

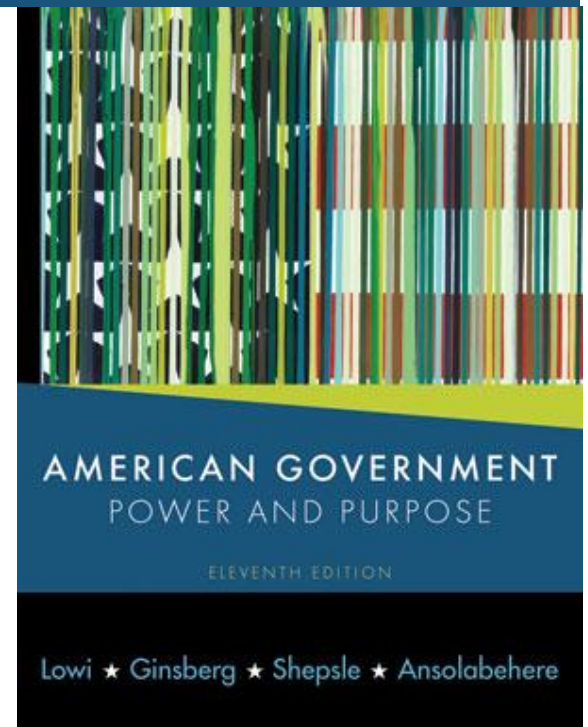
12

Groups and Interests

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

POWER AND PURPOSE

Lowi ♦ Ginsberg ♦ Shepsle ♦ Ansolabehere



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Interest Group Pluralism

“By a faction I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”

—James Madison, *Federalist 10*

James Madison's *Federalist 10* provides a basis for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of interest-group politics in the United States.



The Institution Principle:

Because “the latent causes of faction . . . are sown in the nature of man,” Madison argued that institutional arrangements must be erected to control the effects of factional politics.

Madison believed:

- ▶ Pitting the interests of different factions against one another was the most reliable way to control the negative effects of factional politics;
- ▶ And increasing the number and variety of factions actually aided the pursuit of the public good.

Following Madison,
pluralists argue that
interest-group politics
is a major strength of
American government
and society.

Pluralism is the theory that
all interests are, and should
be, free to compete for
influence in the government.
The outcome of this
competition is compromise
and moderation.

Pluralists argue that interest groups:

- ▶ Represent many diverse interests in society;
- ▶ Provide expert information and perspectives that improved policy making.





Critics of pluralism argued that interest groups:

- ▶ Represent “special interests” and do not reflect the broader will of the people or the public good;
- ▶ Overrepresent the wealthy in society;
- ▶ Provide self-serving and biased information that warps policy making.

Even if they disagreed on whether group politics was good or bad, what united pluralists and their critics was the belief that interest groups are plentiful, powerful, and influential in American politics.

- ▶ What kinds of interest groups exist?
- ▶ Why do people join interest groups?
- ▶ How do interest groups achieve influence in politics?

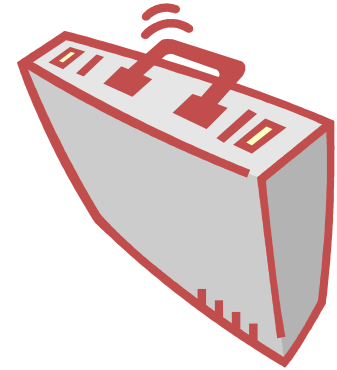
Types of Interest Groups



Interest groups form:

- to increase the chance that their views will be heard;
- to influence government;
- to represent interests and encourage political participation.

Some interest groups organize because they have a direct economic interest in government policies.



Examples of such **economic interest groups** include:

- National Association of Manufacturers
- American Farm Bureau Federation



Organized labor organizations are important interest groups in Washington politics.

Examples include:

- American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO)
- International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)
- Service Employees International Union (SEIU)



