

CHAPTER 11

Interest Groups

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the wide variety of interest groups that operate in the United States and to assess their impact on the political system. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, the student should be able to do each of the following:

1. Explain why the characteristics of United States society and government encourage a multiplicity of interest groups.
2. Indicate the historical conditions under which interest groups are likely to form and specify the kinds of organizations Americans are most likely to join.
3. Describe relations between leaders and rank-and-file members of groups, including why members' priorities may not determine the leaders' actions.
4. Describe several methods that interest groups use to formulate and carry out their political objectives, especially the lobbying techniques used to gain public support. Explain why courts have become an important forum for public-interest groups.
5. List the laws regulating conflict of interest and describe the problems involved with revolving door government employment. Describe the balance between the First Amendment's freedom of expression and the need to prevent corruption in the political system.

OVERVIEW

Interest groups in the United States are more numerous and more fragmented than those in nations such as Great Britain, where the political system is more centralized. The goals and tactics of interest groups reflect not only the interests of their members but also the size of the groups, the incentives with which they attract supporters, and the role of their professional staffs. Because of the difficulty of organizing large numbers of people, a group purporting to speak for mass constituencies will often have to provide material benefits to members or acquire an affluent sponsor. The chief source of interest group influence is information; public support, money, and the ability to create "trouble" are also important. The right to lobby is protected by the Constitution, but the tax and campaign finance laws impose significant restrictions on how money may be used.

CHAPTER OUTLINE WITH KEYED-IN RESOURCES

- I. Explaining the proliferation of interest groups
 - A. Why interest groups are common in the U.S.
 1. Many kinds of interest groups in the country mean that there are many different interests
 2. Constitution provides many access points to government
 3. Political parties are so close so interests work directly on government
- II. The birth of interest groups (THEME A: HISTORY AND INTEREST-GROUP FORMATION)
 - A. Periods of rapid growth
 1. 70 percent of Washington-based groups have established their D.C. office since the 1970s
 2. 1770s—independence groups
 3. 1800s—religious associations, antislavery movement
 4. 1800s—trade unions, Grange, fraternal organizations

5. ⑥ 1880s, 1890s—business associations
 6. ⑥ _____-business and professional associations, charitable organizations
 7. ⑦ _____-environmental, consumer, political reform organizations
- B. Factors explaining the rise of interest groups
1. Broad economic developments create new interests, redefine old interests
 - a) Farmers produce cash crops in unstable markets instead of merely subsistence farming
 - b) ⑧ _____ industries established, creating a need for mass-membership unions
 2. Government policy itself
 - a) Wars create veterans, who demand benefits
 - b) Encouraged formation of American Farm Bureau Federation, professional associations
 3. Emergence of strong leaders, usually from a ⑨ _____ movement; drawn to need for change and inspired by political and religious doctrine
 - a) Religious revival of 1830s and 1840s, and creation of ⑩ _____ organization
 - b) 1890–1920, college-educated middle class increased in size
 - c) ⑪ _____ college enrollments more than doubled and civil rights and anti-war movements were also influential
 4. Expanding role of government—creates policies of concern to groups
- III. Kinds of organizations (THEME B: BIAS IN THE GROUP PROCESS AND KINDS OF ORGANIZATIONS)
- A. ⑫ _____: any organization that seeks to influence public policy; two kinds: institutional and membership interests
- B. Institutional interests
1. Defined: individuals or organizations representing other organizations
 2. Types
 - a) Business firms: example, General Motors
 - b) Trade or governmental associations
 3. Concerns—bread-and-butter issues of concern to their clients
 4. Other interests—governments, foundations, universities
- C. ⑬ _____ interests
1. Americans join some groups more frequently than citizens in other nations
 - a) Social, business, professional, veterans', charitable—same rate as elsewhere
 - b) Unions—less likely to join
 - c) Religious, political, civic groups—more likely to join
 - d) Greater sense of political efficacy, civic duty seems to explain tendency to join civil groups
- D. ⑭ _____ to join
1. Solidary incentives—pleasure, ⑮ _____
 - a) Solidary incentives require organizations to structure themselves as coalitions of small local units
 - b) Facilitated by the importance of ⑯ _____ governments in the U.S.
 - c) Examples: ⑰ _____; (LWV), NAACP, Rotary, Parent-Teacher Association, American Legion
 2. ⑱ _____ incentives—money, things, services
 - a) Organization may also influence how laws are administered to bring benefits to members
 - b) Examples: farm organizations, ⑳ _____
 3. ⑲ _____ incentives—goal/purpose of the organization itself
 - a) Though this group also benefits nonmembers, people join because:
 - (1) They are passionate about the goal(s) of the organization
 - (2) They have a strong sense of ㉑ _____
 - (3) Cost of joining is minimal

