

Poli 100E: Interest Group Politics

Summer Session 1, July-August 2023

University of California, San Diego

Instructor: Micah Farver (he/him)

Email: mfarver@ucsd.edu

Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-4:50pm (in person)

Location: WLH 2115

Office hours: Thursdays 12:30-1:30pm and by appointment (SSB 345, or remote by Zoom)

Zoom link: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/6307558161>. Calendly sign-up link:

<https://calendly.com/mfarver-1/micah-farver-office-hours-2?month=2023-07>

Teaching Assistant: Austin Beacham

Email: abeacham@ucsd.edu

Office hours: By appointment, Zoom link: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/my/beacham>.

Course Description

In Federalist Paper 10, James Madison warned against the dangers of “factions” and outlined how the U.S. constitutional system would limit their influence. In the years since, interest groups have proliferated in the U.S., particularly since the mid-20th century, and the study of interest groups has become central to understanding U.S. politics. As interest group political spending has continued to increase in recent years—including through lobbying and campaign spending—many politicians and political observers have warned about the influence of interest groups on the U.S. political process, particularly regarding inequality and representation of citizen interests. Interest group activity now shapes debates over the most important policy issues, including gun control, environmental policy, healthcare, and taxation. Interest groups also provide unique opportunities for representation of underrepresented constituencies, and for citizens to become more involved in the political process.

This course will explore interest group politics in the U.S. through a variety of dimensions, and will address the following questions:

- What are interest groups, and how have they developed over time in the U.S.?
- How representative are interest groups of the society as a whole, and particularly for historically underrepresented populations?
- How do interest groups regulate their activity and attract members?
- How do interest groups engage in lobbying and campaign spending?
- What influence do interest groups have on political and policy outcomes in the U.S.?
- What does interest group political behavior indicate about American democracy overall?

Course Learning Objectives

After successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Explain the current landscape of interest group activity, and how this has changed
2. Demonstrate knowledge of how interest groups form, and trends that have led to increased group growth in the U.S.
3. Apply theories of interest group formation, goals, and influence to particular groups
4. Explain how representative interest groups are of U.S. society, including for under-represented populations
5. Demonstrate the ability to access, understand, and present data on interest group campaign spending and lobbying
6. Demonstrate detailed understanding of a particular interest groups' activities, strategies, and influence.
7. Demonstrate understanding of how interest groups shape U.S. democracy

Course Design

Class meetings will be on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and will be in person with no remote access available. The course is designed to be participatory in nature, with student discussions guiding the bulk of the lectures, and each class will include both large and small-group discussion. Prior to each class, students will be expected to have read the materials for that day. During weeks 2-4, students will be expected to complete answers to a discussion question on Canvas prior to class.

You are also encouraged to write down notes and questions from the reading to bring to class! Course slides will be posted on Canvas following classes for students to review.

Summary of Course Requirements

Assignment	Weight	Due Date
Class Participation and Discussion Threads	15%	In class participation- ongoing Discussion threads- Tuesdays/Thursdays by 1:30pm (no threads for weeks 1 and 5).
Documentary analysis memo	15%	5pm on Sunday, July 16th

Final Project- interest group proposal	5%	Before class on Thursday, July 13th (2pm)
Final Project- group spending analysis	15%	5pm on Sunday, July 23rd
Final Project- presentation	10%	Tuesday, August 1st or Thursday, August 3rd (in class)
Final Paper	40%	5pm on Friday, August 4th
	100%	

Grading Scale

A+ = 100 – 98; A = 97 – 94; A- = 93 – 90; B+ = 89 – 87; B = 86 – 84; B- = 83 – 80; C+ = 79 – 77; C = 76 – 74; C- = 73 – 70; D+ = 69 – 67; D = 66 – 64; D- 63 – 60.

Description of Course Requirements

- *Class participation and discussion questions: 15%*

Your class participation grade will be based upon two components: in-class attendance and participation, and answers to discussion questions on canvas.

In class participation

The course is designed to be participatory, and in-class participation and student discussion will be a central component of each class, through both large and small groups. If you attend class and participate, you will receive full credit. There will be multiple modes of participation, and you don't necessarily need to speak in the large group context, but active participation in small groups will be necessary to receive full points.

