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Interest Groups in the Fifty American States: Findings from the Twenty-Five Year Hrebenar-Thomas Study

Clive S. Thomas, University of Alaska Juneau and Ronald J. Hrebenar, University of Utah

Since the mid-1970s there have been major advances in research and publications on interest groups and lobbying in the American states. Our comprehensive fifty-state project, conducted over the past twenty-five years—the Hrebenar-Thomas study—is part of this expanded literature. This article provides an overview of the study and its findings.

Project Goals and Methodology

When we embarked upon the project in 1982, the goal was to develop the first comprehensive understanding of the various aspects of interest group activity in all fifty states. The focus was groups in the policy process as opposed to the internal organization of groups. Of particular interest to us were: (1) the range of groups operating; (2) their strategies and tactics; (3) the types and roles of lobbyists; (4) group regulation; (5) group influence of various types; and by synthesizing findings from the first five, (6) the affect that state interest group systems have on representation, participation and policy making.

The methodology combined a quantitative and qualitative approach. Its three major elements were: (1) to identify a expert(s) in each state to conduct research on their state; (2) develop a common research instrument to be used in gathering information in all fifty states; and (3) synthesize the results. Over the twenty-five years of the study ninety-six researchers were involved with thirty-three of the states having the same researcher throughout the project. The initial comprehensive study of state interest groups conducted in 1983-84, was repeated in 1989. Since then there have been five focused updates—the last in 2007 concentrating on interest group power and other major developments as observed by the team of researchers.

Crucial to the study was a broad definition of interest groups to embrace informal as well as formally organized groups and particularly various governmental entities. Most previous studies and some present ones, including those by Gray and Lowery, include only registered interest groups. By our calculations, this fails to include about a third of all interests engaged in lobbying.

The definition we use was:

> An interest group is an association of individuals or organizations or a public or private institution that, on the basis of one or more shared concerns, attempts to influence public policy in its favor.

Besides providing the first fifty-state analysis of the various aspects of interest group activity, the project also conducted the first systematic analysis of interest groups in thirty-three of the states. The results of the study have been published in various books and articles.[1] What follows is a summary of the findings over the years.

1. Contrasts and Similarities Across the Fifty States

With states ranging in population, economic and social diversity (or lack thereof) and political orientation—from California and New York to Wyoming and Vermont—there are many contrasts when comparing group systems. These include: the range of groups operating in a state (very few manufacturing groups lobby in Montana, for example); the level of the specialization of lobbyists (most California lobbyists specialized, few North Dakota lobbyists do); and in several states major interest groups (such as business and labor) are more aligned with political parties than in others (New Jersey being an example of the former, Alaska of the latter).

2. Expansion in the Number and the Range of Groups

The so-called "advocacy explosion" has not only occurred in Washington, D.C.; it is also evidenced in the states. The period down to the mid-1960s saw activity mainly from the five so-called traditional interests—business, labor, agriculture, education and government. Since then, both the numbers and types of groups operating has seen a major increase. This has been the result of increased government involvement forcing many interests to get involved in politics to either advance or protect their interests. It is also due to advancing political

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awareness as the nation enters a post-industrial phase of development.

Specifically, the expansion in the number and range of groups comes from two sources. One is a variety of new groups entering politics, such as environmentalists, public interest groups as well as more out-of-state interests as the national and international economy and issues, such as anti-smoking, gathered momentum. Another reason is that the old traditional interests have fragmented as issues become more complex and a trade association or general organization (like a general local government association) did not serve the specific needs of an organization. Thus, many businesses and local governments now lobby on their own while still remaining members of their general organization.

3. Strategies and Tactics

Unlike Washington, D.C., there appears to be little hyper-pluralism—too many groups chasing too few policy makers—in most states with the possible exception of a few of the larger populated ones. Nevertheless, all states have increased the range of strategies and tactics. Until the 1960s, in the very personalized atmosphere of many states, few groups used anything more than a lobbyist to promote their cause. Today, everything from direct lobbying by using lobbyists and constituents to lobby in person to grassroots letter, e-mail and phone campaigns to indirect methods such as the use of campaign donations (including through political action committees—PACs) to using the media may be employed.

What is often misunderstood, however, is that these new techniques are not a substitute for a lobbyist. There is no substitute for this personal contact between the lobbyist and policy maker—it is crucial to exerting influence. The increasing range of strategies and tactics are simply supplements to bolster the lobbyist's message by bringing more pressure to bear on policy makers.