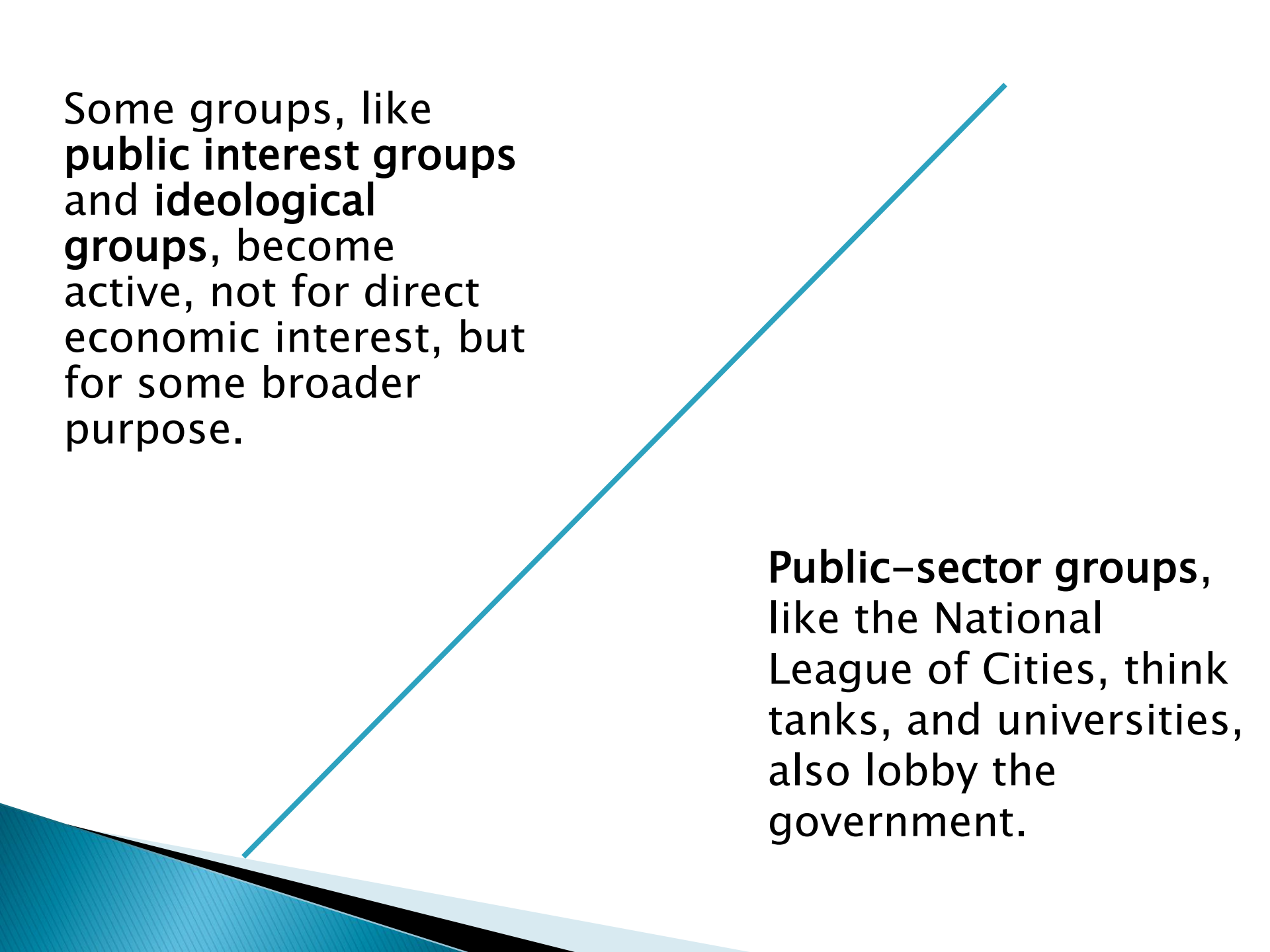


Professional associations like the

- American Medical Association
- American Bar Association

try to influence the government.

Some groups, like **public interest groups** and **ideological groups**, become active, not for direct economic interest, but for some broader purpose.



Public-sector groups, like the National League of Cities, think tanks, and universities, also lobby the government.

If pluralists are correct that there are many (and many different kinds of) interest groups, critics of pluralism are nevertheless also correct that some interests, particularly wealthy interests, are better represented than others in American politics.



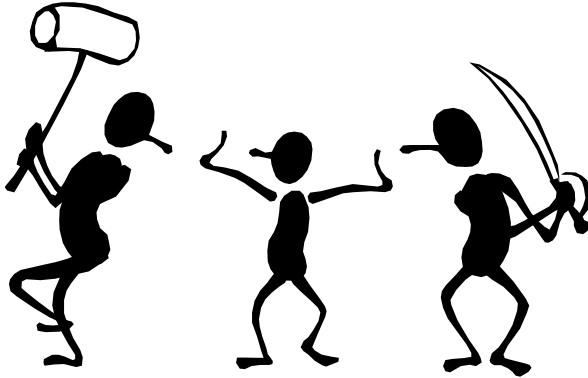
Who is Represented by Organized Interests?

Economic Role of the Individual	U.S. Adults (%)	Orgs. (%)	Type of Org. in Washington	Ratio of Orgs. to Adults
Managerial/administrative	7	71.0	Business association	10.10
Professional/technical	9	17.0	Professional association	1.90
Student/teacher	4	4.0	Educational organization	1.00
Farmworker	2	1.5	Agricultural workers' organization	0.75
Unable to work	2	0.6	Organization for the handicapped	0.30
Other nonfarm workers	41	4.0	Union	0.10
Homemaker	19	1.8	Women's organization	0.09
Retired	12	0.8	Senior citizens' organization	0.07
Looking for work	4	0.1	Unemployment organization	0.03

The Logic of Collective Action

Both enhancing democracy and representing the “evils” of factional politics, interest groups, however problematic, are a fixture of American politics.

How can we reconcile the vast number of interest groups in American politics with the idea that achieving collective action is difficult?



Recall the *Collective-Action Principle*:

All politics is collective action.

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1. Government requires collective social action;
 2. As the number and diversity of the relevant actors increase, so too does the collective-action problem.

In *The Logic of Collective Action*, Mancur Olson argued that incentives exist for individuals to shirk their responsibilities to contribute to the public good.

