

Investigating “who gets what, when, and how,” as Harold Lasswell defined politics, remains a key task of political science. Group theories of politics were once thought to have much to add to this question. As Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leech recently put it, “Forty years ago, the group approach to politics was so dominant that it virtually defined the contemporary approach to political science.”¹ Group theory set out to explain politics through patterns of interaction among people with similar interests attempting to influence the policy debate. Early interest group researchers thought this group behavior could explain what kinds of people obtain what they want from government and could help account for how that success is achieved. Modern interest group scholars have since abandoned the pursuit of any unified group theory, according to William Mitchell and Michael Munger: “deductive theory has not provided the hypotheses and explanations offered by political science in studying interests. Accordingly, we have a vast and factually rich body of data but one that is analytically incoherent.”² As a result, leading interest group specialist Allan Cigler never expects to work toward a global theory of politics: “I suspect our knowledge of representative issues dealing with organized interests will always be fragmentary, and scholarship will continue to lag rather than anticipate changes in the primary trends of national politics.”³

This paper is a theory-building exercise designed to show that this outcome is not inevitable. The empirical work on interest groups in American politics can indeed be fit into a group theory of politics that may help us answer some of the basic questions of political science. The project is a sympathetic reformulation of David Truman’s *The Governmental Process* as a framework that can identify the multiple arenas in which interest groups compete and the factors and strategies that lead to effective influence on policy. The goal is not merely to show that Truman has been misrepresented by current scholars, but to put current literature in context and show how utilizing Truman’s framework can help us determine how power is distributed in American politics and how some groups gain advantages over others. The central premise of the

¹ Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech, *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and Political Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), xv.

² William C. Mitchell and Michael C. Munger, “Economic Models of Interest Groups: An Introductory Survey,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 35 no. 2 (1991): 513.

³ Allan J. Cigler, “Research Gaps in the Study of Interest Groups Representation,” in *Representing Interests and Interest Group Representation*, ed. William Crotty, Mildred A. Schwartz, and John C. Green (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 35.

project is that there are identifiable domains in which interest groups compete and identifiable categories of factors by which some groups gain advantage. By situating the current literature in Truman's outline, we can understand the distortions produced by isolating certain questions in the interest group literature and we can show what pieces of the puzzle have been answered and which remain.

In this reformulation of Truman, interest groups can be thought of as having three components: social groups with shared interests, sets of organizations which seek to represent those interests before government, and factions within government that seek to advance the same agenda. Interest groups in society arise out of an environmental context of socioeconomic and institutional opportunities but their eventual effectiveness in the policy arena is conditioned by three sets of variables: the strategic social position of the group, internal organizational characteristics of the group, and characteristics of the lobbying environment. Modern interest group theories are better understood in this context, with collective action problems seen as one portion of internal organization and information exchange seen as one part of interaction in the lobbying environment. Given this outline, group theory can advance an agenda for assessing the political power of interest groups and can direct research toward answering the primary theoretical questions of political science.

The outline proceeds in four parts. Part 1 is an expansion of Truman's theory; it identifies the variables relevant to group mobilization for effective influence and extends a conception of interest groups that incorporates their social roots. Rather than summarize Truman, it integrates current literature that has not explicitly built on Truman's conceptions but can be shown to update his analysis. Part 2 is an exploration of major sections of the current interest group literature and their accompanying theoretical bases; it will show that the expanded version of Truman's theory is able to incorporate the other perspectives, promoting a more systematic way of exploring interest group competition. Part 3 reframes the traditional "power debate" in the context of this group theory, arguing that the model allows research to progress by asking answerable questions about power relations. Finally, Part 4 illustrates the substantial explanatory power of this group theory for the entire discipline and for related fields.

Some may see this project as merely a rehashed version of pluralism. If pluralism is understood as an articulation of how politically active groups of American citizens influence the policymaking process, then this project is indeed in that vein. The goals of this theoretical

integration reach beyond any effort to declare a winner in old debates, however; it is designed to advance the understanding of interest aggregation in a democratic society.

PART ONE: AN EXTENSION OF TRUMAN'S GROUP THEORY

Truman designed his work to “present some of the major variables affecting the activities of interest groups and to work out a conception of the dynamics of American government that may give reliable meaning to those behaviors.”⁴ Since the publication of *The Governmental Process*, organizational operations have changed considerably but the role of interest groups in American government has remained largely as Truman described it. Complaints about interest group influence have certainly not subsided. Interest groups appeared prominently as villains in Ross Perot's 1992 campaign; they are the focus of campaign finance reformers and they are referenced in policy debates as diverse as energy, abortion, and taxes. Accompanying this increasing concern, however, there has been heightened awareness of deterioration in the "civil society" and a call for more organizational involvement by American citizens. Organizations are thus critiqued for multiplying in some cases and disappearing in others. Since group behavior can be described as both the essence of democracy and its major threat, Truman's research questions have never been more relevant.

The Environment of Group Mobilization

Truman's starting point is the environmental context of interest group formation and competition. Interest groups, he argues, arise in society out of connections among individuals that are often responses to social, institutional, and economic change. Truman conceives of organized interests as constantly recreated groupings rather than static actors. His work identifies three categories of social disturbances that help to activate similarities among

⁴ David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*, 2d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971; reprint, Berkeley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies, 1971), 505.

individuals, providing the context for interest group organization: (1) technological change,⁵ (2) the behavior of allied groups and opponents,⁶ and (3) intervening institutional change.⁷

Technological development affects social organization in two ways. First, technological change and organizational momentum may move government and private groups to adopt similar organizational forms. Truman's examples are bureaucratization, changes in interpersonal communications and mass media, and economic specialization.⁸ Second, economic and social alterations may bring new issues to the forefront or create new actors in the policy debate.⁹ This category includes the rise and decline of various industries and the emergence of new concentrations of wealth. Explanations of interest group competition that focus on political economy would fall within this category.

Truman also speaks of the behavior of opponents and allies as potential disturbances. First, since an organization's competitors are often close by on the ideological spectrum, the appearance of similar groups or changes in the policy agendas of existing groups will promote or deter new mobilization.¹⁰ Second, if new groups are mobilized, policy opponents may reassess their political needs.¹¹ "Population ecology" explanations of interest group competition would be included under this heading.

The category of intervening institutional change describes major alterations to what Truman calls the "rules of the game" by which interest groups compete. It includes attempts to restrict group activities, the encouragement of group development, and the unintended consequences of institutional reform. This encompasses regulation of lobbying, campaigning,

⁵ Truman, 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁹ Current analyses suggest that this is still the case. See Burdett A. Loomis and Allan J. Cigler, "Introduction: The Changing Nature of Interest Group Politics," In *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 24.

¹⁰ This encompasses what David Lowery and Virginia Gray refer to as the impact of the group population on group "density" and "diversity." See Virginia Gray and David Lowery, *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation: Lobbying Communities in the American States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 65 and James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 263.

¹¹ Since Truman's work, business groups have responded to Ralph Nader's public interest movement. See Jeffrey M. Berry, *The Interest Group Society*, 2d ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), 38.

and group tax procedures along with changes in the level of government regulation and the initiation or modification of government programs. Explanations of group change which emphasize the rise of new patrons or changes in the size of government would fall within this category.

Recent regression analysis has shown that all three types of environmental variables are still relevant to interest group configuration, according to Virginia Gray and David Lowery: “institutions become dominant—when interest communities are denser, states experience economic stress, government size increases, and the size of the economy is small.”¹² Gray and Lowery say that they are challenging Truman’s theory, referring to “Truman’s assertion that [interest organization] diversity faithfully reflects the complexity of social and economic interest in the polity.”¹³ Truman does not, however, maintain that a disturbance is the only prerequisite to organization. He explicitly indicates that not everyone effectively organizes into groups following a disturbance. This leaves a population full of “latent groups” and tremendous variety in the level of effective organization among groups. Groups are typically made possible by environmental factors, therefore, but many interest groups have faced disturbances and not yet mobilized.

Cross-sectional Differences in Group Influence

Even when environmental variables are held constant, then, there are cross-sectional differences in the level of mobilization for effective influence. Truman outlines three categories of explanations for differences in the ability of groups to achieve effective access: "(1) factors relating to a group's strategic position in the society; (2) factors associated with the internal characteristics of the group; and (3) factors peculiar to the governmental institutions themselves."¹⁴ Mobilization is conceived of as the process of moving from the point of social association to political influence, not merely the problem later isolated by Mancur Olson of founding and maintaining a single membership association.

¹² David Lowery and Virginia Gray, “The Dominance of Institutions in Interest Representation: A Test of Seven Explanations,” *American Journal of Political Science* 42 no. 1 (1998): 243.

¹³ Gray and Lowery, *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation*, 11.

¹⁴ Truman, 506.

Strategic Position in Society

The developmental dynamics of group organization are illustrated in the “strategic position in society” category. Strategic position, in this reformulation, is comprised of advantages from (1) economic structure, (2) historical bases of organizational power, (3) social institutional structure, and (4) the role of status in reputational political interaction. It addresses the variables long of concern to “elite pluralists”¹⁵ in the context of a broader group theory.

Scholars have long recognized differences in strategic position made possible by economic structure. First, according to Truman, property rights convey organizational power: “the social relationship that we call property includes, in part, the power of owners to control the behavior of other people.”¹⁶ The modern literature extends this analysis, showing that corporations, in particular, have easy reach of employees, suppliers, and stockholders and can quickly generate resources and participation.¹⁷ Second, it may be generally easier to build groups from a hierarchical starting point. If there is an easily designated leader, internal dissension and organizational costs may be reduced.

