

Name: _____

Interest Groups

Have you ever heard someone say, "There is power in numbers"? What does that phrase mean? Sometimes, individuals are passionate about an issue or concern but it can be difficult to have the time or resources necessary to effect change. In addition, it can be difficult to be seen or heard when it's just one individual rallying for change. That is where interest groups come in.

Finding Common Interests

Connecting with others that share similar opinions is the starting point of interest groups. **Interest groups** are a group of people who are concerned with a particular issue and who try to influence legislators to act in their favor. They are also sometimes referred to as special interest groups. There are multiple ways an interest group can use their size and resources to achieve their goals. They may work to influence elected government officials to either support or oppose **public policy** decisions. They may also attempt to sway **public opinion** to promote and advocate for their ideas. There are thousands of interest groups in the United States, all representing different interests. However, most interest groups can be divided into five different categories.

Using context clues, define public policy.

What is the purpose of an interest group?

Types of Interest Groups

Interest Groups	Public Interest	Economic Interests	Progressional Groups	Ideological Groups	Single-Issue Groups
	Focuses on topics that affect the general public	Promotes the economic interests of their members in business, labor, and trade organizations	Advocates for people in a particular profession	Promotes policies based on a set of core political or religious beliefs	Focuses on one narrow topic
Examples	Environmental Defense Fund, League of Women Voters	The Screen Actors Guild, American Federation of Labor	National Education Association, National Union of Healthcare Workers	The Christian Coalition of America, American Conservative Union, Americans for Democratic Action	The Humane Society, Mothers Against Drunk Driving

Figure above adapted from iCivics: Interest Groups

Place the following interest groups into their respective categories:

National Association of Manufacturers - _____

American Medical Association - _____

The National Rifle Association - _____

Influencing the Government

Interest groups have several ways that they can influence public policy. There are both pros and cons to interest groups playing this role. On one hand, interest groups are an effective way for individual citizens to have their voices heard. However, concerns are often raised regarding elected officials listening more to interest groups than their constituents.

Influencing Methods

One way interest groups ensure that elected officials know about their cause is by hiring **lobbyists**. Lobbyists meet with elected officials and attend legislative meetings to share information with the individuals who will be making important decisions. The goal of a lobbyist is to convince those in office to support or oppose particular legislative actions. Since a lobbyist only represents one side of an issue, elected officials must be aware of the bias that comes with their information and always conduct additional research.



Lobbyists often meet outside the U.S. Congress building to raise awareness about specific issues



Interest groups support candidates with campaign signs and other advertising

Another way interest groups can influence government is by supporting, or **endorsing**, a candidate during an election. Typically, the interest group will issue their support for a candidate who also believes in their cause. Interest groups may help pass out campaign signs, produce a commercial in support of a candidate, and encourage their members to vote for that individual.

In addition to candidate endorsements, interest groups also use money to influence the government. To do this, an interest group will form a **political action committee**, also known as a **PAC**. PACs collect and donate money either directly to a candidate's election campaign or use it to try and influence an election outcome on their behalf. To try and avoid the problem of interest groups being able to "buy" a candidate, PACs are regulated by the government. There are rules that interest groups must follow when providing money to a political campaign. These campaign financing laws, however, are not always perfect, and often a source of debate.



Interest groups collect and donate money to candidates during campaigns

Whether offering an official endorsement or making a large donation, interest groups hope that by helping a candidate get elected to office will in return help their cause. Once a lawmaker, that candidate can write and vote on legislation that aligns with the views of the interest group. They may also be able to influence other lawmakers during their work.

What are the positive and negative impacts of interests groups influencing the government?

Positive:

Negative:

Monitoring the Government

Not all interest groups focus their time and efforts on influencing the government. There are many interest groups that exist to monitor the government and use their collective power to take action if deemed necessary. Two examples of these types of interest groups would be the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Both groups pay particular attention to ensuring that the government does not violate any civil rights and liberties of American citizens. They work to educate and raise awareness on the topics of rights and liberties. They also raise money to support their legal teams who will bring any perceived rights violations to court.

ACLU



ACLU is an interest group that seeks to protect civil liberties and rights outlined in the Constitution

How do interest groups act as a watchdog?