

Interest Groups

Interest Groups

- Private organization that seek to influence public policy
- Characteristics:
 - Organized structure
 - Shared beliefs/goals
- 1st Amendment protection:
 - *'the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.'*

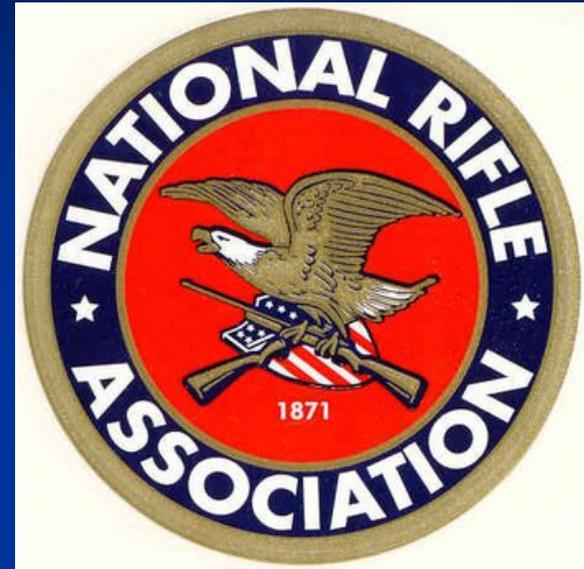
■ Five main functions of *Interest Groups*:

- ***Representation*** → interest of members
- ***Political Participation*** → enable people to participate
- ***Education*** → of members, public, & government officials
 - About issues of interest & why IG goals should be supported
- ***Agenda-building*** → push new issues onto public agenda
 - *Examples: Consumer protection & Veterans' issues*
- ***Program Monitoring*** → watch how laws are administered
 - Assess Federal or State Government regulation

Interest Groups vs. Political Parties

- Interest Groups:

- Narrow Focus
- Issue Driven
- Ideological



- Political Parties:

- Broad Focus
- Election Driven
- Mainstream



Praise vs Criticism

■ Praise:

- Stimulate interest in public affairs
- Represent members with similar interests
- Supply credible information to officials
- Vehicles for political participation
- Keeps tabs on government

■ Criticism:

- Disproportional power compared to group's size/importance
- Hard to tell who is represented
- Use of tactics that would undermine the political system
- Views of only the active minority

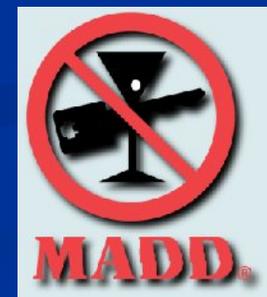
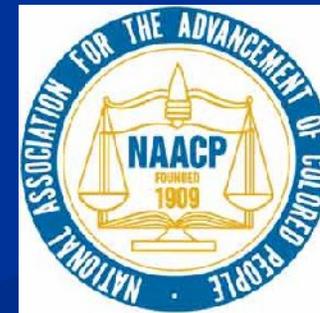
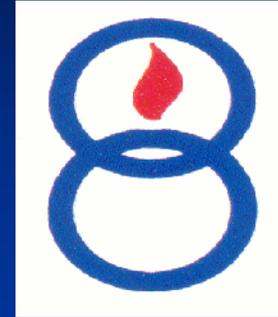
Types of Interest Groups

- Economic – Business:
 - Chamber of Commerce
- Economic – Labor:
 - AFL-CIO
- Economic – Agriculture:
 - Grange
- Profession/Trade:
 - Screen Actors Guild
- Public Interest:
 - Public Citizen
- International:
 - Human Rights Watch



Types of Interest Groups

- Single-Issue:
 - National Right to Life
- Ideological:
 - Conservative Caucus
- Civil Rights:
 - NAACP
- Religious:
 - Christian Coalition
- Government:
 - National Governor's Association
- Environmental:
 - Greenpeace
- Community:
 - MADD



Influencing Public Opinion

- Interest Groups want to achieve the following goals
 1. Supply the public with information the organization thinks the people should have
 2. Build a positive image for a group
 3. Promote a particular public policy

Shaping Policy

- Lobby:
 - Attempt to influence government decisions.
 - Lobbyist
- Electioneering:
 - Funds and campaign support for candidates.
 - PAC's
- Litigation:
 - Civil Case taken to court if legislation is too slow.
- Public Opinion:
 - Appeal to the citizens to apply pressure for the cause.

