

# 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

## 1 Groups and Politics

## 2 Groups and Politicians

# “Special Interests” vs. “Public Interest”

- 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 (philanthopists, government)
- Decline of broadly based, participatory, cross-class organizations

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)

# How Do Interest Groups Change Politics?

- 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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