# 15

# Interest Groups

In early America, interest groups were largely ad hoc organizations formed in local communities. Following the advent of television, the first national political organizations began to take shape. Today, smartphones and social networks have once again contributed to changes in the interest group system.

No longer does joining a group imply attending physical meetings or becoming a dues-paying or card-carrying member. Today, joining an interest group or participating in a social movement may be as simple as clicking a "like" button, signing an online petition, or signing up for an email listserv.

As a result, the way we understand interest groups and their role in American politics is also changing. Although some groups still hold in-person marches and protests, the numbers of people attending these events pale in comparison to the number of virtual supporters groups have in cyberspace. Such was the case in 2011 with the Occupy Wall Street movement. Approximately 2,000 protestors gathered in New York City at the height of the movement, but tens of thousands were inspired to hold similar protests across the country, and millions liked the movement on Facebook or followed it on Twitter.

Gone, too, are the days when interest groups' primary roles in electoral politics were to knock on doors and make phone calls on behalf of candidates. Today, groups have found new responsibilities, as decisions such as *Citizens United* v. *Federal Election Commission* (2010) have opened the door for greater involvement by political action committees (PACs) and SuperPACs.

Finally, interest groups are becoming more informal. Stalwart groups such as the Chamber of Commerce continue to play key roles in politics. But, so, too, do nebulous interests organized around race, ethnicity, or class. In 2014, for example, citizens on both sides of the issue responded intensely to the police shooting of Michael Brown, a young, unarmed African American man. Weeks of protests followed in Ferguson, Missouri, drawing new attention on federal, state, and local levels to civil rights policies in the United States.

**THE ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS IN ELECTIONS HAS CHANGED** Above, members of the NAACP plan a voter targeting campaign during the 1960 presidential election. Below, television host Stephen Colbert and members of Colbert Nation celebrate the creation of a Super PAC for the 2012 election cycle.

15.1

**social capital**
Cooperative relationships that facilitate the resolution of collective problems.

15.2

**civic virtue**
The tendency to form small-scale associations for the public good.

15.3

**interest group**
A collection of people or organizations that tries to influence public policy.

15.4

**pluralist theory**
The theory that political power is distributed among a wide array of diverse and competing interest groups.

15.5

**disturbance theory**
The theory that interest groups form as a result of changes in the political system.

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The face of interest group politics in the United States is changing as quickly as laws, political consultants, and technology allow. Big business and trade groups are increasing their activities and engagement in the political system. At the same time, evidence concerning whether ordinary citizens join political groups is conflicting. Political scientist Robert Putnam, for example, has argued that fewer Americans are joining groups, a phenomenon he labeled "bowling alone."[1] Others disagree, concluding that America is in the midst of an "explosion of voluntary groups, activities and charitable donations [that] is transforming our towns and cities."[2] Although bowling leagues, which were once a common means of bringing people together, have withered, other organizations such as volunteer groups, soccer associations, health clubs, and environmental groups are flourishing. Older organizations, such as the Elks Club and the League of Women Voters, are attracting fewer new members, but this does not mean that people are not joining groups; they are simply joining different groups and online social networks.

Why is this debate so important? Political scientists believe that involvement in community groups and activities with others of like interests enhances the level of **social capital,** "the web of cooperative relationships between citizens that facilitates resolution of collective action problems."[3] The more social capital that exists in a given community, the more citizens are engaged in its governance and well-being, and the more likely they are to work for the collective good.[4] This tendency to form small-scale associations for the public good, or **civic virtue,** as Putnam calls it, creates fertile ground within communities for improved political and economic development.[5] Thus, if Americans truly are joining fewer groups, overall citizen engagement in government and the government's provision of services may suffer. Newer groups, such as the Tea Party movement, place increased demands on government, even when the demands are for less government.

Interest groups are also important because they give the unrepresented or underrepresented an opportunity to have their voices heard, thereby making the government and its policy-making process more representative of diverse populations and perspectives. In addition, interest groups offer powerful and wealthy interests even greater access to, or influence on, policy makers at all levels of government.

# Roots of the American Interest Group System

**15.1** Trace the roots of the American interest group system.

**Interest groups** are organized collections of people or organizations that try to influence public policy; they have various names: special interests, pressure groups, organized interests, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), political groups, lobby groups, and public interest groups. Interest groups are differentiated from political parties largely by the fact that interest groups do not run candidates for office.

## Theories of Interest Group Formation

Interest groups may form in society for a variety of reasons. Political scientists have posited several theories to explain this phenomenon. **Pluralist theory** argues that political power is distributed among a wide range of diverse and competing interest groups. Pluralist theorists such as David B. Truman explain the formation of interest groups through **disturbance theory.** According to this approach, groups form as a result of changes in the political system. Moreover, one wave of groups will give way to another wave representing a contrary perspective (a countermovement). Thus, Truman would argue, all salient issues will be represented in government. The government, in turn, should

provide a forum in which the competing demands of groups and the majority of the U.S. population can be heard and balanced.[6]

**Transactions theory** arose out of criticisms of the pluralist approach. Transactions theory argues that public policies are the result of narrowly defined exchanges or transactions among political actors. Transactions theorists offer two main contentions: it is not rational for people to mobilize into groups, and therefore, the groups that do mobilize will represent elites. This idea arises from economist Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action*.[7] In this work, Olson assumes that individuals are rational and have perfect information upon which to make informed decisions. He uses these assumptions to argue that, especially in the case of **collective goods,** or things of value that may not be withheld from nonmembers, such as a better environment, it makes little sense for individuals to join a group if they can gain the benefits secured by others at no cost and become "free riders." (The problem of free riders is discussed later in this chapter.)

