

Public Interest Groups in France and the United States

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This article compares the strength, history, and characteristics of public interest groups in the United States and France. French and American public interest groups differ dramatically in their resources, popular support, and in their relations with state agencies. French groups, dependent on a more powerful central state bureaucracy, are often able to achieve their goals by having them adopted by state elites. American organizations, faced with a more diffuse public sector, seek broader access and use a greater diversity of means of influence. They are often less influential, but paradoxically are stronger organizationally because they are forced to be independent from the state. The differing relations with the state explain the different tactics and organizational maintenance strategies pursued by public interest groups in the two countries. Tight links bind the development of a nation's interest-group system with that of its constitutional structures. An explanation of a national interest-group system must include consideration of the institutional context within which it operates.

THE PARADOX OF LOBBYING FOR THE PUBLIC INTEREST

This article compares public interest groups in France and the United States, focusing on their relations with state agencies. Public interest groups in France and the United States share many characteristics, in particular their symbiotic relations with state agencies. These relations constitute a promise for influence and survival on the one hand, but a recipe for decline and capture on the other. French groups have been more successful in achieving close relations and support from sympathetic state agencies than American groups. However, their symbiotic relations with government sponsors have paradoxically hindered the growth and strength of many French organizations supporting public interest goals. American groups have by no means eschewed close relations with government agencies. However, the diversity of state structures in the United States and the greater range of private sources for support have allowed the American groups to maintain a greater independence from their state sponsors. Paradoxically, the inability of American public interest groups to achieve their goals through state sponsorship has left them in a stronger position in the long run.

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Interest groups do not exist in a constitutional vacuum. On the contrary, the structure and functions of state agencies in a country have profound effects on the development of interest groups designed to work to influence those agencies. French and American public interest groups have contrasting strengths and weaknesses because of the different constitutional contexts within which they operate. This article shows how closely national systems of interest-group representation are tied to broader cultural and constitutional issues. In a previous article with Jack Walker (Baumgartner and Walker 1989) I argued that one could not understand the interest-group environment in the area of education without understanding the efforts (and the difficulties) of the French and American governments to foster the growth of national interest groups. Both state efforts and social contexts were shown to be important in explaining the development of the different interest-group environments in that comparison. More broadly, Graham Wilson (1990) has argued for greater attention to the ways in which states affect national interest-group systems. Norms of official recognition, practical requirements of dealing with centralized and powerful bureaucracies, and other elements of constitutional design and historical practice make clear that one should not expect interest groups to develop similarly in two countries, especially with states as diverse as the United States and France. This is in spite of great similarities in the goals of the various groups concerned, as will be shown in the pages to follow. Clearly, as Wilson writes (1990, especially chapter 5), a complete understanding of the development of a national interest-group system can only come when the nature of the state with which it deals is also considered. This article attempts to add to our understanding of how national interest-group systems develop. It points to historical and cultural factors on the one hand, and to issues of constitutional design on the other as it builds an explanation of how public interest groups differ in the United States and France.

Public interest groups differ from other types of interest groups in an important philosophical way, especially as they are considered in the French political tradition. To a much greater degree than in the United States, French tradition holds the state to be the principal guarantor of the public interest and views with suspicion the transmission of any particular demands. This view is expressed especially by thinkers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu, and finds its way into French constitutional preambles and the training of all state officials. In a country where interest groups and professional associations of all types were outlawed by the *loi Le Chapelier* (1791) and remained so until they were explicitly recognized under the law on associations of 1901, the very need for a "public interest group" is questioned by many. Powerful state agencies are charged with insuring that particular interests be rebuffed and that the national interest be at all times paramount.

Since the time of Colbert, the central state has been considered to be the constitutional embodiment of the national interest, with all other

actors, be they private citizens, corporations, interest groups, even local governments, considered to be partial, or special, interests. Only the state, represented in particular by the members of the *grands corps* of civil servants serving in the major ministries, represents the national interest; all others are partial interests and therefore not endowed with the same philosophical legitimacy. This view of the state as the sole guarantor of the national interest has an important impact on the potential roles of public interest groups in France. If they are truly representative of the public interest, then the state itself should be their strongest ally, or should even take over their activities. Groups acting outside the purview of the state are, by definition in the French view, acting according to their own partial interests, never the national interest. In the French philosophical tradition, too much criticism of the state by a public interest group can cause that group to lose its special legitimacy that comes from representing public interest goals. Anything but close relations with state agencies calls into question the true nature of the goals of supposed public interest groups.

The view of the state as the sole legitimate representative of the national interest is in some ways identical in any representative democracy, but it is not taken as seriously by American government officials or constitutional scholars. The weakness of American executive agencies, the permeability and influence of the legislative branch, the activity of the judicial branch, and the strengths of state and local governments all conspire to give credence to those who might argue that non-governmental groups must be active in pressuring the government to resist particular interests and to support the public interest. These different philosophical starting points are important conditioning factors on the relative roles of public interest groups in the two countries. American public interest groups have no doubt about their role. They must pressure the government to resist the demands of others. They have no qualms about their involvement in the interest-group system, even as they ask the government to intervene often on their behalf. French groups, on the other hand, often think that their goals should rightfully be those of certain state agencies, and officials in those agencies often agree. The strong tradition of government action to protect the public interest in France paradoxically renders illegitimate all those outside of government who claim to speak for the public interest, since the state is assumed to do so already.