Supplying Credible Information

- Most Important Tactic
 - Legislators take on many issues and cannot be experts on all
- Lobbyist:
 - Specialists who gather information and present it in a organized, persuasive and factual manner
- Political Cues:
 - Signal telling legislators what is at stake and how that issue fits into his/her own beliefs
- Ratings:
 - Assessment of legislator's voting record on issues important to an interest group
- 'Grassroots' Lobbying:
 - Using the voters to effect change
 - Ex: Letter writing campaigns, demonstrations, protests

Types of *Lobbying*

Direct
Lobbying

Grass-
Roots
Lobbying

Education
Campaigns

Advocacy
Advertising

Direct Lobbying

Trying to influence
public policy
through direct
contact with
government
officials.

Education Campaigns

Interest groups try to mobilize the public through education hoping that the public will demand government action.

Advocacy Advertising

Newspaper, television,
and radio
advertisements that
promote an interest
group's political views.

Grass-Roots Lobbying

Trying to influence public policy indirectly by mobilizing an interest group's membership and the broader public to contact elected officials.

Other Types of Lobbying

**Astroturf
Lobbying**

&

**Civil
Disobedience**

Astroturf Lobbying

Efforts, usually led by interest groups (*or Corporations*) with deep financial pockets, to create synthetic grass-roots movements by aggressively encouraging voters to contact their elected officials about specific issues.

Civil Disobedience

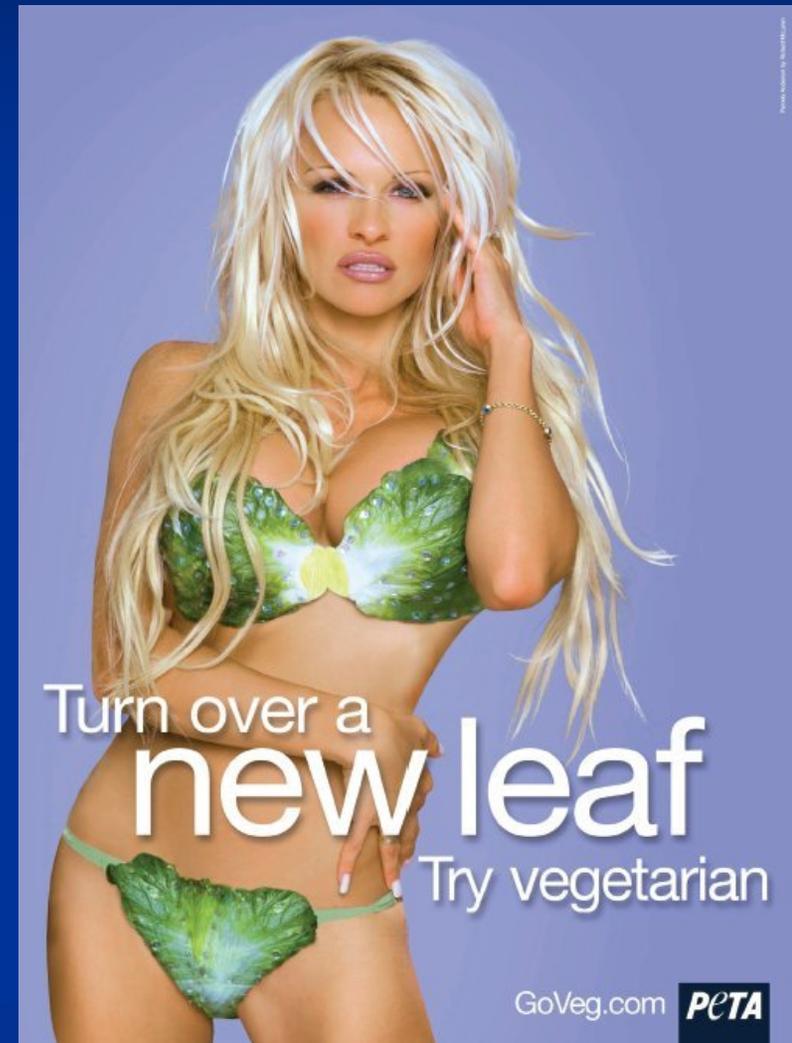
Civil disobedience is the practice of breaking laws in order to pressure legislators to change perceived unjust laws.

