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What to Read on Lobbying

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Mistrust of interest groups and their efforts to lobby the government dates back to the founding of the United States, but so does the recognition that such groups are an integral part of American democracy. Contemporary political science has taken up both of these themes, spawning heated debates about how interest groups are formed, what they do, and how much influence they have. Most commentators fall into one of two opposing camps: those who believe that group demands distort politics and policymaking by pursuing narrow private interests at the expense of a broader public interest, and those who believe the public interest itself is simply an aggregation of group interests.

"The Federalist" No. 10. By James Madison. 1787.[Read](#) [1]

James Madison's famous essay warns against "factions," groups of citizens whose pursuit of private ends contradicts the public interest. Madison conceded that factions were a natural outgrowth of a free society and recognized that democratic politics necessarily involves diverse interests and conflicting views on public policy. He focused his attention, therefore, on controlling the potentially damaging effects of factions by designing political institutions that made it unlikely that a single faction could easily gain control of the government.

***The Governmental Process.* By David B. Truman. Alfred A. Knopf, 1951.**[Purchase at B&N.com](#) [2] | [Purchase at Amazon.com](#) [3]

David Truman's book is a classic statement of pluralism, a midcentury approach to politics that developed from Madison's fundamental observation about the inevitability of factions. For Truman, groups of like-minded or similarly situated citizens are the basic building blocks of the political process. In his model of American democracy, there is no single center of power. Rather, many organized groups with conflicting interests compete for influence, and the political process has a "multiplicity of points of access" through which groups try to shape government decisions. The result is that politics and policymaking are processes of mutual accommodation among contending groups. For Truman, the breadth of the interest-group system and the prevalence of "overlapping

memberships" -- the fact that most people belong to many groups, not just one -- lend stability to democratic politics and produce orderly and incremental change.

***The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America.* By E. E. Schattschneider. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1960.**

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***The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups.* By Mancur Olson. Harvard University Press, 1965.**

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***Political Organizations.* By James Q. Wilson. Basic Books, 1973.**

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In the 1960s and '70s, pluralism came under attack from various quarters. E. E. Schattschneider showed that politics in the United States was biased toward groups with greater resources to influence the political process. "The flaw in the pluralist heaven," he noted, "is that the heavenly choir sings with a strong upper-class accent." Mancur Olson showed that interest groups do not organize naturally, but rather are difficult and costly to form and maintain because of the collective-action problem: individuals have little incentive to contribute to a group if they can receive its benefits by free riding. This means that not all interests in society will find organized expression. And James Q. Wilson showed that organizational imperatives, rather than underlying substantive interests, often color how groups behave in politics. He also demonstrated that the extent and nature of interest organization often depend on the political context. Policies with benefits concentrated among particular groups (rather than the public as a whole), for example, are especially likely to provoke extensive and active interest organization.

***Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements.* By Jack L. Walker. University of Michigan Press, 1991.**

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As the size and scope of the government expanded during the 1960s and '70s, the number and range of lobbying organizations grew dramatically. The lobbying and interest-group landscape that emerged included not only traditional pressure groups but also new kinds of organizations growing out of the civil rights, women's rights, and environmental movements. "Public interest" groups sprang up that claimed to represent not narrowly defined sectors of society, but the public as a whole. Jack Walker's book provides an overview of the resulting late-twentieth-century organizational ecology, focusing on the different resources and strategies that various kinds of groups are able to deploy in their attempts to influence policymaking.

"Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment." By Hugh Heclo. In: *The New American Political System.* Edited by Anthony King. American Enterprise Institute, 1978.

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***The Political Economy of Expertise: Information and Efficiency in American National Politics.* By Kevin M. Esterling. University of Michigan Press, 2004.**

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

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Differently situated interest groups adopt different political strategies. The most basic division is between what might be called "inside" strategies, which rely primarily on direct access to policymakers, and "outside" strategies, which depend on mobilizing public opinion at large. Hugh Heclo's 1978 essay traces the shift in insider lobbying from "iron triangles" to "issue networks." In the past, he notes, interest groups, executive agencies, and congressional committees would collaborate on mutually beneficial policymaking in ways largely invisible to the public. Increasingly, however, these "subgovernments" were being transcended by networks involving not only the traditional actors but also players from the academy, think tanks, journalism, and foundations. This brought policymaking out into the open, but it was still dependent on people with political, professional, and personal ties. Kevin Esterling emphasizes the importance of information in insider lobbying. Interest groups, he shows, can be particularly influential when they provide policymakers with useful information about the likely consequences -- both substantive and political -- of different policy choices. Ken Kollman, meanwhile, highlights two outsider strategies: "signaling," in which groups try to show policymakers how much public support they have, and "conflict expansion," in which they try to increase support among the public.

***Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy.* By Tony Smith. Harvard University Press, 2000.**

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"Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?" By Lawrence R. Jacobs and Benjamin I. Page. *American Political Science Review* 99 (2005): pp. 107-23.

The impact of lobbying on U.S. foreign policy is a topic that seems to come to the forefront of debate every few years. Tony Smith's book explores the connection between evolving American multiculturalism and ethnic involvement in foreign policy discussion. Investigating the changing tactics by which groups have sought to influence policy, he concludes that organized ethnic lobbies exert some influence through a variety of means. (In their much-noted recent book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt reach a similar conclusion in a more histrionic and less rigorous fashion; Smith's case is more judicious and reasoned.) Lawrence Jacobs and Benjamin Page, meanwhile, examine the relative weight of various different groups in driving foreign policymaking and conclude that internationally oriented business groups exert the most significant and consistent influence, followed by foreign policy experts.

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