Interest Groups
Chapter 9
Defining *Interest Groups*

An organized group of people who share some goals and try to influence public policy.
Five Main Functions Of Interest Groups

- Representation
- Education
- Program Monitoring
- Political Participation
- Agenda-Building
Five main functions of **Interest Groups:**

- **Representation** → interest of members
- **Political Participation** → enable people to participate
  - **Government and Politics**
  - About issues of interest & why IG goals should be supported
- **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
Criticisms

1. Some have more influence than they should
2. Who - and how many - a group really represents
3. Dominated by active minority
4. Some groups use poor tactics (bribery)
Types of Interest Groups
Diversity of Organized Interests

- Three general categories of Interest Groups:
  - Economic Interest Groups
  - Citizen Interest Groups
  - Government Interest Groups
Economic Interest Groups

Four types:

- Business Groups
- Organized Labor
- Agricultural Groups
- Professional Associations
Groups Based on Economic Interests

• **Business Groups**: National Association of Manufacturers (NAM; 14,000) and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States (200,000)
  – Trade Associations
    (Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers)
Groups Based on Economic Interests

• **Labor Groups**: group of workers in same job or industry.
  
  – AFL-CIO = American Federation of Labor + Congress of Industrial Organizations
  
  • 13 million members
Groups Based on Economic Interests

• **Agriculture Groups:**
  – National Farmers Union (smaller farms)
  – American Farm Bureau (large farms)
  – National Grange
  – Specific commodities
Groups Based on Economic Interests

• Professional Groups:
  – American Medical Association (300,000)
  – American Bar Association (400,000)
  – National Education Association (2.4 million)
Interest groups, also known as public interest groups, dedicated to promoting a vision of good public policy rather than the economic interests of their members.

Citizen Groups - promote group vision of public good
→ American Civil Liberties Union & NRA
→ Single issue groups (NAACP, Greenpeace, NOW)
Government Interest Groups

- State Governments
- Foreign Governments
- Local Governments
Other Interest Groups

- Groups that promote causes
  - Right to life, women’s vote
- Promote welfare of certain groups
  - Veterans of Foreign Affairs, AARP
- Religious Organizations
  - National Council of Churches
Coalitions and Divisions

• Groups of similar interests join in coalitions
  – The Military Coalition → military & VA benefits
  – Environmental & Nature Conservation groups

• Groups might also divide or realign on various issues
  – Politics & strange bedfellows – NAFTA issue
Reasons why interest groups form?

- **Disturbance Theory** →
  - Usually in response to Government policy
  - Threat to the *status quo* – *The Cat Mother* response

- *IGs* form mostly in response to some government policy:
  - Policies affecting or potentially affecting members’ interests

- Whose interest is usually represented?
  - Rich & powerful - *why*?

  *Social-economic status* → political activism
Obstacles of Interest Group Formation

The *Collective Goods Dilemma*?

A dilemma created when people can obtain the benefits of interest group activity *without paying any of the costs* associated with it.

(In this situation, the interest group may not form because everyone has an incentive to *let someone else pay* the costs of group formation.)

*People who benefit without paying are called?*
Free Riders

People or groups who benefit from the efforts of others without bearing any of the costs.

So how are such obstacles to IG formation overcome?
Overcoming Obstacles to Interest Group Formation

• **Political entrepreneurs**
  – Cat Mother (local) vs. Ralph Nader (National)

• Government or wealthy sponsor funds IG

• Or – IGs attract & motivate prospective members → New members are offered what?
  – **Selective benefits** (vs. **collective benefits**)
  – What are the **three types** of selective benefits?*
Three Benefits from *Interest Groups*

- **Material**
  *(stuff)*

- **Solidary**
  *(identity)*

- **Expressive**
  *(purpose)*
Material

The actual *goods* and *services* that come from belonging to an interest group.
The emotional and psychological enjoyment that comes from belonging to an interest group whose members share common interests and goals.
The *feelings of satisfaction* people derive from working for an interest group cause they believe is just and right. Also known as purposive benefits.
Selective Benefits:
Any benefit given to a member of a group, but denied to non-members.
Interest Groups at Work
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

http://www.thetruth.com/videos/magicalAmount.cfm
Interest Group Strategies

Four major IG Strategies:

- Political Action Committees (PACs)
- Lobbying the Government
- Mobilizing Public Opinion
- Litigating
Political Action Committees

Organizations that solicit contributions from members of interest groups and channel those contributions to election campaigns → usually for those candidates supporting policies favorable to members of the Interest Group).
Lobbying the Government

Trying to influence governmental decisions, especially the voting decisions legislators make on proposed legislation.
Types of Lobbying

Direct Lobbying

Education Campaigns

Grass-Roots Lobbying

Advocacy Advertising
Trying to influence public policy through *direct* contact with government officials.
Interest groups try to mobilize the public through education hoping that the public will demand government action.
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 is the practice of \textit{breaking laws} in order to \textit{pressure legislators} to change perceived unjust laws.
Litigating

• When you lose with the Congress → then what?
  – You can always sue
  – Last action in a continuing cycle

Examples:
  – 1950s *De Jure Segregation* - NAACP
  – Clean Air Act & Endangered Species Act
  – Campaign Reform

• *Amicus Curiae* brief
The Balance Sheet on Interest Groups

• Americans have *love/hate relationship* with IGs
  – *In Theory*: general disdain for factions or “Special Interest”
  – *In Reality*: Support (at various levels) for specific interests
    – Great diversity & interests interact and conflict

• One common thread appears throughout:
  – *Wealthy & more powerful better represented* – Why?
Public Attitudes Towards Interest Groups

- American Cancer Society
- American Civil Liberties Union
- Handgun Control, Inc.
- League of Women Voters
- National Organization for Women
- National Rifle Association
- National Right to Life Committee
- Planned Parenthood
- Tobacco Institute

Favorable
Unfavorable
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