CHAPTER 10

INTEREST GROUPS

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Defining Interest Groups (pp. 308-309)
   A. An interest group is an organization of people with similar policy goals who enter the political process to try to achieve those aims.
   B. Interest groups are often policy specialists, whereas parties are policy generalists.

II. Theories of Interest Group Politics (pp. 309-312)
   A. Pluralism and Group Theory
      1. Pluralist theory argues that interest group activity brings representation to all.
      2. The group theory of politics contains several arguments:
         a. Groups provide a key linkage between people and government.
         b. Groups compete.
         c. No one group is likely to become too dominant.
         d. Groups usually play by the “rules of the game.”
         e. Groups weak in one resource can use another.
   B. Elites and the Denial of Pluralism
      1. Elite theory argues that a few groups, primarily the wealthy, have most of the power.
      2. Groups are extremely unequal in power.
      3. The largest corporations control awesome power.
      4. The power of a few is fortified by a system of interlocking directorates.
      5. Corporate elites prevail when it comes to the big decisions.
   C. Hyperpluralism and Interest Group Liberalism
      1. Hyperpluralist theory asserts that too many groups are getting too much of what they want, resulting in a government policy that is often contradictory and lacking in direction.
      2. Interest group liberalism refers to government’s excessive deference to groups.
         a. Groups have become too powerful in the political process as government tries to aid every conceivable interest.
         b. Numerous subgovernments aggravate interest group liberalism.
         c. Trying to please every group results in contradictory and confusing policy.
III. What Makes an Interest Group Successful? (pp. 312-318)
A. The Surprising Ineffectiveness of Large Groups
   1. A potential group is composed of all people who might be group members because they share some common interest.
   2. An actual group is composed of those in the potential group who choose to join.
   3. A collective good is something of value that cannot be withheld from a potential group member.
   4. The free-rider problem occurs when members of the potential group share in benefits that members of the actual group work to secure.
   5. Olson’s law of large groups states that the larger the group, the further it will fall short of providing an optimal amount of a collective good.
   6. Selective benefits are goods that a group can restrict to those who pay their yearly dues.
B. Intensity
   1. Intensity is a psychological advantage that can be enjoyed by small and large groups alike.
   2. A single-issue group is a group that has a narrow interest, dislikes compromise, and single-mindedly pursues its goal.
C. Financial Resources

IV. How Groups Try to Shape Policy (pp. 318-325)
A. Lobbying
   1. Lobbying is 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 decision.
   2. Lobbyists can help a member of Congress.
      a. They are an important source of information.
      b. They can help a member with political strategy.
      c. They can help formulate campaign strategy.
      d. They are a source of ideas and innovations.
B. Electioneering
   1. Electioneering consists of aiding candidates financially and getting group members out to support them.
   2. Political action committees (PACs) provide a means for groups to participate in electioneering.
C. Litigation
   1. Amicus curiae briefs consist of written arguments submitted to the courts in support of one side of a case.
   2. Class action lawsuits enable a group of similarly situated plaintiffs to combine similar grievances into a single suit.
D. Going Public
V. Types of Interest Groups (pp. 325-331)
A. Economic Interests
   1. Labor
      a. The union shop requires new employees to join the union representing them.
      b. Right-to-work laws outlaw union membership as a condition of employment.
   2. Business
B. Environmental Interests
C. Equality Interests
D. Consumers and Public Interest Lobbies (organizations that seek a collective good)

VI. Understanding Interest Groups (pp. 331-333)
A. Interest Groups and Democracy
B. Interest Groups and the Scope of Government

VII. Summary (pp. 333-334)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying Chapter 10, you should be able to:

1. Define interest groups and distinguish them from political parties.
2. Compare and contrast the pluralist, elite, and hyperpluralist theories of interest groups.
3. Explain what makes an interest group successful and why small groups have an advantage over large groups.
4. Identify and describe the strategies that groups use to shape public policy.
5. Describe some of the many types of groups in the American political system.
6. Evaluate interest groups in terms of their influence on democracy and the scope of government.

The following exercises will help you meet these objectives:

Objective 1: Define interest groups and distinguish them from political parties.
1. Provide a definition of the term “interest group.”

2. Name two factors that distinguish interest groups from political parties.
   1.
   2.

Objective 2: Compare and contrast the pluralist, elite, and hyperpluralist theories of interest groups.

1. Complete the following table on the theories of interest group politics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Role of Groups</th>
<th>Who Holds Power</th>
<th>Group Impact on Public Policy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pluralist Theory</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elite Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hyperpluralist Theory</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. List five essential arguments of the group theory of politics.
   1.
   2.
   3.
3. List four major points made by the elitist view of the interest group system.
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 
   4. 

