

# VOX POP Newsletter

*of Political Organizations and Parties*

An official section of the American Political Science Association  
Produced by the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, The University of Akron

## THEME – INTEREST GROUPS

### Studying Interest Groups Using Lobbying Disclosure Reports

Frank R. Baumgartner, Penn State University • Beth L. Leech, Rutgers University

Scott Furlong noted in the previous issue of this newsletter that the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 represented “two steps forward and one step back.” The two steps forward stem from the wealth of data collected from thousands of lobbyists; these constitute a tremendous resource to those of us interested in lobbying activities. The one step back is the logistical nightmare that hinders any systematic analysis of the data. Furlong’s article<sup>1</sup> reviews the difficulties and advantages of the lobbying disclosure reports; there is no need to repeat his apt description here. Our focus instead is on the ways in which we can overcome the logistical difficulties inherent in the use of the data, potentially providing to the discipline something it sorely needs: broader access to high quality and systematic evidence concerning the substance and scope of interest-group lobbying activities.

In our previous review of the state of interest-group studies,<sup>2</sup> we noted that the field suffers from a dearth of commonly available and widely used sources of basic information. Whereas students of voting behavior can use the National Election Studies, there is no broad and centralized source for information concerning lobbying. In 1995 with the passage of the Lobbying Disclosure Act, Congress required the collection and public availability of a wealth of information concerning lobbying activities. Unfortunately, as Furlong notes, there has been little attention to making these data usable by the scholarly community. Here we report on our efforts to make a database from the reports filed in 1996, noting the scope of our data collection effort, the value of the information we were able to begin analyzing, and the promise of future work in this area. Our experience is that a group of undergraduates supervised carefully can easily make the entire set of reports into a usable database ready for analysis in one year. We hope that solving some of the logistical hurdles facing the field will encourage greater and more systematic analysis of group lobbying activities.

### Size and Logistics of the Empirical Task

The 1995 Lobbying Disclosure Act significantly expanded the reporting requirements for organizations active in Washington, D.C. For the first time, it required semi-annual reports from each firm or organization active in Washington lobbying activities. Lobbying firms must file a report for each client; organizations employing their own in-house lobbyists must report separately. All registrants must indicate the amount of money spent and the issues on which they were active, and they must file a separate report for each of 74 distinct issue-areas on which they lobbied. Reports must be filed semi-annually with the Clerk of the House of Representatives and with the Secretary of the Senate. We obtained the complete set of records for December 31, 1996, filing period—approximately 19,000 reports—and we supervised a group of student-workers as they transferred these microfilmed reports into a computerized database.<sup>3</sup>

Reports include identification material for the lobbyist and client organization (if these are not the same),

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expenditures, or income in the six-month reporting period, and a series of questions. For each of the 74 issue-areas defined by the act, registrants must mention: 1) specific lobbying issues (including bill numbers and specific executive branch actions); 2) houses of Congress and federal agencies contacted; 3) name and title of each employee who acted as a lobbyist. (In addition, those representing foreign entities must state the interest of each such client in the issues listed.) Since a separate report must be filed for each issue-area, many of the filings are quite voluminous. For example, Patton-Boggs, the large lobbying and public relations firm, filed 178 separate reports for 131 different clients, mentioning 380 issues. Similarly, General Motors had 47 reports mentioning 157 issues (and expenses of more than \$15 million) filed on its behalf, for the six-month period from July to December 1996. There are a number of ambiguities in reporting requirements, and some variation in the level of detail that the various registrants report, as we report elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Here, our focus is in the logistics and potential value of the reports as a data source, however.

