CHAPTER 2

The Mobilization of Political Interests in America

Most people, most of the time, are able to find better things to do than participate in politics. Even if some method could be devised to allow all citizens to be consulted on every governmental decision, few people would have the time or inclination to participate. Study and informed debate are required to decide whether the tax code should be amended to allow machines used in manufacturing glass containers to be depreciated on an accelerated schedule, or whether a program is required to subsidize students taking graduate degrees in mining engineering. Yet those are the kind of narrow, technical questions that elected legislators must deal with every day. They manage to address these questions through an elaborate system of specialized committees and with the assistance of thousands of staff members. Most citizens would not be able to comprehend the information generated by the congressional staff, and even if they could, there is little reason to think it would interest them. People have better things to do. Legislating in a modern democracy has become a highly specialized, full-time job.

Most people do not know how their representative votes on most issues that come before Congress. The little they hear in the mass media about new legislation is usually obscured by confusing talk of conference committees, parliamentary maneuvers, floor votes, presidential vetos, or administrative rulings. Some people may have personal dealings with their representatives when they ask for assistance in negotiations with the Social Security Administration or receive information about a governmental program that might assist them in their business or profession. Members of Congress refer to this kind of activity as *case work*, and it is an excellent way for incumbents to increase their popularity. However, even the most active members of Congress manage to render personal assistance to only a tiny proportion of the voters in their districts (see Fiorina 1989). Newsletters can be sent by mail, government publications can be sent to those who might need them, but the majority of citizens never have any direct contact with their representatives and know almost nothing about them.

The linkages between citizens and their representatives, however, are not as tenuous as this sketch would imply. Legislators may not communicate often with each individual voter, but they are in contact, almost every day, with

professional advocates who claim to speak for the elderly, manufacturers of plastic pipe, teachers in the public schools, or some other specialized segment of the public. When members of Congress visit their districts, they consult with a small circle of confidants who have an impression of how the public might react to certain issues; representatives also gain impressions of public sentiment during visits to local Chambers of Commerce, civic clubs, churches, and other community institutions (see Fenno 1978).

When elections take place, these same organizations make efforts to communicate with their members and provide helpful cues about the records and platforms of the candidates, although political parties usually are the most active linking mechanisms between citizens and the government during elections. Even though most individuals have little information about the activities of their representatives, they can still cast votes for the candidates most likely to advance their interests by supporting those with the most appropriate partisan labels. Party workers contact millions of citizens during election campaigns, urging them either to register, contribute money to the campaign, or to go to the polls and vote. All of these institutions—voluntary associations, trade unions, interest groups, and political parties—serve to link the public with their elected representatives. They provide channels of communication through which important political messages may flow.

Political Parties versus Interest Groups as Agents of Mobilization

There is little doubt in the minds of most political scientists about whether political parties or interest groups are preferable as mechanisms for political mobilization in a democracy. The parties win, hands down. During the early years of the 1980s, a review of all scholarly articles published in political science journals found more than ten times the number of articles on political parties than on interest groups (see Walker 1972; Janda 1983; Cigler 1989). Any observer of American politics who had not been trained as a political scientist but whose reading included publications like the *Washington Post* or the *National Journal* would surely regard this as a curiously lopsided investment of intellectual resources, far out of line with the significance of each type of organization in the daily struggle over public policy in Washington. Why would the scholarly discipline of political science lavish so much attention on organizations that are widely believed to be of declining significance in the American political process? Why are comparatively little time and energy spent on the world of interest groups, corporate public affairs officers, law firms, think tanks, and even government bureaucracies—the featured players in journalistic descriptions of political life in Washington?

Political scientists devote so much of their resources to the study of

political parties mainly because of their historic commitment to the task of convincing anyone who will listen that democracy cannot be successful without the existence of vigorous, competitive political parties. Interest groups also have been an important object of concern since the discipline was founded, but, from the beginning, many scholars have been noticeably uncomfortable with the phenomena they were studying (Garson 1978). Walter Lippman complained as early as 1914 about the inability of the sprawling American political system to establish coherent goals or carry out comprehensive plans in his aptly titled *Drift and Mastery* ([1914], 1961). Many writers have warned that, if the interest-group system is allowed to overwhelm all efforts to enact comprehensive legislative programs, there is a grave danger that our highly decentralized system will be unable to adapt to new economic and social developments. By seeking to appease every concern and objection by hundreds of selfish, conservative, special interests, the American system runs the risk of contracting a chronic case of perpetual political deadlock.

Not all interest groups, however, are narrow-minded defenders of the status quo. Many new citizen groups have emerged in recent years advocating extensive reforms and pushing controversial causes, sometimes attracting hundreds of thousands of members. These broadly based associations also attract the complaints of disapproving commentators who refer to them as "single-interest groups" that threaten to "overload" the government with unreasonable demands, polarize debate, and render compromise impossible, eventually leading to a dangerous breakdown in consensus (Huntington 1973 and 1981; King 1975; Rose and Peters 1978).

Besides the tendency of the interest-group system to fragment the system and undermine any semblance of party discipline, charges often are made that interest groups are not representative. The insistent advocates for business or labor represent narrow, selfish, and, for the most part, upper-class interests. Even the new citizen groups are supported mainly by well-educated members of the upper middle class (McFarland 1984). "The flaw in the pluralist heaven," Schattschneider argued in a much cited passage, "is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent" (1960, 35).

Political parties are often portrayed as the solutions to these looming problems of fragmentation, drift, and class bias, since only they are capable of providing broad policy direction, and reliably representing the many unorganized and vulnerable elements of the society. They are the only institutions capable of aggregating demands from conflicting interests, coordinating the constitutionally divided branches of the federal government, concentrating authority, and allowing for the exercise of leadership in the American form of government. Political scientists have long argued that strong political parties were beneficial, whereas powerful interest groups posed a threat to the representative process.

