Political Science 17.20
Introduction to American Politics

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Money and Organized Interests
Lecture 23 (May 7, 2013)
1. Groups and Politics

2. Groups and Politicians
Outline

1. Groups and Politics

2. Groups and Politicians
We like to contrast “special interests” with the “public interest,” but this distinction is largely illusory—there is no single public interest, esp. when aggregating across all issues.

Many different ways of aggregating: partisan politics (coalition of intense policy demanders) vs. interest-group politics (issue by issue)

organized vs. unorganized
Pluralism

- Groups form naturally to defend their interests ("disturbance")
- Fragmented, permeable structure of U.S. government and (then) weak parties → pluralist politics: bargaining among the relevant groups
- No single class dominates; policy mostly resolved by stakeholders.
Critiques of Pluralism

- Schattsneider: upper-class accent
- Gaventa: quiescence taken for consent
- Olsen: collective action problem means that groups will not spontaneously organize
- expressive, solidary, and selective benefits
Who Organizes?

- Small, concentrated groups with intense preferences
- Rule by intense minorities (ethanol)
- Sponsorship by outside actors (philanthropists, government)
- Decline of broadly based, participatory, cross-class organizations
Outline

1 Groups and Politics

2 Groups and Politicians
What Do Organized Groups Offer Politicians?

Groups offer politicians electorally valuable resources:

- Votes
- Labor
- Information
- Money

(Personal interest decidedly secondary.)
The Puzzle of Money in Politics

- Endogeneity: donate because support, or support because donate?
- Little evidence of changing votes
- Why so little money? marginal return must be low.
- Consumers vs. investors, collective action
- Consumers can still bias politics (weighted votes)
- Get nowhere without money
- The market as prison
Lobbying

- Changing votes is hard—lobby supporters
- participation—"buying time"
- subsidizing work (writing bills, coordinating support, providing information and rhetoric)
Politics is biased in favor of well-organized groups that can provide electorally valuable resources (yes votes, but also money).

Baseline: all citizens counted equally

But how to account for differential intensity?

Are campaign finance regulations a violation of free speech?
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