With more than 19,000 reports filed for one six-month period, the most basic issue is how to aggregate them. The 1995 act requires that all information collected be made available to the public, but Congress has not seen fit to make the information easily accessible. Accordingly, members of the public may review the records on computer in the Legislative Resource Center maintained by staff of the clerk of the House of Representatives, but these data are available only as scanned-in images of the reports themselves. That is, no database exists that would allow one to discern any patterns of activity. One can search through the scanned documents to find all those lobbyists active in certain areas, but one must then print out each report individually. Of course, the typical user of this information may be a journalist or a congressional aide interested only in a single corporation or a single issue, but for the purpose of systematic analysis of all the reports, the publicly available records are quite difficult to use, as Furlong rightly noted. The Senate Public Records Office has recently completed a database that, beginning with the year-end 1988 reports, allows an individual to search in forty-three fields from the reports. This is a substantial improvement, but researchers still must travel to Washington to review this information, downloading the information (so that the data may be analyzed statistically) is not allowed, and it is not possible to search according to the bills and regulations in which groups were involved. Future plans of the Senate office include web-based distribution, which will mitigate travel problems, but even so, the issue-related information is available only on the scanned-in forms (or as a searchable database entry) and a great deal of coding must be done before the raw data as collected can be analyzed.

Considerable information from the 1997 lobbying disclosure reports (and soon from the 1998 reports) is available free from the Center for Responsive Politics and through its web site (<[www.crp.org](http://www.crp.org)>). Extensive though this site is, even it does not have the level of detail available in the original reports. For example, the Center for Responsive Politics site does not provide information about the issues on which the groups lobbied. The company Public Disclosure Inc. (<[www.tray.com](http://www.tray.com)>) has likewise compiled a database of registrants from the year-end reports from 1998. For a \$199 fee, anyone may download a database that includes the name of the registrant, name of client, and the amount spent. Unfortunately for interest-group scholars, this source contains no information about the targets of lobbying activities or the issues on which the lobbying occurred. Still, these sites constitute invaluable tools and are easily accessible, in contrast to the congressional forms themselves.

The only complete solution is the creation of a database designed for use by scholars. This is far from an impossible task. We purchased the first two years of reports on microfilm (forty-two rolls) from the U.S. Senate for the cost of reproduction: \$840. We then designed a Microsoft Access database entry form and supervised a set of student workers as they entered the relevant data from the last half of 1996 (thirteen rolls of microfilm). All of the reports were entered, identification numbers were assigned to each registrant and each client, and we were able to analyze the results after approximately 1,000 hours of student coding. The 74 issue-codes make it possible to break down activity by area. The range of targets mentioned is impressive, including congressional committees and a large number of executive agencies. We can therefore note which agencies are targeted by lobbying activities with what frequency and by whom. Making a list of the issues mentioned is considerably more complex. Some groups mention general areas of activity (e.g., "Medicare reform") whereas others give specific bills. Some refer to entire bills; others only to those sections that interest them. Suffice it to say that our coding efforts in this area continue. We expect to have a completed set of issue-codes, allowing us to compare sets of lobbyists active on given issues, after an additional 250 hours of student coding work. All in all, therefore, the logistics involved in this project amount to the purchase of the forms and less than 1,500 hours of data entry. At \$8 an hour, one six-month reporting period can be completed for less than \$15,000. Of course, Congress could create and distribute the data in this form itself, but our point is that even if it does not do so the costs of creating a database are not so enormous as to make it possible. The real problem is to find the resources or to coordinate efforts to do so on a continuing basis.



## Preliminary Results from the 1996 Reports

It is not possible to give a complete picture of the results of our analysis in this space, but we can mention several findings that indicate the usefulness of the database and the potential, if scholars were able to analyze these data on a continuing basis, to address some important issues in American politics.<sup>5</sup> First is the number and range of registrants. More than 1,700 groups registered directly, but an additional 4,200 organizations did no lobbying themselves but were reported as the clients of Washington lobbying firms. The lobbying firms, rarely the subject of scholarly inquiry, numbered 1,208. Of the 967 lobbying firms that reported earning more than \$10,000 in fees in 1996, their average fee was \$376,973. Aggregate fees paid to Washington lobbying firms totalled approximately \$365 million. Aggregate expenditures by all registrants was over \$800 million, with more than half of that total coming from businesses and trade associates (\$461 million and \$180 million, respectively). These figures are all the more impressive when one considers that they exclude spending on grassroots lobbying, media purchases, and the like; the definition of lobbying used in the act is quite restrictive. Of course, there are reasons to be wary of the exact dollar figures in any given report—some registrants may under-report their activities whereas others may have an incentive to over-report. Still, the overall picture that emerges from this new data source is one of a massive and well-funded army of lobbyists, much greater than previous surveys have indicated. Not only is the level of activity greater than previous studies note, but the degree of pro-business bias apparent here is even greater than in previous surveys of interest groups. Among the 178 organizations that spent more than \$1 million on lobbying in 1996, for example, only 10 were citizen or nonprofit organizations, the rest represented businesses, trade and professional associations, and institutions.