The elite bias that transactionists expect in the interest group system is the result of differences in the relative cost of mobilization for elite and nonelite citizens. Individuals who have greater amounts of time or money available simply have lower transaction costs. Thus, according to one political scientist, "The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class bias."[8]

**transactions theory**
The theory that public policies are the result of narrowly defined exchanges or transactions among political actors.

**collective good**
Something of value that cannot be withheld from a nonmember of a group, for example, a tax write-off or a better environment.

**public interest group**
An organization that seeks a collective good that will not selectively and materially benefit group members.



## Kinds of Organized Interests

In this text, we use interest group as a generic term to describe the numerous organized groups that try to influence government policy. They take many forms, including public interest groups, business and economic groups, governmental units such as state and local governments, and political action committees (PACs) (see Table 15.1).

**PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS** One political scientist defines **public interest groups** as organizations "that seek a collective good, the achievement of which will not selectively and materially benefit the membership or activists of the organization."[9] For example, many Progressive era groups were created by upper- and middle-class women to solve the varied problems of new immigrants and the poor. Today, civil liberties groups, environmental groups, good government groups, peace groups, church groups, and groups that speak out for those who cannot (such as children, the mentally ill, or animals) are examples of public interest groups. Ironically, even though many of these groups are not well funded, they are highly visible and can actually wield more political clout than other better-funded groups.

**TABLE 15.1** WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED INTEREST GROUPS?

| Name (Founded) | Membership | PAC? | Fundraising—2014 Election Cycle[a] |
|---|---|---|---|
| AARP (1958) | 40 million | N | n/a |
| AFL-CIO (1886) | 11.5 million | Y | $333,037 |
| MoveOn.org (1998) | 5 million | Y | $8,235,299 |
| U.S. Chamber of Commerce (1912) | 3 million businesses | Y | $300,278 |
| Sierra Club (1892) | 1.4 million | Y | $1,187,752 |
| Human Rights Campaign (1980) | 750,000 | Y | $1,322,612 |
| Planned Parenthood Federation of America (1916) | 700,000 | Y | $1,042,957 |
| Christian Coalition (1989) | 500,000 | N | n/a |
| National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (1909) | 500,000 | N | n/a |
| League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) (1929) | 115,000 | N | n/a |
| Public Citizen, Inc. (1971) | 80,000 | N | n/a |

[a]Fundraising data based on money raised through October 15, 2014.

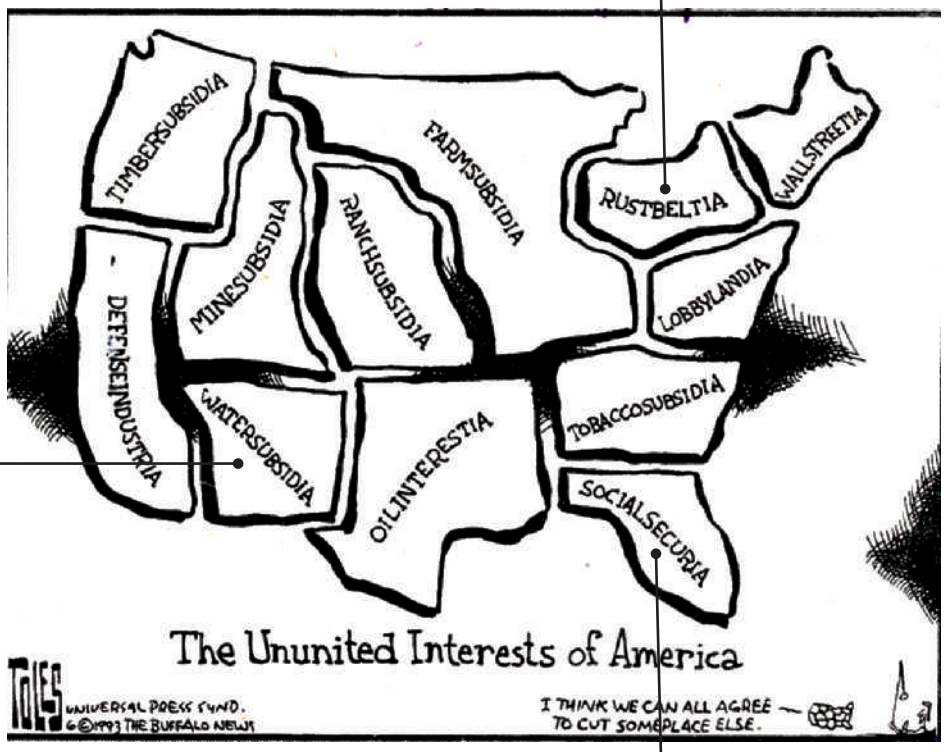
**SOURCE:** Center for Responsive Politics, www.opensecrets.org (accessed November 10, 2014).

# Take a Closer Look

Interest groups may be formed and sustained for any number of reasons. Among these are citizens seeking to represent the unique economic interests of a country or a particular region. The vast size and geopolitical variation of the United States lends itself well to tremendous variations in organized interests, as the cartoon below illustrates.

The population of the American Southwest has increased dramatically over the past several decades. However, much of this area is dry, desert land, meaning that citizens here often lobby their governments to invent creative solutions to water shortages.

The Rust Belt, a region in the upper Midwest and Northeast, is marked by the flight of industries, such as manufacturing, iron, and steel, which once dominated their economies. With the loss of traditional labor markets, citizens in these states frequently seek capital investments to revitalize communities, job creation programs, and other forms of economic development.






Many retirees have moved from their chilly homes in the Northeast, Midwest, and Mid-Atlantic to southern states, particularly Florida. These retirees demand lower property taxes, maintenance of veterans' benefits, and the continuance of Social Security and Medicare.

## CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How do other regions depicted on the map reflect the unique demands citizens place on their governments?
2. What national issues might interest citizens in all areas of the country?
3. How do these regional interests both undermine and enhance the fundamental tenets of American democracy?

**ECONOMIC INTEREST GROUPS** Most groups have some sort of economic agenda, even if it only involves acquiring enough money in donations to pay the telephone bill or to send out the next mailing. **Economic interest groups** are, however, groups whose primary purpose is to promote the financial interests of their members. Historically, the three largest categories of economic interest groups were business groups (including trade and professional groups, such as the American Medical Association), labor organizations (such as the AFL-CIO), and organizations representing the interests of farmers. The influence of farmers and labor unions is on the decline, however, as big businesses such as General Electric and AT&T spend increasingly large amounts contributing to campaigns and hiring lobbyists.

Groups that mobilize to protect particular economic interests generally are the most fully and effectively organized of all interest group types.[10] They exist to make profits and to obtain financial benefits for their members. To achieve these goals, however, they often find they must resort to political means rather than trust the operation of economic markets to produce favorable outcomes for their members.

**economic interest group**
A group with the primary purpose of promoting the financial interests of its members.

**political action committee (PAC)**
Officially recognized fund-raising organizations that represent interest groups and are allowed by federal law to make contributions directly to candidates' campaigns.



**GOVERNMENTAL UNITS** State and local governments—as well as intergovernmental associations, such as the Council of Local Governments—are becoming strong organized interests as they lobby the federal government or even charitable foundations for money to cover a vast array of state and local programs. The big intergovernmental associations as well as state and local governments want to make certain they get their fair share of federal dollars in the form of block grants or pork-barrel projects. Most states, large cities, and even public universities retain lobbyists in Washington, D.C., to advance their interests or to keep them informed about relevant legislation. States seek to influence the amount of money allotted to them in the federal budget for projects such as building roads and schools, enhancing parks or waterways, or other public works projects.

**POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES** In 1974, amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act made it legal for businesses, labor unions, and interest groups to form what were termed **political action committees (PACs),** officially registered fund-raising organizations that represent interest groups in the political process. Many elected officials also have leadership PACs to help raise money for themselves and other candidates. Unlike many other types of interest groups, PACs do not have formal members; they simply have contributors who seek to influence public policy by electing legislators sympathetic to their aims.

# The Development of American Interest Groups

**15.2** Describe the historical development of American interest groups.

Previous experience led the Framers to tailor a governmental system of multiple pressure points to check and balance political factions. It was their belief that the division of power between national and state governments and across the three branches would prevent any one individual or group of individuals from becoming too influential. They also believed that decentralizing power would neutralize the effect of special interests, who would find it impossible to spread their efforts with any effectiveness throughout so many different levels of government. Thus, the "mischief of faction" feared by James Madison in *Federalist No. 10* could be lessened. But, as farsighted as they were, the Framers could not have envisioned the vast sums of money or the technology that would be available to some interest groups as the nature of these groups evolved over time.

## National Groups Emerge (1830–1889)

Although all kinds of local groups proliferated throughout the colonies and in the new states, the first national groups did not emerge until the 1830s when communication networks improved. Many were single-issue groups deeply rooted in the Christian religious revivalism sweeping the nation. Concern with humanitarian issues such as temperance, peace, education, slavery, and woman's rights led to the founding of numerous associations dedicated to addressing these issues. Among the first of these groups was the American Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1833 by William Lloyd Garrison.

After the Civil War, more groups were founded. For example, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was created in 1874 with the goal of outlawing the sale of liquor. Its members, many of them quite religious, believed that alcohol consumption was an evil injurious to family life because many men drank away their paychecks, leaving no money to feed or clothe their families. The WCTU's activities took conventional and unconventional forms, which included organizing prayer groups, lobbying for prohibition legislation, conducting peaceful marches, and engaging in more violent protests such as the destruction of saloons.

The Grange also was formed during the period after the Civil War. Created as an educational society for farmers, it taught them about the latest agricultural developments. Although its charter formally stated that the Grange was not to involve itself in politics, in 1876 it formulated a detailed plan to pressure Congress into enacting legislation favorable to farmers.


WHAT WERE THE FIRST NATIONAL GROUPS TO EMERGE FOLLOWING THE CIVIL WAR?

One of the first truly national groups was The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry or, more simply, the Grange, established in 1867 to educate and disseminate knowledge to farmers. The group also lobbied for farmers' interests in other areas, such as trust-busting.

Business interests also began to figure even more prominently in both state and national politics during the late 1800s. A popular saying of the day noted that the Standard Oil Company did everything to the Pennsylvania legislature except refine it. Increasingly large trusts, monopolies, business partnerships, and corporate conglomerations in the oil, steel, and sugar industries became sufficiently powerful to control the votes of many representatives in state and national legislatures.

Perhaps the most effective organized interest of the day was the railroad industry. In a move that could not take place today because of its clear impropriety, the Central Pacific Railroad sent its own **lobbyist** to Washington, D.C., in 1861, where he eventually became the clerk (staff administrator) of the committees of both houses of Congress that were charged with overseeing regulation of the railroad industry. Subsequently, Congress awarded the Central Pacific Railroad (later called the Southern Pacific) vast grants of lands along its route and large subsidized loans. The railroad company became so powerful that it later achieved nearly total political control of the California legislature.

**lobbyist**
Interest group representative who seeks to influence legislation that will benefit his or her organization or client through political and/or financial persuasion.



