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Author(s): Daniel J. Tichenor and Richard A. Harris

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# Organized Interests and American Political Development

DANIEL J. TICHENOR  
RICHARD A. HARRIS

*Within very recent years these [interest] groups have increased and multiplied. More important still, they have become highly organized and are today conducted by shrewd and capable leaders. . . .*

—E. Pendleton Herring, 1928<sup>1</sup>

*Ours is an era of vigorous activity by organized interests in national politics. In the past two decades we have witnessed what seems to be a virtual explosion in demands by private interest organizations in Washington. . . .*

—Kay Schlozman and John Tierney, 1986<sup>2</sup>

The striking resonance of these quotations from leading interest group scholars generations apart suggests that something remarkably similar may have been happening at both ends of the twentieth century. Contemporary political science offers no shortage of careful research on the behavior of organized interest groups and their place in democratic theory. Yet this impressive body of scholarship routinely concentrates on the past half century of interest group politics. This article highlights the need to expand the time horizons of

<sup>1</sup> E. Pendleton Herring, *Group Representations Before Congress* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929), 2–3.

<sup>2</sup> Kay Lehman Schlozman and John Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 1–2.

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DANIEL J. TICHENOR is assistant professor of political science at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. He is author of *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America*, various articles on the American presidency, social movements, and public policy, and a forthcoming book, *A Question of Representational Bias: Organized Interests and the American State*.

RICHARD A. HARRIS is professor of political science and director of the Walter Rand Institute of Public Affairs at Rutgers University, Camden. His books include *Coal Firms Under New Regulation*, *Remaking American Politics*, and *The Politics of Regulatory Change: A Tale of Two Agencies*, and a forthcoming work, *A Question of Representational Bias: Organized Interests and the American State*.

interest group studies by exploring organized interests during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a watershed period in American political development that receives scant attention in the political science literature on interest groups. Moreover, a perfunctory treatment of the formation, maintenance, and attrition of organized interests before the New Deal (if not the 1960s) imposes a major limitation on theory building in this field. By presenting new research findings on the level and character of interest group activity in the Progressive Era, we hope to illustrate the value of bringing *both* history and theory to bear on the study of interest group politics in America.

It is often assumed that the formation and mobilization of organized interests in U.S. national politics were natural outgrowths of the modern welfare and regulatory state that emerged with the New Deal and expanded in the post-civil rights era. In truth, precious little is known about the relationship between interest groups and federal government activism over time, particularly in the Progressive Era when modern liberalism first began to take shape. More generally, systematic analysis of long-term trends in interest group growth and mortality rates remains a blind spot for most political scientists working in this area. One of the prevailing assumptions of the contemporary interest group literature is that reliable data on organized interests active in Washington politics first appears in the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> Many political scientists who study organized interests acknowledge that the origins of modern interest group politics might be traced to earlier historical periods for which we lack comprehensive data, if for no other reason than the fact that leading scholars of earlier generations insisted that interest group activity in Washington was undergoing profound change in *their* times.<sup>4</sup> Most research in this area, however, has been limited to the past half century, with scant attention paid to a significant body of qualitative historical research on earlier periods. Theoretical assumptions concerning the foundations of modern interest group politics abound, but most neglect the crucial task of gathering systematic evidence on the origins and development of modern interest group politics in America.

Building on the historical-institutional work of political scientists studying the Progressive Era, we present fresh research that illuminates significant changes in the nature and impact of group involvement in national politics dur-

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*; Jack Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); Allan Cigler and Burdett Loomis, eds., *Interest Group Politics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1991); Jeffrey Berry, *The New Liberalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999); and Frank Baumgartner and Beth Leech, *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Consider two classics: Herring, *Group Representation Before Congress*; and David Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

ing the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup> In this vein, we corroborate the findings of historians who have asserted that the Progressive Era constituted both an “organizational synthesis” and a pivotal time when new interest groups flourished in U.S. politics.<sup>6</sup> Our empirical research underscores the need to reevaluate prevailing accounts and theories of the development of American interest group politics. We argue that key methodological and theoretical flaws in previous studies either minimize or ignore significant transformations of interest group politics before the post-World War II era. To understand patterns and secular shifts in interest group politics over time requires theory and data that are not overdetermined by the present. In order to generate empirical insights and theoretical arguments that are not confined to specific historical contexts, we propose a conceptual framework for studying interest group systems across American political history.

### CORNERSTONES OF AMERICAN POLITICS

Beginning with *The Federalist*, No. 10 and James Madison’s celebrated explication of factions, students of American government have understood that interest groups are the stuff of which politics is made.<sup>7</sup> And for most political scientists of the postwar era, new government programs, wartime industrial coordination, and contemporary social movements are the stuff of which modern interest groups are made.<sup>8</sup> One of the theoretical mainstays of interest group literature is the contention that the large-scale organization of interests in na-

<sup>5</sup> See Elisabeth Clemens, *The People’s Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in America, 1890–1925* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877–1917* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Stephen Skowronek, *Building A New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1879–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davison, 1983); Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); and Louis Galambos, “The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History,” *Business History Review* 44 (1970): 279–290.

<sup>7</sup> James Madison, “Federalist, No. 10” in *The Federalist*, Clinton Rossiter, ed. (New York: The New American Library, 1961). See also Arthur F. Bentley, *The Process of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908); Herring, *Group Representation before Congress*; Earl Latham, *The Group Basis of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952).

<sup>8</sup> See Arthur Maas, *Muddy Waters: The Army Engineers and the Nations Rivers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951); Marver Bernstein, *Regulation by Independent Commission* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955); Lawrence Dodd and Ronald Schott, *Congress and the Administrative State* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979); Jack Walker, “The Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups in America,” *American Political Science Review* 77 (June 1983): 390–406; Jeffrey Berry, *Lobbying for the People: The Political Behavior of Public Interest Groups* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Terry M. Moe, *The Organized Interests* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980); Shlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*; Robert Salisbury, “Interest Representation: The Dominance of Institutions,” *American Political Science Review* 78 (March 1984): 64–76.

tional politics stemmed from the big government programs of the modern welfare and regulatory state dating back to the New Deal. From this perspective, interest groups are organized in response to the growth of government and to specific government programs and agencies that most affect the welfare of their members. Groups may form to guard an existing program that benefits their members, to promote new forms of government aid and protection, or to fend off threats of unwanted government intervention. Jack Walker memorably traces the growth of representation for the elderly and the tobacco industry as far back as the New Deal era to illustrate the importance of governmental growth to group formation. As he concludes, “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.”<sup>9</sup> From the 1950s onward, an extensive literature documented the extent to which certain areas of policy were dominated by “subgovernments” or “iron triangles” that allowed various organized interests to become influential clients in the regulatory process.<sup>10</sup> Theodore Lowi has lampooned this system as “socialism for the organized and capitalism for the unorganized,” asserting that the modern liberal formula of creating federal programs controlled by federal agencies to address policy problems is the well-spring of our unaccountable, unresponsive, and interest group-dominated policy process.<sup>11</sup>

Pendleton Herring and David Truman emphasized the significant impact of war mobilization on the organization of interests in Washington political life. Reflecting on World War I, Herring observed that there were compelling reasons for the national government to coordinate industrial production by means of new group associations that linked “separate industries and individual business concerns scattered all over the country.”<sup>12</sup> Once the crisis of war dissipated, group members discerned important benefits of maintaining their associations in times of peace. “This trend toward organization along lines of common interest, whether vocational, industrial, moral, or social, was too fundamental to be affected by the end of the war,” Herring notes.<sup>13</sup> In 1929, Herring estimated that there were roughly 500 national organizations “whose purpose is to keep in contact with the government and present their views to Congress.”<sup>14</sup> In his classic, *The Governmental Process*, Truman drew similar conclusions about the

<sup>9</sup> Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America*, 28–33.

