

# THE ROLE OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AS INTEREST GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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# ABSTRACT

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## THE ROLE OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AS INTEREST GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

Under the direction of Anil Duman

The University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges (CCC) used to receive approximately the same amount of state funding prior to 1988. However, in recent decades, California has adopted numerous policies that favor the CCC. Predicated upon this *empirical observation*, this thesis argues that the three systems act as interest groups, lobbying for state funding, and the CCC is the most effective, despite being the larger group. This observation contradicts with Olson's (1965) "group-size paradox" and poses a *theoretical puzzle*: "*Why are the California community colleges more influential in lobbying despite the collective action problems it may face as a larger group?*".

Existing theories suggest three potential answers for this puzzle: 1) *types of interest*, be it public or private, 2) *degree of conflict*, and 3) *public opinion*. By conducting content analyses of secondary sources, this thesis finds that the CCC's goal is to ensure the affordability of higher education, while the UC seeks to preserve its own reputation and quality at the expense of universal access to and affordability of higher education. Moreover, public opinion has been supportive of policies that seek to lower tuition fees, which are consistent with the CCC's mission, while at odds with the UC's. Thus, my thesis argues that being public interest groups and having favorable public opinion are the two most important determinants of interest groups' influence.

Consequently, the thesis calls for revisions of Olson's "group-size paradox" as well as the Michalowitz's (2004) theory of *degree of conflict*.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 BACKGROUND .....	1
1.1.1. <i>The case of California</i> .....	1
1.1.2 <i>Universities as interest groups</i> .....	3
1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH .....	5
<b>CHAPTER 2: THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
2.2 METHODOLOGY .....	15
2.2.1 <i>Case selection</i> .....	15
2.2.2 <i>Methods</i> .....	16
<b>CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1 ANALYSIS .....	18
3.1.1 <i>Types of interests</i> .....	18
3.1.2 <i>Degree of conflict</i> .....	25
3.1.3 <i>Public support</i> .....	27
3.2 KEY FINDINGS .....	29
<b>CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>31</b>
4.1 DISCUSSION .....	32
4.1.1 <i>Implications for Theory</i> .....	32
4.1.2 <i>Implications for Practice</i> .....	33
4.2 LIMITATIONS .....	34
4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	36
4.4 ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS .....	37
4.4.1 <i>Private lobbying groups and lobbyists</i> .....	37
4.4.2 <i>Political attitudes in California</i> .....	39
4.4.3 <i>Group leaders and lobbyists</i> .....	40
4.5 CONCLUSION .....	42
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>45</b>

# THE ROLE OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AS INTEREST GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

#### *1.1.1. The case of California*

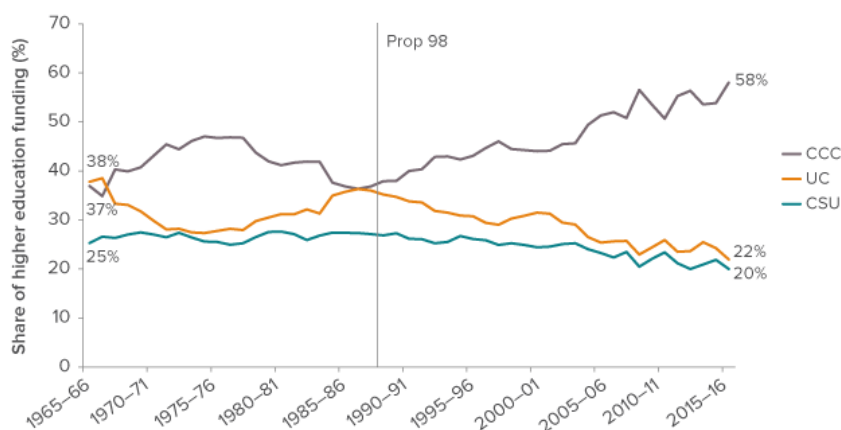
The three-tier higher education system of California, consisting of The University of California (UC), the California State University (CSU), and the California Community Colleges (CCC) used to be the envy of the US for over 30 years, since its establishment in 1960. The reason is this structure was capable of providing both high-quality and affordable education for all Californians (Finney et al., 2014).

However, in recent decades, California has undergone various economic crises, and the state now has a sharply growing population in terms of both size and diversity due to high immigration from Asia and Mexico. According to Finney et al. (2014), California is projected to accommodate 15% of the US population in 2025. Johnson and Sanchez (2019) assert that 27% of California's population was foreign born as of 2017, more than double that in the rest of the US. Of this, 50% were born in Latin America and 40% in Asia. These societal changes have pressured California to alter its funding policy for education. The reason why, according to a comprehensive research by the OECD (2019), is that immigrant students are a key focus of resource redistributions because they tend to be academically and socio-economically disadvantaged. Thus, schools often request more funding to accommodate and support immigrant students, for instance with additional language courses. Therefore, "schools that are struggling to provide quality education for native students might struggle even more with a large population of children who cannot speak or understand the language of instruction" (OECD, 2019, p.104). Extra funding might also be granted to immigrants who face a transition

into a new education system. Besides, Tandberg (2010) also argues that the percentage of the population that is of college age also has a negative impact on state funding, because if a big portion of a state's population is university students, more students will be joining universities and not contributing in a significant way to the state's tax base, "therefore limiting the amount of resources a state can commit to higher education" (p. 765).

The three higher education systems of California used to receive roughly the same amount of state funding up until 1987; however, by the end of 2016 the CCC had received most of California's funding for higher education, while the UC and the CSU shared the rest (figure 1).

**Figure 1. Share of California's higher education funding over time**



Source: California Post-secondary Education Commission, cited in Cook, 2017

This observation demonstrates a puzzling situation that inspires this whole study: "Why did California alter its funding policy in favor of the CCC rather than the UC and the CSU, despite the fact that all the three are public higher education systems?". It is also noteworthy that this puzzling **empirical observation** is different from the **theoretical research question** of this thesis, which I will further elaborate on in this chapter.

### 1.1.2 Universities as interest groups

Existing literature suggests an explanation for the empirical puzzling situation mentioned earlier: the influence of interest groups in altering state funding. Interest groups are defined as groups that advocate for particular policies that, if implemented, would conflict with the interests or values of other interest organizations (Supovitz and McGuinn, 2019; Andrews and Edwards, 2004). Many education experts argue that as state funding is shrinking, public higher education institutions are forced to compete for scarce resources through lobbying efforts (Sabloff, 1997; Tandberg, 2006, 2010; Ferrin, 2004; Tandberg and Wright-Kim, 2019). Berry (1977) argues that many advocacy organizations disguise themselves as research centers or education institutions (p.10). Berry also asserts that many interest groups contend that they only conduct research, but by adopting various lobbying tactics such as contacting officials, calling press conferences, they qualify as advocacy groups. Consistent with these claims, I also consider California's public universities a type of interest groups.

In the case of California, the stark differences in the student bodies of the three public systems might force them to compete against each other: the UC maintains its exclusivity by accepting only the top 12.5% of the state's annual high school graduates, while the CSU accepts the top 33.3% and the CCC provides education for any Californian resident in need; the UC and CSU's students being more affluent, while the CCC's poorer (Finney et al., 2014). <sup>1</sup>

Given the clear funding trajectories that favor the CCC, it is arguable that the CCC is more influential in lobbying, compared to the UC and CSU. Indeed, this assumption can be backed with existing theories of

<sup>1</sup> In this study, the term *universities as interest groups* will be used to indicate the top-level leadership of each system: *the Regents of UC*, *the CSU's Board of Trustees*, and *the CCC's Board of Governors*. The reason is that these boards of leadership are completely and legally responsible for their institution's lobbying activities.



influence. There have been multiple attempts to define *influence*, or sometimes also referred to as *power*. Many argue that influence involves the use of persuasion, information and advice to change the attitudes and opinions of others (Parsons, 1963; Zelditch, 1992; Mokken & Stokman, 1976). Similarly, others define power as the ability to cause others to do something (Wrong, 1979; Zimbardo and Leippe, 1992; Heider, 1958). Also, in conceptualizing *power*, Lukes (1974) argues that the second face of power is the ability to influence agenda-setting process in policymaking. Aligned with the second face of power, other scholars also adopt the outcomes-oriented definition – the ability to influence political outcomes (Michalowitz, 2017; Dür and Bièvre, 2007; Klüver, 2009). According to Dür and Bièvre (2007), interest groups are considered powerful if they can influence outcomes in a way that brings them closer to their initial goals. Or in other words, influence is the ability to control political outcomes (Hart, 1976).