Whatever the roles of public interest groups in the two countries, it is clear that groups claiming to promote the public interest in either country are in a different position from those groups promoting only private interests. Many have written about the relations between state and groups in each country, but these relations may be different, and more cooperative, when we focus as here only on public interest groups. State officials may actively resist the efforts of private interests, but their relations with public interest groups are likely to be considerably more complex.

As this article shows, in both the United States and France one can

observe a virtual merging of state and nonprofit organizations. Once groups become universally recognized as serving a public interest purpose, there is no reason for state agencies to oppose their work. Indeed, nonprofit agencies are often used by the state in the provision of social services, working as virtual extensions of public bureaucracies. These relations are often so close that they make it difficult even to use traditional notions of lobbying and influence. There are certain similarities in the relations between public interest groups and the state in each country. However, there are important differences as well. The two countries show a number of contrasts due to the number, wealth, and nature of the public interest groups active in national policymaking and due to the organization of the state agencies with which they deal. Further, the different conceptions of the role of the state in the two countries cause the expected activities of public interest groups to differ.

American groups are at their most legitimate when they act independently from the government, when they protest against government policies assumed to be taken in response to private pressures. As American groups become too closely associated with any particular government policies or agencies, they lose their special legitimacy. In France, by contrast, public interest groups are at their most legitimate when they are working closely with government agencies or when they argue in favor of certain government programs assumed to be designed with the public interest in mind. As French groups become hostile to the government, or too distant from the state, they lose their reputation for being truly "public interest" groups and are seen more as mundane lobby organizations. In the following sections, I describe the public interest movement in each country, showing how public interest groups differ from private interest groups, and discussing the similarities and differences across the two countries.

PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS AND THE STATE

The Legitimacy of Interest-Group Actions

Many writers have noted the mistrust, if not the disdain, for interest groups in French policymaking circles. There is no question that Americans view interest-group activity as a more legitimate means of pressing demands on government than do the French. However, there are important nuances to the official reaction to interest groups in France. Paradoxically, the French view of interest groups is so negative that many of the most powerful interest groups, those that are most closely tied in with government officials, are not considered to be "interest groups" at all. Kolodziej (1987) describes the relations between defense officials and those in the military contracting industries in terms that clarify that relations are every bit as close in France as in any military-industrial complex. Similarly, Suleiman (1974) points out how French officials dis-

tinguish between those groups that are "serious" and those "outside" groups that the officials hope to ignore. In discussing "pressure groups," French government officials often have in mind all those groups with whom they disagree, or with whom they have poor relations. Legitimate groups, called "serious" groups by Suleiman, are those that play a part in the normal process of policymaking (see Wilson 1987; Keeler 1987). During the long period of economic growth following World War Two, while successive governments were dominated by conservative parties, major economic groups were routinely involved in many details of policymaking. "Interest groups" were those on the outside complaining about the results.

Observers since Tocqueville have pointed out the greater legitimacy of outside interest groups in the United States. There are many reasons for these differences, but one of the most important is the divided institutional structure of the American government. In French policymaking circles, single state agencies are much more likely to act independently or to be at the center of power relations than in the United States where many agencies, levels of government, and legislative actors are more likely to be involved (Aberbach et al. 1981). The permeability of the American system allows greater interest-group access, whereas the French arrangement allows much greater efficiency and power.

The greater power of French policymakers to limit and to choose their interlocutors means that there is a great incentive to be perceived as a "legitimate" or as a "serious" interest, as Suleiman describes. Government officials in France may make every effort to work closely with and help those private economic interests whose health is important to that of the French economy, and who are considered to be "serious" organizations. However, even this level of aid can be surpassed if a group can achieve the status of a public interest organization. For in that case, the proper role of the state agency is not simply to facilitate the action of the group, but indeed to take it over.

There are many groups in French society that have effectively convinced others that their goals are so much in the public interest that the state has all but adopted them as its own. Gilpin (1968) discusses the national consensus on the importance of scientific research, giving an excellent example of how private interests often become identified with the public interest in important areas of the economy. Baumgartner and Wilsford (1994) have shown that these relations remain important into the 1990s. State support for scientific research in France, as a proportion of total research funding, remains very high by international standards. State elites consider it their job to foster those policies deemed to be in the national interest, so many benefits accrue to those who are seen to further these goals. Other examples of important national programs seen in France to be simple extensions of the national interest include cultural activities (public art, theater organizations, music, even cartoons, all of which are heavily subsidized by the ministry of culture), youth recreation

and educational associations (similarly subsidized in a variety of ways), the civilian nuclear power program (seen as a necessity since the oil embargo of the 1970s, but much more controversial in other similarly situated countries), even many large-scale commercial operations (such as the Airbus commercial airliners and the Ariane space program, seen as guarantors of national prestige, but also of international economic competitiveness (Bériot 1985; Baumgartner 1989; Baumgartner and Wilsford 1994).

