

## Government in America

### CHAPTER 11 OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

#### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

#### INTRODUCTION

Although voter turnout has declined substantially in the U.S. since the 1960s, the number of interest groups active in lobbying the government has increased dramatically. This chapter examines this growth and the activities of interest groups, why individuals join groups, and what groups get for their efforts.

#### THE ROLE AND REPUTATION OF INTEREST GROUPS

An **interest group** is *an organization of people with similar policy goals* that tries to influence the political process to try to achieve those goals. In so doing, interest groups try to influence every branch and every level of government. This *multiplicity of policy arenas* helps distinguish interest groups from political parties. Interest groups may also support candidates for office, but American interest groups *do not run their own slate of candidates*. Interest groups are often *policy specialists*, whereas parties are policy generalists. Thus, interest groups do not face the constraint imposed by trying to appeal to everyone (unlike political parties).

Despite their importance to democratic government, interest groups traditionally have had a negative image in America. Even Madison's term **faction** was general enough to include both parties and groups. There is little doubt that honest lobbying outpaces dishonest lobbying by a wide margin. Ironically, many political scientists now believe that *honest lobbying poses greater problems for democracy* than dishonest lobbying.

#### THEORIES OF INTEREST GROUP POLITICS

Understanding the debate over whether honest lobbying creates problems requires an examination of three important theories: (1) **pluralist theory** argues that interest group activity brings representation to all as groups *compete and counterbalance one another*; (2) **elite theory** argues that *a few groups (mostly the wealthy) have most of the power*; (3) **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*.

According to pluralist theory, groups win some and lose some, but *no group wins or loses all the time*. Pluralists do not deny that some groups are stronger than others or that competing interests do not always get an equal hearing, but they argue that *lobbying is open to all* and should not be regarded as a problem. No one group is likely to become too dominant, and *all legitimate groups are able to affect public policy*.

Elite theorists maintain that *real power is held by relatively few people, key groups, and institutions*. Government is run by *a few big interests* looking out for themselves. Interest groups are extremely unequal in power; thus the preponderance of power held by elites means that *pluralist theory does not accurately describe the reality of American politics*.

This chapter also explores *hyperpluralism and interest group liberalism*. Theodore Lowi coined the phrase **interest group liberalism** to refer to the government's *excessive deference to groups*. Interest group liberalism holds that virtually all pressure group demands are legitimate and that the job of the government is to advance them all. In an effort to appease every interest, government agencies skyrocket.

Interest group liberalism is promoted by the network of **subgovernments** (also known as **iron triangles**). These subgovernments are composed of key interest groups interested in a particular policy, the government agency in charge of administering the policy, and the members of congressional committees and subcommittees handling the policy. Relations between groups and the government become too cozy. Hard choices about national policy rarely get made as the government tries to favor all groups, leading to *policy paralysis*. Hyperpluralist theorists often point to the government's contradictory tobacco-related policies as an example of interest group liberalism.

## WHAT MAKES AN INTEREST GROUP SUCCESSFUL?

Many factors affect the success of an interest group, including the *size of the group*, the *intensity*, and its *financial resources*. Small groups actually have *organizational advantages over large groups*. A **potential group** is composed of all people who might be group members because they share some common interest. An **actual group** is composed of those in the potential group who choose to join. Groups vary enormously in the degree to which they enroll their potential membership.

A **collective good** is something of value (such as clean air or a higher minimum wage) that cannot be withheld from a potential group member. Members of the potential group share in benefits that members of the actual group work to secure. The **free-rider problem** occurs when potential members decide not to join but to sit back and let other people do the work (from which they will nevertheless benefit). According to **Olson's law of large groups**, *the bigger the group, the more serious the free-rider problem*.

The primary way for large potential groups to overcome Olson's law is to provide attractive benefits for only those who join the organization. Selective benefits are goods that a group can restrict to those who pay their yearly dues, such as information publications, travel discounts, and group insurance rates. One way a large potential group may be mobilized is through an issue that *people feel intensely* about, such as abortion. Both small and large groups enjoy a psychological advantage when intensity is involved. Politicians are more likely to listen when a group shows that it cares deeply about an issue, and many votes may be won or lost on a single issue. One of the biggest indictments of the interest group system is that it is biased toward the wealthy.

