

INTEREST GROUPS

I. INTRO

- a. In 2008, interest groups, primarily the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, spent heavily on pro-business candidates to try to offset the potential filibuster-proof (60) majority of Democrats in the Senate
- b. Swift boat ads against Kerry in 2004

II. INTEREST GROUPS PAST AND PRESENT: THE “MISCHIEFS OF FACTION”

- a. Founders were concerned with **FACTIONS** – groups with common interest
- b. Federalist #10, Madison acknowledged factions and argued they could pursue unequal distribution of property; also agreed that the causes of factions could not be removed, the effects needed to be controlled
- c. Separation of powers, staggered terms of office, and promoting **PLURALISM** – competition among different factions
- d. **A NATION OF INTERESTS**
 - i. When associations of like people (gun advocates, feminists) seek to influence government, they are called **INTEREST GROUPS**; also called **SPECIAL INTERESTS**- can be negatively construed
 - ii. Politics is best seen as a clash among differing interests
 - iii. Persuade the public that their interest is **VERY** important
- e. **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**
 - i. Consists of many people interested in a significant issue, idea or concern and who are willing to take action to support or defend it; i.e. civil rights movement, anti-immigration movement

1. Feels that they have not been adequately represented in government
2. Bill of Rights (1st Amendment) protects the rights of social movements

f. TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS

- i. Some are formal (NRA, AARP); some have no formal organization (tea party)
- ii. Several broad types:
 1. Economic – business and labor
 2. Ideological or single-issue
 3. Public interest
 4. Foreign policy
 5. Government itself
- iii. Categories are not mutually exclusive
- iv. Overlapping nature of interest groups (AARP, NRA) is INTEREST GROUP PLURALISM

g. ECONOMIC INTEREST GROUPS

- i. Business- most familiar is the large corporation; i.e. Walmart, Microsoft
 1. Small Business Administration deals with small business issues
- ii. Trade and other associations- National Association of Realtors
 1. Broadest is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- iii. Labor- largest and broadest is labor unions
 1. Oldest are farm organizations; Cesar Chavez
 2. 19th Century it started; AFL-CIO
 3. OPEN SHOP- labor union affiliation is optional
 4. CLOSED SHOP- labor union affiliation is mandatory
 5. FREE RIDER- accrues benefit of union without joining
 6. Union membership has fallen due to change from manufacturing to service industries

- 7. Traditionally identified with the Democratic party
- iv. Professional Associations- American Medical Association
 - 1. Government at the state level regulates many professions; licensing of lawyers, doctors, teachers
- h. IDEOLOGICAL OR SINGLE-ISSUE INTEREST GROUPS
 - i. Focus on a single issue and share a common view for government to pursue policies consistent with it; NRA
- i. PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS
 - i. Ralph Nader and the consumer organizations that investigate and report on governmental and corporate malfeasance
- j. FOREIGN POLICY INTEREST GROUPS
 - i. Most prestigious is the Council on Foreign Relations in NYC
 - ii. China's refusal to grant independence for Tibet
 - iii. One of the most influential is the American Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC)
 - iv. NGOs (Nongovernmental Organizations) are nonprofits that attempt to influence foreign policy outside the government; Greenpeace
- k. PUBLIC SECTOR INTEREST GROUPS
 - i. Government itself; National Governors Association; states have lobbyists to influence national agendas
 - ii. National Education Association

III. CHARACTERISTICS AND POWER OF INTEREST GROUPS

- a. Securing the participation of individuals in groups (COLLECTIVE ACTION OR PUBLIC CHOICE) is challenging due to the free rider problem
- b. Groups vary in their goals, methods and power
- c. SIZE AND RESOURCES
 - i. Size is important, but so is the relative activity of the members
 - ii. SPREAD of membership (relative dispersion) is important
 - iii. Groups vary in their extent of RESOURCES- money, volunteers, expertise and reputation
- d. COHESIVENESS
 - i. Mass-membership organizations fall into 3 categories
 - 1. Small number of formal paid leaders who devote full or near full time
 - 2. A few hundred involved members who attend meetings, pay dues, organize structures
 - 3. Thousands on people in name only and cannot be depended on in elections
 - ii. Strength of ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE is important to be effective
- e. LEADERSHIP- leader must understand how much power he/she holds and how to best use it effectively
- f. TECHNIQUES FOR EXERTING INFLUENCE
 - i. LOBBYING- Efforts by individuals or groups to influence public officials and public policy
 - ii. PUBLICITY, MASS MEDIA AND THE INTERNET; one way to influence large numbers of people
 - 1. Businesses (large-scale advertisers) hold an advantage

