

# AP GOV INTEREST GROUPS REVIEWED!

Government in America (Pearson) Chapter 10

American Government: (Wilson) Chapter 11  
Institutions & Policies

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## ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS

- **Interest group** is a organized group that seeks to pursue policy goals & influence public policy.
  - Provide opportunities for participation
  - Influence how people relate to government & policy-makers
- **Different than political parties**
  - Interest groups do not run candidates for political office
  - **Policy specialists**, not policy generalists
- Rise of the internet and social media make it easier for interest groups to organize and lobby policy makers




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## THEORIES OF INTEREST GROUP POLITICS

- Debate as to whether interest groups bring more benefits or harm to the political process
- 1. **Pluralists** believe that interest groups are a positive in that they link people and government
  - **Group theory of politics**
    - Various groups compete
    - no one interests dominates
    - opposing interests would balance one another
  - Acknowledge
    - Some groups are stronger than others
    - Not all interests get equal attention




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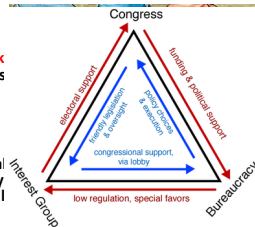
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## THEORIES OF INTEREST GROUP POLITICS

2. **Elitism** argues that interest groups are extremely unequal in their power and influence
  - Very few powerful groups that benefit the wealthy few at the expense of everyone else
  - There may be many different groups, but most do NOT have significant power
3. **Hyperpluralism** argues that many groups competing is bad for governing
  - Too many interest groups creates **gridlock** as the government has too many interests to cater to
    - Increased spending, programs, and regulations
  - **Iron triangle** is when a interest group forms a close relationship with the federal agency (bureaucracy) that oversees policy related to their interest and congressional committees who handle those policies
    - Leads to control of the regulators by the regulated



## WHAT MAKES AN INTEREST GROUP SUCCESSFUL?

1. **Small groups** tend to have an advantage in interest group politics
  - Easier to organize and to *convert potential group members into actual group members*
  - **Collective good** are benefits that can't be denied to nonmembers of a group
  - **"Free rider"** problem is when nonmembers or potential members reap the benefits
2. **Intensity** of support or opposition to an issue increases the chance an interest group will be successful
  - Single-issue groups tend to dislike compromise and are increasingly on the rise. Example: abortion related interest groups
3. **Wealth and financial resources** can help interest groups achieve their goals
  - Financial resources provide access to politicians and political campaigns
    - Inequality of political and economic resources
    - Unequal access to decision makers
  - Wealth doesn't always translate into favorable policy outcomes—system is competitive

## HOW GROUPS TRY TO SHAPE POLICY

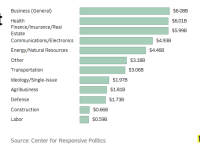
- Interest groups use a variety of ways to try to achieve their policy goals
- **Lobbyists** are used to put pressure and influence political figures
  - Types:
    - Full-time lobbyists
    - Temporary lobbyists
  - Why do Congressional leaders meet with lobbyists?
    - Receive specialized policy knowledge
    - Strategize how to win over votes Congress and get support amongst voters
    - Lobbyists provide ideas & legislative proposals
    - \$\$\$\$



## HOW GROUPS TRY TO SHAPE POLICY

- **Electioneering** is the strategy of providing financial support to candidates friendly to a groups cause and getting members to support them at the polls
  - Interest groups establish **political action committees (PACs)** to donate to candidates
  - Debate: Does PAC money make politicians obligated to pursue the interests of interest groups?
- **Litigation** is the strategy of using the courts and lawsuits to create change
  - Civil Rights Movement battled segregation on constitutional grounds in the courts
  - **Amicus curiae** briefs allow a group to give their opinion on how the court should rule and why
  - **Class action lawsuit**: combining common grievances amongst people into a single lawsuit
- **Going public** is the strategy of mobilizing public opinion to influence policy makers

Lobbying spending by sector, 1998-2014



Source: Center for Responsive Politics



## TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS

- Four distinct types of interest groups:
  - Economic interests
  - Environmental interests
  - Equality interests
  - Consumer / Public interest

## TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS:

- **Economic**: concern over taxes, regulation, subsidies, wages, etc.
  - **Labor Unions**
    - When membership is mandatory: “**Closed shop**”
    - Many states have passed “**right to work laws**”
  - **Corporate groups**
    - Well funded lobbyists and PACs
- **Environmental**: concern over global warming, water quality, etc.



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## TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS:

- **Equality Interests:** concern over issues of racial, gender, sexual orientation justice
  - NAACP sued and won **Brown v. Board of Education** (1954) school desegregation case
  - NOW battling gender discrimination and has fought hard for the Equal Rights Amendment
- **Consumer / Public interest:** concern over issues that they believe will positively impact the **collective good**
  - Whose public interest?




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## UNDERSTANDING INTEREST GROUPS

- Benefits and potential problems of interest-group influence on elections and policy making.
  - “Interest groups may represent very specific or more general interests, and can educate voters and office holders, draft legislation, and mobilize membership to apply pressure on and work with legislators and government agencies.”
  - “interest groups exert influence through long-standing relationships with bureaucratic agencies, congressional committees, and other interest groups; such relationships are described as “iron triangles” and issue networks and they help interest groups exert influence across political party coalitions.”
- Interest groups typically want something from the government
  - Circle of life of interest groups: groups lead to policy and new policy causes new groups to form

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