



## *Who Rules?*



Many governments claim to be democratic,  
but few actually are.

The former Soviet Union, China, even North  
Korea claim to be democratic.

# *Who Rules?*

Even the claims of such countries as England, the U.S. and Canada that "the people" hold the political power are open to question.



## *Who Rules?*



Does political power really reside in the people? Or is it in the hands of special interest groups? Or, do we have a ruling class in America, a “power elite?”

## *The People*



In an ideal democracy political power is shared equally by all citizens. But today's nation-states are too large for direct participation by everyone, making elected representatives a power group that supposedly represent the people.

## *The People*



But, do elected representatives express the interests of the majority of their constituents? Majority rule is possible, but there are some sizeable obstacles in the way.

# *The People*

One of the major problems of any democracy is the apathy of its citizens.



German Information Center

## *The People*



Only 60 to 70% of registered voters actually participate in presidential elections, and voter turnout for lesser offices is much smaller. And because many eligible voters never register, these figures actually overestimate the extent of public interest.

# *The People*



Suppose 100 eligible voters ( $n=100$ )

- Of these, 70% register ( $n=70$ )
- of these, 70% vote ( $n=49$ )
- of these, 70% vote Republican ( $n=34$ )

## *The People*



These 34 people out of a possible 100 have given the Republican Party a "mandate" to rule in the name of the "majority."

## *The People*



But it is not really necessary for all of the citizens in a democracy to vote if those who do are representative of all. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

## *The People*



Studies of citizen participation reveal that those who most need government's help are least likely to participate in the political process. People with higher incomes and better education are much more likely to participate.

# *The People*



Minorities and the poor are less likely to vote. Other forms of political participation, such as working in a political campaign or participating in a political rally, are even less common than voting.

# *The People*

It seems that wealth and education create the interest and the resources for political participation.



# *The People*

Even the citizen who is interested in politics often finds it difficult to discover where a particular politician really stands on an issue.



## *The People*



Politicians often try to conceal their opinions about controversial issues. In addition, voters seldom get a chance to talk directly with candidates, relying instead on the mass media for their information.

# *The People*

Effective campaigners try to project a positive image in their advertising, which often have little to do with the issues. There is also a tendency to smear your opponent--often with half-truths.



# *The People*



In state-of-the-union messages by our Presidents, commentators often complain of the length of the speeches and sometimes of their lack of catchy phrases. "Where's the bumper-sticker?" they ask.

# *The People*

Advertising agencies sell candidates like deodorants. In a 30-second television spot there is little time for serious consideration of political issues.



# *The People*

The press has a business agenda to sell papers.  
They tend to emphasize the “horse race”  
aspect of the campaign.



# *The People*

Also, candidates of minor political parties have little access to the media and are thus frozen out of the arena of serious political debate.



# *Pluralism*

Social scientists who believe that government is influenced by a shifting coalition of interest groups are called pluralists.



## *Pluralism*



According to this view, legislators and other government officials are influenced by interest groups with a particular stake in specific legislation.

# *Pluralism*



These groups include physicians, realtors, labor unions, oil companies, and numerous others are called interest groups or "special-interests."

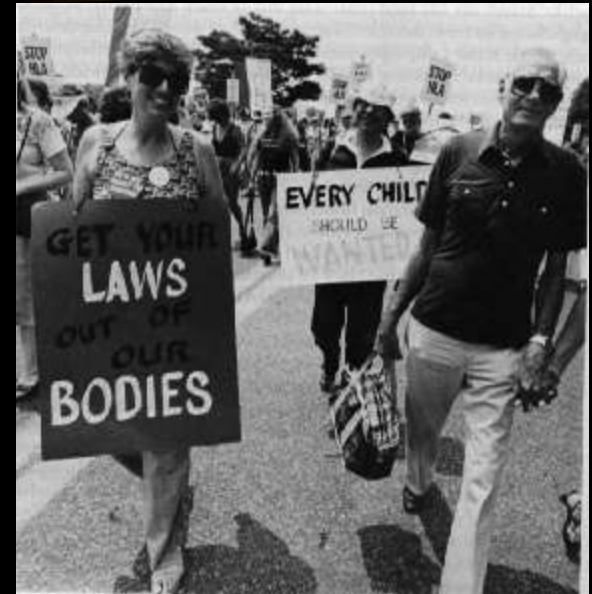
# *Pluralism*



Many such groups are concerned with laws and policies that affect their economic well-being.

