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# Beyond the Party-Group Continuum

## Massachusetts Interest Groups in the 1980s

John C. Berg

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*Studies in the 1960s determined that Massachusetts had strong parties and weak interest groups. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the Republican Party shrank, party competition declined, conflict with the Democratic Party grew, and interest groups gained more importance — and probably will remain important despite the Republican gains of 1990. However, group conflict and citizen mobilization, including increased use of the initiative and referendum, create a situation of interest-centered conflict rather than interest-group dominance as traditionally conceived. This article, based on a 1987 survey of state legislators and legislative aides, plus a summary of recent Massachusetts political history, assesses the relative importance of various types of groups and of particular organizations.*

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**S**tudies of state interest-group politics by V. O. Key, Jr., Sarah McCally Morehouse, and others posit an inverse relationship between the strength of groups and the strength of political parties.<sup>1</sup> In one sense, such a relationship is logically necessary; if parties dominate politics, groups cannot, and vice versa. Morehouse rightly distinguishes between states in which groups can act only through the parties and those in which powerful groups can ignore the parties, offering the domination of Alabama by the Farm Bureau as a classic example of the latter.<sup>2</sup> Studies of Massachusetts interest groups in the 1950s and 1960s accepted this relationship and classified the state as having a strong two-party system with weak groups.<sup>3</sup> However, the most recent of these studies was published in 1969; Morehouse's later book simply reports the conclusions of the earlier studies.

Great changes in the last two decades have moved Massachusetts closer to the interest-group end of the interest-group/political-party dominance scale. However, I believe that movement along this scale does not convey the whole picture. While the interest groups are now much stronger than the parties, they do not dominate Massachusetts politics. They are kept from doing so not by the parties, but by inter-group conflict.

The most dramatic change in Massachusetts politics has been the rise in Democratic Party dominance of the legislature. The Democrats won control of both houses for the first time ever in 1958 and have not lost it since. In the 1976 election,

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Republican numbers in the state Senate dropped below the level needed (8 members) to force a roll call vote and continued to hover just above or below this line until 1990.<sup>4</sup> During the 1980s the Republicans failed to contest most seats. If every Republican candidate in the 1986 election had won (and only 58 percent of them did), the Democrats would still have retained control of both houses by virtue of the 114 uncontested seats. (See Table 1 for a summary of this election for the House.)

Table 1

**Party Competition in Massachusetts Legislative  
Election, 1986 — House of Representatives**

Party Affiliation of Winning Candidate	Party Contest	Contest with Independent	Unopposed	Total Seats
Democrat	23	11	92	126
Republican	14	3	16	33
Independent	1	—	—	1

*Source:* Calculated from *Massachusetts Election Statistics, 1986*, sec. 133, 198–357.

Although Ronald Reagan carried the state in both 1980 and 1984, Republicans did not win any statewide or federal elected office between the election of Senator Edward Brooke in 1972 and that of Governor William Weld, Lieutenant Governor Paul Cellucci, and Treasurer Joseph Malone in 1990. During that time the question often was not whether the Republicans would win, but whether they would manage to field candidates. In 1986, the first two Republican candidates for governor withdrew from the ballot in the face of scandal and the Republicans failed to contest 7 of the 10 Democratic seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, 6 of the 8 seats in the all-Democratic Executive Council, 22 of the 29 Democratic seats in the state Senate, and 103 of the 126 Democratic seats in the House of Representatives.<sup>5</sup>

As might be expected, one result of the two decades of Democratic prosperity was the loss of whatever internal coherence the party might have had. Massachusetts developed an electoral pattern similar to that of the one-party South. In both the state legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives, the renomination of incumbents was rarely challenged; but when a vacancy occurred, there was a mad primary scramble among as many as six candidates. The primary winner — often with far less than a majority of the vote — then faced only token or no opposition from the Republicans and was generally able to retain the seat for as long as he or she chose. (A similar pattern prevailed among the Republicans in the few strongholds they retained through the 1980s.)<sup>6</sup> The preprimary endorsement conventions for statewide offices do little to strengthen the parties, since any candidate who gets as much as 15 percent of the delegate vote can and does go on to the primary.

Things changed dramatically in 1990. Taking advantage of a state budget crisis, the Republicans won the elections for governor, lieutenant governor, and state treasurer. Led by its aggressive chairman, Ray Shamie, the Republican State Committee increased its paid staff to 28 and recruited legislative candidates energetically. Republicans contested 37 of the 40 state Senate seats and won 16, doubling their strength in that body. Having won 38 House seats, they seem determined to bring

two-party competition back to Massachusetts.<sup>7</sup> However, the Democrats continue to dominate the state legislature, hold all 11 (soon to be reduced) seats in the U.S. House and both U.S. Senate seats, and tend to dismiss the 1990 Republican victories as a fluke. Republicans John Volpe and Francis Sargent held the governor's office from 1967 to 1974 without seriously threatening Democratic dominance of the state, and many Democratic legislators hope that Weld's term will meet the same fate. Events may prove them wrong; but so far the Republican gains have had little effect on the *modus operandi* of the Democratic Party policymakers.

Individual Democratic politicians may have strong organizations, but these are purely personal. Such organizations work hard for their leader but have little or no effect on nominations for other offices. This is especially true in the downward direction: a local official may call on his or her troops to work for a gubernatorial candidate, but any attempt by a governor to influence the outcome of a local primary contest is likely to be deeply resented and counterproductive. Thus Governor Michael Dukakis, who possessed one of the strongest personal organizations of any Massachusetts politician, chose to stay out of contests for lieutenant governor in 1982 and 1986, even though he subsequently had to run on a joint ticket with the victor.