These advantages from economic structure are made possible by past decisions about fundamental rights and the structure of the economy that produce certain advantages for social groups. Truman’s argument can be seen as consistent with arguments made in the modern American political development literature that emphasize path dependence. The corporate liberal argument of Martin Sklar, for example, argues that the beginning of the twentieth century saw a movement from proprietary capitalism to corporate capitalism; family price-taking firms were replaced by large publicly-traded firms with complex hierarchies. Support for individualistic free contracting was replaced by support for corporate liberalism and corporations were redefined from state creations to individual actors.¹⁸ Policy choices can be taken out of the realm of possibility, therefore, because of advantages in strategic social position that become

¹⁵ Eva Etzioni-Halevy, “Elites: Sociological Aspects,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. N.J. Smelser and P.B. Batters (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2001), 4422.

¹⁶ Truman, 506.

¹⁷ Berry, 199.

¹⁸ Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 155.

codified in an intervening institutional change. This expanded conception of strategic position identifies the social basis of powerful modern interest groups, including the historical political context that created their advantage.

The major distinction in organizational structure identified in the modern interest group literature is that institutions are better able to mobilize than membership groups. Truman did not focus on institutions or think through their implications but he did show that business can use its economic structure to develop policy influence and that organization by occupation is one of the easier forms of association. Truman uses the sociological definition of an institution as a group with a “high degree of stability, uniformity, formality, and generality.”¹⁹ Institutions, then, are social groups with a specific set of internal characteristics. The reduced startup costs associated with institutions and the role of entrepreneurs in organization building are not his general concern. It seems useful, however, to think of institutional participation in politics as groups of stockholders, employees, or charity supporters with a political interest and a highly organized social group that allows for easy political mobilization.²⁰ In the major modern contribution, Robert Salisbury shows that institutions have an overriding interest in self-perpetuation: “It is not member interests as such that are crucial, but the judgments of organizational leaders about the needs of the institution as a continuing organization.”²¹ This institutional leadership could still be considered what Truman calls “the active minority,” a subset of the interest group with its own interests in mind that controls the interest group organization. It would be a mistake to lose sight of the group basis of these institutions. Even business policy representatives constantly mention the group basis of their support by citing their number of employees, customers, and owners;²² they also generate monetary support in Political Action Committees (PACs) from the same set of contributors.

¹⁹ Truman, 26.

²⁰ In the modern literature, institutions are also shown to differ in their level of interest in policy and their ability to articulate grievances, according to Luigi Graziano: “The interests of institutions are generally more clearly defined, as well as more substantial, than those of private individuals.” (Luigi Graziano, *Lobbying, Pluralism, and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 160.)

²¹ Robert H. Salisbury, “Interest Representation: The Dominance of Institutions,” *American Political Science Review* 78 (1984): 67.

²² Christine DeGregorio, “Assets and Access: Linking Lobbyists and Lawmakers in Congress,” in *The Interest Group Connection: Electioneering, Lobbying, and Policymaking in Washington*, ed. Paul S. Herrnson, Ronald G. Shaiko, and Clyde Wilcox (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 145.

Advantages in mobilization, according to Truman, also stem from institutional building blocks; if a social group is characterized by institutional connections among its members, it will be more likely to build from that starting point. A group that is organized in churches, schools, businesses, government departments, charities, or previous political units will have tremendous advantages. Access to media outlets can also be quite useful.²³ Government workers, students, and community organizers can all use their institutional access for the benefit of an interest group.²⁴ Interest groups within the state such as administrative agencies also have institutional access advantages and government resources to promote their continuation.

Truman recognized that in addition to these advantages from social structure, there is a difference in influence from comments made by different individuals; social status will influence politics. First, interest groups with famous or admired leaders will gain an advantage in the policy debate.²⁵ Second, low-status groups and those without strategic social advantages have to rely on another set of elites that today would be characterized as making up “countervailing power,” according to Truman: “the essentials of the system are peculiarly in the custody of those in key governmental positions and those who occupy leading positions within the groups that make up the structure intervening between the government and the ordinary citizen... elites.”²⁶ Because the active minority controls organization of an interest group, the leaders of social groups may become a separate interest group with more reputational power.²⁷ That most Washington representatives are lawyers may change the kinds of interests that are effectively

²³ The cable industry uses its own stations for political advertising and civil rights organizations use predominantly black newspapers to deliver their message. See Bruce C. Wolpe and Betram J. Levine, *Lobbying Congress: How the System Works*, 2d ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1996), 142.

²⁴ The institutionalization of social groups can even begin with generating high school and college clubs to induce curriculum changes and train young activists; much of the environmental movement may be attributable to this kind of organizing. See William P. Browne, “Lobbying the Public: All-Directional Advocacy,” in *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 357.

²⁵ There may be a curious two-way envy between business leaders and policymakers because people want to be associated with powerful players.

²⁶ Truman, xlv.

²⁷ There has been little analysis of what it means for a set of issue positions to be represented by a public interest group. Being represented by Nader likely changes the nature a group’s influence but scholars have not discovered how. See Berry, 220.

mobilized.²⁸ Ethno-religious groups may also dominate certain sectors of the interest group universe.²⁹ Groups may have influence, therefore, based primarily on the individuals they are able to convince to represent them.

Internal Group Characteristics

According to Truman, strategic social position cannot account for all the advantages in responsiveness from public officials: “The privileged treatment of ‘insiders’ in legislative deliberations suggests a second basic aspect of effective access. In addition to status, the extent to which the interest is effectively organized is an important variable.”³⁰ Truman’s second major category of advantages, internal group characteristics, highlights (1) organizational dynamics borrowed from social psychology, (2) attitudinal differences among group members, and (3) differences in resource availability. In *The Logic of Collective Action*, Olson claims that pluralism assumes complete internal consensus and equivalent resource mobilization³¹ but that is unfounded since it is one of the variables in Truman’s analysis.

First, Truman indicates that effectiveness varies based on how vocal the internal politics is in a group. The organizational problem is dependent on the control and sophistication of the leadership and how much effort it takes to continue to receive support from the membership and “fellow travelers.” Internal social group variables include cohesion, significance of competing demands, leadership skills, and willingness to reach out to other groups. These structural characteristics continue to help or retard an interest group’s policy influence, according to Brian Anderson and Burdett Loomis: “The organizational structure of interest groups—and especially membership groups and trade associations—determines much of their impact in Washington.”³²

²⁸ John P. Heinz, Edward O. Laumann, Robert L. Nelson, and Robert H. Salisbury, *The Hollow Core: Private Interests in National Policy Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 101.

²⁹ Heinz, et al., 143.

³⁰ Truman, 268.

³¹ Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 126.

³² Brian Anderson and Burdett A. Loomis, “Taking Organization Seriously: The Structure of Interest Group Influence,” in *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 84.

Technical sophistication and high levels of communication and networking within social groups may also allow for easier effective mobilization.³³

Attitudinal differences among group members, according to Truman, also affect mobilization. Intensity of preference, the most popularly identified attitudinal group variable, certainly matters but it must be combined with other attitudes. First, there is a need for realization of group consciousness through what the modern racial and ethnic politics subfield calls “perceptions of common fate.” Second, perceptions of both internal and external efficacy are also key factors. Third, if some groups are more willing to work in their own self-interest, it may create differences in mobilization success rates. Fourth, political involvement requires an intersection between personal interests and the perception that government action can achieve those interests. Even once mobilized, a failure to articulate clear policy options can prevent interest group success. Finally, if a group has trusting members, they may be able to activate members who are not knowledgeable on an issue but are still willing to work for the group. Internal reputation of the group leadership matters in addition to external reputation.

These internal group characteristics receive less attention in the modern literature than monetary resources. Truman includes variation in resource availability but does not focus his attention there. Following his approach, scholars should specify what kinds of resources are needed and what sources of revenue are available rather than assuming that social groups need to build large membership organizations with financial support from all members. First, the level of dependence on organizational budget and staff resources may vary by group; some groups, for example, may need more technical equipment or public advertising. Second, Jack Walker's evidence shows that interest organizations generate income based on monetary need to complete specific projects rather than raising as much money as possible; when one source dried up, others were found.³⁴ There is therefore a difference between how much income interest organizations currently generate and how much they have the ability to raise. There may be an element of “satisficing;” interest organization leaders could spend more time generating income if the

³³ Talk radio listeners, for instance, are twice as likely to contact Congress than other citizens. See Kenneth M. Goldstein, *Interest Groups, Lobbying, and Participation in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 118.

³⁴ Mark A. Peterson and Jack L. Walker, “Interest Groups and the Reagan Presidency,” in *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 151.

money was needed for new projects. Third, since corporations, private foundations, and wealthy individuals are the major sources of funding for political advocacy, scholars should study how interest organizations obtain grants from these actors.³⁵ Fourth, even considering these additional sources of revenue, socioeconomic status of group members will likely play an important role in effective mobilization.

Another part of resource mobilization that has been studied less frequently also has the potential to create mobilization advantages: human resources. First, the organizational staff may be generated from the social group itself and effectiveness could be dependent on the kind of labor pool the social group offers. Second, to convince people to volunteer or work for an organization, perceived legitimacy is important. The public interest movement may be partially explained by a willingness on the part of a generation educated in the 1960s to work on social causes for less income. If resource availability is considered in the context of internal group characteristics, as Truman discussed it, scholars can more productively pursue research in this domain.

Characteristics of the Lobbying Environment

Interest group scholars should be concerned not only with the representation of social groups in Washington, but also with their relative levels of influence. Demand aggregation is only one part of how groups achieve success or how concerns are integrated into the final public policy outcome. We should extend Truman's category of "factors peculiar to governmental institutions themselves." This category is probably better described as "characteristics of the lobbying environment" to specify the set of relevant actors and to include interest group competitors and allies within and outside of government. The resources and organizational characteristics needed for policy influence depend on the institutional setting. A civil rights group pursuing change through court action will need a drastically different set of resources than a business seeking a tax exemption in a Congressional committee. In Truman's view, these differences in effective influence are made possible by (1) variation in lobbying target characteristics and (2) the competitive dynamics of the policy area.

³⁵ For a start, see Anthony J. Nownes and Allan J. Cigler, "Corporate Philanthropy in a Political Fishbowl: Perils and Possibilities," in *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 80.