4. Lobbyists

Before our study little distinction was made between types of lobbyists. They were usually labeled professional or amateur: but this was a hazy distinction. Our project identified five types of lobbyists: (1) contract lobbyists, hired for a fee and often represent more than one client; (2) in-house lobbyists, representing one interest—their employer, such as a business or organization; (3) legislative liaisons, usually representing government agencies; (4) cause or volunteer lobbyists; and (5) private individuals.

Our findings revealed that although they get the most publicity because of their often high salaries, contract lobbyists constitute only about twenty percent of the lobbying community with in-house lobbyists and legislative liaisons each having thirty and thirty-five percent, depending on the state. Also, different types of lobbyists have different patterns of recruitment and power bases that are related. For example, contract lobbyists are more likely to have been elected or appointed officials and use their contacts in government as a major selling point. On the other hand, in-house lobbyists are usually recruited from their profession or business and use their expertise as a major power base.

Overall, lobbyists in the states have become much more professional in the past forty years. Certainly, the good ol' boy still exists but there are less and less of them.

5. The Regulation of Interest Groups

Although all fifty states now have lobby laws and they are generally more extensive than federal lobby laws, these state laws have achieved less than many hoped. Part of the problem is a lack of consensus and understanding on what such laws should and can achieve. They cannot turn hitherto powerless groups into powerful forces, nor reduce the political clout of existing influential groups. The most they can do is restrict potential abuses (such as those involving campaign contributions, and gifts to public officials) and publicize (monitor or make transparent) the activities of lobbyists (such as how much they spend on lobbying, and whom they lobby).

As the major impetus for these laws are political scandals and the raising of public consciousness such as occurred in South Carolina and Arizona in the 1990s, most lobby laws are enacted on an ad hoc basis and often within a highly charged political atmosphere. Evidence suggests that most politicians play only lip service to enacting lobby laws or amending existing ones; most would not deal with the issue unless pressured by their constituents or public opinion in general. Plus, it costs money to administer the laws and such agencies are not popular with politicians and their lobbyist friends as such agencies are also often responsible for administering campaign finance and conflict of interest laws. This is compounded by the fact that it is not the public that makes the most use of information available through these watchdog agencies but the press and candidates running against incumbents. Thus, the administering agencies are prime targets for being under-funded or even-de-funded.

6. Three Types of Interest Group Power

Before this fifty-state study, group power was viewed as a generic concept—some vague form of influence usually of the "big players" or highly visible groups—teachers, doctors, insurance, etc.—in state politics. Our project indicated that there are, in essence, three types of group power.

One is single group power of individual groups and their ability to achieve their goals as they define them. These may not be high-profile groups and their activities may be far from the view of researchers. Plus, they may have few issues before government but may be very successful on the few occasions that they lobby.

Second is overall group power which focuses on the high-profile groups, those regularly active. This is the aspect of power of most interest to the public and press when they ask the questions: "Who's got the political clout?" or "Who's running the state?" However, many of these high-profile groups may not always win and may increasingly lose, as school teachers have in the past decade or so across the states.

We identified twelve factors regarding what constitutes the bases of individual and overall group power. The two that appear most important are the extent to which government needs the group and the lobbyist-policymaker relationship.

Third, is group system power which is the power of interest groups in the political system as a whole compared with other aspects of the system such as political parties, the governor, the legislature, etc. We return to this form of group power below.

7. The Influence of the "Big Player" Interest Groups

Despite the increased range of groups operating in state politics over the last four decades, the "big players" that have been influential have changed very little. Over the years we ranked the top 40 groups in terms of their influence across the fifty states. The list below shows the top twenty of these groups in 2007 compared with the early 1980s (number in parentheses):

1	(2)	General Business Organizations (state Chambers of Commerce, etc.)
2	(1)	School Teacher's Organizations (NEA & AFT)
3	(6)	Utility Companies & Associations
4	(4)	Manufacturers
5	(17)	Hospital/Nursing Homes Associations
6	(13)	Insurance: General & Medical
7	(11)	Physicians/State Medical Associations
8	(22)	Contractors/Builders/Developers
9	(9)	General Local Governments
10	(8)	Lawyers
11	(14)	Realtor's Associations
12	(10)	General Farm Organizations (state Farm Bureaus, etc.)
13	(3)	Banker's Associations

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14	(19)	Universities & Colleges
15	(5)	Traditional Labor Associations (predominantly the AFL-CIO)
16	(15)	Individual Labor Unions (Teamsters, UAW, etc.)
17	(36)	Gaming Interests (race tracks/casinos/lotteries)
18	(7)	Individual Banks & Financial Institutions
19	(29)	State Agencies
20	(23)	Environmentalists

The pattern of "big-player" interest group power has been more or less constant over the past forty years. Here it is important not to confuse the visibility of a group or its popularity with the media with its influence. Certainly, some outsider groups and those with minimum resources have from time to time scored political victories. However, it is those groups and interests with major resources—financial, organizational, and political mainly through contacts and their necessity to government—that have exercised influence on a year-to-year basis be these low or high profile interests. Thus, the state interest group system, like its counterpart in Washington, D.C., favors business (including agri-business), the professions, some sectors of labor and various government agencies.