In sum, the lobby disclosure reports appear to represent a useful, if imperfect, source of considerable information of interest to group scholars and to students of American politics more generally. They paint a vivid picture of the lobbying process. Properly analyzed, they will allow the comparison of lobbying in different issue-areas, of different targets, and on different issues. Of course, this is possible only with some considerable investment in creating a usable database.

## Future Possibilities

Students of interest groups, so often captivated by the collective goods dilemma, should learn from their own studies and coordinate to produce some public goods for ourselves. Many sources of information are too costly for a single scholar to acquire or to put together but, with cooperation and collaboration, would be valuable research tools. The partial databases being compiled by the Senate,

Center for Responsive Politics, and Public Disclosure, for example, may make it possible to reduce the amount of time needed to transcribe the reports into a usable database (for reporting periods after 1996). The disclosure reports now required of lobbyists are not a panacea for the systematic study of lobbying and interest-group activities, but they can be a useful starting point for a variety of research projects. Our plan, for example, is to use these reports as a basis for a sampling frame to do interviews with active lobbyists. Those interested in a particular issue-areas could also use these data, as they would tell a lot about the mobilization of interest and the distribution of resources in a given policy area. Like any single data source, they most likely will require supplemental information to be useful to test any particular theory, or fully to illuminate any particular perspective. These data by themselves, in sum, will not be the cure for all our scholarly worries. But they are certainly a potential course of considerable information about the policy process, and we should organize to make them usable, if Congress will not.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Scott Furlong, "The Lobbying Disclosure Act and Interest Group Lobbying Data: Two Steps Forward and One Step Back," *VOXPOP: Newsletter of the Political Organizations and Parties Section of the American Political Science Association* 17 (1998):4–6.

<sup>2</sup> Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech, *Basic Interests: The Importance of Groups in Politics and in Political Science* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank the Program in American Politics, the Department of Political Science, and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Associate Provost for Graduate Studies at Texas A&M University for financial assistance on this project. Baumgartner acknowledges the support of Caltech and Penn State. We also would like to thank the hardworking Texas A&M Students who devoted their summer (and beyond) to data collection for our project: Jessica Geeslin, Elizabeth Murdock, Laura Orea, Melissa Thompson, and Heidi Watzak. Melissa Thompson merits special thanks for her continued work on this project and her efforts to ensure high quality data. Coding for this project is ongoing, but when it is completed we intend to make these data available to other researchers.

<sup>4</sup> See Frank R. Baumgartner and Beth L. Leech, "Business Advantage in the Washington Lobbying Community: Evidence from the 1996 Lobbying Disclosure Reports," presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, April 15–17, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> For a more complete report of these findings, see "Business Advantage in the Washington Lobbying Community."



**JOIN US! POP Business Meeting  
Friday, September 3, 12:30 p.m.**

**1999 POP Workshop  
Soft Money and Interest Groups in 1998  
Competitive Congressional Elections  
Wednesday, September 1  
1:00 - 5:00 p.m.**

*\*There is no fee or registration required for this workshop\**

The course includes an overview of the study, sample, and basic findings followed by a Senate panel discussion. After a short break those in attendance will participate in a House panel discussion, and finally a "Show and Tell" segment will highlight sample television and direct mail campaigns run by parties and interest groups. The course will conclude with a discussion of methods and implications.

Presenters: Ferrel Guillory, Thad Beyle, Penny Miller, Bill Moore, Danielle Vinson, Dennis Dresang, Ted Jelen, Clyde McKee, Sandra Suarez, John Shockley, Russ Dondero, Don Gross, Sandy Anglund, Jay Goodliffe, John Haskell, DeLysa Burnier, and Lonna Atkeson.

