

Today's Agenda

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- Exam next week!
- Interest Groups and Pluralism
- Needs of Interest Groups
- Lobbying
- Political Action Committees

The Push and Pull of Groups and Interests

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- There is a “pull” and a “push” organizing political activity in the United States
 - There is a pull from government to collect information on how governmental decisions will impact various constituencies
 - There is a push from individuals and groups seeking to gain some benefit
- This is pluralism at work
 - Divide factions—which are pernicious as they pursue selfish aims.

Groups and Pluralism

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- An interest group is an organized group of individuals or organizations that makes policy-related appeals to government
 - Interest groups enhance democracy by representing individuals, encouraging political participation, and educating the public
 - But interest groups represent the private interests of a few, not the public interest
- Madison's answer to this was diversity

Groups and Pluralism

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- *Pluralism* is the theory that all interests are and should be free to compete for influence in the government
 - So long as all groups are free to organize, the system is arguably democratic, as individuals will join groups they support and will not join groups they oppose
 - Interest groups are omnipresent, but not omnipotent
 - Bigger groups will have power as they should
- But some groups organize more easily

Organized Interests are Predominantly Economic

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- Economic interest is one of the main purposes for which individuals form groups
- Groups organize for a bigger slice of the pie
- But there are many non-economic interest groups as well

Interest Groups

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- NRA – National Rifles Association
- AARP – American Association of Retired People
- AMA – American Medical Association
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- AIPAC – American Israel Public Affairs Committee
- AFL-CIO
- National Education Association
- MoveOn.org
- Americans for Prosperity

What Do Groups Need?

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- Money, Leadership, and Members
- Groups need money to sustain the organization and to fund the group's activities (lobbying, voter education, etc.)
- Groups with access and organizational discipline are more successful
- Groups with more members are more powerful. AARP is powerful because it represents so many active voters

Group Membership

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- People with higher incomes and higher levels of education are more likely to be members of groups
- There is thus an upper-class bias in the interest group system
- While the bottom rungs of the socio-economic ladder are represented by some groups, parties do a better job of representing these interests
- Offer selective incentives to join interest groups

How Do Interest Groups Influence Policy?

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- **Insider Strategies**
 - Directly influencing decision makers
 - Pursuing advocacy through the courts
- **Outsider Strategies**
 - Educating the public
 - Campaigning and contributing to candidates
- **Many groups pursue both insider and outsider strategies**

Direct Lobbying of Congress

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- Lobbying is an attempt by citizens or groups to legislators for favorable policies and decisions
- Billions of dollars are spent on lobbying each year—much more than on campaigns
- Lobbying is thought of negatively but lobbyists do some good:
 - Provide information
 - Make sure group concerns are heard

Direct Lobbying

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- Lobbyists also seek to influence other parts of government
 - Lobbying the president
 - Lobbying the executive branch
- There are some regulations on lobbying
 - Groups must report spending on lobbying
 - Strict limits on gifts from lobbyists
 - Lobbyists must register as lobbyists

Lobbying and the Courts

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- Interest groups seek to influence policy through the courts by:
 - Bringing suits directly on behalf of their group
 - Financing suits brought by others
 - Filing *amicus curiae* briefs
- This is especially attractive to groups that can rest claims on constitutional rights
 - *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) is an example of a case brought by groups (notably the NAACP) to advance a policy agenda

Lobbying and Public Opinion

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- Interest groups try to pressure politicians by mobilizing public opinion
- One way to do this is to “go public” – the act of launching a media campaign to build popular support
- This includes advertising campaigns, protests, and grassroots lobbying efforts – building lists of supporters and urging them to pressure officials

Lobbying and Elections – PAC's

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- **Political Action Committees – PAC's**
 - Groups give contributions to candidate campaigns and to parties
 - ✦ Must donate to at least 5 candidates. Max donation is \$5,000. Must raise money from at least 50 people
 - In 2008, PAC contributions totaled \$413 million
- **Independent Expenditures**
 - Groups spend money to engage in voter education
 - As long as it is uncoordinated with a campaign, spending in this category may be unlimited

Who Do PAC's Donate To?

Top 20 PAC Contributors to Candidates, 2007-2008

PAC Name	Total Amount	Dem Pct	Repub Pct
National Assn of Realtors	\$4,036,400	59%	41%
Intl Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	\$3,397,550	98%	2%
AT&T Inc	\$3,153,200	47%	53%
American Bankers Assn	\$2,956,265	43%	57%
National Beer Wholesalers Assn	\$2,897,000	52%	48%
National Auto Dealers Assn	\$2,890,500	34%	66%
Operating Engineers Union	\$2,856,825	87%	13%
Laborers Union	\$2,808,150	92%	8%
International Assn of Fire Fighters	\$2,759,600	77%	23%
American Assn for Justice	\$2,719,500	95%	4%
Honeywell International	\$2,581,116	53%	47%
National Assn of Home Builders	\$2,479,000	46%	54%
Air Line Pilots Assn	\$2,442,000	85%	14%
Plumbers/Pipefitters Union	\$2,412,559	95%	5%
Credit Union National Assn	\$2,346,549	54%	46%
Machinists/Aerospace Workers Union	\$2,336,842	97%	3%
American Federation of Teachers	\$2,300,250	99%	1%
Service Employees International Union	\$2,289,250	94%	5%
Teamsters Union	\$2,271,800	97%	3%

Are Interest Groups Effective?

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- The evidence is surprisingly mixed
 - Most research has found that advocacy yields returns only a modest effect on a legislator's decisions
 - Other research has found that the small amount of money corporations spend on advocacy is a sign it is not worth much to them
- However, if advocacy did not work, groups would not spend money on it at all
- But interests/factions raise problems for democracy as the resources needed to gain influence are distributed unevenly

Any Questions?

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