## THE INTEREST GROUP EXPLOSION

The number of interest groups in the United States has been increasing rapidly over the last several decades. Between 1959 and 2001, the number of groups listed in the Encyclopedia of Associations skyrocketed from about 6,000 to 22,000. The increase in the number of groups reflects a growing diversity in the interest group universe. Whereas trade groups clearly dominated the picture in 1959, this is no longer the case. It seems that there is now an organized group for every conceivable interest. Very few occupations or industries now go without an organized group to represent them in Washington.

## HOW GROUPS TRY TO SHAPE POLICY

The three *traditional strategies* of interest groups are *lobbying*, *electioneering*, and *litigation*. In addition, groups have recently developed *a variety of sophisticated techniques* to appeal to the public for widespread support.

**Lobbyists** are political persuaders who are the representatives of organized groups. They normally work in Washington, handling groups' legislative business. Although lobbyists primarily try to *influence* members of Congress, they can also be of *help* to them. For example, lobbyists are an important source of specialized information.

Political scientists are *not in agreement* about the *effectiveness of lobbying*. Much evidence suggests that lobbyists' power over policy is often exaggerated, but plenty of evidence to the contrary suggests that lobbying can sometimes persuade legislators to support a certain policy. It is difficult to evaluate the specific effects of lobbying because it is hard to isolate its effects from other influences. Like campaigning, lobbying is directed primarily toward *activating and reinforcing* one's supporters.

Getting the right people into office or keeping them there is another key strategy of interest groups. Many groups therefore get involved in **electioneering**—aiding candidates financially and getting their members to support them. **Political Action Committees (PACs)** have provided a means for groups to participate in electioneering more than ever before.

Today, **litigation** is often used if an interest group fails in Congress or gets only a vague piece of legislation. Environmental legislation, such as the Clean Air Act, typically includes written provisions allowing ordinary citizens to sue for enforcement. Possibly the most famous interest group victories in court were by civil rights groups in the 1950s. These groups won major victories in court cases concerning school desegregation, equal housing, and labor market equality. Consumer groups have also used suits against businesses and federal agencies as a means of enforcing consumer regulations.

One tactic that lawyers employ to make the views of interest groups heard by the judiciary is the filing of *amicus curiae* (“friend of the court”) briefs. A more direct judicial strategy employed by interest groups is the filing of class action lawsuits, which

enable a group of people in a similar situation to combine their common grievances into a single suit.

The practice of interest groups *appealing to the public for support* has a long tradition in American politics. Public opinion ultimately makes its way to policymakers, so interest groups carefully cultivate their public image.

## **TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS**

Political scientists loosely *categorize interest groups* into four main policy areas: some deal primarily with *economic issues*, others with issues of *the environment*, others with *equality* issues, and still others with the interests of all consumers.

**Economic groups** are ultimately concerned with wages, prices, and profits. In the American economy, government does not directly determine these factors. More commonly, public policy in America has economic *effects* through regulations, tax advantages, subsidies and contracts, and international trade policy. Business, labor, and farmers all worry about government regulations. Every economic group wants to get its share of direct aid and government contracts.

**Environmental interests** have exerted a great deal of influence on Congress and state legislatures. Group politics intensifies when two public interests clash, such as environmental protection and an ensured supply of energy.

**Equality interests** are those groups representing minorities and women who make *equal rights* their main policy goal. Equality at the polls, in housing, on the job, in education, and in all other facets of American life has long been the dominant goal of African-American groups, the oldest of which is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Nineteenth Amendment (1920) guaranteed women the right to vote, but other guarantees of equal protection for women remain absent from the Constitution. More recently, women's rights groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) have lobbied for an end to sexual discrimination.

**Consumers and public interest lobbies** (representing groups that champion causes or ideas "in the public interest") are organizations that seek a "collective good," by which everyone should be better off—regardless of whether they joined in the lobbying. Consumer groups have won many legislative victories in recent years, including the creation in 1973 of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (authorized to regulate all consumer products and to ban particularly dangerous ones). Other public interest groups include groups that speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, such as children, animals, and the mentally ill; good government groups such as Common Cause; religious groups; and environmental groups.

## **UNDERSTANDING INTEREST GROUPS**

The problem of interest groups in America today remains much the same as James Madison defined it over 200 years ago. A free society must allow for the representation of all groups, yet groups are usually more concerned with their own self-interest than with the needs of society as a whole. For democracy to work well, it is important that self-interested groups not be allowed to assume a dominant position.