Americans consider interest groups to play an important part in all policymaking questions; this is taken for granted. French policymakers, on the other hand, are more likely to distinguish between two types of groups: the good groups, that should be promoted and helped, and the bad groups, that should be ignored as mere representatives of partial interests. Suleiman and others have noted the tremendous differences in how "serious" and "outside" groups are treated by state elites in France. The state actively attempts to promote and encourage those "serious" groups, or those with whom it wants to have close relations. For example, John Keeler has described the close ties that bound together the major farmers' union, the FNSEA, and the state during the post-war period. As Graham Wilson (1990) has described, French economic planners worked closely with many powerful interest groups in organizing the post-war economy (see also Zysman 1983; Hall 1986). In the process, they fostered the development and growth of many of the most powerful interest groups in France. In the special case of public interest groups, discussed here, it is clear that many were able to have their goals effectively taken over by the state. The result has paradoxically been that the groups themselves have not grown into such powerful organizational structures even as some of their goals have been achieved. The active role of the state can have many consequences, as the following sections will show.

Historical Development and Growth of the Interest-Group Systems

Both the United States and France are home to a tremendously varied and active set of interest groups in all areas. France's more turbulent political history, especially with the disruptions caused by World War II, has left it with a much more divided and less well established set of interest groups than is found in the United States. At the same time, many of the most powerful social organizations in France developed almost in tandem with the post-war French economy, working closely with state officials in promoting economic growth, social peace, and the development of the welfare state during the *trente glorieuses*, the thirty-year period of rapid modernization and economic growth that followed the war. American groups, by contrast, knew no single such period of growth, and developed with much greater distance between themselves and the state. Professional communities, patrons, and social movements were the sources of most American interest groups (Walker 1991). Government

actions were important in both cases, of course, but the French groups have developed with closer ties both to the state and to important ideological and partisan traditions.

During the 19th century, social services were closely associated with the Catholic church in France. This religious beginning has had great implications for the development of interest groups of all kinds during the 20th century (and of course the resulting cleavage has been central in the organization of constitutional and political structures as well). Progressives insisted on creating separate networks of social service and public interest groups. Rival and duplicate networks of groups were created, each generally associated with the Church or with the secular traditions of socialism or communism. From labor unions to groups organizing children's summer camps, socialist, communist, and Catholic groups existed in parallel. As control of government changed from regime to regime, the fortunes of these organizations waxed and waned.

A period of growth for many social service organizations, laying much of the foundation for public interest groups, followed World War II. With many organizations discredited from the wartime experiences, new groups were formed out of the remnants of the Resistance. The same people who came into government service with an optimism and a dedication to social progress also helped create new social organizations (Bloch-Lainé 1976). Thus the new institutions of government grew in tandem with the development of new labor unions, new educational associations, new charities, and new associations of all types. Vast networks of loosely affiliated nonprofit organizations grew up surrounding particular traditions and supporting huge numbers of staff, volunteers, and providing social services to large numbers of people. These range in France from mutual-aid societies to professional associations and unions to recreational groups to purchasing cooperatives to social service charities to theater groups (Aubert et al. 1985; Bériot 1985). Some of the most influential government officials responsible for the development of the French economy after the war were also instrumental in the creation of a network of "social partners," or interest groups designed to meet a variety of social needs.

The imperatives of "modernizing the economy" that drove the work of such individuals as Jean Monnet and Pierre Massé also had implications for the development of social organizations that could help in this effort (Rosanvallon 1990, 255). François Bloch-Lainé, an influential and long-serving civil servant, was at the core of the creation of the Association pour le Développement des Associations de Progrès (Association for the Development of Progressive Associations, DAP) in 1975, which became the Fondation pour la Vie Associative (Foundation for Associational Life, FONDA) in 1981. This foundation brings together leaders of a variety of social organizations and seeks to help them coordinate their work with public authorities more efficiently and to encourage the growth of associations in general (Fondation pour La Vie Associative, n.d.).

The post-war period can be divided into two important parts for the development of groups active in the public interest. First was the early period when humanitarian needs were great, governmental structures were strained to capacity, and when a great variety of social service and public interest organizations were begun. Second was a period following the events of May 1968 when state elites made concerted efforts to include greater numbers of outside interests in the policy process. Under Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas, and with the aid of Jacques Delors, the French government encouraged public participation of all kinds. Many of the state programs to encourage such participation date from the early 1970s. There is more than only coincidence in the fact that many of those active in the Resistance and the early years of rebuilding the economy were also active in promoting a broad associational movement and in promoting their close relations with government agencies. In any case, the French interest-group system was dramatically altered from 1945 to 1974. By the end of this period of economic growth, a new partnership had been established between many groups promoting social goals and the state agencies also active in those same areas.