4. List the three major points of the hyperpluralist position on group politics.
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 

Objective 3: Explain what makes a group successful and why small groups have an advantage over large groups.

1. What is the difference between a potential group and an actual group?

2. What is Olson’s law of large groups?
3. Define the term “single-issue group” and give an example.

Objective 4: Identify and describe the strategies that groups use to shape public policy.

1. List the four general strategies used by interest groups to shape public policy.
   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.

2. List four important ways lobbyists can help a member of Congress.
   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.

3. Why does PAC money go so overwhelmingly to incumbents?

4. What is an *amicus curiae* brief?
Objective 5: Describe some of the many types of groups in the American political system.

1. What was the main purpose of the Taft-Hartley Act?
2. List three items environmental groups have promoted and three items they have opposed.

Promoted:

1.
2.
3.

Opposed:

1.
2.
3.

3. Name two important organizations involved in promoting equality, and summarize their major goals.

1.

2.

4. What is meant by a public interest lobby?
Objective 6: Evaluate interest groups in terms of their influence on democracy and the scope of government.

1. Summarize the pluralist, elitist, and hyperpluralist perspectives on interest groups and democracy.

   1. Pluralist:
   2. Elitist:

   3. Hyperpluralist:

2. How do interest groups affect the scope of government?

**KEY TERMS**

_Identify and describe:_

interest group

pluralist theory

elite theory

hyperpluralist theory
subgovernments

potential group

actual group

collective good

free-rider problem

Olson’s law of large groups

selective benefits

single-issue groups

lobbying

electioneering

political action committees (PACs)
amicus curiae briefs

class action lawsuits

union shop
right-to-work law

public interest lobbies

Compare and contrast:
pluralist theory, elite theory, and hyperpluralism

hyperpluralist theory and subgovernments

potential group and actual group

collective good and free-rider problem

Olson’s law of large groups and selective benefits

lobbying and electioneering

electioneering and political action committees
amicus curiae briefs and class action lawsuits

union shop and right-to-work laws

**Name that term:**

1. An organization of people with similar policy goals entering the political process to try to achieve those goals.

2. These are also known as iron triangles.

3. There are usually more members in this group than in the actual group.

4. When it is easier not to join a group because you will receive the benefits anyway.

5. “The larger the group, the further it will fall short of providing an optimal amount of a collective good.”

6. People in this group tend to dislike compromise and single-mindedly pursue their goal.

7. In recent years, these have provided a means for groups to participate in electioneering more than ever before.
8. This enables a group of similarly situated plaintiffs to combine similar grievances into a single suit.

9. These organizations seek a collective good that will not selectively benefit the membership of the organization.

USING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Investigate an interest group that is of interest to you. Contact the group to see if they can provide information on the group and its policy goals. Find out how the group’s actual membership compares to its potential membership. Try to identify the strategies that the group uses in trying to achieve its policy goals. Briefly describe what you found in terms of how well the group is achieving its goals and forging a link between people and policy.

2. Using newspapers, newsmagazines, or the Internet, collect some current examples of group involvement in the policy process. Try to find examples of various types of groups, such as groups in different policy arenas, public interest lobbies, and single-issue groups. Analyze each example in terms of the policymaking area in which group activity was focused (e.g., electoral, legislative, administrative, or judicial), strategies used by the group to affect policy, and the degree to which the group was successful in achieving its policy goals. Discuss whether or not your findings support the interpretation of groups provided by the pluralist theory, elite theory, and hyperpluralist theory.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Check ☑ the correct answer:

1. Participation in both elections and interest groups has declined dramatically since 1960.
   □ True
   □ False
2. Interest groups differ from political parties because
   □ a. parties use technology more effectively.
   □ b. groups tend to be policy specialists, while parties tend to be policy generalists.
   □ c. the group’s main arena is the electoral system.
   □ d. parties seek many access points in government.

3. The theory that argues that just a few groups have most of the power is the
   □ a. pluralist theory.
   □ b. elite theory.
   □ c. group theory of politics.
   □ d. hyperpluralist theory.

4. The group theory of politics
   □ a. is a part of traditional democratic theory.
   □ b. supports the idea that elites run the government.
   □ c. sees groups as an important linkage institution.
   □ d. states that groups have become too powerful.

5. Which of the following is NOT an essential part of the group theory of politics?
   □ a. Groups are extremely unequal in power.
   □ b. Groups usually play by the rules of the game.
   □ c. Groups weak in one resource can use another.
   □ d. Groups compete.

6. Public opinion polls have shown that most people believe that government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.
   □ True
   □ False

7. Which of the following statements about the elite theory perspective on groups is FALSE?
   □ a. Real power is held by relatively few key groups.
   □ b. The power of a few is fortified by an extensive system of interlocking directorates.
   □ c. The real game of group politics is the one played by the corporate elites.
   □ d. Groups provide an effective check on elite power.

