

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE  
POLITICAL INTEREST GROUPS

**Terms and concepts to know:**

Political interest group	Madison and <i>Federalist 10</i>
Calhoun's "concurrent majority"	Bentley and "group behavior"
Dahl and "pluralism"	Socialization of conflict
Lowi and "interest group liberalism"	Leadership / cohesion
Structure / size	"Free-rider" problem
Access and influence	Group legitimacy
Economic groups	Public interest groups
Think tanks	Single-issue groups

**Study and discussion questions:**

1. Discuss the concept of a political interest group. If you were to start an interest group of your own, what issue would it be organized around?
2. Do you agree with Madison that "numerous divisions in American society [are] dangerous to a healthy republic?" What do you think of Calhoun's notion of a "concurrent majority?"
3. What do you think of Dahl's thesis (the classic statement of pluralism) that "American democracy is not a rule by numerical majority but a rule by combinations of groups?" How, if at all, does this undermine other theories of American government, particularly elite theory?
4. The Heritage Foundation is a well-known conservative interest group. Their proposals for the next four years are outlined in a document titled "Project 2025" and it has come under increased scrutiny as we head toward the November presidential elections. C.J. Polychroniou sees this document as a blueprint for proto fascism. Is this a fair characterization? How likely is it that such a proposal could go into effect, given the current divisions in the country?
5. How does Klein characterize the "corporate agenda" in the age of globalization? Why does she think that this agenda is a threat to democracy in any meaningful sense?
6. Contemporary political discourse often speaks of "free market democracy" as an ideal that all countries strive to attain. Why would the movements that Klein discusses take issue with this easy equation of democracy and free markets?
7. Discussions of democracy do not usually address the worksite. Why does Bernard think it is important to include workplace relations of power when we consider the foundations of democracy? Analyze her statement that "[u]nionists cannot leave politics alone, because politics will not leave unions alone."

**Readings:**

Heineman. *American Government*, Chapter 7.  
WEB – Readings from the "Political Interest Groups" links.

**Video:** *Golden Rule: The Investment Theory of Politics*