

# 4. Interest Groups

# 1. Definition

- Organized body of individuals
  - : They share some political goals.
  - : They try to influence public policy decisions.
- Ex) League of Women Voters
  - [National Organization for Women \(NOW\)](#)
  - National Rifle Association (NRA)
  - Handgun Control
  - Tobacco Institute
- **Pluralist democracy**
  - : Interaction of interest groups and gov
- **Majoritarianism**
  - : The gov makes policies according to the majority of the public.



## **National Organization for Women**

(<http://www.letscc.net/detail.php?idx=2443&k=National%20Organiz%20ation%20for%20Women>)

ex) Deficit reduction was a hot issue in 1993.

→ A deficit reduction proposal was offered.

→ BTU (British thermal units) proposal

: a tax levied on the amount of heat in an energy source

\*\***BTU**: amount of energy needed to heat 1 pound (0.45 kg) of water  
from 39 to 40 ° F (3.8 to 4.4 ° C).

: often used in the power, heating & air-conditioning industries.

### → **Groups responded**

(1) Farmers

: Wanted to reduce the tax on diesel fuel used by tractors

(2) Steel industry

: Wanted to reduce the tax on coal

(3) Firms that make products for the export market

: Their goods would be more expensive on the world market.

- By the time the legislation passed the House, interest groups had achieved so many exemptions.
- The BTU tax may not be needed then.

- **Pluralism over majoritarianism**

- : The majority wants the deficit reduced, but not many people want any particular method of reducing the deficit.
- : Interest groups push hard for tax exemptions, and finally lobbied Congress representatives to make exemptions for them.

## 2. Are Interest Groups good or not?

### 1) Good

- [Alexis de Tocqueville](#)
- : Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, form associations. This reflects a strong democratic culture.



**Alexis-Charles-Henri Clérel de Tocqueville**  
(29 July 1805 – 16 April 1859)  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexis\\_de\\_Tocqueville](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexis_de_Tocqueville))

## 2) Bad

- [James Madison](#)

: He regarded Interest Groups as factions.

: Lots of differences will develop between factions.

ex) Farmers will oppose merchants + tenants + landlords and so on.

: Each group pushes its selfish interests that may not always  
in the best interest of other Americans.