Questions should be directed to David Magleby, Department of Political Science, Brigham Young University, 745 Spencer—West Kimball Tower, Provo, UT 84602, phone: 801-378-3716, fax: 801-378-5730, and/or email: david\_magleby@byu.edu.

**APSA Section Membership Counts  
May 14, 1999**

1.	Federalism	345
2.	Law & Courts	679
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**Financing the 1996 Election**

Contributors: Herbert Alexander, Robert Biersack, Anthony Corrado, Diana Dwyre, Peter L. Francia, Rachel E. Goldberg, John C. Green, Paul S. Herrnson, Melanie Haskell, Wesley Joe, Robert E. Mutch, and Clyde Wilcox.

The 1996 election revealed dramatic changes in the way federal campaigns are paid for. Through soft money donations, issue advocacy campaigns, and other stratagems, parties and candidates have been able to circumvent the regulations put into place after the Watergate scandal. Despite rhetorical condemnations, there is every reason to expect these trends to continue in the future.

This study of the 1996 election—the latest in a quadrennial series sponsored by the Citizens' Research Foundation—catalogues the new campaign finance practices and their consequences. The introductory chapter charts the sea-change in campaign finance. Succeeding chapters focus on spending in the 1996 election, the finances of presidential and congressional candidate committees, and the major categories of campaign contributors—individual donors, political parties, and interest groups. The book concludes with a consideration of the prospects for campaign finance reform.

*Financing the 1996 Election* is expected to be published in September 1999 by M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

**Parties and Elections in America:  
The Electoral Process  
Third Edition**

*L. Sandy Maisel*

*Parties and Elections in America* is a major revision of a well-respected text covering all aspects of the electoral process from historical roots to election year 2000. This new edition is completely revised and up to date, including data from the 1996 presidential election, the 1996 and 1998 congressional and statewide elections, and the early phase of the 2000 presidential election.

*Parties and Elections in America* is expected to be published in August 1999 by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

**Politics, Parties and Elections in America  
Fourth Edition**

*John F. Bibby*

This comprehensive text incorporates the latest research concerning what political parties do, how they are organized, how party leaders behave, and the impact of political parties on government and the evolving nature of parties. *Politics, Parties and Elections in America* also discusses the limitations of political parties, the mechanics of elections and how American politics have come to be controlled by political parties.

*Politics, Parties and Elections in America* is expected to be published in August 1999 by Wadsworth Publishing.



