

The rich have more political clout in states, but stricter lobbying rules can narrow gap

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State legislators are more attentive to wealthy citizens' political opinions compared to poor citizens' opinions when making policy decisions, but stricter regulations on professional lobbyists can promote more equal political representation, according to a Baylor University study.

"Stricter lobbying laws are an important tool for ensuring that citizens' opinions receive more equal consideration when elected officials make important [policy decisions](#)," said researcher Patrick Flavin, Ph.D., assistant professor of political science in Baylor's College of Arts & Sciences.

The study—"Lobbying Regulations and Political Equality in the American States"—is published online in the journal *American Politics Research*.

Flavin used public opinion survey data from the 2000, 2004 and 2008 National Annenberg Election Surveys and compared them to state policies to create a measure of how closely income and political influence relate within each state. He then ranked the states in terms of the equality of political representation. States in which rich and poor citizens' opinions are represented relatively equally score high on the rankings, while states in which the lawmakers almost exclusively represent rich citizens' opinions score low.

The top two states in terms of the equality of political representation are Montana at No. 1 and Minnesota at No. 2, with Alabama and Mississippi

coming in at the low end, at No. 47 and No. 48 respectively. (Hawaii and Alaska were not included in the rankings because of a lack of public opinion survey data for those states.)

"One common explanation for why affluent citizens tend to be more successful at getting their opinions translated into policy is that industries that tend to share their opinions—such as finance and real estate—are well represented among professional lobbyists in Washington and statehouses across the nation," Flavin said. "In contrast, disadvantaged citizens do not enjoy the same level of representation among professional lobbyists, and correspondingly exert less influence over the policy decisions made by elected officials."

In light of this reality, Flavin investigated whether states that impose more restrictions on the activities of professional lobbyists tend to represent citizens' opinions more equally. Specifically, he looked at the number of different groups required to register as lobbyists, the frequency of reporting requirements, the types of activities that are prohibited and disclosure requirements.

His statistical analysis revealed that states with more restrictions on professional lobbyists tend to be the most politically equal in terms of representing the political opinions of both the rich and the poor. Flavin explains that "unlike the federal government in Washington where one uniform set of laws governs lobbyists, the states vary, sometimes dramatically. Therefore, we can learn a lot about what types of laws and institutions promote greater political equality by focusing our attention on the [states](#)."

Provided by Baylor University

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