The lobbying target characteristics can be thought of in several parts: (1) the branch of government in focus, (2) the stage of policymaking, (3) the particular individuals lobbied, and (4) the institutional structure common to all actors in American politics. Truman divided his book into different sections for each branch of government; much of the current literature continues this tradition. Within each branch, he says, the set of effective strategies differs widely: “Access to the executive, as to the legislature, is not simple. It is the product of a multitude of conflicting and complementary influences.”³⁶ Direct lobbying continues to include the pieces identified by Truman: legislative contact, advocacy in the administration, court action, and lobbying within a party. The current literature expands on the differences between these domains. Time and personnel at interest organization offices are allocated toward Congress, administrative departments, and independent agencies in different allotments based on policy needs.³⁷ Different types of groups are also more likely to focus their activities on the Supreme Court, Congressional committees, and executive agencies.³⁸ Compared to legislative contact, popular mobilization by interest organizations is less important than expertise in administrative advocacy.³⁹

Within the legislative branch, it also matters what part of the process is the key to achieving interest organization goals. Legislative contact includes preliminary contacts with Members, hearings and issue discussions in the pre-legislative state, bill production and mark-up comments, and lobbying on final passage. A recurring theme in the case study literature echoes Truman’s calculations: the committee and the conference stage are the key moments for interest-group influence. Helping to draft legislation also accounts for a large share of lobbying. Interest organizations generally need to lobby both “friends” and “foes,” with the mix of targets depending on the policy issue and the stage of the process.⁴⁰ Whether organizations are targeting

³⁶ Truman, 438.

³⁷ Heinz, et al., 208.

³⁸ John R. Wright, *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence* New Topics in Politics. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 63.

³⁹ Berry, 148.

⁴⁰ Beth L. Leech and Frank R. Baumgartner, “Lobbying Friends and Foes in Washington,” in *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 231.

Senate or House action also creates strategic advantages based on differences in rules and customs between the chambers.

Within the executive branch, the difficulty in administrative advocacy differs by the task at hand: complaints and participation in administrative hearings, comments to agencies and action in the regulatory process, building contacts in the bureaucracy, and lobbying the president. Securing a Presidential veto, for example, is much more difficult than obtaining a minor agency ruling. Even in the judicial branch, the stage of the policy process is a key variable impacting strategy. Court action now includes lawsuit financing and test case development along with *amicus curiae* briefs, appointment hearings, and providing expert witnesses.⁴¹ Each tactic requires a different set of resources with different levels of effectiveness. Lobbying within a party, a domain included in Truman's analysis but left out of some current research, includes platform development and issue agenda lobbying along with obtaining positions of influence in the local party infrastructure. Different levels of status, group size, and resources are required for each of these processes.

Interest organizations may also have varying levels of success depending on the individuals that they need to target in their lobbying efforts. Before taking any action, interest organizations identify the most important decisions that they might be able to affect and the people most likely to be convinced. Much of staff time is spent identifying routes to connect to key decision-makers.⁴² Organizations often need to target specific committee chairs or members of the party leadership. These Members of Congress likely differ in their openness to lobbying by certain groups and their informational needs.⁴³ The modern literature shows that Members differ in their willingness to advance certain kinds of legislation or use certain tactics on behalf of a group.⁴⁴ Scholars have not focused on how Congressional offices respond to different types of contacts or differences among Members in interest in constituent input; we do not know much

⁴¹ Karen O'Connor, "Lobbying the Justices or Lobbying for Justice?" in *The Interest Group Connection: Electioneering, Lobbying, and Policymaking in Washington*, ed. Paul S. Herrnson, Ronald G. Shaiko, and Clyde Wilcox (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 248.

⁴² Interest group organizations keep tabs on issues that might arise in their domain, they track opinion changes by individual legislators, and they follow agency decision-making. See Berry, 80.

⁴³ Heinz, et al., 240.

⁴⁴ Leech and Baumgartner, 221.

about how different offices analyze constituent contact or what kinds of contacts are given preference.

In reference to the executive branch, there has been little analysis of differences in interest organization contact among agencies and departments. Many agencies have formal advisory committees or commenting procedures, but what kind of information is solicited and how it is used likely differ by agency. Since interest organizations often intervene in the agency enforcement process to ask for specific rulings or advisory opinions, scholars could investigate how effective these techniques are in various kinds of agencies.

Truman's original institutional focus was on how the constitutional characteristics of the entire American government convey advantages on certain types of organizations. According to Truman, the federal system and the allocation of Senate seats favor geographically distributed groups. Economic group advantage may have more to do with business present in the district than legislative favors to powerful actors. Modern institutional researchers should help specify what interest groups are most impacted by government structure.

The current literature has been more attentive to the other category of characteristics of the lobbying environment, the competitive dynamics of the policy area. This category includes (1) the kinds of policies advocated and (2) the constellation of forces present in the issue domain. In the area of advantages from the kinds of policies advocated, the one key finding in the literature is essentially an extension of Truman's focus on the advantage from "technicality and its consequent small public."⁴⁵ The modern "invisibility rule" argues that low publicity is the key to changing provisions. This connects with James Q. Wilson's typology of concentrated and dispersed benefits and costs, which specifies when and why issues generate little publicity:

When costs and benefits are widely distributed, we see majoritarian politics; when both costs and benefits are narrowly concentrated, we see interest-group politics; when costs are distributed but benefits concentrated, we see client politics; and when benefits are distributed but costs concentrated, we have the conditions under which entrepreneurial politics may emerge.⁴⁶

Research on the structure of the policy community is also beginning to flesh out other ways in which policy issues differ in their competitive dynamics.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Truman, 362.

⁴⁶ Wilson, xviii.

⁴⁷ Heinz, et al., 58.

The tactics required may differ based on the kinds of policies advocated. Scholars do not seem to know the role of merely bothering officials through constant harassment or repetition of message compared to actual communication of information by groups. Mobilizing calls to Congress, for instance, may be attempted to merely gain publicity and show issue salience but it may also be designed to impart policy information from people who know an issue and can offer evidence to change the mind of a staff member.⁴⁸ Since legislators often know what interest organization is mobilizing the callers, sometimes the calls may just be interest group advertising.⁴⁹ Scholars have learned that interest organizations representing popular issues with high salience and centrality can better activate public opinion with outside lobbying,⁵⁰ but we do not know when it is most necessary. In addition, different levels and kinds of public support are required for different kinds of political influence. Hundreds of phone calls may be required; five people willing to work in a state political party organization might be sufficient; or millions of voters focusing on a single issue may be the key to success.

In articulating differences by policy domain, interest group scholars have tried to take note of “issue networks.”⁵¹ The constellation of forces organized around an issue is partially determined by interest group success in finding partners, but scholars have not learned much about the dynamics of alliances and building coalitions. Truman focuses on building groups of interest organizations or institutions to gain access to government. His observation that organizations typically favor ad-hoc coalitions and not permanent alliances remains accurate in current studies.⁵² Luigi Graziano found that interest organizations generally partner to build the “breadth of the coalition” and to change “the constellation of forces in Congress.”⁵³ Graziano identifies unique characteristics of coalitions in support of administrative departments, coalitions between non-profit and business actors on general issues of lobbying, and coalitions of actors

⁴⁸ Wolpe and Levine, 96.

⁴⁹ Goldstein, 54.

⁵⁰ Ken Kollman, *Outside Lobbying: Public Opinion and Interest Group Strategies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁵¹ Heinz, et al., 301.

⁵² Berry, 166. Scholars have not focused on how panel discussions, central coordinators, conferences, or self-regulation schemes help build these coalitions.

⁵³ Graziano, 19.

with different motivations for political gain.⁵⁴ More differentiated typologies should be advanced to account for these different types of coalitions.⁵⁵

In determining how both these competitive dynamics and the characteristics of the lobbying target promote or deter effective group mobilization, interest organization tactical choices are the object of study. Modern scholars have yet to explore the range of options available to each group in a comprehensive way or to rank the strategies interest groups would like to pursue. Researchers have not focused on how organizational resources constrain strategic options or asked whether interest organizations would prefer to adopt different strategies given a different set of resources. The goal should be to explain what influences each choice of tactic and then to evaluate each kind of technique for effectiveness in various contexts.

The Parts of Interest Groups and the Types of Organization

The discussion has thus far shied away from setting clear boundaries for the notion of an interest group. Some authors have chosen to limit the subject of the interest group subfield by renaming its object of study “organized interests.”⁵⁶ This debate over the name of the field reflects confusion over the nature of interest groups in group theory. Part of the confusion lies not in a tired definitional debate over terms but in a failure to articulate the parts of interest groups and the connections among them.

Truman’s definition was not limiting; his book included sections on “groups in society,” “groups in government,” and group organizations. He viewed these parts of the interest group as distinct but intertwined. There is a curious overlap between this original formulation and V.O. Key’s famous outline of the political party: there is a “party in the electorate,” a “party organization,” and a “party in government,” Key reasoned.⁵⁷ The interest group literature needs

⁵⁴ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁵ We may need qualitative assessments of alliances that involve consumer groups and businesses, for instance, to describe what these instances of cooperation meant for the eventual policy outcome. See Baumgartner and Leech, 98.

⁵⁶ Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986).

⁵⁷ V.O. Key, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, 5th ed. (New York, Crowell, 1964).

a complement to this outline; scholars could speak of “interest groups in the electorate,” “interest group organizations,” and “interest groups in government.”

Studies in the interest group subfield almost always focus on interest group organizations. Studies of interest groups in the electorate are called by a different name and left to behaviorists and survey researchers. Studies of interest groups in government are pursued separately in the Congress and public administration subfields. To understand how interest groups affect policy outcomes and how some groups gain advantage over others from their social starting point to their governmental influence, scholars will need to understand all three parts and how they interact. As Salisbury points out, traditional analyses have often failed to include all three pieces: “representation involves three essential components rather than two... In addition to the representative and the represented, there is also the agency of government to which the representation is directed.”⁵⁸ In this analysis, part of that agency is also a piece of the interest group.