## 3) Conclusion

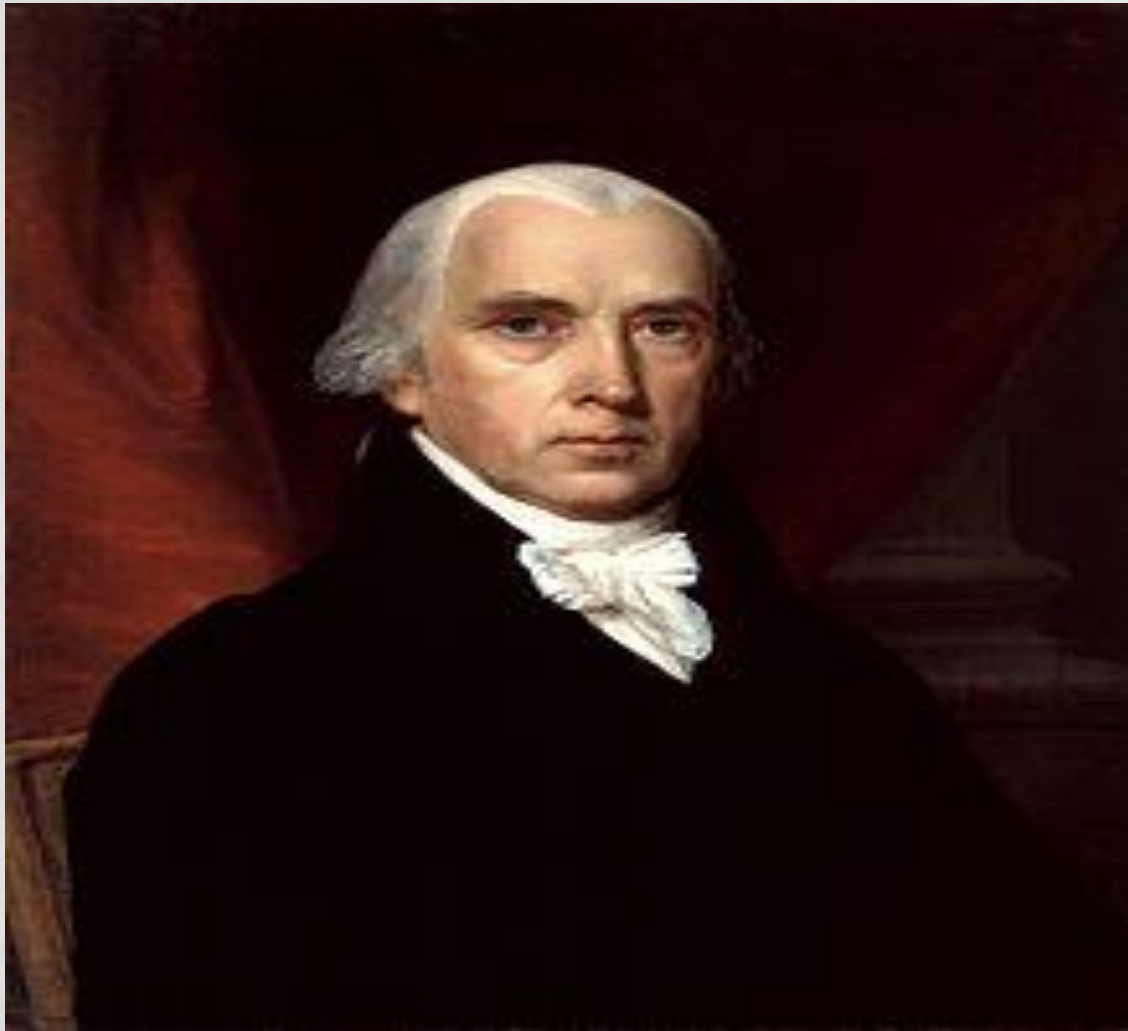
- We may not like interest groups as a whole, but we like interest groups  
that we believe represent views we support.

# 3. Roles of Interest Groups

## 1) Representation

- Interest groups represent people **before their gov.**

- Whatever the political interest, the group has an active lobby operating  
in Washington.



## **James Madison**

4th President of the United States

(in office March 4, 1809 – March 4, 1817)

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Madison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Madison))



## 2) Participation

- Interest groups provide a means by which **like-minded citizens** can pool their resources + channel their energies into collective political action.
- : People band together because they know it is much easier to get gov to listen to a group than an individual.

## 3) Education

- Interest groups educate their members + public + gov officials as part of their efforts to lobby gov.
- : Interest groups **provide policymakers with info** that is not easily obtained from other sources.

## 4) Agenda Building

- Interest groups bring new issues into the political arena through agenda building.
- : American society has **many problem areas**, but public officials are not addressing all of them.
- : Interest groups make the gov aware of the problems + let them know something is needed to solve them.

## 5) Program Monitoring

- Lobbies **follow gov programs** important to their members.
- : Interest groups look at developments in Washington.
- : When a program is not operating properly, interest groups push gov officials to act in order to achieve the group's goals.

# 4. Political Action Committees (PAC)

## 1) What is a PAC?

- Raise and spend money in order to **elect and defeat candidates**
- Represent business companies, labor unions or ideological interests.
- PACs pool campaign contributions from group members + donate the money to candidates for political offices.

- Give up to \$5,000 to a candidate per election
- Give up to \$15,000 to any national party per year
- Give up to \$5,000 annually to any **other PAC** per year
- May receive up to \$5,000 from any one individual, PAC or party committee per year
- Register with the **FEC** within 10 days of its formation
  
- Overall, PACs account for about **30%** of total contributions in U.S. Congressional elections, and considerably less in presidential races
  
- There are about **5,000 PACs**.
  - : Most PACs are small and give less than \$50,000 in total contributions during a 2-year election cycle.
  - : Some PACs are enormous.
  - : The Realtors PAC give about \$3 million in the election year.
  