The party system and the interest-group system are often regarded as being fundamentally at odds. When groups increase in power or influence, the fragmentation they create causes parties to decline in influence. When parties are able to gain control of the agenda of debate, the influence of interest groups surely will recede (see Schattschneider 1942, 1948, 1960; see also Dahl 1982, 190–91). There is such a strong consensus among political scientists about the importance of strong political parties in the American system of government that warnings are frequently issued from leading scholars about the demise of parties, and measures are proposed that would lead to their renewal (see Committee on Political Parties 1950; Ladd 1977; Kirkpatrick 1978; Pomper 1980).

The real live American political parties, however, are not so consistently dedicated to mobilizing the public or coordinating the government as the advocates of party government might wish, nor is the interest group system, taken as a whole, as selfish and narrow as it is portrayed in these accounts. The two systems are not fundamentally antithetical. The party system is most active during elections and when the government is being organized, while the interest-group system predominates during the period between elections, when public policy is being formulated and implemented. Most interest groups are careful to avoid becoming involved in partisan politics. Only 33 percent of the groups in my surveys report that they engage in any form of electioneering. Furthermore, most politically active people who take part in party politics are affiliated with several interest groups at the same time (Baumgartner and Walker 1988 and 1990). Since the late 1970s, parties have begun to offer more consistent, ideologically distinct programs to the public, but during this period the interest-group system has been steadily expanding rather than declining, and even continued its growth in the face of the Reagan administration's consistent hostility toward all liberal organizing efforts during the 1980s (see chapter 8; see also Peterson and Walker 1986). Far from fading away, many elements of the interest-group system expanded and became more active at the same time the party system's role as a coordinating and mobilizing force, especially within the government, also began to strengthen.

The American public is much more thoroughly mobilized for political action in the 1990s than it was 35 years ago, and both political parties and interest groups have contributed to this development. Any harassed member of Congress, under pressure from powerful party leaders while being overwhelmed with thousands of pieces of mail per month and flooded with contacts and overtures from Washington lobbyists, will readily attest to this development. The somewhat contradictory dangers of polarization, political fragmentation, class bias, and legislative deadlock have plagued American democracy from the beginning. They remain serious problems in the 1990s—perhaps even more so because of the rapid mobilization of the middle class for

political action while voting turnout continues to be low, especially among members of the lower and working classes. These problems call out for solution, but they cannot be intelligently addressed until we grasp the roles being played in the political process by all types of political organizations, both political parties and interest groups.

The best way to understand the directions being taken by contemporary political parties and interest groups is to review their recent history. What form did parties take 100 years ago? How did their development affect the development of the interest-group system? And what is the likely future of both the party and the interest-group systems? Are we seeing a dangerous trend toward political fragmentation with dire consequences for our democracy, or are we in the midst of a steady, evolutionary change in the rules of the American political game that will lead to a stronger and more resilient national political community?

The Party System: A Capsule History

After assuming their modern form in the 1830s and 1840s, the parties entered a golden age soon after the Civil War as the chief organizing devices of American politics. (For reviews of the American party system, see, in particular, Chambers and Burnham 1972; Klepper 1981.) For more than three decades, until the Republican party achieved hegemony after the political realignments of 1896, the outcomes of most national elections were in doubt, precinct-level organizers were hard at work for both sides, large numbers of recent immigrants were mobilized into the political system, turnout at elections soared, and the policy agendas in Washington and many state capitals emerged almost entirely from the clash of the two major parties. (For the most approving description of this period of party hegemony, see McGerr 1986.)

These powerful nineteenth-century parties were decentralized organizations composed of largely autonomous state and local units. They were built upon ethnic, religious, and regional loyalties, but the key to their success was the vast supply of material resources at the disposal of party leaders in the form of patronage jobs, government contracts, exclusive franchises for local services and utilities, and privileged access to judges and other public officials. Party leaders were able to reward those who cooperated and punish their opponents with tangible rewards and sanctions. They used this power to maintain their organizations, control party nominations, and shape the policy agenda, but their methods were not always within the law. The boss, the machine, the gerrymander, the graveyard vote, and many other unsavory metaphors became part of common parlance in America during this golden age of party government, and politicians acquired a sinister reputation that lingers today.

As the twentieth century began, a cultural transformation was underway in almost all realms of American life. Large, centrally managed, bureaucratic hierarchies were emerging in the business world with names such as International Harvester or United States Steel, and national professional communities were being formed in fields such as education, accounting, engineering, and the law, based largely upon technical or scientific values (Hays 1957 and 1969). Pressures soon arose for the creation of government agencies in which these new professional specialties could be pursued without the corrupting interference of partisan politicians. The slogan of the advocates of reform in urban government was: "There is no Democratic or Republican method for paving a street!" Educational leaders wanted to get the public schools "out of politics," just as military planners, public health officers, policemen, forest rangers, and other managers of the new public services wanted to free themselves from kickbacks, graft, partiality, and all the other tainted aspects of partisanship (Skowronek 1982).

As these debates over the delivery of public services intensified in the first decades of the twentieth century, political parties were usually depicted as the chief enemies of good government. Party leaders were under attack for corruption, but the conflict actually ran much deeper. Reformers did not believe that such parochial, decentralized, geographically limited organizations could serve as the centerpieces of representative democracy in an industrial society. Local and state political machines often opposed the expansion of government into new services such as public health or city planning, especially if it meant the incorporation of more professionals into the public service who would refuse to submit to party discipline (McDonald and Ward 1984). In the eyes of those who wished to meet the social problems of an industrial society or exploit the nation's potential as a world power, the political parties developed in the nineteenth century were among the chief obstacles to the modernization of business, government, and the professions in America.