8. According to elite theorists, interest group lobbying is a problem because
   □ a. it is open to too many groups.
   □ b. it benefits the few at the expense of the many.
   □ c. it disperses power among a wide range of groups.
   □ d. legislators have become immune to group pressures.
9. Interest group liberalism is characterized by the philosophy that all interests are almost equally legitimate and the job of government is to advance them all.
   □ True
   □ False

10. Which of the following is NOT a part of subgovernments?
   □ a. interest group leaders
   □ b. interlocking directorates
   □ c. administrative agencies
   □ d. congressional committees and subcommittees

11. The Tobacco Institute, the Department of Agriculture, and the House Tobacco Subcommittee working together to protect the interest of tobacco farmers is a classic example of
   □ a. interlocking directorates.
   □ b. the group theory of politics.
   □ c. a subgovernment.
   □ d. elite control of government.

12. The hyperpluralist position on groups is that
   □ a. groups have become too powerful in the political process.
   □ b. interest group liberalism is aggravated by numerous subgovernments.
   □ c. the result of group conflict is contradictory and confusing policy.
   □ d. all of the above

13. A potential group
   □ a. is composed of people who share a common interest.
   □ b. is usually smaller than an actual group.
   □ c. is composed of only active group members.
   □ d. always consists of all consumers.

14. Collective goods
   □ a. can be packaged and sold separately.
   □ b. can be withheld from any group member.
   □ c. are available only to members of the actual group who secure them.
   □ d. are shared by members of the potential group.

15. Free-riders
   □ a. are actual group members.
   □ b. avoid collective goods.
   □ c. aggravate large groups more than small groups.
   □ d. automatically share in group benefits.
16. The larger the group, the
☐ a. more government support it receives.
☐ b. more it behaves like a party.
☐ c. less likely potential members will contribute.
☐ d. more specialized it becomes.

17. Large groups have organizational advantages over small groups.
☐ True
☐ False

18. Which of the following matters could NOT be explained by Mancur Olson’s law of large groups?
☐ a. the problems of public interest lobbies
☐ b. why small groups are easier to organize
☐ c. why large groups are less effective
☐ d. the successes of the consumer movement

19. (bonus) Which of the following organizations has the largest potential membership?
☐ a. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
☐ b. National Organization for Women
☐ c. National Taxpayers Union
☐ d. American Medical Association

20. Goods that a group can restrict to those who pay their yearly dues are called
☐ a. free-rider goods.
☐ b. selective benefits.
☐ c. collective goods.
☐ d. actual benefits.

21. Which of the following is NOT true of single-issue groups?
☐ a. They are the same as public interest lobbies.
☐ b. They have narrow interests.
☐ c. They dislike compromise.
☐ d. They single-mindedly pursue their goal.

22. One of the most emotional issues to generate single-issue groups has been that of abortion.
☐ True
☐ False
23. One of the major indictments of the American interest group system is that it is biased toward the wealthy.
   □ True
   □ False

24. Which of the following statements regarding the Tax Reform Act of 1986 is FALSE?
   □ a. The Tax Reform Act eliminated all but a very few loopholes.
   □ b. The Tax Reform Act is a classic example of how PACs influence votes.
   □ c. The chairman of the Senate Finance Committee was Congress’ top PAC recipient during the tax reform struggle.
   □ d. Senator Packwood turned against lobbyists trying to get his ear on behalf of various tax loopholes.

25. Which of the following is NOT among the strategies used by interest groups to shape public policy?
   □ a. lobbying
   □ b. litigation
   □ c. electioneering
   □ d. avoiding publicity

26. Lobbying
   □ a. is aimed at influencing decision making.
   □ b. is confined solely to the legislative branch.
   □ c. was made illegal with the Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act.
   □ d. is most effective in converting legislators.

27. Which of the following is NOT one of the ways that lobbyists can help a member of Congress?
   □ a. helping to formulate campaign strategy
   □ b. writing and introducing bills
   □ c. providing important information
   □ d. providing ideas and innovations

28. Lobbyists are relatively ineffective in winning over legislators who are opposed to their goals.
   □ True
   □ False
29. Which of the following statements regarding lobbying is FALSE?
   □ a. Studies have shown that lobbyists are particularly effective as information sources.
   □ b. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that sometimes lobbying can persuade legislators to support a certain policy.
   □ c. It is hard to isolate the effects of lobbying from other influences.
   □ d. Unlike campaigning, lobbying is directed primarily toward conversion activities.

