

AP American Government

WILSON, CHAPTER 11

Interest Groups



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.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the roles and organization of Congress. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, the student should be able to do each of the following:

- Explain why the characteristics of United States society and government encourage a multiplicity of interest groups.
- Indicate the historical conditions under which interest groups are likely to form and specify the kinds of organizations Americans are most likely to join.
- Describe relations between leaders and rank-and-file members of groups, including why members’ priorities may not determine the leaders’ actions.
- 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.
- 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.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. 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 cleavages in the country mean that there are many different interests
 2. Constitution provides many access points to government
 3. Political parties are weak so interests work directly on government
- II. The birth of interest groups
 - A. Periods of rapid growth

1. 70 percent of Washington-based groups have established their D.C. office since the 1960s.
- B. Factors explaining the rise of interest groups
 1. Broad economic developments create new interests, redefine old interests
 2. Government policy itself
 3. Emergence of strong leaders, usually from a social movement; drawn to need for change and inspired by political and religious doctrine
 4. Expanding role of government—creates policies of concern to groups
- III. Kinds of organizations
 - A. Interest group: 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. Membership 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. Incentives to join
 1. Solidary incentives—pleasure, companionship
 2. Material incentives—money, things, services
 3. Purposive incentives—goal/purpose of the organization itself
 - a) Ideological interest groups—appeal of coherent and, often, controversial principles
 - b) Public interest groups—purpose principally benefits nonmembers (example, Nader groups such as Public Citizen)
- IV. Interest groups and social movements
 - A. Social movement: a widely shared demand for change in the social or political order, either liberal or conservative
 - B. The environmental movement
 1. Environmental movement highlights general lessons about social movements
 - a) Movement may spawn many organizations
 - b) More extreme organizations will be smaller and more activist
 - c) More moderate organizations will be larger and less activist
 - C. The feminist movement; three kinds of organizations
 1. Solidary, examples: LWV, Business and Professional Women's Federation
 2. Purposive, examples: NOW, NARAL
 3. Material, examples: Women's Equity Action League (WEAL); National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC); National Federation of Republican Women
 - D. Unions continued the activism after their social movement died, but sustaining membership is difficult
- V. The activities of interest groups

- A. Information
 - 1. Supplying credible 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
 - 1. Insider strategy previously most common—face-to-face contact between lobbyist and member of Hill staff
 - 2. Increasing use of outsider 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
- Campaign finance rules
 - 1. 1972: Watergate and illegal donations from corporations, unions, and individuals catalyzed change
 - 2. Brought about the 1974 federal campaign reform law and Federal Election Commission (FEC)
 - 3. Reform law
 - a) Set limit on individual donations (\$1,000 per candidate per election)
 - b) Reaffirmed ban on corporate and union donations...
 - c) ...but allowed them to raise money through PACs
 - d) PAC requirements:
 - (1) At least 50 voluntary members
 - (2) Give to at least 5 federal candidates
 - (3) Limited to giving \$5,000 per election per candidate, or no more than \$15,000 per year to any political party
 - e) Primary and general election counted separately for donations
 - f) Public funding for presidential campaigns:
 - (1) Matching funds for presidential primary candidates, who meet fundraising stipulations
 - (2) Full funding for presidential general campaigns, for major party candidates
 - (3) Candidates may decline public funding: in 2004, George W. Bush, John Kerry and Howard Dean did not accept public funding and ran on money they had raised privately
 - (4) Partial funding for presidential general campaigns, for minor party candidates, if you have won at least 5 percent of the vote in the previous election (2000, Reform Party and Green Party candidates, Pat Buchanan and Ralph Nader, each received some funding; neither was eligible in 2004)
 - 4. 1973 reform produced two problems

- a) Independent expenditures: an organization or PAC can spend as much as it wishes on advertising, so long as it is not coordinated with a candidate's campaign
 - b) Soft money: unlimited amounts of money may be given to a political party, so long as a candidate is not named; this money can then be spent to help candidates with voting drives, etc. (2000 election, approximately half a billion dollars in soft money was spent)
- C. A Second Campaign
- 1. Following 2000 election, desire to reform the 1974 law led to the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act; three changes:
 - a) Banned soft money contributions to national parties from corporations and unions after 2002 election
 - b) Raised the limit on individual donations to \$2,000 per candidate per election
 - c) Sharply restricted independent expenditures—corporations, unions, trade associations, nonprofit organizations cannot use their own money for an advertisement referring to a candidate by name, 30 days before a primary and 60 days before a general election
 - 2. Immediately challenged in court as restriction of free speech: Supreme Court upheld almost the entire law
- D. New sources of money
- 1. 527 organizations: a new source of money under the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act
 - a) Designed to permit the kind of soft money expenditures once made by political parties
 - b) Can spend their money on politics so long as they do not coordinate with a candidate or lobby directly for that person
- E. Money and PACs
- 1. Money is the least 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
 - a) More money is available on all sides of the issues
 - b) Members of Congress take money but still can decide how to vote
 - c) Members are establishing their own PACs, to advance their political ambitions
 - 4. Almost any organization can create a PAC
 - a) Over half of the PACs are sponsored by corporations, one-tenth by unions, and remainder varies
 - b) Recent increase in ideological PACs: one-third liberal, two-thirds conservative
 - 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. Incumbents get the most PAC money
 - a) Labor PACs almost exclusively give to Democrats
 - b) Business PACs split money between Democrats and Republicans
 - c) 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
 - a) Most members vote their ideology and with their constituents
 - b) 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
 - c) PAC money may influence politics in other ways, like access or committee actions
 - d) PAC money most likely to influence “client politics”
- F. The “revolving door”
1. Federal government workers leave to take more lucrative positions in private industry (lobbying, consulting, executive positions)
 2. May give private interests a way to improperly influence government decisions
 - a) Promise of future jobs to officials in exchange for acting in corporate interest
 - b) Person who has left uses personal contacts in Washington for favorable treatment
 - (1) Deaver/Nofziger examples (Reagan administration)
 - (2) 1988 Defense Department investigation
- VI.. Regulating interest groups
- A. Protection by First Amendment
1. 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) Grassroots 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