

Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science.



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holders in various constituencies led them to shift to the GOP.

For the next hundred years the parties would remain much the same. Mass parties mobilized the electorate and used office ambitions to hold candidates and officeholders to the party. Aldrich uses "mass party" to mean something quite different from the way it is used by students of comparative parties, who, following Duverger, mean parties that seek to have an active membership base, such as the Communists and Socialists. The form and character of mass parties had developed before the Civil War, and the author adopts the classic textbook description: the party organization, party in the electorate, and party in government.

By the 1960s, much that held these parties together began to weaken. Changes in communication affected every aspect of parties. Voters became less attached to the very idea of party. In turn, candidates could appeal more directly to voters, mobilizing supporters even before the nomination. Yet, despite the widespread view that parties were in decline, by most measures of strength and activity the parties were as strong as, if not stronger than, ever. But these were not the same kinds of parties. Rather than dominate the candidates and officeholders, they become in Aldrich's term "parties in service" to their candidates, "an organization designed around the ambitions of office-seekers-candidates responsible for their own campaigns."

Why do candidates continue to use these parties? It is far more efficient to take over the party machinery than to create one anew. Issue-oriented activists have emerged to aid individual candidates in seeking to control the machinery. A more volatile electorate also means that the realignments characteristic of past party systems, in which one party came to dominate for long periods, is no longer likely.

By demonstrating that parties solve fundamental problems inherent in democracies, Aldrich has done a major service. Of course, students of parties have noted their virtues for years, but largely in terms of various democratic functions imputed by the observer. Working from the rational choice perspective, Aldrich shows why and how political actors create parties as a rational response in seeking their own goals and how, as conditions change, these parties also change. Aldrich claims only to explain the development of American parties. Yet, because the United States provides such a hostile setting for parties, he comes close to giving us a general theory for all parties in democracies.

Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science. By Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998. 223p. \$55.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

Richard A. Smith, *Millsaps College*

Basic Interests is a superb review of the recent and not-so-recent literature on interest groups in American politics. Over the past half century, political scientists, economists, and sociologists have investigated a great many questions about interest groups, ranging from how and why they form and maintain themselves to how and to what extent they influence the agendas, issue interpretations, and decisions of government officials. Scholars have used diverse theoretical and methodological approaches and have reported a multitude of sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory findings that are difficult for both students and academics to organize, comprehend, and evaluate fully. As a result, in recent years there have been several reviews and assessments of portions of this substantial literature, but Frank

Baumgartner and Beth Leech attempt a critical review of the entire literature, including an analysis of why some areas of inquiry have advanced while others have not.

Baumgartner and Leech have three goals. The first is to chart the development of the interest group literature over the last 50 years and identify broad schools and approaches. The second is to describe and explain why some areas of inquiry have produced great advancements, why others have been understudied, and why still others, even after years of intensive research, remain confused and filled with contradictory findings. The third is to suggest how research can be designed more effectively, especially in areas in which contradiction and confusion reign. The review spans nine chapters and examines such topics as the rise and fall of the group approach to politics; the collective action problem and its implications for interest group formation and maintenance; the scope and bias of interests represented in Washington; and the influence of groups in the policy process.

Baumgartner and Leech begin by assuming that interest groups are at the core of the political process and that this position has not lessened over the last 50 years. They then ask two questions. Why has the study of interest groups over the last half century moved from a position of centrality in the discipline to a position of marginality or, as Baumgartner and Leech describe it, "elegant irrelevance"? How should research on interest groups be conducted so as to restore groups to a position in the discipline that is commensurate with their central place in the political process?

The answers to these two questions are related. The answer to the first centers on the shortcomings of the interest group literature. Beginning in the 1960s, with the demise of the group approach to politics, scholars abandoned any aspirations of developing overarching theories of interest group activities and their effect on the policy process. Instead, they concentrated on narrower, more analytically and empirically tractable questions about particular aspects of interest group behavior. Some of this research, especially the work on group formation and maintenance and the large-scale surveys of interest group networks and activities, produced substantial increases in the collective understanding of group behavior. But much of it, and especially the research that focused on the effect of interest groups in the policy process, did not. According to Baumgartner and Leech, this research suffers from several shortcomings, including the absence of widely shared theoretical frameworks and questions, insufficient attention to the larger context in which groups operate, and too many empirical studies of modest scope and dubious generalizability. As a result, few strong conclusions emerged, and considerable confusion and uncertainty remain about the importance of interest groups in the study of politics.

The answer to the second question focuses on eliminating the shortcomings of prior work. Future research needs to have greater theoretical coherence, broader empirical scope, and greater attention to context, but not necessarily in equal measures. Greater theoretical coherence can compensate for empirical studies of modest scope and narrow context by providing a framework in which to integrate findings and see their broader implications. Large-scale empirical studies and close attention to context can compensate for the lack of a widely shared theoretical framework by providing the information base for supporting well-grounded, empirical generalizations. For example, in the case of studies of group influence, Baumgartner and Leech do not foresee the emergence of a widely shared theoretical framework and thus stress that future investigations must be broad in scope and sensitive to context. They believe that such investigations are the best way to move beyond the present confusion and

uncertainty about the effect of groups in the policy process, and they point to the large-scale interest group surveys of the 1980s as promising examples.