The three parts of interest groups are visible in very different domains. In the interest group of environmentalists, for example, there is a segment of the public that defines themselves as members of the group, there are many institutionalized organizations that serve as the interest group organization, and there is a faction within both Congress and the administration with an affinity toward the group. In the interest group of oil company supporters, there is also a segment of the public including some stockholders and employees who consider themselves members of the group, there is a set of institutionalized organizations which serve as the interest group organization, and there is a portion of Congress and the administration that serve as the interest group in government.

The “interest group in the electorate” should probably be called the “interest group in society” as Truman originally called it because it includes segments of the public acting in both elections and in periods between elections. Just as parties in the electorate might include both official members of a party and sympathizers, interest groups in society include paid members of an official institutionalized group, people who might act on behalf of an organization, and inactivated sympathizers. The people Truman calls “fellow-travelers,” those who share the attitudes of the group but have not become members of any organization, may be just as

⁵⁸ Salisbury, “Interest Representation: The Dominance of Institutions,” 71.

important as those on the membership rolls. As Truman says, the groups in society do not have clear borders; not only are their sizes vulnerable to propaganda by group leadership, they also face balkanization because of intersecting membership affiliations on the part of members. They are fluid groupings that are subject to manipulation by allies and competitors.

The “interest group organization” can be said to include the staff and governing boards of officially institutionalized groups. Unlike the party organization, which is typically a set of coordinated and hierarchical institutional groups such as the national committee, the campaign committees in the House and Senate, and the state party committees, the interest group organization is not always well harmonized. Many interest groups include several organizations that compete with one another to represent the group, differ in strategy, and do not always coordinate. In this formulation, the interest group organization would include these specific institutions, registered 501(c)3 organizations or corporate public affairs offices, but they would only be part of a larger interest group.

Truman’s “internal group characteristics” variable for effective group mobilization would therefore include in-fighting within one interest group but among different institutional actors. If supporters of an industry were organized into a set of institutions such as several corporate government affairs offices and unions coordinated through a central industry association, for example, they might be more likely to be effective. William Browne’s analysis of issue niches, therefore, becomes a discussion of internal characteristics, describing how interest groups become fractured and how organizations within one interest group compete.⁵⁹

The “interest group in government” might also be either highly coordinated or loosely affiliated. In the legislature, they would be similar to what Truman, using agriculture examples, calls a “bloc.” He explains that some legislators are official members of organizations and others are “fellow-travelers.”⁶⁰ There are legislative service organizations, caucuses, study groups, and task forces for various causes and group interests in Congress⁶¹ but there are also untold numbers

⁵⁹ William P. Browne, “Organized Interests and Their Issue Niches: A Search for Pluralism in a Policy Domain,” *Journal of Politics* 52 no. 2 (1990): 498.

⁶⁰ Truman, 343.

⁶¹ Colton C. Campbell and Roger H. Davidson, “Coalition Building in Congress: The Consequences of Partisan Change,” in *The Interest Group Connection: Electioneering, Lobbying, and Policymaking in Washington*, ed. Paul S. Herrnson, Ronald G. Shaiko, and Clyde Wilcox (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 122.

of temporary alliances and tacit agreements. Committees or subcommittees will sometimes unite as an interest group in government but they will also sometimes split into factions. The administration and executive agencies will also include interest groups. One department or agency might be on the side of a particular interest or an interest group might have individual supporters in many executive departments. There may be officially recognized connections among the group in government and its partnering organizations or there may be unofficial support provided by the interest group organization.

To say that an interest group “captured” an executive agency is only to say that the interest group in government is closely tied to the organization. The Chicago Model of interest group research in economics, therefore, argues that sometimes a regulatory body is the governmental manifestation of an interest group.⁶² Group theorists do not assume that organizations are more powerful than government institutions, according to Richard Ellis; they only wish to investigate their relative power through the framework of group competition:

Critics were quick to charge pluralists with believing that groups were all that mattered... But most of those tagged as pluralists, including most especially Truman, never held to anything so implausible. Pluralists looked to groups (in Truman’s words) as ‘a major explanatory variable,’ but explicitly rejected the notion that government officials merely passively registered or mirrored the sum total of organized group preferences. The relative importance of groups and government officials in the shaping of policy, Truman emphasized, was an empirical question.⁶³

In the modern literature, Ronald Shaiko argues that factions within government may be the primary leaders of an interest group, mobilizing the interest organization leadership: “the act of reverse lobbying demonstrates the permeability of our institutions... by soliciting access to the policy process, actors in both [the White House and Congress] acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between themselves and organized interests.”⁶⁴

A political party can be thought of as another governing institution in which interest groups compete or it can be considered a highly-developed interest group or coalition of interest groups. However the party is defined, there are also interest groups within parties. As Truman

⁶² William C. Mitchell and Michael C. Munger, “Economic Models of Interest Groups: An Introductory Survey,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 35 no. 2 (1991): 520.

⁶³ Richard J. Ellis, “Pluralism,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. N.J. Smelser and P.B. Bates (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2001), 11518.

⁶⁴ Ronald G. Shaiko, “Reverse Lobbying: Interest Group Mobilization from the White House and the Hill,” in *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 278.

explains, “The appropriateness of the political party as a means of group access to government proper will depend, therefore, not only upon the claimant groups involved but also upon the characteristics of the party at the particular time, place, and level of government.”⁶⁵ There has not been much research on the role of interest groups in parties or on how interest groups become considered a major force in a party. Even though this is just as likely to be a reasonable path to power, it has been left out of studies of campaign financing and group mobilization. The concept of interest groups within parties could be expanded to refer to any interest group within another interest group. In that spirit, scholars might explore how parts of an interest group become dominant.⁶⁶

Classifying Organizations

It seems clear that the common classification system for interest groups, which consists of corporations, unions, trade associations, professional associations, and public interest groups, is not appropriate. Using characteristics such as tax status to categorize interest groups instead of isolating characteristics that might be relevant to success is quite problematic. Even as a description of differences in interest group organization, it still needs to be more differentiated. First, it does not account for entrepreneurial groups such as front groups for other organizations, “administrations in exile,” or extensions of political candidacies. Second, it does not account for the role of tax law and campaign finance law evasion or the creation of splinter organizations. Third, scholars certainly need to indicate what difference it makes to use “hired guns” as opposed to internal staff, but the type of interest group organization that the outside vendor becomes is also important.⁶⁷ There are several families of non-profit organizations, for instance, that see themselves as different kinds of actors: charities, public interest groups, industry associations, and departments of institutions. Even groups like third parties are sometimes organized as interest groups. In moving from interest groups in society to interest group organizations, different structures emerge in different cases.

⁶⁵ Truman, 282.

⁶⁶ Larger retail businesses, for instance, might become more prominent in the interest group made up of all retailers.

⁶⁷ Heinz, et al., 377.

There are important differences in organizational configuration and the level of formalization among interest groups. Some interest group organizations are merely staff-based lobbying operations, others are mass membership organizations and still others are social movements. Interest group organizations might include business departments, one director and a secretary, or even one person at a law firm representing many clients. Many interest organizations have local chapters, some for show only and some for resource mobilization. Interest organizations also differ in their connection to allied groups, the pervasiveness of their outreach efforts, and their focus on membership satisfaction.

We should think of interest group organizations as differing along many dimensions that all might have an effect on their success and influence. First, interest group organizations differ on the size of their issue agenda, from single-issue groups to broad ideological groups to policy area specialists; some may adopt new issues at the whim of a director or after a business expansion.⁶⁸ Second, there is a willingness to compromise continuum; some groups are of the “I’d rather be right than president” variety and others pragmatically pursue whatever they can without worrying about principles.⁶⁹ These issue differences expand on the typically-cited difference in the issue position spatial division of various groups.

There are also differences in activity and strategy. First, the level of partisanship is an important variable originally highlighted by Truman. Some groups are informal party subsections, others are “non-partisan” with clear favorites, and others do not seem to have a partisan leaning. Second, there are differences in the level of information provided by various groups. Some may be closer to “think tanks” or research organizations; others are ready to use reports, opinion polls, and PowerPoint presentations but have advocacy components.⁷⁰ Some may at least have research staff but not an information focus and others will not provide any information beyond a brochure. Third, different organizations have different strategy selection biases; some, for example, favor outside mobilization and others always work with a single

⁶⁸ Browne, “Organized Interests and Their Issue Niches,” 485.

⁶⁹ Robert H. Salisbury and Laretta Conklin, “Instrumental versus Expressive Group Politics: The National Endowment for the Arts,” in *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 293.

⁷⁰ Andrew Rich and R. Kent Weaver, “Advocates and Analysts: Think Tanks and the Politicization of Expertise,” in *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 242.

committee chair. The target selection bias extends to branch of government, with some organizations as primarily legal actors and some preferring to work through legislative channels.

The modern literature has tried to create simplistic typologies of interest organizations rather than highlighting the range of ways in which groups differ. Researching the many differences in types of interest group organization would help scholars expand the list of variables identified by Truman. Combining this list with a three-part conception of interest groups that includes social groups, interest organizations, and factions within government, may allow researchers to analyze clusters of interest group organizations that correspond to a single interest group and see how organizational competition occurs within such a group. Together, the outline aims to work toward more of a birds-eye view of the interest group universe.

PART TWO: THE MODERN LITERATURE: MORE EXAMPLES, LESS THEORY

The time since Truman's study has brought better opportunities for research. First, there are simply more examples of interest organizations and more instances of organized influence on the policy process. Second, there are now data to test the relative importance of Truman's factors for influencing policymaking effectiveness by interest groups. Recent changes in campaign finance law and lobbying disclosure present an opportunity to study the role of interest groups in American policymaking more systematically. Third, opinion polling should also improve the ability of researchers to study the connections between opinion cleavages in the public and formal interest organization development. Ideally, these data and new set of examples would provide an extension and reformulation of Truman's group theory of politics or supplant it with a new theory that more accurately reflects reality and allows research to move forward within a framework that coalesces the findings into a coherent whole.