8. State Interest Groups, Representation, Participation and Public Policy

While the level of representation in the states, as measured through group membership and the presence of a wider range of groups, is evidenced in our study, to what extent this has effectively broadened the base of representation and democracy as measured by influence is very debatable. However, we can cite the observations made in the last section on the minimal changes in overall group power. Plus, we can offer the following observations about group system power. Group system power is a good monitor because for generations states were dominated by one or a few interests, such as Anaconda Copper in Montana.

While back in the early 1980s nine states were classed as dominating their state's politics, this number was reduced to four by our 2007 update. Yet, whereas eighteen states were assessed as having a complimentary power relationship between interest groups and the rest of their political system, this was only fifteen states in 2007. The category between dominant and complementary, dominant-complementary, increased from 18 to 26 over the twenty-five years. As rough a measure as this is, it indicates that the expansion of representation and participation regarding interest group systems is much less than the advocacy explosion might lead us to believe.

Conclusion

Picking up on the last point, perhaps the most revealing finding from this study is the contrast between the many developments in interest group activity in the states and what this actually translates into regarding increased influence (or lack thereof) on public policy making. Together with this, the project provided an extensive range of data and information that is not only of value for understanding interest groups in the states but has broader application for interest group studies in general including our definition of interest group, our classification of types of lobbyists, and our distinction between three types of interest group power.

Footnote:

1. The books on interest groups in the four regions are: Ronald J. Hrebenar and Clive S. Thomas, eds. Interest Group Politics in the American West (University of Utah Press, 1987); South (University of Alabama Press, 1992); Northeast (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); and Midwest (Iowa State University Press, 1993). The overview can be found in: Anthony J. Nownes, Clive S. Thomas and Ronald J. Hrebenar, "Interest Groups in the States." Chapter Four in Virginia Gray and Russell L. Hanson, eds., Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis, Ninth Edition (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2008); and Clive S. Thomas and Ronald J. Hrebenar, "Interest Groups in the States," chapter in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth edition of this book.

FROM HEADQUARTERS

Letter from the Chair
October, 2008

Dear colleagues,

We hope you all had an enjoyable and productive time at APSA in Boston, and attended lots of POP panels. We had a rich list of panel offerings, and this should translate into a good representation of POP on the 2009 program in Toronto. The section also had a distinguished group of prize winners for the section's various research awards, which are noted elsewhere in this newsletter. Congratulations to all the winners, and our thanks to the many POP members who served on the award selection committees.

If you have a paper or panel idea for the 2009 APSA, please submit your proposal to our POP co-organizers:

Marie Hojnacki, marieh@psu.edu
Christina Wolbrecht, Wolbrecht.1@nd.edu

Our special thanks for Christina and Marie for organizing the panels for our section. APSA now accepts proposals through the APSANET.ORG website. POP is section #35 on the APSA listing.

We also want to welcome the new members of the POP Council. We are very pleased that Fred Bohemke, Paul Goren, Marc Hetherington, and Barbara Sinclair will join the council for the 2008-10 terms. We have a great team, and so POP will be in good shape for the coming year.

This should be a year of new opportunities for the POP section. Approval of our association with *Party Politics* as the official journal of POP is before the APSA council, and should be decided shortly. If possible, we hope to launch the new relationship January 1, 2009. This will increase section dues beginning with 2009 APSA renewals, but it will also provide a heavily discounted subscription to *Party Politics* to all section members, increase the outlets for research by section members, and increase the visibility of the section and our ability to foster teaching and research on political organizations and parties. Once we have official approval from the APSA, we will send a more extensive email on the details to all POP members.

We are also just about to complete updating of the POP syllabi project: http://www.apsanet.org/~pop/syllabus_archive.htm

If you have recently taught a course on political organizations and parties, and would like to contribute your syllabus to the project, please email a Word or pdf file to our section webmaster, Amy Alexander (alexanda@uci.edu) by the end of October.