Yet, this answer overlooks the fundamental problem in determining the role of groups in the policy process, namely, the failure to construct counterfactuals that can establish causal links between the actions of groups and the various outcomes in the policy process that groups strive to influence, such as agendas, issue interpretations, the content of policy options, the decisions of public officials, and the implementation and enforcement of approved policies. Broadening the empirical scope of influence studies and paying greater attention to context are not necessarily going to lead to the construction of more successful counterfactuals. Indeed, they are likely to make the construction even more difficult by significantly increasing the amount of data that must be collected.

Constructing convincing counterfactuals requires the collection of substantial information about the strategies, resources, and positions of all who are involved in the policy (or policies) under investigation, and some of this information is extremely difficult to gather. Indeed, the practice in recent decades of narrowing the scope of empirical investigations of group influence is a direct result of scholars trying to manage the data collection effort. Broadening the empirical scope of such studies may be necessary, but it will require a level of scholarly effort and financial support that is beyond anything attempted so far in the study of interest groups.

Despite the lack of attention to the counterfactuals, *Basic Interests* is still an excellent guide to where the literature has advanced and where it has not. It assumes, however, that the reader is familiar with much of the literature being reviewed and does not go into great detail about any particular theory or body of work. Therefore, it is not appropriate for introductory undergraduate courses, but it is an excellent reference for all faculty who teach courses in interest groups and American politics. It is also appropriate for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses with a strong emphasis on interest groups, as well as for undergraduate senior seminars and introductory scope and methods graduate courses with an emphasis on epistemological issues and the development of political science as a science.

Mistaken Identity: The Supreme Court and the Politics of Minority Representation. By Keith J. Bybee. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998. 194p. \$55.00.

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In a series of contentious, confusing, and contradictory opinions beginning with *Shaw v. Reno* (1993), the Supreme Court has outlawed some but not all congressional and state legislative districts that were designed to ensure that African-American and Latino voters had genuine opportunities to elect candidates of their choice. Citing only Supreme Court opinions and a small part of the huge secondary literature on voting rights and redistricting, Keith Bybee claims that, in voting rights cases, "conservatives" and "progressives" have fundamentally struggled over the definition of "who 'the people' are" (p. 7), but his own analysis and prescriptions are not persuasive. He too readily dismisses or ignores empirical scholarship, disregards many Supreme and lower court opinions that do not fit his scheme, and provides no justification in logic or constitutional law for his key proposal.

Since 1993, Bybee maintains, the five-person majority of Chief Justice William Rehnquist and justices Anthony Kennedy, Sandra Day O'Connor, Antonin Scalia, and Clar-

ence Thomas has consistently adopted an individualist notion of political identity, while the four-person dissenting minority of Stephen Breyer, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, David Souter, and John Paul Stevens (and Harry Blackmun and Bryon White before their retirement) has consistently considered political identity to be group based. Instead, Bybee urges the Court to base its jurisprudence on the idea of "political deliberation," a basis that he believes will tend to reunite the fractured public and strengthen the role of the Court itself. In less exalted terms, he opposes the actual or effective repeal of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which under *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) protects large, geographically compact minorities against repeated defeats by white majorities in racially polarized elections. This would guarantee diversity in legislative membership, he contends. To encourage deliberation, he would have the Court force redistricting to be bipartisan.

A political theorist, Bybee scorns those who believe debates may turn on "simple matters of fact," who support their arguments with "an immense amount of historical detail," or who reduce complexities to "a few bits of numerical data" (pp. 63, 43, 55). Empiricists such as Justice Byron White or political scientist Bernard Grofman, who employ qualitative or quantitative evidence to determine the intent or effect of electoral laws on minority representation, Bybee announces, are guilty of "evasion of theoretical issues" or "evasion of conceptual issues" (pp. 60, 115). In contrast, Bybee neither analyzes data himself nor evaluates the conflicting empirical literature on disputed topics. Rather, he merely adopts convenient assumptions about reality: Political identity, he asserts, "develops during the process of debate and discussion, making it possible for decisions to be made in the common interest" (p. 171). Bipartisan redistricting "loosens incumbents' grip on their constituencies and keeps the legislature responsive to the electorate as a whole. Through conflict and counterargument, policy is made in the common interests of all" (p. 169).

Bybee's selective treatment of legal cases undermines his statements about the nature and consequences of Supreme Court opinions. His contention that *Mobile v. Bolden* (1980) showed "the search for discriminatory intent in the design of political institutions was likely to be fruitless" (p. 23), for example, is weakened by the fact that the plaintiffs successfully proved such an intent when the case was remanded to the district court. His description of the Supreme Court as a representative of "the people as a whole" (p. 37) ignores the body's self-conscious role after the famous footnote 4 of *United States v. Carolene Products* (1938) as the special guardian of the rights of "discrete and insular minorities," as well as its more common historical role as the guardian of majority persecution of those minorities in such cases as *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) and *Korematsu v. United States* (1944). Bybee's declaration that group and individual conceptions of rights form the central issue and dividing line in voting rights cases is undercut by the existence of other dividing lines (intent versus effect; symbolic versus real harm; descriptive representation versus influence; judicial activism versus deference to Congress, the Department of Justice, or state legislatures), none of which is discussed systematically, as well as by the inconsistency with which both sides have held to the group and individual conceptions.

In *Shaw v. Reno*, for example, Justice O'Connor, an individualist in Bybee's scheme, posits three symbolic or "expressive" harms to "our society" that ungainly minority opportunity districts may produce: stereotyping, exacerbating