Although the absence of a strong Democratic Party organization might lead to a chaotic legislature, it does not, because power in the General Court is highly centralized in the hands of the Senate president and the House speaker. The two presiding officers are chosen by majority vote of the members of their respective chambers, but once elected, each possesses a multitude of resources for consolidating his (or potentially, her) power. Unlike the U.S. Congress, the Massachusetts General Court has no seniority system. Committee memberships and chairmanships, office space, furniture, additional staff support beyond the one aide to which each member is entitled, patronage jobs in the State House, and even parking space in the state garages are all under the control of the presiding officers. Legislative leaders also control significant patronage in the state's executive branch, because another of the peculiarities of the state's constitution permits the legislature to define the terms of office — including terms for life — of all executive officials other than judges and elected constitutional officers. The legislature generally must both authorize positions and permit them to be filled.<sup>8</sup> Until 1967, governors often were unable to choose their own major department heads.<sup>9</sup>

The privileges and positions of legislators can be conferred or withdrawn by the leadership at any time. Moreover, many top positions carry salary increments, so that members' pocketbooks as well as their power depend on the leaders' will. Those who wield this power too strongly risk being deposed by the membership, as in 1985, when Speaker Thomas McGee was ousted by George Keverian. But challenges to sitting leaders are rare, so they have a good deal of leeway in legislative matters.

Since the Democrats held both the governorship and the two legislative leadership positions from 1975 to 1991, strong party coordination of policy might have been possible. But in practice, the Democrats' numerical strength was so great that much of the pressure for unity was removed, and disputes among the three powerful Democrats were brought center stage. While the capture of the governor's office by Republican Weld has created more pressure for Democratic unity, Senate president



William Bulger and House speaker Charles Flaherty have not always succeeded in overcoming the centrifugal tendencies of the 1980s.

In a study published in 1981, Doyle and Milburn found that

because of the fluid party organizational structures within most of the New England states, the general influence on governmental policy in all six states comes from organized interests. Factions appear within the parties of the legislatures and from one gubernatorial officer (often of the same party) to another.<sup>10</sup>

One might question whether the divisions within the party today constitute “factions,” but the incoherence of the Democratic Party on policy questions remains. The way is clear for the influence of interest groups.

**The Current Interest-Group Scene**

To discover what legislators and legislative staff thought about various interest groups, I drew up a survey and sent forms to every member of the legislature in the fall of 1987. I asked the members to fill out one copy themselves and give another one to a staff aide. I received replies from 42 of the 200 legislators and from 36 staff members. This response rate is not high enough to show significant patterns through statistical analysis. Nevertheless, the responses were suggestive in some areas. While it is possible that some important groups were not mentioned by the respondents, we can fairly conclude that any group that *was* mentioned frequently has some importance. The survey form requested information about the activity and influence of six types of interest groups: business groups, professional groups, labor, grassroots community groups, religious groups, and women’s groups. Respondents were asked about the activity and influence of each category of group, then asked to identify the particular groups in each category they thought were most important.

Respondents were also asked to rate the seven types of groups separately by three different criteria: how often they heard from each type; how likely their own vote (or their boss’s, in the case of aides) was to be influenced by that type of group; and how much influence that type of group had on the outcome of legislation. The responses were averaged, and interest-group types ranked, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

**Composite Rankings of Interest-Group Influence**

Type of Group	Frequency of Contact		Influence on Personal Vote		Influence on Outcome of Legislation	
	Legislator	Aide	Legislator	Aide	Legislator	Aide(tie)
Labor	4	5	3	6	1	1/2
Business	2	1	5	5	2	1/2
Environmental	1	3	1	2	3	5
Grassroots citizens	3	2	2	1	4	3
Professional	5	4	6	3	5	4
Women’s	6	6	4	4	6	6
Religious	7	7	7	7	7	7

Source: Calculated from my survey, November–December 1987.

These figures show a certain amount of cynicism on the part of the respondents; while their own votes are most influenced by environmentalist and grassroots citizens groups, they perceive business and labor as having the most influence on leg-

islative decisions. Similarly, respondents see themselves as more responsive than the legislature as a whole to women's groups. This may show that the sample is unrepresentative; proportionately more women than men responded. (Twelve female and 26 male legislators filled out questionnaires; in 1987, 37 of the 200 members were female.) But it may also represent a recognition of what one respondent wrote on the questionnaire: "Most high-powered lobby efforts are really geared toward the House speaker, Senate president, and a few key committee chairmen because the rank and file legislators rarely vote against what these people say."

Table 3 shows the specific groups most often mentioned by both legislators and staff members in response to a request to list by name "the most powerful [groups] in Massachusetts."

Table 3

**Legislative and Staff Mentions of the Most Powerful Groups in Massachusetts**

Group	Legislator	Staff
Associated Industries of Massachusetts	12	7
Citizens for Limited Taxation	12	7
Insurance industry	11	6
Massachusetts Teachers Association	12	7
AFL-CIO	8	5
Massachusetts Hospital Association	6	6
Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts	6	3
Massachusetts Bar Association	5	3
Massachusetts High Tech Council	4	2
Massachusetts Municipal Association	7	3
Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group	4	5
Gun Owners Action League	4	2
League of Women Voters	1	3
Chamber of Commerce	0	3
Massachusetts Medical Society	1	4

Source: Calculated from my survey, November–December 1987.

Those mentioned most frequently include business (Associated Industries of Massachusetts), local government (Massachusetts Municipal Association), labor (AFL-CIO, Massachusetts Teachers Association, Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts), and citizens groups of the left (Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group) and the right (Citizens for Limited Taxation). On most major issues, powerful groups are likely to be opposed to one another, yet each of these groups has some issues over which it is the dominant influence. A clearer picture will emerge when we examine each type of group separately.

### Business in Massachusetts Politics

Discussion of interest groups' resources usually covers votes, money, and information.<sup>11</sup> Business, taken collectively, has an additional resource: without its cooperation, the economy will cease to function. Labor, too, can bring the system to a halt by striking, but a union strike is an extraordinary event. A corporation's decision to move a Massachusetts plant to a new location is simply an everyday business decision, what Charles Lindblom calls "the privileged position of business."<sup>12</sup> Polit-

ical leaders must meet the needs of the business community regardless of their lobbying effort. Since business leaders are also effective lobbyists, their power is maximized.