There are many similarities with the American case, in particular the movement towards "maximum feasible participation" of the public in the policy process. However, American groups developed with much greater independence from the government than was the case in France. First, they avoided the partisan ties common to the French groups. Second, American public interest groups often fought for changes in the behavior of private firms rather than for government activity. Civil rights organizations first focused on economic rights, not voting rights, for example (Vogel 1980). In sum, American groups of all types have developed without the strong ideological and partisan ties common to French organizations. French groups, even those promoting completely consensual goals or purely interested in recreational activities, are likely to be part of a broader constellation of ideologically similar organizations based loosely on the traditions of secular humanism, socialism, communism, or Catholicism. These divisions have had important implications for the behavior of French interest groups and their relations with state elites.

American groups have been able to rely historically on a much larger philanthropic tradition (Teltsch 1994; Nielsen 1972); further, since these philanthropies have not historically been affiliated with a single church, as was more often the case in France, they have not developed such a strong political identity. This, in turn, allows them to avoid the hostility that might come from those associated with rival ideologies or political traditions. The American groups are more likely than the French ones to have an independent and consensual public image, unfettered by any ties with particular political ideologies or partisan groups.

Public interest and nonprofit organizations in both countries had their roots in philanthropic organizations of the 19th century. In France there was a further period of expansion during the post-war period, based on

ideologies and relations built up during the Resistance and in reaction to the history of the Vichy government. Both countries, however, were strongly affected by the social movements and unrest of the 1960s. Important and revealing differences emerge from a look at four types of organizations: those concerned with civil rights, the environment, women's rights, and consumer protection. While social agitation was great in both countries, the large mass movements in France left considerably less of an organizational legacy.

The Legacy of the 1960s

Great social movements affected both countries in the 1960s, but those in the United States left a greater range of powerfully endowed social organizations than those in France. In some ways, this is so because the movements were broader in the United States than in France. For example, there was no powerful civil rights movement in the French case. Recent efforts in France to mobilize the minority population show the difficulty of creating such organizations from scratch; in the American case a number of organizations were already established or powerful by the end of 1960s (and several were venerable groups established decades before). The student movements that swept through France in May and June 1968 left little in the way of organizational structures, even if they had a profound impact on the generation that participated in them. Whereas the American movements of the 1960s built on a base of previously existing organizations and led to the development of ties across a great number of newly expanding groups, the French movement left much less in terms of social organizations.

Environmental organizations in the United States saw tremendous growth during the 1960s. Even in this area, the movement built on a core of already established, and often venerable, conservation and nature-preservation organizations that had been in existence since the turn of the century. For example, the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, the National Wildlife Federation, and Ducks Unlimited, four of the largest currently active environmental groups in the United States, were founded in 1892, 1935, 1936, and 1937, respectively. Many new organizations were created in the 1960s and after in the United States; however the growth of new groups was reinforced by an equally impressive growth in the size and resources of pre-existing groups. In a review of the staff sizes of almost 400 environmental organizations active in Washington, Bryan Jones and I found that these groups employ almost 3,000 full time staff members. Of this large group of public interest lobbyists, approximately half work for groups established before 1960, and half work for groups that were created since the environmental movement of that period (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 189).

No comparable data are available on the French case to allow a direct comparison, but two points are clear. In spite of a tradition of conserva-

tion, the number and strength of conservation and environmental protection organizations are considerably lower in France. There has certainly been an increase in environmental activism since the 1960s in France as elsewhere; however this has not led to the creation of many well endowed organizations. One of the reasons may be that, in contrast with the United States, there was not already an infrastructure of existing conservation organizations on which to expand.

The women's movement in both countries similarly knew a tremendous expansion during the 1960s and 1970s. However, a similar contrast is evident in the degree to which this mass movement, which attracted similar attention in both countries, was translated into budgets, staffs, and resources for nationally active organizations in the national capital. American groups representing women grew dramatically, establishing large and effective organizations active in the national capital, but French women's groups were riven by internal divisions and lacked the organizational resources of their American counterparts (for the French case, see Duchen 1986 and Mazur forthcoming; Costain 1992 makes an argument similar to that for American public interest movements, especially the women's movement). The French groups achieved the creation of a ministry for women's affairs, but they did not establish the organizational presence of their American counterparts. In this sense, three major social movements of the 1960s, those surrounding civil rights, the environment, and women each led to a dramatic increase in organizational strength in the American case but not in France.

Consumer protection groups offer a final comparison. Active in both countries as part of the social movements of the 1960s, these groups also differ in their strategies and subsequent organizational strengths. Of the four areas mentioned, consumer protection is probably the most notable success in the French case. In both countries, rapid expansion of the number and activities of organized groups came in the late 1960s. Bykerk reports, for example, rapid growth in the number of a wide variety of specialized and general organizations representing consumers from 1967 to 1971, with slower growth thereafter (1994, 3-4; also Maney and Bykerk 1994). During this same period France also saw the creation of the Institut National de la Consommation (National Consumers' Institute, INC), a state-financed autonomous agency with a staff of 138, a budget of 191MF (approximately \$38 million), and best known for its monthly *50 millions de consommateurs* and other publications featuring product testing, practical advice, and other consumer news (Institut National de la Consommation 1993). The Union Fédérale des Consommateurs (Federal Union of Consumers, UFC), a private organization, was created in 1951, and has expanded greatly during the 1960s and beyond. Its publication, *Que choisir?*, is well known to all French people, and this has been a relatively influential organization (Calais-Auloy 1981).