In the area of public policy, where achieved benefits are distributed equally to those who contributed to policy formation and those who did not, individuals have incentives to “free ride” and let others invest time, energy, and money to get the policy passed.

Given the **free rider problem**, why would anyone join interest groups or otherwise put in the effort to lobby the government for or against a proposed public policy? Indeed, why are there so many interest groups in American politics?

The Institution Principle: Institutions structure politics.

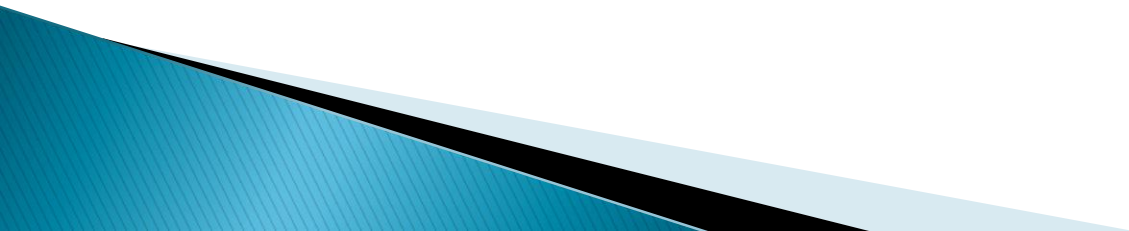
Institutional arrangements provide for a division of labor, rules regarding decision making, and checks on the powers of political actors and institutions.

These routines and structured relationships enable cooperation that alleviates impediments to collective action.



Overcoming the Obstacles

The obstacles to overcoming the collective-action problem are not insurmountable. By building a strong organization, interest groups can offer individuals powerful incentives to join groups and contribute to the collective good.



Through the provision of **selective benefits**, interest groups give individuals incentives to join the group.

Types of Selective Benefits

- ▶ Informational benefits;
- ▶ Material benefits;
- ▶ Solidary benefits;
- ▶ Purposive benefits.

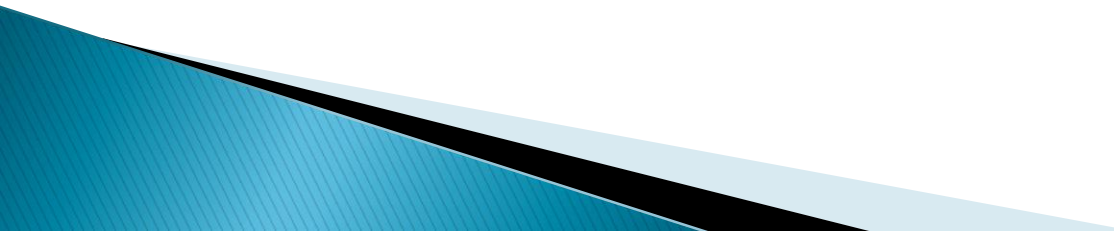
Selective Benefits of Interest-group Membership

Category	Benefits
Informational benefits	Conferences Professional contacts Training programs Publications Coordination among organizations Research Legal help Professional codes Collective bargaining
Material benefits	Travel packages Insurance Discounts on consumer goods
Solidary benefits	Friendship Networking opportunities
Purposive benefits	Advocacy Representation before government Participation in public affairs

SOURCE: Adapted from Jack L. Walker, Jr., *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 86.

Interest-Group Influence

Once formed, interest groups seek to influence the creation and implementation of public policy as well as public opinion regarding policy.

- ▶ Groups influence the creation and implementation of policy in the legislative and executive branches;
 - ▶ Groups seek to influence the interpretation of policy in the Courts;
 - ▶ Groups seek to shape public opinion;
 - ▶ Groups seek to influence the outcomes of elections.
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Strategies of Influence

Contemporary interest groups seek influence over policy makers through a mix of “inside” strategies and “outside” strategies.

