

Chapter 9: Interest Groups
Opener
Lecture Notes

The background of the slide features a stylized American flag. The top half has a blue field with white stars, and the bottom half has red and white wavy stripes. The title 'AMERICAN GOVERNMENT' is centered over this background. 'AMERICAN' is in white serif font, and 'GOVERNMENT' is in a larger, bold yellow sans-serif font with a black outline.

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

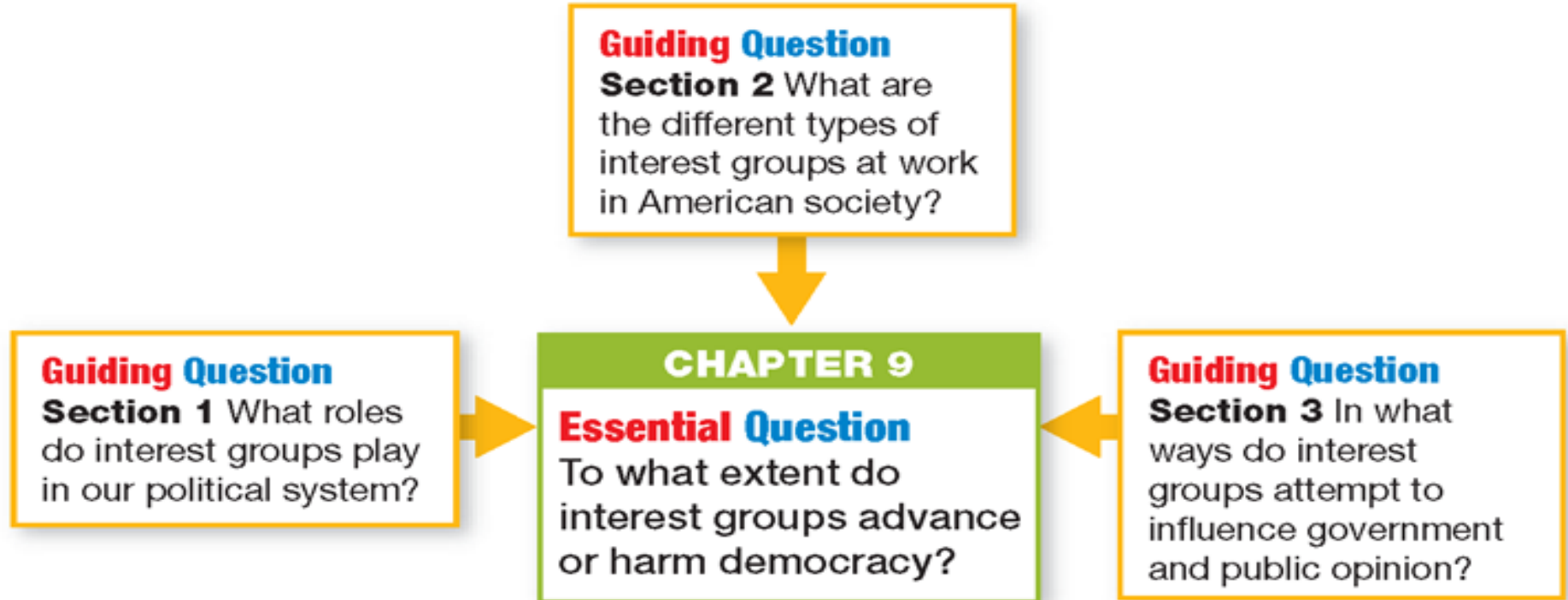
For all our variety, we are interconnected, intersected, and interwoven by organizations – arguably more so than any other modern nation.

-James Cortada and Edward Waking, *Betting on America* (2002)



► Essential Question

- To what extent do interest groups advance or harm democracy?



► Guiding Questions

- Section 1: The Nature of Interest Groups
 - What roles do interest groups play in our political system?
 - Interest groups influence public policy through actions such as promoting awareness of policy issues, bringing people into the political process, and acting as watchdogs over public officials.

► Guiding Questions

- Section 2: Types of Interest Groups
 - What are the different types of interest groups at work in American society?
 - There are economic interest groups, public-interest groups, and interest groups that represent specific segments of society.

► Guiding Questions

- Section 3: Interest Groups at Work
 - In what ways do interest groups attempt to influence government and public opinion?
 - Interest groups use direct methods such as lobbying public officials and indirect methods like grass-roots measures and influencing elections.

Chapter 9: Interest Groups

Section 1

Lecture Notes

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Describe the role of interest groups in influencing public policy.
2. Compare and contrast political parties and interest groups.
3. Explain why people see interest groups as both good and bad for American politics.