The clash between party leaders and reformers that began in the late nineteenth century did not end in one climactic battle. It dragged on in isolated struggles in cities and states all over the country during the next 50 years. As sources of patronage were eliminated and social services were expanded and professionalized at the state and local levels, the material resources required by party leaders to maintain their organizations began to disappear. Political machines collapsed one by one, party organizations fell into disrepair, and their capacity to mobilize potential voters or control their own nominating procedures steadily declined. Besides these serious organizational setbacks, the party system that emerged from the New Deal realignment of the 1930s also began, by the 1950s, to lose its capacity to shape the agenda of American politics. The unlikely alliance of trade union leaders, big city

bosses, Northern liberals, and Southern conservatives that made up the Democratic New Deal coalition was able to shepherd the formulation of a program of social reform during the 1950s, but the programs themselves could not be enacted into law until the Kennedy-Johnson years and the overwhelming Democratic victory in 1964 (Sundquist 1968).

During the Truman administration and throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, stubborn resistance from an alliance of Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans successfully prevented most efforts at domestic reform, creating what James MacGregor Burns called a "deadlock of democracy" that frustrated liberals and, above all, prevented resolution within the legislative arena of one of the country's most serious and potentially explosive domestic problems—racial segregation in the South (Burns 1963). Factions within the Democratic party urgently wanted to address this problem and majorities in favor of national civil rights legislation clearly existed after World War II, but the ruling party was unable to produce legislation on this subject out of fear that its supporting coalition would be blown to pieces by the conflict created by such a debate. Far from being a force for further mobilization of the unorganized and disadvantaged, the party system became a major obstacle to change. Proponents of civil rights were forced to look to the presidency, the courts, and eventually the streets as the only forums where the dilemma of racial segregation might be resolved.

At the state and local level, party organizations were also unable to adjust to the rapid shifts in population and the growth of suburbia after World War II. Representatives of the burgeoning suburban middle class were demanding expensive new government programs in education, health care, transportation, recreation, natural resource conservation, pollution control, and land use planning. Once again, sufficient public support existed to enact these new programs, but established party leaders resisted and delayed, refusing to begin the tremendous expansion of state and local government that such new programs would require. Pressures mounted to reapportion state legislatures according to population so that suburbanites and city dwellers would have a greater voice. In many states during the 1950s, large popular vote majorities failed to produce a majority of legislative seats. Party leaders who profited from these arrangements defended declining rural interests against the rising urban and suburban middle class. When the Supreme Court decided, in *Baker v. Carr* (1962), *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) and subsequent rulings, that state and local legislative bodies must be apportioned according to equal population size, it also opened the policy agenda in these jurisdictions to new issues that leaders of the majority parties had either ignored or bitterly resisted.

The immediate impact of reapportionment was rapid turnover in all representative bodies. Prior to reapportionment in the 1959 general election in

New Jersey, 20 percent of those elected to the state Senate were new members. In 1967, soon after reapportionment, 75 percent of those elected were serving for the first time. Many Southern states were engaged in protracted disputes over the issue that required many court orders and several reapportionments. No sooner was the issue settled than the 1970 census figures became available, requiring yet another round of redistricting. The Tennessee legislature, for example, was redistricted six times in the nine years from 1962 to 1973. This constant shifting of district lines fractured local political organizations, sent many politicians into early retirement, and led to the unsettling of state party systems for more than a decade (O'Rourke 1980). These decisions had their greatest impact on Southern states such as Georgia and Mississippi that had long been controlled by the dominant Democratic party, or Northern states such as New Jersey and Michigan, where carefully constructed coalitions based in heavily Republican rural areas and small towns had blocked proportional representation for predominantly Democratic urban areas. The decade-long turmoil emerging from the process of reapportionment fractured local political organizations in all these states, leaving their party systems in shambles.

The wrenching experience with legislative reapportionment was another of a long series of organizational body blows sustained by the party system in the twentieth century. With the disappearance of the kind of material inducements organizers had always used, and the decline in intensity of the ethnic and religious loyalties upon which the party system had been founded, some other bases were needed upon which party workers might be recruited. It soon became apparent that "Amateur Democrats" who wanted to achieve programmatic policy goals through political action would also expect to have a voice in party affairs and could not be counted upon for loyal support of all decisions by party leaders (Wilson 1962). In the midst of the turmoil caused by reapportionment during the 1960s, Democratic party organizations at the local level in several cities also became the target of protests over the Vietnam War. Volunteer workers concerned with advancing liberal reforms had centered much of their political activity within the party during the 1950s and early 1960s, but with the advent of an unpopular war conducted by a Democratic president, they turned against the party leadership, fracturing local organizations even further and creating a legacy of bitterness that lasted for years afterward (Ware 1985).

During the 1970s, a search for a new formula for organizational viability began in both parties. As the traditional county- and city-based party organizations continued to wither, a system of candidate-centered electoral politics arose, with campaigns staffed increasingly by professional consultants joined by volunteers whose loyalty was to the individual candidate much more than

to the party organization (Ware 1985; McGerr 1986). In response to these developments, Republicans began highly successful experiments with direct mail solicitation for funds, the use of telephone banks, polling, special publications, and other techniques of mass persuasion (Crotty and Jacobson 1980; Harmel and Janda 1982; and Gibson et al. 1983). Through a series of reforms of their nominating procedures, Democrats opened their party to an unprecedented level of participation by volunteer workers and citizens who took part in caucuses, conventions, and direct primaries (Peterson and Walker 1990).

Although appeals to religious, ethnic, regional, and especially racial loyalties still played a prominent role in American electoral politics during this era of candidate-centered campaigning, such powerful symbolic and emotional issues were most often referred to indirectly and with extreme care. Blatant appeals to religious or racial prejudice were almost always counterproductive and had to be avoided. Party leaders found that they must pay more attention to the substance of public policy in presenting their case to the public. A new model of party organization began to evolve in the 1970s, aimed at the growing middle class, built around the latest techniques of mass communication, with centralized staffs of professional fund-raisers and campaign consultants who relied more than ever before upon broadly ideological appeals.