The clearest example of this privileged position came in 1975–1976. With the state facing a recession and a budget crisis, a group of large financial institutions, led by the (then) First National Bank of Boston, declared that it would not buy any of several forthcoming state debt offerings unless several conditions were met, some of which were economic in the narrow sense. So-called moral obligation notes had to be replaced by those backed with the full faith and credit of the state, short-term notes with long-term bonds, and the new bonds were sold with above-market interest rates. But other conditions were more political. In November of 1975 the banks insisted that a “credible” state budget be passed before they would purchase \$131 million in notes. The ensuing budget cut 8,000 cases from the general relief category of welfare, reduced social service programs by \$300 million, eliminated planned cost-of-living increases for welfare clients and state workers, and raised taxes by \$350 million.<sup>13</sup>

Legislators and aides were asked to list the groups in each of the seven categories shown in Table 2 from which they heard most frequently. Table 4 gives the most frequently named business groups, with other information about them as reported to the Office of the Secretary of State for 1986. However, while some specific groups do stand out — Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM), the Massachusetts High Technology Council, and the Business Round Table in particular — other organizations tend to blend with the broader interest in respondents’ perceptions. Thus there were six mentions by name of the Massachusetts Hospital Association (MHA), but five other citations of hospitals or the health care industry. This doesn’t indicate that the MHA is weak, but that it has chosen an effective lobbying strategy.

One state senator, dissatisfied with the survey form, added a written comment: “Your survey fails to delineate the type of lobbying which is effective. If groups have members who are my constituents who contact me — especially on a personal level as opposed to petition or pre-printed letter — I listen. Otherwise ‘groups’ don’t influence me very much other than local groups.” Because this statement could be applied to many legislators, the MHA accordingly seeks to present its cause through representatives of local hospitals, not just in its own name.

The group mentioned most often, AIM, is the umbrella group for Massachusetts manufacturing. As such it concerns itself with the overall business climate; it seeks to lower taxes, limit regulation, and counterbalance the influence of labor unions on such issues as worker’s compensation and plant-closing legislation. With eight paid legislative agents, AIM is active and visible to legislators and their aides. However, much business lobbying focuses on the specific concerns of such regulated industries as health care, banking, insurance, and utilities. Groups representing each industry are active when that industry’s interests are at stake, so that the relative prominence of any particular group is more an indication of what the legislature is doing that year than of any group’s inherent influence.

Professional groups, listed separately on the survey form, might better be considered a subset of business groups. Respondents mentioned doctors (the Massachusetts Medical Society) and lawyers (the Massachusetts Bar Association) most prominently.<sup>14</sup> These groups are strongest when they are defending their professional jurisdiction against incursions by nurses or paralegals. Recently, the two groups have also con-



fronted each other over the issue of medical malpractice, with doctors seeking to limit liability and lawyers upholding the sovereignty of juries. The result has been a lack of state action, with the costs adding to health care inflation.

Table 4

Business Groups Most Often Heard From

Group	Number of Legislator Mentions	Number of Staff Mentions	Number of Paid Agents	Reported Spending, 1986
Associated Industries of Massachusetts	26	16	8	\$130,001
Massachusetts High Technology Council	10	5	2	20,357
Business Round Table	11	4	1	3,028
Chambers of Commerce*	10	11	11	134,782
Massachusetts Hospital Association	5	6	3	68,613
Life Insurance Association of Massachusetts (LIAM)*	5	5	3	134,520
Small business†	10	8	—	—

\*Chambers of Commerce include eight local Chamber of Commerce organizations; LIAM includes mentions of insurance or insurance lobby.

† Most mentions were to generic small business; no one organization stood out, although several received a mention.

Source: Calculated from my survey, November–December 1987, and Massachusetts Secretary of State, *Financial Statistics for Lobbyists, 1986*, and *Legislative Agents and Employers; 1986; Disclosed Salaries — Cross Reference*.

Organized Labor

Legislators rated labor as the most powerful interest in the state, while aides placed it in first position with business. Like business, labor possesses economic power to back up its political efforts, but labor’s economic power is harder to use, as in the difference between everyday business decisions and the rare strike or other work action by labor. Collective bargaining is an effective means of pursuing economic goals, but with the important exception of public employees, for whom decisions about wages and working conditions are simultaneously political and economic, it is difficult to use collective bargaining for political ends. Hence unions in Massachusetts have developed sizable lobbying operations. Groups classified as unions by the Secretary of State reported spending \$284,548 on lobbying activities in 1986. If we add the Massachusetts Teachers Association which, though classified as an education affairs and services group, holds numerous union contracts with local school committees, the total rises to \$359,928. Police and firefighting unions lobby so intensively that the Secretary of State gives them their own category; these groups reported spending \$178,996.

Lockard and Morehouse<sup>15</sup> both found that Massachusetts unions were closely tied to the Democratic Party. Despite the neoliberal tendencies of former Democratic Governor Michael Dukakis, which made him hesitant to identify too closely with unions, this remained true in the 1980s. Given the Democratic dominance of the legislature, unions have felt little need to seek Republican votes. However, the unions’ influence is limited by the equally significant power of business. Rather than wage



intensive conflict for broad social change, labor in Massachusetts has generally chosen to narrow its focus. In addition, some unions are more influential than others. As a result of both these factors, much of labor's lobbying effort is devoted either to winning approval for job-creating public works projects or to improvement of the pay and working conditions of public employees. On the first, labor is as likely as not to find itself allied with business. On the second, its power is limited by budgetary constraints and opposed by antitax groups, but such opposition is normally subdued.

Table 5 shows the labor groups from which respondents reported hearing most often. Except for the umbrella AFL-CIO, which leads the list, public employees' unions dominate, with the AFL-CIO Building Trades Council the only other group to receive significant mention. In recent years the AFL-CIO has pursued interests ranging from the reform of workers' compensation to the defeat of a bottle-deposit law. It has also worked to support the aims of the other unions listed in the table. But despite internal pressure from its left wing, the AFL-CIO has not pursued a broad working-class agenda. When it has done so, its efforts have met with only limited success.

