

INTEREST GROUPS

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WHAT ARE INTEREST GROUPS

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Evil corporate groups who exploit the democratic system...

WHAT ARE INTEREST GROUPS?

Or a varied system of organizations who represent the interests of their members?

Cartographers for Social Equality

- Education of members on issues that affect them
- Lobbying on behalf of members
- Promote democratic participation (voting, etc)

- Founders concern with faction
- *Especially* a majority

- **Pluralism** - interests should be free to compete for influence over government
- This will (hopefully) produce desired outcomes
- Interests groups not equal in resources, though

(ECONOMIC?) INTERESTS

- Many (most?) interest groups represent economic interests
 - Corporate: Chamber of Commerce, Microsoft, etc
 - Labor: AFL-CIO, Teamsters
 - Professional organizations: The Bar Association, the American Medical Association

- Membership essential
 - Collective action problems (and solutions)

- Groups usually rely on membership dues
- As well as voluntary contributions

- Leadership and organization essential
- Can be simple
- Or complicated - melding local chapters into states, then states into national...

- Many more upper-class citizens belong to interest groups than lower-class citizens
 - Wealthier people tend to have more money and time
 - These groups can also provide professional contacts for their careers

- Even groups associated with progressive politics and support for the poor tend to have upper-middle and upper-class members

HOW AND WHY?

- Interest groups don't represent interests in proportion to the interest in the population
- In the 1980s, 7% of adults were in managerial/administrative roles, but 71% of interests groups represented them
 - Or, 4% of the population looking for work but only 0.1% of organizations

- Interest groups join to facilitate cooperation between their members
- All members better off if they achieve some shared goal
- But it's costly to obtain that goal...

PRISONER'S DILEMMA

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- The police need one of you to rat the other in order to build their case

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	Snitch	Don't snitch
Snitch	(3,3)	(0,6)
Don't snitch	(6,0)	(1,1)

WHAT'S THE BEST CHOICE?

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- If we're A, then we're always better off snitching
 - If B also snitches, we get 3 instead of 6 years
 - If B doesn't, then we go free instead of getting 1 year
- So both end up snitching on each other, getting (3,3) instead of (1,1)

- The free-rider problem is pervasive in interest group formation
- Large groups tend to be anonymous
- Difficult to argue that any one person's actions will make a difference
- Enforcement
- Thus, it's hard for large groups to form

- **Selective benefits** - benefits of joining a group that are only available to its members
- Informational: Conferences, research
- Material: insurance, discounts
- Solidarity: networking, friendship
- Purposive: advocacy & participation

(HOW) DO INTEREST GROUPS INFLUENCE POLICY?

- Insider strategies involve directly working with politicians and their staff
- Outsider strategies involve going public and using electoral tactics
- Many groups use both of these

- Lobbying is attempting to influence the policy process through persuasion of government officials
- Lobbyists have to register with the government & disclose what they lobby on
- Approximately \$4 billion per year is spent on lobbying at the federal and state level

- Lobbyists provide information to Congresspeople
- Testify on behalf of clients at hearings
- Direct members' campaign contributions

- Lobbying Congress is hard
- Lobbying the President is harder
- Very limited time

- Continue to lobby after laws passed
- Comment period on new rules is frequently used by lobbyists

- Many regulations on what lobbyists must (not) do:
 - Business can't deduct lobbying costs from taxes
 - Associations must report percent of membership dues that goes to lobbying
 - Registration of lobbyists

- Limitation of gifts to Congresspeople:
 - \$50, no more than \$100 annually

- Bringing suit directly
- Financing suits brought by individuals
- Filing *amicus curiae* briefs

- Increasingly, the courts are a battleground where various interests fight
- E.g. the privacy and abortion fights, segregation, etc

- **Going public** - launching a campaign to raise awareness of your issue and persuade people

- TV, newspapers, radio, etc
- Both image-building
- And persuasive

- Direct mail & email
- Increasingly prevalent

- Raises public recognition for protestors
- Can be disruptive to commerce & traffic, forcing negotiation with protestors
- Strikes and general strikes are some of union's most powerful weapons

- PACs - Political action committees
- Separate and segregated from campaigns
- Typically focus on House races
- Little evidence that PAC contributions “buy” votes from those members

- Independent expenditure committees - Super PACs
- Allowed after 2010 *Citizens United* case
- May raise unlimited amounts of money from any source
 - must report donors
 - may not directly coordinate

- Get out the vote campaigns
- Can have large effects in low-turnout elections

- The **initiative** allows citizens to pass policy without going through the legislature
- Interest groups can run campaigns to get the requisite number of signatures

ARE INTEREST GROUPS EFFECTIVE?

- Lots of research shows that lobbying and such has little or no effect
- If it is effective, why don't we see much more?