The Interest-Group System: A Capsule History

Interest groups have been a part of American life from the country's origins, but the modern system began to take shape only in the late nineteenth century, during the golden age of party government. The rapidly developing industrial economy, besides luring the millions of immigrants to whom the parties were making their appeals, was also spawning a great many new commercial and scientific specialties that served as the foundations for a number of trade and professional societies. These new associations were meant to exercise control over unruly competition within newly developing markets, provide forums for the exchange of information and the development of professional reputations, create knowledge about the latest methods or techniques in the field, and represent the occupational interests of their members before legislative committees or government bureaus (Mosher 1968; Johnson 1972). There is evidence that the membership of these groups waxed and waned with the economy and that there were spurts of development, especially around the national mobilization during World War I, when dozens of these groups were formed each year (Berry 1977; Schmitter and Brand 1982). A new set of linkages between government and the citizenry was emerging, based squarely upon the rapidly growing occupational structure of the industrial society.

Occupational Interests: The Profit versus the Nonprofit Realms

The new, occupationally based interest-group system grew in response to several different forces. From the beginning, occupations carried on mainly in the public sector or in nonprofit institutions organized separately from those in the profit sector. Interest groups usually contained members who were mostly from one sector or the other, and conflict between the two sectors often stimulated the growth of even more interest groups (Walker 1983b).

Beginning in the 1940s, for example, a coalition of occupationally based organizations in the nonprofit sector, led by the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association, began a concerted campaign to reduce cigarette smoking because of its links to cancer and heart disease. This campaign gained wide publicity and was joined by officials in the U.S. Public Health Service, including the surgeon general. The six large firms that dominated the tobacco industry—together accounting for 98 percent of domestic cigarette sales—immediately realized that there was a grave threat of government intervention in their affairs. To combat this threat, they joined forces in a defensive coalition and jointly funded both the Tobacco Research Council, a corporation designed to conduct research under industry auspices, and the Tobacco Institute, a trade association that would coordinate their lobbying efforts in Washington. A struggle began between these two coalitions—public sector professionals, nonprofit institutions, and government agencies on one side, and large corporate and commercial interests on the other—that has continued for more than 30 years, causing many additional organizations to spring up with elaborate coalitions being built on both sides (Miles 1982; Fritschler 1983).

This four-decade-long controversy bears little relation to the cleavages around which the political parties are organized, because it unites all regional interests, Republican and Democratic, where the tobacco industry is dominant. It also invites logrolling tactics in Congress with other bipartisan, regional-industrial blocs (such as the dairy industry, the timber industry, or the oil industry) that wish to protect generous subsidies or obtain favorable government regulations.

Most studies of the formation of business interest groups or trade associations have concluded that they tend to form not so much in response to conflict with organized labor, but rather as responses to threats of unwanted government intervention, as in the case of the tobacco industry, or when factions of an industry seek government aid or protection from their competitors. Antitrust laws prevent some openly collusive joint political efforts, but trade associations tend to form within relatively homogeneous industrial domains where most of the firms perceive the threats emanating from their

political environment in much the same way. Associations are also more likely to be established within industries where a few large firms predominate, presumably due to their willingness to bear a disproportionate share of the costs of organizing because they expect to gain a disproportionate share of any benefits that result (Gable 1953; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Schmitter and Brand 1982).

The expanding scope and size of government not only stimulated the organization of business interests; even more directly they encouraged the rapid increase of new organizations in the nonprofit and public sectors. The growth, during the twentieth century, of public schools, parks and forest preserves, agricultural research stations, public hospitals, and social welfare agencies of all kinds stimulated the creation of numerous professional associations made up of the providers of these new public services. These groups often were created at the suggestion of public officials who realized the political value of organized constituents working to promote their programs from outside of government.

Government Sponsorship

The growth of representation for the elderly provides a good example of mobilization from the top down with government encouragement and leadership. In the case of the elderly, the creation of the first pensions for federal civil servants during the 1920s soon led to the creation of the National Association of Retired Federal Employees that could lobby for increases in the program. A system of neighborhood centers for the elderly begun in New York State during the 1930s led to the organization of the social workers who managed these centers. This new professional society not only encouraged the exchange of information about managerial procedures and professional techniques but also pressed for greater financial support for neighborhood centers from all levels of government. A piecemeal process of mobilization of interests representing the elderly began, with the service providers taking the lead in the effort. The process was spurred on by ambitious civil servants in the Federal Security Agency, and eventually through a series of White House conferences in 1951, 1961, 1971, and 1981. With the federal government's assistance, organizations were created to plan and conduct these national meetings. In each case they remained in existence as independent interest groups, although they were often heavily dependent upon grants and contracts from government agencies or private foundations for their continued maintenance.

It was almost three decades after the mobilization of the elderly began before groups designed to enlist the elderly citizens themselves came into being. One of these groups, the National Council of Senior Citizens, was

formed with the aid of trade unions and the 1960 presidential campaign for John F. Kennedy, while the American Association of Retired Persons, the largest and most powerful group representing the elderly in the 1990s, began in 1958 as a marketing device for a private insurance company.

By the 1970s, a large, potent array of interest groups representing both the providers and recipients of government services to the elderly had grown up in Washington; a system heavily subsidized by private foundations, churches, business firms, trade unions, and the federal government itself through the Department of Labor and the Agency on Aging. Most of these groups were founded *after* the great legislative breakthroughs of Social Security, Medicare, and the Older Americans Act of 1965. In this case, there was no steady buildup of a gathering force of lobbyists and citizens' associations that finally achieved their goals after decades of pressure upon the government. Much of the initiative for legislation in this field came from *within* the government itself. The associations representing the elderly—especially those that represent the clients of these programs rather than the professionals who deliver the services—were more the consequence of legislation than the cause of its passage (Pratt 1976).

