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Impact of the 1980 election on ideological liberal organizations

Michael Coval
Colby College

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THE IMPACT
OF THE
1980 ELECTION
ON
IDEOLOGICAL
LIBERAL ORGANIZATIONS

Submitted 10/15/83
Michael Coval
Senior Honors Proposal
Professor L. Sandy Maisel
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"Ronald Reagan is the best thing that has ever happened to liberal lobby groups for the purpose of attracting members and raising funds. Reagan has aroused liberals out of the apathy into which they had sunk during the Ford and Carter Administrations."

Leon Shull, National Director ADA

For conservatives, it was a moment to savor. For liberals, a time for plaintive rumination. The election of 1980 marked one of the most dramatic upheavals in modern American political history - a massive voter uprising that severed inveterate party lines and shattered the New Deal coalition forged during Franklin Roosevelt's Administration. The breadth of Ronald Reagan's victory and the concomitant influx of congressional conservatives ostensibly portended a sweeping depreciation of the liberal principles which shaped the nation's legislative agenda for nearly three decades. Moreover, the outcome hinted at the inception of GOP domination that could endure for years to come.

Political analysts subsequently ascribed this turnabout to an ephemeral shift of traditional voting blocs, identifying the pivotal factor as national discontent with the Carter Administration's economic policies, rather than enthusiasm for the conservative ideology espoused by Ronald Reagan.1/ Nevertheless, this assessment offered liberals little solace, as the results were commonly perceived as an accurate reflection of a prevailing conservative trend. Ronald Reagan himself fostered this misconception. In a post election address the President-elect stated:
"our victory was not so much a victory of politics as it was a victory of ideas, not so much a victory for any one man or party as it was a victory for a set of principles." 2/

However one chooses to interpret the election outcome, the results remain clear: Ronald Reagan garnered 489 of the nation's 538 electoral votes and a 51 percent popular majority, leaving Jimmy Carter the distinction of being the first Democratic President in 92 years to be denied re-election; the Republicans wrested control of the Senate from the Democrats, unseating such prominent incumbents as Frank Church, George McGovern, Birch Bayh, and Frank Culver; the Democratic majority in the House eroded as 33 freshmen Republicans rode to victory on Reagan's coattails; and the GOP scored major gains in gubernatorial and state legislative races across the country. 3/

Unbeknownst to Democrats in 1980, the seeds for this defeat were planted in 1974, in the wake of the Watergate scandal. Besmirched by Richard Nixon's humiliating resignation and the loss of 95 House seats to Democratic challengers, the GOP sought to avenge this twin embarrassment. In the short-run, the Republican party set out to salvage its waning credibility. While its long-term objective was to undermine the Democratic stronghold of the legislative process. 4/

This opportunity presented itself in the same year when the Federal Election Commission imposed a ceiling on political contributions. The purpose of course, was to preclude the power brokers from determining the course of future elections. But there was
a loophole in the new federal election laws that permitted political action committees to legally and independently spend $5,000 in the primary and another $5,000 in the general election. An unforeseen loophole that conservatives capitalized on immediately.

Under the tutelage of such conservative ideologues as Terry Dolan and Richard Viguerie, the New Right harnessed the support of religious fundamentalists and a host of other right-wing groups and formed a battalion of PAC's, all consigned with the task of toppling liberal incumbents. For the next six years, the New Right galvanized its support, amassed vast sums of money, and ameliorated its strategies and techniques. Concurrently, liberal organizations atrophied, resisting the changes and innovations which their adversaries were perfecting. Lulled into complacency bred by decades of prosperity, these liberal organizations were ill-equipped to thwart the impending Reagan/New Right onslaught.

In 1980, the New Right declared open season on liberals and its PAC's were loaded for bear. Consequently, in a well-orchestrated barrage of negative and caustic media campaigns, the Democrats lost both the White House and control of the Senate. Simply put, the Democrats suffered a colossal defeat at the hands of a better organized, better managed, and better funded opposition.

What effect did this deviating election have on ideological liberal organizations? The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the palpable impact of the Reagan/New Right landslide has been an
unparalleled resurgence of progressive activism at the grass roots and national levels. Their overconfidence tempered by defeat and on the defensive for the first time in recent history, liberals emerged from 1980 more united than ever before. Fearing that the New Right legislative agenda would undercut progressive strides which took decades to achieve, traditionally diverse factions of the liberal community coalesced against a common foe. Inspired by NCPAC's success, liberal organizations adopted some of the innovations they formerly eschewed and mastered a few of their own. By all accounts - Ronald Reagan, Terry Dolan, Richard Viguerie, and Jerry Falwell provided the needed stimulus for a broad-scale liberal renaissance.

