Chapter 11: Interest Groups

1. The Role of Interest Groups
   1. Interest group
      1. An organization of people with shared policy goals entering the policy process at several points to try to achieve those goals. Interest groups pursue their goals in many arenas.
   2. Interest groups mainly serve as Linkage Institutions
2. Theories of Interest Groups
   1. Pluralism
      1. A theory of government and politics emphasizing that many groups, each pressing for its preferred policies, compete and counterbalance one another in the political marketplace.
      2. “Group theory of politics”
         1. Links people and government
         2. Groups compete for power
         3. No one group is dominant
         4. Groups play by the rules
   2. Elitism
      1. A theory of government and politics contending that an upper-class elite will hold most of the power and thus in effect run the government.
      2. Money is a strong influence in election
      3. Most Americans believe in this political theory
   3. Hyperpluralism
      1. A theory of government and politics contending that groups are so strong that government, seeking to please them all, is thereby weakened.
      2. “interest group liberalism”
      3. Iron Triangles
         1. Subgovernments are composed of interest group leaders interested in a particular policy, the government agency in charge of administering that policy, and the members of the congressional committees and subcommittees handling that policy; they exercise a great deal of control over specific policy areas.
      4. Groups have become too powerful
      5. Trying to please the groups will make policy ineffective
3. What Makes an Interest Group Successful?
   1. The Surprising Ineffectiveness of Large Groups
      1. Potential group
         1. All of the people who might be interest group members because they share some common interest
      2. Actual group
         1. The people in the potential group who actually join.
      3. Collective good
         1. Something of value that cannot be withheld from a potential group member
      4. Free-rider problem
         1. For a group, the problem of people not joining because they can benefit from the group’s activities without joining.
      5. Selective benefits
         1. Goods that a group can restrict to those who actually join.
      6. Intensity
         1. Serious issues can draw serious supporters
         2. Single-issue groups
            1. Groups that have a narrow interest, tend to dislike compromise, and often draw membership from people new to politics.
         3. Example: Abortion groups
      7. Financial Resources
         1. Money is a major factor in the effectiveness of an interest group
         2. However, on a large scale, when two groups are battling each other, large amounts of money are spent – but there is little to show that the money had any effect on the outcome
4. How Groups Try to Shape Policy
   1. Lobbying
      1. According to Lester Milbrath, a “communication by someone other than a citizen acting on his or her own behalf, directed to a governmental decision maker with the hope of influencing his or her decison”
      2. Lobbyists primary goal is to influence members of congress.
      3. Lobbyists are an important source of information
      4. Lobbyists can help politicians with political strategy for getting legislation through
      5. Lobbyists can formulate campaign strategies
      6. Lobbyists are a source of ideals and innovations
   2. Electioneering
      1. Direct group involvement in the electoral process, for example, by helping to fund campaigns, getting members to work for candidates, and forming political action committees.
      2. Political action committees (PAC’s)
         1. Political funding vehicles created by the 1974 campaign finance reforms. An interest group can create a PAC and register it with the Federal Election Commission, which will monitor the PAC’s expenditures.
   3. Litigation
      1. If interest groups fail in congress, the next step is litigation.
      2. Interest groups will challenge or defend laws.
   4. Going Public
      1. Interest groups are interested in the views of the public.
      2. Interest groups try to have a good reputation
      3. Interest groups have increasingly spent money on PR firms in order to clean up their reputation
5. Types of Interest Groups
   1. Economic Interests
      1. Businesses want to keep themselves in business
      2. Labor
         1. Union shop
            1. A provision found in come collective bargaining agreements requiring all employees of a business to join the union within a short period, usually 30 days, and to remain members as a condition of employment.
         2. Right-to-work laws
            1. A state law forbidding requirements that workers must join a union to hold their jobs. State right-to-work laws were specifically permitted by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947.
         3. Labor union membership is down because there is simply less manufacturing jobs in the united states.
      3. Business
         1. Businesses want laws that benefit themselves.
         2. Railroad companies want less highways
         3. Trucking companies want more highways
   2. Environmental Interests
      1. Since the founding of Earth Day in 1970, environmental groups have gained in popularity
      2. WWF, the Nature Conservancy, and the NWF all claim memberships of over 1 million
   3. Equality Interest
      1. NAACP
      2. NOW
      3. These interests have secured the rights for millions of Americans and continue to be a path of promise for disenfranchised Americans.
   4. Consumer and Other Public Interest Lobbies
      1. Public Interest Lobbies
         1. According to Jeffery Berry, organizations that seek, “a collective good, the achievement of which will not selectively and materially benefit the membership or activists of the organizations”.
      2. Ralph Nader started the first major consumer group in Washington
      3. Groups work together for a common cause
6. Understanding Interest Groups
   1. Interest Groups and Democracy
      1. Democracy is a wide open system that allows all to equally participate.
      2. Many argue that the competition created by interest groups have made our democracy fairer and includes the views of many in each piece of legislation.
      3. Some also argue that the increased competition in Washington has increased corruption and makes wealth a requirement to be heard in this system.
      4. Hyperpluralists argue that there are too many interest groups it is impossible for all to be heard.
   2. Interest Groups and the Scope of Government
      1. Americans have always formed associations
      2. The growth in the scope of government in the last decade is because of the huge proliferation of interest groups.
      3. Interest groups are largely reactionary and don’t act proactively.