**Papers of Interest  
1999 Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting**

- "In the Long Run: Stability and Change in U.S. Elections." Helmut Norpoth, SUNY at Stony Brook and Suzanne Robbins, SUNY at Stony Brook.
- "Analyzing Political Change in the 1990s." Hazem Ghobarah, University of Texas at Austin.
- "Locating Change in the Meaning of Political Ideology." Robert J. McKee, University of Illinois at Chicago.
- "The Role of Party Conversion and Issue Conversion in Long-Term Partisan Change." Thomas M. Carsey, University of Illinois at Chicago; Geoffrey C. Layman, Vanderbilt University and Michael A. Dimock, North Carolina State University.
- "Third Parties, Vote Choice, and Turnout in the United States." David M. Paul, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty Revisited: The Spatial Determinants of Third Party Voting." Wendy Watson, Ohio State University.
- "Outsiderism: Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996." Andrew E. Busch, University of Denver.
- "Of Democratic Age and Party System Fragmentation: Why Does Time Matter?" Gary Reich, University of Kansas.
- "Coping with Mass Politics: Electoral Institutions, Party Innovation and Liberals in France and Germany, 1870-1939." Markus Kreuzer, Villanova University.
- "The Development of Party Systems in Post-Soviet Societies." Arthur Miller, University of Iowa and Thomas Klobucar, University of Iowa.
- "Election Outcomes and Political Party Strategies in Ukraine." Vicki L. Hesli, University of Iowa.
- "The Best Money Congress Can Buy: Legislative Fundraising and the Donor Collective Action Problem." Bertram Johnson, Harvard University.
- "Policy Evolution Among Greens: Moving from Public Awareness to the Assembly Room." Laura Nielsen, University of Houston.
- "Institutions, Interest Group Power and Policy Capacity." Adam Sheingate, Nuffield College, Oxford University.
- "Effects of Policy Information on Attitude Change." Craig S. Gordon, Georgia State University and Gary Henry, Georgia State University.
- "A New Way to Model Campaign Effects." John Geer, Vanderbilt University and Richard R. Lau, Rutgers University.
- "The Competitive Effect of Presidential Campaigns." James E. Campbell, SUNY at Buffalo.
- "The Timing of Voting Decisions." Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Ohio State University and David Kimball, Southern Illinois University.
- "Can a Non-Partisan GOTV Campaign Boost Turnout? The Findings of a Large Scale Experiment Employing a Variety of Methods, Messages, and Intensities." Alan Gerber, Yale University and Donald Green, Yale University.
- "Closer to a Pluralist Heaven? Cross-Cutting Issues, Representation, and Contemporary Interest Group Politics." Dara Z. Strolovitch, Yale University.
- "Who Contributes to EMILY and WISH: A Tale of Two Lists." Christine L. Day, University of New Orleans and Charles D. Hadley, University of New Orleans.
- "State Political Party Endorsements: Continuity and Change." Malcolm Jewell, University of Kentucky and Sarah Morehouse, University of Connecticut.
- "Candidate-PACs and the Multi-Nuclear Party Organization." Barbara Trish, Grinnell College.
- "Campaign Organizations, Electoral Studies, and Political Science: Have We Missed the Boat?" Jody Baumgartner, Miami University.
- "Strange Bedfellows: Politics, Courts and Statistics." Wendy K. Tam Cho, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Albert Yoon, Stanford University.
- "Information, Interest Groups, and Judicial Decision-Making." Scott A. Comparato, Washington University, St. Louis.
- "The Dispersion of Advocacy: Amici Curiae in the Supreme Court." Gregory A. Caldeira, Ohio State University and Christopher J.W. Zorn, Emory University.
- "Do Supreme Court Justices Utilize Information That They Obtain From Oral Arguments?" Timothy R. Johnson, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.
- "Republicans Face the Fact(ion)s of Life." Allan Cigler, University of Kansas and Burdett Loomis, University of Kansas.
- "Mighty Fortress is our God: How the Christian Coalition has Influenced the Republican Party." Brett Clifton, Btown University.
- "Strange Bedfellows: The Formation and Organization of the Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion." John P. Forren, Miami University of Ohio.
- "Religious Activism and Party Loyalty: The Case of the Republican Presidential Activists." Rachel E. Goldberg, Georgetown University; John C. Green, University of Akron; Clyde Wilcox, Georgetown University.
- "Institutional Change and Coalition Politics in Italy 1993-1996." Daniela Giannetti, Trinity College, Dublin; Nicole Iacobone, POLITEIA; Itai Sened, Tel Aviv University & Washington University in St. Louis.
- "Rational Voting in an Old and a New Democracy: An Analysis of Elections in Unified Germany." Kathleen Bawn, UCLA.
- "Candidate-Centered Elections and Party Unity." Gail McElroy, University of Rochester.
- "A Luxury-Good Model of Economic Voting." Randy Stevenson, Rice University.
- "An Analysis of Different Corporate PAC Contributor Strategies in Midterm and Presidential Elections." Branwell D Kapeluck, Louisiana State University.
- "The End of Mobilization: Contemporary Party, Interest Group, and Campaign Strategies." Steve E. Schier,