In this thesis, I also adopt the definition of influence as “***control over outcome***”, or the ability to lobby for outcomes in a way that brings them closer to their initial goals. Then, I argue that the CCC has been more influential in their lobbying efforts. This influence is manifested in various policy changes that favor the CCC. For instance, Proposition 98, guarantees a minimum amount of state funding for the K12 and the CCC systems (Cook, 2017). This guarantee comes at the expense of the UC and the CSU, as California has been reducing its budget for education. Then, in 2017 the Assembly Bill No.19 provided funding to cover the first academic year at community colleges, before the Assembly Bill No.2 of 2019 increased this funding to make all community colleges free (California Legislative Information, 2017, 2019). In contrast, the UC and CSU’s tuition fees have tripled over the past 20 years due to funding cuts (California State University, Budget Office, 2019; University of California, Office of the President, 2019).

However, this *empirical observation* appears to contradict with conventional theory regarding collective action and lobbying influence. In his groundbreaking work “Logic of Collective Action”, Olson (1965) argues that larger interest groups are less effective than smaller groups in lobbying efforts because of the free-rider problem. The reasons are two-fold: a) the larger the group, the less significant the impact of an individual, thereby incentivizing individuals not to contribute to the group’s efforts; and b) the larger the group, the smaller the share of rewards for each individual should the lobbying efforts succeed. Olson (1965) further claims that rational individuals would have no incentive to contribute to the provision of a public good (quoted in Oliver and Marwell, 1988, p.2). Some other researchers also agree with this “group size paradox” (Spilerman, 1970; Scott and Elassal, 1969; Marwell, 1970). Beyers (2004) argues that it is harder for interest groups that have broad and scattered constituencies to mobilize their supporters.

## 1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

To explain the *empirical observation* mentioned earlier, I argue that the three public higher education systems of California act as a type of interest groups, and the California Community Colleges system is the most effective in lobbying, demonstrated by changes in funding policy that clearly favor the CCC over the UC and the CSU. Nevertheless, this argument contradicts with traditional theories on collective action and lobbying, which state that larger interest groups like the CCC are less effective (Olson, 1965; Spilerman, 1970; Scott and Elassal, 1969; Marwell, 1970). However, in the case of California, the direct beneficiaries of state funding for the UC tend to be more affluent; while those of the CCC often come from low-income households. The differences in student bodies, and as a consequence the lobbying goals of each system, might have an impact on how stakeholders view the relative gains acquired from the collective action. In other words, the direct stakeholders of the UC might view the gains from lobbying activities in terms of private benefits such as ranking/reputation and education quality; while the supporters of the CCC *might* put the weight on

affordability and universal access to higher education at the expense of more crowded classrooms. What this means is that Olson's traditional "gains-losses" argument is not sufficient in explaining the CCC's lobbying power, but there should be different factors such as the nature of such gains, be it private or public, and others. In light of that, the main ***theoretical research question*** of this thesis is: "*Why are the California community colleges more influential in lobbying despite the collective action problems it may face as a larger group?*". Thus, this study is ***theoretically significant*** because it seeks to achieve the following tasks:

- a. Modify the "group size paradox" theory by examining the empirical case of California, where the larger group (the CCC) is more effective in lobbying.
- b. Formally test a revised theory of "collective action" that types of interests, be it public or private, may have an effect on interest groups' influence (more in the theory section).
- c. Test, and later modify, the scope of Michalowitz's "degree of conflict" theory in the case of higher education policy in the U.S. (more in the theory section).
- d. The scopes of Michalowitz's theory are currently limited to the fields of IT and transportation in the EU. By applying this theory to the case of California's education policy, this study expects to examine the external validity of Michalowitz's finding.
- e. Investigate and test how "public opinion" may affect interest groups' lobbying efforts (more in the theory section).

Besides, this study also expects to have the following empirical implications:

1. It explicates what interests the three public education systems of California represent, thereby debunking the myth that all public universities work in the public interests.
2. By seeking to explain the determinants of interest groups' influence, it may enhance the understanding of how to increase the influence of such organizations.

In the next chapter, I further elaborate on the theories regarding collective action, determinants of influence. Then, I elaborate on the methodology employed in this research and provide justifications for my case selection. Next, I provide alternative explanations to the argument that the CCC is a powerful interest group that has successfully lobbied for changes in funding policy. In this section, I eliminate the role of *outside lobbyists* and *political attitudes* in California as potential explanations for the CCC's lobbying power. Additionally, I contend that *lobbying skills* of groups' leaders and activists may also be an important factor that deserves further examination. Finally, I provide key findings of this thesis and lay out some recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Determinants of influence*

Some scholars have been critical of Olson's argument of the "group size paradox". Oliver and Marwell (1988) argue that there is only a negative correlation between size and groups' effectiveness in pursuing a "good" when the cost of this good is proportional to the number of people who share it; or in other words the gains for each member are relatively small. However, when the cost of a commonly pursued "good" is very low relative to the group's interest; or when the gains allocated to each member are high, group size will have a positive effect on individuals' contributions (Oliver and Marwell, 1988). I agree with this argument because it can be argued that lower tuition fees might have more significant implications for low-income students than well-off students. To put it differently, the relative gains, or in this case more affordable higher education, resulting from successful implementation of policies that seek to reduce tuition fees might be important for stakeholders of the CCC. On the contrary, the more affluent stakeholders of the UC may have less incentive to lobby for such policies. Thus, Olson's theory does not seem to fit the case of California. Furthermore, several other studies also demonstrate that larger groups are in fact influential in swinging European policymaking (Pollack, 1997b; Waleigh, 2000; as quoted in Klüver, 2013, p.13).

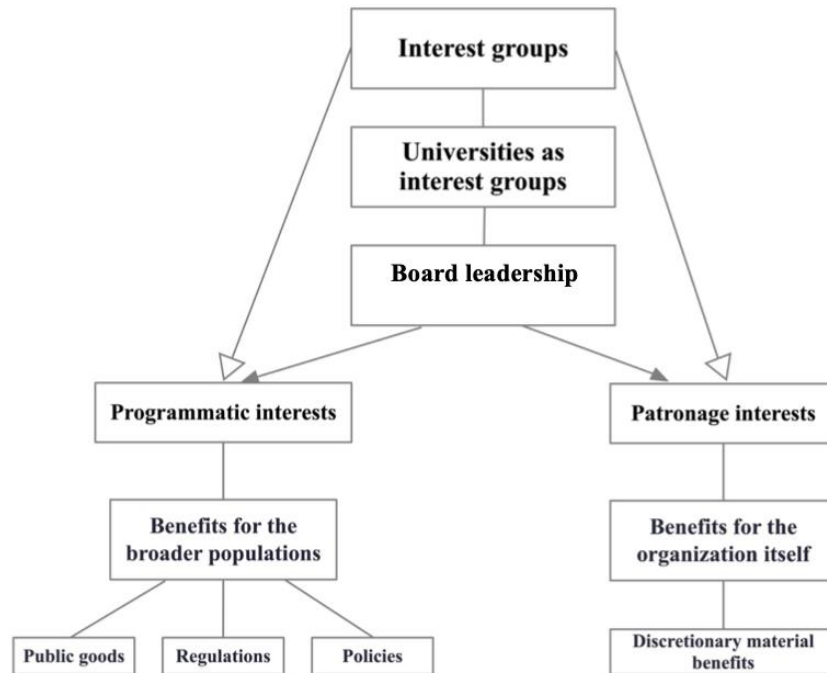
Thus, in this thesis, I will examine the critiques against Olson's tradition theory, and seek to identify other determinants of interest groups' influence besides "group size". Three potential theories that are examined in my thesis include: types of interest, degree of conflict, and public opinion.

#### *a. Types of interest*

Some scholars refute Olson's argument regarding the collective action problem and argue that the focus of analysis should be placed on the types of benefits that groups seek: whether it is private or public interests (McGuire, 1974; Chamberlin, 1974, Estaban and Ray, 1999). These scholars contend that when the pursued good is public in nature, the larger the size, the higher the level of effectiveness (Estaban and Ray, 1999). However, as Estaban and Ray (1999) assert, this revised argument has not been sufficiently demonstrated by existing studies. Moreover, Estaban and Ray's argument also contradicts with the theory that groups with more financial resources, which tend to be private interest groups, exert more influence compared with groups representing public interests (Baroni et al., 2014). That said, Estaban and Ray's theory does appear to be a potential explanation in the case of California higher education systems, and will therefore, be tested in this study. To do so, it is important to explicate what types of benefits the three higher education systems of California lobby for as interest groups.