The 1960s were clearly an important time in both countries for the

growth of new types of interest groups, and public interest groups in particular. However, even though there were massive social movements in France, these movements left a smaller institutional and organizational legacy than in the United States. Consumers' groups were probably the most successful of the French public interest groups in establishing themselves organizationally, but even in this case the American groups are larger and better staffed. The most successful of the French groups were mostly able to get their goals adopted by new state agencies. The creation of a new ministry or of a para-state organization is more common in France than in the United States, and has many advantages for the French groups. It allows them to gain considerable resources that would not otherwise be available and it gives them the legitimacy to engage in intra-governmental disputes over budgets, policies, and the like. Such possibilities would not exist if they acted only as outside interest groups. On the other hand, by becoming involved in government itself, the French organizations inevitably also become involved in partisan politics, losing some of their political independence. In the American case, groups have had success in pushing for the creation of new state agencies (with the Environmental Protection Agency standing as the most prominent example), but they have simultaneously followed other strategies. The result is that the French groups have sometimes infiltrated the state, having their goals translated into those of certain state agencies, but these groups have not developed the independent organizational resources as have their American counterparts. The structures of the state, interacting with the preexisting group system and the changing national social movements, help create distinctly different sets of organizations representing the public interest in the two countries.

The Popular Basis of Interest-Group Activity

Since de Tocqueville, the United States has been known as a nation of joiners, and by comparison it is clear that the popular basis of interest-group action is stronger in that country than in France. Both countries have active sets of groups supported by millions of contributors and activists. However American groups benefit from a much larger well of popular activity and support on which to draw, even on a per capita basis. This explains some of the greater organizational resources and independence from government agencies of American groups.

This is not to say that French organized interests do not have strong popular support. The 1901 law on associations requires that groups declare themselves to state authorities in order to achieve preferential tax status. This declaration is very simple, and a great variety of organizations are so declared each year, ranging from major social organizations to simple renters' groups, neighborhood, or recreational associations. Claire Ullman describes the growth of these organizations:

Following the enactment of the 1901 law granting freedom of association, the number of associations in France initially grew slowly. However, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of such organizations in the last twenty years. According to economist Edith Archambault [1985], the rate of creation of associations has gone from 17,540 created in 1965 and 23,753 created in 1975, to 48,040 created in 1984 and 50,600 in 1988. The rate of increase has been particularly great since 1981, and there are now an estimated 700,000 associations in France (Ullman 1993, 8–9).

Certainly not all of these “1901 associations” are public interest groups; however, with one group in France for every 75 people and with 50,000 new associations being created each year, it is difficult to argue that there is a shortage of interest groups or that the French are not joiners.

Evidence from survey research in the two countries can also show the degree to which participation in groups, including public interest groups, is well rooted in the national traditions. François Héran has conducted the most impressive study on this topic in France, interviewing a national sample of 5,900 households in 1982 and 1983. His findings tell a much more restrictive story. A large proportion of French participation in voluntary associations stems from purely local and recreational organizations, or from a small minority of well educated professionals. There are over 8 million members of sports clubs, 3.9 million union or professional association members, 2.8 million culture and musical association members, and 1 million members of school alumni associations, but there are only 1.9 million members of humanitarian associations, 800,000 members of political groups, and 330,000 members of consumers’ organizations in France. All in all, Héran calculates that only 43% of French adults are members of any associations, including those with essentially local and nonpolitical purposes (Héran 1988). Further, much of the activity in associations stems from a very active minority, usually well educated. In spite of the large numbers of 1901 associations created each year in France, Héran shows that the popular roots of the interest-group system, in particular that of the public interest groups, is not as great as it appears at first.

Evidence from the United States shows a much greater willingness of the public to participate and to contribute to interest groups, including charities and public interest organizations. National polls have consistently found 70% of Americans to be members of at least one voluntary association, and in a 1985 survey using different question wordings and asking also for information on contributions, fully 90% of the respondents indicated that they were either members or contributors to a group in the past twelve months (see Baumgartner and Walker 1988). Public involvement in charities is particularly impressive in the United States, and these charities in turn support a wide variety of public interest causes. Shaiko reports, for example that 40 million Americans contribute \$4 billion annually to environmental groups alone (1991). Charitable contributions in France, by contrast, are significantly lower on a per capita basis, leaving

fewer resources available for hiring staff and creating strong organizations independent from government agencies (see Ullman 1993 and her citation to Cheroutre 1993).