The class will be built around student engagement and participation, and please offer your thoughts and opinions on the topics we are discussing, especially if you aren't sure!

Discussion questions

Prior to classes during weeks 2, 3, and 4, two discussion questions will be posted on Canvas regarding the readings for that day, and you will choose one question to respond to. Please respond with one paragraph that addresses the question, and then one brief response to another student's comment. We will then discuss these responses in class. Thoughtful responses that demonstrate understanding of the material will receive full credit.

- Documentary response memo: 15% total (due Sunday, July 16th by 5pm)

Students will watch the documentary “Unrepresented” outside of class, and will submit a 2-3 page response memo about this documentary (double spaced). You only need to watch the first 45 minutes of the documentary. The documentary is available on Kanopy; please let me know if you have difficulty accessing it. When you go to the Kanopy website, click on “Get Started” in the middle of the screen, and then click on “find your university.” After you find “UC San Diego Library”, you should be able to log in through a vpn.

The memo will respond to the following questions, using detailed examples from the video. You are also welcome to reference course materials as necessary, and can do so with in-text citations (no bibliography necessary, unless for outside sources).

Questions:

- How does the documentary argue that money and interest groups are influencing politics in the U.S.? Highlight 2-3 specific examples that the documentary uses.
- Do you find these arguments persuasive? Why or why not.
- Briefly discuss ideas for how these examples of the influence of political spending could be addressed.
- Overall, what are the implications of this discussion for democracy in the U.S?

Please include an introductory paragraph that summarizes your arguments, as well as a brief conclusion. The final product should be a coherent essay, not simply separate answers to the questions listed above. I will provide a grading rubric in the week prior to this assignment.

- Final project

For the final project, students will write a research paper on the role of interest groups in U.S. politics, utilizing an in-depth exploration of a particular interest group as a case study. This project will be graded along four distinct components, with feedback provided at each point. This will allow you the opportunity to build on this feedback for each successive assignment. The assignments include a topic selection and proposal; an analysis of the chosen groups’ lobbying and campaign spending; a brief in-class presentation on your project; and a final paper.

- Group topic selection and proposal: 5% total (due before class on Thursday, July 13th)

For this assignment, you will select the interest group that you will be exploring in your final paper. The interest groups selected can be any that are active in American politics, with the exception of the NRA or the AARP as these are prominently discussed in the Nownes textbook.

In two paragraphs, write why you are choosing this group, why the policy area that the group is active in interests you, and include a brief description of two sources about the group. These may include news articles, policy reports, or information from the group itself.

As part of the next assignment, you will need to access data on your group from OpenSecrets.org. If you can't find a "Profile" page for your interest group on OpenSecrets, then please choose a different group (OpenSecrets should have information available on most groups). See this [profile page](#) for Exxon Mobil. To find a group's profile, go to OpenSecrets.org, and search for the group name in the search bar on top, and the main result should be the "Profile" page.

- Group spending analysis: 15% total (due Sunday, July 23rd by 5pm)

For the spending analysis, you will analyze your chosen interest groups' campaign spending and lobbying activity, utilizing data from OpenSecrets. In total, your answers should be between 2-3 pages. The bulk of information can be found through OpenSecrets' "Profile" pages, such as this [profile page](#) for Exxon Mobil.

The final essay will ask you to weave together a cohesive narrative of your chosen groups' lobbying and spending activities, and you can draw upon the answers to the following questions in part to do so, including highlighting specific data points.

Please address the following questions

- 1) What is your chosen interest group? What policy area is the group most active in, and why? It may be helpful to review the relevant policy issue profile from OpenSecrets: <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/issues>.
- 2) Describe your groups' campaign spending activities (or by their affiliates). On average, how much does affiliates of the group spend each year, and how has this varied over time? What percentage of their spending is towards Democrats and Republicans? What percentage of the funds are from PACS or Individuals (people affiliated with the group)?
- 3) Describes your group's lobbying activities. On average, how much does the group spend on lobbying each year? How have their lobbying activities changed over time? What issues does the group primarily lobby on? How many lobbyists does the group employ, and what percentage of them are revolving-door lobbyists?
- 4) Pick two recent congressional bills that the group lobbied on, according to their lobbying reports. As much as you can ascertain (with some outside research probably necessary),

what preferences did the group hold regarding these bills? What were the outcomes of the bills?