Finally, POP is already a large and successful APSA section—we were the fifth organized section that APSA established. We expect to grow in size with the new affiliation with *Party Politics*. We will be working during this year to support faculty in teaching and research on political organizations and parties, and welcome your suggestion for new initiatives.

Russ Dalton
University of California, Irvine

FROM HEADQUARTERS

American Political Science Association
Political Organizations and Parties Organized Section
Report of the Secretary-Treasurer
29th August 2008

I. Minutes.

II. Treasurer's Report Checking (July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008)

FUNDS ON HAND JULY 1, 2007		**$13,314.13**
REVENUE FOR PERIOD		
APSA section dues	$ 938.00	
Epstein Fund contributions	3,385.87	
Interest income	.00	
Bank fees – credit	.00	
TOTAL REVENUE		**$ 4,323.87**
EXPENDITURES *		
2008 Award plaques	(276.00)	
2008 Award checks	(900.00)	
APSA Meeting expenses	(308.16)	
Shipping of awards	(15.85)	
Bank fees	0.00	
Epstein Award CD	(6,000.00)	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES		$ (7,500.01)
NET ACTIVITY FOR THE PERIOD		($2,862.01)
FUNDS ON HAND JUNE 30, 2007		**$10,137.99**

III. Treasurer's Report Certificate of Deposit (July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008)

DEPOSIT		$6,000.00
REVENUE FOR PERIOD		
Interest income – 3.01% APY	.00	
FUNDS ON HAND JUNE 30, 2007		**$6,000.00**

* Copying, printing, postage, telephone, travel and staff provided gratis by University of California, Irvine, the Bliss Institute at the University of Akron, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

IV. MEMBERSHIP

Year	POP Membership
2008	595
2007	590
2006	589
2005	601
2004	629
2003	634
2002	614
2001	619
2000	617
1999	527
1998	565
1997	505
1996	519
1995	589
1994	571

Respectfully Submitted,
Holly Brasher, POP Secretary-Treasurer

APSA Organized Section Counts for November 2008

The Committee on Organized Sections oversees policies related to Organized Sections and monitors section size. If a section membership falls below 250 members for four consecutive quarters the Committee will notify the section that they will not be included as part of the next official Program Committee of the Annual Meeting then forming (for example, if notified in the summer of 2007, a Section would be excluded from the 2008 Program Committee). The section typically has a year to reach the 250 member level, and will be listed on the APSA Membership Renewal form with an asterisk indicating the threshold is below the minimum number. If the Section does not reach 250 members in any quarter during the year, it will be required to disband, and can merge with another section, become a related group, or cease to function. If a section merges with another, its remaining treasury will go to that section. If a section disbands without merging, use of any remaining funds must be approved by the Organized Section Committee and the APSA Treasurer. If a section which disbands wishes to return as an Organized Section, it may re-petition as a new section. If reinstated, it would keep its original number and order in the section listing.

Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations	386
Law and Courts	766
Legislative Studies	626
Public Policy	973
Political Organizations and Parties	600
Public Administration	511
Conflict Processes	453
Representation and Electoral Politics	386
Presidency Research Group	395
Political Methodology	1,076
Religion and Politics	592
Urban Politics	348
Science, Technology, and Environmental Politics	326
Women and Politics Research	657
Foundations of Political Theory	736
Information Technology and Politics	361
International Security and Arms Control	557
Comparative Politics	1,593
European Politics and Society	469
State Politics and Policy	450
Political Communication	488
Politics and History	632
Political Economy	644
New Political Science	556
Political Psychology	448
Political Science Education	404
Politics, Literature, and Film	330
Foreign Policy	655
Elections, Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior	950
Race, Ethnicity, and Politics	571
International Politics and History	437
Comparative Democratization	627
Human Rights	362
Qualitative and Multi-method Research	905
Sexuality and Politics	200
Health Politics and Policy	140
TOTAL	**20,610**

FROM HEADQUARTERS

AWARD CITATIONS

SAMUEL ELDERSVELD AWARD, a scholar whose lifetime professional work has made an outstanding contribution to the field of political organizations and parties.

Recipient: John Aldrich, Duke University

Award Committee:

Frank R. Baumgartner (Chair);
Paul A. Beck; and
Kevin M. Esterling

No one is more deserving of this award than John Aldrich. Not only has he made enormous scholarly contributions to our field, but he also has played a vital service role in its leadership. His scholarly research has focused on political parties in the United States, with some attention to parties cross-nationally. It is conventional, following V.O. Key, to conceptualize political parties in the American setting as tripartite organizations—as well as major participants in the electoral process. John Aldrich has made **seminal** contributions in three of these areas, and he has contributed to the fourth—party organizations—as well.

