

Timothy M. LaPira and Herschel F. Thomas. *Revolving Door Lobbying: Public Service, Private Influence, and the Unequal Representation of Interests.* Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017. 240 pp. (\$39.95 Cloth, \$39.95 Ebook).

In an era of declining governing capacity and intractable polarization in Congress (Lewallen, Theriault and Jones 2016; Binder 2014), legislative staff increasingly turn to lobby groups for assistance. This tendency injects significant bias into policymaking which is largely unseen if not hidden (Curry 2015). In their thoughtful, comprehensively researched, and interesting book, LaPira and Thomas go far beyond previous studies to describe and analyze the lobbyists that now play an essential role in federal policymaking. In so doing they advance our understanding about the role of expertise and access in lobbying and the nature and effects of the so-called revolving door between government and advocacy.

The authors first put the common metric of revolving-door lobbyists to the test, which it fails. They find that revolving door status is significantly underreported: performing extensive searches of the lobbyists in their sample to develop comprehensive employment histories, they find that only 42 percent of revolving door lobbyists correctly identified themselves as covered officials. In 2008, 52 percent of lobbyists had been through the revolving door. The average lobbyist had 0.93 government jobs. And, the more federal jobs a lobbyist has had, the more money he or she earns. The median reported revenue of revolving-door lobbyists is 3.3 times the median for conventional lobbyists who nonetheless work on contract for multiple clients.

The authors then present two Weberian ideal-type lobbyists: the K Street Kingpin and the Librarian. The former is a contract lobbyist for a top Washington lobbying firm. He is a policy generalist, representing a wide variety of industries, and counts himself among the “process people” who understand policymaking as an activity rather than the detailed substance of policy content. The Librarian is an in-house lobbyist for an association of librarians. She has a relevant Masters degree and relocated to Washington to take this job, in contrast to the Kingpin who formerly worked as a top staffer for a senator. What the Kingpin lacks in policy information, he makes up for in process knowledge, and vice-versa for the Librarian. Yet the Kingpin earns many times the salary of the Librarian. What explains such a large differential for doing very similar work?

From this puzzle, the authors develop a novel theory about the purpose of lobbying. They argue that from the higher income of the Kingpins that lobbyists’ clients value certain attributes more than others. In particular, the Kingpin’s familiarity with the people and activities of lawmaking enables him to anticipate, and therefore avoid, problems that might befall his clients. (The authors do not specify what these problems might be, but I assume the hazards are financial costs.) The Librarian, meanwhile, lobbies about e-government and Patriot Act transparency. While she has her finger on the pulse of legislation that relates to these narrow issues, the Librarian does not have sufficient experience in Washington policymaking to identify threats before they happen. The authors argue that the Kingpin is more valued on Capitol Hill because he can provide *political insurance* to clients. Importantly, for LaPira and Thomas lobbying is not the transmission of public will to government as part of the “influence production process” (Lowery and Gray 2004). Lobbying is instead consumption by those with the resources

to invest in the reduction of political uncertainty. *This* is why policy outcomes better represent the preferences of wealthy interest groups.

The authors argue that the Kingpin's process knowledge is especially important in the current era of partisan acrimony and gridlock. Must-pass bills such as the Wall Street bailout (pushed through by the Bush administration), and routine reauthorizations such as the Farm Bill (lobbied on by 847 lobbyists, only 3 percent of which represented agribusiness), are prioritized over more substantive bills. In such cases the policy alternatives (Kingdon 1984) are well known; what is needed is political will. Getting the requisite number of votes requires political intelligence, not policy information. Thus, Kingpins are more likely than Librarians to be deployed in *crucial moments on bills that are likely to pass*. Indeed, as bills move further toward passage, the proportion of the lobbyists on the bill who are revolvers increases.

Consequently, Kingpins' and revolvers' clients have more opportunities to influence policy outcomes than do Librarians. For the 10 most-lobbied bills in 2008, revolving door lobbyists outnumbered conventional lobbyists in every case but one, and at high levels: On each of the top 10 bills, an average of 72 percent of active lobbyists were revolvers. This is profound new evidence that particular lobbyists—those who have been through the revolving door—have greater influence than others.

LaPira's and Thomas's theory explains their analytical findings from lobbying disclosure reports and that, relative to other lobbyists, revolvers tend to represent more and more diverse clients and issues, are more likely to represent business interests, and focus on bills at the top of party leaders' agendas. Further, the more diverse the governmental experience of a revolving door lobbyist, the more likely they are to represent a diverse set of clients and broader issue domains.

The unique theoretical contribution of *Revolving Door Lobbying* is to show that frequently, business interests hire lobbyists who are process specialists in order to reduce political uncertainty. The authors' most salient finding is that revolvers are more likely than conventional lobbyists to work on bills that become law because it means that revolving-door lobbyists and the wealthier, business interests they tend to represent have considerably more opportunities to influence public policy. In addition to these remarkable and compelling advances in theory and scientific evidence, the literature is thoroughly and precisely cited, the writing is clear enough for undergraduates, and the analysis is sophisticated but simply presented.

Often, the authors discuss contract lobbyists rather than revolving door lobbyists, though they are not the same: half of revolvers work in-house and 30 percent of conventional lobbyists work on contract. The ambiguity is amplified by the authors' use of the Kingpin, who is both contract lobbyist and revolving-door lobbyist; as such it is not clear if he focuses on process because he formerly worked in Congress or because he is employed by a lobbying firm that has many clients. Yet this is a critique of minor importance since in their analyses, the authors generally distinguish—more precisely than anyone has done before—lobbyists who are documented revolvers from conventional lobbyists. Moreover, the results support the theory and justify the treatment of revolvers as process specialists.

The authors' notion of lobbying as political insurance is a welcome and compelling theory that moves beyond competing arguments in the literature that lobbying is a corrupting force in policymaking or that lobbying has minimal influence. Given the high and underreported

rate of revolving-door lobbying, and especially given the growing reliance on lobbyists for research and even legislative language (McKay 2018), *Revolving Door Lobbying* represents a timely and laudable piece of research that is well-deserving of the attention it is getting.

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