

Lobbying and Policy Changes: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why, Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, and Beth L. Leech, 2009, The University of Chicago Press, ISBN 9780226039459, \$24.00, paper, 360 pages.

In *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, several predominant political science scholars tackle the study of lobbying from a new perspective. Rather than examine predominant interest groups issues or those issues the media covers, Baumgartner et al. randomly select issues in which to focus their study.

These issues were selected based on whichever issue a lobbyist, chosen on the basis of his or her organizational affiliation, stated he or she had most recently lobbied Congress. By defining issues as such, the authors were able to specify 98 issues to include in their analysis, in which they examined the number of possible different “sides” to an issue, grouping actors on the basis of their preferences. Sides of the issue frequently include those who want to protect a current policy in opposition to those who want to change it, and are found to be heterogeneous in nature.

This study occurred over a four year span, 1999-2002 and thus included both the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush presidencies. Through this time period, Baumgartner et al. determined the eventual outcome of these predominant issues to see which side of the issue is achieving their policy goals. The primary argument the authors make, and which they feel is strongly supported through their data collection, is that generally the current policy in effect will remain.

Baumgartner et al. argue that the current policy, the status quo, is the result of an elaborate policy process in which the outcome is an equilibrium between those actors on different sides of the process. Thus, in order for this equilibrium to change, mobilization has to change on a large scale such that power is shifted to create a new equilibrium.

Further changes to an existing policy will therefore not be incremental, but rather sweeping changes in which the status quo is entirely altered. In fact, the authors find very little support for incrementalism, arguing that partisanship and elections actually counter this theory. Partisan divides and changes in political representation reinforce the idea of punctuating the already existing equilibrium to produce drastic policy changes.

Nonetheless, Baumgartner et al. do observe a fair amount of policy change among their 98 issues. The authors argue that significant policy change is much more likely than modest change, as often the two alternatives government officials choose from are the status quo and a dramatically different policy. While the majority of the time, defenders of the status quo are advantageous, if policy is altered it is likely to be in a significant manner.

Although the authors’ argument is contrary to incremental theory, they do argue that issue reframing can emerge incrementally, though it seldom occurs at all. The authors examined whether actors in the policy process were reframing their issues in an attempt to draw attention to their cause. They found that only four of the issues under examination underwent some sort of reframing. Baumgartner et al. argue that policy changes did occur on the issues under examination, but that they were not a result of issue reframing.

The authors also tackle a predominant question in the study of lobbying by examining the effect resources have on outcomes. They find there to be a low correlation between monetary resources and policy outcomes, but argue that their findings need to be considered in a broader context, as other factors come into play, such as the context of the issue.

Baumgartner et al. present an appealing way in which to study the lobbying process. Their findings will be of interest to those interested in punctuated-equilibrium theory.

Caitlyn O’Grady
Carl Albert Graduate Fellow

APSA Legislative Studies Section Newsletter, January 2010, Book Notes, pp. 7-8
<http://www.apsanet.org/~lss/Newsletter/jan2010/Booknotes.pdf>