- 5) How does your groups' spending and lobbying activities compare to other groups in this policy area? It may be useful to explore the summary page for the type of your group (for example, this is the Oil and Gas group [summary page](#)). Briefly compare and highlight the activities of one group that is a natural ally and one that is a natural opponent for your group (for Exxon Mobil, an ally may be BP, while an opponent may be the Sierra Club).

In addition to utilizing data from OpenSecrets to answer these questions, please also utilize at least two outside sources as well in this analysis (will be helpful in answering question #4). Please include in-text citations and a bibliography for these sources. These can be the same sources that you discuss in the group topic selection assignment.

- Final paper: 40% total (due by Friday, August 4th at 5pm)

For the final paper, you will write a 8-10 page paper (doubled spaced, 12pt font) on the role of interest groups in American politics, honing in on your chosen interest group as a case study. The project should read as a cohesive narrative, and make an overall argument about interest groups utilizing at least 3 readings from the course, and at least 5 outside sources. Please use in-text citations and a bibliography for all sources.

The project should include the following components:

- A clear thesis statement about interest groups activities and American politics, building upon the case study of your chosen interest group, readings from course, and outside readings. For example, this could be on the following topics:
 - Whether interest group are representative of citizen interests overall
 - Whether interest groups exacerbate or lessen inequality
 - Interest group strengthening or weakening of democratic processes
 - Whether your chosen group is evidence of “majoritarian pluralism” or “biased pluralism” as discussed by Gilens and Page (2014).
- A detailed exploration of your chosen interest group. This should include
 - A brief summary of the interest group, and it's goals in American politics
 - Discussion of how the group organized and attracts members, if applicable.
 - How does the group engage in American politics? Utilize data on campaign spending and lobbying, as discussed in the previous assignment.
 - What policy issues does the group care about? Select one policy area where the group is active, and discuss specific policy goals the group would like to achieve.

- What influence has the group had on this policy issue? As we will discuss, there are many potential forms of influence beyond passing specific legislation.
- Overall, how does this interest group inform our understanding of interest group political activity in the U.S.?
- A clear structure for the essay. Components to include in this structure include:
 - An introduction with thesis statement
 - Clear, concise supporting paragraphs providing information on your interest group and evidence for your thesis.
 - A conclusion
 - A bibliography, which must include at least 3 sources from class and 5 outside sources.

As mentioned, the discussion of this interest group should be blended into a larger argument on interest groups in American politics, and should not read as a checklist answering information about the group. You are utilizing the evidence from a particular interest group, and its interests and influence in a policy area, to make a larger argument about American politics. You are also welcome to compare the activities of your group to other groups in this area.

Final essays will be graded according to the following criteria (a complete rubric will be provided):

- Consistency and thoughtfulness of overall argument
- Discussion in group policy interests and influence
- Detail in describing group activities
- Use of class sources, data, and outside sources.
- Organization and readability
- Formatting
- Project presentation: 10% total (the week of July 31-August 4th)

Each student will be required to present their final project during the final week of class. Half of students will present on Tuesday, August 1st, and half will present on Thursday, August 3rd. I will circulate a sign-up sheet for these dates. These presentations should be approximately 10 minutes in length, with a brief Q+A period afterwards. In this presentation, you will provide a summary of what you learned about your interest groups' goals, strategy, and political spending, its influence, and what you think the example of this group says about interest groups in American democracy. This is not meant to be a stressful presentation, but an opportunity for you to share your work, gain valuable presentational experience, and learn about the work of others! Furthermore, you can utilize feedback on the presentation to inform your final paper.

Using at least several slides for a powerpoint is strongly encouraged. I will provide further information about the presentation and grading criteria for this during the course, as well as advice for slides.