His early work on presidential nominations, especially since the 1980 Chicago University Press book *Before the Convention* and a 1980 *APSR* article, probed voter and candidate decision-making in the nomination phase of the electoral process. His was among the first work to illuminate the new nomination process that emerged out of the reforms of the early 1970s, and it remains relevant to this day. A later study of "sophisticated voting" in presidential primaries is as pertinent to the most recent Clinton-Obama contest as it was to its 1988 case. This body of research has established John as one of the leading experts on American nomination politics.

Throughout his career, largely through a fertile collaboration with colleagues Paul Abramson and Dave Rohde from his first position at Michigan State, John has advanced our understanding of parties in the electorate through his studies of American voter behavior and participation. We have grown accustomed to his updates every two years on how the most recent national elections have contributed "Change and Continuity" to voting behavior. This work is notable more for its rational-choice emphasis on departures from party loyalty through retrospective voting and the influence of short-term forces, but it also appreciates the party role in voting behavior. In other works, he has turned from micro to macro analysis in grappling with the question of periodic changes in the party systems across the course of American history.

John Aldrich is one of a very few scholars who has easily crossed the divide between studying the political behavior of voters and elites in an institutional setting, in his case the Congress. His work on "conditional party government" with Dave Rohde and its application to the American states have provided a more sophisticated understanding of party influence in legislatures that, in our view, easily counters the charge that the party role is minor in American legislative politics.

John's scholarly record in any one of these distinct areas would qualify him for serious consideration for the Eldersveld Award. Together, they make him an obvious choice. But, there is more! We regard his prize-winning book *Why Parties?* (University of Chicago Press, 1995) as the single most important contribution to our understanding of parties in the last two decades. Its elegant theoretically-grounded answer to the question of why political actors naturally turn to parties motivates the study of political parties, here and abroad, and should give pause to those who advocate a party-less politics. The book's range across the various roles parties have played in American history in providing this answer enables it to tell the story of the American parties as well.

These are just the **parties-related** highlights of what is an impressive record of scholarly achievement. They show that John Aldrich richly deserves to be honored with POP's lifetime scholarly achievement award. And, with his current projects, it is evident that this scholarly lifetime will continue, much to our benefit.

LEON D. EPSTEIN AWARD, honoring a book published in the last two calendar years that makes an outstanding contribution to research and scholarship on political organizations and parties.

Recipient: Dara Strolovitch, University of Minnesota
—Affirmative Advocacy

Award Committee:

Herbert P. Kitschelt, Duke University (Chair);
Jeffrey M. Berry, Tufts University; and
Marjorie Randon Hershey, Indiana University

In this important and engaging work Professor Dara Strolovitch examines interest group representation for the most marginalized in our society, notably women, racial and ethnic minorities, and low income Americans. Numerous Washington-based interest groups ostensibly represent such constituencies, but how well do they represent them? Drawing on her own highly original survey of 286 organizations and in-person interviews she conducted with officers of 40 of these groups, Strolovitch arrives at a disturbing conclusion. Within organizations that speak for these constituencies there is a clear bias against the most marginalized subgroups. Instead, these organizations gravitate toward issues that are of greater concern to other constituencies that they represent.

Strolovitch argues for what she terms "affirmative advocacy." Organizations that claim to represent those who are marginalized should consciously commit to working on some of the issues that are priorities for these subgroups. These may be difficult policy matters with lower chances of a positive governmental response, but Strolovitch believes that social justice will be best served by this kind of turn taking.

Affirmative Advocacy is the best kind of political science: it's methodologically sophisticated and well-grounded in normative theory. Yet it never veers far from the hard substance of real-world politics. *Affirmative Advocacy* is a work of distinction and the Committee is delighted to award the 2008 Leon D. Epstein Outstanding Book Award to Professor Dara Strolovitch of the University of Minnesota.

JACK WALKER AWARD, honoring an article published in the last two calendar years that makes an outstanding contribution to research and scholarship on political organizations and parties.

Co-Recipients:

James Adams (University of California) and
Samuel Merrill III (Wilkes University)
for their article "Why Small, Centrist Third Parties Motivate Policy Divergence by Major Parties"
published in the *American Political Science Review*, August 2006.