For example, in 1984 unions endorsed a bill sponsored by then state representative Thomas Gallagher, a Boston Democrat, to protect workers from plant closings. Basic industry in Massachusetts has been declining, and several of the state's smaller cities have seen the closing of factories that were the mainstay of the local economy.

Table 5

**Labor Groups Most Often Heard From**

Group	Number of Legislator Mentions	Number of Staff Mentions	Number of Paid Agents	Reported Spending, 1986
AFL-CIO	30	15		
Massachusetts Greater Boston			2 1	\$67,581 24,708
Teachers				
Massachusetts Teachers Association	10	8	8	75,380
Massachusetts Federation of Teachers	2	2	1	40,545
MTA and MFT	2	1		
Firefighters	10	4		
Professional Firefighters of Massachusetts			2	5,254
International Association of Firefighters, Boston				
Police and firefighters	1	1		2,400
5 police unions*			8	110,133
AFL-CIO Building Trades Council	7	3	1	3,666
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees	6	4	2	69,000
Service Employees International Union (includes locals 254, 285, and 509)	6	5	2	36,933

\* Combined total for Boston Police Alliance, Boston Police Patrolman's Association, Massachusetts Police Association, International Brotherhood of Police Officers/National Association of Government Employees, and State Police Association of Massachusetts.

Source: Calculated from my survey, November–December 1987, and Massachusetts Secretary of State, *Financial Statistics for Lobbyists, 1986*, and *Legislative Agents and Employers; 1986; Disclosed Salaries — Cross Reference*.

This industrial decline was counterbalanced during the 1980s by the growth of jobs in the service sector and in high-technology industry, so that the statewide unemployment rate was low until the end of the decade. But even at the height of what became known as the Massachusetts miracle, the new jobs either paid less than the old ones or went to different people; hence members of the unskilled industrial work force suffered, and locally depressed areas persisted even when the boom was at its height.

Gallagher's bill would have required advance notice of layoffs on a graduated scale, from one month for layoffs of 50 to 99 employees to one year for layoffs of 1,000 or more. Companies that failed to give notice would have had to offer severance pay to each employee in proportion to the notice not given. It would also have helped community-based nonprofit organizations take over the operation of closed plants. Although the bill was cosponsored by 81 of the 160 state representatives and 11 of the 40 senators, it was blocked by the insistence of the Massachusetts High Technology Council that its members would refuse to expand their operations in Massachusetts if the bill passed. Rather than choose sides, Governor Dukakis called all parties together to try to effect a compromise. After protracted negotiations, a much weakened version of the bill was enacted, which made advance notice voluntary and provided some funds for retraining workers. Despite intense dissatisfaction with the law as passed, Gallagher and the unions ultimately supported it as the best they could hope to get.

Since the 1980s the AFL-CIO has tried to increase its strength by involving its rank-and-file members. Local activists have been urged to run as delegates to state Democratic conventions. In 1983 the unions, which had not yet endorsed a presidential candidate for the 1984 election, demonstrated their strength by asking delegates to write in the word *jobs* for a presidential straw poll taken at the state convention. "Jobs" came in second to Walter Mondale, with 25.6 percent of the vote. While this reaffirmed labor's importance to the party, it is difficult to trace any specific policy results to it.<sup>16</sup>

Labor won a dramatic referendum victory in the 1988 general election. The Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), an interest group of builders who employ nonunion workers, had placed repeal of the Massachusetts prevailing wage law on the ballot by initiative petition. The ABC portrayed the law as helping only highly paid construction workers while driving up the cost of local government. The unions might have been vulnerable to these arguments, but they defined the issue successfully as one of broad class solidarity. Most of their campaign shunned debate on the specifics for such broad slogans as "Question 2 — Bad for You" and, on a suitably illustrated billboard, "Listen to Mama — Vote No on 2." All members of the AFL-CIO Building Trades Council in Massachusetts were assessed \$50 for the campaign fund, and thousands worked the polls on Election Day. Despite one serious gaffe, when a worker who appeared in a television advertisement was found to have made \$70,000 in the previous year, the unions won by a landslide. The victory was defensive, but the new level of rank-and-file mobilization obtained carries the possibility of growing strength in the future.<sup>17</sup>

As stated above, most labor lobbying is done by public employees' unions. This is understandable; since their pay and working conditions are set by elected officials, public employees are the most directly affected by political decisions. Unions repre-

senting state employees seek to legislate pay raises and job security directly, while those representing employees of local government seek state standards for salaries and working conditions and state aid to help local government pay the bills. Unions of teachers, police officers, and firefighters have been particularly effective in influencing legislation. In return, they are able to deliver campaign contributions and the votes of their members in the district. Normally the result has been a classic case of what Theodore Lowi has called “interest group liberalism”;<sup>18</sup> public employees’ unions, which press strongly for particularized benefits, are opposed only by diffuse taxpayer resistance, so they normally win. This has often been the case in Massachusetts, but not always, as we shall see.

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### **Grassroots Lobbying**

The civil rights and campus protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s spawned a host of community organizations all across Massachusetts. Some were launched by former campus activists seeking to broaden their base, others by local residents who saw and admired the successes of groups elsewhere. All shared some relation to the New Left tenet that all people have a right to participate in making those decisions which affect their lives. These local groups developed a wide repertory of political tactics, from civil disobedience to picketing officials’ homes to mass attendance at legislative hearings. While many such groups were unable to sustain grassroots involvement and burned themselves out after a few years, a few have developed funding mechanisms and membership structures that have enabled them to attain permanence. The Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group, more commonly known as MassPIRG, is a typical example.

MassPIRG is part of a national PIRG network, inspired by and still affiliated with Ralph Nader. Nader’s idea was that college students vote to have a per capita fee added to their tuition bills, either as a portion of the student activities fee or as an additional levy, and paid in a lump sum to a state PIRG, which would conduct research and lobby in the public interest — at least as PIRG conceived it. The idea caught on at several campuses, providing MassPIRG with a stable membership and source of funds.