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- Carleton College.
- "Drawing a Crowd or Working Alone: Patterns of Interest Group Involvement in National Politics." Frank R. Baumgartner, Pennsylvania State University and Beth L. Leech, Texas A&M University.
- "Testing the Conventional Wisdom: The Relationship Between Party Contributions and PAC Money in U.S. House Elections." Holly Brasher, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- "Changes in Committee Appointments of Freshman House Members: The Role of PAC Contributions." Jonathan Williamson, Emory University and Matthew Gunning, Emory University.
- "Term Limits and Campaign Contributions: Do Lame Ducks Suffer?" Dorie Apollonio, University of California, Berkeley.
- "Breaking Ranks: Explaining Party Defections in the House of Representatives." Charles J. Finocchiaro, Michigan State University and C.F. Larry Heimann, Carnegie Mellon University.
- "Parties and Pivotal Voters." Rick K. Wilson, Rice University.
- "Who Wins? Party Effects in Legislative Voting." Eric D. Lawrence, University of California, Riverside; Forrest Maltzman, George Washington University; Steven Smith, University of Minnesota.
- "The Cartel Party System and its Existence in Multi-Party and Two Party Western Democracies." Bryan Westhoff, Truman State University.
- "The Structure of Political Beliefs Among Local Party Activists." J.P. Monroe, University of Miami.
- "A Tale of Two Political Parties: Twenty Years of Democratic and Republican Shifts in Platforms and Policy, 1972-1992." Jean-Philippe Faletta, Wayne State University.
- "Speech and Action: The Predictive Value of the Narrative Approach." Fred Meyer, Ball State University.
- "Interest Group Internal Conflict and Policy Deliberation." Kevin M. Easterling, University of Chicago.
- "Initiative States' Leadership in Policy Diffusion." Frederick J. Boehmke, California Institute of Technology.
- "Planting the Seeds for Political Parties: Deputy Associations in the Russian Parliament." Moshe Haspel, Emory University.
- "Sickles into Roses: The Communist Successor Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Comparative Perspective." John Ishiyama, Truman State University.
- "Party Consolidation in the Former Soviet Union." Cynthia Boaz-Moore, University of California-Davis.
- "The Post-Communist Parliament of the Czech Republic: Democratic Leaning and Institutional Development in the First Term." Maurice D. Simon, East Carolina University; Kevin Deegan Krause, University of Notre Dame; Zdenka Mansfield, Czech Academy of Sciences.
- "Organizing for Europe: European Regional Parties at the Millennium." Joel Herndon, Emory University.
- "Explaining Coalitions and Cleavages in European Parliament." Susan Pratt, University of Chicago.
- "The Economy Accountability, and Support for the President of the European Commission." Ronald D. Gelleny, Binghamton University (SUNY) and Christopher J. Anderson, Binghamton (SUNY).
- "National Party Strategies and Voting Behavior in the European Parliament." Matthew Gabel, University of Kentucky and Clifford J. Carrubba, SUNY at Stony Brook.
- "The Link Between Candidate Evaluation and Strength of Partisanship." Susan M. Johnson, University of Wisconsin, Whitewater.
- "Money Can Buy Me Love: Partisan Influence in Electoral Politics." Alan Wiseman, Stanford University.
- "All for the Lack of a Candidate: Barry Goldwater and the Defeat of Race Liberalism in the Republican Party." Thomas F. Bayer, Saint Mary College.
- "Party Pledge Fulfillment under United and Divided Government, Carter through Clinton." Terry J. Royed, University of Alabama; Stephen A. Borrelli, University of Alabama; Brian C. Reed, University of Alabama.
- "Electoral Mandates, Critical Elections, and Political Time." Wayne P. Steger, DePaul University.
- "The Generalized Largest Remainder: A Unified Seats-to-Votes Formula." Kenneth Benoit, Trinity College, Dublin.
- "Measuring Voting Mechanics and Complexity." Thad A. Brown, Los Alamos and David A. Meyer, University of California.
- "The Partisan Realignment of Cellular Automata: Considering the Application of Chaos Theory in the Analysis of Partisan Realignments." Matthew Woessner, The Ohio State University.
- "Trade Association Campaign Contributions: The Logic of Collective PACs." James W. Endersby, University of Missouri, Columbia and Sungdai Cho, University of Missouri, Columbia.
- "The Impact of Term Limits on PAC Contributions." Stacy Gordon, University of Nevada at Reno and Cynthia Unmack, University of California at Davis.
- "Catching the Midnight Express: The Effect of a Change in Majority Status on Business PAC Contributions." Douglas H. Weber, American University.
- "Can Speakers Lead?" Ronald M. Peters, Jr., University of Oklahoma and Craig A. Williams, University of Oklahoma.
- "Leadership Strategies and the Indigenous Effects of Partisanship in the House of Representatives: A Longitudinal Analysis of Special Rules." Bryan W. Marshall, Michigan State University.
- "Conditional Party Government and its Alternatives: Defining Party Power in the House." R. Lawrence Butler, Princeton University.



