

## Discussion Questions for 17.317, U.S. Social Policy

### **Part II: Preferences, Participation, and Representation**

- This section of the course focuses on the mass public – what does the public want, who participates in politics, and whose preferences get expressed in public policy. We begin by looking at political participation, which is a key way in which citizens voice their preferences.

### **Interest Groups II: Business and Labor**

- The discussion last time focused on interest groups in general. This session is on two types of interest groups that have some of the biggest impacts on social policy: business and labor.
- Labor unions: What is their function? What has been the trend in labor unions over time? How do they try to influence policy outcomes?
- What are the implications for politics of the decline of unions? What other entities mobilize working class people?
- Why are unionization rates higher in other countries? What would cultural or institutional arguments look like? How does the legal status of unions differ? What is the role of American federalism in shaping the possibilities for the union movement?
- What are the pros and cons for unions of working mainly through the Democratic party? What are the implications of “capture” by one party? How contrast unions’ situation with that of senior citizens, a group in play for both parties?
- What about the political preferences of individual union members?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages business has as an interest group?
- What are the major business organizations? How do the preferences of large and small business differ?
- What was the role of business interests in the Clinton health care reform effort of 1993/94
- Interest group wrap-up: how do interest groups operate in the American policymaking system? What are their sources of influence and power? What are challenges that interest groups can face as actors trying to influence policy outcomes?