Overall Course Expectations

What you can do to support your success in the course:	What I will do to support your success in the course:
Read the syllabus and stay current with course information	Be prepared and bring my enthusiasm for teaching to each session
Keep up with readings and course assignments, as each one builds on the previous one.	Respond to emails within one working day, and provide timely feedback on assignments / submissions.
Contribute to the learning environment with fairness, cooperation, and professionalism	Establish a learning environment with fairness, cooperation and professionalism, and will take action if these principles are violated.
Treat your classmates, instructional assistants and myself honestly and ethically	Treat you honestly and ethically, and will address any concerns you might have
Commit to excel with integrity ¹ . Have the courage to act in ways that are honest, fair, responsible, respectful & trustworthy.	Uphold integrity standards and create an atmosphere that fosters active learning, creativity, critical thinking, and honest collaboration.
Manage your time, so you can stay on track with the course and complete tasks on time	Only assign work that is vital to the course, and will work to meet the standard credit hour allotment for the course.

Communicate with me if you determine that a deadline cannot be met due to extenuating circumstances	Consider requests for adjustments and will make reasonable exceptions available to all students when approved
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1. Please read UC San Diego's [Policy on Integrity of Scholarship](#) and take the [integrity pledge](#)!

Technology policy

Please silence and put away your phones while in class. Laptops and other e-reader or tablet devices are acceptable to have in class for purposes of accessing course readings and taking notes. Please do not surf the internet or use these devices for any other purposes, as it is very distracting for other students and your own concentration in class.

Inclusive Classroom

Austin and I are fully committed to developing an inclusive classroom that supports diversity of thought, identities, experiences, and learning preferences. The course will benefit from each of your unique perspectives on course questions and materials, and we encourage you to contribute to a healthy class discussion throughout this course. Please be respectful of other people's views, opinions, and ideas, and help us to create an effective learning environment for everyone. For more information about diversity and inclusion at UCSD and resources to support you, please visit: <http://diversity.ucsd.edu>.

Student Survey

About halfway through the class, I will circulate an optional anonymous survey asking what is going well for you in the class so far, what you are enjoying about it, and what you think could be done to make instruction more effective. I appreciate your constructive feedback, and will work to implement it!

Late Assignments

If you miss an assignment deadline, please simply upload the missed assignment as soon as possible. The late penalty for assignments is as follows: 5% off for each 24-hour period that assignments are late. If there are extenuating circumstances that we should be aware of, please email Austin and copy me, and explain the circumstances. Given the due dates for the final course grades, there is very little leeway for turning in late final essays, so please be on top of this final assignment.

Resources to Support Student Learning

Library Help, e-reserves and research tools: <https://library.ucsd.edu/ask-us/triton-ed.html>

Writing Hub: <https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/writing/index.html>

Tutoring: <https://commons.ucsd.edu/students/math-chemistry-tutoring/index.html>

Mental Health Services: <https://caps.ucsd.edu>

Accessibility: Students needing accommodations due to a disability should inform the instructor as soon as possible. In addition, please provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD), located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Please present AFA letters both to me and the OSD Liaison for Political Science (Zain Sharifi, zasharifi@ucsd.edu) as soon as possible so that accommodations may be arranged. OSD contact for further information: <https://disabilities.ucsd.edu/>; osd@ucsd.edu | 858. 534.4382

UCSD Academic Regulations and Policies

If you are utilizing an idea or information from another source, you must provide a proper citation for this information. Although you are encouraged to work together in preparing for class discussions and assignments, each student is expected to do their own work on all written assignments and in-class essays. Violations will be subject to disciplinary measures as outlined by the University. If you have any questions regarding this policy, please consult me or your TA.

Each student is expected to abide by UCSD's policy on Integrity of Scholarship in this course. Please see details here:

<https://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/Appendices/2>). Students are expected to do their own work, as outlined in the UCSD Policy on Academic Integrity and published in the UCSD General Catalog:
<https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/excel-integrity/index.html>.

Required Readings

For the course, we will be using the following textbook:

Anthony J. Nownes, *Interest Groups in American Politics*, 2nd ed. (2013)

The textbook is available electronically through the UCSD library, and chapters have already been uploaded to canvas as PDFs.

Other readings will include book chapters, research articles, and news articles, and are all available on Canvas.

Course Schedule:

**Note: Readings may be adjusted throughout the course. If there is a revision, I will always provide advanced notice, and updates will be posted on Canvas.*

Week 1

Tuesday, July 4th

No class.

Class 1: Thursday, July 6th.

Overview of interest groups

Discussion Questions: What are interest groups? How have interest groups developed over time in the U.S.?