► Key Terms

- **interest group:** a collection of people who share certain views on public matters and work to shape public policy to their benefit
- **public policy:** all the goals that a government pursues in the many areas of human affairs in which it is involved
- **public affairs:** those issues and events that concern the people at large

- What roles do interest groups play in our political system?
 - Interest groups try to influence the making and content of public policy. They do this by:
 - Promoting awareness of public affairs
 - Representing people who share their views, regardless of where those people live
 - Providing useful information to government on specific policy issues
 - Helping people take part in the political process

► Role of Interest Groups

- Interest groups are collections of people who share certain views on public matters and work to shape public policy to their benefit.
 - Members of an environmental group (right) express their support for a “greener” city.



► Roles of Interest Groups, cont.

- This kind of organized effort is a key part of the democratic process.
- A public policy issue can include anything that involves government action or regulation.
- Interest groups operate at every level of government in every community in the United States.

► Political Parties

- Parties and interest groups have some key differences:
 - Parties **nominate candidates** for office, but interest groups do not.
 - Parties need to appeal to enough people to win elections. Interest groups simply want to **influence government policy**, no matter who is in office.
 - Parties are concerned with a wide **range of issues**, whereas interest groups tend to concentrate on a small set of key issues.

► Early Views

- James Madison feared that interest groups would harm democracy.
 - In *Federalist No. 10*, he argued that without separation of powers and checks and balances, such groups would dominate the government.
- Alexis de Tocqueville thought the formation of interest groups was a positive American custom.
 - He was impressed by the many different groups he found in America, representing every sort of interest.

► Early Interest Groups

- Interest groups have always sought a wide variety of goals. The people shown here fought for equality, labor, and economic reforms.



Frederick Douglass, 1818-1895, former slave, American Anti-Slavery Society



Mary Church Terrell, 1863-1954, founder, National Association of Colored Women



Lewis Hine, 1874-1940, photographer, National Child Labor Committee



Oliver Hudson Kelly, 1826-1913, farmer, founder of current-day group known as "the Grange"

► Benefits of Interest Groups

- Interest groups stimulate awareness of public affairs.
 - They do so by developing and promoting policy positions they support and opposing policies that harm their members.
- Interest groups are based on beliefs, not geography.
 - They can represent the interests of people who live in many different voting districts but who share the same attitudes and concerns.

► Benefits, cont.

- Interest groups act as sources of information on specialized topics.
 - They provide government agencies and officials with economic, social, and scientific data that is hard to get from other sources. They also share data from government sources with their members.

► Benefits, cont.

- Interest groups encourage people to participate in politics.
 - People who do not want to be politicians can still take political action by being part of an interest group and promoting issues.

► Benefits, cont.

- Interest groups keep an eye on the behavior of government agencies and elected officials.
 - They help keep the public aware of the way in which government does its work.
- Interest groups compete with each other.
 - There are often interest groups that take opposing stands on key issues. This helps keep any one interest group from abusing its influence.

► Cons of Interest Groups

- Some interest groups have unfair influence.
 - The groups with the most money and the best organization can often gain great influence over government, even if their ideas are not widely popular.
- It is hard to tell how many people an interest group really represents.
- Interest groups do not always promote the views held by a majority of their members.

► Cons of Interest Groups, cont.

- Some interest groups use unfair or illegal tactics.
 - These include acts such as bribery—in the form of money, gifts, and jobs—and threats.
 - The Abramoff scandal exposed bribes given to get politicians to write laws that favored some interest groups.



► Analyzing Political Cartoons

AARP is a well-known interest group for people over 50; it responds to the needs of older Americans. **What is this cartoon saying about AARP and similar interest groups?**

► Review

- Now that you have learned about the roles that interest groups play in our political system, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - To what extent do interest groups advance or harm democracy?

Chapter 9: Interest Groups

Section 2

Lecture Notes

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Explain how the American tradition of joining organizations has resulted in a wide range of interest groups.
2. Describe four categories of groups based on economic interests.
3. Outline the reasons other interest groups have been created.
4. Identify the purpose of public-interest groups

► Key Terms

- **trade association:** an interest group formed by a segment of the business community and focused on a particular trade
- **labor union:** an organization of workers who share the same type of job or who work in the same industry
- **public-interest group:** an organization that works for the best interests of the overall community, rather than the narrower interests of a specific segment

- What are the different types of interest groups at work in American society?
 - **Economic interest groups** represent businesses, labor unions, agricultural groups, and professional associations.
 - Other interest groups represent **specific issues** or segments of society.
 - **Public-interest** groups have the broadest focus, pursuing general public issues.

