

tendency. The data raise a serious question about the validity of the proposition that special-interest groups are a universal form of political organization reflecting *all* interests. As a matter of fact, to suppose that everyone participates in pressure-group activity and that all interests get themselves organized in the pressure system is to destroy the meaning of this form of politics. The pressure system makes sense only as the political instrument of a segment of the community. It gets results by being selective and biased; if everybody got into the act the unique advantages of this form of organization would be destroyed, for it is possible that if all interests could be mobilized the result would be a stalemate.

Special-interest organizations are most easily formed when they deal with small numbers of individuals who are acutely aware of their exclusive interests. To describe the conditions of pressure-group organization in this way is, however, to say that it is primarily a business phenomenon. Aside from a few very large organizations (the churches, organized labor, farm organizations, and veterans' organizations) the residue is a small segment of the population. *Pressure politics is essentially the politics of small groups.*

The vice of the groupist theory is that it conceals the most significant aspects of the system. The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent. Probably about 90 percent of the people cannot get into the pressure system.

The notion that the pressure system is automatically representative of the whole community is a myth fostered by the universalizing tendency of modern group theories. *Pressure politics is a selective process* ill designed to serve diffuse interests. The system is skewed, loaded and unbalanced in favor of a fraction of a minority. . . .

The competing claims of pressure groups and political parties for the loyalty of the American public revolve about the difference between the results likely to be achieved by small-scale and large-scale political organization. Inevitably, the outcome of pressure politics and party politics will be vastly different.

RICHARD SKINNER

From *More Than Money*

Interest groups play an important role in American politics. Critics may condemn the tactics of interest groups, while defenders cite their role in voicing citizens' views to their government. Author Richard Skinner gives some solid background for understanding the world of interest groups. He discusses groups' knowledge about their specific issues, their ability to locate voters who believe a particular issue to be important, and their skill in helping to run campaigns. Skinner's examples are many and varied: the Sierra Club, the National Rifle Association, the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Association of Trial Lawyers of America, the National Federation of Independent Business, EMILY's List. The excerpt concludes by mentioning the complex relationship between interest groups and political parties. In this era, Skinner believes, interest groups have become critical parts of "party networks," further underscoring the link between groups and parties.

[ANOTHER] RESOURCE AVAILABLE to groups is expertise. In this context, expertise consists of special abilities and knowledge that groups can bring to bear in order to win elections. While expertise is necessary to use the other resources effectively, and money and membership are needed to build expertise, expertise is still a separate and distinct resource. Longtime staffers may have skills, acquired from years of activity, that are not easy to duplicate—although political professionals do frequently change jobs, moving from group to group, working for this or that campaign. An organization may have established credibility with members or other voters that can be difficult to replicate. A group may have been closely identified with an issue through decades of activism, such as the Sierra Club and the environment or Planned Parenthood and sexual health. This can build a reputation among voters that can pay off at election time. Or a group may have built a close relationship with its members by advocating for their interests, as organized labor has. Expertise is not simply money transmuted into another form.

There are several types of expertise that an organization can employ in order to win elections. One is *issue credibility*, the ability to speak on a particular issue in a way that affects voters' decisions. Closely aligned with issue credibility is *targeting voters*, the ability to reach specific voters outside the organization, usually ones who care about a priority issue. Another form of expertise is *targeting races*, that is, selecting which races will receive priority involvement. Finally, some groups provide *campaign services*, such as polls, demographic research, candidate training, or fund-raising. . . .

Perhaps the most important form of expertise is issue credibility, the ability to speak out on particular issues in a way that sways a significant number of voters. Issue credibility comes from years of activity, from public visibility, from ties to other organizations, and from spending money. Groups may aim their efforts at a particular segment of voters, often compiled in a computerized list, or at a much broader audience. Groups can use issue credibility not just to win elections, but to raise the salience and visibility of their issue. If politicians believe that a given issue sways voters, they will treat it as important.

Issue credibility has been the Sierra Club's stock-in-trade. . . . In 1998, the club targeted twenty-four races; its favored candidates won in twenty-two of them. . . . But its most visible weapon has been issue ads, which allow the club to use its treasury funds without dipping into its PAC money. Generally speaking, the club has preferred to run issue ads early during campaigns, so it can make the environment a priority issue for candidates and to avoid being drowned out by ads by candidates or by richer interest groups. *National Journal* estimated the club's overall spending in the 2000 elections as between \$9 million and \$9.5 million.