# *Pluralism*

Others come together because of their feelings about certain issues. Examples include anti-abortion groups, civil liberties groups, and patriotic groups.



# *Pluralism*

The power and influence of these groups depends upon:

- group size
- their degree of organization
- money at their disposal



## *Pluralism*

A group must be able to motivate its members to contribute and vote in accordance with the issues of the group. The degree of organization is key, as is the money at its disposal.

# *Pluralism*



Lobbying various legislative bodies is the principal activity of most special interest groups. They try to convince lawmakers to pass the legislation the group desires.

# *Pluralism*



One of the main tools of the lobbyist is information. Legislators usually are not experts on all the legislation they must consider.

## *Pluralism*



Lobbyists also try to influence legislation by cultivating the friendship of individual legislators. Many Washington lobbyists are notorious for their lavish parties.

## *Pluralism*

A lobbyist's promise of political support from a powerful special interest often determines an elected official's decision. Threats by a special interest to support a politician's opposition can also be effective.



*PACs*

Money is one of the special interests main tools.

# PACs

Modern political campaigns require large sums of money, and some groups are very generous in their contributions to legislators who support their interest.



## *PACs*



For example, in a textbook case of special interest politicking, the National Rifle Association donated tens of thousands of dollars to lawmakers in the weeks just before they cast deciding votes against consideration of the 1994 Crime Bill.



*PACs*

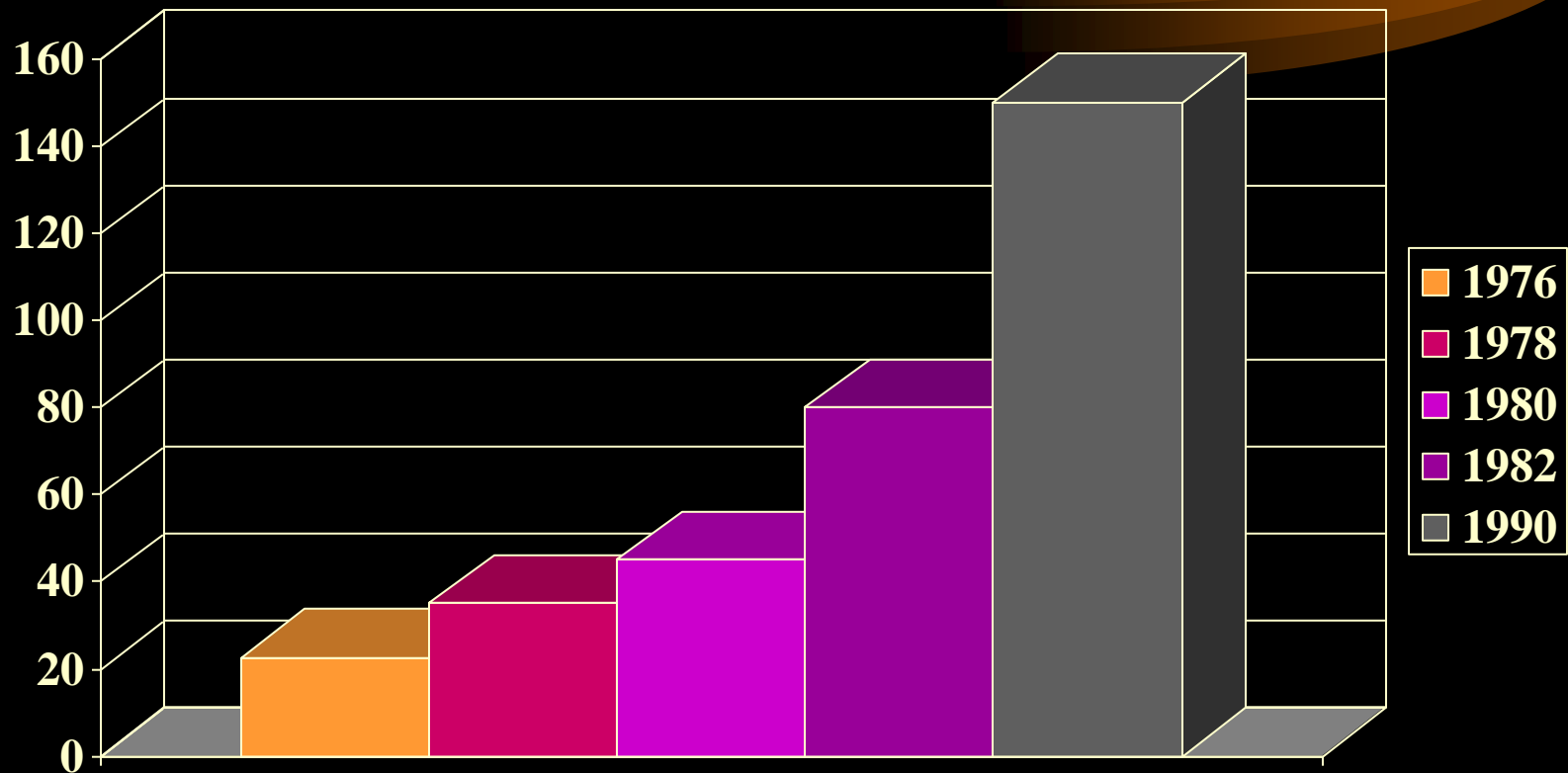
An AP computer analysis of NRA contributions to the House since the start of the 1994 election cycle found the group gave nearly 88% of its \$621,000 in donations to lawmakers who opposed the crime bill.

