INTEREST GROUPS IN OKLAHOMA, 1986 AND 1997

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The interest group universe continues to expand in Oklahoma. While education, labor, oil and agriculture persist, church influence and the newspapers are declining. Service, professional, business, banking, telecommunications and utility lobbies are growing in power. Interest group influence in Oklahoma is becoming more diversified as the state continues to mature and develop economically.

In 1935 Senator Hugo Black (later to become Justice Black) saidon the radio that lobbies were "contrary to tradition, against the public morals, and hostile to good government." He went on to say, "the lobby has reached such a position of power that . . . its greed, trickery, deception and fraud condemn it to the death it deserves" (Schriftgiesser, 1951:74). Obviously the impending death of lobbyists and interest groups was not as near as Senator Black had thought (or hoped). Sentiments similar to those spoken by Justice Black remain intact today. Many citizens, journalists, and reformers continue to view interest groups and their lobbyists with skepticism. This skepticism is increased by revelations of

interest group influence in the electoral process through campaign contributions.

Despite popular distrust political scientists have viewed interest groups in a much more positive light, inspired by Madison's Federalist writings and the growth of the modern state. Arthur Bentley (1949) and David Truman (1971) have placed interest groups at the heart of politics and the governmental system. For them the interest group is an element of continuity, a stabilizing element in a complex, changing political world.

The constant presence of interest groups is evident in mass media coverage of current political events. This examination shows a persistent pattern of group conflict in nearly every major governmental decision. In fact, the passage of a particular bill in Congress or a state legislature is usually described as a victory or a defeat for an interest group or coalition of groups. For example, when the Oklahoma State Legislature passed a moratorium on hog farms, the vote was viewed as a defeat for corporate farm interests (*Daily Oklahoman* March 20, 1998).

There is growing literature on interest group activity in the states (Nownes and Freeman 1998; Gray and Lowery 1993; Lowery and Gray 1993; Hrebenar and Thomas 1987, 1992, 1993a, 1993b). A focus on Oklahoma in the context of this literature provides a comparative perspective of the changing nature of group politics in a Midwestern state. The article is organized into five sections. We first provide a brief overview of Oklahoma politics. Second, we outline the legal and political environments affecting interest groups in the state. Third, we discuss the interest group universe in the state, including interest group tactics. Fourth, we look at previous assessments of group power in Oklahoma, and groups thought to be powerful in 1986 and 1997 by state legislators. Finally, we discuss the implications of the study.

OKLAHOMA POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE STATE

Some researchers contend that Oklahoma is in the midst of social, economic, and political transition. Kirkpatrick Sale (1975), for instance, includes Oklahoma as part of the contemporary "power shift" from the eastern establishment to the newly emerging, economically and politically powerful Sunbelt. As a relatively new state, having joined the Union only in 1907, Oklahoma is still in the process of development and

maturation. Historically, the people of the state have had strong ties to the land through agricultural or mineral extraction. These traditionally dominant economic interests are giving way, however, as the state becomes more urban and the economic base diversifies. Nevertheless, the rural frontier nature of Oklahoma has significantly affected the state's character.

OKLAHOMA'S CHARACTER: A TRADITIONAL VIEW

A state's historical, social, economic and demographic characteristics help shape its political outlook and behavior. In 1984 Daniel Elazar (1984), contended that such factors helped to explain the presence of political subcultures within the states. He classified Oklahoma's political culture as predominantly "traditional" in nature, one that "retains some of the organic characteristics of the preindustrial social order." The role of government is to maintain the status quo. A single political party usually dominates state politics, but party cohesion is weak, politics are personal, and politicians are personalities.

Traditional political culture is quite evident in Oklahoma's politics and history. Although the state is usually divided into a Republican North and Democratic South (Key 1983), since statehood Oklahoma has remained a one- or modified one-party state controlled by the Democrats (Kirkpatrick, Morgan, and Kielhorn 1977; Bibby, et. al. 1983). In fact, up until the 1996 election, state law required that Democratic candidates be listed first on all election ballots. With respect to party cohesion in the state legislature, Stephen Jones (1974, 181) asserts that "Oklahoma is a state in which the influence of pressure politics and local issues is greater than party cohesion or national issues."

As a state with strong ties to the land, Oklahoma lacks much of the diversity associated with more urbanized, heterogeneous states. In 1990, Oklahoma ranked 28th in percentage of population living in urban areas (67.7%) (Morgan, Morgan, and Quitno 1997). The national average was 75 percent. In many respects, the state can be viewed as a collectivity of preurban, agriculturally based, small communities. There are only two moderately large cities: Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Racial, ethnic and religious differences in the state are minimal. In 1995 whites were approximately 83 percent of the population, African-Americans

were about seven percent, American Indians seven percent, and Latinos three percent. Not only is Oklahoma largely white, it is overwhelmingly Protestant. Oklahoma has one of the highest percentages of any fundamentalists state in the Union (Johnson, Picard and Quinn 1971).