Unfortunately, current interest group research is described as fractured and fragmented in almost every literature review of the subfield.⁷¹ No reasonable framework has been advanced to replace Truman's original group theory. Though scholars refer back to Truman's work as a historical footnote and often make reference to his contributions, they reject the use of his

⁷¹ See Berry, Baumgartner and Leech, and Allan J. Cigler, "Interest Groups: A Subfield in Search of an Identity," in *Political Science: Looking to the Future*, Volume Four: American Institutions, ed. William Crotty (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991).

framework. Instead, they choose either unorganized research or theories that describe only small parts of the interest group topic such as collective action theory, population ecology, “information” theory, and “access” theory. To compound the problem, according to Cigler, research has been driven primarily by the law of available data: “data availability has been the major determinant of the interest group politics research agenda, framing both the questions we explore, and the topics we avoid.”⁷² This has had unfortunate results, according to Baumgartner and Leech:

The areas of the literature that have been home to the most confusing collection of contradictory findings have been those where scholars have attempted to make use of data collected by others for a different purpose. Data that come for free are often worth exactly their costs.⁷³

Since few recent researchers have shown interest in developing a coherent group theory of politics, the subfield would benefit from situating the current literature and modern theory in the context of the reformulated version of Truman’s group theory.

Campaign Finance Research: Data Rich, Theory Poor

The best evidence that interest group research has not been proceeding along any coherent theoretical path is the largest single set of research in the interest group subfield, the study of the impact of political action committee contributions on roll call voting in the House of Representatives. If we were working from within Truman’s framework, we would never have created this research plan. First, we would expect that interest organizations attempting to influence the legislature would help author bills before they were introduced, influence amendment votes in subcommittees, or change provisions in conference committee; targeting floor votes would be a last resort.⁷⁴ Second, we would expect campaign contributions to be one source of attempted influence, but partly to help elect people who were supportive rather than to “buy votes.” The campaign contributions would work alongside other kinds of lobbying and only in specific instances for particular members. The last thing researchers would pursue in this

⁷² Cigler, “Research Gaps in the Study of Interest Groups Representation,” 29.

⁷³ Baumgartner and Leech, 186.

⁷⁴ For a modern update, see Marie Hojnacki and David C. Kimball, “Organized Interest and the Decision of Whom to Lobby in Congress,” *American Political Science Review* 92 no. 4 (1998): 777.

framework is studies on the effect of PAC contributions on roll call votes and yet that is how many scholars have expended their resources.

Most reports of the results indicate that, after the many projects of this kind, virtually nothing has been learned.⁷⁵ The PAC literature is commonly described as large, conflicted, and disconnected. There is little effort to integrate the research findings into other interest group studies and the statistical evidence often seems contradictory.⁷⁶ Current campaign finance research thus proceeds in a data-rich but theory-poor setting. Interview evidence indicates that it should be contextualized as part of a larger process, according to Graziano: "Coalitions, grassroots lobbying and PACs do not operate as an alternative to direct lobbying but jointly, and in various combinations."⁷⁷ Economists have often noted that the lobbying budgets of business organizations generally dwarf their direct contributions to political organizations, suggesting that contributors do not view PAC contributions as their primary means of influence. We must therefore fit the campaign finance piece of the interest group literature back into the puzzle.

Researchers should take note of the different potential goals of interest group intervention in the electoral process. Interest organizations might and likely do participate in campaigns (1) to help individual legislators who are spokesmen for their issues, (2) to help a party win control of the legislature or the presidency, (3) to help secure access to public officials, or (4) to set the issue agenda in campaign discourse. There are certainly cross-sectional differences in the pursuit of these various goals and each goal would likely produce a different set of responses.⁷⁸ If an interest organization wanted to help elect or reward its primary spokespersons, it could focus on a few incumbent re-election campaigns. They might donate to candidates from both parties and would not be concerned with donating to campaigns that are not competitive. If an interest organization wanted to help a party win control of a legislature, they would not be as concerned with individual voting records and would focus on a few key races, donating to both challengers and incumbents. If donating for access were the goal, we would expect an interest organization to contribute to incumbents on the most important committees without reference to campaign

⁷⁵ Baumgartner and Leech, 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁷ Graziano, 50.

⁷⁸ Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, *Interest Groups in American Campaigns: The New Face of Electioneering* (Washington: CQ Press, 1999), 91.

competitiveness or party.⁷⁹ If the goal was setting the issue agenda, we might expect an interest organization to control the communications made possible by its contributions and contribute in only high-profile races. In practice, the goals of electoral intervention are usually a mix of these four types of actions and the mix changes across different groups.⁸⁰ Overall analyses of interest organization contributions that assume uniform goals across groups are suspect.

“Access theory” certainly has something to contribute to discussions of interest organization giving. It is hardly a new idea; Truman even titles a subsection of his book “The Basic Objective: Access.”⁸¹ It is clear that interest organizations believe they gain an advantage from having the “ear” of a legislator in times of need. Access has a variety of meanings, from regular communication to advisory board membership to meeting with Members.⁸² Contributions may be given to avoid upsetting a legislator or with an expectation that the access will help a group obtain a crucial small change in legislation. Instead of pursuing a dualistic debate over whether groups want access or want to “buy votes,” scholars should specify the instances in which each goal is more prominent and include the goals that are not described by either formulation.⁸³

Interest organizations have a variety of methods to match their variety of motives for influencing campaigns. As Truman initially said, groups typically focus on propagandizing to their members and getting out the vote; direct contributions may take a secondary role.⁸⁴ Scholars do not have a good sense of when interest organizations contribute directly, when they engage in independent expenditures and issue advocacy, and when they focus on internal mobilization. Given the differing goals of group intervention, independent advocacy is not likely to be synonymous with direct contributions. In addition, the unsaid assumption in most

⁷⁹ Paul S. Herrnson, “Interest Groups, PACs, and Campaigns,” in *The Interest Group Connection: Electioneering, Lobbying, and Policymaking in Washington*, ed. Paul S. Herrnson, Ronald G. Shaiko, and Clyde Wilcox (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 42.

⁸⁰ Rozell and Wilcox, 26.

⁸¹ Truman, 264.

⁸² Wright, 77.

⁸³ There is a sense among practitioners that a lot of political donations are based on pure persistence, repetition of requests, and lines of friendship; these circumstances are not well described in the scholarly literature. See Wolpe and Levine, 50.

⁸⁴ Truman, 305.

campaign finance research is that direct contributions indicate more support than internal mobilization, but it is not at all clear that one is always more effective than the other.⁸⁵ If campaign finance research were conceived of as research on interest group electoral intervention, as Truman envisioned it, more of its current shortcomings would come to light.

The Illogic of Collective Action

By far the most prominent theory in modern interest group research is the collective action research program initiated by Olson. According to Cigler, "By the late 1980s, a loosely integrated body of 'incentive theory' literature had largely supplanted the pluralist model as the subfield's main paradigm to explain group mobilization and development."⁸⁶ Olson only claimed that he had developed a theory of mobilization by membership organizations, but today it is used as a starting point for much of interest group research, despite its limited applicability.

Instead of tracking the association between interest groups in society and interest group organizations as suggested by Truman, collective action scholars assume that interest groups are membership organizations that mobilize a large population to act and contribute funding. This confusion as to the nature of interest groups presents several problems. First, interest organizations differ by how much separation there is between members and non-members. In some groups, membership is a formality reserved as a fundraising tactic.⁸⁷ In others, it conveys deep association with the group and constant interaction with other members. Second, even within membership organizations, it is not clear in the literature whether high turnover and inability to recruit new members are the same set of problems or two separate processes.⁸⁸ Third, and most importantly, it is often unclear whether "group mobilization" describes a fundraising function or a participation function. These are two different theorized systems, one controlling when political involvement takes place and the other describing a financial

⁸⁵ Rozell and Wilcox, 23.

⁸⁶ Cigler, "Interest Groups: A Subfield in Search of an Identity," 107.

⁸⁷ Baumgartner and Leech, 31.

⁸⁸ Interest mobilization could refer to the initial process of finding likeminded people and pursuing political action or it could connote continued association or patronage.

contribution process.⁸⁹ Given that most interest organizations obtain funding from foundations and corporations, wide fundraising may also be less important than generally assumed.⁹⁰ There has been little research comparing the value of a member, a contributor, and an activist to an interest group organization.

As a result of entrepreneurial group formation, there has been an increase in the number of groups with no discernable formal membership. Many of those groups who designate themselves as “public interest groups” are not dependent on membership resources and not concerned with membership relations. They may have influence without representing a membership because they have issue expertise and are seen to represent a particular concern with many sympathizers. In Olson’s formulation, this group would be unlikely to form and would not represent any social group. In the reformulation of Truman’s theory, these interest group organizations would still represent a group in society; the social group need not be fully included in the set of formal interest group organizations that arise to represent it. The organized interests still have a basis in social support, however, and utilize it in their attempts to influence policy.

Collective action theory is also not very useful to scholars in its basic findings on how organizations mobilize members. Many groups do not provide selective incentives and others do not rely on them for mobilization, according to Gray and Lowery: “The Olson incentive theory... simply is not a useful guide to generating valid inferences about the societal-level properties of interest organization communities, largely because it ignores context, the environment in which interest organization takes place.”⁹¹ Olson’s logic does not seem to provide enough to explain the groups currently in existence, much less predict the emergence of new groups, according to Andrew McFarland: “not only did many lobbies exist that Olson implied should not exist, but clearly the number of such lobbying organizations had greatly increased, including lobbies for widely shared, diffuse interests.”⁹² In a curious turn of events, Olson’s logic has been extended

⁸⁹ If it is a fundraising process, scholars should probably compare their analyses to studies of charity contributions and pursue studies of fundraising devices. We do not know whether emotional appeals, issue salience, or endorsed recommendations are most successful.