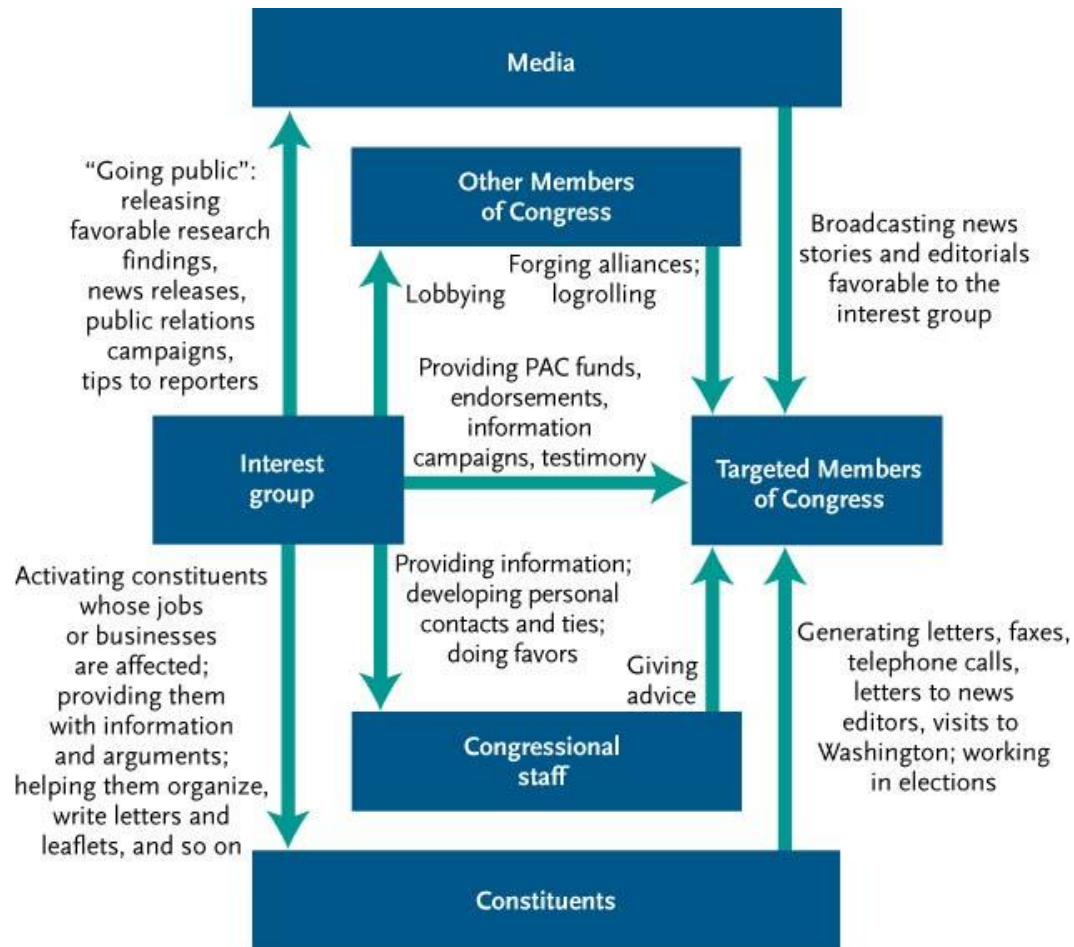
Inside strategies include:

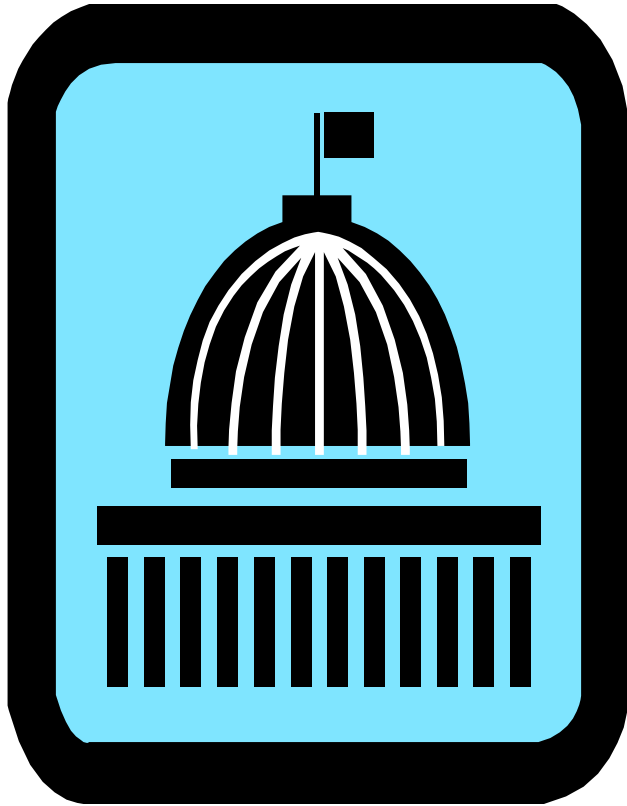
- ▶ lobbying;
- ▶ influencing administrative rule making;
- ▶ litigation.

Outside strategies include:

- ▶ influencing election outcomes;
- ▶ affecting media coverage.

How Interest Groups Influence Congress





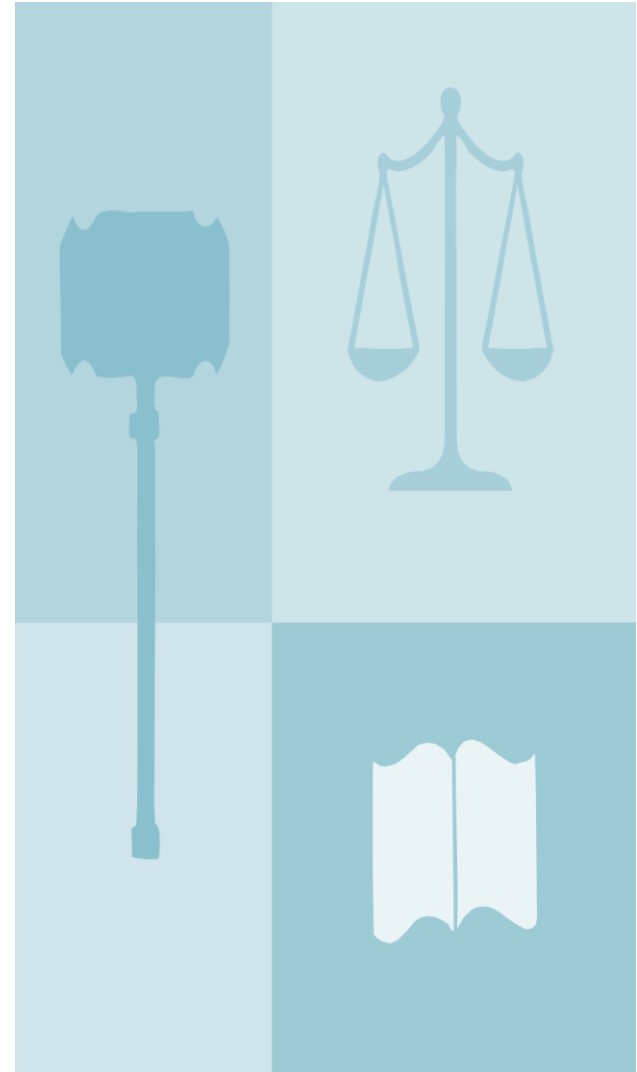
Interest groups **“lobby”** **legislators** in efforts to shape policy as it is being made.