Oklahoma is a poor state. In 1995 Oklahoma ranked 44th among the states in per capita personal income ($18,580) and 46th in median household income (Morgan, Morgan, and Quitno 1997). According to a recent State Senate report average annual pay in Oklahoma in 1994 was $22,292, 12.6 percent less than the 50 state average of $25,109. Mining, transportation, communication, utilities and wholesale and retail trade workers in Oklahoma make up a larger percentage of the private sector workforce than in other states. Oklahoma has relatively fewer manufacturing, service, finance, insurance and real estate workers than the national average. But services, wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing and finance, insurance and real estate are the largest components of the Oklahoma economy, comprising 65 percent of total output. Oklahoma's economy has diversified and is no longer dependent on oil and agriculture. Oil and agriculture make up only about 7.6 percent ($5.4 billion) of the state's total economic output ($71.87 billion) (State Senate Staff 1996).

What does this overview of the traditional character of the state have to do with interest group activity? Previous research suggests that many of the characteristics associated with Oklahoma's socioeconomic and political environment should give rise to moderate to strong interest group power. Specifically, a rural agricultural economic base, as opposed to a more urbanized industrial base, the presence of a limited number of dominant economic interests and the general lack of wealth and interparty competition often positively correlate with interest group influence.

In Oklahoma a few interest groups historically have played a prominent role in state affairs. Moreover, groups that have traditionally been categorized as influential — such as the oil lobby, agriculture, the Baptist church, and local officials — are still formidable forces. But just as Oklahoma is undergoing tremendous social, economic, and political change, the interest group universe is also in transition.

OKLAHOMA'S CHARACTER: A TRANSITIONAL VIEW

Jerome O. Steffen (1982, 29) argues that "Oklahoma is on the verge of experiencing a major growth period." Douglas Hale offers a similar message: transitional Oklahoma is much different than traditional Oklahoma. He contends that the state at present is in an "Age of Resurgence." This era began in the 1950s, following the difficult years of the dust bowl and "Okie" out-migration (Hale 1982). In brief, Oklahoma is changing. Economic development is the "buzz" word among state and local officials.

Education has become a central issue as the state attempts to attract industry and diversify its economic base. Concerns related to the manufacturing sector such as tort reform and right-to-work legislation are salient in transitional Oklahoma. Population changes, urbanization, and changing economic patterns have brought new heterogeneity to a once agrarian state. Associated with heterogeneity, of course, is conflict and diversity of opinion. Russell L. Hanson (1983) hypothesizes that migration trends toward states in the Sunbelt "could transform their political institutions and policies." Oklahoma certainly seems to be a state in which the interest group universe is expanding, where old, traditional groups must now compete with new developing lobbies.

Interparty competition is increasing; voters in 1994 elected only the fourth Republican governor in the state history and going into the 1998 elections Republicans constituted 36 percent of House members and 31 percent of state Senators. In 1979 these were 24 percent for the House and 18 percent for the Senate.

THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS OF INTEREST GROUPS IN OKLAHOMA

THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

In 1985 Oklahoma laws regulating lobbying activities were probably best classified as only moderately stringent (England and Morgan 1993). They basically involved two requirements: registration and disclosure of expenditures. Under state statutes passed in 1978,

any person (1) who spent in excess of $250 in a calendar quarter for lobbying activities, (2) who received compensation in excess of $250 in a calendar quarter for lobbying services rendered, or (3) whose employment duties in whole or part required lobbying regardless of whether the individual was compensated for the service above normal salary, was required to register each year with the Oklahoma Ethics Commission. Employees of state agencies and local governments, however, were not included in the definition of lobbyists and were therefore not required to register to lobby (Council of State Governments 1986a; 1986b).

Oklahoma Statutes adopted in 1996 define a lobbyist as an individual (1) who is employed or retained by another for financial or other compensation to perform services that include lobbying, other than an individual whose lobbying activities are only incidental to, and not a significant part of, the services provided by such individual to the client; (2) who is seeking to do business or doing business with a governmental entity; or (3) who has a substantial financial interest in actions or matters before or affecting a governmental entity. Every lobbyist is required to register with the Ethics Commission on a lobbyist registration form during the month of January of each odd-numbered year or within five days after engaging in lobbying. Lobbyists are restricted to a $300 annual limit on items of value given to any state officer or state employee or their immediate family (Oklahoma Ethics Commission 1997).

In April 1986, 343 lobbyists were registered in Oklahoma representing more than three hundred different organizations. In 1976 only 83 lobbyists were registered. By 1997, the number of registered lobbyists in Oklahoma had grown to approximately 400.

LEGISLATOR ATTITUDES

In 1986, all 149 members of the Oklahoma legislature (101 House members and 48 Senators) were mailed a survey soliciting their views about interest groups in Oklahoma. In 1997, the same survey was mailed once again to all members of the Oklahoma legislature. In 1986, 87 members of the state legislature provided responses to some or all of the questions; in 1997, 45 Oklahoma state legislators responded to the survey.

State legislators were asked to characterize lobbyists in the Oklahoma political system along several dimensions. Specifically, we asked the lawmakers to asses (1) the honesty of lobbyists, (2) the degree to which lobbyists provide accurate information, (3) the degree to which lobbyists have a positive influence on politics, (4) the overall influence of lobbyists, and (5) the degree to which lobbyists act in the public interest. The questions were designed to capture legislators' perceptions of state lobbyists. In turn, these attitudes may affect how state lawmakers receive lobbyists. Table 1 provides both 1986 and 1997 responses of legislators to the five questions.