Readings:

- The syllabus!
- Nownes ch. 1 and 2
- Federalist 10

*Note: there is a significant amount of reading today given that there is no class on Tuesday, so please start early in the week!

Week 2

Class #2: Tuesday, July 11th

Interest group organization and representation

Discussion questions: How are interest groups organized? Are interest groups representative of the overall population?

Readings:

- Nownes, ch. 3.
- Dara Z. Strolovitch. Affirmative Advocacy: race, class, and gender in interest group politics. University of Chicago Press, 2007. (*Chapter 1*)
- Optional (skim): Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady and Sidney Verba. "Representing Interests through Organizational Activity." In Unequal and Unrepresented, Princeton University Press. 2018. (*Chapter 9*).

Final Project, interest group proposal: Due before class on Thursday, July 13th (2pm)

Class #3: Thursday, July 13th

Direct lobbying

Discussion questions: Why do interest groups lobby? Who are their main lobbying targets?

Readings:

- Nownes ch. 5, p. 1-30

- Lee Drutman. *The Business of America is Lobbying*. Oxford University Press. 2015. (*Read chapter 1*).
- Richard Hall and Alan Deardorf. "Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy." *American Political Science Review*. 2006. (*Read Abstract and Introduction, pages 69-72.*)

Documentary analysis memo: Due Sunday, July 16th by 5pm

Week 3

Class #4: Tuesday, July 18th

Direct lobbying

Discussion questions: How do groups utilize revolving door lobbyists? What is the influence of group lobbying?

Documentary reflection: What is the influence of money in politics?

Readings:

- Nownes ch. 5, p. 30-50
- Baumgartner et al. "Money, Priorities and Stalemate: How Lobbying Affects Public Policy." *Election Law Journal*, 2014. (*Read Abstract and pages 1-7*).
- Jesse Drucker and Jim Tankersley. "How Big Companies Won New Tax Breaks from the Trump Administration." *The New York Times*. 12/30/2019.
- Optional (skim): Pamela Ban, Maxwell Palmer, and Benjamin Schneer. "From the Halls of Congress to K Street: Government Experience and its Value for Lobbying." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. 2019.

Class #5: Thursday, July 20th

Campaign spending

Discussion questions: Why do groups donate to campaigns? What spending avenues do groups utilize?

Readings:

- Nownes ch. 6.
- Stephen Ansolabehere, John de Figuerido, and James M. Snyder Jr. "Why is There so Little Money in U.S. Politics? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 2003.
- Shane Goldmacher. "The 2020 Campaign is the Most Expensive Ever (By A Lot)." *The New York Times*. October 28, 2020.

Final Project- group spending analysis. Due by 5pm on Sunday, July 23rd

Week 4

Class #6: Tuesday, July 25th.

Campaign spending, Other avenues of influence

Discussion questions: How has Citizens United influenced group spending and influence? How can interest groups utilize indirect lobbying?

Readings:

- Karl Evers-Hillstrom. "More Money, Less Transparency: A Decade Under Citizens United." OpenSecrets. January 14, 2020.
- Micah Farver. "Citizens United and State Environmental Policy, Regulations, and Outcomes. *Environmental Politics*. 2023. (Read abstract and introduction, pages 1-4).
- Nownes ch. 7 (will assign specific pages)

Class #7: Thursday, July 27th.

Overall group influence

Discussion questions: What is the influence of interest groups in U.S. politics? How can we measure influence?

Readings:

- Nownes ch. 9
- Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics*. 2014.
- LaGina Gause. "Revealing Issue Salience via Costly Protest: How Legislative Behavior Following Protest Advantages Low-Resource Groups." *British Journal of Political Science*. 2022. (Read Abstract, introduction (pages 1-3), Discussion (pages 18-19))
- Watch: "How the NAACP Fights Racial Discrimination." *The History Channel*. 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXi2lM7-NB8&t=3s>.

Week 5

Class #8: Tuesday, August 1st.

Final Project Presentations, Groups and Political Parties

Discussion questions: What is the relationship between interest groups and political parties?

Readings:

- Nownes, ch. 8

Class #9: Thursday, August 3rd.

Final Project Presentations, Class Summary

Discussion questions: What is the role of interest groups in U.S. democracy?

Readings:

- Nownes ch. 10

Final Paper: Due by 5pm on Friday, August 4th