Beyond Self-Interest: Educational Interest Groups and Congressional Influence

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Most research on interest groups has focused on theoretical perspectives concerning why members join these groups. Missing from this work is any connection between theories of organizational maintenance (i.e., how an organization forms) and research on influence activity (i.e., what an organization does). This article argues that a connection exists between organizational maintenance and the participation of their members in the organization's influence activities. Relying on a two-stage study of educational interest groups and the U.S. Congress, this article maintains that rational choice theories of interest group maintenance cannot account for the presence and perseverance of Washington-based education interest groups. A theory acknowledging levels of ideological commitment may be a more appropriate model for understanding educational interest groups at the national level.

INTEREST GROUPS are increasingly important to Americans and thus to our legislative process. This commitment to interest groups has led to what Knoke (1986) calls the "advocacy explosion" and Berry (1984) terms the "lobbying explosion." The best available data with regard to the number of interest groups operating in the Washington, D.C. area show a remarkable increase, from 4,000 in 1977 to more than 17,000 in 1999 (Close, 1979-1999). This explosion includes education interest groups, with roughly 76% of these groups coming into existence since 1960 (Schlozman & Tierney, 1986), resulting in approximately 650 organizations in 1999 (Close, 1979-1999).

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The number of interest groups[1] committed to influencing education legislation is surprising. Interest group researchers have long concluded that when an interest group produces a public good, as American education is believed to be, members lose incentive to participate because they will receive the benefit regardless of group membership.[2] Baumgartner and Walker (1989) posit that organized support for any public good is prohibitive without the support of the government itself. Thus, organizations would be unable to influence education legislation without the support of Congress and the existence of a strong national consensus with regard to the importance and direction that should be taken (Baumgartner & Walker, 1989).

Most research on interest groups has focused on theoretical perspectives concerning why members join (Hildreth, 1994; Knoke, 1988; Olson, 1965). Absent from this work is any connection between theories of organizational maintenance (i.e., how an organization forms) and research on influence activity (i.e., what an organization does). This article argues that a connection exists between organizational formation/maintenance and members' participation in organizational influence activities. Previous studies of group mobilization and maintenance ignore how individual's incentives for joining or belonging to a group might influence whether (and how) they participate in the group's influence activities.

This article argues that rational choice theories of interest group maintenance that assume self-interest cannot account for the presence and perseverance of education interest groups in Washington. The change in the congressional majority in 1994 should have denied groups interested in protecting education the governmental support they needed to continue influencing legislation concerned with this public good. Without the support of the Democratic Party and the accompanying access to the legislative process, organizational maintenance and legislative influence should have declined for these groups. This article will show that education interest groups continue to influence education legislation in Washington and have been able to do so by mobilizing member participation in the legislative process. This article concludes by arguing that a theory accounting for levels of ideological commitment is a more appropriate model for understanding educational interest groups at the national level.

To these ends, this article will focus on the following questions: (a) What influence strategies have educational interest groups employed? and (b) Do the tactics the groups use to influence legislation have any implications for our theoretical understanding of interest groups?

INTEREST GROUP RESEARCH

The literature on group membership provides a theoretical framework to guide our expectations with regard to organizational maintenance and group mobilization. Prior to the mid-1960s, the formation and internal organization of U.S. interest groups generated very little serious research by political scientists (Sabatier, 1992). Most scholars took for granted the large number of business, labor, farm, ethnic, and religious groups. These scholars accepted Truman's (1951) view that man was social by nature and that these groups were the direct result of social behavior.

Olson's By-Product Theory

The publication of Mancur Olson's (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action* revolutionized the study of interest groups. Olson assumed that individuals were rational, self-interested actors. He concluded that it would be irrational for people to join a group in pursuit of collective goods such as education that accrued to members and nonmembers alike. He hypothesized that members join either to gain selective benefits or because they are forced to do so. Any collective political goods pursued by the group would be a by-product of members' real interests.

Olson (1965) developed the by-product theory to explain the behavior of large economic groups but also argued that it applied equally well to any large interest group.[3] Olson believed that people perform cost-benefit calculations when deciding whether to participate in an interest group. Because securing the collective good rarely depends on any one member's decision to participate and, when secured, is available to everyone, rational individuals will choose to free-ride rather than participate.[4] Potential members will not join the organization and, even if they do, will let other members participate in the provision of the good through political influence activities. They will free-ride even when their share of the collective good exceeds their costs in participation.