Results from the 1986 survey reveal that most state lawmakers hold positive attitudes about the honesty of lobbyists and feel that group representatives supply accurate information. Eleven years later, in 1997, new survey results indicate that Oklahoma state legislators hold even more positive attitudes about the honesty of lobbyists and the accuracy of information supplied by their representatives. In fact, 42 percent of those responding to the 1997 survey feel that lobbyists are "very" honest and 33 percent feel that lobbyists provide "very" accurate information, nearly doubling the percentages for these two attitudinal questions recorded a decade earlier.

Legislators are less sure, however, that such groups act in the public interest. The most recent feelings are consistent with results from the 1986 survey. In 1986, 52 percent of the legislators agreed with the statement that lobbyists did not generally act in the public interest compared to 43 percent in 1997. Additionally, in 1997 some legislators are suspect of the influence of groups; 45 percent feel that pressure groups are "somewhat" (36 percent) or "very" (9 percent) overly influential.

The legislators were asked whether they believed that stricter regulations governing lobbying are needed. Surprisingly, despite such strong feelings about the influence of pressure groups in Oklahoma, only 32 percent of state legislators in 1997 either "strongly agree" or "agree" that stricter regulations governing lobbying are required. In 1986 this was 61 percent. Legislators appear largely satisfied with the current lobbying regulations.

In sum, findings from the 1997 survey of state legislators when compared to 1986 survey results show legislators today feel that lobbyists are more honest and provide much more accurate information than they

TABLE 1

State Legislators' Attitudes about Lobbyists in Oklahoma in 1986 (N=87) and 1997 (N=42)

	Positive						Negative				
	Very		Somewhat		Uncertain		Somewhat		Very		
Lobbyists	1986	1997	1986	1997	1986	1997	1986	1997	1986	1997	Lobbyists
Are honest	22	42	64	54	7	4	7	0	0	0	Are dishonest
Provide accurate information	17	33	62	60	8	7	13	0	0	0	Provide inaccurate information
Have positive influence overall	13	22	49	58	19	13	12	5	7	2	Have negative influence overall
Are not overly influential	8	4	34	29	12	22	24	36	22	9	Are overly influential
Generally act in the public interest	5	4	28	29	15	24	32	27	20	16	Generally do not act in public interest

Note: All figures in table are percentages.

SOURCE: Authors' surveys of state legislators, 1986 and 1997

In 1997, according to the *Tulsa World's* capitol bureau correspondent Brian Ford (1997), many of the heavy hitter lobbyists today are former legislators. Don McCorkell and Don Williams became the latest additions to a group of legislators-turned-lobbyists in Oklahoma. In 1997 twenty-five of the nearly four hundred lobbyists registered with the Oklahoma State Legislature were former legislators. McCorkell, a Tulsa Democrat, became a registered lobbyist for Commercial Financial Services Inc., after running an unsuccessful campaign for the U.S. Senate. Don Williams, a Democrat from Balko and former chairman of the Senate Education Committee, now lobbies for the Oklahoma Telephone Association and Philip Morris, Inc. Former two-term Oklahoma Attorney General Larry Derryberry, who also served in the House, claims the title of top insurance lobbyist in the state. Other legislators-turned-lobbyists represent a variety of interests, ranging from the Oklahoma Pork Council to the Oklahoma State Chiropractors Association to El Paso Natural Gas Company.

By law, former U.S. Congressmen are prohibited from serving as lobbyists for one year after leaving office. No such restriction exists for former Oklahoma state legislators. Oklahoma does, however, prohibit former state legislators from obtaining state agency jobs for at least one year after leaving office. State lawmakers have authored bills in the past that attempt to place restrictions on the legislator-turned-lobbyist, but none have passed. Lobbyist and former Oklahoma City lawmaker Kenneth Nance suggests that the edge you have as a former legislator is that you not only understand the legislative process, but you also know how legislators think (Ford 1997).

We might note that some things never seem to change. Of the four 1986 "heavy hitters," Kenneth Nance is a lawyer and former state representative; Richard Huddleston is a former House administrator; and Clem McSpadden is a former President Pro Tempore of the state Senate.

INTEREST GROUP TACTICS

Lobbyists in Oklahoma employ a wide variety of techniques in their effort to influence public policy. Overwhelmingly, the locus of attention is on the legislature. Respondents to our 1986 lobbyists survey

indicated that almost 82 percent of the time spent lobbying is directed toward the legislature, another 15 percent devoted to administrative agencies and less than one percent aimed at the judiciary. In 1997, lobbyists said they devoted 77 percent of their time lobbying the legislature, 17 percent lobbying administrative agencies, and less than one percent of their efforts were aimed at the judiciary.

Following the lead of Scholzman and Tierney (1982), we asked lobbyists in Oklahoma to indicate whether they used twelve specific techniques to advance their legislative goals. They were also asked to assess the effectiveness of each tactic. Table 2 organizes lobbyists' responses into three basic categories of techniques — legislator assisting, influence seeking, and organizational-directed.