Perhaps the most visible aspect of its 2000 efforts was the Environmental Voter Education Campaign, an \$8 million issue advocacy campaign. EVEC targeted mostly Republicans. . . . The club also thanked eleven members for their environmental records; most of these members were Democrats. . . . In 2000, EVEC included mailings, broadcast ads, "video voter guides," and a website. The club targeted women ages twenty-five to forty-five who have children; the club's staff believed that they are more likely to care about environmental issues such as clean air and water. For the first time, the club also produced Spanish-language ads; one former club official argued that Hispanic families have the same concerns as their Anglo counterparts, especially recreation. . . .

Since the environment is an issue with broad public appeal, the Sierra Club has mostly pursued highly visible methods of getting out its message, as opposed to the "under-the-radar" techniques used by other groups. But, with their fund-raising down and the environment off the public

agenda after 9/11, the Sierra Club mostly shifted to "ground war" techniques in 2002, particularly in Senate races in Colorado, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Missouri. The Sierra Club continued this approach in 2004.

The Sierra Club's staff believe that they have greatest credibility when they speak about local issues and when they attack an incumbent for a poor voting record, rather than praising a good one. Local issues mean more to voters than abstract concerns about the Amazon rain forest or global warming. In addition, local issues allow the club to speak to voters in areas not usually seen as sympathetic to environmentalists; for example, pollution from hog farms has become an important issue in the rural Midwest and South. Going negative works better than going positive because voters expect officials to protect the environment, and are shocked when they do not.

Deanna White, deputy political director of the Sierra Club, said that her group's greatest success in 2000 was

the increased visibility of the environment as an issue. And ultimately that's the goal of our program—to get people to talk about the environment. Because the more visibility it gets, the more aware decision makers are that people care about the environment and the more they will be held accountable for what they do.

Other groups capitalize on issue credibility in order to move voters. But many of these groups target their efforts far more than the Sierra Club does. Activists who are interested in "hot-button" issues such as abortion and gun control know that their issues are not salient to many or even most voters. (For example, in four meetings with NRA staff, at no time did they mention contacting voters who do not own guns.) They also know that their opponents care passionately about these issues, and could be activated by a broadcast campaign. So groups concerned with these issues usually target their efforts narrowly at identified supporters.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) mostly eschews broadcast advertising; its main television campaign in 2000 was a series of infomercials aimed at encouraging gun owners to join the organization. Instead of "broadcasting" its message, the NRA "narrow-casts" to a selected audience of gun owners. The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) also avoids broadcast advertising; instead, it and its state affiliates focus on those voters who share their antiabortion commitment. (The exceptions to these rules are telling. The NRA has broadcast some advertisements on cable outlets such as the Outdoor Life Network and in rural TV markets. In both cases, few unsympathetic voters are likely to see the spots. Simi-

larly, Right to Life occasionally runs advertisements on Christian radio.) NARAL [The National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League; Pro-Choice America] has sponsored broadcast advertising before, especially in 1992, a year of unusually high activism by abortion rights advocates. But in 2000, it switched to communicating with identified pro-choice voters by phone, mail, and e-mail. An official with Planned Parenthood suggested that NARAL made its switch because it had exhausted its credibility with "swing" voters because it appeared too partisan and too focused on the single issue of abortion. By contrast, Planned Parenthood, which had built up credibility and a nonpartisan "public service" image over many decades, was able to capitalize on these assets in 2000. It conducted a \$7 million television campaign decrying George W. Bush's views on abortion and sex education that was targeted at such key states as Florida and Pennsylvania.

These groups may target their pitches to sympathetic audiences because they do not want to risk mistakenly activating the opposition: a pro-choice Republican who sees a Right to Life advertisement backing an anti-abortion GOP candidate may decide to vote Democratic this year. It may also allow the groups to use tougher, more persuasive pitches than they could if their messages were going to the general public. Finally, it may simply be more efficient to spend their money on phone banks or mass mailings rather than TV time for ads that will reach many voters who are apathetic or antagonistic on the groups' issues. . . .

[A] group that relied heavily on a voter list was the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] National Voter Fund, created in 2000 to increase political participation by African Americans. It used a voter file of 3.8 million black voters; the fund staff decided to concentrate on infrequent voters because most groups preferred to contact those likely to vote. According to Heather Booth, director of the fund, only about one-fifth of the people included in the list voted frequently. Almost half rarely voted. The fund assembled the file in cooperation with other groups and with a vendor. The vendor acted as a broker, helping the fund buy the best lists in targeted states. The list could be broken down by state, congressional district, age, gender, or marital status. By contacting these voters, the NAACP could translate the issue credibility built through decades of advocating for African Americans into results at the ballot box.