Interest groups also seek to **cultivate access to officials in the executive branch** to influence administrative rule making and the details of policy implementation.

Interest groups hire lawyers to influence the judiciary.

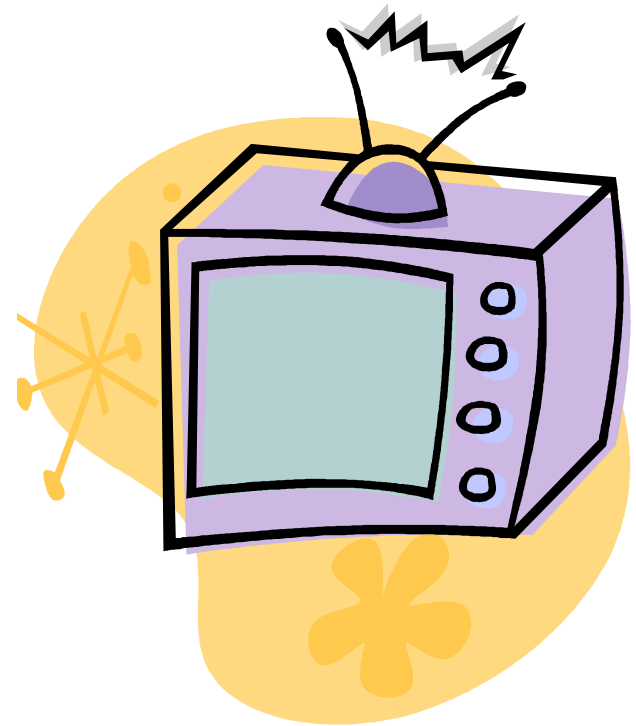
Sometimes groups are litigants in lawsuits.

Often groups submit *amicus curiae* briefs, giving their perspectives on cases to which they are not a party.



Interest groups seek to **influence public opinion** by:

- ▶ Developing media strategies and advertising; this is known as **going public**;
- ▶ Mobilizing citizens at the grass roots.