To maintain the organization, Olson (1965) hypothesized that interest groups must either coerce members (e.g., the union shop) or entice members by offering selective benefits they could not get elsewhere. Political activities to secure benefits extending beyond the group's members cannot compel their participation. Thus, influence activities pursued by an interest group should require little or no participation on the part of members. If the group attempted influence tactics requiring participation beyond what would result in an individual benefit, then the group would lose members and be unable to maintain itself.

Research on Influence Strategies

In the early 1980s, there was an explosion of research on interest group influence. It was characterized by analyses of large-scale survey data of various Washington, D.C. interest groups. Although this work was primarily disconnected from the work on organizational maintenance, there are implications for organizational membership. In 1980 and 1981, Jack L. Walker began a large-scale survey of Washington-based voluntary associations concerned with national policy making. Walker (1983) found that

> The number of interest groups in operation, the mixture of group types, and the level and direction of political mobilization in the United States at any point in the country's history will largely be determined by the composition and accessibility of the system's major patrons of political action. (p. 404)

He concluded that both organizational maintenance and political influence of these associations were the result of patronage within political institutions.

A follow-up study by Walker in 1985 confirmed the effect of political patronage on the interest group's influence activities during the Reagan administration (Peterson & Walker, 1986). Walker and his colleagues found a "virtual revolution" in the access Washington-based interest groups enjoyed because of the sharp partisan transition from the Carter to the Reagan administrations. And, this change in access triggered changes in influence tactics and organizational maintenance.

Kay Lehman Schlozman and John T. Tierney (1983, 1986) conducted a second major survey of Washington-based organized interests between 1981 and 1982. They found that the interest group community consists primarily of business interests; public interest groups and groups representing the less advantaged are underrepresented. Schlozman and Tierney (1986) state, "business actually is a more dominating presence in Washington now than it was two decades ago" (p. 77). They further conclude that interest groups exercise the greatest influence on issues that are not very visible or are not highly and ideologically charged.

In addition to examining the types of groups prevalent in Washington, Schlozman and Tierney (1983, 1986) conducted an extensive survey of the types of influence activities employed by the groups. They found that the arsenal of techniques had greatly expanded. In addition to enhancing older, more direct forms of lobbying, the groups had added techniques involving the media and grassroots mobilization. Schlozman and Tierney concluded that the addition of nonaccess requiring tactics did not represent a true shift in

the influence strategies available to these groups but was simply part of a broader increase in all lobbying activities.

Schlozman and Tierney (1986) claimed that the influence methods available to interest groups were more of the same. However, of all the tactics examined, the greatest increases occurred in grassroots strategies. Cigler and Loomis (1995) argued, "More of the same becomes at some point something categorically different" (p. 393). Tierney (1992) later admitted, "In politics, as in oil spills or hazardous wastes, more of the same is not really the same" (p. 219). What Schlozman and Tierney failed to acknowledge was that the expansion of influence tactics to include grassroots mobilization refuted the self-interest theory of interest group maintenance. The model does not support this degree of participation.

Some research has indicated that influence activities are associated with incentives for membership (Leighley, 1996). Knoke (1988) found that individuals' participation in a group was consistent with their reasons for joining. However, Knoke's work failed to consider that the group mobilization process may be structured by individuals' incentives for joining (Leighley, 1996). Leighley (1996) then concluded that individuals' incentives for belonging to a group are powerful constraints on the group's ability to mobilize for political activity.

Thus, the question becomes, If people join groups for self-interested reasons, can the group then mobilize them for political action? Or, to rephrase it, If grassroots mobilization is necessary for political influence, as will be shown, then how is the continuance of interest group organizations explained? Mobilization for political influence by educational interest groups defies current theories of interest group maintenance. If individuals can share in the collective or public good of education, even if they fail to contribute to their provision, there would be little incentive for them to engage in most types of grassroots mobilization.

METHOD

To address the purposes of this research, a methodology was first needed that would provide a systematic overview of the context in which educational interests operate. And, second, the methodology needed to integrate the interest groups' understanding of the change in their context with the actions they have taken to manage their situations. Given the requirements the research questions suggested, a qualitative methodology was chosen.

Sampling was purposive. Phone interviews were conducted in December of 1995 with both Democratic and Republican congressional education staff members. Each staff member was asked to name the five most influential

interest groups for education issues. Based on their recommendations, the study focused on four groups' influence tactics: the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the National Education Association (NEA), the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and People For the American Way (PAW).

Two data collection strategies were utilized for this study: interviews and document analysis. The study took place in two stages—the first in 1996 and the second in 1999. In both stages, the collection strategy was similar. Semistructured interviews were conducted with lobbyists, identified by congressional staffers, from each organization. Interview questions for the first stage were based on the list of influence activities generated by Schlozman and Tierney's (1986) survey of Washington-based interest groups. In the second stage, the questions based on Schlozman and Tierney's work were supplemented by questions concerning organizational maintenance, changes in organizational structure, and the use of newer influence technologies.

In addition to interviewing association lobbyists, three separate interviews were conducted with congressional education staff members. Both majority and minority staff members in the House and Senate subcommittees on education and appropriations were interviewed. The first interview was conducted by phone. During this interview, staff members were asked to identify groups and their lobbyists. During the second interview, conducted in staff offices in 1996, data were gathered about recent changes in influence strategies. The third interview, conducted in congressional offices in 1999, concerned continuing changes in the groups' influence behavior.

Overall, 24 hours of interview tapes were transcribed for this research. Document analysis triangulated the interview data. Approximately 400 newspaper articles, press releases, and organization publications were analyzed during the course of this study to check and expand on interview responses.

THE EFFECT OF THE 1994 ELECTIONS ON INFLUENCE TACTICS

Schlozman and Tierney (1986) listed 27 influence tactics used by interest groups (see Table 1). This list was used both in forming the questions for the interviews of each group's lobbyist and in coding the interview transcripts and documents. The discussion of influence tactics that follows will be divided into two broad categories: techniques requiring access to decision makers and techniques not requiring access. Representative examples of the findings will be given. In all cases, multiple instances were found unless otherwise noted.

Table 1
Techniques of Exercising Influence

Tactics Requiring Access	*Nonaccess-Requiring Tactics*
Testifying at hearings	Presenting research results
Contacting officials directly	Sending letters to members
Engaging in informal contact	Entering into coalitions
Shaping implementation of policies	Talking with the media
Planning legislative strategy with officials	Inspiring letter writing
Drafting legislation	Mounting grassroots lobbying
Drafting regulations, rules, and so forth	Members contact officials
Serving on commissions	Filing suit
Doing favors for officials	Making election contributions
Influencing appointments	Publicizing voting records
Shaping the agenda	Direct-mail fund raising
	Running advertisements
	Working on election campaigns
	Publicly endorsing candidates
	Engaging in protests
	Showing effects of a bill

Source. Schlozman and Tierney, 1983.

Influence Tactics Requiring Access

The groups in this study regularly met with legislators before the 1994 election. They testified at hearings on education issues, drafted legislation, met formally and informally with Congress members, planned strategy, and enjoyed insider status. Nicholas Penning (1996) of AASA characterized his lobbying prior to the elections: "I worked with the lobbyists from the NEA, from the AFT, and National School Boards, and the four of us would go around. We would be in touch with members" (personal communication, May 13, 1996).

According to a Democratic staffer, the midterm elections of 1994 "[m]ade it much more difficult for the groups. Access was a problem. They felt very, very lost. They didn't know where the train was going because it was a different train and a different track."

Even when these groups did gain some access to members of Congress, the experience was not positive. The AASA was the only group in this study that gave testimony during the 104th congressional session. An AASA member testified before a committee on education appropriations for Fiscal Year 1997 (FY97). He was chosen because he represented a district that received no federal funds. The Republicans concluded that he would be sympathetic to their reductions. When he spoke about the need for increased federal funding,

the chairman of the committee, who was his representative, gave him a stern lecture about how money was not the solution to the problems of education and that studies supported this position (Penning personal communication, May 13, 1996).

