Interest Groups
Interest Groups

- Interest Groups Past and Present: “The Mischiefs of Faction”
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Interest Groups Past and Present: The “Mischiefs of Faction”

- **A Nation of Interests**
  - The founders of the Republic were worried about factions.
  - James Madison played a critical role in limiting the “mischiefs of faction” in many provisions of the Constitution.

- **Social Movements**
  - Represent groups that have felt unrepresented
  - Lobbying
  - Pluralism
Interest Groups Past and Present: The “Mischiefs of Faction”

- Some U.S. citizens identify with groups distinguished by race, gender, ethnic background, age, occupation, religion, or sexual orientation.

- Others form voluntary groups based on their opinions about issues such as gun control or tax reduction. When such associations seek to influence government, they are called **interest groups**.
Interest Groups Past and Present: The “Mischiefs of Faction”

- Interest groups sometimes begin as social movements.
- A social movement consists of many people interested in a significant issue, idea, or concern who are willing to take action to support or oppose it.
After the controversial election in Iran, protesters took to the streets to call for change, and the government responded with violence and repression. □ What aspects of the American democracy, which are not present in Iran, allow for groups to engage in peaceful protests?
Types of Interest Groups

- **Economic Interest Groups**
  - Business
  - Trade
  - Labor
  - Professional

- **Ideological or Single-issuer Interest Groups**

- **Public Interest Groups**
Fears about a defect in Toyotas that led to an uncontrolled acceleration of the car resulted in a safety recall of 3.8 million vehicles. U.S. PIRG, the federation of state Public Interest Research Groups, was vocal about the need for the recall, and played a role in the Senate hearings on product safety.
Types of Interest Groups

Foreign Policy Interest Groups

• **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs):** a nonprofit association or group operating outside government that advocates and pursues policy objectives
FIGURE 6-1 Union Membership in the United States Compared to Other Countries. How might aspects of American culture and ideology help explain the relatively low unionization of the American workforce?

SOURCE: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2008 (Wyattville Road, Loughlinstown, Dublin 18, Ireland).
FIGURE 6-2 Labor Force and Union Membership, 1930-2010. How can you explain the steady upward growth of the labor force without a comparable growth in the unionized labor force?

Barack Obama meets with labor union members over breakfast while campaigning for the Democratic nomination for the presidency. Labor unions have traditionally identified with the Democratic party.

- What can you learn from this photo about the demographics of a typical labor union and the issues with which members would be most concerned?
Types of Interest Groups

Public Sector Interest Groups

- Governments are themselves important interest groups.
- Government employees form a large and well-organized group.
- Public employees are increasingly important to organized labor because they constitute the fastest-growing unions.
Types of Interest Groups

Other Interest Groups

- Veteran’s groups
- Nationality groups
- Religious organizations
2 Characteristics and Power of Interest Groups

- **Collective Action**: Refers to how groups form and organize to pursue their goals or objectives, including how to get individuals and groups to participate and cooperate.

- **Public Choice**: Synonymous with “collective action.” Public choice specifically studies how government officials, politicians, and voters respond to positive and negative incentives.
Characteristics and Power of Interest Groups

Characteristics of Interest Groups

- Size and Resources
  - Incentive to participate
  - Resources
- Cohesiveness
- Leadership
Energy Citizens, a interest group backed by the American Petroleum Institute, holds rallies against climate change legislation, which is under consideration by the Senate. Why might the oil and gas industry prefer using this technique of exerting influence?
Characteristics and Power of Interest Groups

Techniques for Exerting Influence

- Publicity, Mass Media, and the Internet
- Mass Mailing
- Direct Contact with Government
- Litigation
- Protest
- Candidate Support
Characteristics and Power of Interest Groups

Techniques for Exerting Influence (cont.)

• Contributions to Campaigns
  – Bundling
• New Political Parties
• Cooperative Lobbying
Teachers in downtown Los Angeles protest proposed state budget cuts for education. Groups often use protest as a way of generating interest and increasing support for their causes. What are some of the factors that might make government officials more or less likely to respond to protests or demonstrations?
The Influence of Lobbyists

- **Lobbyists**: persons who are employed by an organized interest group or corporation and who try to influence policy decisions in the executive and legislative branches.
- The term “lobbying” was not generally used until around the mid-nineteenth century in the United States.
- Lobbyists help prepare legislation, testify before legislative hearings, and contribute a large share of the costs of campaigns.
The Influence of Lobbyists

Who Are the Lobbyists?

- Lobbyists are former public servants.
- Lobbyists are experienced in government.
- Lobbyists often go to work for one of the interests they dealt with while in government.
  
  – Revolving door
The Influence of Lobbyists

What Do Lobbyists Do?