The fact that the rejuvenation of ideological liberal organizations coincides with the Reagan/New Right victory of 1980 is theoretically substantiated by the noted political scientist, James Q. Wilson. In his book, Political Organizations, Wilson argues:

"The existence of active organizing cadres and the spread of doctrines that give legitimacy to their efforts are not sufficient to explain organizational formation. In addition, there must be a belief among members of an association that matters of concern to them are being affected by other institutions in the society whose behavior can be altered. That belief is more likely to emerge when a highly visible person or organization appears to be posing a serious threat to some values of importance to the members."8/

A theoretical basis also underlies the forementioned coalescence of the liberal movement. According to Wilson:

"Whenever political issues are raised in social structures, there is a desire on the part of most persons to make their affiliations and loyalties
consistent, and thus eliminate the strain and tension that came from being involved in inconsistent social relationships. The more salient the issue, the greater the desire for affiliational consistency."9/ 

James Wilson's theoretical premises and Leon Shull's empirical assessment are remarkably congruous. Each explains that the renaissance of ideological liberal organizations directly corresponds with circumstances favorable for their resurgence: the 1980 Reagan/New Right landslide.
REVIEW OF RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

OVERVIEW OF IDEOLOGICAL ORGANIZATIONS

I. Structure and Composition

A) Membership

The distinguishing feature of ideological organizations are their predominant reliance on "purposive incentives" to bind their members together. Defined here as "benefits of some larger public or society as a whole and not for members, except insofar as members derive a sense of fulfilled commitment or enhanced personal worth from the effort", these purposive incentives have proved to be the catalyst for mobilizing the diverse constituencies of ideological groups.10/ As such, "purposive organizations" tend to attract persons who strongly identify with a cause and are prepared to make a lasting commitment to a particular organization.11/

By their nature, ideological organizations are not cohesive entities. In sharp contrast to single issue politics which involves intense concentration on a particular policy area, ideological groups maintain a far more comprehensive political outlook. Guided by certain moral or philosophical precepts, these groups articulate positions consistent with their ideology on a broad range of issues. Because of this, ideological organizations assume a rather monolithic posture and are uncompromising about their objectives.12/
Due to the comprehensive and inflexible nature of these organizations, the possibilities for intra-organizational conflict increase markedly. Purposive incentives can be amorphous and may vary somewhat according to the priorities of each individual member. Thus, fissures within a group may occur either when an organization explicates a position that a member(s) is opposed to, or when the organization and the individual disagree on which issue merits the group's immediate attention. This likelihood is compounded by the fact that group leaders possess considerable discretion in pursuing the purposive objectives of their organizations.13/ 

The inescapable conclusion derived from these theoretic premises is that ideological groups cannot always function in a manner that promotes organizational cohesion; that divisiveness among members or between leaders and members is inevitable somewhere along the way. While this probably holds true generally, it does not apply when these groups are faced with adversity. As Wilson points at:

"Threats, if they arise from outside the group, tend to increase cohesiveness and integration and heighten the attraction that group members feel toward one another. Various experiments have concluded that harsh or badgering treatment of a group by an outsider decreases hostility within a group and increases cooperativeness. The advantages to the organization, or the organization's representative, of being able to mobilize around a distinct threat or symbolically important moral issue are likely to be greatest, of course, when the members of an organization perceive the threat or issue in similar ways, and this similar point of view is most likely to occur when the members of an organization are more or less alike in material interest or personal ideology."14/
Another factor that oftentimes inhibits organizational cohesion is overlapping membership. Many political activists establish a web of ties to various groups, and these relationships, on occasion, may come into conflict with one another and result in "crosspressuring" of an individual. Empirical data reveals that multiple affiliations tend to produce heterogeneous membership, thereby reducing organizational cohesion.15/

Yet in periods of adversity in which disparate groups share a perceived threat to their interests, be they material or purposive, the reverse effect of crosspressured membership surfaces -- a pattern in which overlapping memberships reinforce each other. The result is likely to be a greater commitment to a cause and thus, a more homogeneous membership.16/ Ample evidence exists to buttress this contention. Following the Reagan/New Right landslide of 1980, a number of liberal organizations experienced surges in membership totals: The National Organization For Women gained 12,000 new members in November, 1980 alone--nearly a ten percent increase (no doubt due to Reagan's obdurate refusal to endorse ERA ratification); the NAACP recorded 17,2000 new members in six weeks in the Fall of 1980;17/ the American Civil Liberties Union headquarters reported that they were receiving 500 letters containing contributions daily, many of those joining being former members; 18/ Americans For Democratic Action's membership burgeoned by 10,000 in one year.19/

B) Fund Raising: Cultivating the Grass Roots
Of the three most important elements of organizational strength—membership, money, and leadership, ideological liberal groups have traditionally only been rich in leadership. Because these organizations accrue purposive rather than material rewards, they generally lead a hand-to-mouth existence. Furthermore, while ideological liberal groups obviously strive to advance the cause of a much larger constituency, it is their conservative counterparts who usually identify with the more affluent populace. Survey data indicates that group membership is positively associated with "higher income, higher education, and higher levels of living." Consequently, liberal organizations cannot rely on those who may benefit most from their efforts to maintain organizational solvency.

Since ideological liberal groups "arise out of the ranks of the powerless", it is imperative that they place a heavy emphasis on fund raising to sustain membership contributions. In theory, the outcome of the 1980 elections should have facilitated the fund raising prospects of liberal organizations. Wilson asserts that:

"Groups faced with a dramatic threat to clear interests or seeking a single objective of overriding moral significance are often able to raise large sums of money or produce the equivalent commitment in time and effort."

