

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**POSC 105  
INTEREST GROUP POLITICS - CONCLUSION**

- I. THIS MORNING:
  - A. Film on money and politics
  - B. Basic ideas of interest group politics
  - C. Advantages and disadvantages of America's heavy reliance on groups to represent interests.
  - D. Film: "The Fixers"
  - E. The presidency
  
- II. INTEREST GROUP POLITICS:
  - A. From the last set of notes.
  - B. To understand American government, especially the "middle levels" one needs to appreciate the central role interest groups play in the political process.
  - C. 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.
  - D. 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.
      - a. Many observers from Madison to the present believe group conflict, if extensive enough, will augment our system of checks and balances. Thus this type of politics is seen as a major advantage.
    - 8. But there are also disadvantages.
  
- III. INTEREST GROUP POLITICS-WHO WINS:
  - A. Representation of the interest of their members.

1. Americans rely heavily on groups to represent them in the political arena.
2. These organizations are a second form of representation.
- B. They provide the political system with information and services.
  1. See Patterson for a discussion of lobbying methods and group tactics.
  2. Lobbying is an information service, not vote buying.
- C. **Private government:** many government programs are administered by private groups. Examples: job training, loans, housing, schools, jails.
  1. A great deal of legislation is written by private groups.
- D. Pluralism: groups are part of society's system of checks and balances.

#### IV. INTEREST GROUP POLITICS-WHO LOSES:

- A. Certain segments of society are not well represented by groups
  1. Even those that are may not actually have their interest represented as well as the leadership thinks and claims.
    - a. The “iron law of oligarchy”
  2. Social and economic inequality disadvantage certain segments of society.
  3. Others are not represented, or are not represented effectively, by groups.
- B. Privatization and conflicts of interest
  1. Examples: regulation and conflicts of interest
    - a. See the article on the web site “Delaware and Banking Laws.”
    - b. Atomic energy, Dow Chemical
- C. Campaign spending, PACs, interest groups, and political influence.
  1. Narrow, “parochial” interests over the common good.
    - a. Example: sugar lobbying
      - \* By the way, note that all of the protagonists in the last film clip were Republicans.

#### V. “THE FIXERS”:

- A. A film that explores the role of money in presidential campaigns.
  1. Since we undoubtedly won’t finish it, you should pay attention to the main ideas.
  2. It provides examples of the ideas and terms we discussed yesterday.
  3. It also provides a “briefing” on some of Clinton’s current problems with campaign financing.

#### VI. A FEW OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY:

- A. The problem of inflated expectations: Americans expect presidents to be all things to all people.
  1. And why not? Listen to campaign promises.
  2. Or, consider the State of the Union speech in which Clinton, among other things, claimed credit for our current economic growth, progress balancing the books, world peace, and on and on.
  3. Listen, also, to popular political discourse and symbols.
  4. Assumptions about presidential power and expectations are thus virtually

- limitless.
- B. Presidential popularity frequently declines the longer a president is in office.
    - 1. See “Presidential Approval Ratings” on the web site.
      - a. The trend shown in the figure summarizes, I think, the American political experience.
  - C. Presidents themselves feel frustrated and disappointed.
    - 1. These feelings have led to enormous antagonisms and brought many presidents into bitter conflict with the media, the Congress, voters, and parties.
    - 2. Clinton’s first term was a perfect example; his second has been (so far) a major exception.
  - D. At the height of the cold war (about 1966 to 1974) many scholars and journalists fretted about the “imperial presidency.”
    - 1. The White House, many in and out of Congress felt, needed to be controlled.
  - E. But, ironically, given expectations and beliefs about presidential power, the office has surprisingly limited power.
    - 1. It is perhaps the weakest branch in constitutional terms.
    - 2. The institutions, structures, practices, and traditions that seem to give presidents their influence and authority actually limit what they can do.
    - 3. Note, for example, how commonly president “drift” into foreign affairs, an area in which they come to feel more comfortable.
      - a. Why? Because they may feel they have greater control over foreign policy than domestic politics.
      - b. In a way it is easy for President Clinton to deal with Saddam Hussein than with Congress or even members of his own party.

VII. NEXT TIME:

- A. The presidency
- B. Reading:
  - 1. Patterson, *We the People*. Start the chapter on the presidency.
  - 2. Suggested: articles on the web site pertaining to campaigning and Delaware’s banking laws.
    - a. These are not required, however.
  - 3. Print a copy of the figure pertaining to presidential popularity.

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