Despite being "*institutions of the public*", existing theories do not agree on what goals public *universities as interest groups* seek (Ferrin, 2004; Sabloff, 1997; Tandberg, 2010). While some scholars argue that higher education institutions lobby to find their autonomy and procure more state funding (Sabloff, 1997; Tandberg, 2010); it is still argued that public colleges and universities are considered to be acting in the public interest (Ferrin, 2004). Second, although some studies investigate the lobbying strategies that public universities employ (Ferrin, 2005; Tandberg, 2009), there has been little to no research on how influential public universities are in shaping education policy, as well as, what determines their influence. It is also important to note that, this thesis only considers the goals of *public universities-as-interest-groups* within the scope of education, that is to say whether they lobby for causes that benefit the population educationally. Other aspects such as the impact of universities on the environment or human rights and others, are not included within the scope of this study.

**Figure 2. Conceptualization of universities as interest groups**



Interest groups can be categorized according to the type of interests that they pursue. Classifying types of interests has long been the subject of an abundant research literature. Usually, they are often classified into *programmatic interests* or *patronage interests*, or also sometimes referred to as *public interests* and *private interests*, or *diffuse* and *specific* interests. The former refers to collective goods, regulations and policies that benefit populations that extend beyond the organization; while the latter indicates discretionary material benefits that stand to benefit only the organization itself or its members (Berry, 1977; Palmer-Rubin, 2019, p.2100; Binderkrantz, 2008; Binderkrantz and Krøyer, 2012; See figure 2). Schuck (1977) argues that “the term public interest group refers to an organizational entity that purports to represent very broad, diffuse, non-commercial interests” (p.132). Beyers (2004) asserts that diffuse interest groups seek policy changes that accrue to even those who do not participate in the collective action, while specific interest groups have a clear-cut stake in defending the concentrated benefits of their constituencies. Since the exact determinants of public interest are still a topic of debate among political scientists, the purpose of this thesis is only to construct an

operational conceptualization of “public interest”. Thus, in this study I will examine “public interest” based on two components: 1) the size of the population that will benefit from the goals that an interest group pursues; and 2) whether the pursued goals imply commercial interests.

### ***b. Degree of conflict***

Also related to the “*types of interests*” theory, Michalowitz (2007) further argues that the degree of conflict between interest groups and decision-makers is an especially important determinant of groups’ influence. In particular, there is a high likelihood that lobbying efforts may succeed when there is no or almost no conflict over an issue between interest groups and policymakers, because the interests of both sides are in alignment or when “decision-makers pursue a strong interest of their own that is favorable to the interests of the interest groups” (p.137). Moreover, interest groups’ influence can also be enhanced when faced with only a weak degree of conflict. Some examples of such scenarios include cases where interest groups only conflict with politicians over technical details of a legislative act, while not touching upon the core interests of decision-makers; or when policymakers are less interested in some particular details of a policy but rather the overall policy outcome (Michalowitz, 2007).

Michalowitz’s theory seems very promising in explaining the case of California, as it is argued that there is a tension between public universities and policymakers in the U.S. Berry (1977) asserts that all policymakers “(...) no doubt, consider their decisions to be in the “public interest” (p.6). Similarly, Labaree (2018) assert that although policymakers want to keep costs low and access high for in-state students (p.135), due to a decline in state budget for education states cannot provide enough funding for universities to keep costs low. Consequently, some public universities increase tuition fees substantially to procure more revenues from recruiting out-of-state-students. Besides, Kaplin and Lee (2006) argue that some state universities are deliberately seeking more autonomy from the state agencies, which might come at the expense of state funding



(p.21). These universities, at the same time, are building private fund-raising streams. In this sense, public institutions are becoming more like private institutions (Kaplin and Lee, 2006, p.21). This tension between public universities as interest groups and politicians might play a role in determining the universities' power. Thus, in addition to explaining what interests the three California higher education systems seek, we can further understand the influence of *universities as interest groups* by examining the interests of California policymakers when making a particular education policy proposal as well. Moreover, the cases utilized in Michalowitz's study belong to the fields of IT and transportation in the European Union; thus, the scope of these findings can also be tested in the case of California's education policy.

On the other hand, in a comprehensive study, Dougherty et al. (2011) claim that public universities in California are innately powerful, and their size gives them great power to sway state legislators. According to Dougherty *et al.*'s (2011) numerous interviews with professionals and elected officials, the authors argue that the complex higher education structure of California is perceived to be a barrier to substantial changes in funding formulas (p. 87). In particular, although the UC is subject to California's politicians regarding its budget requests, elected officials are often reluctant to dictate the UC because of its constitutional autonomy, social importance, high prestige, and elite connections (p.88). Dougherty *et al.*'s (2011) also point out that nearly a third of California's legislators, a quarter of federal senators and representatives, and many top business leaders are UC alumni. The authors furthermore quote numerous interviewees commenting on the power of the California's universities:

Many of the legislators love to hate it [the University of California], but they can't take it on. It's such an important institution in the state...It has such cachet in the state that what it wants to do more or less it gets away with...The University [has] a constitutional autonomy and [has a] worldwide reputation. You look at the number of [UC] campuses in the Shanghai Jiao Tong university ratings for the...top 25

in the world...What are you going to do? Are you going to take that on? Gosh, you'd be ruining the state if you took on the University of California. (respondent, quoted in Dougherty *et al.* 's, 2011, p.88).

Because California has had a strong economy, I think there is a belief [that] things like Silicon Valley are a creation, in part, of our higher education system in places like Berkeley and Stanford. I think that there is a general sense that the digital revolution and some of the other things that are part of the 21st century economy come out of California higher education, and therefore it's something that should be nurtured, should be treasured and should not be messed with. (Respondent – a prominent state legislator, quoted in Dougherty *et al.* 's, 2011, p.85).

All things considered, it seems quite unlikely that California's politicians could easily alter the state's funding policy in such a way that significantly favors the community colleges over the other two systems. If this is the case, then the "degree of conflict" also needs further revisions. My hypothesis is that a combination of a low degree of conflict between the community colleges and policymakers, along with less enthusiastic lobbying efforts by the UC and CSU has enabled California's policymakers to do so, but it is disputable that policymakers are the main forces behind California's changes in funding policy.

### ***c. Public opinion***

Public opinion has often been discussed as a factor that enhances interest groups' influence (Page and Shapiro, 1983; Wlezien and Soroka, 2012; Grossman, 2012). Some scholars state that interest groups may be influential because they inform policymakers of what the public wants, acting as middlemen between political leaders and the public (Hansen, 1991; Rasmussen *et al.* (2014). Furthermore, interest groups structurally represent divided populations and use public opinion as a basis to gain a strategic leverage in policymaking (Denzau and Munger, 1986). Along the same lines, Dür and Mateo's (2014) findings demonstrate that interest groups can enhance the public salience of a social issue through lobbying tactics that impact public opinion,

such as “press releases, information events, protest activities, media advertisements, and many more” (p.1203). Nevertheless, Page et al. (1987) argue that some interest groups’ attempts at swinging public opinion via lobbying strategies are quite likely to bear the opposite effect; that is, if an interest group tries to force public opinion to move in one direction, the result tends to be the opposite direction. However, interestingly, also according to Page et al. (1987), this *reverse effect* of lobbying strategies often occurs to interest groups that represent private interests. On the other hand, groups representing “public interest” may observe a positive outcome between lobbying efforts and public opinion. This argument is very potential in explaining the case of California. Since, so far, the hypothesis is that the CCC represents the public interest while the UC and CSU selective interests. Thus, if Page et al.’s argument is accurate then we may also expect to see positive public opinion for policies that favor the CCC.

Moreover, the relationship between public opinion and interest groups also goes the other way around. While the goals that public interest groups promote tend to have favorable public opinion, the causes that enjoy high public support by the public also enable interest groups to better mobilize their members (Rasmussen et al., 2013; Dür and Mateo’s, 2014). Halpin (2011) asserts that this is a positive feedback phenomenon, when the initial success in gaining favorable public opinion may encourage more members to participate, which will lead to even better public opinion and so on, before resulting in a final successful policy change.

That said, some scholars reject the notion that public opinion substantially influences the policymaking process because policy is really determined by interest groups and political actors (Domhoff, 1998; Wilson, 1990; Wright, 1996). There are also empirical cases when overwhelmingly favorable public opinion does not equate to policy change. Monroe (1998) identifies that during the period of 1980 – 1993 policy outcomes over 500 issues in the US were consistent with public preferences on just 55% of the cases. These findings suggest that a high level of public support does not necessarily equate to policy change. Nevertheless, Dür and Mateo’s (2014) counters this argument by asserting that public opinion’s impact on policy is likely to vary across issues.

Public opinion should only be expected to have a strong impact on issues that are *of great importance* to the public; whereas in issues that enjoy little public attention, politicians have little incentive to follow public opinion (p.1205). Other scholars also agree that public opinion is likely to influence public policy, because politicians are to some extent subject to public opinion to win elections (Gilens, 2012; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Dür and Mateo, 2014). All this considered, I *hypothesized* that public opinion can be an important determinant of influence that strengthens the CCC's lobbying efforts, since the CCC is expected to lobby for an issue that the public is highly concerned about: affordability of colleges and universities.