The Divisions Among Interest Groups in France

Interest-group activity in both the United States and France is clearly very impressive. Even if the proportion of Americans active or contributing to groups is higher, there remains a large enough proportion of French citizens supporting various groups to support a range of powerful institutions. American groups benefit not only from greater mass support, however; they are also better able to cooperate and to avoid costly battles with rivals. The divisions among groups and the small scale of much of French associational activity have been remarked by many. Stanley Hoffmann (1963) discussed the "peculiar" and "atomistic" nature of French involvement in interest groups, noting how groups tended to be more active at the local than at the national level, and he attributed the powers of the bureaucracy to the weakness of the national groups that might have challenged it. A variety of ideological, geographical, and personal factors seems to have contributed to keeping French interest groups from flourishing at the national level. These divisions have affected public interest groups just as much as labor unions, producers' organizations, farmers' groups, and others. If anything, business groups have been better able to overcome these divisions than have those seeking to represent environmentalists, women, labor, or other broad interests.

In interviews with environmental and anti-nuclear activists conducted in 1988, many mentioned their frustrations in attempting to construct a national network of organizations. Those actively opposing particular local projects often resented the "intrusion" of "Parisians" or "outsiders" in their local battle. Such difficulties are common in all countries, of course, but France is remarkable among its European neighbors for the weakness of the organized environmental movement. Public opinion surveys consistently show that there is little difference among France and its neighbors on the degree of public support for the environmental movement (Inglehart 1984; Ansel, Barny and Pagès 1987; Baumgartner 1990), but the organizational manifestations of French environmentalism are weak by international standards.

The effects of the local focus and small scale of many French interest groups can be seen clearly in the case of environmental organizations. For example, the only proposed nuclear power station that was abandoned because of political opposition, at Plogoff in western Brittany, was the subject of intense opposition and well organized protests. However, once the immediate and local threat was passed, this organizational infrastructure was abandoned, never transferred to the national level or set to oppose plants at other locations. Other plants, for example those at Fessenheim and at Creys-Malville, have similarly been the objects of

intense and large-scale public opposition, but these localized disputes have not been transferred effectively to the national level. Environmental activists, like other public interest-group leaders, suffer from an inability to bring local groups into a national network (Boy 1992). Indeed, some of the elements that make local protests successful are precisely those that make national coordination unlikely: regional pride and resentment of central government plans, for example. The local focus of many French groups impedes their perceived legitimacy as well. Central government forces are able to argue, often persuasively, that opposition to government plans stems from parochial local interests and that the state agencies represent, as usual, the true national interest. An inability to organize on a national basis is a serious handicap to those who would overcome this argument.

A second and equally important difficulty in coordinating efforts is the ideological divide that makes many groups fight over scarce organizational resources. France's two major political parties focusing on the environment, *les Verts* and *Génération Ecologie*, suffer from personality conflicts of their leaders, organizational mistrust, and an inability to cooperate. Despite public opinion data indicating as much as 19% popular support during the campaign for the March 1993 legislative elections, the competing groups of ecology parties got less than 8% of the vote, leaving them with no seats in the national legislature (Rey 1993). The 1995 presidential elections saw great distrust of the established political parties, but a lackluster campaign by environmentalists leading to less than 5% of the vote in the first round. Labor unions are not the only large-scale interest groups to suffer from ideological divisions. Many elements of the public interest movement have suffered similarly. These divisions have hindered the development of unified organizational structures that lead to greater influence.

American groups of course have their rivalries. However, the combination of a greater well of potential mass support and a higher willingness to cooperate rather than to splinter has given American groups many advantages over their French counterparts. Paradoxically, the more heterogeneous and ethnically divided country is home to a larger, more unified, and more active set of interest groups, even on a per capita basis.

The Professional Basis of Public Interest Group Activity

As Héran noted (see above), a large number of interest groups can be supported by a small number of intensely interested and active individuals. In both countries, certain categories of professionals are very active in supporting public interest groups. This can be a simple question of socio-economic status, education, and income; but in addition to these biases it can stem from professional activities. Jack Walker has described two important elements on this point in his survey of interest groups in the United States. First, approximately three-quarters of American interest

groups base their memberships on occupational status. That is, professional organizations dominate the interest-group landscape, with only about one-quarter of American groups being open in their memberships to those of any occupation. Second, professionals in the nonprofit sector of the economy support fully one-third of all interest groups active in Washington, and often are among the most active voices in calling for the provision of social services or other public goods (Walker 1991).

Besides religion and philanthropy, then, the professions constitute an important base of support for public interest groups. Certain professionals, often with the support of the agencies for which they work, support a wide variety of public interest groups. In France, this mode of mobilization has been particularly important. Ullman (1993) described state support for the development of many "social partners" in the area of human services. Walker's (1991) evidence for state support for social service agencies in the United States shows essentially similar results. Smith and Lipsky (1993) discuss the development of many social service providers and the important role of state support for their organizational maintenance. Baumgartner and Walker (1989) described the degree to which French and American educational interest groups relied on state subsidies, and found remarkable similarities: 59% of the French groups and 49% of the American groups received state subsidies.

Lucco (1992) described how consumers' organizations in the United States focused their efforts especially on the creation of an agency or an office directly under the control of the president; similarly, one of the greatest goals of the environmental movement was the creation of a cabinet-level position, initially with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In France, environmentalists, women, and consumers have all been successful in pressing for the creation of new state agencies, and sometimes cabinet-level ministries, to represent their interests. Clearly, a variety of public interest groups in both countries seek both state subsidies for their own activities and the creation of new state agencies that would further the goals that they seek to promote. In this sense, the two countries show few differences.