- b) ²² _____ interest groups—appeal of coherent and, often, controversial principles
- c) ²³ _____ interest groups—purpose principally benefits nonmembers (example, Nader groups such as Public Citizen)
- d) Engage in research and bring lawsuits, with liberal or conservative orientation (public-interest law firms, such as ²³ _____ and The Center for Individual Rights)
- e) Publicity important because purposive groups are influenced by mood of the times—they may prosper when the government is ²⁵ _____ to their agenda
- E. The influence of the staff on interest-group policy stances
- ²⁴ Staff influences the group's policy agenda if solidarity or material benefits are more _____ to members (than are purposive goals)
 - Staff opinions may be quite different than members' opinions
- IV. Interest groups and social movements
- A. ²⁷ _____ a widely shared demand for change in the social or political order, either liberal or conservative
- B. The environmental movement
- Effect of a social movement is to ²⁸ _____ the value some people attach to purposive incentives
 - Environmental movement came into being in three eras:
 - ²⁹ 1890s: emergence of conservation as an issue; founding of Sierra Club
 - ³⁰ _____ conservation again popular; Wilderness Society and National Wildlife Federation founded
 - ³¹ _____ environment important again; Environmental Defense Fund and Environmental Action founded
 - Environmental movement highlights general lessons about social movements
 - Movement may spawn many ³¹ _____
 - More extreme organizations will be smaller and more activist
 - ³² More moderate organizations will be larger and less activist
- C. The ³² _____ movement; three kinds of organizations
- Solidary, examples: LWV, Business and Professional Women's Federation
 - Middle class educated women
 - Avoid issues that might divide membership or limit networks (examples: partisanship, abortion)
 - Purposive, examples: NOW, NARAL
 - ³³ _____ positions are taken on divisive issues, highly activist organizations
 - Internal controversy is common
 - Local organizations are highly independent from national organization
 - Material, examples: Women's Equity Action League (WEAL); National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC); National Federation of Republican Women
 - Addresses specific issues of material benefit
 - Not necessarily tied to satisfying the needs of large rank-and-file membership
- D. ³⁴ _____ continued the activism after their social movement died, but sustaining membership is difficult
- Economic changes have not worked to unions' benefit in member recruitment
 - Public approval of unions has declined
 - But unions do offer a mix of benefits and are attracting white-collar employees (example: government workers)
- V. Funds for interest groups
- A. Foundation grants
- One study found that 1/3 of public-interest lobbying groups received more than half of all their funds from foundation grants
 - Many of the groups supported by foundations were law firms that had no members at all
- B. Federal grants and contracts