Madison's solution was to create an open system in which many groups would be able to participate. Groups with opposing interests would *counterbalance* each other. *Pluralist theorists* believe that a rough approximation of the public interest emerges from this competition. *Elite theorists* point to the proliferation of business PACs as evidence of more interest group corruption in American politics than ever. They particularly note that wealthier interests are greatly advantaged by the PAC system. *Hyperpluralist theorists* feel that government attempts to accommodate all major interest groups led to policy gridlock and the inability for government to initiate major policies. Hyperpluralist theory thus offers a powerful explanation for the policy gridlock evident in American politics today.

The power of special interest groups through PACs and other means has implications for the *scope of government*. Most special interest groups strive to maintain established programs that benefit them—and thus promote larger government. Conversely, one can make the argument that the growth of the scope of government in recent decades accounts for a good portion of the proliferation of interest groups. As the federal government has become involved in more areas, more interest groups have risen to influence policy.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

### I. THE ROLE AND REPUTATION OF INTEREST GROUPS

- A. Although turnout in elections has declined since 1960, participation in interest groups has mushroomed.
- B. The *freedom to organize* (the right "peaceably to assemble, and to petition" guaranteed by the First Amendment) is as fundamental to democratic government as freedom of speech or of the press.
- C. Distinguishing interest groups from political parties.
  1. An **interest group** is an organization of people with similar policy goals that tries to influence the political process to try to achieve those goals. In so doing, interest groups try to influence every branch and every level of government.
  2. This *multiplicity of policy arenas* helps *distinguish interest groups from political parties*.
  3. Interest groups may support candidates for office, but American interest groups *do not run their own slate of candidates*. By contrast, interest groups in many countries with *multiparty systems* often form their own political parties to push for their demands.
  4. Interest groups are often *policy specialists*, whereas *parties are policy generalists*.

5. Unlike political parties, interest groups do not face the constraint imposed by trying to appeal to everyone.

D. Why interest groups get bad press.

1. Despite their importance to democratic government, interest groups traditionally have had a negative image in America. Even Madison's term **faction** was general enough to include both parties and groups.

2. There is little doubt that *honest lobbying outpaces dishonest lobbying* by a wide margin. However, many political scientists now believe that *honest lobbying poses greater problems for democracy* than dishonest lobbying.

## II. THEORIES OF INTEREST GROUP POLITICS

A. Understanding the debate over whether honest lobbying creates problems requires an examination of three important theories.

1. **Pluralist theory** argues that interest group activity brings representation to all; groups *compete and counterbalance one another*.

2. **Elite theory** argues that *a few groups (mostly the wealthy) have most of the power*.

3. **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*.

B. Pluralism and group theory.

1. In pluralist theory, the extensive organization of competing groups is seen as evidence that influence is widely dispersed among them. *Groups win some and lose some, but no group wins or loses all the time*.

2. A *group theory of politics* contains several essential arguments.

a. Groups provide a key link between people and government whereby all legitimate interests in the political system can get a hearing from government.

b. Groups compete, and interests constantly make claims on one another.

c. No one group is likely to become too dominant. When one group grows too powerful, its opponents are likely to intensify their organization and thus restore balance to the system.

d. Groups usually play by the "rules of the game," with few groups lying, cheating, stealing, or engaging in violence.

e. Groups weak in one resource can use another. All legitimate groups are able to affect public policy.

3. Pluralists do not deny that some groups are stronger than others or that competing interests do not always get an equal hearing, but they argue that *lobbying is open to all and should not be regarded as a problem*.

C. Elites and the denial of pluralism.

1. Elite theorists maintain that *real power is held by relatively few people, key groups, and institutions*. Government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.

2. Elitists point to *interlocking and concentrated power centers*. About one-third of top institutional positions are occupied by people who hold more than one such position.
3. The fact that there are numerous groups proves nothing because *groups are extremely unequal in power*. When confronted with the power of multinational corporations, consumer interests are easily pushed aside.
4. Honest lobbying is a problem because it benefits the few at the expense of the many.

D. Hyperpluralism and interest group liberalism.

1. Hyperpluralists argue that *the pluralist system is out of control*.
2. Theodore Lowi coined the phrase **interest group liberalism** to refer to the government's *excessive deference to groups*.
3. Interest group liberalism holds that virtually all pressure group demands are legitimate and that the job of the government is to advance them all. In an effort to appease every interest, government agencies proliferate, conflicting regulations expand, programs multiply, and the budget skyrockets.
4. Interest group liberalism is promoted by the network of **subgovernments** (also known as **iron triangles**). These subgovernments are composed of key interest groups interested in a particular policy, the government agency in charge of administering the policy, and the members of congressional committees and subcommittees handling the policy.
5. Relations between groups and the government become too cozy. Hard choices about national policy rarely get made as the government tries to favor all groups, leading to *policy paralysis*. Hyperpluralist theorists often point to the government's contradictory tobacco-related policies as an example of interest group liberalism.
6. Ironically, the recent interest group explosion is seen by some as *weakening the power of subgovernments*. With so many more interest groups to satisfy and with many of them competing against one another, a cozy relationship between groups and the government is more difficult to sustain.