Lobbyists employ most of the twelve techniques quite frequently. With the single exception of using the press, more than two-thirds of the group representatives rely on each of the lobbying strategies. Personal contact with legislators is the most widely used tactic (97.7%), and it is also rated as the most effective by lobbyists. Of the three types of lobbying behavior, legislator-assisting techniques, which include helping draft legislation, appearing before committees, and presenting research results, receive the highest mean frequency of usage (84.5%). But the second and third most effective tactics are found in the organizational-directed category. Lobbyists rate joint lobbying by several organizations and mounting grassroots lobbying efforts as productive strategies. More than four-fifths of the lobbyists use other grassroot tactics such as letter-writing campaigns and having clients lobby legislators to reach their goals.

Given the general overall lack of variation in usage and mean effectiveness of techniques in 1986, in the 1997 survey we did not ask state lobbyists the same questions. Rather, we asked the group representatives to rank order the five most effective tactics they use to achieve their goals. Table 3 summarizes their responses.

The most effective tactics employed by Oklahoma lobbyists in 1997 mirrors those used a decade earlier. Personal contacts with legislators were identified as the most effective lobbying tactic. This finding supports the intuitive notion that this tactic is the most expedient method of influencing legislators. The lobbyists mentioned personal contacts with legislators as being the most effective technique at least twice as often (and in many cases three or even four times as often) as

TABLE 2

Lobbying Techniques Used by Oklahoma Lobbyists in 1986 (N-168)

Type of Activity and Technique	Percent Using Technique	Mean Perceived Effectiveness[a]
Legislator Assisting		
Helping draft legislation	85.1	4.0
Appearing before committees	86.9	3.5
Presenting research results	81.6	3.5
Mean score for 3 techniques[b]	84.5	3.6
Influence Seeking		
Personal contacts with legislators	97.7	4.2
Personal contacts with elected/ politically appointed executive personnel	85.1	3.7
Supporting a legislator at election time	82.0	3.7
Using the press	62.5	3.1
Mean score for 4 techniques[b]	81.8	3.7
Organizational Directed		
Mobilizing public opinion behind a bill	69.7	3.7
Letter-writing campaigns by clients or constituents	80.3	3.6
Joint lobbying by several organizations	84.6	4.0
Using clients to lobby legislators	82.8	3.9
Mounting grassroots lobbying efforts	74.5	4.0
Mean score for 5 techniques[b]	78.5	3.8

[a]Range is from 1 (ineffective) to 5 (very effective).

[b]Mean scores are for each lobbying activity area. Scores are calculated by summing percentage usage and effectiveness and dividing by the number of techniques in activity area.

SOURCE: Authors' survey of lobbyists.

almost every other available tactic. While individually personal contacts with legislators were identified as the most effective tactic employed by lobbyists, as a group influence-seeking was not the objective.

In the aggregate, lobbyists focused their activities on mobilizing public support. These tactics include efforts to gain public support for legislation, letter-writing campaigns, joint lobbying efforts, client lobbying, and general grass-roots efforts. Table 3 reveals that those techniques characterized as organizational directed were collectively the most effective lobbying tactics the lobbyists employed. The overall interpretation of the results between both the individual and group effectiveness of the various lobbying techniques indicates a remarkable consistency across the two time periods.

INTEREST GROUP POWER IN OKLAHOMA

Sarah M. Morehouse (1982), a pioneer in the study of state interest group politics, poses an important question: "How do you go about measuring the power of pressure groups?" Findings are likely to be divergent based on the respondent — political analysts of the state, legislators, lobbyists, etc. Perhaps there are no absolute answers. Interest group power may vary according to organization size, fiscal resources, lobbying skills, and frequency of contact (Truman 1971). Similarly, legislators' representational role orientations may affect their responsiveness to pressure group activities. Since the legislative agenda is dynamic, interest group involvement in politics may vary over time as well. With these caveats in mind, in this section we first provide a brief overview of the literature focusing on interest groups in Oklahoma. Next we summarize the groups identified as the most powerful in 1986 based on legislators' perceptions. Finally, we offer a reassessment of group power based on legislators' perceptions in 1997.

TABLE 3

Most Effective Lobbying Techniques used by Oklahoma Lobbyists in 1997 (N=124)

Type of Activity and Technique	Rank							
	No. of 1st Rank Mentions	No. of 2nd Rank Mentions	No. of 3rd Rank Mentions	No. of 4th Rank Mentions	No. of 5th Rank Mentions	N	Weighted Score[a]	
Legislator Assisting								
Helping draft legislation	6	1	6	7	10	30	76	
Appearing before committees	9	1	9	10	6	35	102	
Presenting research results	5	2	7	6	8	28	74	
Mean score for 3 techniques								2.69
Influence Seeking								
Personal contacts with legislators	23	56	12	9	4	104	397	
Personal contacts with elected/ politically appointed executive personnel	8	3	10	10	6	37	108	
Supporting a legislator at election time	12	4	18	9	11	54	159	
Using the press	0	0	1	7	7	15	24	
Mean score for 4 techniques								2.82

TABLE 3 (continued)

Most Effective Lobbying Techniques Used by Oklahoma Lobbyists in 1997 (N=124)

Type of Activity and Technique	Rank							
	No. of 1st Rank Mentions	No. of 2nd Rank Mentions	No. of 3rd Rank Mentions	No. of 4th Rank Mentions	No. of 5th Rank Mentions	N	Weighted Score[a]	
Organizational Directed								
Mobilizing public opinion behind a bill	5	15	11	3	6	40	130	
Letterwriting campaigns by clients or constitutents	11	1	10	4	9	35	106	
Joint lobbying by several organizations	15	7	9	17	13	61	177	
Using clients to lobby legislators	10	13	10	11	11	55	165	
Mounting grassroots lobbying efforts	9	15	12	14	12	62	181	
Mean score for 5 techniques								3.02

[a]Derived by multiplying number of 1st rank mentions by 5, 2nd rank mentions by 4, 3rd rank mentions by 3, 4th rank mentions by 2, 5th rank mentions by 1 and summing products.