## *PACs*



- Those figures include nearly \$60,000 in donations in the weeks immediately before the vote.
- Big donations like the ones the NRA delivers are important tools of the Lobbyist.
- A check in hand assures the lobbyist of the legislator's ear.

# *PAC Contributions to Congress*





## *PACs*

The contributions to campaigns by Political Action Committees has grown dramatically over the years. In the 2008 election cycle organizations and individuals contributed \$7,402,625,472 in Political Contributions.

# *PACs*

Many have suggested that because of PACs,  
we have the best Congress that money can  
buy.



Dailloux, Rapho/Photo Research

## *PACs*

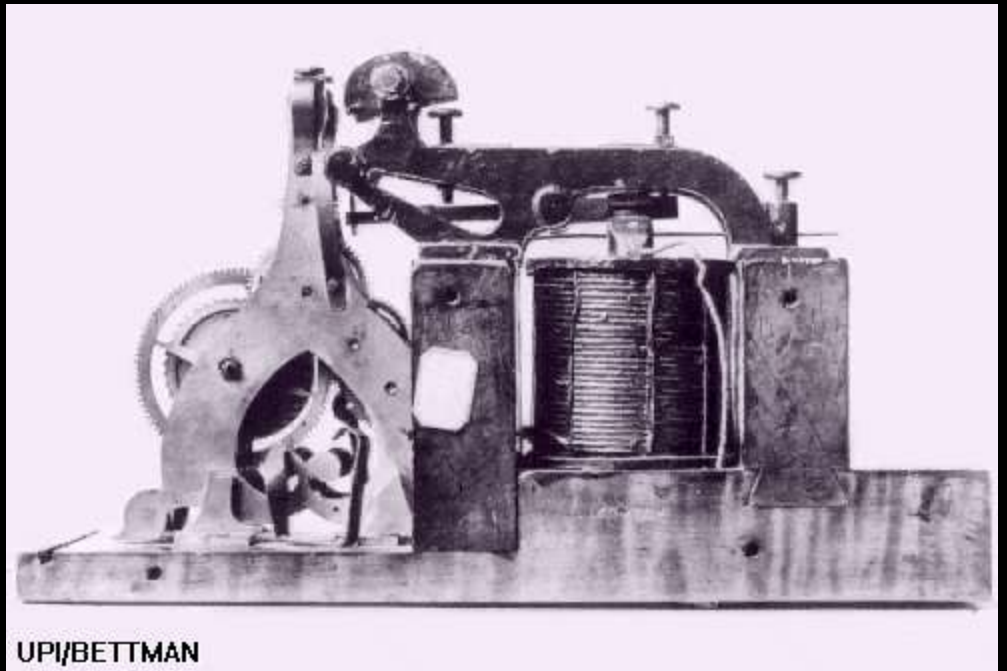


An excellent analysis of the buying of congressional votes is provided by Nat Silver in the recent debate over the reform of health care and the public option. His analysis can be found by clicking on: [Special Interest Money](#).

