

## Interest Groups Part 2

In an ideal world, the public and private sectors are kept separate, kind of like church and state. But in this day and age, money has made its way into the political process in the form of interest groups. While the name “interest group” sounds like the name of a glorified book club, they actually wield more influence than some politicians. So what is an interest group?

Most interest groups were founded on the basis of an economic interest. This includes business, labor, agricultural, and professional interests. Some are grounded in geographic areas, and others are based on a cause like environmental protection. Some even promote the welfare of certain groups of people, like retired citizens, veterans, or minorities.

Public interest groups are interest groups that seek to institute certain public policies that will benefit all or most of the people in the country, whether or not they belong to that organization. They reach out to the public to supply information in support of the group’s interests, to build a positive image for the group and promote particular policies. The most powerful tool in an interest group’s arsenal is propaganda. Prop-a-what-now? Propaganda - a technique of persuasion aimed at influencing individual behavior. The goal of propaganda is to create a particular belief, so it could be either true or false. Interest groups disregard information that does not support its cause, and often times only present one side of an issue.

Celebrity endorsement can be used in propaganda. Showing a young, hot actor using a new product can cause impressionable teens to go out and buy a product. This type of propaganda is called “testimonial.” Another instance of propaganda can frequently be seen in political attack ads. If a politician goes on television and dishes out insults towards his competitor, it is typically a form of propaganda called “name calling.” If a Republican called a Democrat a communist, that would be “name calling.”

Political action committees, also known as PACs, raise and distribute money to candidates who further their goals. Lobbying is an activity by which groups, like PACs, put pressure on legislators and influence the legislative process. Lobbying carries beyond the legislature, though, and is brought into government agencies, the executive branch, and even courts. Nearly all important organized interest groups maintain lobbyists in Washington, DC.

Lobbyists send articles, reports, and other information to office holders. They testify before legislative committees and bring grassroots pressure to bear through emails, letters, and phone calls from constituents. Lobbyists even rate candidates and publicize the ratings, going so far as to make campaign contributions to legislators.

There is a mixed perception of interests groups and lobbyists in America. Not everyone wants money influencing the political system. As such, the job of a lobbyist has the potential to be either a very positive thing for the public, or a detriment to the political process. What do you think?

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