SOURCE: Authors' survey of lobbyists.

GROUP POWER: PREVIOUS ASSESSMENTS

Previous research suggests that a limited number of pressure groups have played a prominent role in Oklahoma politics. In 1947, for example, American journalist John Gunther (1947) identified five groups that he claimed "all . . . [had] something to do with running Oklahoma": the Baptist church, oil interests, the aged (the welfare lobby), education, and local officials. Similarly, writing about Oklahoma politics in the 1960s, Jones (1974) surmised that these five groups were still dominant and added two new powerful interests: labor unions and newspapers. Samuel Patterson (1962) found that lobbyists registered with the House of Representatives in 1961 primarily represented business, farm, labor and governmental groups. Finally, in her comparative interest group study, Sarah Morehouse (1982) asserted that oil interests, local officials, power companies (utilities), and transportation associations are the powerbrokers in Oklahoma.

Only Patterson's assessment is based on empirical data. Gunther isolated salient groups on his travels through the state in the early 1940s. Jones's analysis of group power in the 1960s is an extensive elaboration of Gunther's earlier work but still largely impressionistic in nature. Morehouse (1982, 112) identified significant groups according "to the judicious consideration of . . . available evidence."Perhaps a more appropriate way to measure group strength is to ask legislators, the principal target of lobbying efforts, to list and rank the most influential interest groups in the state. We did just that.

GROUP POWER IN THE LEGISLATURE: 1986

To assess interest group power, members of the state legislature were asked to list and rank the most influential or successful interest groups in recent legislative sessions. Table 4 shows state legislators' perceptions of influential lobbies in Oklahoma in 1986.

Four lobbies emerged as the most powerful. In rank-order by their weighted influence scores, they are education, labor, professional groups, and banking/finance. Only two of these lobbies have been deemed significant in previous analyses of interest groups in Oklahoma: education

TABLE 4

State Legislators' Perceptions of Influential Lobbies in Oklahoma in 1986 (N=87)

	Legislators' Rankings					
Lobby	No. of 1st Rank Mentions	No. of 2nd Rank Mentions	No. of 3rd Rank Mentions	No. of 4th Rank Mentions	Total No. of Mentions	Weighted Influence Score[a]
Education	54	10	12	8	84	278
Labor	7	16	14	10	47	114
Professional groups	4	16	12	15	47	103
Banking/Finance	7	13	5	5	30	82
Public Employees	2	6	5	2	15	38
Oil	2	2	7	8	19	36
Business	3	4	2	6	15	34
Agriculture	2	1	6	6	15	29
Realtors/ Insurance	3	1	3	3	10	24
Human Services	0	3	3	4	10	19
Communications/ Transportation	0	4	2	0	6	16
Utilities	1	1	2	4	8	15
Senior Citizens	0	2	2	3	7	13
City-County Officials	0	2	2	1	5	9
Media	0	1	1	2	4	7
Construction	1	0	0	1	2	5
Other	0	0	3	2	5	8

[a]Derived by multiplying number of 1st rank mentions by 4, 2nd rank mentions by 3, 3rd rank mentions by 2, 4th rank mentions by 1 and summing products.

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from 1986 survey of state legislators.

and labor. Banking/finance and professional groups seem to be the new powerbrokers. Also, every lobby, with the single exception of church interests, identified as prominent in the past was influential in 1986. Given 1986 legislative rankings, however, it seems that the traditionally accorded status of some groups is questionable. For example, oil and agriculture are in the middle of the influence hierarchy. Other interests, such as transportation, utilities, senior citizens, local officials, and the media (newspapers), though still successful, have low aggregate influence scores.

Two generalizations seem plausible from these findings. First, in support of our original thesis, the interest group universe in Oklahoma appears to be in transition. Second and highly related, the power of some traditionally influential groups in the state is changing, either in intensity or in locus of attention. Based on previous studies, findings from our survey of state legislators, and our own understanding of state politics, in 1986 we argued that the "influential group universe" in Oklahoma consisted of ten groups. They can be organized into three categories: (1) traditional, continuing power, (2) traditional, declining power, and (3) nontraditional, emerging power.

Traditional, Continuing Power Groups. In 1986 we put four groups in the traditional, with continuing power category: education, labor, newspapers, and local officials. According to Jones (1974, 176), education "is probably the strongest lobby or pressure group in Oklahoma." Based on our analysis, we concur. The education lobby received fifty-four first rank mentions as the most influential group in the state by legislators, almost eight times the number of its closest rivals — labor and banking/finance. Education's power expressed as a weighted influence score also suggests that the interest be in an "influential class" all by itself.