### III. WHAT MAKES AN INTEREST GROUP SUCCESSFUL?

A. The surprising ineffectiveness of large groups.

1. Many factors affect the success of an interest group, including the *size of the group*, the *intensity*, and its *financial resources*. Small groups actually have *organizational advantages over large groups*.
2. A **potential group** is composed of all people who might be group members because they share some common interest.
3. An **actual group** is composed of those in the potential group who choose to join. Groups vary enormously in the degree to which they enroll their potential membership.
4. A **collective good** is something of value (such as clean air or a higher minimum wage) that cannot be withheld from a potential group member.

Members of the potential group share in benefits that members of the actual group work to secure.

a. Economist Mancur Olson points that all groups—as opposed to individuals—are in the business of providing collective goods. The **free-rider problem** occurs when potential members decide not to join, but rather to sit back and let other people do the work (from which they will nevertheless benefit).

b. According to **Olson's law of large groups**, *the bigger the group, the more serious the free-rider problem*.

(1) It is easier to organize a small group with clear economic goals than it is to organize a large group with broader goals.

(2) Small groups have an organizational advantage over large ones because a given member's share of the collective good in a small group may be great enough that he or she will try to secure it; but in the largest groups, each member can only expect to get a tiny share of the policy gains.

c. This advantage of small groups helps to explain why public interest groups have a hard time financially. In contrast, the lobbying costs and benefits for business are concentrated. Large corporations also enjoy an inherent size advantage. Small potential groups like businesses have an easier time organizing themselves for political action than large potential groups, such as consumers.

d. The primary way for large potential groups to overcome Olson's law is to provide **selective benefits**. These are goods that a group can restrict to those who pay their yearly dues, such as information publications, travel discounts, and group insurance rates.

#### B. Intensity.

1. One way a large potential group may be mobilized is through an issue that *people feel intensely* about, such as abortion.

a. Both small and large groups enjoy a psychological advantage when intensity is involved. Politicians are more likely to listen when a group shows that it cares deeply about an issue, and many votes may be won or lost on a single issue.

b. A **single-issue group**—which has a narrow interest, dislikes compromise, and single-mindedly pursues its goal—characteristically deals with issues that evoke strong emotions (such as nuclear power plants, gun control, and abortion).

2. Perhaps the most emotional issue of all in recent years has been that of abortion. Regardless of which side candidates for political office are on, they will be taking heat on the abortion issue for years to come.

#### C. Financial resources.

1. Critics charge that PACs—as the source of so much money in today's expensive high-tech campaigns—distort the governmental process in favor of those that can raise the most money.

2. Conversely, the big interests do not always win, even on some of the most important issues (such as the Tax Reform Act of 1986).

#### IV. THE INTEREST GROUP EXPLOSION

A. One of the major factors in the explosion in the number of interest groups in the United States has been the development of sophisticated technology such as computerized mail lists.

1. Over 90 percent of groups have their headquarters in Washington, D.C.
2. There are an enormous number of highly specialized and seemingly trivial groups.
3. Almost every group has a staff and publications.

B. The interests of many groups are primarily economic. Eighty percent of the groups originated from occupational, industrial, or professional memberships.

#### V. HOW GROUPS TRY TO SHAPE POLICY

A. The three *traditional strategies* of interest groups are *lobbying*, *electioneering*, and *litigation*. In addition, groups have recently developed *a variety of sophisticated techniques* to appeal to the public for widespread support.