Interest groups in both France and the United States are active in seeking out support from state agencies in order to meet their organizational needs. French interest groups are more dependent on state support than American groups, however, because there are fewer alternative sources of support. Groups benefit in both countries from a variety of tax preferences or subsidies, in particular those groups in France that have been declared "of public utility" or that fit certain other definitions (for example, those supporting veterans or injured soldiers, those providing technical education, or religious or other philanthropies; see Berry 1977 and Walker 1991 for the United States; Ozanam 1957 for the French case). With fewer individuals active or contributing to various groups, and with important rivalries dividing many groups from their allies, French groups appeal more quickly to the state for support. These appeals are often

successful. French government agencies, when relying on outside organizations for the provision of certain social services, typically reimburse the entire cost of the service. American state and federal agencies asking similar groups to assist in the provision of needed public services, typically expect to pay only a portion of the total cost. Whereas "outsourcing" for public services in the United States is a means for government agencies to stretch limited budgets and to support charitable organizations, in France the same process leads to much greater organizational support for the groups involved (Smith and Lipsky 1993; Ullman 1993). Both the incentives and the opportunities to develop an organizational dependence on the state are greater in France.

Relations with Governmental Agencies

The differing degrees of dependence on state sources of support described in the previous section have important implications for the lobbying activities of public interest groups in the two countries. American groups are far more confrontational in their tactics, and much more likely to be open in their criticism of government officials (see Bykerk 1994). French groups are sometimes more influential, but they are much less likely to use outside strategies of political influence.

Under the French constitutional structure, it is paramount to have influence with the executive branch of the national government. In the American system, influence within the executive is of course important, but there are a variety of alternatives. French and American public interest groups are organized in ways that complement the political systems within which they operate. In a system of "administrative pluralism" such as the French, there is a great need for bureaucratic allies. Conflicts abound, but very often each side is represented by a sponsoring government agency.

The intra-governmental nature of many political debates in France makes the representation of political interests through political parties much more important. Public interest groups often see their leaders presented with tempting opportunities to enter the government or otherwise to cultivate political ties. Considering the Catholic, socialist, or communist traditions of many groups in France, this may not seem surprising. However, it affects even those groups that are not from these traditions, and even those striving to maintain a relatively nonpartisan posture.

French political parties are quick to coopt the leaders of major public interest groups if these entrepreneurs gain widespread public popularity or repute. Paradoxically, this quick recognition by the government that an issue has the potential of mobilizing many citizens leads to a race which the government almost always wins. French groups are sometimes crippled by the entry of their charismatic leaders into the world of politics. At least three examples spring to mind. Brice Lalonde, an environmental leader, was appointed minister of the environment despite his lack of a

seat in Parliament (and his previous run against President Mitterrand in the 1981 elections); Bernard Kouchner, formerly the leader of *Médecins sans Frontières* (Doctors Without Borders, one of the most visible French humanitarian organizations), was similarly appointed minister for humanitarian action; and Harlem Désir, the leader of *SOS Racisme* (a major group focusing on immigrant rights and the fight against racism), was closely related to the Socialist Party during the time it was in the government (Malik 1990; Schain 1993).

The constitutional freedom for the prime minister to appoint those from outside of Parliament to the government has often been used in significant cases to bring charismatic leaders from public interest groups into governing circles. At the same time, it has made politicians out of some of these officials, causing them to be more closely linked in the public mind to partisan issues than they might prefer. (Especially in the cases of immigrants' rights groups and environmentalists, many have argued that they were too closely tied to the Socialist Party.) Most importantly, the ease of appointment has often drawn away from the organizational strength of the affected groups. By granting them immediate legitimacy and tremendous symbolic powers, these appointments have sometimes crippled their ability to attract new members or to build a powerful and long-lasting organizational structure. Participation in the government or close collaboration with an established political party eager to put its infrastructure at one's service is an honor few can refuse; however it is not necessarily the best way to build an organization.

American presidents of course have the option of naming whomever they please to the cabinet, and there have been many instances of members of public interest groups accepting powerful positions within executive agencies. However, these tend to be mid-level appointments and from organizations that are well endowed with the financial resources and stability to withstand the departure even of such important figures. Martin J. Smith has described the importance of particular entrepreneurs in developing the American consumers' movement, as well as other related groups. Individuals such as John Gardner of Common Cause, Ralph Nader, and others have played important roles, often acting with the support of like-minded politicians such as Senator Kennedy, Magnuson, or others (Smith 1993, 206; McFarland 1984). French groups have been more likely to suffer from the departure of their founders too quickly into a ministerial position.