## 2.2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.2.1 Case selection

In this research, I will use California as my case. The case of California provides an empirical observation that challenges the conventional theory of collective action whereby larger groups are less effective in lobbying. There have also been some arguments refuting the traditional “group size paradox”; however, such arguments are often made at the general level without specific demonstration (Esteban and Ray, 1999). Thus, California might not be a unique deviant case, but rather a most-likely case.

Besides, some other states in the U.S. such as New York, or Oregon also have similar analytical features, namely three-tier higher education systems, free community colleges and prohibitively expensive upper-ranked research institutions. Thus, the findings of this thesis can also be tested in other states. Moreover, I also expect the results of this study to travel to other countries such as Japan. Japan also has a relatively similar public higher education system despite not being a federal country: top-tier public research universities in Japan (often referred to as *kokuritsu-daigaku* – state-owned universities), second-tier universities equivalent to the CSU system (*furitsu-daigaku* – prefectural universities) and encompassing junior colleges (*tanki-daigaku*). Furthermore, the California context is informative because California's public education system is

the largest in the US, which provides a large number of units of observation – universities and colleges belonging to the three systems, thereby increasing the internal validity of the research.

### *2.2.2 Methods*

This study is conducted with qualitative methodology. In the first section, I conducted content analysis of news articles, books, academic papers, official statements, and written and online interviews to investigate the goals of the UC and CCC. It is also important to note that, a very important source that I considered reliable in understanding the UC's interests was a series about funding for the UC by Professor Emeritus Charles Schwartz of UC Berkeley. The reason is, having been a professor at UC Berkeley, Professor Schwartz has first-hand knowledge and an in-depth understanding of the system, as well as other behind-the-scenes affairs. Despite being very critical of the UC, Professor Schwartz's series is published on UC Berkeley's official website, which makes it appear unbiased.

Then, the explanation for the CCC's interests was more straightforward since existing literature tends to agree that the role of community colleges is more aligned with the public interest. I referred to the CCC's official mission statement, which clearly states that the system's goal is to provide universal access to higher education for all Californians. I also examined other academic articles to confirm this point. Next, in order to examine the degrees of conflicts I looked into the interests of three California governors: George Deukmejian, Jerry Brown, and Gavin Newsom. The reason for these choices was that these three governors oversaw three critical junctures in California's higher education system, which include:

- a. Proposition 98 of 1988, signed by George Deukmejian, which guarantees a minimum level of funding for the CCC at the expense of funding for the UC.
- b. AB-19 of 2017, signed by Jerry Brown, which makes the first year of community colleges tuition-free.
- c. AB-2 of 2019, signed by Gavin Newsom, which makes community colleges free.

Moreover, the analysis of these three governors also provides suitable conditions to examine the *degree of conflict* aspect. While Deukmejian was a conservative Republican, Brown and Newsom are liberal Democrats. This difference allows for the use of the methods of difference and agreement to identify the most significant factors that lead to favorable policy changes to the CCC. I investigated the interests of the three governors by referring to secondary resources such as news articles, interviews, speeches, and academic papers.

Finally, in order to identify the level of public support, I looked into polls concerning public perceptions of higher education in California. However, at the time when this thesis was written, there was no public information regarding public support of Proposition 98, prior to its passage. Thus, I considered the share of votes for the Proposition as the *de-facto* manifestation of public support for Proposition 98.

## CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I present the key findings of my thesis and I also elaborate on the analytical processes I employed in order to draw such findings. The findings directly address the goals that this thesis seeks to accomplish, which include a) modifying the “group size paradox” theory, b) formally testing the revised theories of “collective action” that types of interests, be it public or private, may have an effect on interest groups’ influence, c) testing the scope of Michalowitz’s “degree of conflict”, and d) testing how “public opinion” affects interest groups’ lobbying efforts.

### 3.1 ANALYSIS

In this section, I conduct content analysis of secondary materials in order to examine the three potential determinants of interest groups’ influence, namely types of interests, degree of conflict, and public opinion.

#### 3.1.1 *Types of interests*

##### *a. The UC*

The UC declares that its primary interests are aligned with the public’s interests, emphasizing the long-term societal benefits that they seek to provide through education, public service, and especially research (Mission State of the UC, n.d.). This higher education system claims to produce the best scientific findings that facilitate public benefits for California. That is why the UC contends that its lobbying efforts aim at procuring funding for research activities (Office of the President, University of California, 2002). Nevertheless, regarding the goals that the UC system seeks, the information mentioned on the UC’s official website appears to contradict with its mission statement, since it seems as if the UC aims to put the health of UC first. Moreover, although it is not explicitly stated that the UC seeks prestige, it is implied in a detailed document describing

the UC system that the UC equates federal funding with prestige (see quotes below). Thus, I argue that prestige is one of the goals that the UC aims for when lobbying for state funding.

The distinctive mission of the University is to serve society as a center of higher learning, providing long-term societal benefits through transmitting advanced knowledge, discovering new knowledge, and functioning as an active working repository of organized knowledge. That obligation, more specifically, includes undergraduate education, graduate and professional education, research, and other kinds of public service, which are shaped and bounded by the central pervasive mission of discovering and advancing knowledge. (Mission statement from the University of California Academic Plan, 1974-1978)

Designed to protect the university from shifting political winds, UC's constitutionally granted independence lets leadership put the health of UC first. (University of California, description of the Leadership).

Since universities across the country compete for federal grant dollars, federal expenditures represent a considerable source of prestige for UC campuses. (University of California, The UC Campuses: Selected points of Comparison, p.80)

Besides, three questions arise regarding the UC's real mission: who are the students that directly benefit from the UC's high-quality education? What does the UC spend its budget on? Moreover, why are the UC's tuition fees so expensive?



To answer the first question, it is essential to look into the UC's study body. The UC's students tend to come from affluent backgrounds and these students are the selected group that directly benefits from the UC's teaching and funding (see table 1). The UC universities maintain their exclusivity and competitiveness by accepting only the top 12.5% of California's annual high school graduates. In recent years this percentage has shrunk to the top 9% (Finney et al., 2014). Today, annual tuition and fees for in-state students at the UC add up to roughly \$14,000. In comparison, the costs for out-of-state students even go up to approximately \$44,000 (University of California, 2019). In terms of the student body, the majority of students at the UC system and come from upper-class households. For instance, at UC Berkeley and UC LA, approximately 20% of the students come from the richest 5% households; 33% from top 10%, and 48% from the top 20%. On the other hand, only about 7-8% of their students are from the bottom 20%. The median family income of a student of UC LA is \$104,900, while that of a student at UC Berkeley is \$119,900, compared to the US median family income of \$59,000 (Aisch et al., 2017). Schwartz (2013) also emphasizes that the UC has been increasing enrollment of wealthy out-of-state students, who pay three times as much as in-state students. This strategy has faced backlashes from California taxpayers who feel that their children's access to the UC is compromised for the wealthy.

**Table 1. Comparison of the UC and CCC's student bodies**

<b>System</b>	<b>Students recruited</b>	<b>Fees for Californians</b>	<b>Fees for non-Californians</b>	<b>Top 20%</b>	<b>Bottom 20%</b>	<b>Median income</b>	<b>US median income</b>
UC	top 13%	\$14,000	\$44,000	48%	7-8%	~\$120,000	\$59,000
CCC	everyone	free	\$6800	10%	26%	\$35,000	

Regarding the second and third questions, it can be argued that the UC spends a substantial portion of its budget on non-academic activities, as well as on the competition against other private elite universities at the expense of tuition hikes. In a series called "Financing the university", which is available on UC Berkeley's

website, Professor Emeritus Charles Schwartz of UC Berkeley debunks the financing system of the UC. Schwartz exposes that there were backroom maneuvers by the UC leadership to privatize the UC system at the cost of increasing tuition fees in 2007. According to Schwartz (2007), the UC leadership aimed to preserve "the quality of this great public institution by turning it into a copy of the leading private research universities. Someone will have to pay for this grandiose plan – and undergraduate students are the principal target. That will mean abandoning the Master Plan, with tuition increases that betray the two basic principles of Access and Affordability for undergraduate education" (n.p).

Schwartz also (2009) shows that the UC's revenues from students in 2009 were \$2.5 billion, surprisingly comparable to the amount of state funding of \$2.6 billion. Moreover, Schwartz (2007b) points out that the UC's official data claimed that the cost of undergraduate education in 2006-2007 was \$17,030, and in-state students were only to pay 30% of that cost which is roughly \$7000. Nevertheless, the real costs of undergraduate education were only \$7000. This implies that despite receiving substantial state funding, that funding did not go to undergraduate students in 2007. Along the same lines, Schwartz (2013) claims that in 2013 the UC's in-state students even had to pay twice the real cost of their education due to tuition hikes.