# *The Problem of Factions*

Growth of factions due to:

- Proliferation of government programs
- Technology



# *The Problem of Factions*



Just as the technology of networking people was emerging we see a proliferation of government programs which created fresh issues to get interested in. Combined, the two factors were explosive

# *The Problem of Factions*

Since the 1960s, the technologies have multiplied relentlessly: computerized mass mailings, the personal computer, the fax, the Internet, increasingly powerful software for keeping tabs on member or perspective members.



# *The Problem of Factions*

The number of political associations has grown in lockstep with communications technology. One indication of this growth: the size of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) went from 2,000 members in 1965 to 22,000 in 2009.

# *Association Executives*

ASAE serves approximately 10,000 associations that represent more than 287 million people and organizations worldwide. Their mission: *"To help associations transform society through the power of collaborative action."*

# *The Problem of Factions*

A century ago lobbying was done on behalf of the titans of industry. Now just about everyone belongs to one interest group or another.



## *Some Interest Groups:*

- AARP
- THE NATIONAL TAXPAYERS'S UNION
- THE NATIONL RIFLE ASSOCIATION
- THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SEX EDUCATORS
- THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION,
- THE BEER DRINKERS OF AMERICA

# *The Problem of Factions*



Interest groups are not “them”; they are “us.”

But the fact that lobbying has embraced the middle class hardly means that it is now an equal opportunity enterprise.

# *The Problem of Factions*



Wealthy people can still afford more of it, the poor are still on the sidelines. It is no accident that in this kind of pluralism, payments to the poor are the most vulnerable items in the budget.

# *The Problem of Factions*

All of these lobbies are usually asking for money, whether in the form of crop subsidies for farmers, tax breaks for shopkeepers, Medicare, Social Security payments, lower taxes on beer, or other benefits.

# *The Problem of Factions*

So the increasingly “democratic” face of interest group politics means the American government is asked to pay more, which means that Americans of all classes are being asked to pay more.

# *The Problem of Factions*



The costs of each group's selfishness are spread diffusely across the whole nation while the benefits are captured by the group.

# *The Problem of Factions*



Though every group might prosper in the long run if all groups surrendered some benefits, it makes no sense for any of them to surrender unilaterally.

# *The Problem of Factions*



All this means that the corruption of the public interest by special interests is not an easily cured pathology, but a stubbornly rational pattern of behavior.

# *The Problem of Factions*

It is a beautiful example of Weber's  
“irrationality factor”: Accurate information,  
rationally processed, leads groups to  
undermine the public good.

## *Power Elite*



Elitists would agree with most of the pluralist's analysis, but basically label it as "small change."

# *Power Elite*

Real power, they claim, resides in the hands of a small, unified, ruling class. A power elite.



# *Power Elite*

Although radicals have long argued that America is dominated by a small group of powerful men, it was Mill's book, *The Power Elite*, published in the 1950s, that started the current debate.



## *Power Elite*



Supporters of the idea that the US and other capitalist nations are ruled by a small group are called elitists. Note that elitists do not advocate that this is good, only that it is so.

# *Power Elite*

Elitists see three levels of power in American society. At the bottom of the heap are the great masses of people--unorganized, ill informed, and virtually powerless.



Hulton-Deutsch Collection

## *Power Elite*



The masses can be whipped up to support various policies by media campaigns. Again, a recent example would be the Great Health Care Debates of 2009. The masses have become particularly volatile with increasingly sophisticated communications technology.

# *Power Elite*

Between the masses and the elite are the “middle levels” of power, where some true competition between interest groups still exists.



## *Power Elite*



Mills saw the US Congress as a reflection of these middle levels of power. The elite compete in this arena (and tend to dominate it with their resources), but this is pretty minor league stuff.

## *Power Elite*



According to Mills, although Congress decides some minor issues, the power elite ensures that no serious challenge to its control is tolerated in the political arena.

## *Power Elite*



The power elite is a coalition of people in the highest ranks of the economy, government, and the military who together form a unified ruling class.

