"A Matter of Great Importance": Interest Groups, the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Supreme Court Confirmation Hearings

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Abstract
As Senator Arlen Specter once explained, the Supreme Court confirmation process is a "matter of great importance" to the president, the nominee, senators, and the public at large. The public cares who sits on the Court, and interest groups play a key role in disseminating information about the nominee and his or her qualifications for the job. In this paper, we focus on one piece of interest groups' involvement in Supreme Court confirmation hearings: their decision to send senators summarized information about the nominees via briefing books. We use a combination of archival research and text analysis to examine the briefing books that organized interests sent to Senator Specter during Robert Bork's nomination, which we then compare with the information provided by "official" sources (the White House) as well as the less formal ones (constituents). Our research suggests that interest groups highlight the controversial areas of a nominee's tenure, while official sources highlight qualifications and constituents speak about the nominee in more general, affective terms.

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