Galvanizing membership support and amassing vast sums of money proved to be the key to the New Right's success in 1980. In large part, this was accomplished through sophisticated direct-mail campaigns. Upon establishing a network of computer-based operations with the
capacity to send messages and process the responses, the New Right flooded the nation with emotionally-laden appeals which more often than not included spurious allegations and indictments of liberal incumbents. Nonetheless, these appeals must have been somewhat cogent, for they inspired a wave of conservative activism. The principal architect of this technique is Richard Viguerie, the acclaimed "godfather of the New Right". According to him:

"What a good direct-mail operation can do is concentrate an appeal to a responsive audience and maintain the active membership communication needed to sustain any organization's morale and contribution base."^24/

Theoretically, the palpable result of a widespread campaign such as the one launched by the New Right is the "stimulation of opposing groups." Moreover, "if the goals of an organization are to prevent the establishment of programs judged detrimental to its organizational interests, the technique is to identify the proponents of the programs with 'evil' symbols."^25/ These premises, when considered in aggregate with Wilson's aforementioned quote (footnote 23) lead one to expect to see liberal organizations not only incorporate techniques analogous to those employed by the New Right, but also to experience similar fund raising success.

Empirically, this is exactly what happened. The resurgence in ACLU membership contributions directly correlates to its most recent fund raising campaign. The ACLU took out a series of full page ads in the New York Times which headlined, "If the Moral Majority has its way, you'd better start praying", and concluded by asking for
contributions to "assure that the Bill of Rights will be passed on to
the next generation."26/ Likewise, ADA attributes its boost in
membership contributions to anti-Reagan mailings.

C) Educational Role

Precisely because ideological liberal organizations seek
purposive rather than material rewards from their efforts, they tend
to regard "educational" activities among their principal
responsibilities."27/ Thus, in drawing a distinction between his
organization and those which "speak for private or commercial
interests", an ADA official explained "our competition is in realm of
ideas."28/

Along with their role as "political action" organizations,
ideological liberal groups also operate as "political idea"
organizations - "intellectual and propaganda groups striving to
formulate comprehensive liberal positions on national public
policy." The tactical activities in which these organizations engage
in pursuing this strategy includes the formulation and dissemination
of liberal programs and policies.29/

In their formulation efforts, these groups try to act as
stimulators and coordinators of liberal thinking by convening forums
or conferences. The purposes of which are to "provide a pulpit for
experts chosen for their newsworthiness as well as for their expertise
- whose views and conclusions on questions are likely to attract
attention and command respect." These groups occasionally subsidize research and publications, intended for general distribution, which in effect serve as liberal policy papers.

The chief means for policy dissemination are publications and newsletters. Ideological groups possess the unique power to facilitate the dissemination of ideas and thereby mobilize support for their positions through their publications. Consequently, these groups have proved to be particularly adept at putting forth valuable issue-oriented information. Furthermore, because issue saliency is a key variable in attracting members, newsletters and publications serve to reinforce organizational bonds and maintain an active membership.

Assuming that Wilson's theoretical precepts not only encompass organizational membership and fund raising, but extend to the educational role of ideological organizations as well, one would expect that liberal groups have stepped up their policy formulation and dissemination efforts significantly since 1980.

II. Exerting Political Pressure: Lobbying Techniques

1) Traditional Lobbying - The Direct and Personal Approach

A) Reinforcing Friendly Ties

In theory, the same circumstances which enhance the recruiting
and fund raising activities of ideological organizations also facilitate their lobbying efforts. According to Wilson, being on the defensive and trying to sustain existing programs provides these groups with "organizational maintainence-advantages" they would otherwise not derive when striving to change government policies or promote new ones.

"For one thing, threats to existing material or nonmaterial interests are easier to understand and less productive of disagreement than are opportunities to improve or extend those interests. Rights or income now enjoyed provide a lowest common denominator of interest and agreement; proposals for enlarging those rights or increasing that income are likely to be discounted. If the gains are in the future, if indeed they will be realized at all, there will be an unwillingness to bear present costs of programs that have no guarantee of success. All things being equal, political activity is facilitated by the same conditions that make organizational formation easier-namely, perceived threats to existing values."32/

Buttressing Wilson's contention, V.O. Key states:

"If the purpose is to defeat a bill, lobbyists skill and attention may be even more effective. The procedures of legislatures gives advantages to those who seek to prevent action. At many stages, from committee consideration to executive approval, a bill can be killed, and an alert legislative counsel may perhaps carry the day at one step if not another. 33/

Traditionally, ideological organizations have focused their lobbying efforts on strengthening ties with political decision makers who already share their views and policy objectives. Consequently, their legislative representatives have been consigned with the primary responsibility of "arousing the latent concerns of congressional and administrative sympathizers,"34/ and to "persuade
members to work even harder on behalf of the group's interests."35/ As William Keefe asserts:

"Lobbyists know that few votes are ever changed as a result of their efforts, and accordingly they concentrate their resources on 'backstopping' or reinforcing those members who are known to be favorable to their position."36/

Based on his study of the Americans for Democratic Action's lobbying techniques, Clifton Brock reached the same conclusion.