## The Progressive Era (1890–1920)

By the 1890s, a profound change had occurred in the nation's political and social outlook. A host of problems, including crime, poverty, squalid and unsafe working conditions, and widespread political corruption were created by rapid industrialization, an influx of immigrants, and monopolistic business practices. Many Americans began to believe that new measures would be necessary to impose order on this growing chaos and to curb some of the more glaring problems in society. The political and social movement that grew out of these concerns was called the Progressive movement.

Progressive era groups ranged from those rallying for public libraries and kindergartens to those seeking better labor conditions for workers—especially for women and children. Other groups, including the NAACP, were dedicated to ending racial discrimination. Groups seeking woman suffrage also were active during this time.

Not even the Progressives themselves could agree on what the term "progressive" actually meant, but their desire for reform led to an explosion of all types of interest groups, including single-issue, trade, labor, and the first public interest groups. Politically, the movement took the form of the Progressive Party, which sought on many fronts to limit or end the power of the industrialists' near-total control of the steel, oil, railroad, and other key industries.

In response to the pressure applied by Progressive era groups, the national government began to regulate business. Because businesses had a vested interest in keeping wages low and costs down, more business groups organized to consolidate their strength and to counter Progressive moves. Not only did governments have to mediate Progressive and business demands, but they also had to accommodate the role of organized labor, which often allied itself with Progressive groups against big business.

**ORGANIZED LABOR** Until creation of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886, no real national union activity had taken place. The AFL brought skilled workers from several trades together into one stronger national organization for the first time. As the AFL grew in power, many business owners began to press individually or collectively to quash the unions. As business interests pushed states for what are called open shop laws to outlaw unions in their factories, the AFL became increasingly political. It also was forced to react to the success of big businesses' use of legal injunctions to prohibit union organization. In 1914, massive lobbying by the AFL and its members led to passage of the Clayton Act, which labor leader Samuel Gompers hailed as the Magna Carta of the labor movement. This law allowed unions to organize free from prosecution and also guaranteed their members' right to strike, a powerful weapon against employers.

**BUSINESS GROUPS AND TRADE ASSOCIATIONS** The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) was founded in 1895 by manufacturers who had suffered business losses in the economic panic of 1893 and who believed they were being affected adversely by the growth of organized labor. NAM first became active politically in 1913

**trade association**
A group that represents a specific industry.

when a major tariff bill was under congressional consideration. NAM's tactics were "so insistent and abrasive" and its expenditures so lavish that President Woodrow Wilson was forced to denounce its lobbying tactics as an "unbearable situation."[11] Congress immediately called for an investigation of NAM's activities but found no member of Congress willing to testify that he had ever even encountered a member of NAM (probably because many members of Congress had received illegal contributions and gifts).

The second major business organization, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, came into being in 1912, with the assistance of the federal government. NAM, the Chamber of Commerce, and other **trade associations,** groups representing specific industries, were effective spokespersons for their member companies. They were unable to defeat passage of the Clayton Act, but organized interests such as cotton manufacturers planned elaborate and successful campaigns to overturn key provisions of the act in the courts.[12] Aside from the Clayton Act, innumerable pieces of pro-business legislation were passed by Congress, whose members continued to insist they had never been contacted by business groups.

## The Rise of the Interest Group State

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Progressive spirit reappeared in the rise of public interest groups. Generally, these groups devoted themselves to representing the interests of African Americans, women, the elderly, the poor, and consumers, or to working on behalf of the environment. Many of their leaders and members had been active in the civil rights and anti–Vietnam War movements of the 1960s. Other groups formed during the Progressive era, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the NAACP, gained renewed vigor. Many of them had as their patron the liberal Ford Foundation, which helped to bankroll numerous groups, including the Women's Rights Project of the ACLU, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (now called Latino Justice PRLDEF), and the Native American Rights Fund.[13] The American Association of Retired Persons, now simply called AARP, also came to prominence in this era.

The civil rights and anti-war struggles left many Americans feeling cynical about a government that, in their eyes, failed to respond to the will of the majority. They also believed that if citizens banded together, they could make a difference. Thus, two major new public interest groups—Common Cause and Public Citizen—were founded during this time. Common Cause, a good-government group that acts as a watchdog over the federal government, is similar to some of the early Progressive movement's public interest groups. Public Citizen is a group that advocates for consumer safety and awareness.

**CONSERVATIVE RESPONSE: RELIGIOUS AND IDEOLOGICAL GROUPS** Conservatives, concerned by the activities of these liberal public interest groups founded during the 1960s and 1970s, responded by forming religious and ideological groups that became a potent force in U.S. politics. In 1978, the Reverend Jerry Falwell founded the first major new religious group, the Moral Majority. The Moral Majority was widely credited with assisting in the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980.[14] Then, in 1990, a televangelist named Pat Robertson formed the Christian Coalition. Since then, it has grown in power and influence. Each election cycle, the group distributes tens of millions of voter guides in churches throughout the United States. Although these guides do not explicitly advocate for the selection of a particular candidate, they do highlight party nominees' stances on a number of key issues ranging from abortion to taxation to health care.

The Christian Coalition is not the only conservative interest group to play an important role in the policy process as well as in elections at the state and national level. The National Rifle Association (NRA), an active opponent of gun control legislation,

remains an active player in the political process. And, groups such as the Young America's Foundation have made special efforts to reach conservative high school and college students.

**BUSINESS GROUPS, CORPORATIONS, AND ASSOCIATIONS** Conservative business leaders, unsatisfied with the work of the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, also decided during the 1970s to start new organizations to advance their political and financial interests in Washington, D.C. The Business Roundtable, for example, was created in 1972. The Roundtable is an association of chief executive officers of leading U.S. companies working to promote sound public policy and a thriving U.S. economy.[15] It urges its members to engage in direct lobbying to influence the course of policy formation. In 2011, for example, members of the Business Roundtable cautioned the Obama administration against the economic harm that could result from enacting stricter environmental protection legislation related to preservation of the ozone layer.