This is an unprecedented situation. We are on the brink of a transformation from a state-funded university to a student-funded university. (Then-UC President Mark Yudof quoted in Schwartz (2009).

It is argued that when the cost of teaching is not borne by students but the state, higher education can be considered a type of public goods. However, due to a shift in the financing model of public universities, undergraduate education could be considered a type of "private good" since it only leads to economic benefits for those students (Schwartz, 2013). I also agree with the assertion that since the UC has decided to maintain

its quality and reputation, it seeks to promote the private interests of the students who can afford such prohibitively expensive costs of education.

Similarly, Christensen (2015) argues that the UC has been spending too much money on administrators, thereby driving up tuition fees for students. In 2015, then-UC President Janet Napolitano again proposed to raise tuition by 28% over five years to "cover payroll and retirement costs, hire more faculty and enroll more California undergrads" (Christensen, 2015). However, from 2004 to 2014, the number of UC management officers grew by 60%, and administrators even outnumbered tenure-track faculty members, shows Christensen quoting UC data. Schwartz (2008) states that there is an enormous excess of administrative costs at all UC campuses, wasting roughly \$600 million per year in 2008. Following up on this research, Schwartz (2016) shows that over 24 years, until 2016, the number of UC non-academic staffers grew by 308%, as opposed to only a 62% increase in student enrollment.

Besides, a significant portion of the UC's budget is spent on pension plans, approximately \$1.3 billion a year. One interviewee recorded by Christensen (2015) says that a significant amount of the UC's budget is not going to salaries or to UC campuses but to retirement benefits that should have been set aside. On the other hand, UC officials explain that the increasing costs are needed for competition against other top institutions for talents, top faculty, and advanced technology. Nevertheless, some UC students are not convinced by this explanation. Rebecca Ora, a doctoral candidate at UC Santa Cruz, complains that despite rising tuitions, "class sizes are ridiculous, and desks are broken", "Where is the spending on education?" (Christensen, 2015).

Furthermore, according to Christensen (2015), many have been critical of the UC's efforts to compete with private industry, as a public institution. Christensen (2015) reports that the UC has been spending a remarkably large amount of its budget on administrators and faculty salaries to compete with private institutions such as Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Yale. Gloszewski, a fiscal and policy analyst of the Legislative

Analyst's Office, is reported to question the UC's competition strategies: "You are a public university; should you really be comparing yourself to a very wealthy private university?" (Christensen, 2015). Then-Governor Jerry Brown also insists that "students would not have to pay more if the university system spent less" (Christensen, 2015). Along the same lines, Marginson (2011) asserts that status competition is better at serving private interests than public interests; and for research universities, "the timeless power and prestige of the university" is the real objective (p. 422).

All of these suggest that the UC's primary goal is to maintain its quality and reputation at the expense of affordability for all students. Gaither (1999) also shares this view, asserting that the UC and CSU has chosen to protect quality for its own institution by sacrificing access.

#### *d. The CCC*

Existing literature seems to agree that community colleges work in the public interest. Schults et al. (2007) argue that community colleges are a public good that make meaningful contributions to the enhancement of people's and communities, by providing opportunities for better jobs, improving income, and bettering the quality of life. Moreover, Schults et al. (2007) also assert that the contributions of community colleges are not only limited to the communities or the individual students they serve, but their impact may reach a larger scale, such as at the regional, statewide, or national levels. Elaborating on this point, Marginson (2011) explains that teaching and learning can be considered a public good since general education contributes to a shared knowledge base, and education grants learners the access to the common culture and social opportunities, as well as enhancing social tolerance and international understanding. Thus, according to Marginson (2011), an education system that provides equality of opportunity shall be considered a collective

good. It is also argued that a “real” public higher education system should be open, egalitarian, and contribute to the larger community beyond that particular system (Marginson, 2011).

Based on the aforementioned arguments about the definitional aspects of an “actual” public university, I argue that the CCC also seeks to promote the public interest. The CCC is the largest higher education system in the world, accommodating around 2.75 million students. Eighty percent of the US’ essential workers, including firefighters, law enforcement officers and emergency medical technicians, along with seventy percent of nurses are educated here (AllGov California, 2011). According to the CCC’s official statement, the CCC is designed based on the idea that higher education should be available to everyone. The system embraces a policy of full and open access (California Community Colleges, n.d). In 2018, tuition at the CCC was only about \$1,100 annually. Then, in 2019 California Governor Gavin Newsom increased funding for the CCC, providing completely free education for Californian community colleges’ students. Tuition fees for out-of-state students are currently roughly \$6800 annually (California Community Colleges, n.d).

The student body of the CCC also differs vastly from the other two systems. For instance, at the Los Angeles community college, the median family income of students is only \$35,000. Only 4.3% of the students come from the wealthiest 10%, while 9.6% come from the top 20%, and 26% from the bottom 20% (Aisch et al., 2017). The characteristics of the CCC’s study body demonstrate that the system’s stakeholders are diverse and encompassing (see table 1); moreover, the majority of students come from low, if not very low-income households. This implies that students of the CCC may consider free colleges as essential for their financial situation and social mobility.

### 3.1.2 Degree of conflict

Michalowitz (2007) argues that the degree of conflict between interest groups and decision-makers is a critical determinant of groups' influence. There is a high likelihood that lobbying efforts may succeed when there is no or little conflict over an issue between interest groups and policymakers. Also, interest groups' lobbying activities are more likely to succeed when faced with only a weak degree of conflict. For instance, when interest groups only conflict with politicians over technical details of a policy, while not clashing with the core interests of policymakers; or when policymakers are indifferent about some particular details of a policy, but rather concerned about the general policy outcome (Michalowitz, 2007).

It is often argued that the expected role of community colleges is also aligned with elected officials' interests in bettering their communities (Marginson, 2011). However, this is not always the case. Prior to the enactment of Proposition 98, the degree of conflict between supporters of Proposition 98 and then-California Governor George Deukmejian was very high. Proposition 98 of 1988 was a critical juncture that altered the funding trajectories for higher education in California. Proposition 98 proposed a minimum level of funding for public schools and community colleges and a mandated redistribution of California's excess revenues to public schools and community colleges (University of California, College of the Law, 1988). George Deukmejian, a Republican Governor, was a strong advocate of the UC and CSU and vehemently opposed Proposition 98 (Fetler, 1990). Similarly, according to Scharg (1998), Deukmejian gave the UC relatively generous funding despite a steady decline in funding for the "huge but politically weak community college system" (p.87). Scharg (1998) also claims that Deukmejian demonstrated little tenderness for the working-class students in community colleges, and even signed an argument against the proposition. Despite all that, Proposition 98 was still implemented, resulting in a success for supporters of K-14 education, many of whom are CCC's stakeholders.

Then, it is argued that former California Governor Jerry Brown, a Democrat, has overseen other sweeping education reforms in the 2010s. Brown's interests seem to be aligned with the CCC's or the public's interests to prevent tuition hikes and make college affordable. On the other hand, the degree of conflict between Brown and the UC was high. It is noteworthy that Brown himself was a member of the Los Angeles Community College District Board of Trustees from 1969 – 1971. In an interview in 2012, Jerry Brown clearly asserted that “everyone should have the right and the opportunity to go to college” (Jerry Brown, 2012). In 2013, Brown passed the Local Control Funding Formula, a policy substantial policy change. In the State of the State address in January 2016, Brown asserted that his trademark Local Control Formula recognizes the fact that students encounter different situations, and thus, there should be extra funding for disadvantaged students, such as non-English speaking families and those with low and modest incomes. Brown also pointed out that his leadership team had increased funding for education by 51% from 2011 to 2016. Moreover, it is also reported that Brown consistently demanded that the UC and CSU freeze tuition hikes throughout the years (Blumenstyk, 2014; Asimov and Gutierrez, 2015; Adler, 2018). In 2017, Brown signed Assembly Bill 19, which waives tuition fees for all first-year community college students.

In 2019, Gavin Newsom, a left-winger even by the Democrats' standards, was elected governor of California. Newsom was quick to announce his vision for California's higher education. In a speech during his gubernatorial campaign, he announced that he would make community colleges tuition-free should he get elected: “We're going to do free community colleges, which I subscribe to.” (Newsom, 2018). Even after becoming governor-elect, Newsom was still consistent with his campaign promises, announcing on January 4, 2019 that he would propose a new plan to make community colleges completely free for two years, building upon Brown's previous 1-year tuition-free policy (Hart, 2019). This plan reflects Newsom's goals of increasing access to, and ensuring the affordability of higher education in California (Gordon and Zinshteyn, 2019). Thus, it seems quite apparent that Newsom's interest is consistent with that of the CCC's, while at odds with the UC.