This official campus funding arrangement is unique to the state PIRGs. In addition, MassPIRG uses a technique it shares with a number of similar organizations, the professional canvass. Full- and part-time canvassers, many of them students, are hired on commission to go door to door, talking about PIRG’s current campaigns and asking for contributions. No canvasser is likely to grow rich under this arrangement, but many young people find it rewarding to pick up some ready cash while contributing to a cause they believe in. The canvass produces new dues-paying members, occasional activists, and a steady source of funds to pay the expenses of organizing, research, and lobbying.

MassPIRG has sought to represent the diffuse interests of citizens and consumers, counteracting the tendency toward “interest-group liberalism” cited above. Typical MassPIRG legislative goals have included mail-in voter registration, the closing of nuclear power plants, more rigorous testing of drinking water, and requiring developers to include child-care facilities in large commercial or industrial properties.<sup>19</sup>



MassPIRG, together with a group of similar grassroots organizations, played a central role in the development of the initiative petition as a lobbying tool. Article 48 of the amendments to the Massachusetts constitution, which provides for the right of initiative, was ratified in 1918 but had fallen into relative disuse by the early 1960s. However, the initiative has seen a revival in the last two decades. Early efforts included unsuccessful attempts to regulate utility rates and enact a bottle-deposit law, and a successful one to allow cities and towns to tax business property at a higher rate than residential property. By the late 1970s, citizen-originated referenda often dominated the otherwise uninteresting ballot in statewide elections.

Such groups as MassPIRG and Massachusetts Fair Share liked the initiative because it not only gave them a chance to defeat better-financed interests, but also provided the kind of organizing tactic they needed to maintain their mass membership base. These advantages soon became apparent to another group that felt excluded from the state's power structure, the far right. Following the well-publicized victory of the Jarvis-Gann tax-cutting initiative, Proposition 13, in California, a group called Citizens for Limited Taxation (CLT) launched an initiative drive to enact Proposition 2½. This number did not refer to the measure's position on the referendum ballot (Question 2), but to its central provision: with certain qualifications and modifications, no city or town would be permitted to set its property tax rate at more than 2½ percent of fair market value.

CLT's action touched off a protracted battle. Proposition 2½ threatened the vital interests of public employees, who feared that it would deprive local government of the money to pay them. If that wasn't enough, it also contained provisions repealing all state mandates for spending by local school authorities and abolishing compulsory arbitration of labor disputes involving police and fire departments. These provisions had been important past victories of the teachers and of the police and firefighting unions, respectively. Advocates of improved welfare, health care, and housing also opposed Proposition 2½; while their programs were state funded, they realized that the state would have to make up some of the local governments' fiscal losses, leaving less for other state functions.

Local governments themselves opposed the referendum almost unanimously, as did most other elected officials. On the other side, CLT received major support from the Massachusetts High Technology Council, from real estate interests, and less visibly from other business groups. Since the state's voters were to decide, both sides had to go beyond the usual lobbying tactics. Media advertising, bumper stickers, leafleting, and grassroots meetings burgeoned. But ultimately the chance to vote for lower taxes proved irresistible to the electorate; Proposition 2½ was enacted, 1,438,768 to 998,839, in the 1980 general election.

The initiative and referendum process leads to the enactment of a state statute. Like any statute, Proposition 2½ could have been amended or repealed by the legislature. However, CLT and its charismatic leader, Barbara Anderson, were able to combine grassroots pressure with lobbying to rule this out almost immediately. State legislators and local elected officials, almost all of whom had opposed the referendum beforehand, scrambled to get back in step with their constituents by announcing that they had got the message and would try their best to make the new law work. State aid to local government was increased, but not enough to make up for the loss in local revenues; public employees were laid off and services cut back. The

sense of crisis wore off after two or three years, but the unions had learned that there were new limits on their influence, and both left and right had learned that the initiative process can be used by either side.

Both MassPIRG and CLT remain active. In 1986, CLT employed two paid agents and reported spending \$26,612 on lobbying, while MassPIRG employed eight agents and spent \$42,950. CLT is still influential but no longer succeeds in presenting itself as the voice of the tax revolt; it never managed to develop an organized mass base from those who voted for Proposition 2½. In the survey, it was mentioned twenty times as one of the groups most commonly heard from, but only fifteen of those who mentioned it considered CLT a grassroots citizens group; the other five listed it as a business group.

CLT attempted to regain its earlier status with a second referendum in 1990, this time calling for a cut in the state income tax rate. Although the proposal — Question 3 — was endorsed by William Weld, other Republican candidates, and some Democrats, enough voters were not convinced that it made sense to cut taxes in the face of a state budget deficit of half a billion dollars. The opposition used such slogans as “It goes too far” and “I’m mad, but I’m not crazy” to separate voters’ disgust with and anger at bureaucratic waste from endorsement of this specific proposal, which was defeated.

MassPIRG’s condition has been more stable; while it never reached the height of power once attained by CLT, it continues to enjoy mixed success as it tackles controversial issues. Current MassPIRG interests include control and cleanup of toxic wastes and incentives for the use of recyclable packaging.

Environmental protection organizations in Massachusetts comprise a hybrid category. On some issues they resort to grassroots mobilization; this has been particularly true of the long battle over nuclear power and the successful effort to pass a bottle-deposit law. But much of the environmentalists’ concern has been with preserving open space and protecting the state’s wetlands and coastline from destructive development. There has been grassroots involvement on these issues, too, but the tactics have centered on education and persuasion of policymakers rather than on mass mobilization and initiative petitions. These tactics have been fairly successful; Massachusetts now has strong coastal zone management and wetlands protection laws. In part, this success may have come more easily because the protected areas are in towns inhabited by the state’s social elite. Success in cleaning up Boston Harbor, where untreated sewage washes up on beaches used by the working class, has been harder to come by.