"ADA seldom can and seldom does 'apply pressure' or 'put the heat' on congressmen. Its lobbying is a low-pressure operation, designed more to convince friends than to coerce or convert enemies."37/

Again, Wilson's theoretical analysis serves to substantiate the above empirical assessments:

"Whatever the timing or nature of the intervention, the experienced organizational representative will see his task as one of evolving, maintaining, and enhancing existing relationships with sympathetic or like-minded public officials. He, like the precinct captain of a political party, will devote most of his contact time to stimulating activity by, and providing information to, persons who he has reason to believe are in general agreement with him. Time, energy, and money are in short supply; diverting much of any of these resources to persons known, or suspected to be, opposed to you is less efficient than devoting them to persons who, once aroused and informed, will act on your behalf. And in any event, representatives are human: arguing with persons with whom one disagrees is an unpleasantness one would just as soon avoid. As a result of these factors, a representative tends to become a service bureau for those congressmen (and other officials) already agreeing with him, rather than an agent of direct persuasion for those who do not."38/
Accepting that the lobbying capacity of ideological organizations is enhanced by being on the defensive and that they in turn concentrate on reinforcing existing ties with like-minded public officials, the logical corollary is that liberal congressmen, spurred by relentless lobbying efforts, would pose an effective opposition to New Right legislative initiatives. Recent developments in the 98th Congress lend credence to this assumption. In foreign as well as domestic issues, the New Right sustained a series of legislative setbacks as a number of President Reagan's most prized policy initiatives encountered stiff resistance from united Democrats. To cite just a few examples: The President was forced to acquiesce to a compromise budget plan that transferred billions of dollars to social programs that were originally earmarked for defense expenditures; in the face of strong opposition from the Administration, the Democrats pushed a nuclear-freeze resolution through the House; and the House Select Committee on Intelligence voted along party lines to end covert U.S. support for Nicaraguan rebels.39/

B) Lobbying Alliances and Ad-Hoc Coalitions

While ideological organizations have traditionally concentrated their lobbying efforts on reinforcing ties with political officials who identify with their cause, political analysts have found that "lobbying strength reaches its peak when a number of organizations combine forces. A successful coalition, with its impact on public opinion, can force even the President to take it into account."40/ "Of all the techniques for opening communications
channels between lobbyists and legislators, the tactic of collaborating with other groups is most valued."41/ Consequently, a "cooperative lobbying technique" has become increasingly popular among public interest groups.42/

These legislative combinations "arise because groups share a common ideology and a compatible set of policy objectives."43/ Furthermore, they tend to be ephemeral in nature because of what Wilson calls "the imperatives of organizational maintenance -- the need to maintain a distinctive organizational identity."44/

There are two significant advantages to forming ad-hoc alliances between public interest groups. First, "they allow for an efficient division of lobbying resources." Second, "coalitions can spread the risks and costs among the members. By sharing costs, a given group can participate in more campaigns or more powerfully in fewer efforts." Essentially, the formation of informal alliances enhances the lobbying capacity of public interest groups because it enables them to "join together to defeat or promote an issue without establishing a new organization to coordinate the lobbying effort."45/

Yet in past years, ideological liberal organizations have proved unable to build unified lobbying coalitions with other public interest groups. This undoubtedly stems from the fact that ideological organizations are composed of heterogeneous constituencies and work on a wide spectrum of reform causes; "and the other groups have more cohesive constituencies and must determine
their priorities accordingly. "46/

According to Wilson:

"The normal tendency of formal organizations to resist coalition formation can be overcome if the existing level of resources and autonomy for all prospective members can be significantly threatened (a crisis). In the first case, organizations may coalesce in order to survive or to end a war of attrition that has become too costly; in the latter, they may coalesce because a situation has been created in which all can benefit, thereby changing a condition of partial conflict to one of pure coordination. A crisis may lead to the formation of a coalition because existing money resources are suddenly jeopardized or because a dramatic event leads to a general demand that organizations act together for the common good." 47/

Wilson further contends that:

"On important or divisive issues, an organizational representative can enhance his group's legitimacy if he can describe it as broadly representative of all relevant affected interests. This, in turn often requires him to enter into coalitions with other organizations. An organizational representative knows that policy-makers see a broad coalition as an indication that a majority of the affected parties are behind a policy, that there is accordingly only one 'right' course of action, and above all that his organization's interest in it is not narrowly self-serving." 48/

If Wilson's theories are indeed valid, one would expect that, since 1980, ideological liberal organizations have overcome their problem of engaging in lobbying coalitions. The conditions are favorable for these groups to form such ad-hoc alliances: issue saliency is certainly at a high point, and the threats posed by the New Right are not endemic to any particular organization, but threaten the
interests of all groups which purport to advance any type of liberal cause.

The following example illustrates the validity of Wilson's theoretical premises. To combat Reagan's proposed budget cuts in 1981, Americans for Democratic Action mobilized 150 assorted labor and liberal organizations. Among the most prominent groups that joined the coalition were the AFL-CIO, UAW, the National Council of Churches, and the League of Women Voters. In addition, ADA dispatched its officers to 18 cities to address local budget meetings and encourage the creation of other budget alliances.