Eventually, Newsom got his proposal passed and signed Assembly Bill 2 (AB-2), effectively waiving tuition fees for all community colleges. According to the Office of Governor – Gavin Newsom (2019), Gavin is reported as saying that:

Higher education has the power to transform lives, and all hardworking young people in our state deserve a shot at it (Gavin, 2019, n.p).

This package of bills strikes at the forces that keep the doors of opportunity closed to too many people in our state. Together, we're improving affordability, transparency and integrity in higher education. I thank the Legislature for making this commitment to our students and our future. (Gavin, 2019, n.p).

### 3.1.3 Public support

Public support has been consistently high for policy proposals that intend to make universities more affordable, which implies that affordability is an issue of great salience to the public interest. For that reason, it can be argued that public opinion is aligned with the CCC's goal, which is to lower tuition fees. On the other hand, since the UC's primary interest is to preserve its own reputation and quality, at the expense of affordability, the UC's mission is at odds with public opinion.

In 1988, the majority of the public passed Proposition 98 with 50.7 percent of the voters, despite strong opposition from then-Governor George Deukmejian. At the time this thesis is written, there is a lack of information regarding public opinion prior to the passage of Proposition 98. Thus, I would consider the majority of votes for the Proposition as the *de-facto* manifestation of public support.



In 2017, according to a survey conducted by Baldassare et al., the majority of Californians found affordability a serious issue of California's public education system. 75% of respondents said that the high price of college kept qualified and motivated students from attending. 62% asserted that the level of state funding in 2017 was not adequate. Similarly, the majority of students were against raising student fees (79%). Furthermore, more than 50% of respondents considered college essential and necessary. Based on these findings, it can be argued that the Californian public's interests were more aligned with proposals and policies that aim at keeping costs low. In other words, the public appeared to be in line with the CCC's goals, as well as Brown's proposal to make community colleges free in 2017.

In 2019, according to a poll by the Public Policy Institute of California, 78% of Californians were in favor of Governor Newsom's increased funding plan for higher education, a large portion of which went to the CCC to make this system free. Newsom's plan also froze tuition hikes in the UC and CSU. Besides, according to another survey conducted by PACE (Policy Analysis for California Education), Californians were still concerned about college affordability in 2019. Out of 11 different issues proposed, "making college more affordable" was voted the second priority. Forty-five percent of respondents rated this issue 10/10 in terms of its significance, while 87% rated it six or higher. Furthermore, in 2018, even before Gavin Newsom was elected, there had been great pressure from the public to put the issue of college affordability at the top of the agenda for the in-coming governor. Collins (2018) reported that there was a serious movement called "College for All Act", organized by a group of California's students to push for free college in California. The students attempted to collect 585,407 signatures from registered voters to allow the public to vote on their "College for All Act". It can be argued that the favorable public opinion for policy proposals that seek to ensure college affordability is one important factor in influencing the agenda-setting and policymaking process, since politicians are usually susceptible to the public's demand. On the other hand, high public support also provides

politicians with a mandate to carry out substantial and radical policy changes. Moreover, since the issue of college affordability is of great importance to California's public, it empowers the CCC as a public interest group.

### 3.2 KEY FINDINGS

- a. By using content analysis of various secondary sources, this thesis identifies that the UC's primary goal is to preserve its reputation and quality at the expense of affordability and access. Thus, it is the private interest that the UC seeks. On the other hand, the CCC's interest is to ensure universal access to higher education for all students of California, which is aligned with the public interest.
- b. Public opinion has been consistently positive about and supportive of policy proposals that aim at reducing student fees. As the CCC's goal is to ascertain affordability of higher education for the public, public opinion is aligned with the CCC's interest. On the other hand, the UC seeks to preserve its own reputation, therefore the UC's goal is at odds with public opinion.
- c. By using Mill's methods, it can be argued that the most significant determinants of influence for the CCC are its public-oriented interests and high level of public support (see Table 2).
- d. The findings of this thesis confirm a revised theory of "collective action" that types of interests, be it public or private, may have an effect on interest groups' influence, since the public interest group (CCC) prevailed in this case. This thesis also demonstrates that groups representing "public interest" tend to have a positive outcome between lobbying efforts and public opinion, and that public opinion has a substantial impact on issues that are of great importance to the public.
- e. "Degrees of conflict" is not necessarily a critical factor. The passage of Proposition 98, which favors the CCC over the UC and CSU was a result of a highly conflicting political battle between supporters of the CCC and then-Governor George Deukmejian. For this reasons, the study also shows that a high

degree of conflict between decision-makers and interest groups might not be as salient as Michalowitz claims. Currently, the scopes of Michalowitz's theory are constrained to the fields of IT and transportation in the EU, the current theory appears insufficient in explaining higher education policy in California. This may call for a revision of the scopes of Michalowitz' theory regarding the degree of conflict, and it suggests that further research regarding IT and transportation should be conducted in the US case, to examine whether the higher education sector of California is a unique case, or whether the US differs from the EU. Nevertheless, I still argue that a lower degree of conflict may result in more favorable outcomes, as in the cases of Brown and Newsom in making community colleges free.

- f. Finally, with regard to the theoretical research question posed at the introduction, the thesis demonstrates that larger groups are not necessarily weaker in terms of lobbying efforts, effectively refuting Olson's group-size paradox in the case of California. Despite being the larger group, whose rewards gained from lobbying activities are distributed equally for all of its members (free tuition), the CCC is still more powerful compared to the UC. As explained above, the reasons are related to the mission aligned with the public interest that the CCC seeks, and a high level of public support for the lobbying goals. Thus, the scope of Olson's group-size paradox theory should be revised in light of these findings.

**Table 2. Factors involved in California' s education policy changes**

System	Interests	Type of interest	Public opinion	Interests of decision-makers		Degree of conflict	Result
UC	Preserve quality and reputation	Private interest	Less favorable	George Deukmejian	In favor of the UC and CSU	Low	Proposition 98: in favor of the CCC
					Against the CCC	High	
				CCC	Ensure affordability and universal access	Public interest	Favorable
In favor of the CCC	Low						
Gavin Newsom	Against the UC’ s private goals	High	Passage of AB-2: favorable to the CCC				
	In favor of the CCC	Low					

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

### 4.1 DISCUSSION

This study is inspired by the empirical observation that the three public higher education systems of California, namely the UC, CSU, and CCC used to receive roughly the same amount of state funding for almost thirty years; nevertheless, in 1988 California altered its funding policy and has since implemented policies favorable to the CCC. This thesis is predicated upon the premise that the three public education systems lobbied for funding as interest groups, and the CCC was more successful in its lobbying activities compared to the other two systems. This argument goes against Olson's (1965) conventional theory on interest groups' activities that larger groups are less effective in lobbying.

#### *4.1.1 Implications for Theory*

The findings of this thesis were consistent with some critics of Olson's "group-size paradox" (Oliver and Marwell, 1988, Pollack, 1997b; Waleigh, 2000 as quoted in Klüver, 2013, p.13) that "size" does not always matter. Moreover, a simple "gains and losses for stakeholders" argument is not sufficient in explaining interest groups' lobbying outcomes either. Instead, my thesis formally tested the revised theory of "collective action" that types of interests, be it public or private, may have an effect on interest groups' power. The findings of my study demonstrated that interest groups that work for issues that are of great importance for the public's interests are more powerful. In the case of California, the CCC was the public interest group, therefore it was more effective in lobbying for state funding. For this reason, I argue that Olson's "collective action" problem should be considered for revisions.

Also, my thesis showed that Michalowitz's theory about "degree of conflict" between interest groups and decision-makers is not applicable to the case of California. Currently, Michalowitz's theory is constrained

to the fields of IT and transportation in the European Union. This calls for reconsiderations regarding the applicability and generalizability of this theory.

Furthermore, the thesis also confirmed the theory of “public opinion” that public support tends to be high for issues that are of significance to the public. In this case, universal access to higher education is a crucial issue for Californians, and proposals that sought to ensure the affordability of higher education have been enjoying high public support. The results of my research also imply that interest groups that receive favorable public opinion may also be more influential in affecting policymaking. Future studies may also look into cases where private interest groups enjoy favorable public opinion, and where public interest groups enjoy a low level of public support, in order to further examine the impact of *types of interest* and *public opinion* separately.

#### *4.1.2 Implications for Practice*

The first implication for practice is related to the *types of interest* that public higher education institutions seek. My thesis established that not all public institutions work in the public interest, or at least in the case of California, the UC was acting more similarly to a private institution, lobbying for its private benefits. Therefore, individuals and organizations who intend to lobby for the UC’s interest should be aware of and cautious about the UC’s claims that state funding for the UC goes to research and subsidizing students, since my thesis demonstrated that it is not actually the case.