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### **The Catholic Church**

In 1958 Duane Lockard declared that “a good deal of foolishness has been written about the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Democratic party in Massachusetts.”<sup>20</sup> Much of this foolishness is still believed, yet survey legislators and staff were nearly unanimous in rating religious groups as the least influential of the groups included. The Catholic church does try to influence politics and legislation, as do Protestant churches to a lesser extent. Twenty-two legislators mentioned the Catholic church, and thirteen named the Massachusetts Council of Churches (MCC) among the religious groups most commonly heard from. Eleven aides also mentioned the Catholic church, the only group cited more than three times.<sup>21</sup> But only three

respondents considered “religious groups” to have “a great deal” of influence on legislation. Moreover, the Catholic church has not been very successful in battles over policy. Its highest priorities have been restricting abortions, gaining state financial support for parochial schools, reducing access to birth control information, and preventing use of the death penalty. It has been successful only on the last issue, on which it has been joined by the liberal groups that have opposed it on the first three.

However, the church has won more often in the legislature itself; its final defeats have come in the courts, in the executive branch, or from the voters. Abortion policy provides a good example. While the right of a pregnant woman to have an abortion is protected by the U.S. Constitution and the federal courts, states are not required to pay for abortions through the Medicaid program, and no federal matching funds are provided to states that choose to pay for them. The Massachusetts legislature voted in 1979 not to pay for abortions with state funds, either for Medicaid patients or for state employees. This law was revoked by the state’s Supreme Judicial Court, which found it to be unconstitutionally discriminatory against women, and the state resumed paying for abortions.

Antiabortion forces, including the Catholic church, then sought to amend the state constitution. Amendments must be approved by two successive biennial legislatures, which meet in joint session as Constitutional Conventions (ConCons) for this purpose, and then submitted to the voters at the next general election. Advocates of abortion rights were able to slow down but not halt passage of the amendment by the ConCon. In 1986, a question on the ballot proposed amending the constitution to “allow the legislature to prohibit or regulate abortions to the extent permitted by the United States Constitution,” except for “abortions required to prevent the death of the mother.” The ensuing referendum campaign was hard fought but not particularly close; the proposed amendment was defeated by a 42 percent to 58 percent margin.<sup>22</sup> It was a bad election for the Catholic church as a second proposed amendment, to permit state aid to religious and other private elementary and secondary schools, was defeated even more badly, 30 percent to 70 percent.

These events show that the Catholic church does not control Massachusetts, but they do raise a question about the survey results. Is the low influence reported for religious groups inconsistent with the success of the Catholic church in the legislature on these two issues? While the available evidence does not allow a definitive answer, I do not believe that the legislators and aides were responding dishonestly. Rather, many legislators are personally opposed to the right to abortion. While many of them are Catholics and see their position as part of their Catholic beliefs, they also see it as coming from within, from their own conscience, rather than from without, from pressure by church leaders. While we cannot tell what would happen in the unlikely event that the church were to change its official position, members believe that they are not responding to influence when they vote on abortion.

This interpretation is reinforced by the knowledge that the Catholic church as an organization does not represent the views of its members. While the church has made opposition to abortion rights the centerpiece of its political program, opinion surveys have consistently shown that a majority of Catholic voters are on the other side. This has been reflected in the church’s inability to deliver votes. The antiabortion amendment lost in every county in the state, but came closest in Berkshire



County, one of the most Protestant. And when the archbishop of Boston called on the faithful to vote against U.S. Congressmen Barney Frank and James Shannon in 1982, both won the election.

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### Women in Politics

In 1987 women made up 52.4 percent of the population of Massachusetts, but only 19 percent of the House of Representatives and 15 percent of the state Senate. There are currently no women in the state's congressional delegation.<sup>23</sup> Evelyn Murphy, lieutenant governor from 1987 to 1990, was the first woman to hold statewide elected office. While seeking to increase the number of women in politics, feminists have also sought to compensate for their underrepresentation through lobbying efforts.

Survey respondents ranked women's groups one step from the bottom in frequency of contact and influence on legislation. They were ranked somewhat higher in influence on the respondent's own vote, but even here were only fourth. But while legislators of both genders concur in assigning women's groups less than average influence on the outcome of legislation, these groups are more often heard from and given a better reception by women legislators than by their male colleagues (Table 6).

No doubt the selective lobbying of the most receptive representatives is a necessity, given the resource constraints faced by women's groups. Of the four women's organizations mentioned most frequently by respondents, only the National Organization for Women (NOW) reported spending any money at all on lobbying — a total of \$6,093 — with one paid agent. The League of Women Voters, Mass. Choice, and the Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus each received at least ten mentions, but did not register as lobbying organizations; presumably they rely on their members' volunteer efforts.<sup>24</sup>

Despite their shortage of money, women's groups have had some success. Massachusetts has ratified the Equal Rights Amendment and adopted a similar amendment to its own constitution. The women's lobby has also won passage of a bill to

Table 6

**Mean Ratings of Women's Groups by  
Women Legislators and All Legislators  
Massachusetts Legislature, 1987**

	Mean Rating by Women Legislators (n = 12)	Mean Rating by All Legislators (n = 38)
Groups most often heard from (on a scale of 1 = never to 5 = very frequently)	3.83	3.29
Influence on own vote	3.92	3.26
Influence on outcome of legislation (on a scale of 1 = none to 5 = a great deal)	2.92	2.89

Source: Calculated from my survey, November–December 1987.

change sentencing practices to make the laws against rape more enforceable and various measures to improve the enforcement of child support orders. The feminist movement has done much to increase awareness of the problems of battered women and forced the removal or censure of some judges who have been notably insensitive on this issue.

But women's groups have met with markedly less success on issues that require spending money. Every year a broad coalition of women's groups, social service agencies, and welfare advocates launches the latest round in the Up to Poverty campaign, seeking to bring the income of AFDC recipients up to the official poverty level; but every year the shortfall between benefits and the poverty line increases. The Up to Poverty coalition is unable to overcome the constraints imposed on the budget by those who support other spending programs or oppose higher taxes.