⁹⁰ Jack L. Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 49.

⁹¹ Gray and Lowery, *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation*, 246.

⁹² Andrew S. McFarland, “Interest Groups and Theories of Power in America,” *British Journal of Political Science* 17 (1987): 140.

despite its wide inapplicability; modern collective action theorists attempt to outline the series of incentives, selective, solidary, and purposive, that make group mobilization possible.⁹³

Olson merely shows that given a set of rational expectations on the part of individuals, participation in interest organizations does not follow from agreement on public goods. It is devised as an “even if” statement: even if individuals were following their own self-interest, a group of individuals would not have a universal self-interest. The formulation does not address what happens if the first assumption of rational self-interest is false. It therefore faces several problems. First, scholars have shown that “collective action problems can be solved by appeals to purposes,” not only social pressure and economic incentives.⁹⁴ Second, solidary incentives such as friendship and status have been identified. Third, expressive incentives where “making the effort is its own reward” also seem to motivate mobilization.⁹⁵ Finally, even if instrumental action is perceived, individuals need only a “perception of efficacy” to participate.⁹⁶

Truman maintained that Olson’s contribution was not a useful starting point:

Since many motivations in society fall outside this sphere and are not ‘rational’ in the technical economic sense of self-interested, benefit-maximizing behavior, groups characterized by philanthropic, religious, or other technically nonrational or irrational motives may emerge and operate effectively on the political scene, without the need for coercion or special inducements.⁹⁷

Even Olson realizes his theory is not universally applicable; he recommends turning to other fields for non-rational interests: “a labor of love is not rational... it would perhaps be better to turn to psychology or social psychology than to economics for a relevant theory.”⁹⁸

Even when scholars show that interest organizations do provide selective services, that fact does not show that selective incentives control mobilization, according to David King and Jack Walker: “personal material benefits are not only provided by relatively few groups, but they also are considered the least important class of benefits in attracting members among the groups

⁹³ Terry M. Moe, “Toward a Broader View of Interest Groups,” *Journal of Politics* 43 (1981): 531.

⁹⁴ Wilson, viii.

⁹⁵ Salisbury and Conklin, 283.

⁹⁶ Moe, 536.

⁹⁷ Truman, xxix.

⁹⁸ Olson, 161.

that provide them.”⁹⁹ The byproduct may be a side thought or a business alliance, rather than the primary motivating force. The existence of insurance discounts in an organization, for instance, does not prove that they are the cause of group mobilizations. Selective incentives also may serve less for politics than for organizational stability and expansion. Truman’s initial formulation of selective incentives is more helpful in addressing their significance; in his example of the labor union, the incentives are provided to increase organizational control over a social group:

where the central organization assumes some or all of the responsibility for organization drives and their financing and for the payment of various individual benefits, power goes with the assumption of the function. Sometimes these services have been initiated with just this objective in mind.¹⁰⁰

Olson’s focus on the importance of group leadership and “coercion” is also a focus of current research. This concept is subsumed by Truman’s vision of the active minority: “In the course of maintaining cohesion and of perpetuating itself, the active minority can manipulate and exploit such aspects of formal organization.”¹⁰¹ According to Truman, group internal situations are governed by leadership skills and the make up of the membership, especially their controllability. Truman goes further, saying that groups are forced to pretend to act in a “democratic mold” but generally proceed by elite action and mass reassurance rituals. Focusing on Olson’s version of “coercion” has probably distorted our description of the factors influencing successful mobilization. Surveying the interest group landscape will require thinking of interest groups in separate pieces connected by leadership in association: social groups, formal organizations, and government factions.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ David C. King and Jack L. Walker, “The Origins and Maintenance of Groups,” in *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 87.

¹⁰⁰ Truman, 204.

¹⁰¹ Truman, 194.

¹⁰² Researchers can study how there comes to be many interest group organizations representing an issue perspective or far fewer.

Information Theory: Issue Knowledge, Positioning, and Popularity

Another popular interest group theory that is said to explain the totality of interest organization activities but only expands on a small piece identified by Truman is “information theory.” In the context of group propaganda development, according to Truman, information is a key piece of the puzzle: “One important factor among the informal determinants of access is created by the legislator-politician’s need of information and the ability of a group to supply it.”¹⁰³ All groups are engaged in attempts to use information they develop to their advantage.¹⁰⁴ Truman identifies the same two pieces of information later formalized by and credited to John Wright: policy expertise and “political knowledge of the strength of competing claims.”¹⁰⁵ This political information answers the questions “who are behind this measure?” and “how unified are they?”¹⁰⁶

In Truman’s language, this information exchange is an aspect of the opinion-shaping role of interest organizations in connection with the public and policymakers. Truman argued that the information provided is subjective. Rather than an activity of an information bureau, information production is part of a process of what modern scholars might call symbolic interaction between the public and political leaders. People will want to portray their issue position as in the public interest, he says, no matter how private the position. The information is not typically obscure information unavailable to policymakers; it is generally known but cued by persistence and repetition, status development, and public mobilization. Policymakers are already aware that opposition to gun control is a very salient minority position, for instance, and no amount of National Rifle Association mobilization will change this information; the phone calls from constituents do serve as a powerful reminder, however, and may change the concerns at the forefront of a legislator’s mind.

¹⁰³ Truman, 333.

¹⁰⁴ Scholars highlight the importance of interest group participation in legislative hearings but Members often do not even participate, much less listen attentively to these presentations. It is unclear whether the painstakingly prepared testimony and written materials are all effort for the press, the staff, Members, or group supporters. All information supplied by interest groups, of both the political and policy variety, is scrutinized through filters associated with group reputation, backing, and friendship. Group participation is much more about symbolic signals of alliances and the level of support. See Berry, 142.

¹⁰⁵ Truman, 334.

¹⁰⁶ Truman, 334.

Modern research confirms that interest organizations are engaged in a brainstorming process to advance positions that are likely to further their interests and are also acceptable to more policy actors.¹⁰⁷ They are constantly creating new proposals, suggesting changes in legislative wording, and promoting self-regulatory alternatives or study periods.¹⁰⁸ As Wright says, the interaction of these information supplies has a major impact on how issues are resolved: "The informational theory of group influence suggests that if gridlock occurs, it is a consequence of the way that policy proposals are framed and the agenda is set, not simply a consequence of multiple groups with conflicting objectives."¹⁰⁹ This focus on how information exchange affects outcome is important; it is also predicted by Truman's theory of group propaganda.

Scholars need to investigate issue argumentation, including how turning points, themes, and consensus are developed in an environment of multiple players with competing interests. Interest organizations often pursue fluid, constantly changing strategies that are modified based on daily events and altered objectives. They may even adopt new issue frames or develop new talking points based on a single newspaper article or an official's request. Issue concerns often develop into proposals and enacted policies through a slow build-up of support, including articulation of grievances and policy suggestions. It is often just as important to convince people that government is likely to take action on an issue as to convince them that action should take place. If legislators, allies, and opponents are convinced of the inevitability of action, a set of proposals may gain momentum. Previous efforts are often crucial in the developmental history of policy initiatives; legislators "drop bills" with no intension of passage and proposals are advanced from groups of experts, such as legislative commissions or federal agencies. Responses to key events or opposition proposals are typically key factors in success.

This study of policy dynamics now primarily occurs through case studies. Scholars should seek to integrate these findings into knowledge of the overall process of issue debate, including differences across issue domains and articulation of the circumstances in which certain kinds of proposals are advanced. Without taking note of this process of debate, scholars cannot

¹⁰⁷ Berry, 161.

¹⁰⁸ Wolpe and Levine, 41.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, 174.

hope to determine causes for policy outcomes. Viewing groups as propaganda agents, as Truman did, is more helpful for this analysis than viewing them as information providers.

Linking Mass Behavior: Issue Publics, Group Identification, and Participation

In addition to incomplete interest group theories, scholars have also investigated the politicization of social groups outside of the context of interest group organization. Several areas of research in the political behavior subfield are relevant to interest group discussions but are currently pursued in isolation: (1) public opinion studies of “issue publics,” (2) experiments on social association, (3) political participation studies, and (4) theories of elite-public interaction in the media.

There is significant research on “issue publics,” large subsections of potential members of a group who pay attention to the evolution of particular issues.¹¹⁰ A noticeable portion of the electorate may now be described as single-issue voters and an even larger section seem to be responsive to a small subset of policy issues.¹¹¹ The appearance of these public groups surely is reflected in the growth of single-issue organizations but they have not been tracked together. The concept could be expanded to more closely match Truman’s; there are not only “issue publics” but also potential groups for all kinds of issue clusters and interests. Researchers could now analyze demographic groups and the groups that individuals affiliate with for their level of efficacy, knowledge, and involvement and then see if these are reflected in the formal groups that seek to represent them, either in group representation or selection of strategies.¹¹²

Experimental results from social psychology also can help show how people come to identify with groups, how leaders generate followers, and how groups maintain cohesion.

¹¹⁰ Jon A. Krosnick, “Government Policy and Citizen Passion: A Study of Issue Publics in Contemporary America,” *Political Behavior* 12 (1990): 59-92.

¹¹¹ Given public opinion polling, the “issue publics” are now apparent to politicians and used by interest groups to secure support. Even foreign policy discussions are becoming increasingly tied to domestic political groups, according to Eric Uslaner: “there has been an explosion of lobbying by groups concerned with foreign policy, especially ethnic groups supporting their ‘mother countries.’” (Eric M. Uslaner, “All in the Family? Interest Groups and Foreign Policy,” in *Interest Group Politics: Fifth Edition*, ed. Allan J. Cigler and Burdett Loomis (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), 366.)