2. Newer Modes of Lobbying: Indirect & Electronic Techniques

A) Rise of Grass Roots Lobbying

Tapping grass roots support is not an entirely new phenomenon in American politics. For years, it has been recognized by elected officials as a powerful source of political influence, and has been embraced by ideological organizations as a nexus between the national offices and their heterogenous constituencies. Yet in recent years, cultivating grass roots ties has emerged as a major lobbying tactic among public interest groups. Two principal factors account for this significant transformation of contemporary lobbying: the erosion of political parties as an efficient means for linking citizens with political decision makers; and the advent of sophisticated computer-based technologies and expanded communications capacities.
According to Ronald Hrebenar:

"A technological revolution has enveloped lobbying. The use of computers, data processing, direct mail solicitation, and increased use of media has modernized the lobby game."  

Not surprising, ideological organizations have begun to place increasing emphasis on grass roots lobbying techniques to supplement the more traditional forms of direct lobbying.

The essence of indirect lobbying "is the stimulation of an orchestrated groundswell which will appear to be spontaneous and unorganized. Natural is the key concept in a good grass roots lobbying campaign."  

Ornstein and Elder distinguish the ways in which ideological organizations facilitate the transmission of messages from constituents to political decision makers: the direct approach, which involves "explicit assistance or direction to group members or sympathizers to contact representatives or senators about an issue or bill;" and the indirect approach, in which groups "promote a general viewpoint on a broad public policy issue by using popular outlets for lobbying appeals—ads in newspapers and magazines, commercials on television and radio."  

The former is most commonly manifest in grass roots letter-writing campaigns. If properly managed, this type of campaign will make the deluge of letters, phone calls, and telegrams appear spontaneous and genuine. And if it appears to be genuine rather than an
orchestrated effort of a public interest group, it will prove to be remarkably influential. A recent study found that congressional staff members overwhelmingly ranked "spontaneous letters and phone calls from constituents" as the most effective type of communication. "Orchestrated mail from constituents" was considered to be only relatively important. Representative Thomas Railback (R-Ill.) shares this assessment.

"The most effective lobby campaigns involve the local constituencies -- if you get a letter from a constituent, you pay attention. He is not an outsider. He is somebody who votes for or against you."55/

Initially, the success of the New Right's grass roots efforts were attributed to direct-mail fund raising for conservative candidates. But this only reflects one dimension of the New Right's effectiveness at the grass roots level. To stress only fund raising in Richard Viguerie's words, "is to miss the point of direct-mail." He writes:

"Some people persist in thinking of direct-mail as only fund raising, but it's really mostly advertising. Raising money is only one of the several purposes of direct mail advertising letters. A letter may ask you to vote for a candidate, volunteer for campaign work, circulate a petition among your neighbors, write letters to your Senator and Congressmen, urging them to pass or defeat legislation and also ask you for money to pay for the direct-mail advertising campaigns."57/

Much of the New Right's direct-mail activity continues to emphasize contributions because of the relatively high cost of the technique. Yet, its capacity to stir up conservative passions and to
mobilize attentive groups by carefully targeting its appeals cannot be overlooked. Direct-mail, by identifying a certain set of potential activists, provides a base for broader communications. According to Vugerie:

"Without direct-mail, we might have no National Review, no Human Events, no Conservative Digest, no conservative PAC's, no effective organizations in Right to Work, Right to Life, pro-gun, anti-busing, national defense, pro-family, no large national conservative organizations and youth training. You can think of direct-mail as our TV, radio, daily newspaper, and weekly magazine." 58/

While Vugerie may well be overestimating the impact of his direct-mail campaign, the fact remains that ideological liberal organizations, by creating their own communications networks, can generate a tremendous grass roots response without any reliance upon expensive conventional media outlets. Facing the reality that their constituency is much larger and more broad based than the New Right's and accepting that grass roots lobbying has become more influential than the traditional personal approach, the conditions are ripe for liberal groups to undertake just such an endeavor.

The second facet of grass roots lobbying Ornstein and Elder refer to is the indirect technique in which interest groups "seek to mold favorable public attitudes toward their organizations and goals." As William Keefe points out:

"Public relations is now recognized as a central, sometimes predominant, means by which groups seek to obtain their goals; indeed no major organization would feel at all secure without a broadly based program for influencing public opinion. Major
organizations have found it advisable to organize both short- and long-range public relations programs, the former focused to gain immediate public support in skirmishes with other groups and government, the latter aimed at molding a climate of friendly opinion to the organization and its aims. At bottom, the purpose of each is to 'make the program of the group appear synonymous with the general welfare.' Groups have come to recognize that, over the long haul, success is likely to depend on their having accumulated a reservoir of public goodwill, which in turn will have been shaped partially by widespread acceptance of their ideological positions. Merchandising an ideology or educating the public, whatever the process may be termed, is the continuing function of interest group public relations."