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### **Massachusetts Lobbyists**

As interest groups grow more important, so do lobbyists. Lobbying is a growth industry in Massachusetts. In 1984, registered lobbying groups reported spending just under \$5 million. By 1986, the total had reached \$8.9 million, and final figures for 1987 are expected to approach \$10 million.<sup>25</sup>

Lobbyists are composed of many types. Some are retired politicians, like former Senate president Kevin Harrington, whose six-foot-six figure can often be seen around the State House. Harrington reported lobbying income of \$123,015 in 1986 and \$199,336 in 1987 from sources including insurance interests, the Shell Oil Company, and the Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration Institute.<sup>26</sup> Some are professional lobbyists who have worked their way up through their skill and contacts. A good example is William R. Delaney, a retired police officer who launched a lobbying firm, Delaney Associates, in 1980. In 1987 the firm earned \$593,288 from twenty-one business clients. Delaney learned his skills as president of the Metropolitan Police Patrolmen's Union in the early 1970s, then decided to go into business for himself.<sup>27</sup> But Delaney's success has not been unmixed; early in 1988 he was indicted for having failed to file state income tax returns for the years 1982–1984.<sup>28</sup>

Harrington and Delaney fit the traditional picture of the lobbyist who works for well-heeled special interests. Old-style lobbyists, aware of the high centralization of power in the Massachusetts General Court, cultivated personal relationships with the House speaker, the Senate president, and a few other key legislators. Much of their work was done over a drink at the Golden Dome pub across the street from the State House, over lunch at Anthony's Pier 4 Restaurant on the Boston waterfront, or during conversations in the private offices of the leaders. Campaign contributions, along with occasional bribes, were a major source of influence, but knowledgeable intermediaries were needed to direct the money to the right place while avoiding scandal. Therefore the ideal lobbyists were either former legislators or others who had built up networks of personal friendship with legislators over the years.

Lobbying of this sort was effective, but limited to those who could afford it. Since it was based on money, it was most useful for business interests. Labor unions employed similar tactics and were successful at gaining limited objectives. Unions of state employees seeking legislated pay increases and construction unions seeking public works projects were particularly prominent in their use of lobbyists.

During the 1970s and 1980s a new, more populist style of lobbying developed. Judy Meredith is a good example. She began as a community activist, found that she enjoyed lobbying, and decided to go professional. In 1986 she reported earnings of \$59,200 from such groups as the Council of Human Service Providers, the Coalition to License Acupuncturists, and Greater Boston Legal Services; in 1987 she earned \$63,000, including \$16,000 from the city of Boston.<sup>29</sup> Meredith and other lobbyists of this type found that they could replace the power of money with the power of votes. They put more of their energy into educating their own client groups' membership about issues and legislative procedures and finding ways to let legislators know that their constituents are watching how they vote. One such tactic is the lobby day, when supporters of a cause from around the state gather at the State House to meet with their representatives and senators.<sup>30</sup>

These new tactics have helped change the style of Massachusetts interest-group politics. Today, even business-oriented lobbyists find that it helps to demonstrate grassroots support for their cause, as with the Massachusetts Hospital Association campaign described at the beginning of this article. Nevertheless, money is still vastly important in lobbying, and more and more of it is funneled through political action committees (PACs). Although 1987 was not an election year, the ten largest PACs contributed \$271,763 to members of the state legislature, a 64 percent increase over their contributions in the previous nonelection year.<sup>31</sup> Each of the top ten PACs represented an industry or a labor union, most with important legislative goals that year, as shown in Table 7.<sup>32</sup>

Table 7

**Contributions and Legislative Goals of  
Ten Largest Political Action Committees  
Massachusetts Legislature, 1987**

PAC	Legislative Interest	Result	Amount Contributed
Massachusetts Realtors	Defeat land bank bill	Success	\$56,361
Painters District Council #35	Retain prevailing wage law	Success	42,865
Massachusetts Bankers State Fund	Cut tax on banks	Pending	32,750
Bay State Physicians	Defeat universal health care	Success	29,097
Beer Distributors	General influence	—	24,700
Massachusetts DEAC (new car dealers)	Extend consumer protection to used car buyers	Success	24,250
Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Administrators	Defeat universal health care	Success	17,940
Sheet Metal Workers #17	Retain prevailing wage law	Success	17,250
Committee to Elect Responsible Public Officials	Further utility interests	Mixed	14,050
Service Employees International Union 254	Further interests of public employees	Mixed	12,500

Source: Adapted from Peter B. Sleeper, "PACs Spend Lavishly, Effectively," *Boston Globe*, January 31, 1988, 27.



Interest groups are a big and growing business in Massachusetts. The number of registered lobbyists continues to rise, as do interest-group spending and campaign contributions. Until the 1990 election, Massachusetts seemed to be growing increasingly similar to a traditional one-party state, with the Democrats holding a dominant electoral position but little or no coherence on policy issues. As in the old one-party South, this allowed interest groups to grow in importance as the organizing force in policymaking.

But Massachusetts differs from those one-party states in having strong labor unions, environmental organizations, women's groups, and such grassroots groups as MassPIRG. These interests are not strong enough, singly or collectively, to overcome the economic weight and political power of the state's businesses, but they are strong enough to prevent the development of the kind of single-interest business dominance common in the Old South and West. Moreover, there are important divisions within the business community; for example, the huge health care industry depends on third-party payments, which are financed through taxes and premiums assessed in part on other industries. Such divisions further act to prevent single-interest dominance. The situation in Massachusetts might thus be better characterized as one of interest-centered conflict rather than interest-group dominance.

Recent events suggest that party competition may return. The Republican Party made a significant comeback in the 1990 election, winning the governorship and the treasurer's office and doubling the size of its state Senate bloc. Governor William Weld is a Republican very much in the mold of John Volpe and Francis Sargent whose victory would have done no more than theirs did to change the balance of party strength; but the Republican legislative gains may have more lasting importance. The Republican State Committee, which in the last few elections had run talented neophytes for Congress (and seen them obliterated) while virtually ignoring the state legislature, reversed its strategy; it made a strong effort to find legislative candidates, and the party gained seats as a result. It also made a serious effort to shed its previous antiabortion label; Weld, Cellucci, and several successful Republican legislative candidates in 1990 took strong positions in favor of the right to reproductive choice.

