

## Introduction: Political Conflicts and Their Representation

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Democracies exist because people have different wants. The political process represents those wants and begins the process of trying to reach publicly-accepted policy decisions. The greater the conflict within a society, the more difficult it is to reach accommodations. New York State represents a state where the diversity is considerable and the conflicts are acute.

### **The Sources of Conflict**

Section one of this book focuses on the conflicts politicians struggle with in trying to reach decisions. It is these conflicts which make reaching decisions so difficult within the state.

There are significant conflicts which revolve around class, region, and race. John White discusses the long history of regional conflicts within the state. There are different populations and needs in the regions of the state. New York City has a much higher percentage of low income individuals who have many needs for government social programs. This creates class conflicts within New York City. The concentration of needs in New York City also creates a sense that New York City is different from the rest of the state. The rest of the state has substantial numbers of low income individuals, but the political perception has emerged that New York City is different from the rest of the state. This creates a continual concern whether New York City is getting more or less than it deserves.

While class and regional conflicts dominate much of the agenda of the state, the political world has been changing. New York has experienced a long-term debate about whether the state should pursue a liberal or conservative agenda. White suggests that the drift has been away from liberalism, and that the state has become less concerned about responding to the liberal agenda of low income needs.

Conflicts involving race are also significant. The non-white population has grown in the state, and their concerns differ from those of whites. They are more concerned with social programs, jobs, and representation in the legislature. Ester Fuchs and Phillip Thompson argue that the emergence of these issues at the state level has been slow, but the state has gradually become more of an arena for addressing these concerns.

Finally, the political arena also draws the attention of a large group of interest groups who want to make sure that their interests are considered and protected. While broad conflicts over class, region, and race play a major role in New York politics, there is also a steady stream of lobbyists who present arguments for specific groups. David Cingranelli presents an overview of the diversity of groups seeking attention. He argues that lobbying has grown in recent years. This activity is part of the endless process of attempting to persuade state officials that specific concerns need to be addressed. While the conflicts of region, class, and race may receive more media coverage, the presentations of lobbyists are enduring and crucial in the political process.

## **The Intergovernmental Tangle**

The state also has extensive intergovernmental entanglements. When politicians listen to pleas from groups for the state to do more or less, those pleas often end up involving questions of other governments. As Sarah Liebschutz documents, New York receives very large amounts of aid from the federal government. Steven Gold reviews the large amounts of aid the state dispenses to local governments as well as the mandates imposed on local governments.

Decisions about responding to groups often involve intergovernmental aid issues. For the state to do more for low income groups, it often means providing more matching funds for federal programs and accepting federal requirements. It also means that fewer state

funds may be available for state aid for local schools and governments. As Liebschutz and Gold indicate, the sums of money involved are large.

### **Organizing Issues: Political Parties**

Conflict is pervasive in New York State politics. The difficult matter is to achieve some coherent consideration of issues in the political arena. A group may care about only one issue, making it difficult to create broad coalitions to support collections of policies. Diversity can overwhelm and fragment.

Political parties in New York are crucial in organizing issues. Jeffrey Stonecash analyzes differences in party electoral bases and voting patterns and how the parties seek to maintain their positions and cohesiveness. He also examines how the differences in party electoral bases contribute to the ongoing representation of the enduring differences which exist within New York politics.

The conflicts which affect decision making are significant in New York. These initial chapters provide an overview of all these conflicts and the primary institutions—interest groups and parties—which bring these issues to the political arena.