

4. Interest Groups

1. Definition

- Organized body of individuals
 - : They share some political goals.
 - : They try to influence public policy decisions.
- Ex) League of Women Voters
 - [National Organization for Women \(NOW\)](#)
 - National Rifle Association (NRA)
 - Handgun Control
 - Tobacco Institute
- **Pluralist democracy**
 - : Interaction of interest groups and gov
- **Majoritarianism**
 - : The gov makes policies according to the majority of the public.



National Organization for Women

(<http://www.letscc.net/detail.php?idx=2443&k=National%20Organiz%20ation%20for%20Women>)

ex) Deficit reduction was a hot issue in 1993.

→ A deficit reduction proposal was offered.

→ BTU (British thermal units) proposal

: a tax levied on the amount of heat in an energy source

****BTU:** amount of energy needed to heat 1 pound (0.45 kg) of water
from 39 to 40 ° F (3.8 to 4.4 ° C).

: often used in the power, heating & air-conditioning industries.

→ **Groups responded**

(1) Farmers

: Wanted to reduce the tax on diesel fuel used by tractors

(2) Steel industry

: Wanted to reduce the tax on coal

(3) Firms that make products for the export market

: Their goods would be more expensive on the world market.

- By the time the legislation passed the House, interest groups had achieved so many exemptions.
- The BTU tax may not be needed then.

- **Pluralism over majoritarianism**

- : The majority wants the deficit reduced, but not many people want any particular method of reducing the deficit.
- : Interest groups push hard for tax exemptions, and finally lobbied Congress representatives to make exemptions for them.

2. Are Interest Groups good or not?

1) Good

- [Alexis de Tocqueville](#)
- : Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, form associations. This reflects a strong democratic culture.



Alexis-Charles-Henri Clérel de Tocqueville
(29 July 1805 – 16 April 1859)
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexis_de_Tocqueville)

2) Bad

- [James Madison](#)

: He regarded Interest Groups as factions.

: Lots of differences will develop between factions.

ex) Farmers will oppose merchants + tenants + landlords and so on.

: Each group pushes its selfish interests that may not always
in the best interest of other Americans.

3) Conclusion

- We may not like interest groups as a whole, but we like interest groups
that we believe represent views we support.

3. Roles of Interest Groups

1) Representation

- Interest groups represent people **before their gov.**

- Whatever the political interest, the group has an active lobby operating
in Washington.



James Madison

4th President of the United States

(in office March 4, 1809 – March 4, 1817)

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Madison)

2) Participation

- Interest groups provide a means by which **like-minded citizens** can pool their resources + channel their energies into collective political action.

: People band together because they know it is much easier to get gov to listen to a group than an individual.

3) Education

- Interest groups educate their members + public + gov officials as part of their efforts to lobby gov.

: Interest groups **provide policymakers with info** that is not easily obtained from other sources.

4) Agenda Building

- Interest groups bring new issues into the political arena through agenda building.

: American society has **many problem areas**, but public officials are not addressing all of them.

: Interest groups make the gov aware of the problems + let them know something is needed to solve them.

5) Program Monitoring

- Lobbies **follow gov programs** important to their members.
- : Interest groups look at developments in Washington.
- : When a program is not operating properly, interest groups push gov officials to act in order to achieve the group's goals.

4. Political Action Committees (PAC)

1) What is a PAC?

- Raise and spend money in order to **elect and defeat candidates**
- Represent business companies, labor unions or ideological interests.
- PACs pool campaign contributions from group members + donate the money to candidates for political offices.

- Give up to \$5,000 to a candidate per election
- Give up to \$15,000 to any national party per year
- Give up to \$5,000 annually to any **other PAC** per year
- May receive up to \$5,000 from any one individual, PAC or party committee per year
- Register with the **FEC** within 10 days of its formation

- Overall, PACs account for about **30%** of total contributions in U.S. Congressional elections, and considerably less in presidential races

- There are about **5,000 PACs**.
 - : Most PACs are small and give less than \$50,000 in total contributions during a 2-year election cycle.
 - : Some PACs are enormous.
 - : The Realtors PAC give about \$3 million in the election year.

- **Leadership PACs**
 - : Some Congress members form as a way of raising money to help fund other candidates' campaigns

2) Why do interest groups form PACs?

- When an interest group, union, or corporation wants to contribute to federal candidates or parties, it **must** do so through a PAC.
- Members of Congress and their staffers are very **busy** and their time is limited.
 - : But they cannot turn down a lobbyist's request for a meeting if the PAC of the lobbyist's company had made a significant **campaign contribution** in the last election.
 - : The PAC gives you access.
 - : It makes you a player.
 - : Corporate PACs give about 80% of their contributions to **incumbent members** of Congress.
 - : The incumbent is probably going to win.

3) Side Effect of PACs

- Approximately **50%** of the money raised by House incumbents comes from PACs.
 - : PAC money may lead to access to the incumbents + favoritism.
 - : PAC money can lead to **corruption**.
 - : PAC donations seem to influence what goes on in congressional committees.
 - : In a democracy influence should be affected by money.

: From this perspective, the issue is **political equality**.

- However, PACs **offer a means** for people to participate in the political system.

: By PAC, small givers can pool their resources + fight the big giver.

: Prohibiting PACs would restrict the **freedom of political expression**.

5. Tactics & Techniques of Interest Groups

- To achieve political influence, Interest groups use many tactics & techniques.

1) Lobby

a) Who are lobbyists?

- Represent the organizations before gov

: Lobbyists tell the gov officials what their members want.

: Lobbyists tell the organizations what gov is doing.

ex) When an administrative agency issues new regulations,

lobbyists interpret the content + implications of the regulations for members.

b) How lobbyists are hired?

- Lobbyists have a long experience in/around Washington.
- : Many lobbyists have law degrees.
- : Lobbyists have served in the **legislative or executive branches**.

- : Excellent lobbyists know well how gov operates.
- : They find their background useful in the bargaining + negotiation over laws and regulations.
- : Lobbying is a lucrative profession (\$90,000 per year).

c) Direct Lobbying

- Personal contact with policymakers
- : **98%** of Washington lobbyists use direct contact with officials, + members of Congress + agency officials + staff members.

- How often should a lobbyist meet policymakers?

- : It is not enough for lobbyists to meet policymakers just before a vote or a regulatory decision.
- : Lobbyists must **maintain contact** with congressional members + an agency staffers and constantly provide them with information.

- **How do lobbyists say?**

: They do not say “Vote for this bill, otherwise our people in the district will vote against you in the next election.”

: But they will say “If this bill is passed, we are going to see hundreds of **new jobs** created in our state.”

d) Grassroots lobbying

- **Letter-writing campaigning**

: Faxes, telephone calls + emails

: Interest groups often launch letter-writing campaigns through their regular publications or special alerts.

: They may even provide **sample letters** + the names + addresses of specific policymakers.

2) Protest in the street

- If people in gov seem **not responsive** to letter-writing campaigning, a group might resort to political protest.

: A protest (demonstration) such as picketing or marching is to attract media attention to an issue.



Occupy Wall Street

(<http://www.letscc.net/detail.php?idx=2441&k=occupy%20wallstreet>)

: Protesters hope that **TV/newspaper coverage** will help change public opinion + make policymakers more receptive to the group's demands.

3) Info Campaigns

- Organized efforts to gain public support by giving info about an issue
- : Hand out **pamphlets** or booklets in the street

4) Coalition Building

- Several groups **band together** for the purpose of lobbying
- : Their joint effort will achieve their goals more easily.
- : Coalitions form most often among groups that work in the **same policy area** + have similar constituencies, such as environmental groups or feminist groups.