislative committee and the full chamber, where both the committee and the lobbyist could have an informational advantage over the chamber. His analysis establishes conditions under which different types of lobbying—e.g., lobbying over agendas and lobbying over final passage—are informative or influential. Krishna and Morgan (2001) also offer a model that has useful implications for whether a legislator, who potentially can acquire information from two different interest groups, both with specialized information, will become better informed by granting access to just one or to both groups. Battaglini (2002) extends this line of analysis to situations where a legislator has uncertainty over, not one, but two dimensions. He shows that when lobbyists specialize on separate dimensions and are equally informed, legislators can become fully informed by listening to both lobbyists. Kim and Rothenberg (2006) show, however, that when lobbyists are not symmetrically informed, complete information revelation does not occur.

Other signaling models address related aspects of the lobbying problem, such as the collective action problems that groups must overcome in order for lobbying to be informative or influential. Lohmann (1998) notes that smaller groups are more likely to overcome the collective action problem, and that incumbent legislators can increase their re-election prospects by favoring these interests in the policy process. Ainsworth and Sened (1993) demonstrate how a lobbyist's decision to communicate directly with a legislator can provide a costly signal about the size and viability of an interest group, which in turn can help potential members coordinate their actions. In Beddenson and Feldman (2002), groups "search" for potential beneficiaries of a public good in legislators' districts and convey information about beneficiaries to legislators. Lobbying of this sort is cost effective only when there are multiple legislators.

Among models dealing with the allocation of contributions or other resources, Grossman and Helpman (1994) allow multiple groups, each representing a distinct industry sector, to offer contributions to a single governmental decision-maker in exchange for favorable trade policies. Grossman and Helpman find that when there is competition among groups, as when some groups represent consumer interests and others represent producer interests, the decision-maker will realize a net advantage in contributions over the costs of deciding against constituents.

Helpman and Perrson (2001) analyze a model where multiple groups lobby multiple legislators, but where each group lobbies just one legislator. The legislators must reach a majority decision about how to allocate a fixed budget among the groups, and one legislator is chosen randomly to make a proposal. Groups indicate their support for a proposed allocation of the budget through contributions that are contingent on legislators' decisions. If a group prefers a proposed allocation over the default allocation, then the group offers a larger contribution for a yea vote than for a nay vote. Finally, legislators vote so as to maximize their contributions. In the analysis of this model, once a proposed allocation can secure a majority, groups can pare back their contribution offers to nearly zero as long as long as the contribution for a yea vote is slightly greater than the contribution for a nay vote. Thus, in equilibrium, if legislators are assumed to prefer a proposed allocation when contribution schedules are equal, no group will make a contribution. Ironically, then, if one assumes that legislators are lobbied by only one group, there should be no lobbying.

The Grossman and Helpman (1994) and Helpman and Perrson (2001) models differ in two respects: the number of legislators needed for a decision and whether different groups lobby the same legislator. Baron (2006) incorporates both assumptions and develops a general resource-based model where groups attempt to form a majority or supermajority coalition of legislators by providing legislators with politically valuable support. The groups have opposing policy preferences, and the legislators decide which alternatives are to be placed on the agenda, when to bring the agenda up for a vote, and how to vote on final passage. Baron finds that when both groups do not lobby the same legislator, groups will lobby only those legislators predisposed against them. Moreover, he finds that when the stakes are "high," groups will lobby counteractively; that is, they will recruit natural allies to counteract the anticipated efforts of the opposing group.

These results stand in stark contrast to those suggested by Hall and Deardorff (2006), who also assume that groups provide politically valuable support, or "subsidies" to legislators. Hall and Deardorff conclude that interest groups will lobby only their allies and never their enemies, and, further, that groups will "seldom" lobby uncommitted legislators. There are several possibilities for why their predictions differ from those of Baron and others. First, there is no well-defined legislative process or outcome in Hall and Deardorff. There is only "progress" on bills, and there is no end point or closure to progress. Thus, unlike in Baron, there is no stopping point to the lobbying process where a legislator can invoke a vote on final passage. Second, legislators, for their part, respond mechanically to interest groups' subsidies. If a group's subsidy shifts the legislators' budget line, the legislator simply increases his or her efforts proportionally to what the legislator was doing prior to the subsidy. Consequently, the effect of interest group lobbying in the Hall and Deardorff framework is to increase the amount of legislative output, not the direction or balance of the output.

Interest groups, unlike legislators in Hall and Deardorff, do not face budget constraints, nor do they take into account the stakes of the issue when deciding whether to lobby. Lobbying, therefore, is costless. The structure of the model does not prevent groups from lobbying on issues they do not care much about, so long as they find a friendly legislator they can subsidize. One assumption of the model is that legislators "care about influencing more than one policy at a time." This assumption, together with costless lobbying, could result in the following strategic calculation by groups. Suppose that a group cares a great deal about issue *A*, with alternatives a and $\overline{a}$, but very little about issue *B*, with alternatives b and $\overline{b}$. Suppose further that the group prefers $\overline{a}$ to a and b to $\overline{b}$, and that there is a legislator who prefers a to $\overline{a}$ and b to $\overline{b}$. Such a legislator would be an ally of the group on *B* and an opponent on *A*. The group could then subsidize the legislator's progress on *B* to prevent progress on *A*. Empirically, the group would be observed to be lobbying its ally, but its true strategic objective would be to influence an unfriendly legislator.