Furthermore, Ronald Hrebenar contends that the success of interest group's public relations activity is noticeably enhanced when these organizations are on the defensive and are "trying to prevent a change in the existing order":

"Lobbies that practice defensive propaganda are usually well established organizations. Success at negative lobbying is usually easier to obtain because it is a lot easier to stop something in government than to get something new approved. Within the mazes of Congress and the executive branch there are a hundred places to ambush a piece of legislation. One of the tactics used by established lobbies is to carry their fight to the American public for two basic reasons. First, they feel a real need to convince the public of the legitimacy of their position. Second, they react to their opponent's media campaigns and seek to reduce the impact of their opponent's arguments."

As mentioned earlier, ideological organizations are particularly adept at "carrying their fight to the American public" because they consider educational activity among their paramount responsibilities. Edward Hollander, a former ADA official, described his organization's emphasis on policy formulation and dissemination
"as an effort to get ideas and issues up into the political marketplace:"

"What we really try to do is raise and publicize problems and issues which others might like to ignore. Then we yell as loud as we can to keep the politicians from sweeping these problems under the rug. Sometimes we can convince some liberal politicians that our position on these issues -- say civil rights for instance -- is not only morally right but also good politics. Once the issue is up into the political consciousness of the public we try to keep it moving, but about all we can do is hope that the normal democratic processes will take it to a successful end. Our unique function, I suppose, is to raise issues in as many public places as possible."61/

Because grass roots lobbying is widely recognized by political officials as the most efficacious means for an organization to translate its objectives into public policy, it is clear that the recent shift toward tapping grass roots support by public interest groups will indeed continue. Furthermore, it is equally apparent that ideological liberal organizations stand to benefit most from this trend: they have access to a far broader-based and thereby potentially more powerful constituency: and their emphasis on educational activity combined with the impact of New Right legislative initiatives, makes them ideally suited to mold favorable public attitudes toward their cause.

B) The Proliferation of Political Action Committees

The congressional elections of 1976 first drew attention to the increasingly prominent role of political action committees in
campaign politics. During that election, a host of single issue PAC's, conservative in ideology, spent record sums of money to unseat liberal and entrench conservative incumbents. In that one year alone, NCPAC raised over $3 million, and "old-time liberal" Senators Frank Moss of Utah and Gale McGee of Wyoming went down to surprising defeat.62/

By 1978, the number of PAC's, again nearly all conservative, tripled from 576 in 1974 to more than 1,828.63 While the New Right helped defeat Senators Dick Clark of Iowa, Frank Haskell of Colorado, and Thomas McIntyre of New Hampshire, they raised more than $5 million to re-elect Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina and raised $4.5 million for Senator John Tower's campaign. In addition, NCPAC played an instrumental role in Edward King's gubernatorial upset victory in Massachusetts.64/

Amidst heated congressional debate over the proper role of PAC's, the onslaught of 1980 came. The New Right gave the term "hit list" a political connotation as liberal incumbents were first targeted for defeat and then besieged by a flurry of negative and acrimonious media campaigns. Polls conducted after the first phase of NCPAC attacks generally showed that the --

"Media campaigns diluted support among Republican voters for the Democratic incumbents. More importantly, the attacks weakened the loyalties of Democratic voters and left them susceptible to subsequent persuasion by the campaigns of the Republican challengers."65/

Yet the NCPAC assaults served conservative candidates in other
ways as well. By savagely attacking the credibility and integrity of liberal incumbents, NCPAC "allowed Republican candidates the luxury of taking the high road." In Terry Dolan's words, "A group like ours could lie through its teeth and the candidates it helps stay clean."66/

Moreover, NCPAC attacks wreaked havoc on Democratic campaign strategy. Writing for *Campaigns and Elections* magazine, Brad Bannon asserts:

"Many of the Democrats facing re-election in 1980 sought to avoid the impact of issues such as national defense, government spending, and abortion by basing their campaigns on their personal qualifications and their long years of public service to their state during their tenure in the U.S. Senate. But the NCPAC attacks changed the campaign agenda, prompting many of the target candidates to abandon their original campaign strategy and respond directly to attacks on their voting records. The candidates put themselves on the defense, fighting the unconventional battle with unfamiliar weapons."67/

In the wake of the 1980 elections, liberals set out to stage a counterattack. Liberal PAC's a rarity prior to the Reagan/New Right landslide have since proliferated in number. In the first half of 1981 alone, three major PAC's were formed to combat the New Right. In February, Mo Udall and Paul Tsongas organized Independent Action, to assist "progressive candidates" financially. In March, George McGovern formed Americans for Common Sense, using mailing lists that date back to his ill-fated Presidential campaign. In May, Pamela Harriman announced the formation of Democrats for the 80's with a
combination of familiar old names now out-of-office and a collection of current incumbents.

Armed with the technological innovations and expertise they formerly resisted, these and other liberal PAC's are now busy laying the foundation for their own Washington purge in 1984. According to Maxwell Glen, a writer for the National Journal:

"Their goal is threefold: to maintain a Democratic majority in the House and assist embattled liberals in the Republican controlled Senate; to neutralize the effect of the New Right, including conservative Christian activists, in Washington and elsewhere; and to promote liberal positions on such issues as the environment, foreign policy, abortion, women's rights, and social security."