The second implication for practice concerns the argument that public interest groups are influential in lobbying activities. This is very important since my thesis has demonstrated that large groups can still effectively influence the policymaking process to the public’s advantage. Understanding that public interest

groups are powerful in nature also directs the attention towards how to intensify large public interest groups' power. I suppose that the answer for this question lies not necessarily in all and any members of a group, but rather in the leaders and professional lobbyists of the interest organizations. I argue that a large number of members constitutes an enormous level of public pressure on policymakers, and the leaders and lobbyists of such groups are those who utilize this potential power of public interest groups to lobby for their groups' goals. Thus, if the leaders are skilled in lobbying strategies, they can effectively push for policy changes that favor the broad population.

Next, since public opinion is an important determinant of interest groups' power, it is also crucial for interest groups to garner favorable public support. In the case of California, favorable public opinion for the CCC, as well as the *public-oriented goals* that the CCC sought might have been the main reasons why California adopted Proposition 98, in spite of a high degree of conflict between then-Governor Deukmejian and the CCC.

Finally, the thesis directly explained the empirical observation posed in the introduction regarding why California altered its funding policy in favor to the CCC over the other two systems. The answer is because the CCC sought to protect the public's interest even during economic crises, while the UC sought to protect its own reputation. Thus, the CCC enjoyed a high level of public support which constituted a source of its power, pressuring California's leaders to protect the interests of the broader population.

## 4.2 LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to my thesis, which may have had an impact on my findings. First, while there was an abundance of information concerning the degrees of conflict before the adoption of Proposition 98 and

AB-2, there was not enough data regarding Jerry Brown's stance on funding for community colleges prior to the passage of AB-19. All secondary sources solely either show that Brown has signed the bill, or there have been lobbying campaigns calling for Brown to adopt the bill. Thus, it might be important to conduct interviews with sources familiar with what happened behind closed doors to accurately measure the degree of conflict between Brown and supporters of AB-19, many of whom are advocates for the CCC.

Second, although the governors are the chief executives of California, the policymaking process is complicated and involves other political actors, especially the legislative branch. Having said that, my thesis did not examine the degrees of conflict between California's policymakers and the higher education systems. Thus, there should also be in-depth interviews with California's lawmakers in order to further understand the conflicts that happened in the legislature.

Moreover, as mentioned in the "Implications for Practice" section, I argue that the lobbying and organizing skills of interest groups' leaders and professional lobbyists may also be very important in determining lobbying outcomes. That said, my thesis did not examine this aspect.

Besides, within the scopes of this thesis, I did not investigate the CSU in the analysis chapter. A similar analysis of the CSU might complete and strengthen the results and implications of this study. Finally, since the case of the CCC entails both a high level of public support, as well as public-oriented goals, this thesis did not clearly explicate how significant each variable is. Thus, there should be further studies to confirm and measure the importance of each variable.



### 4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

First, since California is a very particular case, future research should also look into other states in the US such as New York, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii... whose analytical features are similar to those of California's higher education system, and also have free community colleges. For instance, the State University of New York (SUNY) is also one of the largest higher education systems in the US and has observed a similar dilemma between access and quality:

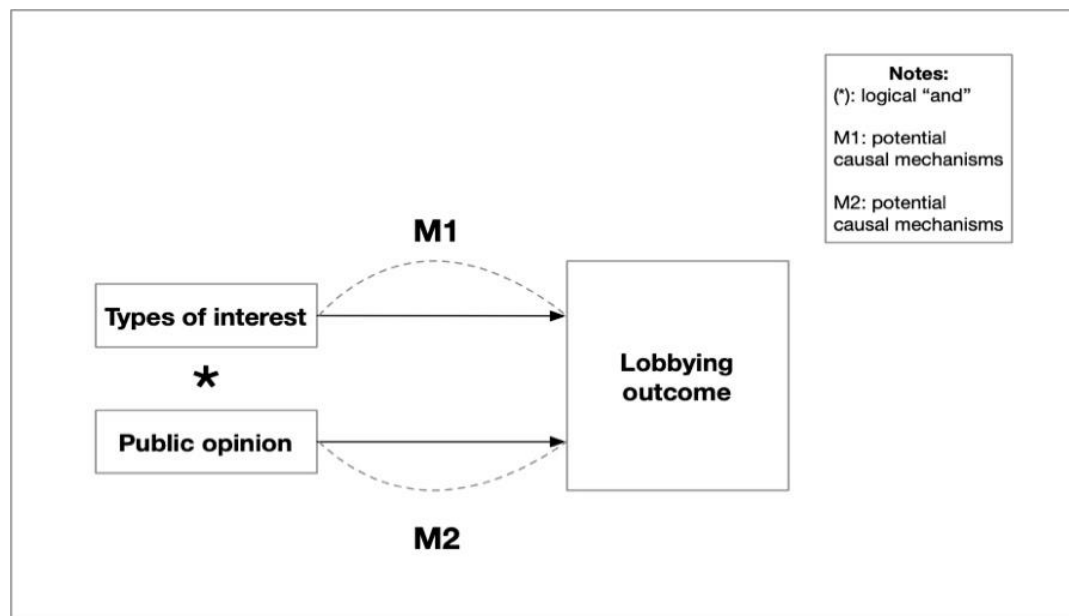
In 1975, the State University of New York was a public higher education system committed to providing access to a quality education. In 1982 SUNY is a higher education system being forced to choose between access and quality education (Stephens Report; quoted in Colby & White, 1989, p.324).

Moreover, SUNY is also a three-tier higher education system governed by a Board of Trustees, consisting of research universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges (New York State, State University of New York, n.d.). New York also adopted a new program that made colleges tuition-free for middle-class New York residents in 2017 (New York State, n.d.). Thus, further case studies of New York and/or similar states can further strengthen or refute the argument that *types of interest* is a critical determinant of interest groups' influence.

Moreover, my thesis is a case study that has established a causal relationship between the two most significant determinants of interest groups' influence, namely *types of interest* and *public opinion*, with the likelihood (or unlikelihood) of lobbying outcomes. However, the thesis does not explicate the mechanisms through which the impact of *types of interest* and *public opinion* was materialized. Therefore, it may be also

important to investigate the causal mechanisms that bridge this causal relationship. For this reason, future research may look into the lobbying strategies employed to promote the *types of interest* and influence *public opinion*, or the actors involved in such lobbying activities in order to further understand how lobbyists capitalize on *types of interest* and *public opinion* to increase their lobbying power (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Causal relationship between two variables and lobbying outcome**



#### 4.4 ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE CCC BEING THE MOST POWERFUL INTEREST GROUP IN LOBBYING FOR STATE FUNDING

##### 4.4.1 Private lobbying groups and lobbyists

The first alternative explanation that deserves further explanations is the influence of independent and private individuals and interest groups in lobbying for funding policy in California. However, this explanation can be easily ruled out since numerous types of lobbying strategies may result in violation of federal law in the State of California. In an official statement, then-President of the University of California Richard C.

Atkinson (2002) raises his concerns about individual lobbying efforts by the UC faculty, as well as outside consultants in pursuing research funding directly from the state Congress.

In 1995, the State of California implemented the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 which “requires individuals, businesses and other organizations that make or receive payments to influence state governmental decisions – such as advocating for or against legislative bills and state agency regulations – to register as lobbyists and submit periodic reports of their lobbying activity” (California, Fair Political Practices Commission, 2016). In accordance with these regulations, the University of California has also adopted a Lobbying Disclosure Policy which mandates that “no University of California employee, administrator, or faculty member, or other individual retained to provide outside assistance, should engage in activities that would require them to be registered as a lobbyist under the definition of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 without prior written approval of the President of the University of California or the Chancellor” (Richard C. Atkinson, 2002).

Similarly, the California State University and all CSU employees are also subject to the Lobbying Disclosure Act. For this reason, the whole CSU system is registered as an organization that employs in-house lobbyists, or in other words, the CSU system *per se* is an interest/lobbying group (California State University, n.d). Likewise, the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges are also responsible for the system’s advocacy function (California Community Colleges, n.d.)

All things considered, it can be argued that the three higher education systems of California are responsible for their own lobbying efforts. Even if there are other private groups and individuals that take part in the lobbying process, those groups and individuals are still obliged to follow the advocacy principles and

guidance of the three systems' boards of leadership. For this reason, I assert that the three systems are the most significant *lobbying groups* that have pushed for changes in funding policy in California.