The prominent role of government officials, activist legislators, and presidents in creating the interest groups associated with the mobilization of the elderly was not an aberration. The mobilization of the handicapped, the mentally ill, children, and many other disadvantaged or vulnerable elements of the population followed a similar pattern during the past half-century. The leading role of officials within the public sector in patronizing these movements matches the role of large national and multinational corporations in stimulating the organization of trade associations in the business and commercial sector. But governmental leadership in the mobilization of interests has not been confined to creating groups that advocate an expansion of the welfare state. Business firms have mainly been successful in organizing themselves around narrowly defined market sectors where homogeneous interests exist. Leadership from the government, however, has been necessary in almost all cases where broadly based associations have been created to represent the collective interests of all businesses in the management of the economy or the maintenance of the capitalist market system.

Secretaries of commerce have complained throughout the twentieth century about the weak and indifferent participation of business leaders in discussions at the highest governmental levels. In order to strengthen this voice, and presumably increase their own influence within their administrations, entrepreneurial commerce secretaries have assumed a prominent role in creating many business associations, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce during the Taft administration; a number of trade associations during the Coolidge and Harding administrations; the Business Council and the Commit-

tee for Economic Development during the Roosevelt administration; the Labor-Management Group under the Kennedy administration; the National Alliance of Businessmen during the Johnson administration; and the Business Roundtable during the Nixon and Ford administrations (McConnell 1966; Silk and Silk 1980; Arnold 1982; McQuaid 1982; Vogel 1989).

Governmental leadership has also been crucial in the creation of many other broadly based organizations meant to represent the collective interests of distinctive sectors of American life. For example, the American Farm Bureau Federation began as a network of official advisory committees to county agents organized by the Department of Agriculture, the National Rifle Association was launched in close consultation with the Department of the Army during the nineteenth century to encourage familiarity with firearms among citizens who might be called upon to fight in future wars, and the American Legion was begun during World War I with government support to encourage patriotism and popular support for the war effort. One of the most important results of the New Deal was the relatively peaceful organization of large industrial unions under the supervision of the newly created National Labor Relations Board, following years of bitterly violent resistance to unionization by employers.

Even modern feminist organizations, representatives of a powerful social movement with access to many committed volunteers, received millions of dollars of support in their early years from a series of White House conferences during the Kennedy administration, from federal legislation sponsored by President Kennedy assisting in the creation of Commissions on the Status of Women in every state, from large grants to the International Women's Year of the United Nations, and both statewide and national conferences on women's issues paid for with public funds during the 1970s and 1980s. Once organized, many feminist organizations received much needed funds from grants and contracts with federal agencies for research, data gathering, and the conduct of demonstration projects. The National Organization for Women (NOW) itself was created in 1966, shortly after one of the annual national conventions of State Commissioners on the Status of Women, by a group of commissioners frustrated by the limits on political action placed upon them by their official status (Freeman 1973; Carden 1974; and Gelb and Palley 1982).

Although NOW moved on to create a mass membership base, it was typical of the feminist movement in that most of the interest groups it spawned "began as leadership or cadre organizations lacking a mass base" (Gelb and Palley 1982, 25). The women's movement would undoubtedly have made an important mark upon American life without leadership and financial support from the government in its early years, but the organizations representing it almost certainly would have been more narrowly focused, smaller, and more

parochial. In addition, they would have found it much more difficult to attract the attention of the communications media or the political leadership.

The government has many means at its disposal for encouraging the growth of particular interest groups. Nonprofit associations, in particular, benefit from generous provisions in the tax laws without which the very existence of many of them would be imperiled. Gifts, even membership dues to many citizen groups, are fully tax deductible, so groups are better able to solicit contributions from a broad range of individuals. Not only for citizen groups does the tax system provide benefits, however. Professionals can usually deduct the costs of membership in professional societies, and costs of attending conferences as professional expenses. Large businesses typically pay the dues of their employees when membership in a group is for professional reasons, then the businesses deduct these expenses as costs. So the tax system has important implications for the financial health of almost all interest groups in America. Far from hurting the groups, generous provisions are typically given to promote membership and, thereby, to sustain the activities of associations of all types. In fact, the vast majority of membership organizations in the United States appear to avoid taxes altogether, representing quite a remarkable subsidy to their operations. As we will discuss in greater detail in chapter 5, over 90 percent of the groups responding to our 1985 survey reported having tax-exempt status.

Government agencies may provide large grants to various groups in order to carry out specific projects. Even if these are essentially fees for services provided, these large budget items often allow the groups to cover staff expenses, rent office space, and meet overhead expenses that help maintain the groups' financial health. In particular, if the contracts can be expected to be renewed over several years, they provide a long-term cushion against the constant worries of attracting a greater and greater membership base. Especially when groups can provide expertise on matters of public policy, they are particularly likely to garner large contracts from federal agencies. If the Justice Department wants to know something about the state of the profession in the area of law, to whom would it turn for information but the American Bar Association? If there were questions about the state of higher education, a group like the Association of American Universities would be well placed to win a federal grant to conduct a study. Now obviously such grants would not sustain an entire organization, but for many groups they can provide a relatively important and stable source of income.

Long-term financial support provides a base of financial security that many groups need. Foundation support is particularly important for many groups, in addition to government contracts. For example, the annual report of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) for 1990–91 gives the following analysis of the group's budget: membership climbed to an all-time high of

200,000; annual revenues reached a total of $16.9 million, of which 22 percent came from foundation grants, and 63 percent from membership and contributions. In the category of contributions, however, many foundations made longer-term commitments, not counted in the annual budget. "An additional $3.5 million of support has been recorded in the category of contributions designated for use in future years. This amount, which is not reported in current income, reflects the growing number of foundations that have committed themselves to long-term support of EDF programs by awarding multi-year grants" (EDF 1990, 18). Groups seek to avoid complete dependence on annual contributions from members by developing such long-term funding sources.

