

The Real Nature of Politicians

Politicians are tools, not people. If we want to change how they vote, we need to understand what they are motivated by. They will only politically respect us if they politically fear us. Politicians are people pleasers that are averse to controversy, they are primarily motivated by reelection, and we can control them by demonstrating an ability to mobilize angry voters.

Politicians pursue office because they want the status of winning a popularity contest. Few of them are deeply ideological, and they will base their positions around the political center in order to offend as few people as possible. They are averse to controversial bills because they want to be well liked. We have to apply political pressure to overcome this nature. Understand that they will be nice to you in person even if they're voting against you. Do not let a handshake, kind words, or a smile misdirect you from your primary goal: get them to immediately vote the way you want and inflict consequences if they don't. Do not accept promises of future action in place of immediate action. If you want friends in the political class, get a dog instead.

Facts and logic do not convince a politician to vote your way because they are primarily motivated by reelection and election to higher office. They are dominated by ambition and not ideology. They have some sort of ideological position when you talk to them, but it can be swayed if they believe they will lose an election because of that position. The political establishment will threaten them with consequences if they step outside what is deemed politically correct. It is our job to make them fear us more than they fear the political establishment.

Since legislators fear threats to their reelection, demonstrating an angry voter base is the fastest way to get a politician to change their vote. The best way to demonstrate this during the legislative session is to have activists testify in committee and have people call into the legislator's office. We want to be louder than the opposition and show that we have the support to influence the next election if a legislator votes against our wishes. Even if we don't win the overall vote on a bill, the record of the vote will help advise our next fight and give us evidence for attacks on our opponents in the next election cycle. We follow through on our demands by recruiting challengers to run against legislators who are voting wrong and supporting them with political mail and door knocking efforts. The pressure during the legislative session means nothing without this follow through, and even if you don't win the election you will cause political pain that can make them change their voting behavior. Unelecting incumbents will have a ripple effect beyond the district you are working in and cause other legislators to fear voting against your wishes. Politics is predictable because politicians are predictable.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it dangerous to form a personal friendship with a politician?
2. How do other entities try to sway politicians? What motivations do they tap into?
3. How can we sway politicians and what advantages do we have?
4. What do we need to accomplish in the legislative session to have success in the electoral season and vice versa?
5. When does the legislative session happen in our state and when are the primary elections?
6. What are reasonable goals we can set for the legislative session and primary elections?