► Interest Groups A-Z

- There are thousands of interest groups in the United States operating at all levels of society.
- They vary greatly in size. Some have millions of members, others only a handful.
- The majority of interest groups are based on promoting or protecting economic interests.
- The sheer scope and diversity of interest groups means that people may belong to one without even realizing it.

► Business Groups

- Checkpoint: Why are business groups formed?
 - Business groups ask government to enact policies that promote and protect their economic interests.
 - Trade associations represent segments of the business community.
 - These include industry groups formed by oil, natural gas, and pharmaceutical companies.
 - Different business groups often disagree about preferred government policies.

► Labor Groups

- Labor unions push for government policies that benefit their members.
 - The AFL-CIO is the largest U.S. labor group, made up of 56 unions with a total of 10 million members.
- The decline of American manufacturing has weakened labor unions.
 - Membership has dropped. Unions look for new members as government workers and service employees unionize.
- Organized labor is often united, but can be divided by regional or economic differences in the labor force.

► Changing State of Labor

- Union membership has declined as the economy has shifted from manufacturing to services.
- However, the voice of unions remains strong politically with education, training, and library occupations having the highest rates of union membership.
- Unions have also become increasingly diverse demographically.

► Agricultural Groups

- Agricultural groups still have great influence on government farm policy.
 - The **Farm Bureau** and the **National Farmers Union** are major agricultural groups.
 - There are many other groups organized around specific producers of goods such as beef, milk, and wheat.

► Professional Associations

- Checkpoint: How do professional associations differ from business, labor, and farm groups?
 - Professional associations represent highly trained and/or licensed professionals.
 - Most are smaller than other business groups.
 - Examples include doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, etc.
 - Not all members of a profession belong to an association.

► Disagreements

- Some industry interest groups may compete for customers in the same market.
- White-collar and blue-collar labor groups may want different social welfare policies.
- Producers of the same agricultural good in different states may compete for market share through their interest groups.

► Disagreements, cont.

- Economic interest groups of all types often compete with each other for federal aid or tax breaks.
- Government regulation may help members of one business group compete while hurting members of another.

► Issue-Oriented Groups

- Issue-oriented groups promote a cause or an idea rather than economics.
 - There are many such groups working **for or against causes** across the political spectrum.
 - There are groups supporting and opposing legal abortion and gun control.
 - Many groups fight for conservation issues.

- Checkpoint: What are “think tanks”?
 - The research institutions called “think tanks” are also interest groups. They promote their policy goals in many media outlets.
 - The Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation are conservative think tanks, while the American Enterprise Institute and Brookings Institution are more centrist.

► Other Interest Groups

- There are hundreds of interest groups that promote policies favoring specific segments of society.
 - The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars support veterans' interests.
 - Americans of various ethnic or racial backgrounds are represented by a wide range of groups such as the NAACP, the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, or the National Association of Arab Americans.
 - There are also many religious groups that seek to shape government policy.

► Influencing International Events

- Years of conflict in the Sudan between the government and rebel groups in Darfur have left hundreds of thousands dead and made refugees of millions more.
 - Amnesty International, the Save Darfur Coalition, Human Rights Watch and other groups provide various resources to the refugees and press the United States, other nations, and the UN to act in this critical situation.



► Public-Interest Groups

- Public-interest groups seek to work for broader government policies that will benefit the general public, including those who do not belong to or support the interest group.
 - These groups have become more common in the past few decades.
 - Examples include Common Cause and the League of Women Voters.

► Review

- Now that you have learned about the different types of interest groups at work in American society, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - To what extent do interest groups advance or harm democracy?

Chapter 9: Interest Groups

Section 3

Lecture Notes

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

PEARSON

► Objectives

1. Understand the difference between the *direct* and *indirect* approaches of interest groups.
2. Describe how lobbyists influence the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.
3. Examine how interest groups use grass-roots lobbying.
4. Identify how interest groups use media, propaganda, and political campaigns to influence public opinion and policy.

► Key Terms

- **lobbying:** the process by which organized interests try to affect the decisions and actions of public officials
- **lobbyist:** someone who tries to persuade public officials on behalf of an interest group

► Key Terms, cont.

- ***amicus curiae* brief:** “friend of the court” brief; written arguments presented to a court in support of one side in a legal case that an interest group is not directly involved in, but whose outcome it has a stake in
- **grass-roots pressures:** influence brought to bear upon public officials by members of an interest group or the public at large, often using very basic measures such as letters, phone calls, or emails

- In what ways do interest groups attempt to influence government and public opinion?
 - The **direct approach** involves face-to-face efforts to lobby Congress, the executive branch, and the courts.
 - The **indirect approach** involves building public support through grass-roots measures, shaping public opinion, using propaganda, and trying to influence the outcome of elections.