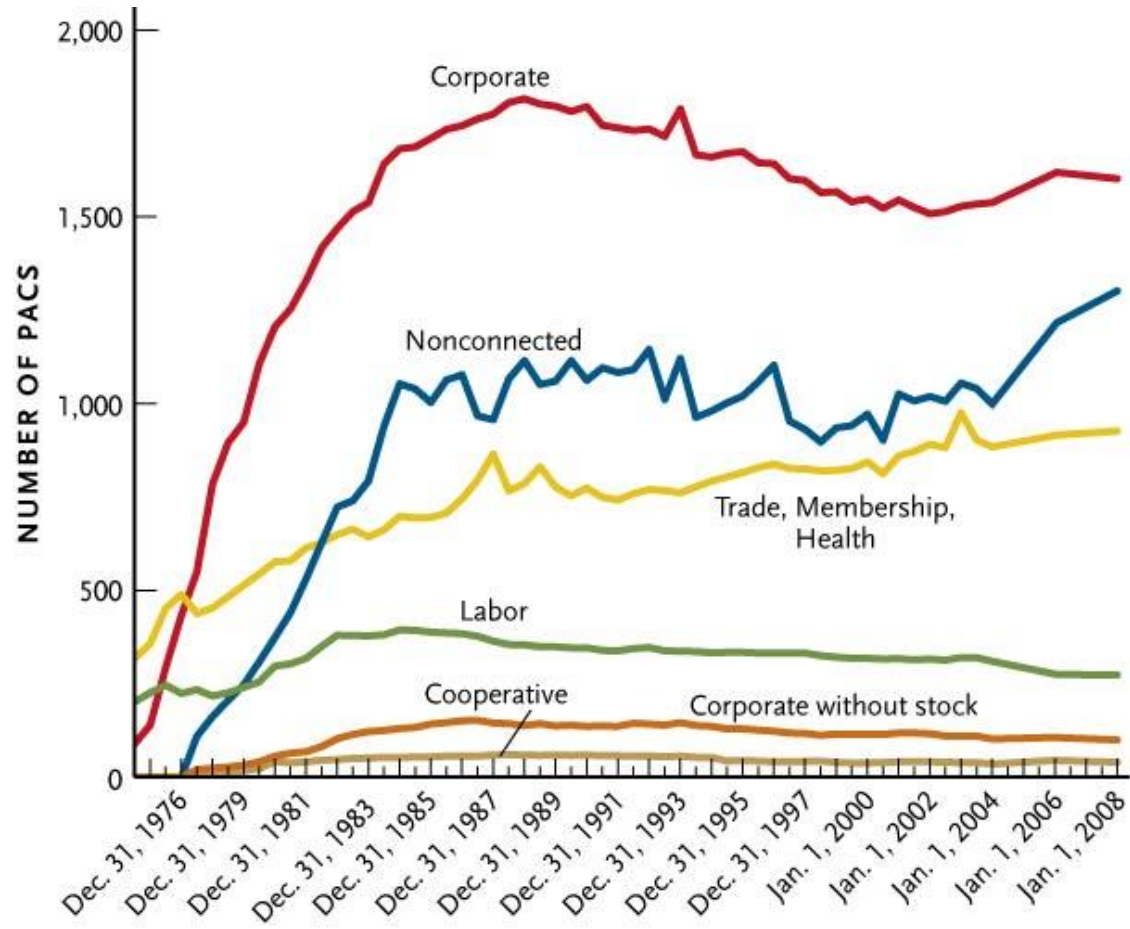




Finally, interest groups seek to **influence the outcome of elections.**

- ▶ By mobilizing their members, groups can deliver volunteers and votes to campaigns.
- ▶ Through political action committees (PACs), groups contribute money to candidates. The influence of such PAC contributions has increased considerably in recent years.

PAC Count, 1974-2008



Presidential Campaign Receipts for PAC Contributions (In Millions of Dollars)

	2000	2004	2008
PAC Contributions			
All Candidates	259.8	310.5	412.8
House	193.4	225.4	301.6
Senate	51.9	63.7	79.9
President + Party	14.5	21.4	31.3
Independent Expenditures			
All	20.6	55.9	134.6
House	7.7	5.4	21.6
Senate	6.8	7.1	14.3
President	6.1	43.4	98.7
Nonfederal (Soft) Party Donations	26.4	144.5	21.8

SOURCE: Federal Election Commission, www.fec.gov.

Assessing American Pluralism

*The Policy Principle:
Political outcomes are the
products of individual
preferences and
institutional procedures.*

Outcomes are the products
of the intermingling of
individual goals and
institutions.

How do the ways that
interest groups
organize and
compete for
influence affect the
representative
character of
American group
pluralism?

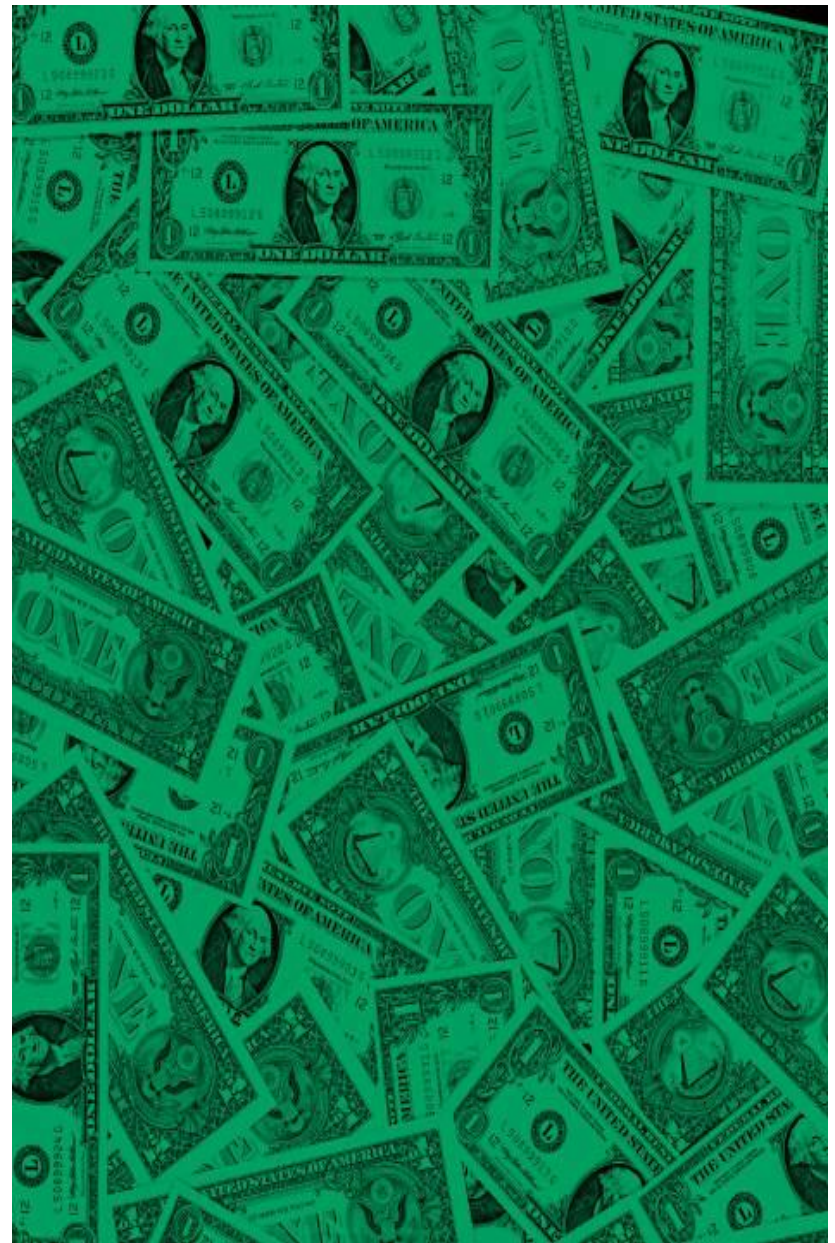
Recall that critics of pluralism argued that the wealthy were overrepresented in group politics.