Most large corporations, in addition to having their own governmental affairs departments, employ D.C.-based lobbyists to keep them apprised of legislation that may affect them, or to lobby bureaucrats for government contracts. Large corporations also channel significant sums of money to favored politicians or political candidates.

**ORGANIZED LABOR** Membership in labor unions held steady throughout the early and mid-1900s and then skyrocketed toward the end of the Depression. By then,

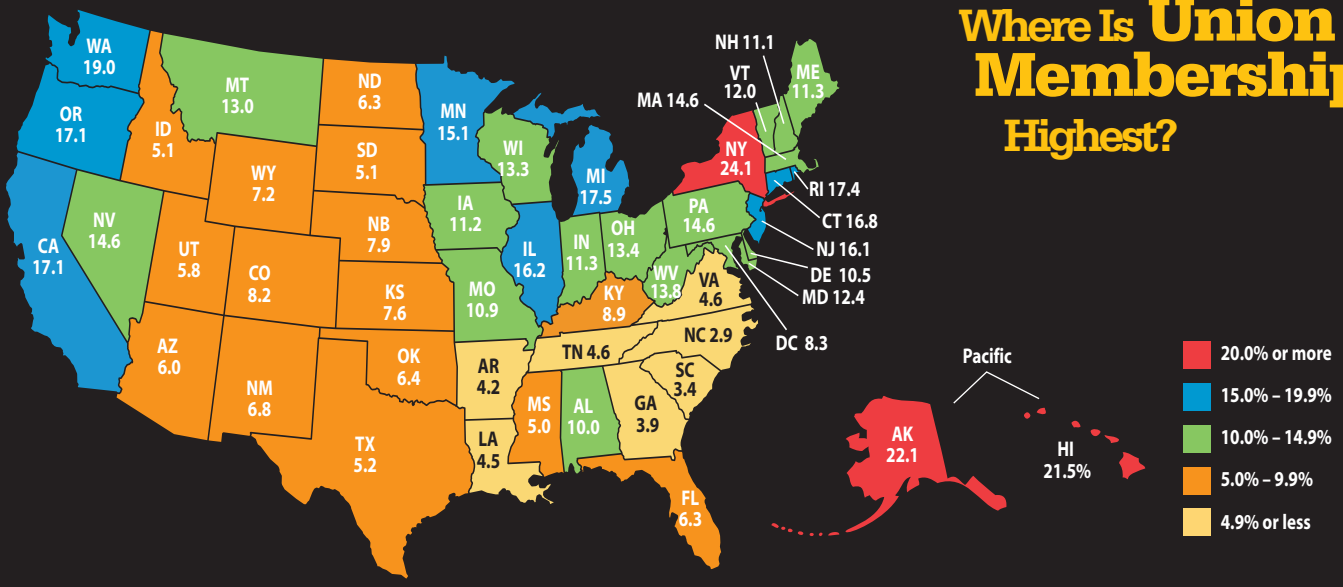

HOW IS THE FACE OF UNION MEMBERSHIP CHANGING?

Historically, most union members were white, male, blue collar workers and female teachers. In more recent years, however, unions have become more female and more diverse. Part of this change is the result of broadening union membership to include service workers, such as those shown here protesting with the Service Employees International Union.

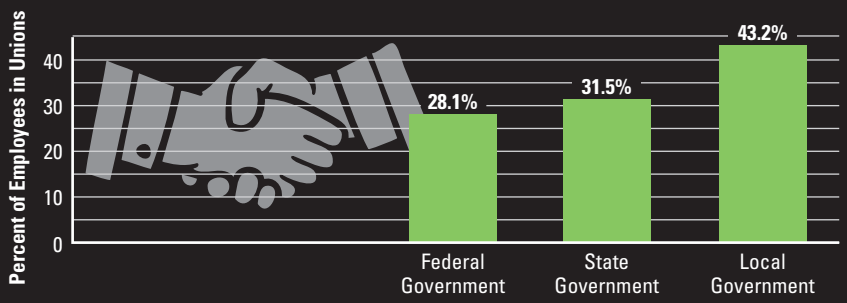
# Who Are Union Members?

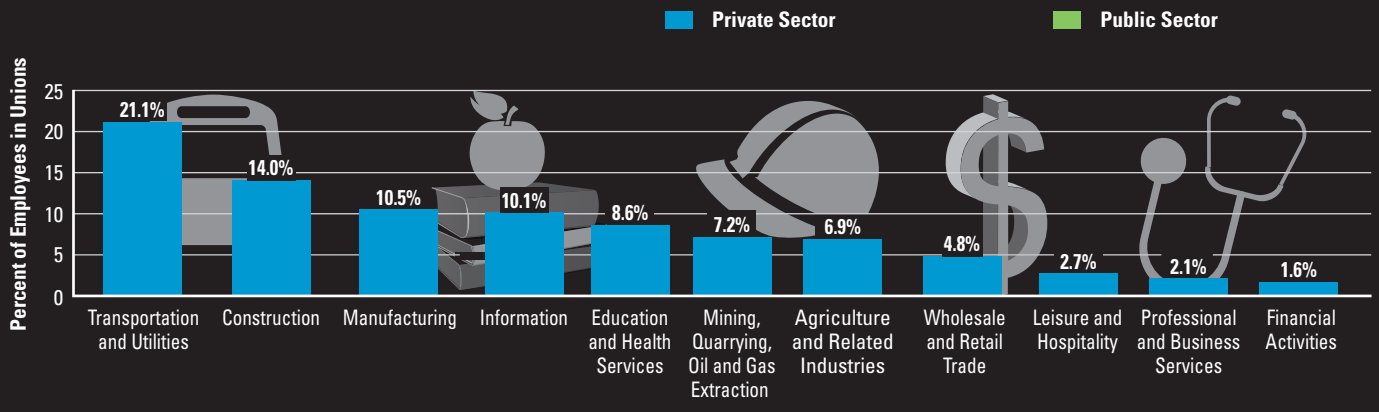
Labor unions have a rich history in the United States. During the peak of union labor in the 1950s, almost 30 percent of working Americans were members of a union. However, union membership, especially among private sector employees, has declined dramatically in recent years. These numbers provide a stark comparison to other industrialized democracies, for example, Finland, where 70 percent of workers are members of a union.

