

**Government 251**  
**Interest Groups and Social Movements in the United States**  
Spring Semester 2009  
Clark University

Jefferson 400  
Tuesday and Friday, 12:00-1:15  
Professor Robert Boatright  
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*"What's most important is that we elect a President with the proven ability to bring Democrats and Republicans together to get results so we can stand up to special interests."*  
– Barack Obama, November 27, 2007

*"Maybe I've just lived a little long, but I have no illusions about how hard this is going to be. You are not going to wave a magic wand and have the special interests disappear."*  
– Hillary Clinton, February 25, 2008

*"She's taken on the special interests and the political power brokers in Alaska and reached across party lines to get things done."*  
– Joe Lieberman (referring to Sarah Palin), September 3, 2008

*"I understand who I work for. I don't work for a party. I don't work for a special interest. I don't work for myself. I work for you. I've fought to get million-dollar checks out of our elections. I've fought lobbyists who stole from Indian tribes. I fought crooked deals in the Pentagon. I fought tobacco companies and trial lawyers, drug companies and union bosses."*  
– John McCain, September 5, 2008

Why do Americans (or at least, American politicians) claim to hate interest groups so much? We frequently hear complaints about the prevalence of organized interests in American politics, and American laws are frequently criticized for alleged "special interest" provisions. Yet it would certainly seem a distinctly American, if not distinctly human, impulse for citizens to join groups and associations. Where did we go wrong? What is the proper amount of interest group influence on politics? Do we have a good balance in our politics, or are groups, in fact, too influential?

In this course we will survey interest group formation, maintenance, lobbying, and campaign strategies in the United States. We will explore the history of organized interests in the United States; the changing perspectives that the general public,

journalists, politicians, and political scientists have had about the proper role of organized interests; and the changes in interest group politics wrought by legislation and technological change. We will contrast the imperatives and incentives of organized interests with those of political parties, elected and unelected government officials, individual citizens, and unorganized public interest constituencies. In doing so, we will seek to gain an understanding of how these goals interact and how the presence of organized interests in policy debates can be beneficial or detrimental to other political actors and to the political system as a whole. We will look at general works on interest groups, and we will also read several case studies of individual groups. Each of you will get the chance to do an in-depth study of one organized interest, and you will seek to relate the activities of this group to what you have learned in the course. The goal of these considerations - indeed, of the entire course - is not only to help you better understand what interest groups are and what they do, but to help you form your own opinion on the relationship between organized interests and democracy.

*Requirements:*

*Participation and Attendance:* The most important requirement for this class is your attendance and participation. You must show up for class, and you must come prepared to discuss the readings. I hope to lecture less than half of the time; I will present the main arguments of the readings and seek to provide context for them, but the goal of this class is for you to develop your own ideas about the proper role of organized interest within our political system. You should feel free to ask questions about aspects of the readings you do not understand. The level of the readings varies quite a bit; most require little background knowledge, but a few presume knowledge of statistics or of particular aspects of American political history. You do not need to have a thorough understanding of everything in the readings, and I do not expect you to understand the more complex statistical work we will encounter, but I will expect you to understand the main points in the readings and to ask about aspects you do not understand. Class participation will comprise ten percent of your grade.

*Term Project, Presentation, and Exercises:* Early in the semester you will choose a group to study for the semester. We will make sure that the projects, when put together, include a variety of different group “types.” For instance, we’ll try to include issue-based groups on the political left and right, labor unions, business groups and trade associations, and grass roots organizations. Once you have chosen a group and a local contact person for this group, you will complete a series of four exercises on different aspects of this group’s activities. You should plan to post your exercises on the class Blackboard site the evening before they are due, to bring a printed copy with you to class to turn in, and to discuss your exercise in class. You will begin by looking at how the group works at the national level, but as the semester goes on you will also explore the local context of this group’s activities – how it lobbies local governments, what local group activists do, and the relationship between local members and the parent organization. You will be required to meet with your local contact person at least twice over the course of the semester. Your presentation and your term paper will consist of a summation of your

exercises, an analysis of the connection between local members or affiliates and the national organization, and a normative analysis of your group’s role in the American political system. Cumulatively, your work on this project will comprise sixty percent of your grade. I will give you letter grades on each of your individual exercises to help you figure out how you are doing on the project, but I reserve the right to adjust the grade for this entire project according to how you put all of the pieces together. Once the semester has ended, we’ll see if there’s anything collaboratively we want to do with this material.

*Reaction Papers:* During the second half of the course, we will read three different books exploring different interest group “sectors” or coalitions. For each of these books, you will prepare a 2-3 page reaction paper outlining your thoughts on how these works relate to the broader theoretical issues we have considered earlier in the course. These reaction papers are meant to guide our discussions of these books. Each reaction paper is worth ten percent of your grade.

***Summary: Class Requirements and Percent Contribution to Final Grade***

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Contribution to Grade</b>	<b>Objective</b>
Class participation and attendance	10%	Understanding course material
Term Project and related components	60%	Ability to apply interest group theories to the activities of particular groups
Reaction Papers	30% (10% each)	Conveying your ideas to classmates; developing an understanding of contemporary issues in national interest group politics

*Prerequisites:*

There are no official prerequisites for this course. You will likely find the material covered in Introduction to American Government and Research Methods to be helpful, but neither is required. During the first week I will get a sense of what sort of background everyone has, and we will approach the course material with that in mind.

