

# Public Opinion/Interest Groups

## Lecture Notes

## What Are Interest Groups?

- Organizations of people sharing common goals
- Bridge between public and lawmakers
- Influence public opinion, elections, and policy
- Vary in size: from small groups to millions of members
- Range in structure: highly organized to informal

## Types of Interest Groups

### Business and Labor Groups:

- National Manufacturers Association
- AFL-CIO

### Professional Groups:

- American Medical Association
- American Bar Association

### Agricultural Groups:

- American Farm Bureau Federation
- National Farmers' Union

## More Types of Interest Groups

### Public Interest Groups:

- Common Cause
- Public Citizen

### Religious Groups:

- National Council of Churches
- Anti-Defamation League

### General Welfare:

- American Legion
- AARP (Association for Retired Persons)

## What is Lobbying?

- Direct contact with lawmakers
- Performed by professional lobbyists
- Many are former government officials
- Work at federal, state, and local levels
- Provide information to support positions
- Help draft bills and legislation

## Interest Group Tactics

### Election Support:

- Campaign contributions
- Get-out-the-vote campaigns
- Supporting candidates

### Other Methods:

- Court action
- Public awareness campaigns
- Media outreach
- Internet advocacy

# Measuring Public Opinion

## Methods Include:

- Elections
- Political party feedback
- Interest group input
- Mass media coverage
- Letter writing campaigns
- Calls, emails, and social media
- Opinion polls

## Types of Polling

### Scientific Polls:

- Carefully selected sample groups
- Structured questions
- Professional interpretation

### Straw Polls:

- Informal surveys
- Often through media
- Less reliable results

## Positive Aspects of Interest Groups

- Provide additional public representation
- Act as watchdogs on government
- Balance competing interests
- Give voice to specific communities
- Offer expertise to lawmakers
- Help inform public debate

## Challenges and Concerns

- Potential for too much influence
- Campaign finance issues
- Difficulty in regulation
- May create gridlock
- Can oppose public interest
- Unequal representation based on resources