Despite their access problems, all of the groups stated that they continued to try to influence legislation by direct lobbying. This was confirmed by a Democratic education staffer: "They still visit as often and do direct lobbying as often." When Rebecca Isaaks of PAW was asked what her organization did to influence legislation after the election, she stated,

> We educate people on the Hill. We try and get groups that would be able to get to certain members to get to them. Whatever they need to hear, who they need to hear from, we try to get them. We develop materials, we do briefings, we develop strategy with legislators—we do all kinds of stuff. (personal communication, April 29, 1996)

Grassroots Tactics

Prior to the 1994 elections, these interest groups infrequently used nonaccess-requiring techniques. Gradually, after the election, the organizations realized the necessity of initiating these actions. When a PAW representative was questioned about grassroots tactics, she stated, "It's something that we really should do and we want to be doing more of. We're trying to start; we do a number of reports. We're trying to put action kits in them to try and give people an idea."

Use of the Media

Each group felt it had a positive relationship with the media prior to the election. A Republican staffer concurred, "The NEA [particularly] is pretty savvy in terms of their ability to get a message out." Following the election, the media was not perceived to have changed. Isaaks concluded, "I think the media still wants to know what's going on with some of this stuff. I think they call around. We get a fair number of calls" (personal communication, April 29, 1996).

This perception is probably inaccurate. Efforts by the Committee for Education Funding (CEF), a coalition of 90 organizations, represent the discrepancy between the groups' perceptions and the actual coverage they received. During the fight over the education budget cuts for FY97, the CEF attempted to get press coverage twice. In its first attempt, it held a press conference that attracted only the educational media.

For its second attempt, the coalition hired a public relations firm. The CEF planned a national education bake sale in front of the Capitol. Committee members also delivered one cookie to each legislator. Attached to the cookie

was a note that said educators would need to sell one million cookies at $1 million each to expiate the proposed funding cuts. Each group concluded during interviews that it was a huge success. All the major television networks were there, radio people were there, and press people from all the major newspapers and major news services were also there. However, the event yielded only a photo story in *The Washington Post* and a photo, but no story, in *The New York Times*. None of the television stations, none of the radio stations, and none of the other newspapers covered the story.

Mobilizing Members

Only PAW and the NEA had any member mobilization network in place prior to the 1994 election. The network for the NEA was loosely organized, at best. Dale Lestina (personal communication, October 13, 1996) described it as follows:

> Our members are scattered as the population is scattered, so we run about 5,000 members per congressional district and many of those members are politically active, and so they work in a campaign, either for or against someone and involved with that kind of thing. We have the computer, we have the telephone lines, we have updates we provide them—all those kinds of things.

The mobilization network of PAW was more structured than that of the NEA, as described by Lestina. PAW used volunteers in a program called Action Activists. These activists participated in phone banks, wrote letters to the editor, and visited their elected representatives. (personal communication, October 13, 1996)

Despite their delay in taking action following the 1994 election, every group began or intensified member mobilization techniques during the 104th congressional session. The AASA set up a phone bank. Their lobbyist, Nicholas Penning, explained.

> The biggest thing that [we] did was contact people directly by telephone, like a phone call you'd receive, "Would you like to receive *Newsweek*?" But they were calls, instead about education. "Do you consider education a national priority?" And, if the person did, going a step further, "Would you be willing to talk to your member of Congress in their office right now and give them a message not to cut education?" Well, it turned out they got 40% of these cold calls willing to take the patch through to the member's office. (personal communication, May 13, 1996)

AASA randomly called people in key congressional districts and got 200 calls a week into member's offices; at the peak it was 200 calls a day. Although AASA did not approach the numbers that the Christian Coalition

and other grassroots savvy groups had been able to generate, it became confident that the American public cared about education. The excited group began to try other techniques.

PAW increased its number of activists, and the PTA began using its chapters to gather information on the effect of spending cuts. The NEA began providing more structure to its activities. And, each group began training their members on lobbying strategy either in the form of seminars or in action kits. In 1995, PAW held activist training in 10 states for the first time.

THE CONTINUING EFFECT OF THE 1994 ELECTIONS: INFLUENCE IN 1999

Influence Tactics Requiring Access

By 1998, access for these groups had marginally improved, but it was no longer the primary focus of their influence efforts. As Penning of AASA explained, "Even people with whom we worked with before, when they were in the minority, now they're the majority, are difficult to work with" (personal communication, May 13, 1996).

As a result of the difficulty, Bruce Hunter of AASA related that his group had significantly reduced the number of trips they made to Capitol Hill. Access to Congress members played a minor roll in their influence strategy.

Each group had reduced the importance of access in its influence strategy by 1999. Only the PTA and the NEA indicated that they had been involved in drafting legislation or amendments. Maribeth Oakes (personal communication, May 27, 1999) of the PTA expressed that their efforts drafting legislation had led to very little success, and more often than not, they were asked to respond to previously drafted bills. And, only the NEA representative spoke of testifying at congressional hearings during the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization process.

Although all of the groups had decreased their use of access by 1999, they all had begun using quasi-access tactics. Quasi-access tactics involve using members, rather than lobbyists, to visit and make contact with congressional members and staff. For example, the PTA began a member-to-member program in 1998 (Oakes, personal communication, May 27, 1999) and AASA created a legislative corps during the same period (Hunter, personal communication, May 27, 1999). In each case, the association pairs at least one of its members with each member of Congress. The association members are responsible for making continuous contact with their congressional member, visiting them at home and in Washington, and informing them of their positions on upcoming legislation. Maribeth Oakes of the PTA explained, "We

often send our members on these visits because they can get in where we [lobbyists] can not" (personal communication, May 27, 1999).

Grassroots Tactics

Each of these groups had shifted their influence strategy to focus on grassroots efforts by 1999. This shift required a number of changes in organizational structure to support mobilization efforts. For example, the AASA reduced the number of staff members working in Washington (Hunter, personal communication, May 27, 1999). PAW developed a Field Department to provide mobilization assistance to members (People For the American Way, 2000). The NEA's Committee on Legislation held regional hearings to discuss legislative issues (National Education Association, 2000). And, the PTA both narrowed the issues that the organization tries to influence and strengthened the relationship between the national association and the state and local affiliates (Oakes, personal communication, May 27, 1999).

These organizational changes enabled the groups to quickly activate their members. It has also allowed their members to make their policy preferences clearer to the associations. For example, Maribeth Oakes of the PTA related how a member in Florida had e-mailed the legislative office information about that state's voucher plan. The PTA then used the information the member had provided to focus their stance on national voucher proposals (personal communication, May 27, 1999).

Use of the Media

The groups' use of the media had also changed by 1999. All the groups reported that media coverage of educational issues had increased in recent years. A Democratic staffer concurred by stating,

> There is a lot more coverage, and it is often excessive. We get a lot of coverage of education but there is little result of that coverage. There is still only 2% of the federal budget spent on education, but it gets about 25% of all legislation coverage.

By 1999, the groups shifted their perception of the media. The media was no longer viewed as an influence tactic but was another entity in the legislative process. Group representatives felt that the media often drew attention to issues that they would not have focused on. For example, each of the groups mentioned the Educational Flexibility legislation as being media driven. The bill was a block grant proposal that most thought would not get much attention given the upcoming Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization (personal communication with Democratic Staffer C, 1996/1999). A story appeared in *USA Today* touting the flexibility it would give states (Hunter,

1999). This coverage generated further media coverage and drew the attention of legislators. As a result, most groups were forced to mount an attack against the bill. Bruce Hunter of AASA concluded, "The media often causes us to have to respond to issues off our message" (personal communication, May 27, 1999).

Mobilizing Members

In 1999, all of the groups in the study had significant initiatives to mobilize members. All were extensively using the World Wide Web to maintain contact, provide information, and engage members in the legislative process. The NEA initiated Cyber Lobbyists and PAW began their online Activist Network. In both instances, association members sign up online to participate. Once enrolled, members receive e-mails that alert them to needed action. The e-mails give the members information about legislation, how to contact their legislator, and the association's positions on issues (National Education Association, 2000; People For the American Way, 2000). Each group maintains legislative status information, its policy positions, and congressional contact information on the association Web site.

Along with these online efforts, the groups have increased the number of advocacy training workshops. They have also expanded their legislative conferences to involve more of their membership. In addition, the PTA and PAW provide their members with written guides on various influence strategies. For example, the PTA provides a guide to writing op-ed pieces on legislative issues (Oakes, personal communication, May 27, 1999).

Both the PTA and AASA have undertaken initiatives that have an educative component. Nick Penning (2000b) of AASA mobilized his members to invite legislators to visit their schools. During the visit, the members illustrated for the congressional delegates how federal programs operate in the schools. The purpose was to educate the legislators about how federal programs work and the effects they have on children. The PTA has created a series of discussion groups at the local level. These groups meet concerning legislative issues, and the PTA provides staff support for these local efforts.