Anyone who has received dozens of mail solicitations for funds from a variety of interest groups can recognize another form of government assistance to the group system: postal rate subsidies. Nonprofit organizations, citizen groups, and others benefit enormously from this form of subsidy (though they are not the only ones to receive it). Without it, they would face millions of dollars in extra costs, or would have to curtail their solicitation drives, thereby further reducing their budgets.

To summarize, the American national government is an important sponsor of many interest groups. Of course, wealthy individuals, corporations, and foundations have greater freedom of choice in their decisions to underwrite the activities of groups that they support, and, for many groups, a single private sponsor may be their primary source of support. The federal government is unlikely to be the sole sponsor of a group; however, its overall impact on the group system, through tax incentives, contracts, and grants, is enormous (see Berry 1977, 44 ff and 1984, 90–91; Schlozman and Tierney 1986, 92–93; Shaiko 1991). Governments in most democracies play a similar role in encouraging the group system. For example, the French government provides thousands of civil servants to work full-time in a variety of citizens' organizations, such as educational associations, cultural groups, and labor unions (see Baumgartner 1989a; Baumgartner and Walker 1989). Government support is an important source of patronage for groups in the United States, as elsewhere.

The Rise of Citizen Movements

Most of the groups seeking to represent women in Washington have emerged from social movements and are open to all citizens, regardless of their occupations or status. Other groups of this kind, such as the Anti-Saloon League, Marcus Garvey's Negro Improvement Association, the Townsend Movement, the Committee of One Million, the Society Against Nuclear Energy, or the Students for a Democratic Society made a dramatic impact upon the political

life of their times. These groups often motivated thousands of people to put forth great effort in intense political activities, but soon they collapsed and disappeared, often with few discernible results. Not all "cause" or citizen groups experienced such rapid cycles of hyperactivity and collapse, but those that did manage to persist were often relatively small or were the exclusive preserve of a circle of dedicated activists sponsored by a few wealthy individuals or institutional patrons.

Citizen groups built around a compelling moral cause or single issue have always been greatly outnumbered in the modern interest-group system by associations founded upon occupational communities. They still are, but, in the 1990s, citizen groups constitute a larger proportion of national lobbying organizations than ever before. Evidence for such a shift in the composition of the group system is difficult to find because there has never been a comprehensive census of interest groups operating in the American political system. Still, comparing the creation dates of groups in my survey shows that over half of the citizen groups were created in the past 25 years, in a dramatic surge of growth that has changed the nature of interest-group politics in America. Profit sector organizations have not shown such a surge in growth, as will be shown in greater detail in chapter 4.

It is clear that groups such as Common Cause, the Sierra Club, NOW, the Moral Majority, and the Wilderness Society are important participants in the national debate over public policy and also appear to have achieved a degree of administrative stability that is unprecedented. With the growth of a large, well-educated middle class since World War II, and with the development of many new techniques of carefully targeted mass communication, such as computerized mailing systems, closed-circuit video conferences, and toll-free telephone lines, it has become possible to organize large, highly dispersed formations of citizens united only by their dedication to a cause or common beliefs about the appropriate direction of public policy.

When the public is surveyed concerning their memberships and contributions to voluntary associations, the vast extent of involvement becomes clear. Almost nine Americans in ten contribute to, or are members of, some kind of voluntary association. These not only are professional associations but include many associations concerned with social issues (see Baumgartner and Walker 1988 and 1990; for philanthropic organizations, also see Pifer 1987, 120–21). Millions of Americans are extremely active, making routine contributions to groups advancing such causes as consumer protection, environmental conservation, and civil rights, and there is evidence of a similar, perhaps even larger body of supporters willing to make contributions to groups advancing conservative social issues. Common Cause has managed to stay in existence for a decade relying almost solely upon direct mail solicitation. There have been ups and downs, but the group had almost 270,000

members in 1989 (McFarland 1984; Common Cause 1989). The Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), originally founded in the 1950s, was still in operation in 1984 with an expanding list of over 80,000 members (*New York Times*, 16 April 1984). The leaders of both political parties and interest groups are discovering that ideological commitment, under some circumstances, can serve as a sound basis for long-term organizational membership.

The early development of interest groups in the United States was based on occupational and professional groupings, with profit sector and nonprofit sector groups often organizing separately. Indeed, the organization for political action of one group often led to the countermobilization of others, as the interest-group system in America grew in the first half of the twentieth century. Government actions often played an important role in organizing constituents for action, as in the case of elderly Americans. The nonprofit sector saw encouragement from government and foundations, while profit sector organizations were often subsidized by large corporations. The nature of the American interest-group system has been transformed in the past 35 years, however, by a tremendous flowering of new citizen groups based on ideology more than on professional interests. The 1960s brought about dramatic changes in the nature of American politics, especially in how interests are organized for political action at the national level.

Increased Mobilization in the 1960s

The system of political parties and interest groups underwent a transformation during the past 35 years in which new groups and civic organizations formed at an unprecedented rate, bringing many formerly quiescent elements of the population into closer contact with the nation's political leaders. The seeds of this organizational activity were evident in 1955, with the Montgomery bus boycott, and burst into flower with the sit-ins, freedom rides, and protest marches of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Armed with the symbolic authority of affirmative decisions from the Supreme Court, and backed by a broad coalition of liberal religious groups, labor unions, and civic leaders from the white community, the civil rights movement called into question the moral foundations upon which political leadership had been based in the postwar years. Its demand for the immediate implementation of the American democratic creed led many other groups in the population (who also believed they were victims of discrimination) to make similar appeals.

White college students who were veterans of the early years of protest came home from the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964 and immediately attempted to convince their fellow students that they were somehow members of an oppressed class in need of liberation. Plans to give students an equal voice in curriculum development, academic tenure decisions, campus plan-

ning, and budget making were advanced—first at Berkeley in 1964 and later at other schools all over the country—and many universities were soon racked by civil disorder. Confrontations with college administrators and local police had all the rhetorical and tactical earmarks of the civil rights protests in Atlanta and Birmingham because the student leaders had often been initiated into civic life through participation in those protests. Regardless of whether they had been directly involved, they were using the heroic style of the Southern black students as their guide to political action.