Even if French prime ministers sometimes name a single charismatic leader of a public interest group to the cabinet, French ministers are unlikely to fill their personal staffs with those who previously were leaders or activists in public interest groups. For many reasons (including the fact that their salaries are paid by their home ministry), they prefer to name high civil servants for these mid-level positions (Rémond et al. 1982). American presidents, with thousands of appointments at their disposal, often appoint staff members from public interest groups at

various levels of the bureaucracy. Similarly, congressional staff positions, numbering in the tens of thousands, are attractive to many public interest group officials. This "revolving door" in Washington serves to strengthen rather than weaken those public interest groups who lose some staff members for a year or two. The French practice, focusing as it does on a single highly visible appointment, is more likely to cause long-term harm to the organization. It is one reason why many of the most successful social movements in France have not successfully been transformed into professional, well staffed, and long-lasting organizations. It also helps explain the difficulty for the French groups to maintain a non-partisan public image.

Lobbying Strategies

American public interest groups have a greater organizational base from which to act and they use a much wider variety of tactics of influence than their French counterparts. Public interest groups in the United States have often focused on procedural reform as a means of influencing government and private business. Some of the greatest successes of this movement have, in particular, had to do with the use of the court system. Increased standing to sue for damages, the development of class action litigation, the creation of Environmental Impact Statements, the use of Freedom of Information requests, and the ability of public interest groups to publicize and especially to delay administrative decisions have often been their greatest tools for influencing public policy (Vogel 1980; Baumgartner and Jones 1993). American courts, often suspicious of executive actions, differ dramatically from their French counterparts on this score.

In the French constitutional philosophy the state is assumed to be acting in the public interest, so increased standing to sue, greater administrative openness, and other complications in state decisionmaking are unlikely to be adopted (Cohen-Tanugi 1985; Baumgartner 1989; Provine 1993). Further, class action litigation is explicitly barred in French jurisprudence, though there have been recent efforts to introduce the concept. For example a bill was introduced in 1990 allowing consumers' organizations to act on behalf of aggrieved parties. In spite of major pieces of legislation protecting consumers' interests passed in 1973 and in 1988, this concept remains foreign to French law (Institut National de la Consommation 1990, 7). (French legal, manufacturing, and governing circles are not likely to view the American model, with occasional large product liability damages, as something to emulate; for an example of its chilling effect on AIDS research, see Provine 1993, 87-8.)

Similar constitutional constraints discourage French groups from focusing on parliamentary lobbying, local governments, or many other venues that have been the routes for success by many American public interest groups. Certainly the state is affected by public opinion and lobbying.

However, the myriad strategies that American public interest groups have used in forcing the government to act are not as useful in a centralized system. American groups, fighting against a more diffuse foe, have developed into strong and independent organizations. French groups, facing a more powerful, yet often more cooperative, state, have not developed their organizational capabilities as much. One of the reasons has been a lack of coordination, leadership, and resources. However, it is important to note that another reason has been a lack of need.

CONCLUSION

The roles and functions of public interest groups in France and the United States are closely linked to the conception of government and the constitutional structures in each country. Many have argued that the decentralized, weak American state is vulnerable to domination by a "confederation of oligarchies" (McFarland 1983). The French and American responses to this problem of representative government differ dramatically. Bureaucratic statism, the French response, implies less need for independent public interest organizations. Interest-group liberalism, the American response, calls on the contrary for the development of many public interest groups. They are needed to expose privileged private relations with government and to fight for open decisionmaking processes where a greater variety of views may be aired. In France, centralized state power is seen as the primary tool against the power of private interests, so the roles of public interest groups are less confrontational, less devoted to procedural reform, and more focused on altering the agendas of public bureaucracies themselves. French public interest groups seek not to change the procedures of government so much as to have government adopt new goals. Few doubt that the acceptance of a goal will lead to its realization if state resources are put behind it.

Public interest groups in the United States are more numerous, more active, better staffed, more wealthy, and more specialized than their counterparts in France. Are they more effective because of this? They certainly are more effective in certain areas: they maintain greater independence from governmental agencies, they can publicize certain procedural problems with greater ease, and they can sometimes force Washington to act. One of the reasons they are so active, however, is the very weakness of the American state in resisting demands for private favors. French public interest groups, while organizationally weaker than their American counterparts, at least have one large advantage: a powerful state bureaucracy that is often on their side. This advantage, of course, can be a great liability when state elites define the public interest in ways that differ from how a public interest group might define it. This seems particularly problematic in areas of international trade where state elites are often quick to equate the public interest with the interests of the largest private employers in the country.

Both French and American public interest groups have many successes to their credit. The successes in the French case often stem from the actions of state elites in adopting public interest goals as their own. The American system often harbors more conflicts, but there are notable successes there as well. In the end, it is easier, and perhaps more appropriate, to evaluate procedures rather than outcomes. Here, the different constitutional structures chosen by the two nations could not show better their divergent justifications, workings, and logics. The Colbertian logic of control requires the acquiescence of elite state actors; this is a necessary, but also a sufficient, condition for action. The Madisonian logic of dispersed power requires constant vigilance, checking, and fighting; having the ear of state elites is certainly not a sufficient condition for action, and it may not be a necessary one either. Groups active in these two different systems could not be effective if placed in the rival context. Historical tradition, social cleavages, and other mass-based factors have a great impact on the organization of interest groups in any country; however it is clear that state structures and constitutional design have much to do with it as well.

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