American Government

CHAPTER 9

Interest Groups
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SECTION 1 The Nature of Interest Groups

SECTION 2 Types of Interest Groups

SECTION 3 Interest Groups at Work
• *Interest groups* are private organizations whose members share certain views and work to shape public policy.
The Role of Interest Groups

• *Public policy* includes all of the goals a government sets and the various courses of action it pursues as it attempts to realize these goals.

• Interest groups exist to shape public policy.
Political parties and interest groups differ in three striking respects:

1. in the making of nominations
2. in their primary focus
3. in the scope of their interests
Nominations

• Political parties are responsible for the nominating process, while interest groups hope to influence those nominations.
Primary Focus

• Political parties are interested in winning elections and controlling government, while interest groups are interested in influencing the policies created by government.
Scope of Interest

- Political parties concern themselves with the whole range of public affairs, while interest groups tend to focus on issues that their members are concerned about.
Valuable Functions of Interest Groups

• Interest groups raise awareness of public affairs, or issues that concern the people at large.

• Interest groups represent people who share attitudes rather than those who share geography.
Valuable Functions of Interest Groups (continued)

• Interest groups provide *specialized information* to government agencies and legislators.

• Interest groups are vehicles for *political participation*.
• Interest groups keep tabs on various public agencies and officials.

• Interest groups compete.
Criticisms of Interest Groups

• Some groups have an influence far out of proportion to their size or importance.

• It can be difficult to tell who or how many people are served by a group.
• Groups do not always represent the views of the people they claim to speak for.

• In rare cases, groups use tactics such as bribery, threats, and so on.
1. What is the role of interest groups?
   (a) Raising the interest rate
   (b) Organizing party conventions
   (c) Influencing public policy
   (d) All of the above
2. Which of the following is not a criticism of interest groups?

(a) They keep tabs on public agencies.

(b) They may not represent the views of all of their members.

(c) Some use underhanded tactics.

(d) Some have undue influence.
Reasons for Interest Groups

• Most interest groups have been founded on the basis of an economic interest, especially business, labor, agricultural, and professional interests.

• Some are grounded in geographic area.
Reasons for Interest Groups (continued)

• Some are based on a cause or idea, such as environmental protection.

• Some promote the welfare of certain groups of people, such as retired citizens.

• Some are run by religious organizations.
Representative Jeff Duncan
Third Congressional District of South Carolina
Membership in Labor Unions

Membership in Labor Unions

Percent of U.S. workers

Note: Statistics are for nonfarm employees.

SOURCE: AFL-CIO
A *public-interest group* is an interest group that seeks to institute certain public policies that will benefit all or most of the people in the country, whether or not they belong to that organization.
1. What kind of an interest group is the National Bar Association?

(a) Religious
(b) Professional
(c) Agricultural
(d) Labor Union
2. The Wilderness Society is what type of interest group?

(a) Agricultural
(b) Cause-related
(c) Professional
(d) Public-interest
Influencing Public Opinion

Interest groups reach out to the public for these reasons:

1. To supply information in support of the group’s interests
2. To build a positive image for the group
3. To promote a particular public policy
• *Propaganda* is a technique of persuasion aimed at *influencing individual or group behaviors*.

• Its goal is to create a *particular belief* which may be true or false.
• Propaganda disregards information that does not support its conclusion. *It is not objective.* It presents only one side of an issue.

• Propaganda often relies on name-calling and inflammatory labels.
• **Political Action Committees (PACs)** raise and distribute money to candidates who will further their goals.
Influencing Parties and Elections

Growth of PACs

Number of PACs

Year

Corporate
Labor
Trade/Membership/Health
Non-Connected

SOURCE: Federal Election Commission

Chapter 9, Section 3
John Roberts
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
Lobbying is any activity by which a group pressures legislators and influences the legislative process.
Lobbying carries beyond the legislature. It is brought into government agencies, the executive branch, and even the courts.

Nearly all important organized interest groups maintain lobbyists in Washington, D.C.
Lobbyists at Work

Lobbyists use several techniques:

- They send articles, reports, and other information to officeholders.
- They testify before legislative committees.
Lobbyists at Work (continued)

Lobbyists use several techniques:

• They bring “grass-roots” pressures to bear through email, letters, or phone calls from constituents.

• They rate candidates and publicize the ratings.

• They make campaign contributions.
1. What is propaganda?
   (a) A bill that has been vetoed
   (b) A one-sided argument
   (c) An objective description
   (d) A scientific paper
Section 3 Review

2. How do lobbyists influence legislators?
   (a) Campaign contributions
   (b) “Grass roots” campaigns
   (c) Publicized ratings
   (d) All of the above