The power of education in public affairs is somewhat paradoxical. Oklahoma does not rate particularly high nationally on educational indicators. For example, in 1984 Oklahoma ranked 31st among the states in per pupil expenditure for elementary and secondary schools and tied for 39th in average annual salaries for public elementary and secondary classroom teachers (Statistical Abstract 1985). Nevertheless, as Gunther (1947, 881) commented in 1947, teachers in Oklahoma are "sophisticated politically and highly vocal." Also, in recent years, legislators and state

leaders increasingly have acknowledged the importance of education in economic development.

Although Oklahoma seems an unlikely state where labor should be powerful, in the mid-1980s it ranked 43rd nationally in percentage of nonagricultural employees belonging to labor organizations — labor interests have a long and active history in state politics. For a number of years labor has been the beneficiary of sympathetic support from key leadership in the state legislature (Jones 1974; Patterson 1962). Important legislative leaders, for example, helped defeat right-to-work legislation in 1961 and have kept it from reaching a vote of the full legislature in recent years.

The third group in this category is newspapers. Although Table 4 shows a low weighted influence score for the media, as Frosty Troy, editor of the *Oklahoma Observer* and longtime commentator on state politics surmised in a January 1987 interview with the authors, "There is not a lobby more feared among legislators than the newspapers." Particularly influential is the *Daily Oklahoman*. E. K. Gaylord, founder and publisher of the newspaper, is considered one of the state's patriarchs. Until his death in 1974 at the age of 101, Gaylord played an important role in state affairs. In 1947 Gunther (1947, 881) went as far as to assert that Gaylord was "the nearest thing to a boss the city [Oklahoma City] has." Similarly, commenting on the power of Gaylord through the 1960s, Jones claims, "Whatever position Gaylord supports usually wins" (Jones 1974, 187). The domineering and much-feared titan was succeeded by his son, E. L. Gaylord, who has carried on his father's powerful influence.

The final group is local officials. Associated with Oklahoma's traditionalistic political culture is the importance of local interests in state politics. The power of local officials appears quite stable and may even be increasing. Despite the fact that county government was recently the focus of national attention in the wake of widespread corruption, county commissioners remain a political force. Simply put, they can still help "deliver the votes."

Traditional, Declining Power Groups. Historically, three other groups have been especially prominent in state affairs. They continue to be important, but in 1986 their influence seemed to be diminishing or changing in locus. Perhaps the most important is the Baptist church. In Oklahoma, a state with a strong fundamentalist religious orientation, the

Baptist church has been a powerful force in state and local politics. But church interests seem to be losing vitality. In recent years voters approved liquor-by-the-drink (1984) and pari-mutuel betting (1985), long opposed by the Baptists and other conservative Protestant denominations. It is interesting to note, however, that in recent years a state lottery initiative as well as off-track betting (1998) failed in a statewide vote.

Two other groups are also categorized as traditional but declining in influence: agriculture and the energy lobby. These two interests represent, of course, the paramount economic interests of the past. Since 1982 the oil industry in Oklahoma has been in a deep recession. Agricultural interests have fared similarly. The influence of both groups, however, may not be attenuating as much as it is changing location. Jones (1974, 175) argues, for example, that "the influence of oil in Oklahoma is more readily evident on the national scene . . . than on the state scene."

Because agricultural policy, like energy legislation, is in many respects nationally defined, the hypothesis that agribusiness interests have been nationalized could be advanced. Regardless of whether one accepts our argument, there is no doubt that agriculture and mineral extraction activities no longer hold the premier positions of power they enjoyed in the past. Both groups, however, continued to be ranked as influential by state legislators in 1986; oil had the sixth highest weighted influence score and agriculture the eighth. In contrast, new groups seem to be growing in power along with Oklahoma's transitional economy.

Nontraditional, Emerging Power Groups. In 1986, three groups were included in this nontraditional, emerging power category: professional groups (primarily lawyers and doctors), banking/finance, and business. The three types of interests were ranked by legislators in 1986, respectively, as the third, fourth, and seventh most influential lobbies in Oklahoma. Only one of the groups, business, has been mentioned in previous research as important. The emerging power of these three lobbies illustrates the thesis that interest group power in Oklahoma is in transition. The fact that legislators rank these types of interests as influential adds support to Steffen (1982) and Hale's (1982) contentions that the state is in the midst of economic change. As the economic base of the state moves from a reliance on activities tied to the land to one on manufacturing and services, lobbying activities by business interests and

service-oriented professional groups that are regulated by state laws are likely also to increase.

That state legislators consider banking/finance as an important lobby is not surprising. Since the failure of the Penn Square Bank in 1982, more than fifty other banks in the state have either failed or been declared insolvent, more than twenty alone in 1987. The troubles of banking and finance enterprises have been directly linked to the sagging oil and agriculture economies in the state. In response, the state legislature has been heavily involved in matters of concern to financial interests. Lawmakers recently approved out-of-state ownership of local banks and branch banking, for instance.

GROUP POWER IN OKLAHOMA: 1997

In order to offer a reassessment of powerful interest groups in Oklahoma, in 1997 we once again asked members of the state legislature to list and rank the most influential or successful interest groups in recent legislative sessions. Table 5 summarizes the results of the survey data. Like Table 4, Table 5 shows the number of first through fourth rank mentions and a weighted influence score (WIS) for each lobby.