Ultimately, one must turn to empirical evidence to choose between the contrasting predictions of Baron (2006) and Hall and Deardorff (2006). Hall and Deordorff's claims that groups will not lobby their enemies or undecideds finds little support in the empirical literature. In their National Survey of Government Relations, Baumgartner and Leech (1998) asked organizations whether they consult with allies, attempt to persuade undecided officials, and attempt to persuade opposing officials. A majority of the organizations responded positively to all three, with 63 percent, 76 percent, and 58 percent reporting, respectively, that each was a good description of their activities. Austen-Smith and Wright (1994) discovered that 30 percent of the organizations opposed to Robert Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court reported lobbying senators who were "99% definite for the Reagan nominee." Hojnaki and Kimball (1998) found that groups were quite likely to lobby legislative opponents when groups strong organizational support in opposing legislators' districts. Across their four issue areas, they report probabilities of .87, .80, .64, and .92 of groups lobbying opponents. They report even higher probabilities of groups lobbying uncertain legislators. Given the unmistakable empirical evidence that interest groups lobby both opposing and undecided legislators, a credible theoretical model of the lobbying process must predict these patterns. Hence, two of the key predictions of the Hall and Deardorff model—"Lobbyists will not lobby their enemies" and "Lobbyists will seldom lobby uncommitteds"—are strongly contradicted by the empirical evidence.

The extent to which groups lobby their allies, even when they do not anticipate lobbying by opponents, is an open question. Although a relatively high proportion of organizations report lobbying allies, it is unclear empirically whether allies are lobbied to counter opponents, or for some other reason. To date, only two studies have attempted to estimate allied lobbying as a function of anticipated oppositional lobbying. Austen-Smith and Wright (1994) and Hojnacki and Kimball (1998) reach different conclusions, but with different model specifications and with data organized at different levels of aggregation. Thus, it is too early to be confident empirically that counteractive lobbying is an appropriate explanation for lobbying allies, but it is also too early to reject the hypothesis of counteractive lobbying.

The existing theories that predict lobbying of allies, opponents, and undecideds—whether information-based (e.g., Austen-Smith and Wright, 1992) or resource-based (e.g., Baron, 2006)—predict that allies should be lobbied only when groups anticipate that their opponents will also lobby. No theory of which I am aware predicts that allies will be lobbied in the absence of anticipated lobbying by the opposing group when two competing groups are allowed to lobby. There are, of course, several hypotheses for why allies might be lobbied in the absence of anticipated oppositional lobbying, but these do not follow from a model of competitive lobbying. Ainsworth (1998), for example, proposes that groups will be drawn into "lobbying enterprises;" Kollman (1997) suggests that ideological biases in the congressional committee system constrain the options that groups have for lobbying opponents; and Baumgartner and Leech (1998) have proposed that groups lobby their allies so that these legislators can lobby other legislators. The latter is an interesting hypothesis, but it introduces an agency problem that has not been explored.

Presently, then, the extent to which groups lobby allies in the absence of anticipated oppositional lobbying, and why they might do so, is unclear. It is always possible that a substantial amount of this activity occurs for ad hoc reasons—that is, reasons outside a competitive modeling framework. If so, then there may be no single, parsimonious explanation for observed lobbying patterns.

Back to Milbrath

Recall Milbrath's assertion: "nearly every vigorous push in one direction stimulates an opponent or coalition of opponents to push in the opposite direction. This natural self-balancing factor comes into play so often that it almost amounts to a law." By "self-balancing," Milbrath evidently wanted to imply that lobbying efforts cancel one another and therefore are not influential. However, Milbrath did not actually observe self-balancing—this he inferred—and so I will restrict my attention here to the observable portion of the statement: "nearly every vigorous push in one direction stimulates an opponent or coalition of opponents to push in the opposite direction." Repeated case studies, together with the quantitative evidence on lobbying patterns alluded to above, provide strong support for this claim.

The only exceptions would seem to be lobbying over distributive policies where there are only winners and no clear losers. Theoretically, the vote-buying model of Groseclose and Snyder (1996), which is essentially a model of distributive politics, predicts that only one lobbyist will participate. Hence, Milbrath's regularity needs a slight re-phrasing: "On issues with clear winners and losers, nearly every vigorous push in one direction stimulates an opponent or coalition of opponents to push in the opposite direction."

Still, Milbrath's claim falls short of a law. One cannot be sure, even with many large-N samples, that in every instance, past or future, on issues where organized interests stand to win and lose, lobbying by one side will provoke lobbying by the other. To elevate such a claim to the status of law, one needs deductive statements that provide a logical basis for why a proposed regularity will always occur as claimed. In short, the empirical regularity should be explained and justified by a theory of lobbying.