Lobby Regulation

- Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act: 1946
 - Required registration and quarterly financial reports
 - Supreme Court restricted its application to direct contact with Congressmen
 - 'Grassroot' activity was not restricted
 - Little effect
 - No staff to enforce the law
- Lobbying Disclosure Act: 1995
 - Tightened registration and disclosure requirements
 - Broader definition of Lobbyists
- Tax Code
 - Non-profits lose tax exemption and deduction if a 'substantial part' of group activities is lobbying
- Campaign Finance Law
 - PAC is limited to \$5,000 contribution on a candidate

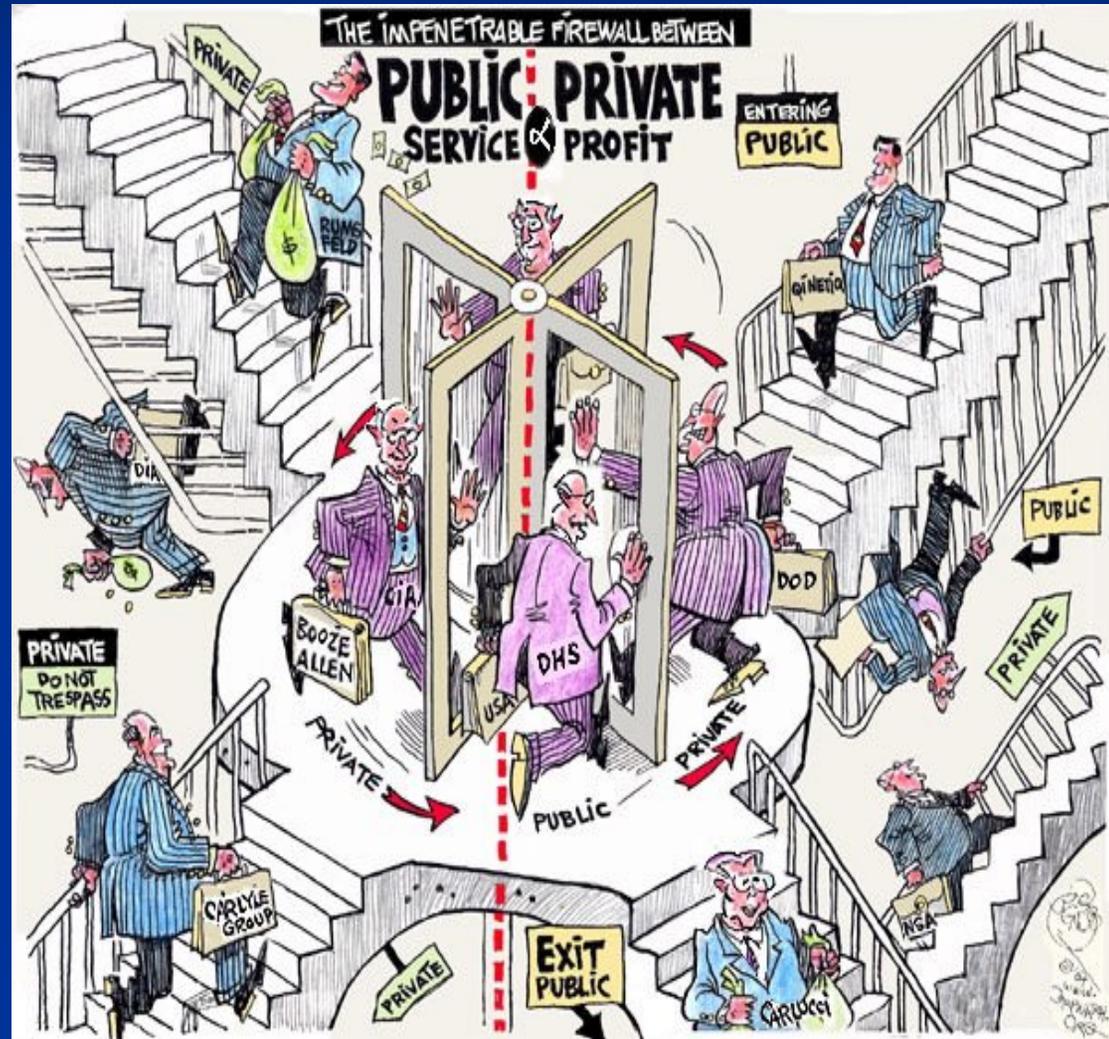
Propaganda

- Persuasion technique used to create a particular belief
 - ‘Name Calling’
 - Attach labels
 - ‘Card-stacking’
 - Present one side
 - ‘Symbols’
 - Uncle Sam
 - ‘Testimonials’
 - Endorsements
 - ‘Bandwagon’
 - Follow the crowd