## Where Is Union Membership Highest?




## Public vs. Private Sector Employees




### CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How can you explain the regional variations in union membership shown in the map above?
2. Why do you think there are varying rates of union membership between public and private employees and across differing professions?
3. What would be the positives and negatives of increasing (or decreasing) the number of unionized American workers?

organized labor began to wield potent political power, as it was able to turn out its members in support of particular political candidates, many of whom were Democrats.

Labor became a stronger force in U.S. politics when the American Federation of Labor (AFL) merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1955. Concentrating its efforts largely on the national level, the new AFL-CIO immediately channeled its energies into pressuring the government to protect concessions won from employers at the bargaining table and to other issues of concern to its members, including minimum wage laws, the environment, civil rights, medical insurance, and health care.

More recently, the political clout of organized labor has waned at the national level. Membership peaked at about 30 percent of the workforce in the late 1940s. Since that time, union membership has plummeted as the nation changed from a land of manufacturing workers and farmers to a nation of white-collar professionals and service workers.

Even worse for the future of the labor movement is the split that occurred at the AFL-CIO's 2005 annual meeting, ironically the fiftieth anniversary of the joining of the two unions. Plagued by reduced union membership and disagreement over goals, seven member unions, including three of its largest, seceded from the AFL-CIO. The head of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) at that time, Andy Stern, said the AFL-CIO had grown "pale, male, and stale."[16]



# What Do Interest Groups Do?

**15.3** Identify several strategies and tactics used by organized interests.

Not all organized interests are political, but they may become politically active when their members believe that a government policy threatens or affects group goals. Interest groups also enhance political participation by motivating like-minded individuals to work toward a common purpose. Legislators often are much more likely to listen to or be concerned about the interests of a group as opposed to the interests of any one individual.

Just as members of Congress are assumed to represent the interests of their constituents in Washington, D.C., interest groups are assumed to represent the interests of their members to policy makers at all levels of government. In the 1950s, for example, the NAACP was able to articulate the interests of African Americans to national decision makers, even though as a group they had little or no electoral clout, especially in the South. Without the efforts of civil rights groups, it is unlikely that either the courts or Congress would have acted as quickly to make discrimination illegal. By banding together with others who have similar interests at a particular time, all sorts of individuals—from railroad workers to women to physical therapists to concerned parents to homosexuals to mushroom growers—can advance their collective interests in Congress, statehouses, communities, and school districts. Gaining celebrity support or hiring a lobbyist to advocate those interests also increases the likelihood that issues of concern will be addressed and acted on favorably.

Interest groups, however, do have a downside. Because groups make claims on society, they can increase the cost of public policies. The elderly can push for more costly health care and Social Security programs; people with disabilities, for improved access to public buildings; industry, for tax loopholes; and veterans, for improved benefits that may be costly to other Americans. Many Americans believe that interest groups exist simply to advance their own selfish interests, with little regard for the rights of other groups or, more importantly, of people not represented by any organized group.

Whether good or bad, interest groups play an important role in U.S. politics. In addition to enhancing the democratic process by providing increased representation and participation, they raise public awareness about important issues, help frame the public agenda, and often monitor programs to guarantee effective implementation. Most often, they accomplish these goals through some sort of lobbying or electoral activities.

**lobbying**
The activities of a group or organization that seek to persuade political leaders to support the group's position.

## Lobbying

Lobbying is at the top of most interest groups' agendas. **Lobbying** is the activities of a group or organization that seek to persuade political leaders to support the group's position. The exact origin of the term is disputed. In mid-seventeenth-century England, there was a room located near the floor of the House of Commons where members of Parliament would congregate and could be approached by their constituents and others who wanted to plead a particular cause. Similarly, in the United States, people often waited outside the chambers of the House and Senate to speak to members of Congress as they emerged. Because they waited in the lobbies to argue their cases, by the nineteenth century they were commonly referred to as lobbyists. An alternate piece of folklore explains that when Ulysses S. Grant was president, he would frequently walk from the White House to the Willard Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue just to relax in its comfortable and attractive lobby. Interest group representatives and those seeking favors from Grant would crowd into that lobby and try to press their claims. Soon they were nicknamed lobbyists (see Figure 15.1).

Most politically active groups use lobbying to make their interests heard and understood by those who are in a position to influence or change governmental policies. Depending on the type of group and on the role it aims to play, lobbying can take many forms. You probably have never thought of the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts as political. Yet, when Congress began debating the passage of legislation dealing with discrimination in private clubs, representatives of both organizations testified in the hope of persuading Congress to allow them to remain single-sex organizations.