Milbrath's regularity could occur in two ways. First, assuming that organizations overcome the collective action problem on both sides of the issue, then groups could lobby only friendly legislators, where some legislators are for the issue and some are against. Alternatively, groups with opposing viewpoints could lobby the same legislator. Either scenario could give rise to the empirical observation of a push in one direction stimulating a push in the opposite direction.

Of these two possibilities, only the latter is predicted by current theories. In Helpman and Perrson (2001), for example, lobbyists are aligned with only one legislator, but the model predicts that no lobbying occurs. Thus, Helpman and Perrson cannot be used as a justification for Milbrath's regularity, even though their model is important for explaining why one-sided lobbying is not a reasonable representation of reality. Milbrath's regularity is consistent with Hall and Deardorff, but as noted earlier, Hall and Deardorff's model fails to predict substantial instances of groups lobbying opposing and undecided legislators.

The theoretical justification for Milbrath's regularity must therefore be found in models that predict counteractive lobbying. From a resource perspective, Baron (2006) predicts counteractive lobbying when the "stakes" are high—that is, when lobbyists greatly prefer one alternative over another. From an informational perspective, Austen-Smith and Wright (1992) predict counteractive lobbying when there is a reasonable chance of changing legislators' prior beliefs—i.e., the outcome is in doubt—and when the costs to legislators of acquiring information first-hand are neither too large or too small. If none of these conditions are met, then both models predict that lobbying will occur only on one side of the issue and Milbrath's regularity will not be predicted. When the conditions do hold, however, the two models are appealing explanations for Milbrath's regularity because they yield very similar predictions, despite the differences in structure and assumptions. Although both models would be on stronger ground if they had survived repeated empirical efforts to falsify the hypothesis of counteractive lobbying, there is not sufficient empirical evidence to reject these models at this time.

Milbrath's regularity can now be re-stated to accommodate the conditions for counteractive lobbying.

> On issues with clear winners and losers, where the stakes are high and the outcome is in doubt, and where it is moderately difficult for legislators to become informed, then a push by interest groups in one direction will stimulate an opponent or coalition of opposing groups to push in the opposite direction.

By including the appropriate boundary conditions, I have dropped the modifiers "nearly" and "vigorous" from Milbrath's original formulation. The revised statement now has law-like qualities. When the conditions of the statement are satisfied, then we can safely deduce that two-sided lobbying will occur. Ideally, before elevating this statement to the status of a law, one would like stronger empirical validation of the lobbying theories provide the explanatory basis for the statement. Nevertheless, even in its present form, the statement seems to be one thing that we know with some confidence about interest groups and lobbying.

Conclusion

It is probably fair to say that interest group research over the past fifty years or so is not an area of political science with as much identity or appeal as legislatures, public opinion, political parties, voting behavior, courts, and more recently, bureaucracy. Nevertheless, I believe that research on interest groups has advanced and accumulated significantly over the past few decades. Scholars have been intrigued for nearly 100 years with explaining policy outcomes in terms of interest group activities, and so there seems to be something intuitive and satisfying about approaching American politics in this way.

Research that I have described as the new group theory continues a tradition of attempting to explain political outcomes in terms of interest group activity. The major difference between traditional group theory and the new group theory is that the latter provides deductive explanations for how, when, and why interest group influence will occur, whereas the former relied principally on description, analogy, and assertion. I have argued that the new group theory provides explanations for an often-noted empirical regularity, and that, together, the regularity and the explanation for it, constitutes a statement about interest groups in which we can have considerable confidence. Whether it is the one thing we *should* know about interest groups I am not entirely sure. I am fairly confident, however, that it is one thing we *do* know.

Yet even if one accepts my argument for a law-like statement about interest groups and lobbying, one must still ask where it leads. Ideally, the existence of two-sided lobbying under the boundary conditions specified above should provide useful insights about interest groups and American politics. I think there are at least two implications.

First, from an informational perspective, when lobbying is two-sided, legislators will be better informed than when not lobbied, or when lobbied by only one group.[5] Legislators will be better information in the sense that they know how proposals map into policies or about the electoral consequences of their actions. A cynic might argue that the latter merely increases the incumbency effect in congressional elections. An optimist, however, might argue that legislators will more accurately represent the preferences of concerned constituents.

Second, from a resource perspective, two-sided lobbying yields additional resources, or "rents," for legislators. Legislators have a bargaining advantage when lobbied by two opposing groups, and this advantage can generate resources that exceed the constituency costs legislators might incur by deciding against voters at home. How legislators might use these resources is unclear. Again, a cynic might reply that they merely enhance election prospects, while the optimist could argue that they increase legislative capacity, information gathering, opportunities to communicate with constituents, and recruit activists.

No matter how legislators apply the informational gains and surplus in resources that results from competitive lobbying, the fact that two-sided lobbying generates surplus information and resources suggests that the consequences of lobbying are important. In a

[5] When issues are multi-dimensional, the informational benefits of lobbying are less clear, but even then legislators will generally be better informed when lobbying is two-sided.

political world where resources are always scarce, changes in informational or other benefits could affect processes and outcomes. From this perspective, lobbying is hardly a wasted profession.

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