

Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why by Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, and Beth L. Leech. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2009. 360 pp. Cloth, \$66.00; paper, \$24.00.

A quick glance at almost any contemporary newspaper suggests that interest groups are often successful in securing their desired policy changes in Washington DC. But is this depiction accurate? Surprisingly, political scientists know little about the influence that groups may hold over government policy outcomes. It is to this severe gap in our understanding that five leading scholars direct their recent treatment.

The Baumgartner et al. book is a path-breaking attempt to collect information on interest group lobbying activities. Focusing specifically on policy issues, the authors link lobbying activities to actual shifts in government policy. They first identify a random selection of lobbying groups. (However, their use of the Lobbying Disclosure Act from which to choose these groups likely skews their sample towards congressional policymaking and away from other venues.) Second, Baumgartner et al. interview a representative from each selected group and ask him or her to discuss the most recent federal policy issue their organization has been active on—this issue then becomes an observation for the study. The authors focus on 98 policy issues in total, which they track closely from 1999 to 2002. (Much of this information is available on the project's website.) The sheer breadth and diversity of their data collection efforts bolsters the authors' conclusions on lobbying influence and is a testament to the book's importance.

The book's central theoretical contribution is its re-conceptualization of what is meant by "interest group influence" in government. Baumgartner et al. see group influence as not just the ability to promote desired policy change but also the ability to

thwart (or stop) unwanted change. The authors demonstrate that interest groups lobbying on an issue tends to form into two distinct “sides”, whereas one side defends the status quo, while the other promotes change. While this idea is not novel, the authors flesh it out through data analysis. Indeed, the book forces scholars to think anew about the power of the status quo, and the influence of those that defend it.

Baumgartner et al. uncover several other notable results. For example, they find that policy change occurs on 40 percent of the 98 issues during their analysis period, and many of these changes are characterized as major shifts, not incremental movements. Additionally, contrary to most research, Baumgartner et al. conclude that interest group resources are not a key determinant of securing policy change.

Yet, like all important books, I wanted more. In particular, I wanted to know more about the determinants of policy change. The authors present few multivariate analyses and are unable to explain much of the variance attached to the policy shifts in the sample. I also wanted to know more about one of the key “resources” identified: the support of government allies. Indeed, I question this characterization—might the support of government allies be better conceived of as a goal of lobbyists, not a resource? Finally, I wonder how we are to understand the fact that policy change occurred on 40 percent of the issues within a four-year time period. Is this evidence of a status quo bias, or does it suggest the frequency of policy change?

In the end, *Lobbying and Policy Change* is an important book because it challenges our perceptions and extends our understanding of interest group influence. It will surely end up on the shelves of most scholars of interest groups and public policy.

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