1. Expansion of federal grants in the 1960s and 1970s benefited interest groups; cutbacks in 1980s hurt them ³³
 2. Money given not for _____, but to support projects
 - a) Providing social services
 - b) Running community projects
 3. Very difficult to tell whether grants are used effectively or not
- C. Direct mail
1. Unique to modern interest groups
 2. Through the use of computers, mail is sent directly to a specialized audience
 3. But this approach is also expensive—must generate checks from at least 2 percent of the people contacted
 4. Techniques
 - a) ³⁶ Teaser on the envelope
 - b) _____
 - c) ³⁷ _____
 - d) Personalization of the letter
- VI. The problem of bias
- A. Reasons for belief in upper-class bias
1. Those who are more ³⁸ _____ are more likely to join and be active
 2. Business/professional groups more numerous and better financed than those representing minorities, consumers, or the disadvantaged
- B. These facts do not decide the issue
1. Describe inputs to the political system but not who eventually wins or loses on particular issues
 2. Business groups are often divided among themselves
- C. Important to ask what the bias is ³⁹
1. Many conflicts are among upper-middle class, politically active
 2. Resource differentials are clues, not conclusions about the outcomes of political conflicts
- VII. The activities of interest groups (THEME C: INTEREST GROUPS IN ACTION)
- A. Information ⁴⁰
1. Supplying _____ information the single most important tactic of interest groups
 2. Detailed, current information at a premium and can build (or destroy) a legislator – lobbyist relationship
 3. Most effective on narrow, technical issues—links to client politics
 4. Officials also need political cues regarding what values are at stake and how that fits with their own political beliefs—so groups may establish informal coalitions based on their general political ideology
 5. Rating systems are intended to generate support or opposition for legislators
- B. Public support: the rise of the new politics ⁴¹
1. _____ strategy previously most common—face-to-face contact between lobbyist and member of Hill staff ⁴²
 2. Increasing use of _____ strategy—grassroots mobilization of the issue public (effects of individualistic Congress, modern technology)
 3. Politicians dislike controversy, so work with interest group they agree with
 4. Lobbyists' key targets: the undecided legislator or bureaucrat
 5. Some groups attack their likely allies to embarrass them
 6. Legislators sometimes buck public opinion, unless the issue is very important and would cost them an election
 7. Some groups try for grassroots support
- C. Money and PACs ⁴³
1. Money is the _____ effective way to influence politicians
 2. Campaign finance reform law of 1973 had two effects:
 - a) Restricted amount interests can give to candidates

- b) Made it legal for corporations and unions to create PACs that could make donations
3. Rapid growth in PACs has probably not led to vote buying
- More money is available on all sides of the issues
 - Members of Congress take money but still can decide how to vote
 - Members are establishing their own _____, to advance their political ambitions
4. Almost any organization can create a PAC
- Over half of the PACs are sponsored by corporations, one-tenth by unions, and remainder varies
 - Recent increase in ideological PACs: one-third _____, two-thirds _____
5. Ideological PACs raise more money, but raising the money also consumes it, so less is available to give to campaigns and candidates
6. _____ In 2003-2004, unions and business/professional organizations gave the most
7. _____ get the most PAC money
- Labor PACs almost exclusively give to _____
 - Business PACs split money between Democrats and Republicans
 - Both parties are dependent on PAC money
8. PACs provide only one-third of the money spent by House candidates
9. No systematic evidence that PAC money influences votes in Congress
- Most members vote their ideology and with their constituents
 - When an issue is of little concern to voters and ideology provides little guidance, there is a slight correlation between PAC contributions and votes, but that may be misleading
 - PAC money may influence politics in other ways, like access or committee actions
 - _____ PAC money most likely to influence "client politics"
- D. The _____
- Federal government workers leave to take more lucrative positions in private industry (lobbying, consulting, executive positions)
 - May give private interests a way to improperly influence government decisions
 - Promise of future jobs to officials in exchange for acting in corporate interest
 - Person who has left uses personal contacts in Washington for favorable treatment
 - Deaver/Nofziger examples (Reagan administration)
 - 1988 Defense Department investigation
 - Agencies differ in vulnerability to outside influences
 - _____: may have judgment about new drugs clouded by promise of lucrative positions if drug is approved
 - _____ may have better chance at lucrative position later if they are vigorous at prosecuting antitrust suits
- E. Trouble
- Disruption has always been part of United States politics, and has been used by groups of varying ideologies, etc.
 - Tactics have been more frequently used since the 1960s, becoming more generally accepted
 - Goals:
 - Disrupt the institution and force negotiations
 - Enlist the support of others, who will also press for negotiations
 - Create martyrs to draw public concern and support
 - Often create no-win situations for public officials, who are criticized whether they negotiate or not
- VIII. Regulating interest groups
- A. Protection by First Amendment
- 1946 Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act accomplished little in requiring registration and financial reports

- a) Supreme Court restricted application to direct contact with members of Congress
 - b) activity not restricted
 - c) No staff to enforce law by reviewing registration or reports
2. 1995 act provided a broader definition of lobbying and tightened reporting requirements
 - a) Requires reports twice a year, including client names, expenditures, issues
 - b) Still exempted grassroots mobilization
 - c) No enforcement agency established, but Justice Department may undertake investigations
 - d) Tax-exempt, nonprofit organizations cannot receive federal grants if they lobby
- B. Other significant restraints
1. Tax code; nonprofits lose tax-exempt status if a “substantial part” of its activities involve lobbying
 2. Campaign-finance laws limit donations by individual PACs

WEB RESOURCES

Virtually every interest group has a website to present its positions and priorities, and to recruit members and fundraise. A number of sites are also excellent information resources, though it is always important to remember that these organizations are engaged in advocacy and therefore will be presenting their particular interpretations. For listings of major public-interest law firms and Washington think tanks, see the boxed text in this chapter of the text.

To locate the organization that you are interested in see the *Encyclopedia of Associations* for up-to-date information about its name and pertinent characteristics (The *Encyclopedia* is also available online at <http://library.dialog.com/bluesheets/html/bl0114.html>). Then, enter the name into a ‘Net search engine and start surfing. You should note that most websites are maintained by the national office; for information from state and local offices, you may need to make direct contact with their personnel.

Developing an annotated bibliography of web-based resources in a particular area of politics or policy can be an excellent assignment for students, as it allows them to critically assess the content of the pages and seek out a diverse set of organizations.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

What are the differences between interest groups and political parties? Ask students to think through the issue networks that are associated with partisan politics. Encourage them to look beyond the Democratic and Republican Parties to the various third parties. Can we really distinguish between interest groups and political parties? Is it fair to say that increased power for one set of organizations tends to decrease the power of the other set?

Do interest groups corrupt the political process? Political participation is much more common and much more extensive among those with greater economic and educational resources. This is certainly true of interest group membership, with some notable exceptions among organizations for veterans and for older citizens. What is the effect of this circumstance on the political process? Is it possible that the class bias is off-set by the presence of public interest groups? Can these difficulties be corrected by regulation of the interest groups and their lobbyists?

Campaign finance as an element in the policy process? Political action committees give most of their support to incumbents and, further, are particularly supportive of incumbents in the majority party. What does this mean for the policy process? What does this mean for patterns of partisan change and continuity in the Congress? In answering this question, remind students that there is little to no direct evidence that campaign donations are related to policy outcomes.

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IMPORTANT TERMS

*ideological interest group	Political organization that attracts members by appealing to their political convictions or principles.
*incentive	Something of value one cannot get without joining an organization.
*material incentive	Many things valued in monetary terms.
*political cue	A signal telling a legislator what values are at stake in a vote, and how that issue fits with his or her own political views or party agenda.
*public-interest lobby	An interest group whose efforts significantly benefit nonmembers.
*purposive incentive	A benefit that comes from serving a cause or principle.
*ratings	Assessment of a legislator's voting record on issues important to an interest group.
*social movement	A widely shared demand for change in some aspect of the social or political order.
*solidary incentive	The sense of pleasure, status, or companionship experienced in small groups.

THEME A: HISTORY AND INTEREST GROUP FORMATION

Instructor Resources

Scott H. Ainsworth, *Analyzing Interest Groups: Group Influence on People and Policies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002.

Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: A Critique*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1967.

Laura Cohen Bell, *Warring Factions: Interest Groups, Money, and the New Politics of Senate Confirmation*. Ohio State University Press, 2002.

Anthony Downs, *Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 1990.

Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1969.

Mancur Olson, Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.

E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People*. Hinsdale, IL: The Dryden Press, 1975.

David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981.

Summary

An interest group is any organization that seeks to influence public policy. Interest groups are found in many societies, but there is an unusually large number of them in the United States. This proliferation is a result of:

1. The great number of social cleavages along income, occupational, religious, racial, and cultural lines.
2. The United States' constitutional system, which stimulates political activity, including interest group activity. Because of federalism and the separation of powers, there exist many different centers in which important decisions are made. Therefore many different interest groups can exercise some power. In Britain, on the other hand, groups are fewer in number and larger in scale to match the centralized governmental structure.
3. The decline of political parties, which has made the wielding of power by interest groups more practical (because the system is more fragmented) and seemingly more needed. In European countries with strong parties, interest groups—such as labor unions and professional societies—tend to work through the parties.

There are two kinds of interest groups: *institutional* and *membership*. The former are organizations representing other groups. Typical institutional interests are business, governments, foundations, and universities. Membership groups are supported by the activities and contributions of individual citizens.

Since the 1960s, the number of interest groups has increased rapidly. There have been other historical eras of interest-group proliferation. These include the 1770s (pro-independence groups), the 1830s and 1840s (religious and antislavery groups), the 1860s (trade unions, the Grange, and fraternal organizations), the 1880s and 1890s (business organizations), the 1900s and 1910s (a vast array of organizations), and the 1960s (environmental, consumer, and political reform organizations). Interest groups do not, therefore, arise spontaneously or automatically out of natural social processes. At least four factors help explain the rise of interest groups.

1. *Broad economic developments*. For example, the rise of mass-production industry encouraged the rise of mass-membership labor unions.
2. *Government policy*. Public programs create constituencies with an incentive to organize to maintain their benefits. Veterans' benefits create veterans' groups; the licensing of professionals by state governments gives societies of doctors and lawyers a strong reason to exist. Sometimes the government supports the formation of organizations (the American Farm Bureau Federation is an example) by providing benefits to their members. Sometimes government policies are designed to make private interest-group formation easier, as was the case with the passage of laws in the 1930s to aid labor.
3. *Religious and moralistic movements*. These produce people, frequently young people, who are willing to form organizations, often at large personal cost. The religious revivals of the 1830s and 1840s thus fed the antislavery crusade, and the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s likewise produced an organizational explosion.

4. The more activities government undertakes, the more interest groups form as a response to those activities. Accordingly, public-interest lobbies have increased since 1970, when government became active in civil rights, social welfare, and consumer rights.

Discussion Questions

1. Why have interest groups grown stronger as the parties have grown weaker? Could this inverse relationship be changed, with both interest groups and parties growing more powerful? Or are there incentives for these organizations to compete? Could interest groups and political parties both grow progressively weaker?
2. Which have been more important in the formation of interest groups: changes in the economic structure of society or changes in people's ideas and beliefs? What evidence does the text give on this point? Can you think of other examples?
3. The text contends that governmental policy encourages the growth and activity of interest groups; programs create constituencies. What about the reverse—do interest groups create governmental programs? Could interest-group activity be responsible for the expansion of government itself? In *The End of Liberalism*, Theodore Lowi presented the theory that public policy is formulated by government bureaucrats working cooperatively (and even exclusively) with particular congressional committees and interest groups. Has the complexity of contemporary society shifted the advantage to interest groups?

THEME B: BIAS IN THE GROUP PROCESS AND KINDS OF ORGANIZATIONS

Instructor Resources

Robert M. Alexander, *Rolling the Dice with State Initiatives: Interest Group Involvement in Ballot Campaigns*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002.

Gene M. Grossman and Elhanan Helpman, *Special Interest Politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

R. Allen Hays and Steven A. Shull, *Who Speaks for the Poor: National Interest Groups and Social Policy*. Garland Publishing, 2001.

John B. Judis, *The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of the Public Trust*. Routledge, 2001.

John R. Wright, *Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence*. Longman, 2002.

Summary

If it is true that America has more interest groups than other nations, does it follow that more Americans belong to groups? The answer is “no” for unions and for business, professional, and charitable organizations. It is “yes” for civil and political organizations and religious associations. Americans' willingness to join civic or political organizations probably reflects a greater sense of civic duty and political efficacy here.

Interest group joiners tend to be high-status individuals. They have the income, the free time, and the wide range of interests necessary for group activity. Some believe that interest-group activity therefore has an upper-class bias. However, this bias must be considered in light of political outputs (who wins and who loses in particular issues at particular times) and internal divisions within groups (farmers, for example). There are major opinion cleavages among elites. Furthermore, some organizations of

otherwise disadvantaged people have considerable political influence (the NAACP or consumer groups, for example), whereas others (taxpayer associations or pro-gun control groups) are relatively poorly organized and ineffective. However, interest groups representing business and the professions seem more influential and better financed than groups representing the poor, consumers, and minorities.

Furthermore, we cannot assume that what an interest group does in the political arena is simply the expression of the interests of its members. Every political organization has an external political strategy and an internal recruitment strategy. These may be different or even in conflict. The active support of labor unions for civil rights legislation in spite of the opposition or skepticism of union members, and the consistently leftist positions of the National Council of Churches of Christ, which represents a number of fairly conservative Protestants (many of them southerners), are examples. Whether an organization's political position will represent its members' interests will depend on at least four factors.

1. *The homogeneity of the group.* The United States Chamber of Commerce consists of many different types of businesses and thus can say little or nothing about tariffs.
2. *People's motives for joining.* As long as union members are satisfied with the union's performance on bread-and-butter issues, and as long as Protestant churchgoers receive spiritual or social satisfaction in local congregations, the national AFL-CIO and the National Council of Churches of Christ can do pretty much as they please. Thus members motivated by solidary or material incentives will give great discretion to the staff to pursue their own purposive goals.
3. *The size of the staff.* Organizations with large staffs are more likely to take political positions in accordance with staff beliefs. Furthermore, staffs will tend to have distinct views, either liberal/left (National Council of Churches of Christ) or conservative/right (American Farm Bureau Federation).
4. *The level of militance and activity of the membership.* Members of some organizations, such as the John Birch Society or Greenpeace, tend to be passionately convinced of the rightness of particular policies. Leaders of these organizations will not find members indifferent or easily satisfied, and they will be forced to take strong stands—perhaps even stands they would prefer to avoid. *Social movements* also create dedicated interest groups, as exemplified by civil rights, feminist, and environmental groups.

Groups do not necessarily represent the views of their members. And large constituencies (consumers, or women, or taxpayers) are particularly hard to organize. This is not because such people are apathetic but because of the free-rider problem. No single individual's membership perceptibly affects the likelihood that the group will succeed in achieving its goals, yet if it does achieve its goals, every person in the class represented will share in the benefits, regardless of whether he or she was actually a member. The average individual has virtually no incentive to join.

Organizations may overcome this problem by supplying services to individual members, in addition to engaging in political activity. The Illinois Farm Bureau and American Association of Retired Persons follow this strategy. Groups such as Common Cause or Ralph Nader's Public Citizen may raise large amounts of money through *direct mail*. (Organizations that make their appeals to broad, controversial principles are termed *ideological interest groups*.)

Instructor's Note: This Theme works well with the *How Things Work* box, Conflict of Interest.

Discussion Questions

1. Which incentive—material, purposive, solidary—is routinely most important in your decisions to join an interest group? Why? Does this lead you to pay greater attention to the group's external political strategy or to its internal recruitment strategy?

2. Explore the reasons why an interest group's external political strategy and internal recruitment strategy may appear contradictory. Can an interest group confronting these circumstances be successful? Why? What leadership skills are required to direct an interest group experiencing these tensions?
3. Do you belong to any groups for purely purposive reasons? Are you a free rider in relation to any interest groups? Weigh the costs and benefits associated with group membership. What ethical obligations should each citizen confront as a potential participant in public-interest groups?

THEME C: INTEREST GROUPS IN ACTION

Instructor Resources

Jeffrey M. Berry, *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999.

Paul S. Herrnson, Ronald G. Shaiko, and Clyde Wilcox, *The Interest Group Connection: Electioneering, Lobbying, and Policymaking*, 2nd ed. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 2002.

Ronald J. Hrebenar, Robert C. Benedict, and Matthew J. Burbank, *Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Political Campaigns*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999.

Kevin W. Hula, *Lobbying Together: Interest Group Coalitions in Legislative Politics*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999.

Brian Anse Patrick, *The National Rifle Association and the Media: The Motivating Force of Negative Coverage*. Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.

Alan Rosenthal, *The Third House: Lobbyists and Lobbying in the States*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2001.

Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, *Interest Groups in American Campaigns: The New Face of Electioneering*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1998.

Charles R. Shipan, *Designing Judicial Review: Interest Groups, Congress, and Communications Policy*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Summary

Interest groups attempt to influence policy by supplying public officials with things they want. These things include:

1. *Credible information.* This may include policy information to allow a legislator to take a position on an issue or technical information needed to implement a policy. When the Federal Energy Administration was trying to allocate scarce oil and gasoline supplies, it discovered that the information it needed was possessed only by the oil companies. An interest group is most powerful when the issue is narrow and technical and there are no competing interest groups to supply competing information. Finally, supplying information may involve *political cues* that will allow a public official to line up on the liberal or conservative side of an issue.
2. *Public support.* Grassroots mobilization is a tactic chosen by an increasing number of interest groups. For example, environmental interest groups have successfully mobilized support for and against legislators with the "Dirty Dozen" campaign. Also known as "indirect lobbying" or "outsider lobbying," this tactic works best when issues carry great emotional significance. Otherwise, members of Congress generally hear what they want to hear and deal with interest groups that agree with them.