Lists can also be compiled from publicly available sources. While the National Rifle Association boasts more than 4 million members, that is only a small percentage of the estimated 80 million Americans who own

a gun. (Polls have shown that about two out of five American adults own a firearm; for example, a 1999 Louis Harris survey found that 39 percent of respondents reported having a gun in their home or garage. . . .) Since there is no national registry of gun owners—thanks in part to the NRA's efforts—the organization has to put together its own list for voter contact. The NRA buys some lists that are likely to contain many gun owners, for example, subscribers to outdoor-sports magazines such as *Field and Stream*, *Guns and Ammo*, and *Outdoor Life*. But the NRA also uses many publicly available lists: those of licensed hunters and holders of concealed weapon permits, for example. NRA volunteers attend gun shows and visit gun stores, where they obtain lists of customers. The NRA can then add these names to its lists of gun owners targeted for voter turnout. . . .

Once groups have targeted voters, they have to reach them. The most common means of contacting voters are phone, mail, and e-mail. Usually, reaching voters by phone simply means using phone banks, whether staffed by volunteers or paid workers, whether in-house or outside. But telemarketers have worn out Americans' patience for being called at home. So groups have had to get more creative. One of the most distinctive means of reaching voters by phone is "robo-calling." This is the use of a taped message sent out by computer to thousands of potential voters, usually on the eve of an election, with the purpose of reminding them to vote. Often the message is intended more for being recorded on an answering machine rather than being heard directly by the recipient. The message is frequently recorded by a celebrity or by a politician. NARAL used messages recorded by Sarah Jessica Parker, star of HBO's *Sex and the City*, while Planned Parenthood used Barbra Streisand. The NAACP National Voter Fund used Bill Clinton. (Interestingly, the fund found that the infrequent voters it targeted welcomed phone calls at home; unlike more politically active people, they were not used to people asking for their votes.) By contrast, and perhaps illustrating the importance of grassroots organization, the National Education Association used the leaders of the local affiliates. While robo-calls seem cutting edge, the evidence of their effectiveness is mixed at best. Certainly they are no substitute for more personal means of contacting voters.

The other classic means of reaching targeted voters is by mail. The NRA has long sent distinctive orange postcards reminding gun owners of its endorsements. It also mails bumper stickers that serve as visible evidence of the NRA's support for a candidate. The Sierra Club sends voter guides to its members and others. While its mailings are not as focused as some other groups', they are primarily sent to its primary target audience

out their members, the Sierra Club can talk to “soccer moms” about the environment, and ATLA [Association of Trial Lawyers of America] can encourage trial lawyers to contribute to Democratic candidates. While these webs of relationships are not precisely the same as formal party organizations, they are still essential parts of party politics today—“extended parties” or “party networks.” . . .

... [P]olitical scientists have tended to view groups and parties as competing forms of political organization. Parties aggregate voters; groups disaggregate them. Parties serve to counteract the inegalitarian biases of the American system; groups exacerbate them. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, commentators decried the simultaneous decline of political parties and the proliferation of interest groups. On the fate of political parties, however, a new conventional wisdom is beginning to emerge: that parties have actually experienced a revival over the past two decades.

With this strengthening and polarization of political parties, we may be seeing an evolution by some interest groups toward closer ties to the parties. With the current atmosphere of polarization, it may no longer be as easy for groups to work with members of both parties. Narrow margins of control make every seat count. Close group-party alliances, such as those between the Democrats and organized labor and between the Republicans and the Christian Right, have been flourishing. These ties may be growing strong enough that we can treat some groups as actual parts of a party network. As part of this party network, groups can perform valuable tasks that are beyond the capabilities of the party committees. . . .

... [S]ome interest groups clearly have developed closer relationships with the political parties. They are often part of the same partisan ideological networks of individuals and organizations. These party networks not only include party committees and friendly interest groups, they include individual politicians and the leadership PACs under their control, think tanks, lobbyists, and perhaps even media figures. The Republican National Committee, the NFIB [National Federation of Independent Business], Tom DeLay and his [now defunct] leadership PAC (Americans for a Republican Majority), the Heritage Foundation, Vin Weber (a onetime House Republican, now a well-connected lobbyist), and Rush Limbaugh are part of a Republican network. This network shares information and coordinates activity.

The professionalization of politics has allowed more individuals to both live “off” politics and live “for” politics. Rather than being rewarded with deputy postmasterships or sinecures in the city Parks Department, today’s political professionals can instead seek jobs as chiefs of staff or communications directors, perhaps with an eye to an eventual corner of

of women ages twenty-five to forty-five who are registered to vote. The lists have been purchased from vendors.