- Many lobbyists participate in issue networks or relationships among interest groups, congressional committees, subcommittees, and government agencies that share a common policy concern.
After leaving his position as White House Counsel, Greg Craig, shown here between former Chief of Staff Rahm Emmanuel and Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, became a partner in a Washington, D.C. law firm. While lawyers do not face the same “revolving door” restrictions as lobbyists, concerns were still raised regarding his recent insider status when it was announced that he would be advising Goldman Sachs, which was facing a lawsuit from the SEC.
The Influence of Lobbyists

What Do Lobbyists Do? (cont.)

• Interest groups provide money for incumbents.

• Interest groups provide information of two important types.
  – Political
  – Substantive

• Interest groups sometimes attempt to influence legislators and regulators by going directly to the people and urging them to contact public officials.
Money and Politics

Interest groups seek to influence politics and public policy by spending money on elections in several ways.

– Interest groups contribute money to candidates for their election campaigns.

– Interest groups contribute to political parties.

– Interest groups assist candidates seeking office, especially in contested races.
Money and Politics

Interest groups seek to influence politics and public policy by spending money on elections in several ways (cont.).

– Interest groups contribute money to other interest groups.

– Interest groups communicate to the members of their group, including employees.

– Interest groups spend money independently of the parties and candidates.
Money and Politics

Political Action Committees

- **Political Action Committee (PAC):** the political arm of an interest group legally entitled to raise limited and disclosed funds on a voluntary basis from members, stockholders, or employees in order to contribute funds to favored
Money and Politics

Political Action Committees (cont.)

- Corporations
- Trade and health organizations
- Labor unions
- Ideological organizations
Money and Politics

Political Action Committees (cont.)

• More recently, elected officials have begun to form their own PACs called Leadership PACs.

• **Leaderships PACs** are formed by an officeholder who collects contributions from individuals and other PACs and then makes contributions to other candidates and political parties.

Money and Politics

Political Action Committees (cont.)

- PACs are important not only because they contribute such a large share of the money congressional candidates raise for their campaigns but also because they contribute so disproportionately to incumbents.

Over time, how has the distribution of PAC money changed? Why do PACs contribute so disproportionately to incumbents?

Money and Politics

Political Action Committees (cont.)

• The law limits the amount of money that PACs, like individuals, can contribute to any single candidate in an election cycle.

• The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) doubled individual contribution limits and mandated that they increase with inflation while leaving PAC contribution limits unchanged.
Money and Politics

Other Modes of Electioneering

• Another way interest groups can influence the outcome of elections is by persuading their employees, members, or stockholders to vote in a way consistent with the interests of the group.

• Until the 2004 election cycle, interest groups and individuals could avoid the contribution limitation to political parties by contributing so-called **soft money** to political parties.
Money and Politics

Other Modes of Electioneering (cont.)

- **Soft money** is money raised in unlimited amounts by political parties for party-building purposes.

- **Issue Ads**: Interest groups could also help fund so-called issue ads supporting or opposing candidates as long as the ads did not use certain words.
Money and Politics

Independent Expenditures

• The Supreme Court has ruled that individuals, groups, and parties can spend unlimited amounts in campaigns for or against candidates as long as they operate independently from the candidates. When an individual, group, or party does so, they are making an independent expenditure.
Money and Politics

Campaigning Through Other Groups

- Interest groups found a way to circumvent disclosure and contribution limits through **issue advocacy**.
  - Labor unions were first to use this tactic
  - 527 organizations
  - Section 501(c) of tax code permits some charitable groups & nonpartisan voter registration drives
In this image from one of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth’s television advertisements, then-presidential nominee John Kerry’s patriotism and Vietnam War record are called into question. ■ What methods do issue groups have to influence elections that individual campaigns do not?
How Much Do Interest Groups Influence Elections and Legislation?

- Because PACs give more money to incumbents, challengers have difficulty funding their campaigns and have to rely more on individual contributors.

- Mass-membership organizations fail to mobilize their full membership in elections, although they can effectively mobilize when their interests are directly attacked.
How Much Do Interest Groups Influence Elections and Legislation?

- Only a fraction of any candidates' funds come from a single group.
- It is debatable how much campaign contributions affect elections.
- There is no guarantee that money produces a payoff in legislation.
How Much Do Interest Groups Influence Elections and Legislation?

Curing the Mischiefs of Faction:

- Regulating lobbying
- Regulating political money
- Under the **Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995**, the definition of a lobbyist was expanded to include part-time lobbyists, those who deal with congressional staff or executive branch agencies, and those who represent foreign-owned companies and foreign entities.
An important part of campaigns is registering new voters and canvassing them about their views on issues. In this photo, a volunteer from an interest group focusing on get-out-the-vote efforts uses a palm pilot to record survey responses from a Minnesota family. ■ In what ways can an interest group like this make America more democratic? Under what circumstances could they be accused of the "mischiefs of factions"?