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FROM HEADQUARTERS (Continued from page 5)

Award committee:

Kira Sanbonmatsu, Rutgers University (Chair);
Pradeep Chhibber, University of California, Berkeley; and
Kristin Goss, Duke University

This article considers the effect of small, centrist, third parties on the major parties. The authors find that the presence of such a party motivates the major parties to propose policies that are much more divergent than without the third party – even if this third party stands no chance of winning. Adams and Merrill show that the major parties shift their policies in the same direction relative to each other but in the opposite direction relative to the minor party. The authors modify the standard two-party spatial model of policy-seeking parties to incorporate a third party and present evidence from the British case.

The award committee found this article to be very original and its main finding counterintuitive and important. The article has implications for understanding major party positions as well as the situation of third parties. Third parties are less likely to get their preferred policy, even when the third party is expressive.

EMERGING SCHOLAR AWARD, honoring a scholar who has received his or her Ph.D. within the last seven years and whose career to date demonstrates unusual promise.

Co-Recipients:

Scott Desposato, UC-San Diego and
Seth Masket, University of Denver

Award Committee:

Geoff Layman (Chair), University of Maryland;
Marc Hetherington, Vanderbilt University; and
Susan Webb Yackee, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Scott Desposato received his Ph.D. in 2001 from UCLA. He spent the first four years of his career at Arizona, and has been at UCSD since 2005. Scott has put together a truly outstanding record for someone who received his degree only seven years ago. He has published 15 journal articles, with two of those appearing in *AJPS*, three in *JOP*, and two in *BJPS*. He has nine other publications, and his work has been cited in journal articles an impressive 84 times to date. Scott has received two NSF grants, and is working on a book project on variance in the nature and tone of political messages across political systems that are based on data collected with those two grants.

Scott's work covers a wide range of topics—from the role of non-governmental organizations in promoting political change to the impact of electoral rules and governmental systems on party development, to the gender gap in Latin American political behavior, and to the incumbency advantage and majority-minority districts in U.S. congressional elections—and is theoretically and methodologically sophisticated. That is particularly true of his work on parties. For example, his 2006 *AJPS* article on party switching in the Brazilian legislature provides key insights into how strategic politicians create and use parties in the first place by examining legislators' reasons for and behavior after switching parties. The model of party switching that Scott develops in that paper could be applied to any number of political systems to gain understanding about the origins and functions of political parties.

Seth Masket received his Ph.D. in 2004 from UCLA and has been at the University of Denver since that time. Seth also has quite an impressive publication record, particularly for someone who has only been out for four years. He has five refereed journal articles, including one in *AJPS*, one in *JOP*, one in *BJPS*, and one in *QJPS*. He has a book based on his dissertation forthcoming with the University of Michigan Press, and he has five additional publications.

In addition to these impressive numbers, Seth's work provides important theoretical insights into partisan, electoral, and legislative politics in the U.S. For example, his 2007 AJPS article on partisanship in the California assembly may be a true classic in the party politics literature. The literature has a fundamental division between scholars who see parties as dominated by ambitious office-seekers and fundamentally oriented toward the non-ideological electoral goals of those politicians and scholars who see parties as dominated by and propagating the goals of ideologically-oriented activists. To gain leverage on the nature of parties, Seth very cleverly takes advantage of a natural experiment in the California state legislature based on a period from 1914 to 1959 in which ideological outsiders could not influence party nominations. What he finds is that legislative partisanship completely broke down over that period, suggesting that, left to their own devices, the candidates and office-holders of the two parties will blur any and all policy distinctions between them. Thus, it is ideological outsiders who constrain office-seekers through their influence in nomination politics and who provide structure and policy distinction in the two-party system.

In short, these are two young scholars who not only have been extraordinarily productive, but also have produced very important works that have fundamentally added to our understanding of political parties and interest groups. They are both very deserving of this award.

POP/PARTY POLITICS AWARD, honoring the best paper presented at a POP-sponsored panel at the previous APSA meeting.

Co-Recipients:

Brian Feinstein and Eric Shickler,
"State Party Platforms and Civil Rights Policy, 1920-1968."

Award Committee:

Maryann Barakso (Chair), University of Massachusetts;
Georgia Kernell, University of Michigan; and
Dorian Warren, Columbia University

SCHOLARLY PRECINCTS

More Than Money: Interest Group Action in Congressional Elections
(Rowman & Littlefield, 2007)
Richard Skinner, Bowdoin College

While interest groups have long been at the center of the study of American politics, most explorations of their influence have tended to dwell on lobbying. When political scientists do look at groups' electoral activities, they usually tend to study contribution activity by political action committees. But a world of political activity has emerged that is not confined to PAC contributions—activities such as issue advocacy, independent expenditures and voter mobilization. My book *More Than Money: Interest Group Action in Congressional Elections* (Rowman & Littlefield) attempts to understand this world of interest group action in a theoretical fashion. I conducted case studies of ten interest groups, most of them active in congressional elections. These groups include the AFL-CIO, the NRA, the AARP, the Sierra Club, NARAL, the National Right to Life Committee, and the Association of Trial Lawyers of America.