¹¹² Truman implored researchers to investigate external and internal efficacy, internal group communications, and motivations for political action within groups. See Truman, 220.

Studies of the factors that encourage individuals to sign political petitions and contribute money also bear on the question of how interest organizations build support. Rather than relying on an idealized conception of rational choices by individuals, the behavior literature explores various heuristics used in political cognition and identifies the motives for individual action in a group context: conformity to social norms, fulfillment of psychological needs, moral prescriptions of altruism, and economic self-interest. This research should be integrated into models of interest group development, according to Robert Salisbury and Laretta Conklin:

Strict economic rationality has not served very well in developing our understanding of other forms of political participation either; altruism, philanthropy, sociotropic voting, and other such motivations seem to be quite common. We would argue... that interest group activity, at either the individual or organizational level, can best be understood as a specific variety of political participation, and that the investigations in one sphere of participation should be comparable.¹¹³

Despite being the most studied forms of public participation, electoral intervention and protest solicitation are two of the least used forms of interest group influence. Groups do promote protests and are often active in elections but the primary way they mobilize the public is through motivating contact of legislators from constituents.¹¹⁴ When interest organizations advertise, scholars need to analyze what their message is, how connected it is to participation in the organization itself, and the breadth of the target audience. Ken Kohlman's effort to connect interest organization mobilization to public opinion research is probably the biggest innovation in interest group research techniques. Kohlman's insight is not in his utilization of game theoretic models, but in his finding of the connection between organizational capacity and strategy selection and the level of latent group membership.¹¹⁵ Organizations often must have strong social connections to be able to adopt certain strategies, he says: "outside lobbying does vary across issues, and it varies both in accordance with how important the issue is to the group and with the popularity and salience of the issue to the mass public."¹¹⁶ Scholars know that interest group organizations are connected to social groups, therefore, but interest group theory does not integrate the vast literature on public opinion.

¹¹³ Salisbury and Conklin, 285.

¹¹⁴ Goldstein, 15.

¹¹⁵ Kollman, 99.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 92.

Behavioral research has not yet extended its conceptions of elite-public interaction to interest groups. In *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, John Zaller analyzes the dynamics behind opinion formation, the interaction of elites and the public through the mass media.¹¹⁷ The analysis of how cues by elites work to shape opinion needs to be utilized in the interest group domain. Zaller shows that partisan leaders can shape opinion; Truman's formulation allows any set of elites that have a mass following to impact public opinion through propaganda. The implications of the study of how groups generate grassroots pressure and media responsiveness are understated. We need to know not only how groups urge postcards and phone calls and how they target messages, but when they go about expanding the public mobilized around an issue and how they work to bring new people into the issue debate.¹¹⁸ Public opinion scholars would benefit from adding interest group leaders to the set of elites that may impact opinion formation.

PART THREE: GROUP THEORY AND THE POWER DEBATE

Readers will likely take note of the basic view of politics that emerges from this reformulation of group theory. In dusting off Truman and offering a new interpretation, there is a danger in forgetting the intellectual historical context in which his work was generally forgotten, the response to pluralism.¹¹⁹ If group theory is to be considered "pluralist," it should not be equated with every view of politics that has ever been called by that name. The group theory proposed here does not idealize the American state or pretend that any group is equally equipped to pursue policy influence. Instead, the group basis of politics is an analytic theoretical starting point; it describes government as the process of fractured interest aggregation with many actors and points of governmental access.

The pluralist perspective that organized minorities rule is certainly adopted here. In its basic outline, group theory presumes that political groups are pursuing divergent strategies with different priorities and levels of success. Dissimilar groups may be most effective on different

¹¹⁷ John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99.

¹¹⁸ Some groups only "go public" with their members but others target the general public; these are different processes and decisions that need to be analyzed separately.

¹¹⁹ G. David Garson, "On the Origins of Interest-Group Theory: A Critique of Process," *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974): 1518.

sets of issues. If an elite rules, it is the leaders of social groups that manipulate opinion, form alliances, and compete for access to government rather than a small cadre with only class interest in mind.

Group theorists are interested in formal interest organizations as representatives of democratic factions. This does not imply that influential political insiders are a representative sample of groups in society. It is problems in the movement from groups in society to organized and effective political action that is the focus of study, not an assumption. Truman's discussion of "overlapping memberships" is meant to show the problem of classifying groups on only one variable, not to pretend that all affiliations are equally important in creating organized interests.

Reframing the Power Debate: Asking Answerable Questions

Readers may fear that this reinstatement of group theory will lead us back to irresolvable questions about the nature of power. Despite its importance to democratic society and the discipline of political science, the power debate subsided long ago without resolution. As Baumgartner and Leech put it, "the 1950s and 1960s were marked in both political science and sociology by vituperative and ultimately inconclusive debates about the distribution of power in society, with the literature on interest groups at the center of these debates."¹²⁰ Forty years later, there has been little progress in answering the original questions posed in that debate: (1) how equally is power distributed? and (2) how do some groups gain advantage over others?

In both scholarly literature and public discourse, there is concern that all groups are not effectively represented. Democratic theory seeks to move us toward a society that incorporates all perspectives and toward a government that reflects all of us. As Truman said, this normative debate should be informed by an analytic discourse: "We need to know what regular patterns are shown by group politics before we can predict its consequences and prescribe for its lapses."¹²¹

Nevertheless, scholars have insisted on tying analytic frameworks to normative evaluations, with some even referring to Truman's work as a "vision of benign social balance."¹²² As a representative example, McFarland argues that pluralism assumed complete

¹²⁰ Baumgartner and Leech, 13.

¹²¹ Truman, 12.

¹²² Gray and Lowery, *The Population Ecology of Interest Representation*. 31.

interest mobilization: “Writing in the early 1960s, the pluralists erred in assuming that all important interests would be organized and attain access to the political process.”¹²³ Jeffrey Berry discounts group theories of politics by referring to these allegations of their bias:

These critics were not making the more radical argument...[that] America was governed by a small ruling class. Rather, they were saying that there was disproportionate privilege, and that privilege was rationalized by pluralism. Not all relevant interests were adequately represented by interest groups, and pluralism falsely suggested that all those significantly affected by an impending decision were taken into the policy-making process.¹²⁴

No such assumption ever existed within mainstream pluralism. All scholars that have looked seriously at interest groups have discovered that some are more effective at influencing policy than others. As Ellis points out, enlightened readers have come to recognize this:

Pluralists were said to believe that all important or legitimate interests and opinions were represented within the political system, or even that all groups had substantially equal access to the policy-making process. As the ideological dust kicked up in the 1960s has slowly settled, scholars have begun to recognize that few, if any, of those scholars commonly described as pluralists harbored such naïve views of the political process.¹²⁵

Writing that interest groups serve a function is not to approve of the policy outcomes they generate. Truman’s outline is designed to show how some groups gain advantage, not a prescription for utopian governance: “Neither the closing sentence of *The Governmental Process* nor the pages that precede it assert that the system is self-corrective.”¹²⁶

One central reason for the misunderstanding of the pluralist side of the power debate is the conflation of two questions by its opponents: (1) how uneven is power distributed among groups? and (2) should political groups be described as having a hierarchical organization that matches a class structure? Pluralism’s answer to the latter question is clearly “no” but the answer to the former question does not follow directly from pluralist premises. Even if power is organized in groups, it could still be highly unequal. According to Ellis, a new generation of scholars can work to separate normative and descriptive theory: “There is no inherent reason that an empirical commitment to the study of interest groups *a la* Truman need predispose the analyst to find any given distribution of power.”¹²⁷ Pluralism could even be pursued from a very radical

¹²³ McFarland, 139.

¹²⁴ Berry, 12.

¹²⁵ Ellis, 11518.

¹²⁶ Truman, xlv.

¹²⁷ Ellis, 11518.

perspective, showing that there are many opportunities for some groups to gain advantage over others and that certain types of groups seem to dominate these opportunities. If these advantaged groups consistently have what Truman called “class character,” this would have tremendous consequences for political outcomes.¹²⁸ What is needed is a framework that allows scholars to work through this inequality, relying on ascertainable facts about interest group organization.

This reformulation of Truman can serve as a starting point in that effort. Several stages of inequality in the interest group system are identified. The first stage is the appearance of more organized groups to represent particular interests. Scholars often write as if more organizations representing an interest is the key evidence of inequality but it may merely be a sign of internal fracturing. The second stage involves groups with more organizational effectiveness. One group may be just as effective and knowledgeable as three groups on the other side of an issue. In the third stage, some groups achieve greater receptiveness and impact in the policymaking process regardless of their skills and activities. This corresponds to Truman’s use of “strategic position in society” as a key variable in interest group effectiveness. Fourth, some groups have more resources to provide to policymakers, whether it is information, financing, or voter mobilization. Finally, some issue domains provide advantages to some types of groups, making potential partners more accessible or opponents more difficult to organize. Success is therefore mediated through a series of stages where inequality may build up: the creation of representative organizations, the strategic effectiveness of organization tactics, the receptiveness of policymakers to the organization, the provision of greater resources of interest to policymakers, and the location of better potential allies.

The sources of inequality in each stage can be divided into (1) social group advantages, (2) institutional advantages, and (3) advantages from path dependence. As envisioned originally by Truman, some groups benefit from their position in social status systems or their reputation and brand identity. In parallel to Truman’s focus on internal group characteristics, education and information disparities, attitudinal differences, resource disparities, and differences in social connections are each separate variables that impact group advantage. Much of what power theorists should be outlining, then, is which social groups have which advantages.

¹²⁸ John F. Manley, “Neo-Pluralism: A Class Analysis of Pluralism I and Pluralism II,” *American Political Science Review* 77 (1983): 370.

