

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**POSC 105
INTEREST GROUPS**

- I. THIS MORNING:
 - A. The weakness of the American party system
 - B. Nominations, primary, elections, and democracy
 - C. Interest group politics

- II. SOME EXPLANATIONS OF THE PARTY SYSTEM:
 - A. General-welfare liberalism and tradition
 - B. Federalism and separation of powers
 - C. Strength of interest groups
 - D. Candidate-centered campaigns
 - E. Television gives candidates independent "access" to voters.
 - F. Recent developments:
 - 1. Nominations
 - 2. Money and politics

- III. NOMINATIONS AND PRIMARIES:
 - A. Conventions and caucuses used to be the primary method for selecting presidential candidates.
 - 1. Now primaries dominate the process
 - B. Nominations at presidential level
 - 1. State primaries (e.g., New Hampshire, Delaware, California) and delegate selection
 - 2. Caucuses (e.g., Iowa)
 - 3. Super-delegates
 - 4. National conventions
 - C. Nominations at the state level: conventions and primaries
 - D. The Effects:
 - 1. Fragmentation which leads to loss of accountability which leads to apathy and less capacity

- IV. CAMPAIGN FINANCES:
 - A. Some background
 - 1. Watergate and reform
 - 2. What the laws did or tried to do
 - a. Federal Election Commission (FEC)
 - b. Disclosure

- c. Limits on spending (see below)
 - d. Public financing: goes only to presidential candidates for nomination and regular (general) election expenditures.
 - * Candidates agree to spending limits
 - * Efforts to extend it to congressional elections have failed.
 - e. **Political action committees:** organizations that solicit contributions from members and others and distributes to candidates
- B. Recent developments
- 1. ***Buckley v. Valeo***: the “money talks decision”
 - 2. "Soft money": contributions ostensibly made to parties for purposes such as "get-out-the-vote" drives, but in actuality support candidates at all levels.
 - a. The recent controversy surrounding Clinton’s re-election fund raising activities largely involve soft money issues.
 - 3. Independent committees and generic (issue advocacy) ads
- C. Results: reforms have inadvertently encouraged or at least not prevented
- 1. Flow of money into campaigns
 - 2. Weakening of parties, increasing strength of interest groups.
- V. INTEREST GROUP POLITICS:
- A. To understand American government, especially the “middle levels” one needs to appreciate the central role interest groups play in the political process.
- B. Interest groups compared to political parties:
- 1. Do not try to run government **as a whole**, only to protect the interests of their members.
 - 2. **Private**, not public, bodies and hence not accountable in the same way parties are.
 - 3. Do not run their own candidates for office.
- C. The American way of politics: interest group conflict
- 1. The belief in the legitimacy of groups: ours is a nation that places great value on interest groups.
 - 2. Main “actors” or players are organized groups.
 - 3. Usually, several sets of groups on each side of an issue.
 - 4. Groups struggle in many arenas for favorable outcomes, decisions.
 - 5. Groups **participate** in policy development and especially implementation.
 - 6. Tools: contact and access and favors (lobbying), public relations, “knowledge,” election contributions
 - 7. On paper the “system” remain relatively stable, “balanced,” open, representative.
- VI. NEXT TIME:
- A. More on interest groups including film clips that illustrate their method of

operation and influence

B. Reading:

1. Patterson, *We the People*: Chapter 9
 - a. Read for general understanding but especially pages 286 to the end.
 - b. What are “an iron triangle”? a PAC? Grass roots lobbying?
 - c. What are the pros can cons of the “group system”?
2. Be sure to start *Debt and Deficits*, which I will discuss next week. I think is very helpful, even for those who might not agree with everything the authors say.

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