

GV101 Week 11: Interest Groups and Social Movements

Class Task and Questions to Consider

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Office Hours (by appointment via the [Student Hub](#)):
Thursdays, 09:30 – 10:30, CBG.4.13
Thursdays, 14:30 – 15:30, CBG.4.13

Country Question:

- What are three interest groups in your country, and what interests do they represent?
 - When was the last time there was a large social movement in your country?
 - Are there any particular barriers to collective action in your country?

Class Task:

- This week you will be undertaking a task rather than answering questions. In your group you will be allocated an actor in a pensions dispute occurring at some higher education institutions (i.e. universities). The actors are:
 - Lecturers (either junior or senior, allocated to individuals within one group), who are currently not members of the union and represent one third of the academic workforce (which is also half of the non-unionised two-thirds of the workforce);
 - The lecturers' union (allocated to one group collectively);
 - The employers' organisation (allocated to one group collectively).

The background to the task is that the pension fund in question undertakes annual valuations to project whether it will be running a deficit or surplus in future. Last year's valuation projected a deficit going forward and has prompted the pension fund to raise contribution levels for both employees (i.e. lecturers) and employers (i.e. universities). However, the union queried the valuation, arguing that it made unduly cautious assumptions, without which the deficit would not be so dramatic, and contributions would not be required to increase.

In light of the above, the union successfully balloted for and held strikes at affected universities last year, which resulted in the appointment of a joint expert panel (with members chosen by both the union and the universities) to review the pension valuation. The joint expert panel broadly agreed with the union's position that the valuation made unduly cautious assumptions and recommended a revaluation of the pension fund. Both the union and the employers endorsed this conclusion in principle, but the union now argues that the employers did not place sufficient pressure on the pension fund to implement the revaluation. If the pension fund undertakes a revaluation, it may increase the liability for the employers. As things stand, both employees and employers are now being asked to increase their contributions to the pension fund.

The union has again disputed the need for increased pension contributions by employees, taking the position that their members should bear no additional costs, and that increased contributions may make the pension fund less viable by driving away members. As such, they have begun organising for a second strike action to strengthen their hand in negotiations with the employers going forward.

Essential Reading Questions:

Although the focus of the class will be on the above task, here are some questions on the essential readings for you to consider if you wish:

1. Clark, Golder, and Golder outline Olson's work on the 'collective action, or free-rider, problem.' What is that problem and why does it exist?
 - a) What are 'K' and 'N', and how do they relate to the collective action problem?
 - b) What solutions to the collective action problem, if any, can you identify?
2. Do you find Olson's conceptualisation of human actors and their calculus, and thus his explanation of (a lack of) collective action, convincing? Why?
 - a) What alternative explanations of (a lack of) collective action are there?
3. Thies and Porche compare economic and political explanations for the persistence of agricultural subsidies. Which do they find to be the more convincing explanation? Do you agree with their conclusion, and why?
4. There are specific elements of economic and political explanations for the persistence of agricultural subsidies that are identified by Thies and Porche. What are these and how can their impact be explained?

Further Reading Questions:

5. Olson claims that 'there is a systematic tendency for "exploitation" of the great by the small!' Why is this so?
6. What is the difference between a 'privileged', an 'intermediate', and a 'latent' group, as outlined by Olson? What are the implications for collective action?
7. What are 'selective incentives' according to Olson, and why are they important for latent groups? Can you think of some real-world examples of selective incentives?
8. What are the three families of causal mechanisms that Farrell identifies in relation to the impact of the internet on collective action?
 - a) How do they relate to, and anticipate, the widespread ideas of 'clicktivism' and 'echo chambers'?
9. Pierskalla and Hollenbach identify a robust positive relationship between mobile phone coverage and violent collective action in Africa. How do they explain this relationship with reference to collective action and coordination problems?
 - a) Despite the negative events associated with expanded mobile phone coverage identified by Pierskalla and Hollenbach, they remain at least partially optimistic about the continued expansion of that coverage. Why? Do you agree?

Essential Readings for Next Week:

- 'Veto Players' section in William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder, *Foundations of Comparative Politics* (London, Sage Publications, 2019), pp. 345-348.
- 'Majoritarian or Consensus Democracy' section in William Roberts Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder, *Foundations of Comparative Politics* (London, Sage Publications, 2019), pp. 352-364.
- Arend Lijphart, 'Democracies: Forms, performance, and constitutional engineering', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 25, No1 (Jan., 1994), pp. 1-17.

Further Reading for Next Week:

The further reading questions for next week will be based on the following two sources, which you may choose to focus on:

- 'Veto Players Theory' chapter in George Tsebelis, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 17-37.
- John D. Huber and Cecilia Martinez-Gallardo, 'Cabinet Instability and the Accumulation of Experience: The French Fourth and Fifth Republics in Comparative Perspective', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan., 2004), pp. 27-48.
- Anthony J. McGann and Michael Latner, 'The Calculus of Consensus Democracy: Rethinking Patterns of Democracy Without Veto Players', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 7 (Jun., 2013), pp. 823-850.