



Reading Assignments

Chapter 9:
Interest Groups:
Organizing for Influence

Chapter 10:
The News Media:
Communicating Political
Images

Supplemental Reading

Click [here](#) to view a PDF of the Chapter 9 presentation.

Click [here](#) to view a PDF of the Chapter 10 presentation.

Key Terms

1. Agenda setting
2. Citizens' (noneconomic) groups
3. Economic groups
4. Framing
5. Grassroots lobbying
6. Inside lobbying
7. Interest groups
8. Lobbying
9. Objective journalism
10. Outside lobbying
11. Partisan press
12. Political action committees (PACs)
13. Single-issue politics
14. Super PAC's
15. Watchdog role

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Identify the major types of interest groups and some examples of prominent ones.
2. Compare and contrast inside lobbying and outside lobbying.
3. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of allowing organized groups to function.
4. Discuss the evolution of the media from the founding of the United States until today.
5. Explain the function of the news media within American society.
6. Discuss how the news audience has changed from the 1970s until now.

Unit Lesson

One of the most influential groups on politics is that of Interest groups. Interest groups come in many shapes and sizes and spend lots of money to have access to those making policy decisions. Many lobbyists that work for these interest groups were once politicians themselves and have friends and former co-workers still in politics. This allows these lobbyists to gain access easier than most regular citizens. Foreign governments, states, businesses and even citizens groups will lobby in Washington. Economic groups outnumber all other groups in the policy-influencing arena.

Citizens groups such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and NOW (the National Organization for Women) are groups that form for a cause that is worthy or a purposive incentive. These, and other groups like them, will often have broad agendas dealing with what they perceive as moral issues. Many more citizens groups have single-issue agendas such as The Sierra Club, which promotes the preservation of scenic areas.



NAACP leaders with poster (*New York World Telegram & Sun*, 1956)

Due to financial considerations, economic groups will have more influence over government officials than citizen groups. In the last five to ten years, it has been easier for citizen groups to gain members, as well as, donations because of the Internet's ability to reach lots of people. The Internet has also made it easier for these same

groups to organize faster. This was seen during the activation of protesters in the MoveOn organization who were protesting the Iraq war, and in the various protests for democracy that broke out in the Middle East in 2011-2012.

In order to influence politics, a lobbyist must have significant contact with those who make the decisions. Inside lobbyists have direct access to law makers and often supply them with information on policies that show their group's position. Money will often flow when inside lobbying is taking place. Inside lobbying targets all three branches of the government, from giving needed information to members of Congress concerning various bills that "deserve" their attention, to pharmaceutical companies giving "evidence" of how their own drugs work to the FDA (Food and Drug Administration). Lobbyists will even attempt to influence the appointments of court judges. There are triangles and networks that work non-stop to exert influence over lawmakers and their decisions.

On the other side we have outside lobbyists who attempt to use public pressure in a grassroots effort to influence policymakers. One of the biggest outside lobbyist groups is the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons), which was founded in 1958 to protect the interests of those over the age of 50. When any legislation comes up that would impact those 50 and over, the AARP kicks into action and starts writing, calling, e-mailing, protesting, and even visiting their Representatives to let them know how they should vote.

From the moment a person decides that he or she wants to run for office, they must start raising money. Once an individual is elected, he or she must spend a great deal of time raising more money to get re-elected. One way for candidates to get money is through PACs (Political Action Committee). PACs are allowed to give money to as many candidates as they want, but can only give \$10,000 to any single candidate. "Super PACs" on the other hand can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money but cannot give money directly to any campaign. These Super PACs can do as much good as harm to any candidate they support. Super PACs often use the money they get from donors to run expensive ad spots. Not all of the ads that these PACs run are truthful or even helpful to the candidate they support.

Politics and the media have a love hate relationship. Some have made the statement that any press is good press, but that is not always the case, as South Carolina's Governor Sanford found out when news of his disappearance to visit his out-of-country mistress hit the stands and the comedy circuit. At that



Walter Cronkite on television 1976 (*Library of Congress, 1976*)

point, every good thing he had ever done was dismissed in the court of public opinion, and the media tried to keep the scandal alive and force him out of office (he refused to go). In fact, Sanford later won a special election to regain his old congressional seat in South Carolina's first Congressional District. He is just one instance in a long line of politicians who have been embroiled in scandal. While many leave office with their tails tucked, there are

still those who stay and weather the storm until the media finds another target and forgets all about them.

The job of the press is supposed to be that of keeping the public informed but also to attract an audience so that they can gain profit. These two goals do not always work to the benefit of the people they serve. In the early days of mass printing, papers tended to be partisan, backing one party or the other.

Sensationalism (yellow journalism) was also a big problem in journalism. In order to sell papers, the story had to grip the imaginations of the public and keep them wanting more. It did not matter if the facts were true or not.

Print media eventually turned to radio in the 1920s, and it was agreed that because there were so few radio channels, those that controlled the airwaves had to give equal time to all sides/parties. In the 1950s, television became the medium used by most to get their news, and the Fairness Doctrine made it law that both sides of a view would be given fair/equal time. Once cable television and FM radio became popular, the Fairness Doctrine was no longer needed and was rescinded. Today, we have even more opportunity to hear varying views with the Internet.

Even with all of the channels that cable television supplies, the media is still considered the “gatekeepers” to the news that we receive. No matter what news station you watch, there is very little variation on the stories that you will see. The media will often set the agenda of what the population is thinking and talking about. When we watch the news and see more and more stories about political corruption, we start thinking that political corruption is getting out of control and that it is worse now than it has ever been. However, corruption in politics has always been there, and it is just that the news outlets have brought it to your attention more. When this happens, the public starts crying that there needs to be reform in the government and that we need to “clean house.”

Although networks say that they are unbiased in their reporting that is not always true. People cannot be human and be unbiased, and this will show in how things are presented. People tend to look for the news that will back up what they already “know” and “believe,” and fortunately there are enough news outlets today that they can find what they are looking for. In the end, it is our responsibility to step out of our one-sided views and seek to learn both sides of any issue.

References

New York World-Telegram & Sun. (1956). NAACP leaders holding a poster [Photograph]. Retrieved from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NAACP_leaders_with_poster_NYWTS.jpg.

U.S. Library of Congress. (1976, September 23). Walter Cronkite on television 1976 [Photograph]. Retrieved from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Walter_Cronkite_on_television_1976.jpg.