The National Organization for Women has been described as the "NAACP of the women's movement," (Carden 1974) and consciously modeled itself after the civil rights organizations of the 1960s (Gelb and Palley 1982). The Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), one of the most active of the Hispanic groups in the 1980s, was incorporated by a former staff member of the NAACP (Broder, 1980). Hundreds of other groups were formed during the 1960s and 1970s representing Hispanics, women, the handicapped, homosexuals, and other disadvantaged elements of society in attempts to make the same kind of gains for their constituents that they believed blacks were achieving through the civil rights movement. These groups used class-action lawsuits, acts of civil disobedience, initiatives and referenda, as well as conventional electoral politics— the same mixture of tactics that had been pioneered by the civil rights movement. Established institutions were placed under great pressure as one group after another attacked customary procedures for hiring employees or measuring achievement. Most of the society's fundamental assumptions about human relations and the bases for authority were subjected to searching criticism.

Once this process of political mobilization of the disadvantaged sectors of the society was well underway, other kinds of social movements began to arise. At the beginning, these came mainly from the educated middle class, and they were dedicated to forwarding the rights of consumers against the power of large business firms, placing restraints on the ability of businesses and individuals to exploit the environment, or granting the government extensive powers to ensure higher standards of industrial health and safety. Many of the groups in fields such as civil rights or environmental protection had been in existence for decades and there had been a steady buildup throughout this century in broad public support for the values underlying these movements. The political atmosphere of the 1960s, however, provided the catalyst needed to create organizations dedicated to advancing these values.

The Political Consequences of Increased Mobilization

The elaborate networks of associations and advocacy groups that grew up during the decades after World War II provided hundreds of new channels

through which public preferences and opinions could be both molded and transmitted to the political leadership. The degree to which they transformed the political system was graphically illustrated by the striking differences in the reactions of the American public to the wars in Korea and Vietnam. When public opinion polls measuring support for the war in Korea in the 1950s are compared with the results of similar polls measuring support for the war in Vietnam more than a decade later, the patterns are remarkably similar. As casualties mounted and frustration grew over the limited goals of American forces in both conflicts, the numbers of citizens expressing disapproval of the war effort began to rise at about the same rate (Mueller 1973). Public approval of Presidents Truman and Johnson, as measured by the Gallup Poll, dropped rapidly as each war dragged on (Gallup 1980). Voters in both the national elections of 1952 and 1968 shifted toward those candidates who promised to end the fighting, but in the 1960s the more highly mobilized public, accustomed to unconventional forms of political expression, erupted in an angry series of public demonstrations. Members of Congress immediately began to receive questioning letters from their constituents, heard outspokenly negative testimony in congressional hearings, and were visited by delegations of concerned citizens. Political leaders found that they were no longer as well insulated as they had been only a little more than ten years before from the shifting tides of public opinion.

Most of the groups formed in the 1950s and 1960s were dedicated to liberal causes, but they were matched almost immediately by conservative countermovements that grew even stronger in the 1970s and 1980s. Planned Parenthood was soon confronted by the National Right to Life Committee; the Fellowship of Reconciliation encountered the Committee on the Present Danger; the National Council of Churches was matched by the Moral Majority. These new conservative groups, often employing organizing techniques introduced by the liberals, such as computer-assisted direct mail solicitation for funds, began campaigns of opposition to most of the central policies of the Kennedy-Johnson years. The New Christian Right, a complex of voluntary associations and nonprofit corporations centered around the Moral Majority, was similar in some ways to the civil rights movement. It grew up around an established network of fundamentalist churches, television evangelists, and bible colleges, each with its own sources of income and strong community ties. These established institutions provided the administrative and financial foundations upon which a national movement could be built (Leibman and Wuthnow 1983). While many of the particular organizations of the conservative movements of the 1980s have proved short-lived, others have taken their places, often based on similar appeals, with virtually the same mailing lists, contacts, and purposes.

Several new policy initiatives were launched by this rapidly growing

conservative network and some, such as the tax limitation movement, began to have a major impact on the course of political debate in the country. These conservative movements, like the liberal ones that preceded them, drew many elements of the population—housewives concerned over abortion, business executives concerned with government regulation, and Protestant evangelicals worried about moral questions—into active participation in political life for the first time. With the help of sympathetic business firms and foundations, an imposing network was created consisting of think tanks, public interest law firms, and political magazines dedicated to conservative causes (Blumenthal 1986). This conservative movement, rising in opposition to the liberal movement that preceded it, was an extension of the process of political mobilization begun by the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The civil rights movement had a profound impact on the American political system that has reverberated throughout the society for decades, steadily expanding the boundaries of the active political community, as Americans organized for action through a burgeoning network of voluntary associations. The nature of American democracy has changed, as massive numbers of citizens have begun to be represented through a variety of professional and issue-based groups.

The Transformation of American Political Parties

Political parties have not been collapsing under the impact of the great upsurge of political mobilization during the past several decades; rather, they have been transforming themselves. Realizing that it is unlikely that parties will ever receive large public subsidies, or that restrictive legislation will be passed that would restore the virtual monopoly on representation enjoyed by political parties in the late nineteenth century, both the Republicans and Democrats launched efforts during the past decade to rebuild their organizations by employing many of the same techniques used by many successful interest groups.

Rather than trying to recreate the precinct organizations of a century ago, parties have tried to recruit millions of people willing to make small contributions. This money is used to develop large, sophisticated staffs that seek to coordinate national election campaigns, provide consultation for local and state parties, and provide advice for Political Action Committees (PACs) and other sympathetic contributors who want to back promising new candidates. This new approach to organizational viability must be founded on ideological appeals, or at least upon more consistent approaches to public policy than American parties have used in the past. The continued loyalty of small contributors, who are receiving mainly moral or ideological reinforcement in exchange for their support, can be assured in no other way. Parties, by

adopting this approach, are beginning to compete with the ideologically based citizen interest groups for the loyalty of the affluent new middle class, the active core of the citizenry.

