

## **PART IV: CONCLUSION**

### **Chapter 9: Interest Groups Are Strategic Players in the U.S. Congress**

This project has contributed to our understanding of interest group behavior in the U.S. Congress, and fills a theoretical gap in the interest group literature, by including interest groups as players in the traditional spatial model of legislative choice. In this *spatial model of interest group choice*, interest groups respond to a legislative environment by selecting lobbying strategies in an attempt to affect the legislative policy space in three possible ways. First, they can seek to change the policy preferences of members of Congress and, in effect, move the median voter position of the House floor or legislative committee of jurisdiction. Second, they can try to emphasize a different axis of debate, thereby changing the (relevant) dimensionality of the policy space. Third, groups can endeavor to affect the docket on which a bill exists by offering manipulations to the rules that govern how a bill is considered. Using the assumptions of the spatial model, I derive six general propositions that describe the policy (spatial) circumstances in which groups should be expected to be engaged in each of the three strategy types. The model is based on the assumption that interest groups are strategic actors in legislative policy making; they have an interest in policy outcomes and therefore attempt to manipulate the formation of policies.

The primary contribution this project makes to our understanding of interest groups and Congress is the theoretical approach offered in the second chapter. This project constitutes a first step in understanding both how interest groups attempt to manipulate the legislative policy space *and* how the nature of this strategic space affects a group's lobbying choices. The existing interest group literature concentrates on the *tactics* of lobbying (protests, informational lobbying, counteractive lobbying, campaign contributions, etc). However, in order to develop a true theory of interest group participation in legislative outcomes we must be able to describe these tactics as components of a *strategy*. The spatial model of legislative choice greatly advanced the congressional sub-field of political science by providing rigorous and systematic models of legislators and how they arrive at policy outcomes. Including interest groups in this model fills a theoretical cap in the interest group and congressional literatures because it provides a means of connecting tactics to strategies. Theoreticians can model strategies, but not tactics. The challenge, or course, is that strategies are difficult to measure, as I have shown in this project. Difficulty of measurement, however, should not prevent scientists from developing good theory. The challenges of developing good empirical design to test theories are not unique to the study of interest groups. Given that this project is the first such attempt to include interest groups as legislative players in the spatial legislative game, it provides both answers and questions. It also provides the necessary base from which to begin to better understand how interest groups strategically interact in the legislative policy making process.

In order to test the propositions derived from the spatial model, I must gauge them indirectly. I do not observe interest groups engaged in a particular strategy; rather I observe them engaged in a particular tactic that can possibly be considered an example of multiple strategies. I propose that the spatial representation of the policy space suggests that interest groups engage in a cost-benefits analysis of action that allows them to determine when, and under what circumstances, they should engage in a lobbying *tactic*. There are legislative costs associated with action that I break down into four categories in Chapter 3: those costs associated with the nature of the issue, the nature of the policy preferences of members of Congress, the nature of the procedural context, and the nature of the bicameral context. I use relevant literature

to outline whether interest groups should incur more or fewer costs when engaging in these three strategies types, under these various conditions. Groups also include an assessment of their resources in a determination about the costs and benefits of taking lobbying action.

In general, some groups are equipped to afford more costly action and others are not. The literature is straightforward about the characteristics that endow groups to be prepared to engage in insider or outsider tactics; however, it is difficult to apply this literature to my tripartite classification of group strategies. Using the leverage of the literature on interest group resources, in Chapter 4 I derive predictions about how groups' organizational characteristics make the three strategy types more or less expensive. Finally, I show that a group makes a decision about whether or not to act based on the benefits and costs of action. The benefits of action are derived from the level of priority a group assigns to the policy. The costs are determined by the spatial representation of the legislative context, characteristics of that context, and the types of resources groups can afford to expend toward action.

The theoretical portion of the project is more persuasive than the empirical portion. With respect to the hypotheses in Chapter 5, I find meager empirical support from the specifics of the probit models. Of the legislative context variables, the variable *new issue* performs consistently, significantly, and in the expected direction across multiple models. For other variables that measure the legislative costs of action, I find mixed results, some of which do not support the hypotheses in Chapter 5. Some of the group resource variables perform more consistently and as expected across models, providing more support for the hypotheses from an organizational capacity standpoint. Thus, my results are consistent with prior literature; even with a few surprises, such as the lack of robustness on the *budget* variable. This result is not, however, inconsistent with other work. Rather, I conclude that overall budget size is not predictive of a group's specific activities; it is the means by which a group allocates their budget that helps determine their legislative activities.