More Than Money constructs a theoretical framework—not a rigid model, but a means toward greater understanding—for an area of politics that has attracted some empirical interest but has lacked linkage to existing theories of interest group behavior. This framework is based upon three concepts: the incentives that groups offer to potential members, the resources that they possess for political action, and the political and legal context to which they must respond.

I expected that, in an environment of partisan polarization and narrow margins of control, highly partisan groups would seek to

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FROM HEADQUARTERS (Continued from page 6)

become involved beyond the limits on PAC contributions. Nonpartisan groups, which do not care which party controls Congress, and which may be primarily interested in pursuing access, should not become involved to such an extent. I also predicted that groups will seek to deploy their resources most efficiently in this effort: money, membership, and expertise. Groups that can spend large amounts of money will invest in issue advocacy or independent expenditures. Groups with large memberships will mobilize their members to vote. Groups who established expertise in an area helpful to a campaign (candidate training, polling, mobilizing non-members) will put those assets to work for approved candidates. Groups who have large budgets, large political staffs and long histories of political involvement are most likely to perform these services.

Membership incentives constrain groups' actions and autonomy in politics. Groups based upon purposive incentives will attract an ideological membership that may push for a more strident approach to elections. Groups acting under these constraints will not be able to adopt a "pragmatic" strategy aimed at backing incumbents of both parties. Groups based on material incentives that are able to prevent exit will have enormous autonomy. Within reasonable limits, they will not have to consider membership views when making political decisions. Groups based on material incentives that are unable to prevent exit will be under serious constraints in their political activity. Staff will fear losing members if they make political decisions that could alienate some of them.

Decisions about activating non-members will be shaped by the nature of a group's membership and issue platform. Groups with a strongly purposive membership may steer their resources toward activating non-members to vote since their membership is already politicized. They may also encourage their members to become activists. Groups with a non-purposive membership will instead focus on activating their members. Groups that stress issues that appeal to a broad segment of voters will use these to attract support among the general public. Groups that stress issues that appeal only to their memberships or to well-defined demographic segments are more likely to "narrowcast."

The groups that I studied have become expert at asking their members to become politically active. But they do not all ask them to do the same things. Most purposive groups, with their relatively small, highly politicized memberships, do not waste much time asking their members to vote. They are too few to sway elections by themselves, and, by the very act of joining, they have shown themselves to be very likely voters. Instead purposive groups focus on recruiting their members to become activists, who will help sympathetic candidates by giving their time and their money. By contrast, labor unions make turning out their members to vote their top priority. Unlike people who join purposive groups, union members are not *necessarily* highly politicized since they did not join their unions for political reasons. So unions possess the numbers to affect elections; but they have to mobilize their members to vote and to vote for their endorsed candidate.

Groups can also employ their areas of expertise to achieve their political ends. In this context, expertise consists of special abilities and knowledge that groups can bring to bear in order to win elections. While expertise is necessary to use the other resources effectively, and money and membership are needed to build expertise, expertise is still a separate and distinct resource. Long-time staffers have skills, acquired from years of activity that are not easy to duplicate — although political professionals do frequently change jobs, moving from group to group, working for this campaign or that. An organization may have established credibility with members or other voters that can be difficult to replicate.

Interest groups possess expertise that is not easily transferred and that is not simply an outgrowth of spending. While unions can contribute millions of dollars to Democratic candidates and committees, they cannot so easily transfer their expertise at turning out their members to vote. The NRA has invested years of work and treasure in building its credibility with gun owners; a start-up organization could not expect to duplicate the NRA's clout, even if it could match its spending.

In *More Than Money*, I also sought to understand the relationship between interest groups and political parties, in an atmosphere of partisan polarization and narrow margins of control. We need to expand our notion of what a political party is. It is not simply a series of committees. It is instead a matrix of relationships between politicians, whether they work in party organizations, in interest groups, in the media, in political action committees, in consulting firms or in government itself: a party network. The activists at the Sierra Club, or EMILY's List, or the AFL-CIO may not get their checks from the Democratic National Committee, but they are part of the same Democratic Party network.