- **Leadership PACs**
  - : Some Congress members form as a way of raising money to help fund other candidates' campaigns

## 2) Why do interest groups form PACs?

- When an interest group, union, or corporation wants to contribute to federal candidates or parties, it **must** do so through a PAC.
- Members of Congress and their staffers are very **busy** and their time is limited.
  - : But they cannot turn down a lobbyist's request for a meeting if the PAC of the lobbyist's company had made a significant **campaign contribution** in the last election.
  - : The PAC gives you access.
  - : It makes you a player.
  - : Corporate PACs give about 80% of their contributions to **incumbent members** of Congress.
  - : The incumbent is probably going to win.

## 3) Side Effect of PACs

- Approximately **50%** of the money raised by House incumbents comes from PACs.
  - : PAC money may lead to access to the incumbents + favoritism.
  - : PAC money can lead to **corruption**.
  - : PAC donations seem to influence what goes on in congressional committees.
  - : In a democracy influence should be affected by money.

: From this perspective, the issue is **political equality**.

- However, PACs **offer a means** for people to participate in the political system.

: By PAC, small givers can pool their resources + fight the big giver.

: Prohibiting PACs would restrict the **freedom of political expression**.

## 5. Tactics & Techniques of Interest Groups

- To achieve political influence, Interest groups use many tactics & techniques.

### 1) Lobby

#### a) Who are lobbyists?

- Represent the organizations before gov

: Lobbyists tell the gov officials what their members want.

: Lobbyists tell the organizations what gov is doing.

ex) When an administrative agency issues new regulations,

lobbyists interpret the content + implications of the regulations for members.

## **b) How lobbyists are hired?**

- Lobbyists have a long experience in/around Washington.
- : Many lobbyists have law degrees.
- : Lobbyists have served in the **legislative or executive branches**.
  
- : Excellent lobbyists know well how gov operates.
- : They find their background useful in the bargaining + negotiation over laws and regulations.
- : Lobbying is a lucrative profession (\$90,000 per year).

## **c) Direct Lobbying**

- Personal contact with policymakers
- : **98%** of Washington lobbyists use direct contact with officials, + members of Congress + agency officials + staff members.
  
- **How often should a lobbyist meet policymakers?**
- : It is not enough for lobbyists to meet policymakers just before a vote or a regulatory decision.
- : Lobbyists must **maintain contact** with congressional members + an agency staffers and constantly provide them with information.

### - **How do lobbyists say?**

: They do not say “Vote for this bill, otherwise our people in the district will vote against you in the next election.”

: But they will say “If this bill is passed, we are going to see hundreds of **new jobs** created in our state.”

### **d) Grassroots lobbying**

#### - **Letter-writing campaigning**

: Faxes, telephone calls + emails

: Interest groups often launch letter-writing campaigns through their regular publications or special alerts.

: They may even provide **sample letters** + the names + addresses of specific policymakers.

## **2) Protest in the street**

- If people in gov seem **not responsive** to letter-writing campaigning, a group might resort to political protest.

: A protest (demonstration) such as picketing or marching is to attract media attention to an issue.





## **Occupy Wall Street**

(<http://www.letscc.net/detail.php?idx=2441&k=occupy%20wallstreet>)



: Protesters hope that **TV/newspaper coverage** will help change public opinion + make policymakers more receptive to the group's demands.

### 3) Info Campaigns

- Organized efforts to gain public support by giving info about an issue
- : Hand out **pamphlets** or booklets in the street

### 4) Coalition Building

- Several groups **band together** for the purpose of lobbying
- : Their joint effort will achieve their goals more easily.
- : Coalitions form most often among groups that work in the **same policy area** + have similar constituencies, such as environmental groups or feminist groups.