*Class Support:*

Because this is a small class, it is my hope that you will find your own participation in this class useful, stimulating, and interesting. I am available for questions, concerns, and comments any time by email. I will have regular office hours and am happy to meet with students at other times as well. Please do not hesitate to offer suggestions on how to make this class a good experience for you or on issues you would like to see covered.

*Required Texts:*

The following books are available at the bookstore:

Berry, Jeffrey, and Clyde Wilcox. 2007. *The Interest Group Society*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Pearson Longman.

Cigler, Allan J., and Burdett A. Loomis, editors. 2007. *Interest Group Politics*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly.

Smith, Mark A. 2007. *The Right Talk: How Conservatives Transformed the Great Society into the Economic Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bai, Matt. 2007. *The Argument: Billionaires, Bloggers, and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics*. New York: Penguin.

Nownes, Anthony. 2006. *Total Lobbying: What Lobbyists Want (and How They Try to Get it)*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, Miriam. 2005. *A Civil Society? Collective Actors in Canadian Political Life*. Toronto, ON: Broadview Press.

*Schedule:*

Note: We will have the flexibility to change the syllabus as we see fit. We will definitely get to all of the books you've purchased, but we may shift dates around; if that gets too confusing, I'll issue a revised schedule at some point during the semester.

January 13: Introduction to the Course

January 16: What is an interest group? Why are groups important in politics?  
Berry and Wilcox, Ch. 1

January 20:  
We'll all watch the inaugural address together.

January 23: Interest Groups and Political Science

Handouts:

David Truman, "The Alleged Mischiefs of Faction."

Robert Dahl, "The Nature of the Problem."

E. E. Schattschneider, "The Contagiousness of Conflict."

January 27 and 30: A History of American Interest Group Politics, 1960 –  
Berry and Wilcox, Ch. 2  
Cigler and Loomis, Ch. 1

➔ *Proposals for Term Projects due Jan. 30. On the 30<sup>th</sup> we will have a brainstorming session on what to ask group members when you talk with them.*

February 3 and 6: Group Organization and Maintenance

Berry and Wilcox, Ch. 3

Patterson and Lowery articles in Cigler and Loomis (ch. 2, 6); other C&L articles depending on student interests

Handouts:

Mancur Olson, excerpts from *The Logic of Collective Action*.

Robert Salisbury, “An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups”

Jack Walker, “The Origins and Maintenance of Interest Groups in America”

➔ *Initial contacts with local members/representatives of groups must be made by February 6.*

February 10 and 13: Thinking About Group Types and Niches

Heaney article in Cigler and Loomis (ch. 12)

Handouts:

Browne, “Organized Interests and their Issue Niches.”

Boatright, Malbin, Rozell, and Wilcox, “Interest Groups and Advocacy Organizations after BCRA”

➔ *Exercise #1 due Feb. 13: Describe your group – what sort of group is it, how did it form, and how has it been maintained. Describe the relationship between the national organization and local chapters or affiliates.*

February 17 and 20: Interest Groups and Elections

Berry and Wilcox, ch. 4-5

Guth, Currinder, and Dwyre articles in Cigler and Loomis (ch. 7, 8, & 9)

Readings on the 2008 election TBA

➔ *Exercise #2 due Feb. 20: What role does your group play in electoral politics?*

February 24 and 27: Inside Lobbying: General Perspectives

Berry and Wilcox, ch. 6, 8

Berry, Godwin, Kersh, and Loomis articles in Cigler and Loomis (ch. 10, 11, 17, & 18)

➔ *Exercise #3 due Feb. 27: What issues does your group lobby on? How does it lobby? (Note: You should be draw upon conversations with the local group you are following by now.)*

March 3 and 6: No Class – Spring Break

March 10 and 13: Lobbying: A Case Study

Nownes, *Total Lobbying*

**March 17 and 20: Outside Lobbying**

Berry and Wilcox, ch. 7

**MORE (A case study of something; Health care in 90s, or something current  
– EFCA perhaps)**

➔ *Exercise #4 due March 20: How does your group seek to engage the public in its activities?*

**March 24 and 27: Interest Groups and the American Left**

Bai, *The Argument*

➔ *Reaction Paper to Bai due March 27*

March 31: Reading TBA; we will either select a topic of interest, use this as a catch-up session, or take some time to talk through issues related to the term projects

➔ *No Class April 3.*

**April 7 and 10: Interest Groups and the American Right**

Mark Smith, *The Right Talk*

➔ *Reaction Paper to Smith due April 10*

**April 14 and 17: American Interest Groups in Comparative Perspective**

Miriam Smith, *A Civil Society*

➔ *Reaction Paper to Smith due April 17*

**April 21: Student Presentations**

➔ *How effective is your group? Are its activities politically beneficial? How engaged are local members in what goes on at the national level? At the local level?*

**April 24: Normative Issues**

Berry and Wilcox, ch. 9 & 10

Cigler and Loomis, ch. 19

**May 5: *Term Papers Due, 3:00 at my office***