In general, the results from the empirical models are somewhat encouraging. The disconnect that exists between the theoretical approach and empirical design prevents me from drawing conclusions on whether or not to reject the hypotheses. The lack of support for the three hypotheses in Chapter 5 suggests that the hypotheses should be rejected; however the tenuous relations between the hypotheses and empirical probit models prevent me from making this conclusion. For example, hypothesis one in section 5.4 states that as the costs associated with preference-changing tactics increase, an interest group is less likely to use a preference-changing tactic. I have expectations about signs on coefficients for explanatory variables in terms of preference-changing activities; yet, I do not have a single model that tests an activity *solely* as a preference-changing activity. Seventeen of 21 individual probit models include a tactic that *could* be considered preference-changing; however, because I do not know whether a given activity is *actually* preference changing, the inference between the expected sign on coefficients and the dependent variable is weak. This uncertain inferential connection disallows me from concretely rejecting or not rejecting the hypotheses in Chapter 5.

Yet recall that rather than rejecting or not rejecting hypotheses about *strategies*, the substantive conclusions arise from the inferences I can make about *tactics*. When referring to tactics, the results in the probit models are robust. Every significant coefficient is a substantive conclusion about the probability of groups engaging in a specific activity. For example, groups are more likely to make financial contributions and use grassroots strategies when the President has threatened a veto. Substantive conclusions such as these inform our understanding of how interest groups participate in the legislative process.

It is difficult to directly test this spatial model of interest group choice. While scholars have developed means of spatially representing the preferences of members of Congress (see Krehbiel 1988), it is unclear how to do so for interest groups. Typically, numeric representations of members' preferences are based on interest group scores; however, it would be difficult to develop a reliable, valid measure to represent the policy preferences of interest groups without violating rules of endogeneity. Thus, rather than directly test the spatial model of interest choice presented in Chapter 2, I develop a positive model of interest group behavior based on groups' assessments of the costs and benefits of taking lobbying action. The model is useful because it offers a precise calculus of interest group decision making; however, there are disadvantages to the model as well. In the following paragraphs, I outline two important suggestions for improvement in future studies: expanding the theoretical scope of evaluation and expanding the empirical methods of measurement.

First, let us consider expanding the theoretical scope of evaluation. I make the argument that one can determine the probability of group engagement in a tactic by an understanding of the costs, without the benefits. In Chapter 5 I argue that the probability of a group using a tactic decreases as the cost of action decrease, all else being equal. This theoretic approach helps me produce the research design and empirical model in chapters seven and eight; however, results show that it may be the case that a group will decide to take some action based on an assessment of *benefits*, regardless of costs. In other words, even if the costs are high, if the benefits are *so* high that they outweigh the costs, my theoretical model would predict the wrong outcome. This may be what I observed in the case of HR4444, where groups determined PNTR to be of such great importance that the costs of action did not deter their lobbying activity. Had I produced a theoretical model that accounted for the level of benefits in relation to the level of costs, I might have predicted that groups could still determine that action on a bill is prudent even when costs are high (given higher benefits). In future studies of interest groups and Congress, it would be therefore valuable to develop the theoretical model further, to include an assessment of benefits *and* costs. And expanded theory, as such, would capture the empirical realities of cases such as HR4444.

Second, consider expanding the empirical methods of measurement. I make the theoretical argument that groups engage in three types of strategies; however, I only measure groups' participation in individual tactics. In Chapter 6 I point out the behavioral equivalence problem that this poses. Specifically, a group can protest, but without knowledge of the *intent* or message of the protest, I do not know whether the group is engaged in a preference-changing strategy or a dimensional-changing strategy. Therefore, the empirical portion of this project would be advantaged by a method that allowed one to capture the intent of group action. There are two possible ways to do this: subjectively or objectively. From a subjective standpoint, one could ask a group what it was trying to accomplish with each tactic it used. An experienced interviewer might be able to tease out of a group which strategic objective it wanted to achieve. My experience, however, leads me to believe this might be an impossible task; there is no evidence that groups think of their actions as overtly strategic. They do not necessarily consciously consider that they want to change a member's policy preference, change the emphasis of debate, or alter a docket. To attempt to impose this on an interest group in an interview might taint the interviewee's recollection of his behavior. Rather, from an objective standpoint, one might ask groups about the specific message they were attempting to convey and the intended audience of the message. A series of questions that explore a group's specific message with a specific tactic might allow one to determine which of the three strategies a group

was engaged in. Alternatively, a more controlled, but potentially less externally valid means of testing, is to design experiments or simulations to directly test the propositions in Chapter 2. Such an approach avoids the behavioral equivalence problem of mapping tactics onto strategies. This is one means of future research on the question of group strategies.

In conclusion, this project contributes to our understanding of how interest groups strategically interact in the legislative policy making game of the U.S. Congress. The theory described in Chapter 2 provides a foundation for future work on interest groups and their role in the legislative process. The empirical portion of the project supports the overall claim that interest groups engage in broad strategic action and select individual tactics based on an analysis of the costs and benefits of some action toward a policy. The general theoretical approach described in this research is supported by the case studies in Chapter 6, and supported weakly by the empirical results in Chapter 8. The empirical results suggest that groups engage in some preference-changing tactics, but the overall inferential link between group *tactics* and group *strategies* has been difficult to conclusively draw. Future studies on interest group activity in Congress should be informed by this research and develop methods to overcome the behavioral equivalence challenges of interest group activity.