Interest Groups

Chapter Seven
Interest Groups in a Democratic Society

- Roles of interest groups
  - Interest groups are private organizations that try to shape public policy.
  - Interest groups try to influence the behavior of political decision makers.
Interest Group Formation

- Escalation in the number of interest groups
- Interest groups formation tied to the existence of certain structural factors
  - When there are many interests
  - When the political culture supports the pursuit of private interests
- Diversity of interests in the United States
Rules of the political game encourage the formation of interest groups.

- The First Amendment guarantees citizens basic rights that are essential to the ability of citizens to form organizations.
- Government is organized in such a way that decision makers are relatively accessible to interest groups.
- Because of federalism, checks and balances, and the separation of powers, there is no dominant center of decision making.
Interest Group Formation and the Growth in Government

• As government takes on more responsibilities, it has a greater impact on facets of economic, social, and personal life.

• People, groups, and organizations are increasingly affected by the actions of government.
What Interests Are Represented

- Interest groups may be classified by the type of interest they represent.
  - Public interests are interests that are connected in one way or another to the general welfare of the community.
  - Private interests are associated with benefits for some fraction of the community.
Private Interest Groups

- Producer groups
- Professional groups
- Unions
Public Interest Groups

- They try to get government to do things that will benefit the general public rather than the direct material interests of their own members.
What Interest Groups Do

- Interest groups are composed of people with common goals or interests who try to convey the views of some sector of society and to influence government on their behalf.
- The two basic types of interest group activity are the inside game and the outside game.
The Inside Game

- The inside game involves direct contact of the interest group representative and government officials.
  - The politics of insiders, of the old-boy network, of one-on-one persuasion in which a skilled lobbyist tries to persuade a decision maker to accept the point of view of the interest group
- Lobbying Congress
- Lobbying the executive branch
- Lobbying the courts (amicus curiae briefs)
The Outside Game

- The outside game is an indirect form of influence that involves interest group efforts to mobilize public opinion, voters, and important contributors.
  - Mobilizing membership
  - Organizing the district
  - Shaping public opinion
  - Involvement in campaigns and elections
Success of an Interest Group Depends on:

- Access
- Information. If a group has demonstrated that they have that accurate and reliable information
- Status of Group: ex. American Medical Association
- Leaders: ex. Rainbow Coalition/Jesse Jackson
- Number of Followers
- Group unity
Success p.2

- **MONEY:** not as important as the media would lead us to believe
- **Narrow goals:** focus their resources in a more effective manner
- **Offensive vs. Defensive:** Groups that seek to sustain the status quo tend to me more successful than groups seeking change or reform
- **Objectives of the Group**
The Interest Group System and Democracy

- Representational inequalities
- Resource inequalities
- Access inequality
  - Interest group liberalism
  - Iron triangles, or subgovernments
- The special place of business corporations