30. Which of the following is generally NOT a major part of electioneering?
   □ a. providing financial aid to candidates, frequently through PACs
   □ b. encouraging group members to campaign for a favorite candidate
   □ c. running an interest group leader as a political candidate
   □ d. activating group members to vote for a favorite candidate

31. Most PAC contributions are given to challengers rather than incumbents.
   □ True
   □ False

32. (bonus) Congressional candidate Steve Sovern organized a PAC called LASTPAC in order to
   □ a. get PAC money since no other PAC would support him.
   □ b. urge candidates to shun PAC-backing.
   □ c. unite the PACs under one political organization.
   □ d. get other candidates to support the goals of the Legal Assistance Support Team (LAST).

33. Which of the following types of groups has NOT resorted to litigation as a strategy for affecting policy?
   □ a. groups interested in equality
   □ b. groups interested in the environment
   □ c. public interest lobbies
   □ d. none of the above

34. *Amicus curiae* briefs
   □ a. enable a group of similarly situated plaintiffs to combine similar grievances into a single suit.
   □ b. consist of written arguments submitted to the courts in support of one side of a case.
   □ c. are required before an interest group can sue for enforcement of a particular piece of legislation.
   □ d. are most often used by PACs.
35. Most interest groups are not concerned with the opinions of people outside of their membership.
   □ True
   □ False

36. Public policy in America has economic effects through
   □ a. regulations.
   □ b. tax advantages.
   □ c. subsidies and contracts.
   □ d. all of the above

37. Right-to-work laws are generally supported by
   □ a. business groups.
   □ b. labor unions.
   □ c. public interest groups.
   □ d. all of the above

38. The concept of the “union shop” illustrates the seriousness of the free-rider problem for labor organizations.
   □ True
   □ False

39. The influence of business groups would best illustrate the
   □ a. pluralist theory.
   □ b. elite theory.
   □ c. hyperpluralist theory.
   □ d. democratic theory.

40. Which of the following statements regarding business groups is FALSE?
   □ a. Business PACs have increased more dramatically than any other category of PACs.
   □ b. Trade and product associations are the most visible of Washington lobbies.
   □ c. Business interests are generally unified when it comes to promoting greater profits.
   □ d. The specific trade and product associations have been very effective in influencing legislation.

41. Which of the following issues is NOT on the hit list of environmentalist groups?
   □ a. alternative energy sources
   □ b. strip mining
   □ c. offshore oil drilling
   □ d. supersonic aircraft
42. When the two public interests of environmental protection and an ensured supply of energy clash,
   □ a. group politics intensifies.
   □ b. compromise is achieved.
   □ c. the need for energy always wins.
   □ d. groups play a secondary role to elite interests.

43. Today, civil rights groups are particularly concerned with affirmative action programs to ensure equal educational and employment opportunities.
   □ True
   □ False

44. Most recently, the National Organization for Women has been most active in
   □ a. getting the Equal Rights Amendment ratified.
   □ b. the enactment of individual statutes on equal rights for women.
   □ c. achieving equal voting rights.
   □ d. all of the above

45. Organizations that seek a collective good, the achievement of which will not selectively and materially benefit the membership or activists of the organization, are called
   □ a. single-issue groups.
   □ b. public interest lobbies.
   □ c. PACs.
   □ d. pluralistic groups.

46. Which of the following would NOT be considered a public interest lobby?
   □ a. Common Cause
   □ b. the Public Interest Research Group
   □ c. the Chamber of Commerce
   □ d. the Christian Coalition

47. James Madison
   □ a. favored a wide-open system in which many groups would be able to participate to counterbalance one another.
   □ b. wanted the Constitution to forbid the growth of groups and factions.
   □ c. believed American society would be best served by a relatively small number of powerful groups.
   □ d. believed that public interest groups were dangerous because the common man was not qualified to speak for the public interest.
48. Presidents Carter and Reagan both felt that interest groups were beneficial to their administrations and helped with policy formation.
□ True
□ False

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. What are interest groups? How do groups differ from political parties?

2. Compare and contrast the pluralist, elite, and hyperpluralist theories of interest groups. In your opinion, which theory best describes reality, and why?

3. What is the difference between a potential group and an actual group? Why is this difference important to understanding the free-rider problem? Be sure to include a discussion of collective goods in your answer.

4. Why are small groups generally more effective than large groups? Explain Olson’s law of large groups.

5. How do intensity and financial resources affect interest group success? What are single-issue groups and how effective have they been in American politics?

6. What are the principal strategies that groups use to affect policymaking? Which strategy seems to be the most effective, and why? Are certain strategies better suited for different types of interest groups?

7. What impact do PACs have on interest group behavior? Evaluate the role of PACs.

8. What are the different types of interest groups? What are their primary goals, what strategies do they use, and how successful have they been?

9. How do interest groups affect democracy and the scope of government in the United States?