<sup>10</sup> For a superb overview and critique of this literature, see Hugh Heclo, “Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment” in Anthony King, ed., *The New American Political System* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1978), 87–124.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969).

<sup>12</sup> Herring, *Group Representation Before Congress*, 51.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Marc Petraccia, “The Rediscovery of Interest Group Politics” in Marc Petraccia, ed., *The Politics of Interests: Interest Groups Transformed* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 13.

influence of major twentieth-century wars on the organization of farm groups, labor unions, and trade associations. Like Herring, Truman found that the responsibility of the federal government for unprecedented economic planning during warfare led to its active promotion of new organized interests who could simplify its tasks. But the process could be contagious: “Once the habit of associated activity was established under the stimulus of government encouragement, most such groups tended to persist and to invite imitation.”<sup>15</sup> It can be argued as well that the cold war, which extended over more than a quarter-century, had a similar positive effect on the development of organized interests.

A third theoretical explanation posits that dramatic expansions in both the number and intensity of citizens groups and other organized interests in recent decades reflect the influential movement politics and increased prosperity of the 1960s. Jeffrey Berry, for example, suggests that “the central underlying catalyst” in the mushrooming of citizens groups in national political life can be traced to the social unrest and political efficacy of the civil rights and antiwar movements.<sup>16</sup> “The message of the civil rights and antiwar movements was clear to other would be reformers,” he notes. “Citizens’ interest groups, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of the civil rights movement, or the Student Mobilization Committee of the antiwar movement, could have an effect.”<sup>17</sup> Walker found that in the wake of the civil rights movement, many new groups were begun through government sponsorship and the support of private foundations eager to redirect the energies of political insurgencies into established channels. Moreover, the liberal causes that flowered during the 1960s and 1970s were eventually matched by conservative countermovements in the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>18</sup>

Each of these accounts of interest group formation suggests that increased political mobilization is closely linked to a steady expansion of the power and responsibilities of the federal government. Significantly, all three accounts obscure the vibrant, protean interest group politics that flourished during the Progressive Era (historical demarcations of the period vary slightly, but it is most commonly associated with the decades of the 1890s, 1900s, and 1910s). Whereas political science has contributed to a rich understanding of U.S. party systems over time, it has been surprisingly inattentive to the origins and development of modern American interest group politics. This research gap reflects an unfortunate disconnection from impressive historical research on the unprecedented mobilization of new organized interests during the Progressive Era. Important new qualitative studies of Progressive Era interest group politics by Elisabeth Clemens and Elizabeth Sanders, among others, have had little or no impact

<sup>15</sup> Truman, *The Governmental Process*, 55, 71–77.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Berry, *The New Liberalism, Encyclopedia of Associations* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1989), 25–26.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey Berry, *The Interest Group Society*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Scott Foresman, 1989), 29.

<sup>18</sup> Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America*, 33–38, 48–55.

on the standard political science literature.<sup>19</sup> In fairness, however, the historical limitations of most political science research on interest groups are largely the result of limited systematic evidence from early periods.

Practical research constraints, not the least of which is the availability of data sources, have encouraged political scientists to concentrate their analysis of interest groups on the second half of the twentieth century. Major treatises on modern interest groups rely on survey instruments, field interviews, and contemporary reference works such as the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, the Congressional Quarterly's *Washington Information Directory*, or *Washington Representatives*.<sup>20</sup> While these sources have yielded impressive results in terms of counting, categorizing, and expanding our understanding of interest groups, they do not permit us to track back any further than the mid-1950s. Some interest group specialists acknowledged the possibility that earlier periods might hold rich information, but little effort was made to move beyond speculation on this score. That being the case, the literature necessarily took on an ahistorical cast or, more precisely, implied that the immediate post-war period was the dawn of modern interest group politics. This politics definitely broadened in the 1970s to incorporate a strong public interest movement and deepened in the 1980s to institutionalize patterns of behavior discernable mostly to those within the Washington Beltway who understood administrative and judicial affairs. But interest group politics before the 1950s remained obscure, largely because analysts concluded that only post-war data sources could be trusted. As Walker asserts, "Without reliable estimates of both the birth and death rates of different types of groups it is not possible to reconstruct history conclusively from a cross-section survey."<sup>21</sup> Recent work by Gerald Gamm and Robert Putnam on voluntary associations and by Theda Skocpol and her colleagues on large membership organizations show the empirical and theoretical rewards of generating new data on group mobilization in earlier periods. But presumably because these recent works do not examine the broad array of organized interests engaged in national politics over time, they cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of how interest group politics has evolved.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Clemens, *The People's Lobby*; and Sanders, *Roots of Reform*.

<sup>20</sup> Walker, "Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups"; Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*; Jeffrey Berry, *The New Liberalism; Washington Information Directory* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2001); and *Washington Representatives* (Washington, DC: Columbia Books, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Walker, "Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups," 397.

<sup>22</sup> See Gerald Gamm and Robert Putnam, "The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America, 1840-1940," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29 (Spring 1999): 511-557; Theda Skocpol, Marshall Ganz, Ziad Munson, Bayliss Camp, Michele Swers, and Jennifer Oser, "How America Became Civic" in Morris Fiorina and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 27-80; and Theda Skocpol, Marshall Ganz, and Ziad Munson, "A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Voluntarism in the United States," *American Political Science Review* 94 (September 2000): 527-541.

While the interest group literature effectively portrays the post-war evolution of interest group politics and offers useful explanations of group formation in that period, we argue that it is historically incomplete. Careful examination of the Progressive Era reveals a highly developed system of interest group politics with its own characteristics and dynamics. This argument is theoretically significant because it points to evidence that organized interests burst onto the national stage before the Progressive agenda had been translated into legislation and programs. Did the rise of big government drive interest group formation in America, as much of the existing literature presumes? If the Progressive Era was the first period of widespread national interest organization, this mobilization predates the realization of the modern welfare and regulatory state during the New Deal and succeeding decades, thereby challenging prevailing causal accounts. Our research findings raise fresh questions about whether increased group formation and political mobilization actually precede, accompany, or follow extensive national policy making and state-building. These questions challenge us to think in broader theoretical terms about the connections and causal dynamics between interest groups and state-building.

More generally, as our data show, the existence of a robust set of organized interests engaged in Progressive Era political life highlights the need for careful, historically-based explanations of the relationship between interest groups and American political development. Expanding the time frame of interest group research can elucidate historical patterns and long-term shifts not discernible by relying exclusively on data since the 1950s. Little systematic information is available about the origins, maintenance, and attrition of organized interests engaged in national politics during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Likewise, our knowledge of how interest groups respond to changing institutional arrangements and policy programs of the national state and party system seem routinely overdetermined by contemporary data. Taking stock of interest group systems that have emerged in American politics over time offers a more promising basis for theory-building that is not constrained by contemporary empirical foundations and thus limited to a particular historical context. Our conception of interest group systems calls for an analysis of distinctive patterns in the number, variety, centralization, structural opportunities, and professionalism of organized interests in particular historical periods as well as of the “critical junctures” that usher in decisively new patterns of interest group politics. In this vein, we devote considerable attention to the rise of a new interest group system in the Progressive Era.