B. Lobbying.

1. **Lobbyists** are political persuaders who are the representatives of organized groups. They normally work in Washington, handling groups' legislative business.
2. Basically, there are two types of lobbyists: regular, paid employees of a corporation, union, or association, and lobbyists for hire on a temporary basis.
3. Although lobbyists primarily try to *influence* members of Congress, they can also be of *help* to them. Ornstein and Elder list four ways lobbyists can help a member of Congress:
  - a. They are an important source of information. Lobbyists can confine themselves to a single policy area, and thus can provide specialized expertise.
  - b. They can help a member with political strategy. In effect, they are free consultants.
  - c. They can help formulate campaign strategy and get the group's members behind a politician's reelection campaign.
  - d. They are a source of ideas and innovations.
4. Political scientists are *not in agreement* about the *effectiveness of lobbying*.
  - a. Much evidence suggests that lobbyists' power over policy is often exaggerated.
  - b. Plenty of evidence to the contrary suggests that lobbying can sometimes persuade legislators to support a certain policy. Examples include opposition to gun control legislation by the National Rifle Association and intensive lobbying against the 1988 Catastrophic Health Care Act conducted by the nation's most wealthy senior citizens.

c. It is difficult to evaluate the specific effects of lobbying because it is hard to isolate its effects from other influences. Like campaigning, lobbying is directed primarily toward *activating and reinforcing* one's supporters.

#### C. Electioneering.

1. Getting the right people into office or keeping them there is a key strategy of interest groups. Many groups therefore get involved in **electioneering**—aiding candidates financially and getting their members to support them.

2. **Political Action Committees (PACs)** have provided a means for groups to participate in electioneering more than ever before. In recent years, nearly half of the candidates running for reelection to the House of Representatives have received the majority of their campaign funds from PACs. Most funds from PACs go to incumbents (\$134 million to House incumbents during the 1999-2000 election cycle compared to \$17 million to challengers) because *incumbents are the most likely to provide a return the PACs' investment*.

#### D. Litigation.

1. Today, **litigation** is often used if an interest group fails in Congress or gets only a vague piece of legislation.

a. Environmental legislation, such as the Clean Air Act, typically includes written provisions allowing ordinary citizens to sue for enforcement. The constant threat of a lawsuit increases the likelihood that businesses will consider the environmental impact of what they do.

b. Possibly the most famous interest group victories in court were by civil rights groups in the 1950s. These groups won major victories in court cases concerning school desegregation, equal housing, and labor market equality.

c. Consumer groups have used suits against businesses and federal agencies as a means of enforcing consumer regulations.

2. Tactics and strategies.

a. One tactic that lawyers employ to make the views of interest groups heard by the judiciary is the filing of *amicus curiae* ("friend of the court") **briefs**, which consist of written arguments submitted to the courts in support of one side of a case.

b. A more direct judicial strategy employed by interest groups is the filing of **class action lawsuits**, which enables a group of similarly situated plaintiffs to combine similar grievances into a single suit.

#### E. Going public.

1. Many interest groups find it important to shape a good *image*, employing public relations techniques to present themselves in the most favorable manner.

2. The practice of interest groups appealing to the public for support has a long tradition in American politics.

## VI. TYPES OF INTEREST GROUPS

A. Political scientists loosely *categorize interest groups* into four main policy areas: some deal primarily with *economic issues*, others with issues of *the environment*, others with *equality* issues, and still others with the interests of all consumers.

B. Economic groups.

1. All economic interests are ultimately concerned with wages, prices, and profits.

2. In the American economy, government does not directly determine these factors. More commonly, public policy in America has economic *effects* through regulations, tax advantages, subsidies and contracts, and international trade policy.

a. Business, labor, and farmers all worry about government regulations. Every economic group wants to get its share of direct aid and government contracts.

b. Business executives, factory workers, and farmers seek to influence government because regulations, taxes, subsidies, and international economic policy affect their economic livelihoods.

3. Labor.

a. Labor has more affiliated members than any other interest group except the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP). The AFL-CIO is itself a union of unions.

b. Unions have fought hard to establish the **union shop**, which requires new employees to join the union representing them.

c. Business groups have supported **right-to-work laws**, which outlaw union membership as a condition of employment. In 1947, Congress passed the **Taft-Hartley Act** permitting states to adopt right-to-work laws.

d. The American labor movement reached its peak in 1956 when 33 percent of the non-agricultural work force belonged to a union; the percentage has declined since then to about 16 percent.

4. Business.

a. Seventy percent of all interest group organizations having a Washington presence represent business, and business PACs have increased more dramatically than any other category of PACs. Most large firms now have offices in Washington that monitor legislative activity.

b. Business interests are generally unified when it comes to promoting greater profits, but are often fragmented when policy choices have to be made. Two umbrella organizations—the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the Chamber of Commerce—include most corporations and business and speak for them when general business interests are at stake.