Institutional advantages stem from the types of organizations social groups create and their impact on political action. As explored above, differences in the types of social institutions groups can use as building blocks for political goals, variation in the infrastructure within groups, and opportunities for specialized knowledge from daily life all have an impact on effective group mobilization. The type of structures groups are able to create also has a significant effect; organizations with hierarchical structures or geographic dispersion, for example, may be more prepared for effective political action. If interest group scholars can not only describe differences among groups, but also test which variables are most important to group success, they could better outline how some groups gain advantage over others.

Finally, advantages from path dependence also have an impact on the power debate. Some characteristics of the lobbying environment itself are determined by interest organization activities around foundational issues regarding the “rules of the game.” As an analog to the rules committee discussion in Congress, there may be room in the interest group literature for the special role played by the pursuit of institutional reform and changes in debate procedure.¹²⁹ Settling on these institutional rules constrains future action.¹³⁰ The debates over procedural reform and civil liberties color other issue debates by creating outcomes that constrain future action in other issue categories. There is thus a path dependence in interest group competition focused on the “rules of the game” that changes the characteristics of the lobbying environment; interest group competition may occur not only within the context of the character of the lobbying target but also in the context of previous decisions about the rules of competition. Answering the power debate questions, therefore, requires a developmental narrative incorporating the early decisions that created the environment for certain groups to succeed.

Describing the Subtle Nature of Inequality

The outcome of the analysis suggested here, cumulative empirical work framed in group theory, will likely include a better description of inequality in both its magnitude and its causal

¹²⁹ There are interest group communities surrounding campaign finance reform, for instance, because groups with fewer resources but more public interest credibility want an advantage over moneyed interests.

¹³⁰ Truman shows that courts have a tremendous influence on the “rules of the game;” many interest groups therefore gravitate toward them.

factors. We are likely to see intersecting elite systems rather than the small management group originally suggested by stratification theory. The exploration of widely distributed advantages and how they add up, however, will not necessarily result in a description of the American polity that is any less damning.

In most issue domains, there is some organization representing all notable factions in a debate; it would be hard to think of an issue perspective that is not a part of the agenda of any group in Washington. There is likely to be a large difference in the level of influence these groups have, however, and this may be more important than organization itself. If the difference in effectiveness is larger than the difference between Congressional backbenchers and Congressional leadership, for instance, this would have a major impact on policy outcomes.

Given the kind of inequality described here, the normative agenda advanced by Michael Walzer in *Spheres of Justice* is inadequate. Walzer argues that a society needs to separate the domain involving finances, the economy, from the one involving politics, the polity; if we can make political action independent of economic action, we will solve for inequality.¹³¹ If the way groups are able to organize is inseparable from their social roots, however, Walzer's proposed solution still prevents the group system from representing society accurately. If the skills, social institutions, and status of groups stem from a social position caught up in the economic system, simply trying to eradicate the influence of money on politics will be ineffective.

The reformulated group theory also contains insights that can be applied in another normatively charged debate. The original power discussions featured claims about how the terms of political debate were restricted by class interests and how the resulting set of policy alternatives was reduced. This analysis was criticized for its simplicity and the inability to operationalize the variables. In a group theory framework, these kinds of claims can be better articulated. The path from social pressure to policy inaction is mediated by several important processes that shape the eventual outcome; the task is to define the characteristics of the mediation process. First, a group will typically be represented by people who may have other interests in mind, including perpetuating their own influence. Second, a group's ability to articulate its own policy preferences is dependent on internal characteristics of the group. Third, moving from interest organizations to groups in government involves new sets of interests that

¹³¹ Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

may override the group interest. Fourth, outside environmental factors such as technology and social change may condition the available choices. Fifth, historical decisions condition the choices available in modern politics.

As Robert Dahl pointed out, groups compete within some social consensus; not all options are available and proposals have to be articulated in the accepted language of the society. In Truman's framework, the policy debate is about framing the issues and advancing the right proposals rather than mere representation and argumentation. The importance of momentum, getting everyone to agree that something is going to happen and that they should help shape it, cannot be overstated. Policymakers look for the easy way out in satisfying group interests, upsetting as few people as possible.¹³² Building consensus is a key part of the policymaking process; many proposals are worked out in what could be called "conference call decision-making," so that policies are crafted in a way that keeps most people reasonably happy with the outcome.

Truman's "defensive advantage" in politics, that it is easier to block legislation and that most group activity is preventative, is a key part of understanding the advantage of those in power in the status quo. As practitioners Bruce Wolpe and Bertram Levine say, "One can almost always find a well-placed legislator who can be convinced to lodge an objection to proceeding on a given bill or amendment... [and] the legislative process itself tends to defuse the impetus for action."¹³³ According to the authors of *The Hollow Core*, crisis responses and slight policy adaptations are most likely to succeed: "This reactive component of the policy agenda enjoyed the highest level of legislative success. Incremental policy proposals that maintained existing programs also enjoyed high levels of adoption."¹³⁴ What is left out of the set of achievable political options may therefore be more important than what remains.

¹³² Wolpe and Levine, 57.

¹³³ Ibid., 56.

¹³⁴ Heinz, et al., 412.

PART FOUR: THE IMPORTANCE OF A COHERENT GROUP THEORY

In outlining sets of variables that affect how well groups in society affect policy, this paper is meant to be a step toward identifying potential group advantages, not an exhaustive accounting of all relevant considerations. This reformulation of Truman's theory divides interest groups into three parts, corresponding to Key's sketch of a political party. In moving from interest groups in society to interest groups in government, several sets of variables help determine successful policy influence. First, the environmental context of the mobilization process features socio-economic factors, the behavior of opponents and allies, and intervening institutional change. Second, the strategic position of a group, including advantages from social and economic structure, status systems, and historical bases of authority, account for a major part of the inequality in the group system; this category of variables incorporates elite theories of power but gives them identifiable implications. Third, internal characteristics, including organizational dynamics and differences in resource availability, better account for unequal representation than the incomplete collective action theory advanced by Olson. Finally, characteristics of the lobbying environment, including variation in lobbying target and the constellation of forces present helps to predict effectiveness differentials among interest organizations. The reader is not expected to adopt this exact reformulation of group theory, only to accept that group theories of politics should help guide research in the interest group subfield.

Building a coherent group theory is a major task that should not be solely undertaken by interest group scholars. Group theory can help the interest group literature build connections to related fields. Many subfields in political science implicitly use group theories of politics and might benefit from a full articulation of the theory. Research on political parties is the obvious example. Party theories of politics are a subset of group theory with an additional notion of path dependence for some political groups with institutional advantages. Scholars have not looked much at what causes interest organizations to form rather than new parties. The vast interest group system may serve as a functional alternative to a multiparty system in American politics.

Subfields such as racial and ethnic politics also clearly might benefit from a better articulation of interest group competition because they focus on specific formulations of social groups and their efforts to influence the policy debate. Much current research on political economy could be conceived of as a subset of interest group studies as well. Instead of

discussing industry power, scholars might discuss the actual organizational representatives of various businesses and how their efforts to influence policy and the structure of the economy are influenced by the same variables that affect other interest groups. Research on the policy history of specific domains could help advance interest group studies by articulating how the issues involve change the nature of the bargaining; scholars might benefit from a group theory that could be applied to specific case studies.

Connected disciplines also might share the benefit of a coherent group theory. Economic studies of business political organization and the regulatory process could be put in better context and compared to other studies of group influence on public policy. In sociology, studies of social movements could finally be connected to similar work in political science. In ethnic studies, notions of group identity and behavior could be expanded to include other kinds of groups and to specify what is distinctive about ethnic political mobilization. In psychology, social influence and group context could be related to political behavior. Even though Truman began with evidence from social psychology and organizational theory, the interest group subfield has not ventured back to produce an updated account of how social group behavior interacts with political institutions.

Group theory can also be seen as the context within which administrative and legislative mutual adjustment operates. The administrative process of regulation promulgation may be one sphere of interest group influence. In addition to restating the types of bargaining available to interest group leaders, group theory would attempt to take account of differences in institutional characteristics. Charles Lindblom's analysis may provide a starting point for such a theory; he says that interest groups "share in decision making by exercising controls over executives, legislators, and agencies, thus practicing manipulative adjustment."¹³⁵ By integrating Lindblom's categorization of mutual adjustment techniques and account of administrative decision-making within a theory of interest group behavior, this theoretical course could help describe democratic decision-making without normative judgment or the assumptions of pure rationality.

Reinstating group theory in the study of organized interests will help direct the interest group subfield toward answering the great questions of political science. As William Crotty puts it, "'group concepts of politics'... have provided what is arguably the most-lasting and perhaps

¹³⁵ Charles E. Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

the most-persuasive theorizing on political decision-making in the United States.”¹³⁶ A new version of group theory could be the starting point for a political metanarrative that can synthesize many current approaches to the study of politics.

Most of the modern discipline of political science is made up of traditional research on political institutions, mass behavior studies, or rational choice modeling. Studies within each section of the discipline are typically unconnected and notoriously out-of-synch. Group theory provides one outlet for connecting these various methods of study because it utilizes the work of all three sets of scholars. Institutionalism is a necessary piece of the puzzle because it shows how past decisions on structure condition current group competition, how certain rules privilege some groups over others, and how the targets of lobbying respond to and perceive interest organizations. Research on mass behavior takes on added importance because interest groups stem from portions of society; attitudes and behavioral propensity are studied not for the intrinsic interest, but to show how they are connected to the interaction of representatives in the policy debate. Rational choice theory is incorporated because the strategic advantages of various players and the dynamics of mobilization and political influence are the object of study.

The task presented here may seem unlimited in scope but the potential uses of the products of such a research program are quite extensive. Since the alternative is the continuation of fractured research with no clear theoretical formulation, any effort to expand on group theory using current research on interest groups should be welcome. By exploring the role that group theory has to play in political science, scholars can come to better understand the role of interest aggregation in a democratic society.

¹³⁶ William Crotty, “Interest Representation and Interest Groups: Promise and Potentialities,” in *Representing Interests and Interest Group Representation*, ed. William Crotty, Mildred A. Schwartz, and John C. Green (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 1.