In addition, each group has asked members to write letters, call their representatives, and send postcards when legislation is coming to a vote. There are conflicting perspectives on the effect of these efforts. The association representatives generally felt these efforts yield positive results. They believe that it demonstrates the commitment of their members to the legislative process and reminds the legislators that their members are electoral constituents.

Democrat staffers felt these efforts were important, especially for influencing floor votes. One staffer (Democrat A, 1996/1999) stated, "It's so important that sometimes we'll initiate the effort. One of us will call up an

organization and say, 'We need your organization to have its members send letters and call about this.' " The Republican staffers were less supportive of these efforts. One staffer indicated, "Calling and flooding the switchboard just makes us mad." Another claimed that the letters are often "off target." And, a third stafferclaimed that kind of mail does not get read. Regardless of whether the tactic influences the legislative process, all the groups and all the staffers agree that the groups have achieved tremendous response to their requests.

DISCUSSION

Prior to the 1994 congressional elections, the education interest groups in this study influenced legislation using tactics consistent with Olson's (1965) by-product theory of interest groups. In each case, they relied heavily on lobbyists and direct access to legislators. Their influence strategy did not depend on the participation of their membership to reach its objectives.

Following the 1994 elections, each group expanded its use of nonaccess, requiring grassroots mobilization tactics. Because the groups were denied access to the legislative process, they increasingly turned to their membership for participation. Olson's (1965) by-product theory would have predicted that this change in focus would require coercion of members to participate, and with time would diminished organizational membership.

However, Olson's (1965) by-product theory holds little explanatory value for the educational interest groups in this study. In each organization, membership has increased or remained constant since the 1994 elections (see Table 2). Furthermore, group representatives feel that the shift in tactics has generated greater influence in the legislative process. For example, Nick Penning of AASA believes that a Medicaid reimbursement regulation was changed because of the participation of his members. His organization sent out an action alert to its members. The members contacted their House representatives, and 24 hours later an amendment was added to an appropriations bill that required the Health Care Financing Administration to either "substantially revise or abandon the current draft" regulations (Penning, 2000a). This kind of legislative success had been unachievable in the past and "every education group in D.C. said we were stuck with the guidelines, that nothing could be done" (Penning, 2000a).

The groups' representatives also indicate that the shift to grassroots mobilization provides another incentive for membership. For example, Bruce Hunter at AASA commented, "Our members want and need to feel influential" (personal communication, May 27, 1999). Maribeth Oakes stated that her members might initially join their local PTA because they want benefits for their own child but, "Once they become members [of the national

Table 2
Changes in Membership Between 1994 and 1999

	1994 Membership	*1999 Membership*
American Association of School Administrators	14,000	17,000
National Education Association	2,000,000	2,500,000
People for the American Way	300,000	300,000
Parent Teacher Association	6,000,000	6,500,000

organization] their concern becomes more global to include concern for the education of all children" (personal communication, May 27, 1999).

These groups' members participate in politics regardless of personal gain. This finding is consistent with other work that has attempted to empirically validate Olson's (1965) theory. Marsh (1976, 1978), Tillock and Morrison (1979), Mitchell (1979), and Moe (1980) studied Olson's (1965) model of collective action. In each study, the authors found that members of interest groups placed a greater value on collective goods than the model would have predicted.

To overcome the inadequacies of Olson's (1965) model, rational choice theorists have been forced to rely on other conceptions of benefit that include, for example, solidarity and "public regarding" (Goldstein, 1999). Olson himself toyed with the idea of expanding incentives to include such things as solidarity and psychic rewards but ultimately rejected the idea.[5] Expanding self-interest to include personal satisfaction from altruistic acts would make the theory nonfalsifiable (Sabatier, 1992). Any action would be considered self-interested, and any benefit would then be selective.

Olson's (1965) model, which assumes self-interest, is much too simple to explain the legislative context and educational interest group influence that has occurred since 1994. Beyond its inability to explain the groups' success at mobilizing members while maintaining their membership, Olson's model fails to account for the relationship between government entities and interest groups. Interest group reliance on access-requiring techniques prior to 1994 was more likely due to the relationship between the interest groups and powerful legislators than it was to the self-interest of their members.