While all liberal PAC's share a complementary set of goals, their strategies for achieving them vary. For instance, the Progressive Political Action Committee and the National Progressive PAC have adopted the "NCPAC independent attack strategy" -- waging negative media campaigns through the mass media. The prime target for 1984 is the quintessential conservative Senator from North Carolina, Jesse Helms.

But most liberal PAC's intend to avoid negative campaigns and contribute their resources to besieged liberal incumbents or friendly challengers. For example, Americans for Democratic Action PAC has already been operating for four years and contributed $48,250 to 36 liberal House and Senate candidates in 1980.
By whatever means liberal PAC's intend to wage their war against the New Right, they are well aware that in order to mount such a campaign vast amounts of organizational resources are required, namely money. Although they harbor no illusion of matching the $5.4 million that NCPAC spent in 1980, liberal groups hope to raise millions of dollars by capitalizing on public fears about Reagan/New Right legislative initiatives and programs. Consequently, with the exceptions of Democrats for the 80's and the Committee for the Future of America, major liberal PAC's are emphasizing grass roots solicitation of small sums of money rather than relying on appeals to large donors. On paper, this strategy seems viable. According to most estimates, there are three to five million names in the "universe" of liberal donors.72/

Because of their reliance on purposive incentives, ideological organizations "usually try to get involved only when there's a clear philosophical dispute."73/ And when such occasions arise, these groups tend to target their campaign resources "where it will do the most good" -- contributing to candidates who share and will strive to enact their policy objectives.74/ Ronald Reagan's victory and the influx of conservatives on Capitol Hill not only carried the seeds for a "philosophical dispute," but has the makings for an all-out ideological donnybrook. Thus, one would expect to see liberal PAC activity intensify dramatically since 1980 and leading up to the 1984 election. The overriding goal being a flood of grass roots contributions to oust conservative congressmen and replace them with liberal candidates.
CONCLUSION

Throughout this section, I sought to establish a nexus between interest group theory and empirical observations. This in turn, would provide the framework from which I would set forth a series of hypotheses concerning the impact of the deviating 1980 elections on ideological liberal organizations. What I found in fact, was not just a link but a near perfect correlation between theory and practice, each reinforcing the other and pointing to the same ineluctable conclusion: The upshot of the Reagan/New Right landslide of 1980 was a dramatic renaissance of American liberalism. A renaissance so pervasive that ideological liberal organizations stand to benefit tremendously in terms of sustaining membership and raising funds. Moreover, it promises to facilitate the formation of liberal lobbying coalitions and enhance their capacity to cultivate grass roots support.
"Periods of apparent adversity and danger to an organization are golden opportunities for membership growth and fund raising."75/

-HYPOTHESIS I-

Since the 1980 elections, ideological liberal organizations have experienced a significant resurgence in membership totals and a concomitant increase in contributions in response to emotionally-laden direct-mail campaigns.

A) To test this hypothesis, I intend to establish whether or not ideological liberal organizations did indeed prosper in terms of membership growth and fund raising since 1980. And if so, to see if this resurgence can be attributed to successful anti-Reagan/anti-New Right grass roots solicitations. Validating this hypothesis will require these groups to conclusively show: first, that their memberships and contributions have increased markedly; and second, that this phenomenon directly stems from direct-mail appeals.

B) The primary source of this data are the membership files and contribution records of the respective organizations. If a resurgence since 1980 is detected, I will consult with staff members responsible for membership drives and fund raising to see if is linked to direct-mail campaigns.
"The degree of unity within a group is probably most fundamental in determining the measure of success it will enjoy through its political activity."76/

-HYPOTHESIS II-

Hoping to capitalize on public fears about President Reagan's conservative policies, ideological liberal organizations are placing an increased emphasis on policy formulation and dissemination to coalesce and mobilize potential liberal activists, thereby eliminating the New Right's heretofore monopoly on getting issues into the political marketplace.

A) The true test as to whether or not ideological liberal organizations operate more effectively as political idea groups when on the defensive, is to see how and how often they have facilitated the exchange of liberal views since 1980. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the quality and quantity of the forums and conferences (formulation) sponsored, and the publications and newsletters (dissemination) released by these groups since the Reagan/New Right landslide. If this hypothesis is to be verified, these groups must show that they are, in fact, stimulating and coordinating liberal thinking through the forementioned and possibly other means of policy formulation and dissemination.

B) The principal sources of this data will be interviews with appropriate staff members, namely public relations personnel, and my
own experiences as an ADA intern. During my six month tenure in Washington, I intend to ascertain how ideological liberal organizations have promoted policy formulation and dissemination to coalesce and mobilize potential liberal activists since 1980.
"Lobbying may reinforce, activate, or convert legislators; plainly the most important effect is reinforcement."77/ ..."Lobbying strength reaches its peak when a number of organizations combine forces."78/

-HYPOTHESIS III-

Facing a common threat and sharing complimentary sets of goals, ideological liberal organizations and assorted single-issue groups have begun to engage in ad-hoc legislative alliances since the 1980 election. By pooling their resources with various single-issue groups, ideological liberal organizations are seeking to enhance their lobbying capacity and thus, neutralize the New Right's legislative initiatives.