With the growth of the Internet, most politically active groups have developed an online presence. All of the groups included in this study have sophisticated websites where visitors can get lists of endorsements and statements on public issues and sign up for e-mail lists. On the AFL-CIO’s [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] site, workers could download flyers that could then be printed and distributed. The Sierra Club experimented with banner ads on popular Internet sites, but did not find them particularly helpful. The National Rifle Association is collecting e-mail addresses from its members to supplement “snail mail” addresses and telephone numbers. In May 2001, NRA federal affairs director Chuck Cunningham estimated that his organization had collected about 200,000 e-mail addresses, but hoped to have 2 million within a year. NARAL collects e-mail address through mail and its website. Planned Parenthood also uses e-mail to contact its activists, and the e-mails may even include links to streaming video. But one top official expressed skepticism about e-mail, since it is not organized geographically. The National Education Association also e-mails its members, and it has the added difficulty that it is not allowed to send e-mail to teachers’ work addresses. . . .

Interest groups possess expertise that is not easily transferred and that is not simply an outgrowth of spending. While unions can contribute millions of dollars to Democratic candidates and committees, they cannot so easily transfer their expertise at turning out their members to vote. The NRA has invested years of work and treasure in building its credibility with gun owners; a start-up organization could not expect to duplicate the NRA’s clout, even if it could match its spending. The Sierra Club, the NAACP, and Planned Parenthood all have “brand names” that may be as relevant to voters as Coca-Cola, Kellogg, and Budweiser are to consumers.

For many organizations, their political expertise helps justify their very existence. Group leaders can boast of their effectiveness to potential members, to journalists, to other political activists. Belonging to a group that has shown political prowess can itself be an incentive for members to join.

Groups’ areas of expertise allow them to fulfill different roles in the party networks. The NRA can mobilize gun owners, while Right to Life organizations can turn out antiabortion voters, both usually in support of Republican candidates. Arguably, both can speak to their constituencies more effectively than the party committees can. Similarly, unions can turn

office on K Street.* As they move from position to position, professionals remain enmeshed in webs of relationships within their own partisan universes. Even when working as lobbyists or consultants, they remain active in support of their party and its candidates. . . .

We need to expand our notion of what a political party is. It is not simply a series of committees. It is instead a matrix of relationships between politicians, whether they work in party organizations, in interest groups, in the media, in political action committees, in consulting firms, or in government itself. The activists at the Sierra Club, EMILY's List [Early Money is Like Yeast—it makes the dough rise], or the AFL-CIO may not get their checks from the Democratic National Committee, but they are part of the same Democratic Party network. The people working for the NRA, the NFIB, or other Republican-leaning organizations are essential parts of the Republican Party network. Rather than tearing down the party system, they are among its most important pillars. . . .

ROBERT KAISER

From So Damn Much Money

The inside story of lobbying firms in Washington, DC, is told through the story of the rise and fall of Gerald Cassidy, co-founder of Schlossberg-Cassidy & Associates, once the preeminent K Street lobbying organization. Robert Kaiser tells us about the young consultants' (Cassidy and his partner Kenneth Schlossberg) start in the 1970s when their efforts on behalf of Tufts University yielded an early "earmark"—a word later to become one of every American government student's key terms. Kaiser points out the "deep conflict of American values" that lobbying provokes. Of course, influence over the decisions that government makes is central to the U.S. political system. But lobbying became a big industry—a big-money industry. Kaiser follows the firm, which became Cassidy & Associates, into the 1980s and 1990s, as the nation's economy prospered and wealth grew. Lobbyists got their share. In the new millennium, with the cost of political campaigns soaring, lobbyists became deeply involved in fundraising on behalf of members of Congress. While alas, the fate of Cassidy & Associates is not an entirely happy one, Kaiser reveals, the interrelationships of members of Congress, PACs, lobbyists and money continue on. The more important government becomes in the lives of Americans, the higher the stakes for interested groups and the lobbyists who carry their messages.

FRIENDS WHO KNEW BOTH MEN at the time agree that the firm was [Kenneth] Schlossberg's idea, and that he was the moving force in its creation. The firm's original name suggests as much: Schlossberg-Cassidy & Associates. Schlossberg was the president, [Gerald] Cassidy the secretary-treasurer. The only "associate" was Loretta Cassidy, who did some secretarial work. . . .

The official address of Schlossberg-Cassidy & Associates was 623 South Carolina Avenue, Schlossberg's Capitol Hill townhouse. The office was in the basement. The firm's original articles of incorporation, filed in May 1975, described its "purposes" in terms that reflected Schlossberg's original idea: "To provide a broad range of services to industry and government including but not limited to research, counseling, evaluation, planning, policy making and analysis of agricultural, food, nutrition and health programs, policies and products." No lobbying there.

*K Street in Washington, D.C., is filled with many prosperous firms that engage in lobbying for businesses, foreign nations, and, well, basically any organization that will pay for their services. The lobbying firms can be called law firms, public relations firms, or consultants, but the bottom line is that K Street is synonymous with lobbying.—Eds.