# *Power Elite*

One of the major sources of unity of the power elite is its members' common social background. They come from upper-class white families from urban areas.



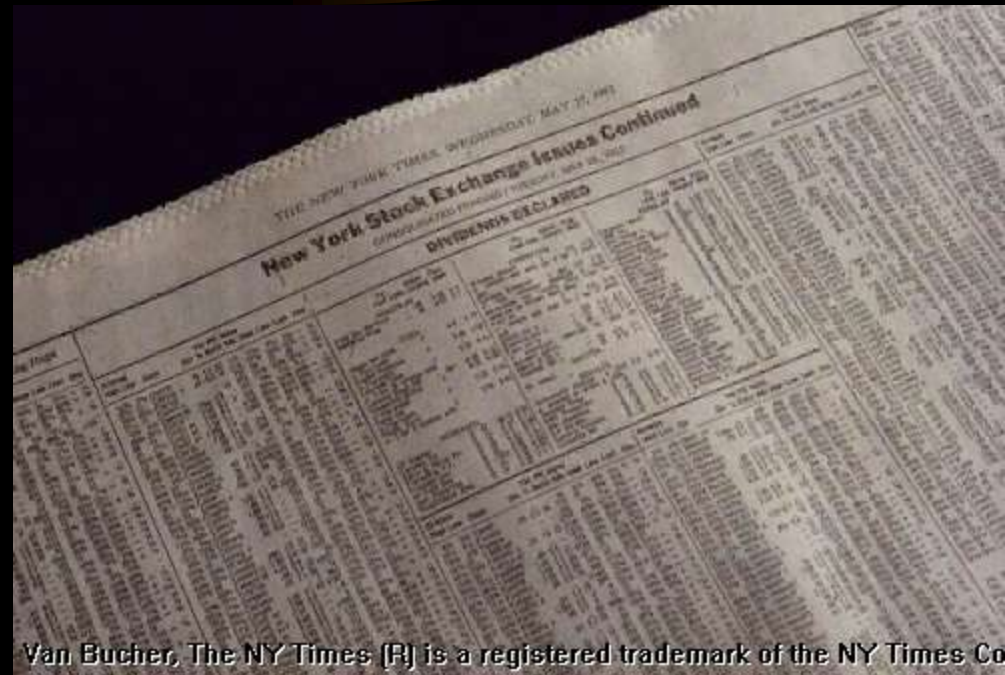
## *Power Elite*



They attend the same prep schools, the same ivy league colleges, and share the same attitudes toward the world and their positions in it. The social networks that they represent are closely interconnected, with many common interests.

# *Power Elite*

The power elite does not represent some great conspiracy of evil men, but rather the leaders of the dominant organizations of American life.



# *Power Elite*

The power of the elite does not come from their personal wealth, but rather from their positions at the top of the bureaucratic hierarchies that dominate American life.



# *Power Elite*

These leaders meet socially and they often coordinate their activities through membership in common organizations.



Photo Researchers, Inc.

## *Power Elite*



Their institutional positions also assure common values and outlook. Personal wealth, while not the source of power, does give them initial access to these positions.

## *Power Elite*



More recent writings of the elitist school accept Mills' conclusion that power is concentrated and centralized, but question his inclusion of the military leadership in the power elite. Most are now convinced that critical decisions are made by an economic-political elite.

## *Power Elite*



Mills believed that the power elite was a relatively new phenomenon resulting from a number of historical and social forces that have enlarged and centralized the facilities of power, making the decisions of the elite much more consequential than in any other age.

## *Power Elite*



Mills pointed to a recent growth of elite power in American society. This growth is due to the expansion of government and corporate bureaucracy, which has become far more pervasive and centralized. Thus, the means of elite power is far greater than it was in the past.

## *Power Elite*



The key decision makers now have instruments to influence the masses, such as television, 24/7 cable news outlets, PR and advertising firms, and techniques of propaganda and violence that are unsurpassed in the history of mankind.

## *Power Elite*



The tremendous advances in transportation and communication have also made it much more likely that the elite can coordinate their power.

## *Power Elite*



With the rise of bureaucracy, power is much more centralized in hyper-industrial societies.

# *Power Elite*

Though having something quite different in mind, Mills would agree with Ronald Reagan when he said: “Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.”

