Week 3 Lesson: Interest Groups and Business Corporations, and Social Movements

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Interest Groups and Business Corporations

Interest groups are private and public organizations that try to influence behavior of political decision makers to shape public policy. Interest groups are important for our democracy and public interest. They are not political parties nor are they officially part of the government. Instead, they are organizations whose members share the same objectives or goals who work together to attempt to influence and shape public policy. In government, this is called pluralism. Interest groups are easy to create. Our diverse interests and government policies encourage the growth of interest groups as well. There are two different types of interest groups: public and private. The chart below compares these two types of interest groups.

Interest Groups

Public Interest Groups

* Work to benefit society as a whole through causes that will affect the lives of Americans in general.

Examples

* League of Women Voters - educates voters (not just women) about candidates and issues
* American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) - works to protect the Constitutional rights and freedom of Americans

Private Interest (Economic Groups)

* Producer groups - represent enterprises that produce goods or services, such as businesses or agriculture.
* Professional groups - represent the interests of professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and dentists.
* Unions - primary role has been to protect jobs of members, work for maximum wages and benefit levels.

In order to understand interest groups, we need to get an idea of what interest groups do and how they work. Private interests' groups are more about protecting the interests of their members, mostly economically, whereas public interest groups work to secure protections or benefits for society. Let us consider each group separately.

Private interest groups are more involved in politics and are typically comprised of businesses due to resources at their disposal. They also play a huge role in the health of local, state, and national economies, groups, and organizations. This makes them very powerful in government. Large corporations such as Boeing, Microsoft, and Google have their own lobbyists. Medium size businesses such as U.S. Chamber of Commerce also have lobbyists to represent them. Small businesses usually join with others to form a single interest group to pool influence and resources. Agriculture and agribusinesses have grown substantially and work through organizations such as the American Dairy Association, the National Association of Wheat Growers, and the American Farm Bureau Federation to promote their interests. Doctors, lawyers, dentists and accountants also have associations that lobby for them as well such as the American Medical Association and the American Dental Association.

Public interest groups are committed to defending and improving the public interest. One type of public interest group is an advocacy group. These are people with active concerns that have a cause. Many public interest groups started with racial, ethnic, or gender injustice that sparked people into connecting to promote change. In early history, advocacy groups for public interest dealt with labor laws, religious freedoms, slave trade, independence etc. In the late 1960's it became more about civil rights, women's rights, and other movements. Some examples of public interest groups would be the Association of Retired Persons, American Association of People with Disabilities, and Aba Commission on Homelessness and Poverty.

Interest groups, both private and public, tend to develop when there is chaos in the economic, social, or political environment, termed "disturbance theory", such as the fires in California, issues with the elderly, or a change in our government.

The Inside versus the Outside Game

Interest groups often hire lobbyists to work on their behalf. Lobbyists represent the interest of their group to try to convince legislators, executive branch officials and others in the government to support their causes. This form of lobbying occurs in closed door sessions meaning it is private, between the lobbyist and the government official. Many of the lobbyists are retired members of Congress and higher-level bureaucrats so they understand how politics work and can use that knowledge to their interest group's advantage. The inside game is conducted quietly, out of public attention. In turn, lobbyists are expected to make contributions to the campaign war chests. This is why it is called the inside game.