First, we should note that when compared to 1986, the interest group universe as well as the powerful lobbies in the state had not changed considerably by 1997. In 1997, two groups emerge as the most powerful — education and professional groups. Education, like in 1986, is in a class by itself, with a weighted influence score (WIS) of 114. The third ranked interest group in 1986 emerges as the second most powerful group in 1997 (based on its weighted influence score) — professional groups. Following these two lobbies, are three traditionally powerful groups in Oklahoma politics. Labor has a WIS of 37 and is ranked third in 1997 (second rank in 1986). Agriculture has a WIS of 35 and has a fourth rank in 1997 (eighth rank in 1986). And business has a WIS of 32 and a fifth rank in 1997 (seventh rank in 1986).

Next comes a group of four lobbies that have weighted influence scores in the twenties and high teens — telecommunications, oil, utilities, and banking/finance. Finally, other influential lobbies according to state legislators, but that have lower weighted index scores, are human services/health care, insurance, government officials, and senior citizens.

TABLE 5

State Legislators' Perceptions of Influential Lobbies in Oklahoma in 1997 (N=45)

	Legislators' Rankings[a]						
Groups	Rank In 1986	No. of 1st Rank Mentions	No. of 2nd Rank Mentions	No. of 3rd Rank Mentions	No. of 4th Rank Mentions	Total No. of Mentions	Weighted Influence Score (WIS)[b]
Education	1	20	6	6	4	36	114
Professional groups	3	7	7	5	7	26	66
Labor[c]	2	1	4	8	5	18	37
Agriculture	8	2	5	5	2	14	35
Business	7	3	3	3	5	14	32
Telecommunications	11	3	2	3	2	10	26
Oil	6	2	5	0	1	8	24
Utilities	12	2	0	4	4	10	20
Banking/Finance	4	1	3	2	1	7	18

TABLE 5 (continued)

State Legislators' Perceptions of Influential Lobbies in Oklahoma in 1997 (N=45)

Groups	Legislators' Rankings[a]						
	Rank In 1986	No. of 1st Rank Mentions	No. of 2nd Rank Mentions	No. of 3rd Rank Mentions	No. of 4th Rank Mentions	Total No. of Mentions	Weighted Inbluence Score (WIS)[b]
Healthcare/Human Services	10	0	2	3	1	6	13
Insurance	9	1	1	1	0	3	12
City-County officials and Indian Tribes	14	0	2	0	3	5	9
Senior Citizens	13	0	1	1	2	4	7
Other		0	3	0	3	6	9

[a]Total number of times each lobby was ranked 1st through 4th most influential in recent legislative session by state legislators.
[b]Derived by multiplying number of 1st rank mentions by 4, 2nd rank mentions by 3, 3rd rank mentions by 2, 4th rank mentions by 1 and summing products.
[c]Unlike in 1986, in 1997 public employees were included in the labor category.

SOURCE: 1997 survey of state legislators.

Based on previous studies, findings from our survey of state legislators in 1986, and our own understanding of state politics, in 1997 we argue that the influential group universe in Oklahoma consists of two general types of groups — traditional, continuing lobbies; and continuing, emerging lobbies.

Traditional, Continuing Power Groups. In our opinion, seven groups belong to this category — education, oil, agribusiness, business, labor, government officials, and the media. Education continues to be recognized as *the* most influential lobbying group in Oklahoma. The continued strength of the educational lobby a decade later is still somewhat ironic. Oklahoma's national rankings on educational indicators are even lower today than they were in the 1980s. As of 1996-1997, Oklahoma ranked 46th among the states in per pupil expenditure for elementary and secondary schools and 46th in average annual salaries for public elementary and secondary classroom teachers (Hovey and Hovey 1998). But, the primary theme underlying the powerful emerging lobbies, as well as the more traditional lobbies in Oklahoma, is economic development and diversification of the state's economic base. The importance of education to the process of economic development appears to remain a stimulus for the support and influence of these groups.

Another traditional, continuing lobby is the oil industry, which seems to have rebounded from the crash of the early 1980s. In recent years it seems, based on legislator's perceptions, the oil lobby has reemerged as a prominent group at the state capitol. The obvious conclusion that can be drawn from this is that oil will always be important in Oklahoma.

Agricultural issues have also seen resurgence at the state House. While agricultural policy has always been a major part of Oklahoma's heritage and captured immense national attention, the focus today is not to lobby for price supports or subsidies. Rather, in the last year or so agribusiness has become big business in the state of Oklahoma primarily through corporate hog and chicken farms. The recent rise in corporate farming throughout the state may be considered one of the new economic development initiatives in the state. Some environmentalists and citizen groups are up in arms, however, about the potential harm of these enterprises to the environment due to the smell and other social costs associated with corporate animal farming. The winners and losers in this battle will not be defined in the nation's capitol, but rather they will be decided in Oklahoma City.

The business lobby and labor lobby, although seemingly incompatible, still remain traditional powerful lobbies in the state. Both in 1986 and 1997, business lobbies were perceived by legislators as moderately powerful groups. Labor slipped slightly from second rank in terms of the weighted influence score in 1986 to third in 1997. Labor remains impressive, however, in its continued ability to prevent right-to-work legislation from being passed in the state legislature. Teachers' unions, firefighters and police unions/associations, and state employees remain active and vocal in Oklahoma politics.

