

Baumgartner, Frank R. **Basic interests: the importance of groups in politics and in political science**, by Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech. Princeton, 1998. 223p bibl index afp ISBN [0-691-05914-4](#), \$55.00; ISBN [0-691-05915-2](#) pbk, \$15.95. Reviewed in 1998oct CHOICE.

Baumgartner and Leech (Texas A&M Univ.) offer an extremely valuable analysis of the current state of research on interest groups. Despite an extensive literature on the subject, the authors argue that "interest group studies have defined themselves into a position of elegant irrelevance" because these interesting but unrelated theoretical ideas shed little light on burgeoning data on the topic. Quite properly, Baumgartner and Leech frame their book around the late Maneux Olson's contributions. They note that the literature dramatically changed following his 1965 book, focusing less on lobbying and more on group formation and member incentives. The authors identify areas in which understanding has advanced and other areas in which confusion still reigns. They provide very useful lists of published case studies and surveys, along with an appendix itemizing all of the interest group articles in the *American Political Science Review* from 1950 through 1995. A striking omission in this otherwise comprehensive volume is a discussion of labor unions, which figure prominently in both theory and empirical research on interest groups. Essential reading for upper-division undergraduates, graduate students, specialists, and those interested in groups in the political process. -- *M. E. Ethridge, University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee*