



# **American Government**

**Unit 2**

**Chapter 18**

***“Interest Groups and Public  
Opinion”***

# Interest Groups



- **Definition** – group of people with common goals who organize to influence government.
  - Interest groups support candidates who favor their ideas
  - They do not nominate candidates
  - Usually focus on one or a few issues
- **Purpose** – to bridge the gap between government and the people
  - Communicate wants, policy goals, etc.
- **Political Power**
  - Strength in numbers
  - Financial resources or expertise of members

# Types of Interest Groups



- **Business-Related**

- **NAM (National Association of Manufacturers)**
  - Lower individual & corporate taxes
  - Limit government regulation of business
- **United States Chamber of Commerce**
  - Works for smaller businesses
- **Business Roundtable**
  - Works for the largest & most powerful corporations

- **Labor-Related**

- **AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor & Congress of Industrial Organizations)**
  - **UAW...United Auto Workers**
  - **UMW...United Mine Workers**
    - **COPE (Committee on Political Education)**
      - Directs major goals such as fund-raising, voter registration drives, and support for political candidates.

# Types of Interest Groups



- **Agricultural**

- **American Farm Bureau Federation**
  - Helps the larger & more successful farmers
- **NFU (National Farmers' Union)**
  - Smaller farmers
  - Supports laws protecting migrant farm workers
  - Higher price supports for crops & livestock

- **Professional Associations**

- **ABA (American Bar Association)**
- **AMA (American Medical Association)**
- **CTA (California Teachers' Association)**

- **Environmental**

- **Sierra Club**
- **National Wildlife Federation**

# Affecting Public Policy



- **Lobbyists**

- **Representatives of Interest Groups that make direct contact with Congressional members**

- **Provide info**

- **Useful information in order to persuade the lawmaker**
- **Restriction on gifts...no more than \$100**
- **Misrepresentation of facts may result in a loss of access to Congressional members**

- **Draft Bills**

- **50% of legislation comes from lobbyist assistance in writing public policy**

# Getting Support



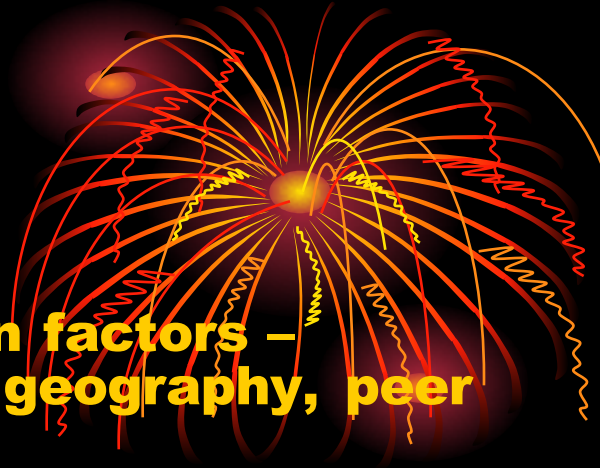
- **Media**
  - **Dramatic & biased advertising**
- **Letter Writing**
  - **Thousands of letters to demonstrate “universal” support for an issue**
- **Limitations**
  - **Different groups compete for power and influence.**
    - **No single group can control all**
      - **Smaller groups (narrower aims) tend to be the most powerful.**

# **PACS (Political Action Committees)**



- **Organizations that are designed to collect money in support of a political candidate.**
  - **Result of laws preventing large donations from individual corporations or labor unions.**
  - **FECA (Federal Election Campaign Act (1971))**
    - **PAC must register with the government at least 6 months before an election.**
    - **Strict accounting rules**

# Public Opinion



- **many are same as political socialization factors – (family, age, race, income, occupation, geography, peer groups, etc)**
  - **Schools**
    - **learning independent of parents, exposure to different viewpoints, develops critical thinking, questioning beliefs, etc.**
  - **Historic Events**
    - **major impact on the views of people – reacting to past successes and failures**
  - **Opinion Leaders**
    - **someone who has an unusually strong influence on the views of others**



# Public Opinion



- **Mass Media**
  - ***“mirror & molder”***
    - **May not tell public what to think, but rather what to think about.**
  - **Newspapers –earliest form of mass media 1st in Boston (1704)**
    - **45% of adults read a newspaper daily (declining)**
  - **Magazines – distributed nationally in the 1900’s expanding exposure**
    - ***Time, Newsweek, and US News & World Report = 10 million copies a week.***
  - **Radio – starting in the 1920’s brought news and entertainment to public – survived due to convenience in cars, at work, etc.**
  - **TV – became popular in the 1940’s**
    - **today in 98% of households – principal source of news for 80% of the population**

# Measuring Public Opinion



- **Polls – attempting to collect information on public opinions by asking questions.**
  - **Most effective indicators of public opinion besides elections**
  - **Factors that can skew results**
    - **wording of questions (is it fair, neutral?)**  
**Wording will strongly affect the answers to the questions**
    - **method of conducting the poll**  
**how was it administered? Internet? Phone? etc**