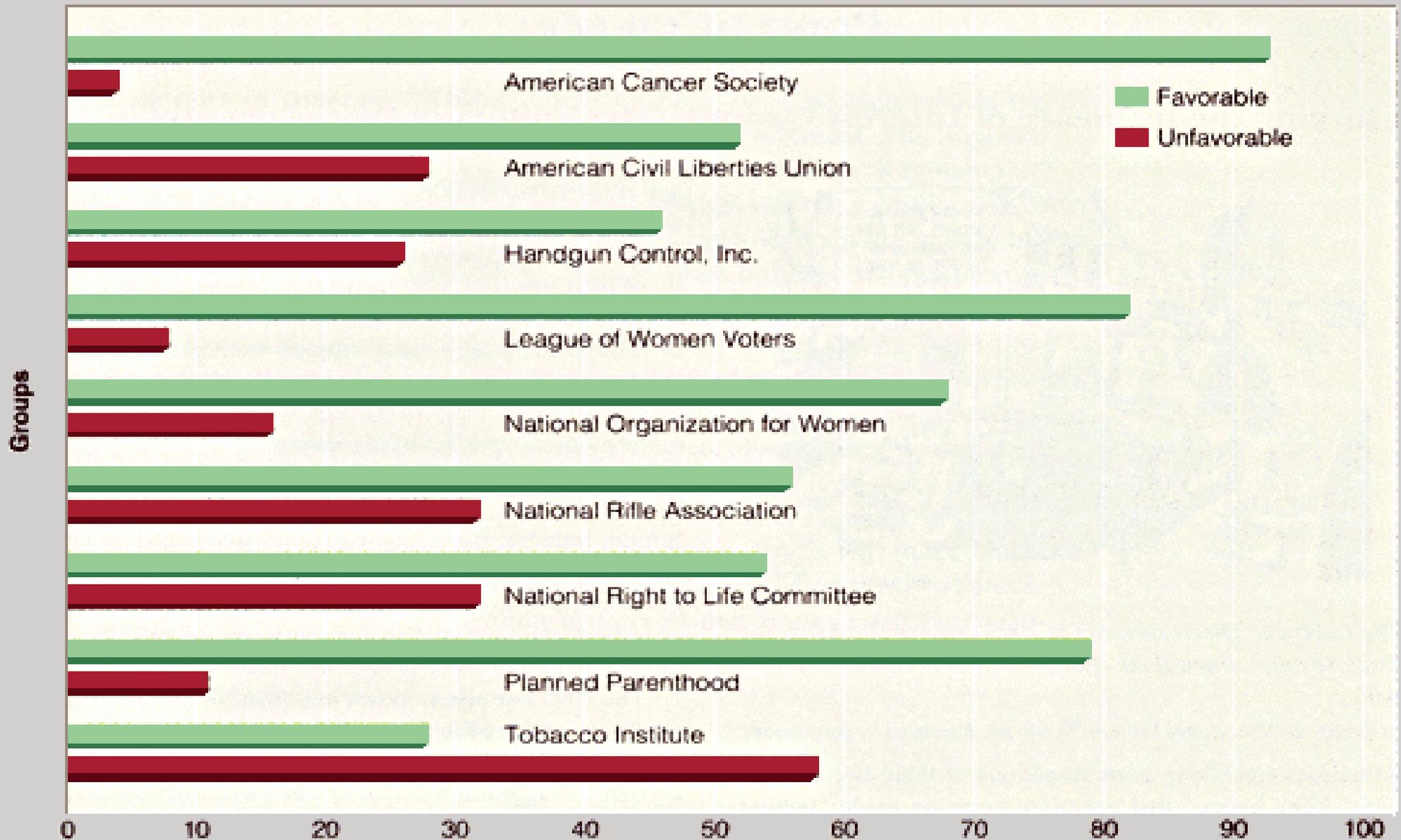


'Revolving Door'

- Federal officials use of position to favor a corporation in exchange for future employment



Public Attitudes Towards Interest Groups



The Contributions of Interest Groups:

- Represents views of IG members to Government
- Enables people to participate in political process
- Educates public about potential issues affecting them
- Pushes new issues onto the political agenda
- Monitors Government action & pushes for change
 - Examples: Women's suffrage & civil rights laws
- Upholds right of Americans to petition Government
 - (First Amendment right upheld)
- IGs now ingrained as integral part of American political process