### A NATIONAL INTEREST GROUP SYSTEM EMERGES

Clearly, an assessment of interest group activity over time requires the integration of multiple data sources and must be informed by both quantitative and qualitative analysis.<sup>23</sup> Our strategy, therefore, is to use a variety of sources and

<sup>23</sup> Berry makes this argument persuasively in *The New Liberalism*.



methods to triangulate our analysis on the research objective of identifying and explicating interest group systems.<sup>24</sup> In the absence of a single reliable data source, we have sought to pull together a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative materials to provide a broader historical view of organized interests in American politics since the late nineteenth century. Quantitative research on interest groups in national political life before the past half-century is hard to find. Jack Walker's pioneering work on interest group origins is one of the notable exceptions.<sup>25</sup> Determined to gather comprehensive data on group formation and maintenance in the United States, Walker settled on the Congressional Quarterly's *Washington Information Directory* (1980) as the best source from which to draw a reliable sample of organized interests engaged in national politics from the nineteenth century to the present. As he explained, "After checking the several sources against each other and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, the *Directory* was chosen as the source of group names most likely to provide a balanced picture of associations concerned with national affairs."<sup>26</sup> Eventually, he identified 913 groups that fit his purposes, 564 of which responded to the survey he administered. On the basis of survey reports of when these 564 groups were founded, Walker offered evidence that relatively few groups were formed before midcentury and that the origins of modern interest group politics lie in the postwar decades.

However, at least two elements of Walker's salutary research should give us pause. First, his survey relies on existing groups from a contemporaneous reference source to gain a sense of the overall number and variety of groups that have emerged in American national politics over time. As Walker himself acknowledges, such a source obviously does not list groups that were once active in national policy making but no longer exist. His survey responses concerning founding dates of organized interests tell us nothing about those groups that have disappeared from the political landscape. Second, he excludes several significant kinds of organizations from his analysis such as trade associations and unions. A comprehensive account of the role of organized interests should include these actors and an assessment of how they interact with the interest groups Walker and others focus on.<sup>27</sup> Toward that end, we employ a fivefold typology of interest groups: citizens groups, unions, trade associations, professional associations, and "other" groups. We also draw a coarser distinction between private corporations and interest groups.

To illustrate the limitations of looking at existing groups for information about long-term formation trends, we compiled a list of all interest groups printed in the latest edition of the *Washington Information Directory*. Rather than relying on a survey instrument to establish the founding dates for our sam-

<sup>24</sup> The concept of triangulation is discussed by William Dunn, *Public Policy Analysis*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Princeton: Prentice-Hall, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>27</sup> See Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*.

ple population of organizations, we used the *Encyclopedia of Organizations* to obtain that information. The *Encyclopedia* yielded founding dates for 71.2 percent of the groups on our list (higher than the 64.8 percent response rate elicited in Walker's survey). Our results suggest that no more than a few hundred interest groups emerged in national politics before the 1920s, an outcome consistent with both standard accounts and Walker's findings.

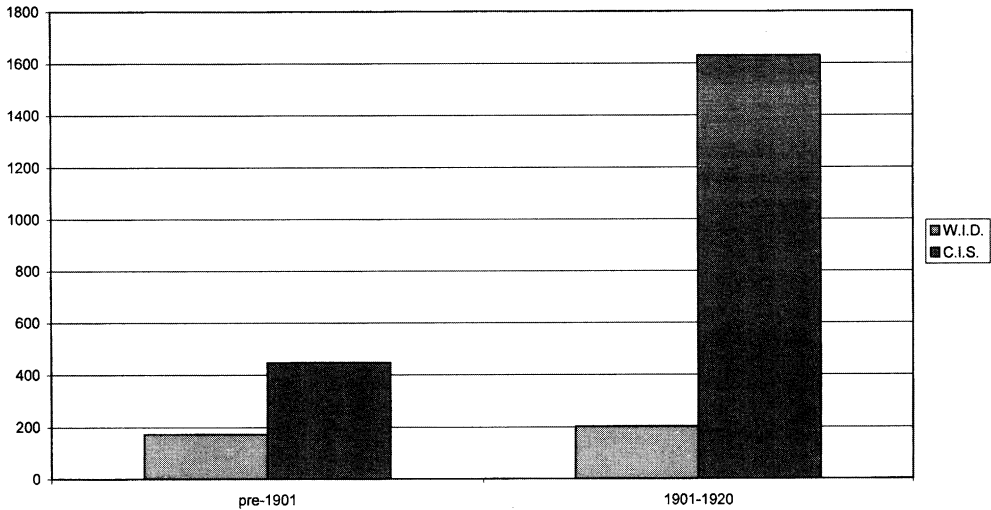
At the same time, however, we developed completely new data from the Congressional Information Service's *U.S. Congressional Committee Hearings Index*.<sup>28</sup> The *Index* catalogs congressional testimony from 1833 to the present by topic and organization testifying. It offers one of the best available data sources on the number, variety, and activity of groups engaged in national affairs before the 1950s. Moreover, it allows us to track the emergence of nascent issue networks by identifying sets of organized interests that testified regularly in particular issue areas. Thus, we can track the frequency of participation to assess which groups or kinds of groups were most closely allied to the emerging Washington establishment. It is possible, for example, to develop a ratio of the number of groups in a particular category to the number of appearances by that group. As Jeffrey Berry points out, this statistic can show one facet of the relative importance and influence of an organization.<sup>29</sup> Another virtue of the *Index* is that it allows us to examine the same measures across time. Finally, careful analysis of when interest groups first appear at congressional hearings can serve as a proxy measure for the emergence of new groups. For hearings conducted between 1833 and 1917, we were able to track 10,656 appearances of 5,372 organized interests.

Of course, this new data set has some limitations of its own. While the *Index* lists all organizations and associations testifying at congressional hearings, it does not separate them into the categories of our typology (private corporations, trade associations, unions, professional associations, citizens groups, and "other" groups). Consequently, we had to make judgments about where to place organizations in developing our list. Another limitation of the *CIS Index* is that the list of groups derived from it is not exhaustive, since testimony before Congress depends on being invited to testify and not all groups received invitations. There is little question that interest mobilization in this period coincided with momentous changes in Congress, such as the increased number of standing committees and the growing professionalism of lawmakers. Our case study research underscores these connections between changing interest group political activities of the Progressive Era and transformations in key national policy-making structures. Indeed, our complimentary analysis of executive department papers and interest group archives suggests that organized interests were highly attentive to a variety of institutional openings and barriers that emerged in the Progressive Era. In any case, the omission from our *CIS Index* data on

<sup>28</sup> *C.I.S.U.S. Congressional Committee Hearings Index, Part I: 1833–1917*.

<sup>29</sup> Berry, *The New Liberalism*, chaps. 2 and 3.

FIGURE 1  
*The Emergence of Interest Groups in National Politics*



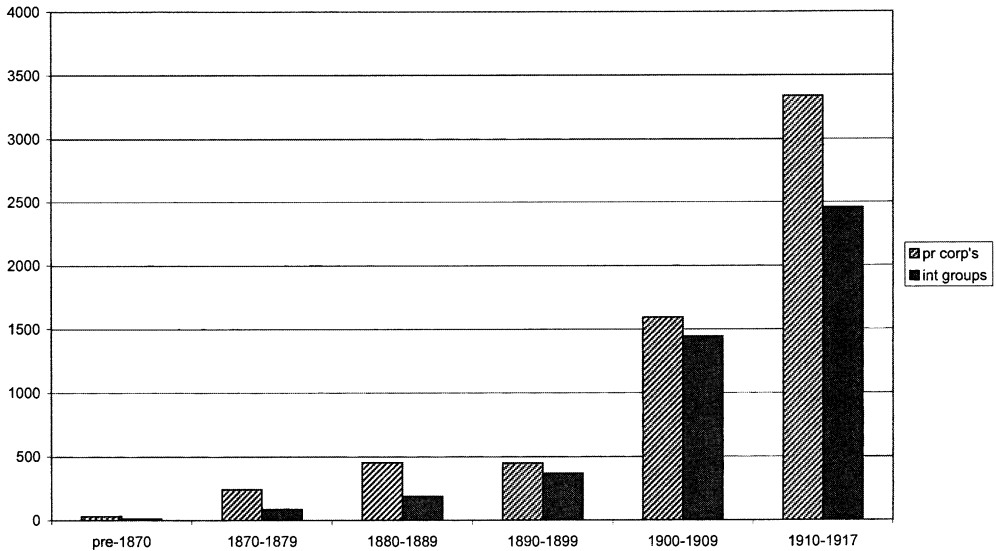
Sources: Data from *Washington Information Directory* (Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000) and *CIS Index for Congressional Hearings, 23<sup>rd</sup>–64<sup>th</sup> Congresses* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985).