Governmental entities are not passive reflectors of interest group demands. Theorists interested in the role of the state have long argued that a self-interest explanation of group formation and mobilization is incomplete (Skocpol, 1985; Wilson, 1990). "The timing and characteristics of state intervention [affect] not only organizational tactics and strategies [but] the content and definition of interest itself" (Berger as cited in Skocpol, 1985, p. 23).

Table 3
Possible Levels of Member Commitment and Political Participation

Type of Member	*Main Characteristics of Participation*
Potential members	Nonmembers with a common interest in the group's mission but unwilling, for any number of reasons, to join the organization
Joiners	Members of the organization but unwilling to support its endeavors in any active way
Particular participants	Members who participate in the political activities of the group but only on particular issues
Passive participants	Members who engage in the political activities of the group only in response to organizational requests
Member activists	Members who are willing to initiate political action

As a result, the structure and apparatus of the interest group system are very much a function of the organization of the state at any given period in its development.

Commitment theory may offer an explanation for the influence activities of education interest groups. Commitment theory, a still-developing body of work originating in research on political parties, contends that people join an interest group because they believe in the group's mission. Members become involved in the group's attempts to influence legislation because they are committed to the group's ideals. The theory's basic premise is the high degree of time, energy, and resources needed for involvement in group activities stems from "beliefs about good policy" (Sabatier & McLaughlin, 1990). Expected collective benefits arising from a group's political activities are then critical to political participation. Only those individuals who have buttressed self-interest with ideological incentives will be sufficiently committed to join the group and then become politically involved (Sabatier, 1992).

Commitment theory expects increasing degrees of commitment to collective benefits as one moves from the potential members of a group to its members and then to its activist members (Sabatier, 1992). In the education interest groups involved in this study, we may, with further research, be able to differentiate between potential members, joiners, particular participants, passive participants, and member activists (see Table 3).[6] Then, if commitment theory has adequate explanatory value for education interest groups, the shift to grassroots influence tactics by the groups in this study may enhance organizational maintenance by providing members outlets for participation that match their varying levels of commitment.

Although theories of the state and commitment may have greater explanatory value for education interest groups, none of the theories discussed here can account for the role the media played in legislative activity during the

course of the study. In previous work on interest group influence, the media was treated as a tactic to be used by groups. In this research, none of the interest groups was able to use the media in a deliberate manner. Yet, interviews with congressional staffers indicated that media coverage plays a significant role in the legislative outcome.

The press was perceived to be acting independently of interest group influence. In *The Roar of the Crowd* (1993), Michael O'Neill suggests that the press can act either as another interest group, with their own agenda, or as a reflection of general public opinion. In either case, the role the press plays in influencing public policy at the federal level deserves more attention.

NOTES

1. Interest groups go by many names—special interests, vested interests, pressure groups, organized interests, political groups, the lobby, and public interest groups. In practice, the value of classifying interest groups depends on the reason for studying them. Those concerned with the interest groups' effect on government will find such a categorization less useful. The process of influence is one that differs from situation to situation. This study is not concerned, therefore, only with interest groups qua interest groups. Its aim is to analyze interest group behavior in the broad context of political change.

For present purposes then, *interest group* is defined as an organization that translates social power into political power. Social power refers to citizens or gestures that symbolically represent citizens. Political power is equated to legislative action. Therefore, the definition of interest group used in this research is directly tied to the purpose by its focus on action. Interest groups are organizations that use citizens or gestures that represent citizens, such as letters of support or lobbyists representing members, to defend or promote legislation. Their influence or success is determined by the group's use of social power or their ability to pass, or keep others from passing, legislation.

2. See, for example, Anderson & Tollison, 1988; Barro, 1973; Becker, 1985; Downs, 1957; Mitchell & Munger, 1991; Olson, 1965; and Piguo, 1928.

3. For Olson, a group is considered small "where each member gets a substantial proportion of the total gain [of the good] simply because there are few others in the group" (1965, p. 34).

4. Olson (1965), in *The Logic of Collective Action*, never used the term *free-rider*, although free-riding is often associated with this work. The nearest Olson comes to the concept of free-riding is the following:

> Once a small member has the amount of the collective good he gets free from the largest member, he has more than he would have purchased for himself, and has no incentive to obtain any collective good at his own expense. (1965, p. 35).

5. See Olson, 1965, p. 61, note 17.

6. The categories suggested here are based loosely on Verba and Nie's (1972) levels of participation in the electorate.

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