How might the need to provide “selective benefits” in order to organize be an added cost to group politics?

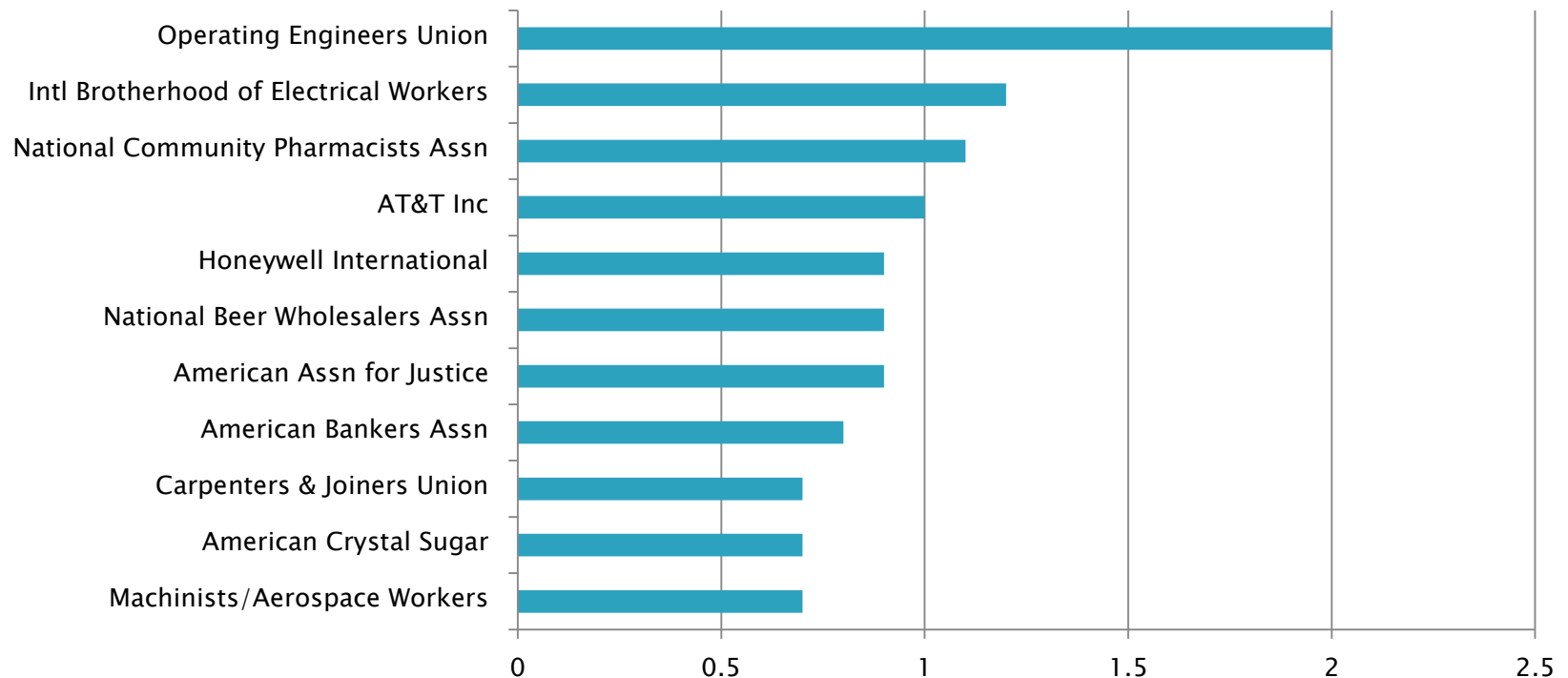
How might the need to hire lobbyists, lawyers, pollsters, and media consultants contribute to such class biases in pluralism?

What interests benefit from a political system in which interest groups regularly donate large amounts of money to the policy makers they seek to influence?

Which groups and industries give the most money to members of Congress?