groups not invited to testify before Congress is a limitation that, if anything, should be expected to *underestimate* the number of groups engaged in national politics. That is, the bias of the data should favor standard accounts by undercounting the number of interest groups in national politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Even with the conservative bias of this measure in terms of how many new interest groups participated in national politics before 1920, our data generated from the *CIS Index* suggest that the number and variety is far greater than previous studies have recognized. Figure 1 captures just how dramatically the *Directory*—and concomitantly, Walker’s survey of existing groups—understates the emergence of new groups in national politics of the early twentieth century when compared to our *CIS Index* data. Our findings from the *CIS Index* suggest a dramatic expansion in the number of groups that first appeared at congressional hearings in the Progressive Era. Consider, for example, that between 1890 and 1899, 216 interest groups appeared for the first time at a congressional hearing. Nearly three times as many groups (622) testified for the first time in the first decade of the twentieth century. During the following eight years, more than a thousand new interest groups did so.

Equally compelling are the rates at which particular kinds of interest groups first appeared before Congress during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nearly every interest group category—professional groups, trade associations/economic interests, unions, citizens groups, and other varieties of groups—increased from one decade to the next. Yet the rates of expansion by category

FIGURE 2  
*Appearances of Private Corporations and Interest Groups at Congressional Hearings, 1833–1917 (23rd to 64th Congresses)*

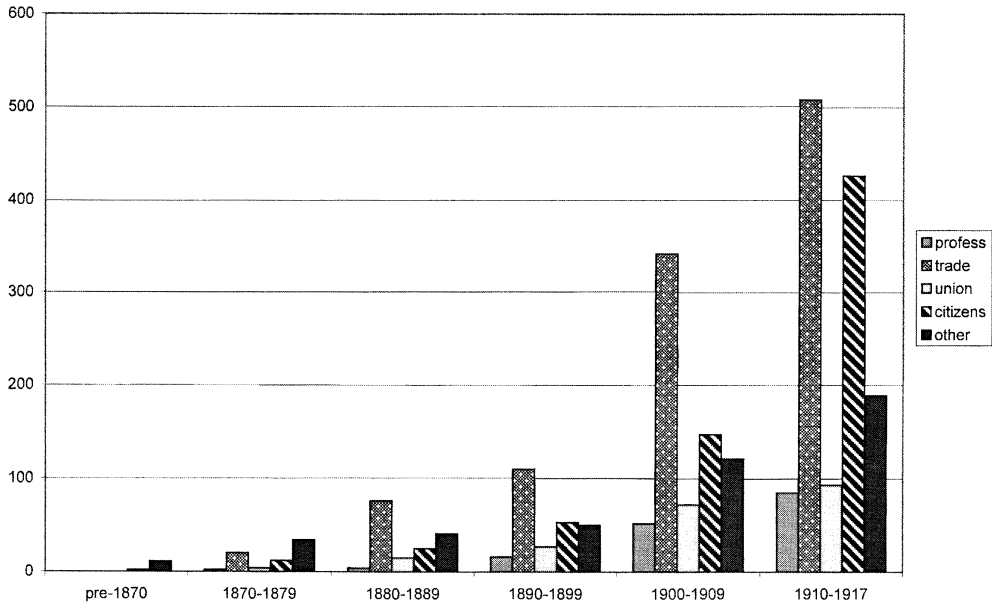


Source: *CIS Index for Congressional Hearings, 23<sup>rd</sup>–64<sup>th</sup> Congresses* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985)

were clearly not equal. The number of trade associations and related economic interests that first appeared in each decade were larger in total number than any other interest group category before 1920. But just as striking is the unmatched rate of growth of citizens groups that appeared at hearings for the first time during the early twentieth century; 128 citizens groups first appeared between 1900 and 1909, less than half of the 288 new trade unions of the same period. Between 1910 and 1917, however, the number of new citizens groups testifying at hearings more than doubled to 361, nearly identical to the 368 trade unions and related economic interests that first appeared in the same eight years.

When we cast our nets more widely to examine the total number of appearances of both interest groups and private corporations at congressional hearings between 1833 and 1917, one of our most significant findings is the sharp increase in the amount of testimony by organized interests in Washington after the turn of the century. As Figure 2 indicates, appearances of interest groups and private corporations more than tripled between 1900 and 1909 from roughly 800 to 3,000. They also increased at a sharp rate in the eight years between 1910 and 1917 from 3,000 to nearly 6,000. This explosion in the representation of organized interests before congressional committees, and by implication within the Washington policy-making community more generally, is unmistakable. One also may note that private corporations appeared at hearings more often than interest groups in these years. However, private corporations tended to

FIGURE 3  
*Total Number of Interest Groups Appearing Before Congress by Type, 1833–1917*



Source: Created by authors from data in *CIS Index for Congressional Hearings, 23<sup>rd</sup>–64<sup>th</sup> Congress* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985).

testify before Congress only once or twice during the entire period examined. Moreover, most private corporations were local and their appearances were inspired by the narrowest of concerns. That is, most of the private corporations in our data set were focused on how a specific national policy might affect a decidedly local and material interest, such as a local metal screw company testifying on tariffs for metal imports or a small Colorado mining company focused on the acquisition of nearby public lands. By contrast, a large proportion of the interest groups we analyzed appeared at several hearings and were concerned with a broader set of policy issues. This may reflect the fact that roughly half of the interest groups that testified before Congress between 1833 and 1917 were national organizations, whereas only 10 percent of the private corporations could be described as national.

Our findings with regard to an additional measure, the total number of interest groups appearing before Congress in each period, strengthen our conclusion that the early twentieth century polity was a vibrant time for interest group activism at the national level, especially when compared with the nineteenth century (see Figure 3). Whereas 256 interest groups appeared before Congress from 1890 to 1899, that figure rose to 734 between 1900 and 1909, and then nearly doubled to 1,301 over the next eight years. Moreover, when one compares the numbers of first group appearances with the total number of interest

TABLE 1

*Interest Group Appearances at Congressional Hearings, By Category (1889–1917)*

Category	1889–1899 (51 <sup>st</sup> –55 <sup>th</sup> Congresses)		1899–1909 (56 <sup>th</sup> –60 <sup>th</sup> Congresses)		1909–1917 (61 <sup>st</sup> –64 <sup>th</sup> Congresses)	
	Group #	Appearances	Group #	Appearances	Group #	Appearances
Trade Associations	110 (43%)	165 (45%)	342 (47%)	667 (46%)	508 (39%)	715 (29%)
Citizens Groups	53 (21%)	66 (18%)	147 (20%)	262 (18%)	426 (32%)	819 (33%)
Unions	27 (11%)	56 (15%)	72 (9%)	240 (17%)	93 (7%)	479 (17%)
Total	256	367	734	1,442	1,301	2,459

Source: Based on data developed from the *CIS Index for Congressional Hearings, 23<sup>rd</sup> to 64<sup>th</sup> Congresses* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1985).

groups that testified at legislative hearings, it is striking just how many new interest groups comprised the total of those that testified each decade (1,008 of 1,301 interest groups between 1910 and 1917).