The last two groups in this category of traditional, continuing groups are government officials (city/county officials and Indian Tribes) and the media. City and county officials remain prominent lobbies at the state House. The county courthouses are still the centers of "real politics." The Oklahoma Municipal League effectively represents the needs of local officials.

The absence of the media among the most effective lobbies in the state is worthy of mentioning. The influence of this lobby was so strong just a decade ago that it was noted that legislators were "fearful" of it. In 1997, not a single legislator identified the media as an influential lobby in the state. Nevertheless, we steadfastly assert that the media (i.e., newspapers) remain very influential in state politics.

Continuing, Emerging Power Groups. It appears that the nontraditional emerging groups we identified in 1986 have arrived. In fact, in 1997 we refer to these groups as continuing, emerging. These groups include professional groups (second 1997 rank, WIS=66), telecommunications (sixth rank, WIS=26), utilities (eighth rank, WIS=20) banking and finance (ninth rank, WIS=18), human services/healthcare (tenth rank, WIS=13), and insurance (eleventh rank, WIS=9). All of these lobbies reflect the diversification of the state's economic base.

These lobbies and the groups they represent are essential to the current and long-term development of the state, economically and socially. In fact, one could argue that the group category name could be changed from continuing, emerging groups to simply economic development.

Most prominent of the continued, emerging lobbies is professional groups. These groups, as identified by state legislators, are primarily doctors and lawyers. In recent years these professional groups have

been very active in large political battles such as tort reform, workers compensation reform, truth in sentencing, regulation of the professions.

Advancements in technology in many respects are responsible for propelling some of the other groups to positions of elevated power in the state. The increased demand for better and faster communications certainly accounts for the elevated status of the telecommunications lobby. Advancements in laser technology, for example, appear to be at the heart of a current debate raging in the state between the optometrists and the opthamologists.

These findings regarding the nontraditional emerging powers vividly echo the sentiments of one member of the Oklahoma State Senate. The legislator mentioned to us that the perceived strength of groups in Oklahoma is highly dependent on current issues. It was noted that the influence of groups is better identified within the context of the "hot" issues facing the legislature. Thus, while traditional lobbies such as education, labor, oil, and agriculture plod along with generally fixed agendas, issues facing the new emerging lobbies such as professional groups, telecommunications, banking and finance, and healthcare are more dynamic and transitory. We would reiterate that the constant among these groups is the strong nexus to the state's attempt to improve its economic base.

CONCLUSION

Oklahoma has been characterized as a "strong" pressure group state, where a few "significant groups" in the past have been successful in achieving favorable policy responses (Morehouse 1982). We agree with this characterization of interest groups in the Oklahoma political system. Survey data presented here indicate that groups deemed influential in the past are currently actively engaged in lobbying and that legislators rate the influence of interest groups in the legislative process as important. A sizable number of legislators felt that lobbyists were "somewhat" or "very" overly influential in state politics, 46 percent in 1986 and 45 percent in 1997. Moreover, 52 percent of legislators in 1986 and 43 percent of legislators in 1997 "somewhat agree" or "very much" agree with the statement that lobbyists generally do not act in the public interest.

Disagreement would surely arise over which interests in the state are the most powerful. Most observers over the years have recognized education as one of the strongest state lobbies. The Oklahoma Education Association, with its membership of over 45,000 teachers and administrators, in particular, has long been identified as among the most active groups in the state. Legislators as the overall most influential pressure group also singled out education both in 1986 and 1997. In fact, giving the number of first ranks mention by legislators in both 1986 and 1997, the education lobby is in a class by itself. Labor continues to be strong in the state, second ranked in 1986 and third rank in 1997. Business, professional groups, and banking/finance follow these two lobbies. The latter two interests traditionally have not been recognized as among the state's more powerful groups. Even though Oklahoma still depends quite heavily on oil and agriculture, the appearance of these two new powers suggests that the state has indeed caught up in the overall national trends toward a service and information economy. And though these particular issues may recede, it seems likely that state interests organized around the service, financial, and information sectors of the economy will remain powerful forces for some time to come.

Oil still accounts for a substantial portion of Oklahoma State taxes. And no one doubts agriculture's critical contribution to the state's economy will continue, especially given new state laws that authorize large corporate hog and chicken farms. But these traditional interests no longer dominate the policy agenda at the state capital. No doubt, as the state's economy is transformed, the interests represented in the halls of the legislature will also change.

How long Oklahoma will remain a state in which interest groups occupy a dominate/complimentary position in state politics is a question of debate. The interest group universe continues to expand. While some interests persist (e.g., education, labor, oil, agriculture), others seem to be declining (e.g., church interests, newspapers). But as new interests and new demands related to the state's changing economy make their presence felt, group influence is likely to become more diversified and pluralistic, characteristics often associated with moderate or low interest group power in state affairs. In the final analysis, as Oklahoma continues to mature and develop economically, service, professional, business, banking/finance, telecommunications, and utility lobbies will continue to grow in power. In addition, since a trained and well-educated labor force

is essential for economic development, the education lobby will continue to dominate the group universe in Oklahoma.

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