► Lobbyists and Lobbying

- Lobbying involves special interest groups influencing the decisions and actions of public officials.
 - Lobbying occurs at **all levels of government** and most interest groups use it. There are an estimated 30,000 lobbyists dealing with Congress alone.
 - Most lobbyists are **professionals**. They must register with the clerk of the House and the secretary of the Senate. They must also report regularly on their income and activities.

► Lobbyists in Action

- Today, members of Congress may not accept gifts from lobbyists.
- Former senators and top executive branch officials must now wait two years before they can become lobbyists. Former House members must wait one year.

How Government Works

Lobbying in Action

An electricity company has recently announced plans to build a wind farm in a coastal location. There are a number of competing interests involved and each is taking steps to make sure their influence is felt. ***What actions might these interest groups take to build public support and further their views?***

Step 1 A Proposal
A project for building an electricity-generating wind farm in waters off the shores of an upscale vacation area is announced. The plan promises a nonpolluting source of electricity.

Step 2 Debate Begins
Some environmental interest groups favor the project as a source of clean energy. Others oppose the project because it may harm birds or ocean life. Each side tries to build public support.

Step 3 Government Action
The project requires approval of several State and Federal Government agencies. Those agencies consider everything from environmental impact to effects on the electric power industry. Interest groups mobilize to influence the views of the many agencies involved.

Step 4 Final Decision
Public agencies issue their rulings on the project, which might require legislative action.

► Lobbying Congress

- Lobbyists concentrate on influencing congressional committees.
 - In this picture, lobbyist Jack James of the AFL-CIO (right) speaks with Bernie Thompson (D., Miss.), chairman of the House committee on Homeland Security.



► Lobbying Congress

- Lobbyists concentrate on influencing congressional committees.
 - They **testify before committees** and provide them with useful information on specialized topics, and even draft legislation for lawmakers.
 - The goal is to **move bills** that lobbyists support out of committee and get them approved and to block bills they oppose.
 - It is in the best interest of lobbyists to **provide accurate information** to Congress, to avoid harming their own reputations.

► Lobbying the Executive Branch

- Checkpoint: Why do lobbyists target the executive branch?
 - The executive branch makes many of the detailed, day-to-day decisions about how to implement public policy.
 - Lobbyists want the President to appoint officials sympathetic to their views and to have agencies adopt regulations that favor their interests.

► Lobbying the Courts

- Interest groups lobby the courts by bringing lawsuits.
 - The goal is to change the legal interpretation of certain laws to fit with the policy goals of the groups.
 - Interest groups also file *amicus curiae* briefs to support one side in a legal case, hoping to influence the outcome in favor of their goals.
 -
- In addition, interest groups try to get federal judges sympathetic to their views appointed to the courts.

▶ Grass-Roots Lobbying

- Grass-roots lobbying **encourages the public** at large to pressure elected officials to support certain policies.
- **Common tactics** include writing or phoning officials and staging demonstrations or protests.
- Interest groups may also publish rankings of members of Congress that rate how those lawmakers vote on issues
- The AARP is particularly effective at grass-roots lobbying.

► Digital Lobbying

- Groups such as liberal MoveOn.org have turned to the Internet as a tool for grass-roots lobbying.
 - The Internet is used to make appeals, to collect members, for petitions, for fundraising, and as an organizing tool.
 - Most organized interest groups now have web sites and email lists. Many also use blogs to reach members.



► Shaping Public Opinion

- Interest groups try to gain support for their goals.
 - Groups encourage the news media to report on their activities, all with the goal of promoting their policies.
 - They often use celebrities, like Michael J. Fox and Muhammad Ali, who support Parkinson's research, to endorse their proposals.



► Propaganda

- Propaganda is a method of persuading people to adopt a particular belief, whether the belief is true or false.
 - Propaganda starts with a conclusion and then gathers data to support it.
 - A common tactic is to attach positive or negative labels to people, depending on who the interest group supports.
 - Other tactics include urging people to follow the crowd and “jump on the bandwagon” or convincing the public that the interest group is just like them.

► Influencing Elections

- Getting candidates elected to office is a good way to influence government policies.
 - Interest groups use **political action committees** (PACs) to contribute money to candidates who share the same or similar views on key issues.
 - They also **help conduct campaigns** by providing consultants, volunteers, and information for speeches.



► Review

- Now that you have learned the ways in which interest groups attempt to influence government and public opinion, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
 - To what extent do interest groups advance or harm democracy?