Finally, we found that a comparison of the total number of groups that testified by category with the total number of appearances by group category underscores Berry's recent finding that the kinds of groups with influence in the Washington policy-making setting may not always be proportional to their number (see Table 1). For instance, during the 1900s, trade associations and related economic interests comprised 47 percent of the groups appearing at hearings and 46 percent of group appearances; citizens groups were 20 percent of all groups and 18 percent of appearances; and unions accounted for 9 percent of all groups and 17 percent of total group appearances. Unions enjoyed similar influence during the next eight years, constituting 7 percent of all groups testifying and 17 percent of all appearances. And while citizens groups made up 32 percent of all groups appearing and 33 percent of all appearances between 1910 and 1917, trade associations had fewer opportunities to testify (29 percent) than their number (39 percent of all groups appearing) may have implied. Finally, the fact that citizens groups appeared more often than any other kind of interest group between 1910 and 1917 is striking, since trade associations represented 7 percent more of the total number of groups testifying. Perhaps most remarkable is that the total number of citizens groups and unions testifying in this period was roughly the same as that of trade associations, but they combined to give 50 percent of all testimony in these years compared to trade associations' 29 percent.

### THE ISSUE NETWORK CONCERNING IMMIGRATION REFORM

Case study research provides qualitative evidence that the Progressive Era was marked by a proliferation of national interest groups directly advancing their policy goals within the Washington establishment.<sup>30</sup> In particular, our own case

<sup>30</sup> See Sanders, *The Roots of Reform*; Clemens, *The People's Lobby*; Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* (New York: Atheneum, 1972); Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*; and Skowronek, *Building a New American State*.

study investigations suggest that interest group activism in varied issue areas of this period was consistent with a policy-making environment more closely resembling “issue networks” than iron triangles or subgovernments.<sup>31</sup> The politics of national immigration reform from the 1890s to the 1920s is illustrative of these findings.

During the 1890s, a new set of interest groups led by the Immigration Restriction League (IRL) emerged at the national level to champion broad reductions in European immigration. Significantly, these groups explicitly sought to transcend traditional party politics in favor of what might be best described as Progressive notions of “direct democracy” and “scientific government.”<sup>32</sup> The IRL, for example, was a highly intellectual and professional organization, formed by prominent academics, business leaders, social workers, civic activists, jurists, and politicians that reached across party lines for support.<sup>33</sup> “Our organization is a non-partisan one,” the IRL declared early on, “and we do not support or oppose a candidate for office on party grounds.”<sup>34</sup> Instead, the group adopted what it considered a “dignified,” “factual,” and extra-party strategy, embracing social science research, mass publicity, broad coalition-building with other groups, and direct Washington advocacy to advance its policy aims. “An office in Washington,” IRL leaders concluded in 1897, “is practically indispensable for successful prosecution of the League’s work.”<sup>35</sup> Of course, the efficacy of the IRL and its allies among patriotic associations, professional groups, organized labor, and various citizens groups was contingent upon whether key officials and institutions of the national state were receptive to their novel extraparty efforts.

The standing immigration committees that were established by Congress in 1890 proved to be a crucial structural opening for the IRL and its nativist allies in this period. The creation of these committees reflected the expanding scale and complexity of congressional work at the turn of the century.<sup>36</sup> The formation of permanent House and Senate immigration committees was an important development for nativist groups like the IRL. Dominated by New England patricians like William Chandler (R-NH) and Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA) in the Senate and Samuel McCall (R-MA) in the House, these com-

<sup>31</sup> See Hecla, “Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment.”

<sup>32</sup> On direct democracy in Progressive Era political thought, see Sidney Milkis and Daniel Tichenor, “‘Direct Democracy’ and Social Justice,” *Studies in American Political Development* 8 (Fall 1994): 282–340; on Progressive reverence for “scientific government,” see James Morone, *The Democratic Wish* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 115–123.

<sup>33</sup> See the Annual Reports of the Executive Committee of the Immigration Restriction League, 1894–1899, original copies of which are found in the Prescott F. Hall Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>34</sup> Press statement issued by the IRL, Joseph Lee Papers, Immigration Restriction League Files, Massachusetts Historical Society, Box #3.

<sup>35</sup> Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the IRL, 11 January 1897, Hall Collection.

<sup>36</sup> Nelson Polsby, “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives,” *American Political Science Review* 62 (September 1968): 144–168; and Morton Keller, *Affairs of State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 301–307.

mittees welcomed independent expertise, favored policy activism, and supported broad restrictions on European immigration. Most important, these committees breathed life into a national immigration policy network that institutionalized formal input from social science experts and activists and routinized the drafting and proposal of immigration reform legislation. Working closely with nationally organized groups like the IRL in 1896, the immigration committees shepherded literacy test legislation (targeting southern and eastern European newcomers) through both houses.<sup>37</sup>

Tellingly, stunned defenders of robust European immigration responded by mounting their own centralized opposition to the restrictionist measure. In Washington, trade associations such as the National Association of Manufacturers, steamship and railroad companies, and various ethnic and religious associations mobilized at the eleventh hour, vigorously lobbying the White House to veto the measure. Consequently, when Grover Cleveland vetoed the legislation, pro-immigration groups successfully pressured lawmakers to let the legislation die. In the wake of the 1896 legislative struggle, an impressive group of pro-immigration intellectuals, business leaders, social workers, and other activists formed the Immigration Protective League to mirror the advocacy work of the IRL.<sup>38</sup> Subsequently, traditional ethnic organizations like the German American Alliance and the Ancient Order of Hibernians were joined by representatives of newer immigrant groups, such as the Liberal Immigration League and the American Jewish Committee, which explicitly sought to counterpoise the IRL's lobbying and research activities.<sup>39</sup>

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, two large and diverse coalitions of interest groups waged a pitched battle in Washington over the future of national immigration and naturalization policies. For a sense of these alignments, see Table 2. If the large number of participants actively involved in this policy environment contrasted sharply with the small circle of actors associated with iron triangles or subgovernments, so too did the high visibility of the immigration issue in these years. Indeed, in their efforts to win support from uncommitted government officials and organized interests, both immigration defenders and restrictionists sought "to expand the scope of conflict" (to borrow Schattschneider's terminology).<sup>40</sup> Immigration restrictionists, for example, took great pains to link their cause with a host of other prominent reform impulses of the day. They reminded prohibitionists and "good government" reformers that new immigrants undermined temperance and fueled corrupt urban party machines. They cast restrictionism as "but a part of the great conservation movement," dedicated to conserving the quality of American citizenship. To social workers and welfare reformers, they warned that newcomers compounded

<sup>37</sup> See Daniel Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), chap. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *New York Times*, 8 January 1898.

<sup>39</sup> Tichenor, *Dividing Lines*, chap. 5.

<sup>40</sup> E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinhart, and Winston, 1960).