**Partisan Approach to Postwar American Politics**

Byron E. Shafer, Editor

(Chatham House 1998)

*Rick Farmer, University of Akron*

Political parties in America have undergone significant transformation in the postwar period. This transformation is both cause and consequence of the politics of the period. In *Partisan Approaches to Postwar American Politics* (Chatham House 1998), Byron Shafer and his co-authors seek to use political parties and partisanship as a window for observing American politics. They examine six elements (party officeholders, party factions, partisan elites, party organizations, mass partisanship, and partisan rules) to determine: Can parties provide a window into the events of the past 50 years? Did parties shape those events? How much can we learn from this window?

The chapters are developed in a parallel fashion. Each chapter begins with a description of the immediate postwar period. Then, it proceeds to a discussion of changes that have taken place since 1946. This is followed by a description of the current situation. Finally, each chapter turns to a discussion of the importance of these specific changes in understanding postwar American politics.

Parties offer an interesting window on politics because they are often the primary intermediaries, bringing together individuals and policy ideas, dispensing political actors and policy agendas. Parties are studied because they are both a valuable independent variable and an excellent dependent variable in the political process. In the postwar period, Shafer sees in the foreground shaping public policy. One layer below the surface he sees the competition between party factions shaping the policy shapers. Parties are also in the foreground of the postwar picture as partisan loyalties, among the general public, weaken. Parties can be seen in the background as they organize to do battle and as their battlefield is shaped by shifting rules of engagement.

The greatest value of this book lies in its individual chapters, in the information and analysis that they provide. Randall Strahan examines the role of partisan officeholders. He explains how the mass decline of partisanship coupled with stronger congressional parties have created a situation where the Presidency is less partisan and the Congress is more partisan. This observation is particularly important in light of the fact that the parties have recently traded branches of government. As a window in politics in the postwar period, Strahan concludes, political leaders registered rather than caused the political change that occurred.

Parties have long suffered the effects of internal bickering and shifting factional coalitions. Nicol Rae describes these shifting factions in the postwar period. He finds that the least factionalized party generally wins the Presidency. However, because factions often have geographic bases, the most factionalized party often controls Congress. Rae argues that party factions have shaped the electoral alignments of these decades, making them an excellent window on postwar politics.

Sifting social forces cause a circulation of elites, which Byron Shafer describes. He uses the emergence and decline of various factions to explain much of postwar politics. Four groups are tracked through the postwar period: organized labor, Modern Republicans, New Democrats, and evangelical Protestants. He finds that the issue agenda shifts as various groups rise to prominence.

John Bibby provides an excellent portrayal of party organization activity in the postwar period, tracking their decline and reemergence as they adapt to new political realities. He explains the rise of candidate-centered politics. Then, he discusses the niche that party organizations have found for themselves in the candidate centered era. Parties provide important and valuable services, which candidates otherwise may not be able to afford. This allows the parties to coordinate activities among campaigns, fo-

cusings resources where they are most needed. Ultimately this coordination and assistance creates a sense of solidarity among the parties' elected officials. In effect, parties have institutionalized their candidate support role in a way that harmonizes with candidate centered politics.

The decline of mass partisanship is documented by William Mayer. His analysis indicates that the decline has given rise to split-ticket voting and divided party government. Simultaneously the parties have become more ideologically distinct. Decreased mass partisanship, split-ticket voting, divided party government, candidate centered politics, increased party organization, and increased ideological cohesion have given rise to what Mayer called a "semi-responsible" party system, where parties are better organized but less accountable. Mayer feels the change in mass parties is more a reflection of postwar politics than a cause.

An aspect of partisan competition that is often overlooked or undersold is the formal rules which structure elections. Harold Bass chronicles these changes in the postwar period. The changes may seem minor but the effects are significant. The loss of control over nominations to primaries severely weakened the parties. Changes in ballot structures contributed to split-ticket voting, thus, divided government. Increases in suffrage reduced the overall percentage of voter turnout. In other words, many of the problems commonly identified by scholars can be traced to rule changes.