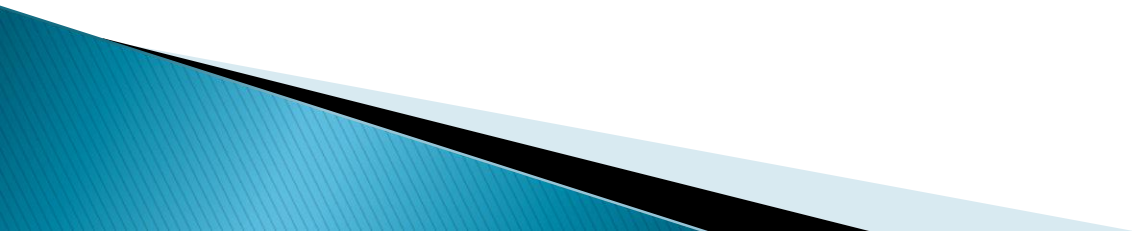


Top PAC Contributors to Federal Candidates, 2009–2010



Note: Figures are in Millions of Dollars. Source: Center for Responsive Politics, “Top PACs,” <http://www.opensecrets.org/pacs/index.php>, accessed September 25, 2009. Based on incomplete 2009–2010 election cycle, including moneys reported to the Federal Election Commission as of August 23, 2009.

Additional Art for Chapter 12



The Prisoner's Dilemma

		Prisoner B	
		Snitch	Don't snitch
Prisoner A	Snitch	A gets three years. B gets three years.	A gains freedom. B gets six years.
	Don't snitch	A gets six years. B gains freedom.	A gets one year. B gets one year.

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

Interest Groups and Representation

Americans have long been suspicious of organized interests and the possibly deleterious effects of campaign contributions. Political action committees (PACs) donate large amounts of money to members of Congress for their reelection campaigns. In turn, many observers worry that members may pay closer attention to the desires of the special interest groups than to their constituents.

One can get a sense of the magnitude of PAC contributions from this table. Each row shows the contribution by an industry to members of the committee that has jurisdiction over policies that most concern the industry, as well as contributions to members who are not on the committee. Notice that while the contributions to all members are quite sizable, industries tend to direct most of their money to committee members who are most involved with issues that are important to the industry. Assuming PACs are not making these contributions out of a purely charitable instinct, one can surmise that they expect something in return for their money.

INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTIONS TO HOUSE COMMITTEE MEMBERS, 2008 ELECTION CYCLE

Committee & Industry	Average Amount to Committee Members (\$)	Average Amount to Non-Committee Members (\$)	Ratio
Agricultural Committee, Agricultural Services and Products	\$37,955	\$5,877	6.5
Armed Services Committee, Defense Aerospace	\$28,289	\$11,216	2.5
Education and Labor Committee, Education	\$19,523	\$11,415	1.7
Energy and Commerce Committee, Health Professionals	\$104,616	\$56,578	1.8
Financial Services Committee, Commercial Banks	\$49,843	\$18,387	2.7
Natural Resources Committee, Oil and Gas	\$31,098	\$18,198	1.7

Source: Center for Responsive Politics, www.opensecrets.org (accessed 5/12/09).

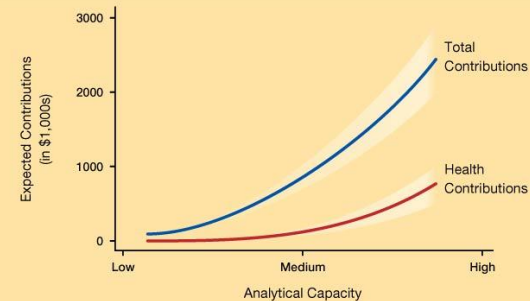
The framers were attuned to the potential problems of factions and special interests. In *Federalist 10* Madison proposed the "extended sphere" of a large and diverse republic as an institutional solution. In a diverse republic, Madison argued, any single faction acting alone would have little influence as competition between the many various groups would prevent any one group from

dominating. In addition, in a large republic, representation would "refine and enlarge" public opinion because these opinions pass through a select body.¹ Madison, however, did not foresee our current system of campaign finance. Is there any evidence that this institutional solution works in modern times?

Madison's prescience, perhaps, can be seen in recent research by Kevin Esterling.² Esterling shows that PACs tend to direct their contributions to members who have high "analytical capacity," or those members who are attentive to research and analysis in their work in committees. Esterling limited his study to committees with jurisdiction over health policies. We saw in the previous table that health interest groups tend to direct their contributions to these members, and this figure shows they contribute most heavily to members with high analytical capacity (see the red curve in the graph), or the ones who are most likely to "refine and enlarge" public opinion. In addition, these same members tend to attract more contributions from groups that are not health-related (see the blue curve), suggesting that members with high analytical capacity are pressured by groups with diverse interests, exactly as envisioned in Madison's "extended sphere."

While it may be that the groups intend to advance their special interests, the overall pattern of contributions seems to reward legislators who try to inform legislation with research and analysis.

EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS BY ANALYTICAL CAPACITY



¹James Madison, *Federalist 10*, in the *Federalist Papers*, Clinton Rossiter, ed. (New York: Penguin, 1961), pp. 82–83.

²Kevin M. Esterling, "Buying Expertise: Campaign Contributions and Attention to Policy Analysis in Congressional Committees," *American Political Science Review* 101 (February 2007): 93–109.

This concludes the presentation slides for Chapter 12: Groups and Interests

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