TABLE 2  
*Immigration Coalitions of the Progressive Era*

<i>Alien Rights Should Be:</i>	<i>Alien Admissions Should Be:</i>	
	<i>Expanded or Maintained</i>	<i>Restricted</i>
Broad	Immigration Protective League American Jewish Committee German American Alliance Liberal Immigration League	American Federation of Labor Knights of Labor
Narrow	National Assoc. of Manufacturers U.S. Chambers of Commerce Steamship and Railroad Companies	Immigration Restriction League Patriotic Societies Asian Exclusion Leagues The Grange Eugenicist Organizations

urban poverty, crime, and overcrowding. In short, Progressive Era immigration reformers constantly sought to draw new groups and actors into the fray as fresh converts to their cause.<sup>41</sup>

If the congressional immigration committees were almost exclusively responsive to the restrictionist agenda during the 1890s, their changing membership and the mobilization of nationally organized pro-immigration groups made them more receptive to representatives of both camps until World War I. In fact, interest groups both for and against immigration restriction in the early twentieth century gained access to the national policy-making process in a variety of institutional settings, from congressional halls and federal courtrooms to the White House and bureaucratic offices. Significantly, each camp could point to a distinctive set of structural openings that afforded it privileged access to decision makers during the Progressive Era.<sup>42</sup>

The interest groups most actively engaged in immigration reform politics understood well that power within the nascent issue networks of this period often rested upon policy knowledge or expertise. A familiar set of interest group representatives frequently appeared before congressional committees in these years, ranging from Frances Kellor of the Immigration Protective League to Prescott Hall of the Immigration Restriction League, each of whom skillfully linked specific policy goals to expert findings. Both camps saw great importance in the creation of special commissions to investigate immigration and naturalization policy, believing that intellectual legitimacy was essential for winning crucial policy battles. When the Dillingham Commission was established in 1907, for example, Max Kohler of the American Jewish Committee and Union of American Hebrew Societies warned allies that its “report is likely to shape our immigration policy for a number of years. . . .”<sup>43</sup> In similar fashion, IRL

<sup>41</sup> See Tichenor, *Dividing Lines*, chap. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Max Kohler to Simon Wolf, 27 September 1910, Max James Kohler Papers, National Jewish Historical Society, Box #1.

operatives concluded that a negative report “will hurt us for many years.”<sup>44</sup> Groups on both sides of the issue agreed that there was “no more valuable work” than developing expertise designed to shape the findings of congressional committees and investigatory commissions in this era of scientific government.<sup>45</sup> Policy specialists with both immigration expertise and knowledge of the complex Washington environment proved to be the most influential lobbyists in immigration reform politics.

### REINTERPRETING INTEREST GROUP HISTORY

When political science turns its attention to dynamic change in American politics, it often does so with periodization schemes and a theoretical language that ignore organized interests. Consider, for example, partisan realignment theory, which decades ago developed a general account of American political development built on the concept of party systems. Beyond highlighting the pivotal role of parties in our political history, work on party systems illuminated both long-term, dynamic processes associated with realignments and distinctive features that distinguish one party system from another.<sup>46</sup> Historically, political parties are generally understood to have served the functions of aggregating interests and expressing popular will in the policy-making process. Partisan realignments and critical elections are the mechanisms through which these functions are fulfilled: when realignments occur, state-building, major policy shifts, and regime changes follow in their wake.<sup>47</sup>

What is striking about this realignment scholarship in relation to the interest group literature is that organized interests are not usually viewed as agents of transformation, even though a group basis of American politics has been acknowledged since the founding. Indeed, organized interests are typically understood as either an impediment to change or as entities acted upon by external forces. In their inertial role, interest groups provide lobbyists with privileged access and undue influence on policy making. These advantages are the basis for a powerful critique of American politics.<sup>48</sup> In addition, American politics is understood to be primarily about incrementally allocating money and material goods, not transforming the political status quo. This, of course, is often depicted as the quintessential politics of iron triangles, subgovernments, and issue networks.

<sup>44</sup> Robert DeC Ward to Joseph Lee, 17 February 1907, Lee Papers, Box #1.

<sup>45</sup> Prescott Hall to James Patten, 4 February 1907, Lee Papers, Box #1.

<sup>46</sup> See Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970); and Joel Silbey, “The Rise and Fall of Political Parties” in L. Sandy Maisel, *The Parties Respond* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990), 26–59.

<sup>47</sup> Burnham, *Critical Elections*.

<sup>48</sup> See Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, “Two Faces of Power,” *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962): 947–952; Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People*; Lowi, *The End of Liberation*; Charles Lindblom, *Politics and Markets* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

In an important qualification to this bleak picture of unsystematic and unaccountable policy making, several political scientists have pointed out that the public interest movement of the 1960s and 1970s injected a vigorous element of competition into the process.<sup>49</sup> Berry provides a compelling articulation of this viewpoint. Rooting his thesis in the postmaterialist argument advanced by Ronald Inglehart, Berry documents the success of public interest organizations in insinuating themselves into the issue networks and shaping the policy agenda.<sup>50</sup> Since the 1970s, the corporate bias of subgovernmental politics, while not eradicated, has surely been modulated.

One prominent standard history of interest groups in American politics thereby begins in the 1930s and runs roughly as follows: The New Deal realignment laid the foundation for Franklin Roosevelt's administration to launch in earnest the construction of a modern liberal state that would deliver federal programs to legitimate organized labor, regulate business, provide a measure of economic security, and distribute largess to corporations and citizens alike. Modern interest group politics, in turn, developed from this milieu and gave rise to organizations that were adept at accessing federal largess and protecting the programs that mattered to them. This system reached a zenith in the early 1960s, at which point the social movements spawned by postmaterialist values began an unrelenting attack on this insular and elitist politics. These social movements for civil rights, ending the war in Vietnam, women's rights, environmental protection, consumer protection, and other causes essentially evolved into a new set of organized interests that took their place in Washington politics and fundamentally reshaped the policy process. With an enervated party system, the social movements could not be absorbed into the political arena and find expression through the electoral process. Perhaps, as Sidney Milkis has argued, the New Deal really was "the realignment to end all realignments," putting in place an administrative state that would provide the arena for future political competition.<sup>51</sup> In any case, it is clear that there was a regime change in the 1970s as these new interest groups, animated by quality-of-life rather than material concerns, introduced a new set of ideas and policies. These public interest lobby groups themselves were institutionalized as part of the Washington landscape, leaving us with an interest group system that is in some respects more permeable than that of the immediate post-war period.

One of the most compelling elements of this standard history is its emphasis on the rise of postmaterial values. But like most standard accounts, its portrait of interest group development reflects a linear progression since the 1960s—a

<sup>49</sup> See Berry, *Lobbying for the People*; Andrew McFarland, *Public Interest Lobbies* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1976); and Michael McCann, *Taking Reform Seriously: Perspectives on Public Interest Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

<sup>50</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); and Berry, *The New Liberalism*.

<sup>51</sup> Sidney Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The American Party System Since the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

kind of “big bang” theory of interest group origins that is severely abridged and perhaps misleading. As early as 1926 E. Pendleton Herring observed,

. . . the first trait which these groups exhibit as factors of power is that of organization. They are organized to a degree never possible before in the history of the world. Technological processes have made this possible. In the second place, these groups are ably and intelligently directed. They know their way about. In the third place, they have all the strength of unity and cohesion which is the result of a definite program and a common aim. Let it be emphasized again that the presence of these groups means that *a systematized and integrated organization for the representation of diverse interest groups is now functioning* at Washington.<sup>52</sup>

It was apparent to Herring that an interest group system emerged at the national level shortly after the turn of the century, which both reflected and generated political transformations.