No matter how successful the parties are in adapting to the demands of campaigning in the age of mass communications and programmatic politics, however, it is hard to imagine a set of issues or ideological appeals that could divide the highly mobilized, contemporary electorate neatly into only two political camps. The social issues of abortion and public support for religious institutions cut across the constituency that supports national health insurance, and environmental issues divide this group in yet another way. None of these issues is likely to go away and all are promoted by well-financed policy communities made up of dozens of interest groups and other political organizations. These overlapping and conflicting policy communities create a constantly shifting, somewhat bewildering political agenda in Washington, but they also make the American system more adaptive and responsive by allowing citizens loyal to different political parties an opportunity to voice passionately felt concerns while remaining generally loyal to one political party. They supplement, rather than weaken, the political parties by insuring that debate about issues not consistent with society's basic partisan divisions takes place in democratic legislative forums, rather than in the streets.

Furthermore, if party politics does center more around fundamental public policy questions, and if national elections increasingly appear to pose significant choices between different ideological paths, there is good reason to expect an *increase*, not a reduction, in interest-group activity. Political parties might be reinvigorated in their new role as coordinators of large coalitions of interest groups, PACs, political consultants, and other political organizations, but if institutional patrons are freely left to sponsor political action, and the futures of many government programs enacted during the recent expansion of the welfare state are put in jeopardy at each election, those that support these programs can be expected to respond with vigorous efforts to organize new interest groups that will defend the gains they have made.

Summary and Conclusion

The increase in the level of political mobilization in the American system during the past 35 years resulted from fundamental social changes, such as the growth of a large, new, educated middle class from the emergence of many new institutions prepared to subsidize political organizations, and from the steady expansion of the power and responsibility of the federal government. Increases in the number of specialized membership and nonmembership organizations involved in policy formulation and advocacy have led to a dramatic increase in the range of interests being represented and the number of issues

being debated in Washington. In the past, most citizen groups that emerged from social movements simply faded away once the intense enthusiasm of their followers began to cool, or when a string of policy defeats caused marginal supporters to lose interest. In the 1990s, however, many of the citizen groups born during the past 35 years are still in business, with help from their patrons, even though public interest in their causes has declined. These groups promote concern for their favorite issues and stand ready to exercise leadership whenever there is a new burst of public enthusiasm for their causes. As a result of the expansion of the interest-group system and the change in its composition, the processes of passing legislation and evaluating public policies have become much more complicated, and policy formulation has become much more conflictual than ever before (chap. 7; Nordlinger 1981; Gais, Peterson, and Walker 1984).

This is a period of historic transformation in the relationships between interest groups and political parties in America. Many elements of the public that were largely inactive or completely quiescent 35 years ago, from blacks and ethnic minorities to Protestant evangelicals and the CEOs of large manufacturing corporations, have recently plunged into public affairs in greater numbers, causing a persistent crisis of participation that has lasted for a generation. The growth in the politically active core of the citizenry has stimulated the expansion in the size and power of the public sector, and this expansion has, in turn, stimulated more people to become involved in public affairs. In order to cope with the growing pressures for participation, many organizational and procedural innovations have been introduced into the political system, making the past three decades one of the most creative periods in the country's history. Public interest law firms, political action committees, campaign consultants, and think tanks have become familiar parts of the American political scene during this period, causing important changes in the opportunities and incentives available to both citizens and their elected representatives.

Access to government has been provided for many social groups that in the past had been either ignored or, as with blacks, brutally excluded from political life by force. There is little prospect that the interest groups in the nonprofit sector based upon the country's increasingly elaborate occupational structure will disappear—especially those that have emerged as a direct result of the expansion of the welfare state. The many newly founded citizen groups also have shown remarkable resiliency. Political parties have begun to accommodate this new, highly engaged, conflictual political environment and have begun to reorganize to adjust to the newly intrusive role of the mass media that it involves. America continues its risky experiment with democracy in the modern world. We have moved to a higher plateau of political engagement during the past three decades, from which there is no turning back.

CHAPTER 3

Explaining the Mobilization of Interests

There is an interesting contradiction between the political science literature and the social reality of interest groups during the past three decades. Political scientists in the 1950s viewed the founding and maintenance of groups as the natural result of the mobilization of individuals sharing common interests, and yet this was a period of relative quiet among mass-based groups. Later, the 1960s saw tremendous growth in the number and size of groups, especially in the wake of the civil rights, environmental, and antiwar movements (all seeking collective or ideological goods), precisely as scholars focused on the difficulties of mobilizing citizens for action. This chapter reviews some of the major contributions to interest-group theories during the past 30 years and notes how explanations focusing solely on the individual psychological decision to join or to contribute to a group cannot account for the flowering of groups in America. Individual motivations are fundamental to our understanding of group activities, as many scholars have argued, but institutional factors must also be considered. A renewed focus on these institutional factors helps explain how so many groups could be formed even though they must overcome tremendous obstacles that are based on individual motives for behavior.

Pluralism, Mobilization, and the Collective Action Dilemma

Given the explosive growth in the number and variety of interest groups in America during the past three decades, it is ironic that scholarly analysts during this same period spent much of their time explaining why it is nearly impossible to create voluntary associations representing broad collective interests. During one set of meetings held at Washington's Mayflower Hotel, scholars assessed the difficulties of mobilizing citizens for collective action. Scholars discoursed about the nature of collective goods and how it was virtually impossible for certain kinds of groups to mobilize effectively. As the participants left the elegant and socially isolated enclosure of the hotel, they walked right into massive demonstrations by tens of thousands of Americans who had not heard about the collective action dilemma, but who had apparently overcome its restrictions. Thousands of Americans were descending on