2. Internet is becoming more important
 - a. Gives citizens information for organizing, etc.
 - b. New exclusive online forums for political action; blogs
3. Mass mailing- computerized lists are important
4. Direct contact with Government – groups and individuals can respond to the FEDERAL REGISTER where proposed regulations are given an opportunity to be responded to
- iii. LITIGATION – Turn to the courts for action
 1. NAACP, ACLU
 2. File AMICUS CURIAE BRIEFS (friend of the court) where they are not a direct party
- iv. PROTEST – Tea party protests
- v. SUPPORT OF CANDIDATE- interest groups invest in one of the two major parties
 1. Labor favors Democrats
 2. Ideological issue groups can target certain candidates (NRA, anti-abortion); large influence
- vi. CONTRIBUTIONS TO CAMPAIGNS
 1. PACs- legal mechanism to contribute to campaigns; can achieve BUNDLING by bringing together like-minded donors
- vii. NEW POLITICAL PARTIES
 1. Publicize a cause; Free Soil Party (anti-slavery 1840s; Prohibition Party, Green Party)
- viii. COOPERATIVE LOBBYING- like-minded groups; environmentalists

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF LOBBYISTS

- a. Started around the mid 19th century; perform useful functions for government; provide information and mobilize public opinion; have negative connotations
- b. WHO ARE THE LOBBYISTS?
 - i. Powerful, knowledgeable, and many times previous government employees
 - ii. Moving from a governmental job to an interest group is called REVOLVING DOOR
 - 1. Former members of Congress are effective
 - iii. ISSUE NETWORKS are relationships among interest groups, congressional committees and subcommittees sharing a common policy concern
 - iv. Legal and political skills are necessary parts of a lobbyist's power base
- c. WHAT DO LOBBYISTS DO?
 - i. Provide money for campaigns to favored legislators
 - ii. Provide two types of information
 - 1. POLITICAL- who supports and opposes legislation
 - 2. SUBSTANTIVE- impact of proposed laws
 - iii. Provide technical assistance in drafting bills

V. MONEY AND POLITICS

- a. Lobbyists and interest groups influence politics by spending money
 - i. Directly on a candidate
 - ii. To a specific party that supports interest group
- b. POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES (PACs)
 - i. Political arm of an interest group legally allowed to raise and spend money on a particular political candidate, party or issue
 - 1. 608 in '74 to 4234 today

- 2. Growth in PACs is in business world
- 3. Review table 6-2 on page 166
- ii. Elected officials have formed their own PACs called LEADERSHIP PACs where they can pool individuals' contributions
- c. HOW PACs INVEST THEIR MONEY
 - i. Main influence is contributing money to candidate or party
 - ii. Incumbents are important due to wielding power
 - iii. Law limits the amount of money individuals can contribute
 - iv. Since '70s \$10K to any federal candidate in election cycle and individuals limited to \$4600 per candidate
 - v. BIPARTISAN CAMPAIGN REFORM ACT doubled individual contribution limits and mandated they increase with inflation while leaving PAC contributions unchanged
 - vi. PACs can creatively sidestep the limitations
 - vii. Contributions made to committee chairs and party leaders due to power
- d. MOBILIZING EMPLOYEES AND MEMBERS
 - i. Businesses followed the lead of labor unions in this area
 - ii. NRA has been strong here
- e. OTHER MODES OF ELECTIONEERING
 - i. Individuals and interest groups could donate unlimited SOFT MONEY to parties
 - ii. 2000-2002 \$500MM
 - iii. Issue ads; swift boat ads
 - iv. Presidential campaign has highest priority
- f. INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES
 - i. INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES were allowed by Supreme Court in 1976 as long as they are independent of candidate; unlimited expenditures

- ii. Well below PAC expenditures
- g. CAMPAIGNING THROUGH OTHER GROUPS
 - i. ISSUE ADVOCACY- do not use “vote for” or “vote against”
 - ii. Labor unions with the first to exploit tactic
 - iii. 527 ORGANIZATIONS- Swift Boat Veterans for Truth
 - iv. Review tables 6-3 and 6-4 on pages 170-171
 - v. 501c organizations like Planned Parenthood (Democrats) and Chamber of Commerce (Republicans)

VI. HOW MUCH DO INTEREST GROUPS INFLUENCE ELECTIONS AND LEGISLATION?

- a. While money is crucial to effective campaigns and reelection, it is often overstated due to conflicting contribution ideologies
- b. Also depends on the context in which money is given and received; smaller elections can be influenced to a greater degree
- c. COMMUNICATING WITH VOTERS AND MEMBERS
 - i. Mass-memberships are too diffused to mobilize full membership; although they can effectively mobilize when attacked
 - ii. Pluralistic cross-pressures deflate single issue interest groups
 - iii. Labor unions and businesses have been effective

VII. CURING THE MISCHIEFS OF FACTION-TWO CENTURIES LATER

- a. Madison would be concerned with the power of faction today
- b. The evils of interest groups has been discussed for years

- c. Concerns arise for single-issue interest groups
- d. One of the main arguments against interest groups is that they do not represent people equally
- e. In order to control the power of interest groups and lobbyists, the U.S. has moved to regulate the groups and monies
- f. Federal legislation has not been very effective and loosely enforced
- g. Interest groups provide important opportunities for individuals to work together for a common cause or purpose