Upon reflection, it seems that the Progressive Era not only enjoyed a vibrant, albeit different, interest group system, but also witnessed an emphasis on nonmaterial issues on the national agenda. In addition to labor and anti-trust policy, the country was absorbed with such issues as suffrage, child labor, segregation, immigration, conservation, prohibition, and municipal reform. It would be difficult to describe these issues as postmaterial, but clearly Americans were wrestling with quality-of-life concerns at both the beginning and the end of the twentieth century. This fact indicates that instead of a secular trend from material to post-material values in the postwar period, there is an ongoing tension and interaction between these sets of values. In both periods, moreover, social movements propelled these nonmaterial issues onto the national agenda without benefit of a partisan realignment. Certainly, in both periods political parties sustained withering attacks, not the least of which came from organized interest groups. Although there was a critical election in 1896, Progressive reform obviously took place in spite of that realignment, not because of it. To initiate major policy shifts of the Progressive Era, social movements organized for effective lobbying and policy advocacy at the national level. As such, they helped to inaugurate big government—a process that belies the clientele version of history in which organized interests followed on the heels of big government. Similarly, the major policy shifts of the late twentieth century documented so well by Berry and others also constituted an episode of remaking American politics by organizing new interests in support of new programs and forming new federal bureaucracies. Rather than merely arguing that there is nothing new under the sun in American politics, we are proposing that drawing connections between these two periods reveals patterns of historical change that have not been examined in the literature on interest groups.

An alternative version of interest group history, and one that we find persuasive, would posit that organized interests in both periods grew out of an interaction between social movements and the establishment. Specifically, be-

<sup>52</sup> Herring, *Group Representation Before Congress*, 18. (Emphasis added.)

cause social movements at both the beginning and the end of this century found regular political institutions to be both inhospitable to reform programs and impediments to social progress, they eventually sought ways of working around or altering the status quo. These ways included not only organizing and adopting new lobbying techniques, but also reforming parties and electoral politics, opening up legislative decision making, and using the courts in new ways, essentially remaking interest group politics. The organized interests, as we have noted, pursued both material and nonmaterial—or as Herring put it—“selfish” and “altruistic” goals. In addition, our own case study work indicates that many of the characteristics of today’s issue networks were in ready supply in major policy arenas during the Progressive Era. Again, this finding suggests that existing accounts of group politics are not so much wrong as incomplete.

### PERIODS OF INTEREST GROUP POLITICS

To help redress existing gaps in the literature, we propose a new research agenda that is attentive to distinctive periods of interest group formation, political activity, and attrition in U.S. history. Political scientists and historians alike have always been drawn to the definition of historical periods and the study of regime transformation.<sup>53</sup> The attraction is essentially two-fold: establishing periodization schemes imposes a theoretical order on the profound shifts in political culture, institutions, and public policy; and analyzing regime transformation provides a theoretical rigor for the normative comparison of different periods. From its inception, political analysis has sought to assess the values of democracy—participation, accountability, and popular sovereignty—across regimes. In contemporary American politics, it is clear that organized interests offer one of the most significant institutional opportunities for those values. We suggest that the study of interest group systems will provide important theoretical insights into the development of American politics—insights that have been conspicuously absent from the study of regime transformation in the United States.

We define an interest group system in terms of five major variables: the aggregate number of organized interests; the variety of organized interests; the nationalization of organized interests; the professionalism of organized interests; and the structural opportunities and obstacles confronting organized interests. The first three of these variables are fairly straightforward enumerations of the level and kind of organized interest activity. The latter two are more complex indicators of the character of interest group systems and react upon each other as groups develop resources to take best advantage of the structural milieu in which they operate. Taken together, these variables will enable us to distinguish systems of interest group politics in different historical periods.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1981); Morone, *The Democratic Wish*; Burnham, *Critical Elections*; and Richard Harris and Sidney Milkis, *Remaking American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989).

At the most elemental level, the aggregate number of organized interests active in American political life helps us to distinguish an interest group system. From Herring's classic study through current scholarship, interest group theorists have sought to estimate the size of the interest group universe. Not only is this a logical first step in empirical analysis of interest group behavior, but it also has theoretical implications for understanding broader shifts in American politics. At least since David Truman's seminal work in the early 1950s, political scientists have amassed empirical data on the formation of organized interests.<sup>54</sup> Their explanations and findings on group formation have been a crucially important theoretical contribution, but tell us precious little about group formation before the mid-twentieth century. Truman, for example, has argued that social, technological, and economic complexity gives rise to more groups to represent emergent interests. For our purposes, this may well imply that periods of societal transformation are the leavening for new interest group systems.<sup>55</sup> All of this work, however, leaves a glaring gap with respect to group attrition over the course of the past century. We should expect there to be factors that lead to an attrition of some groups even as new groups emerge to take their place. Before we can discern those factors, we need longitudinal data on group numbers and formation throughout the twentieth century to demarcate interest group systems.

Second, interest group systems may be characterized by the variety of organized interests that exist in a given historical period. The search for measurement of the mix of groups has been driven in large part by the long-standing pluralist/elitist debate. On the one hand there are those who believe, with Schattschneider, that business dominance in America insures that the heavenly chorus sings with an upper-class accent or, with Lindblom, that business enjoys a privileged position.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand there are those who maintain, as Bauer, Poole, and Dexter did, that even if business groups are more numerous than others, they are hardly monolithic.<sup>57</sup> Still others have adduced evidence to show that the influence of public interest groups has been severely underestimated.<sup>58</sup> Whichever side of this debate one favors, the variety of organized interests in play is a critical variable. In addition, shifts in the proportion of a particular kind of group and the relative mix of groups indicate the development of new systems. One might hypothesize, for example, that at the outset of transformational periods we should expect to find a higher proportion of interests concerned with material issues as society struggles to find its footing in

<sup>54</sup> See Moe, *The Organized Interests*; and Salisbury, "Interest Representation."

<sup>55</sup> Truman, *The Governmental Process*.

<sup>56</sup> Schattschneider, *The Semi-Sovereign People*.

<sup>57</sup> Raymond A. Bauer, Ithiel De Sola Poole and Lewis Anthony Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy* (New York: Atherton Press, 1963); Richard Harris, *Coal Firms under the New Social Regulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985).

<sup>58</sup> See Berry, *Lobbying for the People*; McCann, *Taking Reform Seriously*; and Andrew McFarland, *Public Interest Lobbies* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise, 1976).

shifting socioeconomic relations. Conversely, one could suggest that population swings such as a more educated demographic cohort would lead to an interest group system with relatively more citizens organizations focused on non-material issues. For different reasons, Walker theorizes that those groups will suffer very high mortality rates. Again, none of these theoretical questions can be answered without accumulating historical data that is lacking in contemporary scholarship. Following the typology developed by Schlozman and Tierney, we place all organized interests in one of the following categories: private businesses, trade and economic associations, unions, citizens groups, and other. The second category encompasses not only trade association, but also other economic-based organizations such as the National Grange. The last category includes the press, church-based religious groups, educational institutions, hospitals or other health care institutions, and foundations.

Third, the national versus local or regional orientation of organized interests distinguishes one interest group system from another. Students of the Progressive Era clearly see that period as a transition from classical to modern liberalism, from a negative to a positive view of government, and perhaps above all, as a transformation from state and local to national politics. Without developing strong quantitative indicators, they also postulate the nationalization of interest groups. The contemporary political science literature maintains that the postwar period is the critical time in which interest groups were reoriented to the national level. We see these views as ultimately compatible, but only with a careful extension of our empirical data back to the early part of the last century. Indicators of nationalization would include the number of interests with staff and offices in Washington, DC, testimony of national organizations before Congress on major policy issues, and coverage of group behavior in the news media.

The fourth variable that we propose to define an interest group system is the resources that organized interests mobilize in pursuit of their goals. We use the term resources in the broadest sense to include human, financial, and technological assets. Clearly, such resources will never be evenly distributed among organized interests. Still, we believe that it is possible to distinguish systems based on the amount and kind of resources that are mobilized system-wide. Moreover, there is a dynamic, competitive dimension to any interest group system such that success will be mimicked and diffused throughout the system. Thus, particular kinds of expertise, lobbying techniques, and communications technology will be adopted generally if they prove to be effective in specific cases. Groups are likely to opt for an approach that not only seems likely to work in its own historical context (that is, its own interest group system), but also matches its resources to the opportunities and obstacles of that context.