- c. The hundreds of trade and product associations fight regulations that would reduce their profits. They seek preferential tax treatment as well as government subsidies and contracts.
- d. It is not only American trade associations that are concerned with policies such as tariffs and preferential tax treatment; foreign corporations and governments are also concerned.

C. Environmental interests.

1. Environmentalists have exerted a great deal of influence on Congress and state legislatures. A few environmentalist groups—like the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society—have been around since the nineteenth century, but many others trace their origins to the first *Earth Day* in 1970, when ecology-minded people marched to symbolize their support for environmental protection.
2. Group politics intensifies when two public interests clash, such as environmental protection and an ensured supply of energy.
  - a. Environmentalists insist that, in the long run, energy supplies can be ensured without harming the environment or risking radiation exposure from nuclear plants.
  - b. Energy producers argue that environmentalists oppose nearly all new energy projects. They argue that some limited risks have to be taken to fulfill energy demands.

D. Equality interests.

1. Interest groups representing women and minorities have made equal rights their main policy goal.
2. Equality at the polls, in housing, on the job, in education, and in all other facets of American life has long been the dominant goal of African-American groups, the oldest of which is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Although they have won many victories in principle, *equality in practice* has been much slower in coming.
  - a. Today, civil rights groups continue to push for more effective affirmative action programs to ensure that minority groups are given educational and employment opportunities. In recent years, the NAACP's main vehicle has been the *Fair Share program*, which negotiates agreements with national and regional businesses to increase minority hiring and the use of minority contractors.
3. The Nineteenth Amendment (1920) guaranteed women the right to vote, but other guarantees of equal protection for women remained absent from the Constitution.
  - a. More recently, women's rights groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) have lobbied for an end to sexual discrimination.
  - b. Their primary goal has been the passage of the *Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)*. The ERA was approved by Congress in 1972 but fell three states short of the 38 necessary for ratification.

Interest groups such as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum battled NOW and other women's groups over ratification of the ERA.  
c. NOW remains committed to enacting the protection the ERA would have constitutionally guaranteed by advocating the *enactment of many individual statutes*.

E. Consumers and public interest lobbies.

1. **Public interest lobbies** (representing groups that champion causes or ideas "in the public interest") are organizations that seek a "collective good," by which everyone should be better off—regardless of whether they joined in the lobbying.
2. Consumer groups.
  - a. The consumer movement was spurred by Ralph Nader, who was propelled to national prominence by his book, *Unsafe at Any Speed*, which attacked the safety of General Motors' Corvair. Nader successfully sued General Motors for invasion of privacy after the GM hired a private detective to dig into his background and follow him around. He used the proceeds from the damage settlement to launch the first major consumer group in Washington, D.C.
  - b. Consumer groups have won many legislative victories in recent years, including the creation in 1973 of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (authorized to regulate all consumer products and to ban particularly dangerous ones).
3. Other public interest groups include groups that speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, such as children, animals, and the mentally ill; good-government groups such as Common Cause; religious groups; and environmental groups.

## VII. UNDERSTANDING INTEREST GROUPS

A. Interest groups and democracy.

1. The problem of interest groups in America today remains much the same as James Madison defined it over 200 years ago.
  - a. A free society must allow for the *representation of all groups*, yet groups are usually more concerned with their own *self-interest* than with the needs of society as a whole.
  - b. For democracy to work well, it is important that self-interested groups not be allowed to assume a dominant position.
2. Madison's solution was to create an open system in which *many groups would be able to participate*. Groups with opposing interests would *counterbalance* each other.
  - a. *Pluralist theorists* believe that a rough approximation of the public interest emerges from this competition.
  - b. *Elite theorists* point to the proliferation of business PACs as evidence of more interest group corruption in American politics than ever. They particularly note that wealthier interests are greatly advantaged by the PAC system.

c. *Hyperpluralist theorists* maintain that whenever a major interest group objects strongly to proposed legislation, policymakers will bend over backwards to try to accommodate it. They argue that this behavior has made it increasingly difficult to accomplish major policy change and has thus led to policy gridlock.

B. Interest groups and the scope of government.

1. The power of special interest groups through PACs and other means has implications for the *scope of government*.
2. Most special interest groups strive to maintain established programs that benefit them—and thus promote government with a broader scope. Both President Carter and President Reagan remarked at the end of their time in office that their attempts to cut waste in federal spending had been frustrated by interest groups.
3. Conversely, one can make the argument that the growth of the scope of government in recent decades accounts for a good portion of the proliferation of interest groups. As the federal government has become involved in more areas, more interest groups have risen to influence policy.