Each individual chapter easily stands alone, taking a comprehensive longitudinal look at its particular subject. Each is rich in historic context and offers two distinct and comparable snapshots of parties, one in the immediate postwar period and as the century turns. The comparison of these snapshots in historic context reveals much about how parties have adapted to their changing circumstances.

A significant amount of data is presented in the chapters to support the authors' narratives. These data do not require sophisticated analysis and are presented in ways that are easily comprehensible. The data are readily accessible and serve as a handy reference on a variety of party-related topics in a single volume.

The strength of the book's chapters also proves in some ways to be its weakness. Because each chapter stands alone there is considerable redundancy, to borrow a statistical term, within and between the chapters. Attempting to use the prescribed parallel framework, each author describes at the outset an era in which parties are strong. However, they feel compelled to note that this is not the final condition of the parties. As the evolution of the parties unfolds, the authors remind us repeatedly that we have not reached the end of the story. Ultimately, this forces the authors to describe the current party system at the end of each major section, creating significant redundancy. The "between" redundancy occurs as each of the six authors describe the same history and events. For example, because the Progressive Era was so important in the evolution of party structures, each author necessarily describes the Progressives, their reforms, and the effects. Similar redundancies occur with a variety of events as each author independently makes a case.

An opening historical/contextual chapter could have alleviated some of the redundancies. Equally useful would have been a comprehensive chapter which drew all of the findings together into a single analysis. It would be valuable to consider how each of these chapters speak to one another. Several interesting possibilities are available. One set of questions that arise is, what can we make of Strahan's claim that the least factionalized party wins the Presidency and Rae's claim that the least partisan candidate wins the Presidency? How does Mayer's discussion of mass parti-



*continued from page 7*

sanship or Bass's discussion of primaries affect this phenomenon? Or, how does Bibby's explanation of party organizations affect the opposite claims that the most factionalized and most partisan party wins the Congress? What does the overall picture of political parties in America look like at the turn of the century? These are just a few of the questions which these chapters stir, but the book makes no attempt to answer. Rather the editor's brief introduction focuses on the question, how important are parties in understanding politics?

This book is valuable to party scholars at several levels. It is an important and useful resource for those who study and write about parties. The chapters present good description of how parties have adapted to the changing times in the last half of the 20th Century. They offer easily accessible data on a variety of important topics in a single volume. The topics are covered in a comprehensive manner. Each of the chapters is a contribution in its own right and scholars will want to build on these works.

In the classroom the independent chapters could be used individually in a variety of courses. Strahan's chapter on officeholders could be used in a class on Congress. Rae and Shafer's chapters on factions and elites could be used in a course on interest groups. Mayer's chapter on mass participation could be used in a course on public opinion. Bass's chapter on rules could be used in a course on campaigns. Since each of the chapters tend to cover much of the same ground, Bibby's chapter on party organizations may be the most useful as a stand alone chapter. It could be used in a discussion of Congress, parties, elections, or American government more generally. The book as a whole has value in a course on political parties. Students will come away from the book understanding that parties are dynamic, not static and that parties are relatively weak, yet rebounding.

### Call for Papers Coping with Term Limits April 12-13, 2000 Columbus, Ohio

By April 2000 six states will have had at least one post-term limits legislative session. Several other states will be feeling the effects of imminent term limits. The Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics is hosting a conference that will focus on the observable/measurable effects of term limits on state legislatures across the country. The conference will occur in Columbus, Ohio, April 12-13, 2000. A goal of this conference will be to move beyond scholarly and practitioner speculation to observable effects. Another goal will be to move beyond simple case studies to a comparison of effects in various states.

This call is open to all who wish to submit work that collects observable data on more than one state and provides a scholarly analysis of those observations. A limited number of excellent proposals will be accepted for the conference. Accepted authors will receive transportation and lodging for the conference and a small honorarium. The best papers may further be accepted into an edited collection to be produced by the Bliss Institute following the conference.

Please submit all proposals by October 15, 1999 to Dr. Rick Farmer, Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio 44325-1914, phone: 330-972-7983, email: rfarmer@uakron.edu.



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