

Introduction to Part I

The Sources of Conflict

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Democracies exist because people have different values and needs. The political process represents these differing wants to politicians who must struggle with 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. Part 1 of this book focuses on the conflicts within the state that politicians struggle with in trying to reach decisions. There are significant conflicts that revolve around region, class, and race. These conflicts make it difficult to reach decisions within the state.

One of the enduring sources of conflict within the state revolves around New York City and its population. Robert Pecorella reviews how New York City differs from the rest of the state in terms of its ethnic and racial composition and its economy, and how those differences lead to conflicts within the political process. New York City has a higher percentage of renters and minorities. It has more people who rely on mass transit. It has many low-income individuals, who have many needs for government social programs. These differences create a sense that New York City is different. The rest of the state, of course, has substantial numbers of low-income individuals, but the political perception has emerged that New York City has very different needs, and that it spends more on social programs than the rest of the state.

This creates a continual concern with whether New York City is getting more or less than it deserves.

Here are also significant disputes that stem from intergovernmental programs. As Don Boyd indicates, the state receives large sums of money from the federal government and provides extensive fiscal aid to local governments. The state adopts programs such as Medicaid that create state obligations and require state revenues. When the state adopts programs, it often results in the state imposing accompanying obligations on local governments. While the state defines what it will do regarding Medicaid and welfare, counties must pay part of Medicaid costs, and counties administer welfare programs. Many at the local level are not happy with the burdens imposed by the state in these policy areas, and want the state to either cut mandates or provide more revenue. The same conflicts over mandates and state aid occur with local education.

There are also consistent differences among demographic groups, and these become bases for differences between the parties. The nonwhite population has grown in the state, and nonwhites tend, on average, to be more liberal than whites. Nonwhites are generally more concerned with social programs and jobs. Urban populations differ from suburban and rural populations. Urban areas, for example, have less affluent tax bases and need more state aid for schools than suburban communities do. The affluent have less need for government assistance to go to college than those with lesser incomes. In New York nonwhites, urban groups, and the less affluent tend to align with the Democratic Party, while whites, suburban and rural groups, and the affluent are more likely to align with the Republican Party. These differences between the parties in their electoral bases become the basis for ongoing policy disputes within the state, and are reviewed by Amy Widestrom and my staff. There are also significant third parties in New York, and Robert Spitzer examines their role.

The political arena also draws the attention of many interest groups that want to make sure that their interests are considered and protected. While there are broad conflicts revolving around geographical areas, race, class, and intergovernmental programs, in New York politics there is also a steady stream of lobbyists who present arguments for specific groups. Rogan Kersh presents an overview of the diversity of groups seeking attention. He argues that lobbying activities have 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.

Finally, there is the important issue of how much the electorate is informed about the issues and conflicts within the state political process. Journalists must regularly decide how much information to convey to the public about policy conflicts, what events should have priority, and how news about policy conflicts should be presented. Elizabeth Benjamin, a *Times-Union* reporter, presents an overview of the relationship between the press and elected officials.