

ALL ABOUT INTEREST GROUPS

An interest group or lobby is a formal group of people formed through a common interest shared amongst a substantial number of citizens who work to express and fulfill their interest. And while the three branches system of government was intended to arrest the momentum that these groups had, they ended up creating many endpoints with which groups could use to push their interests.

Such groups are powerful units with which people are able to express their beliefs, but they are also potentially dangerous: a number of lawmakers have been outraged at the influence that some interest groups have over the government (and thus the democratic process). Scores of other lawmakers claim that such groups can also mislead the public and generally gain too much influence to maintain democracy.

Furthermore, when many groups are pushing specifically for their interests and not many general interests, resources often have to be divided and compromise can break down. This can eventually result in bigger and more powerful groups being able to exert their influence and divert resources solely to their cause, a form of elitism.

WHAT THESE THINGS CAN DO TO OBTAIN THEIR INTERESTS

- **Lobbying**: lobbying is an attempt to pressure the government into doing something that would be conducive to the fulfillment of the lobbyist's interests. This term originates from people actually walking up to lawmakers in lobbies before votes and pleading with them to vote a certain way. Very important to note however, page 562 states that lobbying either fails to sway a lawmaker OR the target of lobbying was going to vote a certain way anyways, meaning that not much evidence exists to back up the idea that lobbying is effective. The other half of lobbying is obtaining information through informal interactions.
- **Establishing** mutually beneficial relationships with others: the traditional **iron triangle** is an interest group, lawmakers and those in the bureaucrats. Bureaucrats get funding and cooperation from Congressional committeepersons, committeepersons get support from the interest groups, bureaucrats gain support and cooperation in exchange for action on their part.
- **Establishing networks** of many groups that push for similar or shared interests (if many interest groups have one thing in common to get done, they can band together). It is unfortunate however that after the common concern is addressed, the network dissolves. For instance, some civil rights groups and religious groups may disagree on abortion or prison time but may agree on healthcare and social programs, and can thus form an issue network to address those issues together.

- This can involve convincing another group that your issues are going to affect the other group, and thus, the other group should start supporting our issue.
- **Conducting research** and arguing certain questions, such as “How many lives would increasing the drinking age save?”. By obtaining hard evidence
- **Allowing** elected officials to use pre-built platforms such as TV and radio, in exchange for support of a certain issue in Congress. The other version of this is publicly **endorsing** an official - that is, publicly announcing your support with an official, allowing the official to piggyback off of the interest group’s power.
 - This can be used to align and ally with political parties (who do support and push candidates thru office) OR pull a disagreeing party towards their ideology through their power.
- **Defending** or offending in courts in order to have the court create some precedent that can run outside of the limits of the current laws (i.e. declaring a certain discriminatory yet completely legal practice to be unconstitutional and in fact illegal).

All of these actions, unless specified, take place at all levels of government.

OTHER THINGS

- A 501C3 group is one that receives tax deductions for charitable contributions BUT cannot lobby or donate to campaigns, whereas a 501C4 group can lobby and campaign, but have limits on what they can spend per unit of time on campaigning.
- Grassroots techniques involve attempting to mobilize large amounts of the general public rather than a certain select few in power. A grasstops technique involves mobilizing a small amount of the public that has power over the rest of the GP.
- Various social movements are the catalyst for creation of interest groups, for instance, women’s rights movements, climate and environmental movements, consumer awareness and safety movements, etc.
- There are two new SC cases: Reno v. ACLU (which protects speech on the Internet under AM1) and Loving v. VA, which had the effect of banning limitations on interracial marriage.
 - In Reno, there was a decency bill passed intended to protect minors that eventually came under fire. Eventually, the court ruled that since (A) the bill did not define indecent and was thus not targeted enough and that (B) the Constitution protects indecent but not obscene speech, the bill had no legal base on which to stand.
 - In Loving, an interracial couple was arrested in VA and sent to jail. They challenge this action, and eventually, it was ruled that (A) there was no rational purpose for this test, (B) that even though the law applied equally to all races that it took the decision to marry another person away from the person, violating the DPC and thus making the law and the action taken by VA unconstitutional.
- **Bundling** is the practice of gaining lots of funds from a number of donors. Under the Honest leadership and Open Govt Act of 07, lobbyists must now report the details of this (if the funds exceed 15,000 USD over 6mo).

MEMBERSHIP

Most interest groups charge money (for instance, a trade association charging lots of money for their white collar worker's participation) or have some other requirement for entry.

These groups however usually represent the entire voting bloc, not just the people in the group (for instance - there are many more supportive African Americans than there are NAACP members). Therefore, they usually offer incentives to join. These incentives can be divided into categories:

- **Purposive incentive:** lets the joiner know where their money is going and that they can feel good about contributing.
- **Solidary incentives:** let joiners meet up with like-minded people every so often, for instance, a normally scheduled meeting or a field trip to go do something that benefits the cause.
- **Material incentives:** are cash based incentives that give the joiner some financial reason to join, for instance, free cool shit that corporations give out, discounts, subscriptions, etc.

It has been noted however - upper class people are much more likely to be in an interest group than those of a lower income, creating an upper class bias, and even though membership fees are often small, these procedures still drive away prospective members.

ALL IG TYPES

<i>TYPE</i>	<i>EXPLANATION</i>
labor union + trade associations	Labor unions are essentially bands of workers that have much more power in negotiating salary and working conditions as one unit. A trade association is a form of union (reversed? not true?), that is, groups that form around the issues of a specific industry and still band together as one unit, only this time the target is the government.
professional associations	Represent larger groups of workers, usually white collar ones such as lawyers and doctors.
inter-govt' lobbies	Are formed from government employees (usually local employees, such as EMS workers, or local officials, such as mayors).
think tanks	Institutions dedicated to researching and advocating through evidencing certain large issues such as the economy.
public interest group	A public interest group is not one that works in a niche area but rather works to improve the lives of citizens in general. A real "citizen's lobby". These are usually targeted at one big demographic (such as working

	class individuals) and work on a number of fronts to improve their lives (such as working towards the passage of the 21→18 voting age restriction, or campaign integrity and financing laws).
single issue groups	These are interest groups not focused on a variety of issues that apply to a great deal of Americans but rather specific issues, such as gun rights.
ideology based interest groups	These are interest groups (not just normal consolidations of people) that form around a political ideology and argue many issues on their side of the political plane. An example of this is the ACLU - formed around WWI to counteract restrictions on the first amendment by the government and devoted itself to preserving the free expression rights of citizens.

SCANDALS

A number of issues have existed within lobbies and interest groups.

- Successful lobbyists can make more than gov't officials themselves, meaning that it would be financially beneficial for an individual to leave office only to begin lobbying the government. The concept of government officials moving from person to legislator to person affected by legislator (and thus a potential lobbyist but with powerful connections) is known as the **revolving door**.
- The involvement of PAC money in elections and the negotiating and the borderline bribery are areas of controversy amongst members of the public, especially amongst special interest groups, even concerning some that an elitist form of government was taking shape.
- The idea that special interests and lobbies can often take precedent over the interests of the general public, and the fact that more powerful groups get their ideas in the big pool of ideas more, resulting in elitism. Furthermore, if enough special interest groups with narrow interests do this, the government can become hyperpluralism.
- Finally is the use of interest groups and lobbying as a route for corruption: there is the well-known Cunningham incident, where a certain defense contractor bribed an official with favors such as cash, cars, antique furniture, and hookers (reportedly) in exchange for him directing funds towards that contractor, come budgeting time. Such practices are illegal and highly undemocratic, although that does not entirely stop them from happening.