Since E.E. Schattschneider, political scientists have argued for years that interest groups undermine the party system. They portray groups as being unable to assemble the broad coalitions that parties can build. They also argue that groups reinforce elitist biases of the American system. But when a group's preferences overlap strongly with a party's platform (for example, organized labor and the Democrats), there is an incentive for such a group to support a party's candidates. When control of a House of Congress depends upon the outcome of a few races, this incentive becomes even stronger.

Nor are groups and parties easily disentangled. Interest groups may function as "subcontractors" for the parties. If campaign finance laws limit the degree to which groups can coordinate their actions with candidates, they certainly can perform functions for the parties for which they have special expertise: the National Rifle Association can contact gun owners, The Sierra Club can run advertisements about environmental issues, and unions can communicate with their members. Liberal and conservative activists hold regular meetings of ideological confreres to plot strategy and trade insights. For the 2004 election, a new entity called "America Votes" sought to coordinate the political activities of many liberal/Democratic groups.

These party networks not only include party committees and friendly interest groups, they include individual politicians and the leadership PACS under their control, think tanks, lobbyists, even media figures. The Republican National Committee, the NFIB, Roy Bluat and his leadership PAC (Rely on Your Beliefs), the Heritage Foundation, Vin Weber (a onetime House Republican, now a well-connected lobbyist) and Rush Limbaugh are part of a Republican network. This network shares information and coordinates activity.

Even with John McCain and Barack Obama proclaiming their independence from partisan politics, we see interest groups continuing to play vital roles in the party networks. At the annual convention of the National Right to Life Committee, Karl Rove and Fred Thompson warned delegates that Obama would shift the Supreme Court to the Left. Despite its quarrels with McCain over gun shows, the National Rifle Association has announced that it will spend $40 million to keep Obama out of the White House. Conservative and evangelical leaders, despite their misgivings about McCain, have rallied around him to prevent the humiliation of a defeat by a candidate some have likened to George McGovern. While organized labor has experienced divisions, both through the fracturing of the AFL-CIO and through the tensions produced by the Democratic contest, unions are united in their support for Obama and in their quest to persuade their members. Aware that John McCain's "maverick" image has led many voters to erroneously believe that he supports abortion rights, NARAL has launched a persuasion campaign, aimed at pro-choice women. Even in challenging times, interest groups remain vital to their party networks.

SCHOLARLY PRECINCTS

Call for Papers
Comparative Sociology
http://www.brill.nl/coso

Comparative Sociology (www.brill.nl/coso) is a quarterly international scholarly journal published by Brill of Leiden, Netherlands dedicated to advancing comparative sociological analyses of societies and cultures, institutions and organizations, groups and collectivities, and networks and interactions. In addition, book-length manuscripts may also be submitted to the related book series, *International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology* (www.brill.nl.issa).

Two issues of the journal each year are devoted to "special topics," and six topics currently open for submissions (through July 2009) are:

- Democratic Quality and Social Democracy
- Constitutional Courts Cross-Nationally
- Institutional Design
- Bourdieu on Professions
- Public Realm Ascent v. Field Autonomy Ascent
- Enlightened Localism (edited by Benjamin Gregg)

Consult the Website for descriptions of each.

Editor-in-Chief is David Sciulli, Professor of Sociology, Texas A&M University, and Columbia University Ph.D. in Political Science (compsoc@tamu.edu). Submissions are welcome not only from sociologists but also political scientists, legal scholars, economists, anthropologists and others. Indeed, the journal and book series are particularly keen to receive works of comparative political sociology and comparative legal sociology. All submissions are peer-reviewed and (initial decisions) are typically made within less than three months.

Call for Papers
The State of the Parties: 2008 & Beyond
October 2009 - Akron, Ohio

The University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics will sponsor the sixth quadrennial "State of the Parties" conference on American political parties in October 2009, in Akron, Ohio. The purpose of the conference is to assess changes in American political parties resulting from the 2008 presidential campaign and election. The conference will bring together scholars and practitioners for this purpose, and the best papers will be included in the 6th edition *of The State of the Parties*, scheduled to be published in 2010.

Papers on any aspect of contemporary American political parties are welcome, including political polarization; regional voting patterns; national, state and local party organizations; presidential primaries and campaigns; the role of money and other resources in the 2008 campaigns; and the role of parties and partisanship in the federal, state, and local governments.

Scholars interested in presenting a paper should submit a one-page proposal by March 13, 2009 to: John Green, Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio 44325-1914, telephone: (330) 972-5182, fax: (330) 972-5479, e-mail: bliss@uakron.edu.

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