Those opportunities and obstacles presented by the evolving political institutions of the American State constitute the fifth and final variable that shapes an interest group system. Although organized interests seek change in political institutions to create a more hospitable policy environment, they also are in-

fluenced by the nature of political institutions confronting them. The institutions with which organized interests interact may be informal (issue networks and subgovernments) as well as formal (Congress and the courts). As institutions change, so too do interest group politics. The interplay between interest groups and political parties is illustrative. While many scholars have noted the likelihood of a relationship between parties and interest groups, we know of no careful historical analysis of the developmental relationship between the two. Certainly, there is no current discussion of interest group systems that parallels that of party systems. As Charles Merriam poignantly noted in the early twentieth century, “Organizations, societies, leagues, unions, spring up all around us, and become centers of political power. . . . These groups did not exist on the same scale a generation ago, but now they rival the party and the ‘machine’ at many points.”<sup>59</sup> Herring turned this logic around when he concluded, “the chief explanation for the rise of these organized groups of voters, with an alert interest in legislation and politics, is to be found in the decline of the political party as a leader in opinion.”<sup>60</sup> Two decades later, E. E. Schattschneider asserted that the power of interest groups correlates negatively with the power of parties.<sup>61</sup> It is perhaps telling that organized interests proliferated and flourished in national politics during the two eras in which party power was systematically eroded by reformers: the Progressive Era and the 1960s and 1970s. Yet the dynamic interplay of interest groups and political institutions such as parties in American politics can only be assessed systematically across several historical periods and only by identifying distinct interest group systems.

## CONCLUSION

The Progressive Era was a watershed period for organized interests in national political life. One cannot truly understand the origins and development of modern interest group politics in America without taking stock of the crucial transformations ushered in during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At a time when the nineteenth century “state of courts and parties” was in full retreat and institutions of the national state were undergoing significant change, organized interests—unprecedented in number, variety, and professionalism—became active in federal politics.<sup>62</sup>

As we have shown, more organized interests than ever before emerged on the political stage in these decades. Indeed, the Progressive Era system was animated by aggregate numbers far greater than the standard literature estimates. This finding alone underscores the prospects for more ambitious theory-building when political scientists are attentive to the task of gathering comprehensive historical information about politically active interest groups. It encour-

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Herring, *Group Representation before Congress*, vi.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in Schlozman and Tierney, *Organized Interests and American Democracy*, 201.

<sup>62</sup> Skowronek, *Building a New American State*, 27.



ages an analytical framework that apprehends not only the long-term trends in group formation and maintenance, but also group attrition. It underscores the possibility that the constellation of organized interests engaged in political life has undergone an intriguing ebb and flow over the years that merits careful theoretical explanation.

Significantly, the surge we found in politicized interest groups during this period was evident across categories, from trade and professional associations to organized labor and citizens groups. One of the defining features of the Progressive Era system is the rich variety of organized interests that mobilized in pursuit of distinct policy goals. It is crucial that the study of interest groups takes into account and seeks explanations for the varying levels of participation and influence by different types of interest groups in given historical periods. Private corporations, trade associations, unions, professional associations, citizens groups, and other organizations emerged at different rates over time and participated at varying levels within historical periods. At particular times, the frequency of participation for given categories of groups can be out of proportion with their numbers. These sorts of categorical comparisons over time hold the promise of drawing out important historical patterns for theoretical analysis, including classic questions of systemic bias in favor of business and upper-class interests.

The Progressive Era system is also characterized by an unprecedented centralization of interest group politics. Long before the New Deal or the social movement insurgency of the 1960s, interest groups of the early twentieth century increasingly focused their activities on federal governmental actors, institutions, and policies. More groups than at any previous time sought to influence policy making within the Washington Beltway in those years, and many established national offices for the first time in the nation's capital. The evidence provided here illustrates that the nationalization of U.S. interest group politics began before the rise of the modern welfare and regulatory state that emerged in later decades. Accordingly, it demonstrates the need for more careful investigation of whether interest group formation and national political mobilization precedes, coincides with, or follows big government programs.

Our findings also indicate that organized interests, adapting to the enervation of the traditional party system during the Progressive Era, made the most of new structural openings in the national state for pursuing their policy goals. In a period in which Congress grew into a more professional institution and its standing committees increased in number and power, interest groups developed new strategies and capacities to exploit these changes. Not only did more organized interests testify before Congress than ever before, but many also evolved into active partners in young policy communities. Almost a quarter-century ago, Hugh Hecló took political scientists to task for tending “to look for one group exerting dominance over another, for subgovernments that are strongly insulated from other outside forces in the environment, for policies that get ‘produced’ by a few ‘makers.’” By searching for a privileged few, he

observed, we overlooked “the many whose webs of influence provoke and guide the exercise of power. These webs, or what I will call ‘issue networks,’ are particularly relevant to the highly intricate and confusing welfare policies that have been undertaken in recent years.”<sup>63</sup> As our case study research on interest group politics and immigration reform highlights, the concept of issue networks is highly relevant to historical periods as early as the Progressive Era. Our findings challenge standard accounts of a secular shift over time from iron triangles of the old days to issue networks of today.

Our analysis suggests that a number of nascent issue networks of the Progressive Era evolved into iron triangles in later decades and then became issue networks again in recent decades. The new issue network that emerged in immigration policy making during the Progressive Era was anything but an anomaly. In the area of antitrust issues, for instance, one can observe a marked expansion in the number and kind of organized interests that became regularly involved in shaping national policy on this issue. When the antitrust issue first emerged as a fixture in national politics with the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 and the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, powerful congressional parties were the central aegis for aggregating competing interests. Not surprisingly, organized interest group involvement in lobbying these two major pieces of legislation was relatively modest, confined primarily to the Grange and local trade associations. By contrast, after the turn of the century, a fairly robust and stable set of organized interests—trade associations, labor unions, and citizens groups—emerged as regular participants in the antitrust policy-making process. Another young issue network thereby was born. Our ongoing case study research suggests that the trends we have discerned in immigration and antitrust policy-making were indicative of a rich variety of nascent issue networks that emerged in this political era. Other issue networks have proven durable from one period to the next. Assessing interest groups and policy making over broad time horizons brings to light shifting proportions and constellations of issue networks and subgovernments, a phenomenon our conception of interest group systems helps capture.

When data on group formation and legislative behavior are brought to bear, we can see a picture of interest group politics that strongly suggests a set of historical patterns worthy of close examination. Organized interests did indeed burgeon in the past half-century as our current interest group literature demonstrates. However, it is equally clear that the beginning of the twentieth century also witnessed a dramatic expansion of organized interest participation in national policy making. In addition, we have shown that the Progressive Era expansion included a disproportionately high rate of citizen groups organizing, foreshadowing the well-documented surge of public interest group formation since the 1960s. Both periods reflect the initial role that citizens groups can play in advancing a national reform agenda. Moreover, our analysis of the attrition

<sup>63</sup> Heclo, “Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment,” 102.

rates of Progressive Era organizations suggests that it will be possible to construct a data set that will allow a deeper historical study of interest group politics in America and to draw evolutionary connections both across interest group systems and among interest groups, party politics, and state-building. The most important potential benefit of this historical research, however, is the opportunity to explore broader dynamics of interest group politics over time. Assuming “what’s past is prologue,” formulating an understanding of organized interests by analyzing the past forty years is analogous to coming into a play after the second act. We can surely appreciate the dialogue among the actors, but we cannot have a very deep appreciation for the underlying currents that moved the drama to that point.\*

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