#### 4.4.2 Political attitudes in California

The second alternative explanation concerns the political climate in California. California is often considered a progressive state, whose political climate has empowered interest groups that lobby for progressive causes, such as tuition-free colleges. Nevertheless, I still rule out *political attitudes* as a decisive determinant of the CCC's influence, because several empirical surveys and observations demonstrate that California is, in fact, not so progressive. Moreover, not all progressive states, even those more liberal than California, have free community colleges. On the contrary, some states often considered conservative also adopted plans that make colleges tuition-free around the same time as California.

First, although California today is indeed a progressive stronghold, the state was not always so liberal. During the critical 1980s that led to the passage of Proposition 98, and the 1990s that observed a continuous decline in state funding for higher education, California voters had elected two Republican governors: George Deukmejian (1983-1991) and Pete Wilson (1991-1999). After Gray Davis – a one-term democratic governor (1999-2003), California again elected another republican: Arnold Schwarzenegger (2003-2011). Furthermore, although California has been becoming *more* liberal in recent years, the political climate has not shifted too far to the left. Jerry Brown (2011-2019), the Democratic governor who made the first year of community colleges free, is a moderate democrat (Nagourney, 2018). In the 2016 democratic primary, the majority of California's voters supported Hillary Clinton - a moderate politician who proposed debt-free colleges, over Bernie Sanders – a far-left politician who pushed for tuition-free colleges. As recent as 2020, according to Politico (2020), Bernie Sanders came ahead of the runner-up Joe Biden in the Democratic presidential primary,

with 35.5% to 28% of the votes. However, I argue that this margin is not so significant, given an incredibly large field of moderate candidates, which had possibly split up the moderate votes. After summing up the vote shares of all candidates who have acquired more than 1%, I argue that the support for progressive candidates and that for moderate candidates is remarkably close, at 48.8% (Bernie Sanders, 35.5%; and Elizabeth Warren, 13.3%) and 46.8% (Joe Biden, 28%; Michael Bloomberg, 12.2%; Pete Buttigieg, 4.4%; and Amy Klobuchar 2.2%) respectively. These observations are also consistent with two Gallup Polls regarding U.S. political ideology across states. The first poll was conducted in 2012, illustrating that California is not listed in the top ten most liberal states (Newport, 2013). The second poll was conducted in 2019, showing that California had become more liberal and ranked as the 7th most liberal state, however, with 29% of residents identifying as conservative and 29% as liberal, while 36% claimed to be moderate (Jones, 2019). More importantly, among the ten most liberal states in 2012, only five states, as of June 2020, have adopted policies that make colleges tuition-free. These states are Oregon, Delaware, Rhode Island, Hawaii, and New York (Farrington, 2020). On the contrary, other states, which are often considered conservative, have already implemented programs that offer free higher education to eligible students, such as Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Arkansas... (Farrington, 2020).

All things considered, I argue that "*political attitudes*" is not a decisive factor in explaining why California has adopted policies favorable to the CCC.

#### **4.4.3 Group leaders and lobbyists**

In addition to the more general determinants of influence such as *types of interest*, *degree of conflict*, and *public opinion*, more subjective and specific factors should also be considered. In particular, this includes the lobbying and organizing skills of leaders and lobbyists for an interest group. Linden (2015) argues that the single most salient determinant of interest groups' influence is access to policymakers, since access precedes influence. Of course, it can be counterargued that there are still cases where public pressure alone can

effectively force politicians to alter their position. However, access is still definitely an important factor, since it allows for direct interactions and/or negotiations between lobbyists and decisionmakers. Linden (2015) states that access can be gained through numerous factors, such as personal connections, group structure, membership and importance of the group at the time (p.21). Since this thesis has investigated *group structure*, *membership* and *importance of the group* (group size; characteristics of student bodies and stakeholders; and public support), the last factor, namely personal connections should be examined. Linden (2015) also contends that politicians are more likely to meet and discuss with those with whom they have a good personal relationship. Since lobbying is regulated in California, the *particular individuals* who lobbied for and negotiated on behalf of their education system might be of great importance.

Furthermore, as my thesis has identified that public opinion is a critical factor in determining interest groups' success, it can furthermore be argued that the *political strategists* and *group leaders* who organize public campaigns to influence public opinion may also be the individual-level factors. Delibashzade and Malazogu (2015) argue that political consultants familiar with public relations, advertising, and the political process are responsible for determining a campaign plan. Successful political strategists increase public awareness and support for their group's mission, thereby pressuring lawmakers and politicians to act favorably to their interest group. Along the same lines, Murphy (2001) emphasizes that personal characteristics of lobbyists, recommending that lobbyists for higher education institutions should be those who possess strong communication and people skills, honesty and integrity. Murphy (2001) also shows that the lobbyists interviewed in his research state that their words are their greatest asset. Thus, determinants of interest groups' influence should further be investigated at the individual level.

## 4.5 CONCLUSION

The empirical case of California presents a puzzling observation that there was a clear change in funding trajectories for the three higher education systems of California, despite almost 30 years of equal amount of state funding for the three systems. Starting from this empirical observation, this thesis argued that the three higher education of California acted as interest groups, and the CCC was more powerful compared to the other two systems, thereby pushing policymakers to implement funding policies that favor the CCC. This argument, however, contradicts with Olson's "group-size paradox" theory, which states that larger interest groups are less effective due to the collective action. Supporters of Olson's theory argue that larger interest groups might incentivize their members to "shirk" or free-ride collective lobbying activities. Moreover, since the share of rewards will be distributed among members, the larger the group, the smaller the rewards each member gets, thereby distorting incentives to participate. Nevertheless, the success of the CCC in lobbying for favorable funding policies, despite being the larger group representing the broad population of California, calls for revisions of Olson's theory. Thus, the main *theoretical puzzle* of this thesis is: "*Why are the California community colleges more influential in lobbying despite the collective action problems it may face as a larger group?*".

I investigated this theoretical question based on three theories of determinants of interest groups' influence, including *types of interest* (McGuire, 1974; Chamberlin, 1974, Estaban and Ray, 1999), *degree of conflict* (Michalowitz, 2004), and *public opinion* (Rasmussen et al., 2013; Dür and Mateo's, 2014; Halpin, 2011). My thesis found that the CCC's primary goal is to ensure affordability of and access to higher education for all Californians, which is consistent with the public interest. On the other hand, the UC's mission is to maintain reputation and quality at the expense of affordability and universal access. Then, *degree of conflict* is not necessarily a critical factor, as lobbying efforts for Proposition 98 - a policy that is favorable to the CCC at the

expense of state funding for the UC and CSU - were successful despite a high degree of conflict between then-Governor Deukmejian and advocates of Proposition 98. Next, the Californian public has consistently been supportive of policy proposals that seek to lower tuition fees and ensure affordability, which is in line with the CCC's interest, while clashing with that of the UC's.

Using Mill's methods of difference and agreement, my thesis argued that being a public interest group and having high public support for its goals are the two critical reasons why the CCC was able to successfully lobby for favorable funding policies. Thus, *types of interest* and *public support* should be considered to modify Olson's "group-size paradox" theory. Other theoretical implications of the thesis include a call for revisions of Michalowitz's theory of *degree of conflict*, and recommendations for future studies to look into other potential determinants of interest groups' power, namely lobbying and organizing skills of leaders and lobbyists, and lobbyists' personal connections with lawmakers. Moreover, similar studies should also be conducted in other higher education systems within the US in order to assess the generalizability of this thesis's findings. Besides, the findings of my study should further be tested in other policy fields, apart from higher education policy, to identify the extent to which *types of interest* and *public opinion* can determine large groups' lobbying success.

On a practical note, I expect the findings of my research to travel to other public education systems within the United States that share similar analytical features with the California's system, such as New York and Oregon. Thus, lobbying campaigns for state funding for education in such states should aim at promoting the public interest essence of their institutions, in order to influence public opinion. Students and other education activities may also consider capitalizing on this perceived power of public interest groups, appealing to politicians' susceptibility to public opinion.



Finally, access to higher education is considered a right in many places. That is why the role of public higher education is extremely significant, and thus, the state should provide a high-quality, affordable education for the public. That said, in several countries, it is still prohibitively expensive to pursue a high-quality university education. Some examples of such countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia... even in countries where public universities are affordable, there are still some special, high-quality programs provided by public universities that charge unreasonably high costs to their students. The students who can afford such education often come from an affluent background, who have already been advantaged through having the financial resources to receive good academic training prior to universities. Thus, universities that lobby for their own private interests at the expense of the public may worsen the social and economic patterns of inequality. The reason is, higher education has long-lasting impacts beyond the time spent at university; thus, limited access to high-quality education may also prevent social mobility. To be specific, graduates of reputable universities earn higher salaries compared to those who go to lesser-known institutions. For this reason, it is of great importance to further investigate public universities as interest groups, the types of interest they seek and their sources of power, so that the public can play a role in pushing for favorable and necessary changes.

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