If the Republicans can sustain their efforts for the next few elections, Massachusetts may come to have a real two-party system.<sup>33</sup> If this happens, it may lead the Democratic Party to gain more policy coherence as well; some interest groups may then find themselves forced into partisan coalitions. Labor unions, citizens' groups of the left and right, and the Massachusetts High Technology Council already show signs of partisan sympathy. However, environmentalist groups, women's groups, and other business groups — particularly the life insurance and health care interests, but also AIM — seem determined to work with members of both parties. Unless the parties unify themselves much more strongly than they have to date, these groups will probably succeed in remaining neutral. The next few years will hold great interest for students of Massachusetts politics. 🍷

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## Notes

1. V. O. Key, Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, 5th ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1964), 154–161; Sarah McCally Morehouse, *State Politics, Parties and Policy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), 116–118; William Doyle and Josephine F. Milburn, "Citizen Participation in New England Politics: Town Meetings, Political Parties, and Interest Groups," in Josephine F. Milburn and Victoria Schuck, eds., *New England Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing, 1981), 49; Duane Lockard, *New England State Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 162.
2. Morehouse, *State Politics*, 106.
3. Lockard, *New England State Politics*; L. Harmon Zeigler and Michael A. Baer, *Lobbying: Interaction and Influence in American State Legislatures* (Belmont, Mass.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1969); Morehouse, *State Politics*.
4. Cornelius Dalton, John Wirkkala, and Anne Thomas, *Leading the Way: A History of the Massachusetts General Court 1629–1980* (Boston: Office of the Massachusetts Secretary of State, 1984), 277–278; Alec Barbrook, *God Save the Commonwealth: An Electoral History of Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 104–105.
5. Massachusetts Secretary of State, *Massachusetts Election Statistics, 1986*.
6. In 1986 there were four Republican primary contests for seats in the Massachusetts House, with three candidates per contested nomination. There were forty-one Democratic contests, with 2.73 candidates per contest. *Massachusetts Election Statistics, 1986*.
7. See Agnes S. Bain and John C. Berg, "Redistricting and Endangered Incumbents: The 1990 Massachusetts State Elections." Paper presented at the New England Political Science Association, Worcester, Mass., 1991, for a fuller description and analysis of the 1990 election in Massachusetts.
8. Donald Levitan with Elwyn E. Mariner, *Your Massachusetts Government*, 10th ed. (Newton, Mass., 1984), 64–72.
9. *Massachusetts Constitution*, chap. 1, sec. 1, art. 4; Dalton et al., *Leading the Way*, 146, 329.
10. William Doyle and Josephine F. Milburn, "Citizen Participation in New England Politics: Town Meetings, Political Parties, and Interest Groups," in Milburn and Schuck, *New England Politics*, 49.
11. Key, *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*, 132–138.
12. Charles E. Lindblom, *The Policy-Making Process*, 2d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
13. Michael Stone and Emily Achtenberg, *Hostage! Housing and the Massachusetts Fiscal Crisis* (Boston: Boston Community School, 1977), 28–30; see also John Kifner, "Massachusetts Raises Taxes Sharply Under Pressure of Banks," *New York Times*, November 10, 1975.
14. Teachers were also mentioned, but their organizations were more likely to be considered labor unions.
15. Lockard, *New England State Politics*, 163; Morehouse, *State Politics*, 115.

16. Chris Black, "Mondale Wins Massachusetts Straw Poll," *Boston Globe*, April 10, 1983, 1, 46; Robert Healy, "The Mondale Vote and Labor's Clout," *Boston Globe*, April 10, 1983, 44.
17. Clyde W. Barrow, "Organized Labor and Community Mobilization: The 1988 Massachusetts Prevailing Wage Initiative." Paper presented at the New England Political Science Association, Cambridge, Mass., April 1989.
18. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States*, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 50–61.
19. *MassPIRG Report* 21, no. 1 (1988).
20. Lockard, *New England State Politics*, 164.
21. It may be relevant that fourteen of the legislators surveyed, but only five of the aides, identified themselves as Protestants.
22. *Massachusetts Election Statistics, 1986*, 450.
23. There have been two women representatives from Massachusetts, Louise Day Hicks, a conservative Democrat, and Margaret Heckler, a moderate Republican. Both were defeated for reelection, Hicks after one term, Heckler after eight.
24. Mass. Choice is classified as a political action committee rather than a lobbying organization; its emphasis is on electing more pro-choice legislators rather than influencing the votes of incumbents.
25. Massachusetts Secretary of State, *Financial Statistics for Lobbyists, 1986*, and *Financial Statistics for Lobbyists, 1987*.
26. Massachusetts Secretary of State, *Legislative Agents and Employers; 1986; Disclosed Salaries — Cross Reference*; and *Legislative Agents and Employers; 1987; Disclosed Salaries — Cross Reference*.
27. Frank Phillips, "Beacon Hill Lobbyists Bring Home More Bacon," *Boston Globe*, February 1, 1988, 17–18; Renée Loth, "Lobbyist's Rise to Top," *Boston Globe*, February 23, 1988.
28. Renée Loth, "Top Lobbyist Charged with Tax Violations," *Boston Globe*, February 27, 1988. Earnings are from Massachusetts Secretary of State, *Legislative Agents and Employers; 1987*, which includes income reported through May 1, 1988.
29. Massachusetts Secretary of State, *Legislative Agents and Employers; 1986*, and *Legislative Agents and Employers; 1987*; see also Judith C. Meredith and Linda Myer, *Lobbying on a Shoestring: How to Win in Massachusetts . . . and Other Places, Too* (Boston: Massachusetts Poverty Law Center, 1982).
30. Meredith and Myer, *Lobbying on a Shoestring*, 12–14.
31. PACs are limited to contributing \$1,000 per candidate per year. Making off-year contributions allows them to double the amount contributed.
32. Peter B. Sleeper, "PACs Spend Lavishly, Effectively," *Boston Globe*, January 31, 1988, 21, 27.
33. On the other hand, Weld may find — as Volpe and Sargent did in their time — that he can govern best by cooperating with the legislature's Democratic leaders. If he does, he may undercut his party's ability to make a strong partisan appeal to the voters.