A) In measuring the validity of this hypothesis, it is essential to initially establish: the approximate number of ad-hoc coalitions ideological liberal organizations have joined since 1980; which single-issue groups they choose to align with; and which issues precipitated the formation of these loose alliances. This in turn will shed light on the overall effectiveness of lobbying coalitions in reinforcing organizational ties with legislators who share their policy objectives.

B) I will rely on the legislative representatives themselves to provide the principal source of data necessary to validate this hypothesis. Through personal interviews, I intend to establish the
underlying reasons for their respective organization's cooperation in each particular coalition, and ask them to assess the impact of these joint ventures.
"Studies have shown that attempts to 'pressure' legislators are counterproductive. Moreover, groups with real grass roots support often have more influence with legislators than do Washington-based staff organizations."79/

-HYPOTHESIS IV-

With access to a far broader-based and thus, potentially more influential constituency, ideological liberal organizations have set out to thwart the New Right's legislative initiatives by cultivating grass roots support in two distinct ways: One, the direct approach -- "explicit assistance or direction to group members or sympathizers to contact representatives or senators about an issue or bill; two, the indirect approach -- "promoting a general viewpoint on a broad policy issue by using popular outlets for lobbying appeal-ads in newspapers and magazines, commercials on television and radio."80/

A) The basic yardstick of this hypothesis is the capacity of ideological liberal organizations to maintain a steady stream of correspondence between the grass roots and lawmakers. Thus, it is imperative to first establish the frequency in which these groups prompt potential activists to contact their legislators. Next, it is equally necessary to find at how often and through what channels ideological liberal organizations attempt to shape a favorable public opinion for their policy objectives among strategic elements of the population. Verifying this hypothesis requires these groups to
plainly show that they are acting as a conduit between the grass roots and political officials more often and on more polemic issues. Further, they must demonstrate that they are facilitating this exchange of communications through broad media appeals.

B) The sources of this data will again be the lobbyists and public relations personnel of these groups. They can provide me with the data needed to establish how much emphasis their organizations are placing on grass roots tapping.
"As demoralized liberals awaken to a new decade, they're discovering that Reagan's election may have been a blessing in disguise. To judge by the increased budgets of liberal PAC's.81/

-HYPOTHESIS V-

Inspired by the impact of the New Right and reacting to conservative electoral successes in 1980, liberals are mounting a counterattack, manifest in the proliferation of political action committees. These groups are turning public disenchantment with the Reagan Administration's policies into PAC contributions, aimed at assisting embattled liberal incumbents and giving a boost to financially strapped liberal challengers in the forthcoming 1984 election.

A) In order to gauge the validity of this hypothesis, it is essential to establish whether or not liberal PAC's have amassed the sums of money needed to neutralized NCPAC and other conservative PAC's by relying on a flood of small donations. This in turn requires liberal PAC's to demonstrate that their contributions have increased significantly since 1980. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon these PAC's to show that these contributions are being funneled directly into the campaign budgets of beseiged liberal candidates. Findings to the contrary will serve to repudiate this hypothesis.

B) The PAC records of financial contributions will provide me
with sufficient enough data to assess the prospects of an effective counterattack by liberal PAC's in 1984. By consulting with personnel responsible for targeting the money, I will learn how these PAC's determine which candidates they will assist and how much they will invest in their campaign treasuries.
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AMERICAN POLITY

If the forementioned hypotheses are in fact, verified, the Reagan/New Right victory of 1980 will prove to be a pyhric victory for conservatives. The evidence compiled in this proposal overwhelming suggests that the election outcome compounded by the current Administration's policies have sown the seeds of a pandemic liberal renaissance, one which promises to neutralize the New Right, at least in the short-run. As John Herbers, a New York Times journalist sees it:

"In many grass roots communities across the nation, citizens are restless. The decline of the nation's industrial base, concern over unemployment, falling incomes, farm foreclosures and bankruptcies have stirred new rumblings. A multitude of citizen action groups on the left, which sprung up in the 70's to secure specific but frequently narrow goals on the state or local level, are now seeking to organize the discontent nationally and reverse the drift toward conservatism evident in President Reagan's election in 1980."82/

Heeding these rumblings of discontent, beleagured Democrats on Capitol Hill are stepping out of the shadows, voicing a more vociferous opposition to the Administration's proposals and moving with unaccustomed authority to seize the initiative on critical issues. According to Washington Post columnist Helen Dewar:

"Into this power vacuum the Senate Democrats have stepped with a unity, commanded and a sense of mission that has escaped them since Reagan swept into office, bringing with him a Republican Senate majority for the first time in a quarter century."83/
Clearly, the short-term implication of the Reagan/New Right landslide of 1980 is a nationwide resurgence of the liberal movement. Yet the long-term implications are less certain and hinge on the ability of this heterogeneous liberal constituency to maintain some semblance of unity after 1984. Historically this has not been the case. Without a clear threat to their vested interests, unity among liberals ebbs markedly, and the rift between ideological and single-issue groups widens. But if liberals have learned anything at all from the 1980 election, they have learned not to let their guard down.
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