3. *Money.* Interest groups can establish political action committees to finance political campaigns, they can lobby Congress to reduce or increase the appropriations for government agencies, and they can provide jobs for former government officials (the revolving door). To obtain money beyond member dues, interest groups have turned to foundation grants (e.g., Ford Foundation), federal grants and contracts, and direct mail solicitation.
4. *Direct action.* Tactics such as protest marches, sit-ins, picketing, and violence have always been part of politics, used by both the left and the right. The object is to disrupt the workings of some institution to force it to negotiate with you, to enlist the support of third parties (for example, the media), or to provoke attacks and arrests so that martyrs are created.

Many policies have been enacted or proposed to regulate interest groups; all must deal with the fact that interest-group activity is a form of political speech protected by the First Amendment. For example, the *Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act of 1946* required interest groups to register with the secretary of the Senate and clerk of the House of Representatives, as well as to file quarterly financial reports. The Supreme Court upheld the law but limited its impact to groups whose “principal purpose” is to influence legislation. Both the 1946 law and the subsequent Supreme Court ruling, therefore, left significant loopholes for interest groups to exploit.

It was not until 1995 that Congress responded to popular concerns with the passage of tighter regulatory legislation. The new law broadened the definition of a lobbyist, thereby requiring more advocates to register with the House and the Senate, and also obliged lobbyists to disclose more information about their clients. Lobbyists must now register if they spend at least 20 percent of their time lobbying and/or are paid \$5,000 or more for lobbying in any six-month period. Corporations and groups must register if they spend more than \$20,000 in any six-month period on their lobbying staff. Having registered, lobbyists must submit biannual reports that list the names of their clients, their income and expenditures, and the issues on which they worked. Although the law did not establish a new enforcement agency, violations may be referred to the Justice Department for investigation. Fines for breaking the law could amount to \$50,000. In addition, a controversial proviso barred those tax-exempt nonprofit groups currently receiving federal funds from lobbying.

Ultimately the most effective restraints on interest-group activity may result from the tax code (which threatens to revoke a group’s tax-exempt status if it engages in substantial amounts of lobbying) and campaign finance laws. Yet interest groups have discovered ways to evade even these restraints. Consider the restriction on campaign contributions. These spending limits can be circumvented by bundling.

Bundling occurs when a PAC solicits funds for a candidate and the donor writes the check for that candidate. All of these checks are then delivered as a “bundle.” The federal campaign records reflect a series of individual donations and the PAC’s role is not in evidence. Bundling has become one of the most common PAC practices and has been used with considerable success. An outstanding practitioner is EMILY’s List, a PAC that supports pro-choice, Democratic women candidates. (The PAC name is an acronym: “Early Money Is Like Yeast”—to complete the phrase, “it makes the dough rise.”) In the 1992 election cycle, EMILY’s List spokespersons claimed to have contributed or bundled \$6.2 million. Thus, even the best regulations may be ineffective barriers against the power of interest groups and PACs. (Also see the chapter on the role of money in campaigning.)

Discussion Questions

1. Information is the primary tactic employed by interest groups. A substantial proportion of the legislation introduced into Congress is written either entirely or in part by interest groups. Why would members of Congress introduce such legislation? Is the public vulnerable to exploitation by powerful groups due to their monopoly over information?

2. Compare and contrast the 1946 and 1995 laws regulating lobbyists. Why is this legislation constitutional? Why is it so difficult for Congress to develop clear standards for legislative lobbying? (Consider how voters, interest-group members, lobbyists, and legislators each view lobbying.)
3. PACs have been called collection agencies for interest groups. They were created to evade laws that forbid corporations and labor unions from giving money “directly” to federal candidates. Why does Congress permit the law to be trampled by allowing the existence of PACs? Do PACs threaten the constitutional order?