Lobbyists and organizations can influence policy at the local, state, and national levels in multiple legal ways. Almost all interest groups lobby by testifying at hearings and contacting legislators. Other groups also provide information that decision makers might not have the time, opportunity, or interest to gather on their own. Interest groups also file lawsuits or friend of the court briefs to lobby the courts. And, groups energize grassroots members to contact their representatives or engage in protests or demonstrations.

**LOBBYING CONGRESS** A wide variety of lobbying activities target members of Congress: congressional testimony on behalf of a group, individual letters or e-mails from

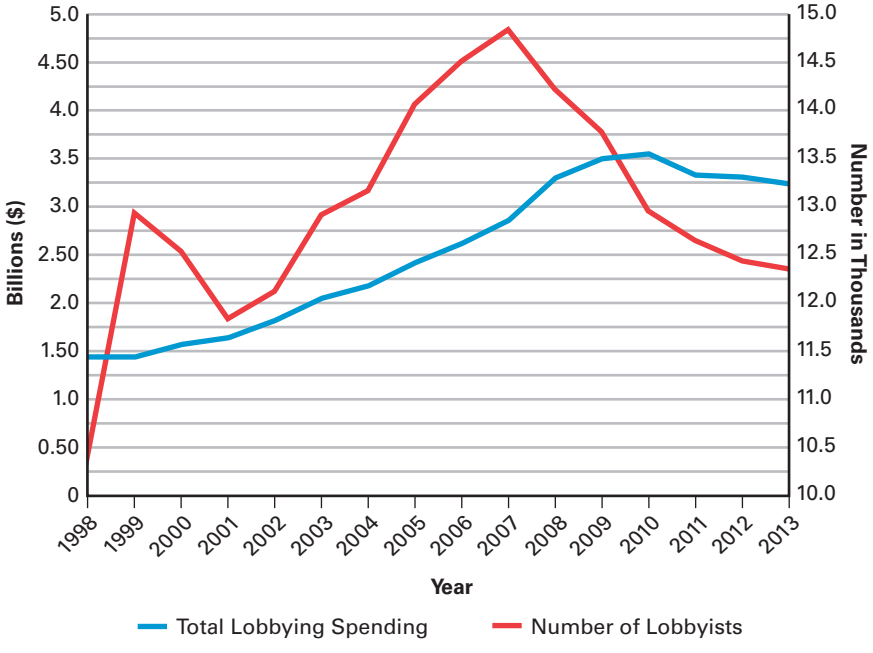



**FIGURE 15.1** HOW MANY LOBBYISTS ARE THERE? HOW MUCH DO THEY SPEND?

Each year, more than 10,000 lobbyists attempt to influence public policy in Congress and the federal agencies. This large scale lobbying effort is an expensive industry, costing billions of dollars each year.

**SOURCE:** Center for Responsive Politics, http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/index.php.

interested constituents, campaign contributions, or the outright payment of money for votes. Of course, the last activity is illegal, but there exist numerous documented instances of money changing hands for votes.

Lobbying Congress and issue advocacy are skills that many people have developed over the years. In 1869, for example, women gathered in Washington, D.C., for the second annual meeting of the National Woman Suffrage Association and marched to Capitol Hill to hear one of their members (unsuccessfully) ask Congress to pass legislation that would enfranchise women under the terms of the Fourteenth Amendment. Practices such as these floor speeches are no longer permitted.

Today, many effective lobbyists are former members of Congress, staff aides, or other Washington insiders. These connections help them develop close relationships with senators and House members in an effort to enhance their access to the policy-making process. A symbiotic relationship between members of Congress, interest group representatives, and affected bureaucratic agencies often develops. In these iron triangles and issue networks, congressional representatives and their staff members, who face an exhausting workload and legislation they frequently know little about, often look to lobbyists for information. "Information is the currency on Capitol Hill, not dollars," said one lobbyist.[17] One aide reports: "My boss demands a speech and a statement for the *Congressional Record* for every bill we introduce or co-sponsor—and we have a lot of bills. I just can't do it all myself. The better lobbyists, when they have a proposal they are pushing, bring it to me along with a couple of speeches, a *Record* insert, and a fact sheet."[18]

Not surprisingly, lobbyists work most closely with representatives who share their interests.[19] A lobbyist from the National Rifle Association (NRA), for example, would be unlikely to try influencing a liberal representative who, on record, was strongly in favor of gun control. It is much more effective for a group such as the NRA to provide useful information for its supporters and to those who are undecided. Good lobbyists also can encourage members to file amendments to bills favorable to their interests, as was evident in the recent health care debate. They




WHAT ROLE DO LOBBYISTS PLAY IN CONGRESS?

This cartoon presents one popular view of how legislation gets enacted on Capitol Hill. Political science research, however, reveals that interest groups do not directly "buy" members' votes in a quid pro quo. They do, however, reward loyal supporters in Congress with campaign contributions and other incentives.

## The Living Constitution

*Congress shall make no law respecting . . . the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.* —FIRST AMENDMENT

This section of the First Amendment prohibits the national government from enacting laws dealing with the right of individuals to join together to make their voices known about their positions on a range of political issues. Little debate on this clause took place in the U.S. House of Representatives, and none was recorded in the Senate.

Freedom of association, a key concept that allows Americans to organize and join a host of political groups, grew out of a series of cases decided by the Supreme Court in the 1950s and 1960s, when many southern states were trying to limit the activities of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). From the right to assemble and petition the government, along with the freedom of speech, the Supreme Court construed the right of people to come together to support or to protest government actions. First, the Court ruled that states could not compel interest groups to provide their membership lists to state officials. Later, the Court ruled that Alabama could not prohibit the NAACP from urging its members and others to file lawsuits challenging state discriminatory practices. Many commentators have drawn parallels between these protests and those that recently occurred in Ferguson, Missouri, in the wake of a police shooting of a young, unarmed, black man, Michael Brown.

### CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What role has protest played in American history?
2. Does requiring a government permit infringe on the right to protest? Under what conditions could a government permit be declined?

also can urge their supporters in Congress to make speeches (often written by the group) and to pressure their colleagues in the chamber.

A lobbyist's effectiveness depends largely on his or her reputation for fair play and provision of accurate information. No member of Congress wants to look uninformed. As one member noted: "It doesn't take very long to figure out which lobbyists are straightforward, and which ones are trying to snow you. The good ones will give you the weak points as well as the strong points of their case. If anyone ever gives me false or misleading information, that's it—I'll never see him again."[20]

**LOBBYING THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH** As the executive branch has increasingly concerned itself with shaping legislation, lobbying efforts directed toward the president and the bureaucracy have gained in frequency and importance. Groups often target one or more levels of the executive branch because so many potential access points exist, including the president, White House staff, and numerous levels of the executive branch bureaucracy. Groups try to work closely with the administration to influence policy decisions at their formulation and later implementation stages. As with congressional lobbying, the effectiveness of a group often depends on its ability to provide decision makers with important information and a sense of where the public stands on the issue. The National Women's Law Center, for example, has been instrumental in seeing that Title IX, which Congress passed to mandate educational equity for women and girls, is enforced fully by the Department of Education.

**LOBBYING THE COURTS** The courts, too, have proved a useful target for interest groups.[21] Although you might think that the courts decide cases affecting only the parties involved or that they should be immune from political pressures, interest groups for years have recognized the value of lobbying the courts, especially the U.S. Supreme Court, and many political scientists view it as a form of political participation.[22]

Generally, interest group lobbying of the courts can take two forms: direct sponsorship or the filing of *amicus curiae* briefs. Sponsorship involves providing resources (financial, human, or otherwise) to shepherd a case through the judicial system, and the group may even become a named party, as in *Los Angeles Flood District* v. *Natural Resources Defense Council* (2013). When a case that a group is interested in, but not actually sponsoring, comes before a court, the organization often will file an *amicus* brief—either alone or with other like-minded groups—to inform the justices of the group's policy preferences, generally offered in the guise of legal arguments. Over the years, as the number of both liberal and conservative groups viewing litigation as a useful tactic has increased, so has the number of briefs submitted to the courts. An interest group has sponsored or filed an *amicus curiae* brief in most of the major U.S. Supreme Court cases noted in this text.[23] Interest groups also file *amicus* briefs in lower federal and state supreme courts, but in much lower numbers.

In addition to litigating, interest groups try to influence nominations to the federal courts. For example, they play an important part in judicial nominees' Senate confirmation hearings. In 1991, for example, 112 groups testified or filed prepared statements for or against the controversial nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court.[24] In 2009, for example, 218 groups testified or prepared statements for or against the nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court. The diversity of groups was astounding, from gun rights groups to pro-choice groups, women's groups, and Hispanic advocacy organizations.[25]

It is also becoming more common for interest groups of all persuasions to pay for trips so that judges may attend "informational conferences" or simply to interact with judges by paying for club memberships and golf outings. In fact, many commentators criticized the absence of Justice Antonin Scalia from the swearing in of Chief Justice John Roberts because Scalia was on a golf outing in Colorado. This outing was part of a legal conference sponsored by the Federalist Society, a conservative group that was highly influential in judicial appointments during the Bush administration.[26]

**GRASSROOTS LOBBYING** Interest groups regularly try to inspire their members to engage in grassroots lobbying, hoping that lawmakers will respond to those pressures and the attendant publicity.[27] In essence, the goal of many organizations is to persuade ordinary voters to serve as their advocates. In the world of lobbying, few things are more useful than a list of committed supporters. Radio and TV talk-show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh and Rachel Maddow try to stir up their listeners by urging them to contact their representatives in Washington, D.C. Other interest groups use petition drives and carefully targeted and costly TV advertisements pitching one side of an argument. It is also routine for interest groups to e-mail or text message their members and provide a direct Web link as well as suggested text that citizens can use to lobby their legislators.

**PROTESTS AND RADICAL ACTIVISM** An occasional, though highly visible, tactic used by some groups is protest activity. Although usually a group's members opt for more conventional forms of lobbying or influence policy through the electoral process, when these forms of pressure group activities are unsuccessful, some groups (or individuals within groups) resort to more forceful measures to attract attention to their cause. Since the Revolutionary War, violent, illegal protest has been one tactic of organized interests. The Boston Tea Party, for example, involved breaking all sorts of laws, although no one was hurt physically. Other forms of protest, such as the Whiskey Rebellion, ended in tragedy for some participants.

Today, anti-war activists, animal rights activists, and some pro-life groups, such as Operation Rescue, at times rely on illegal protest activities. Members of the Animal Liberation Front, for example, stalked the wife of a pharmaceutical executive, broke into her car, stole her credit cards, and then made over $20,000 in unauthorized charitable donations.[28] Members of this group also use circus bombings, the sabotage of restaurants, and property destruction to gain attention for their cause.[29] Other radical groups also post on the Internet the names and addresses of those they believe to be

engaging in wrongful activity and urge members to take action against these people. Some groups have faced federal terrorism charges for these illegal actions.

## Election Activities

In addition to trying to achieve their goals (or at least draw attention to them) by lobbying, many interest groups also become involved more directly in the electoral process. The recent presidential and midterm elections, for example, were the targets of significant fund-raising by organized interests. Interest groups also recruit and endorse candidates, aid in get-out-the-vote campaigns, and rate office holders.

**CANDIDATE RECRUITMENT AND ENDORSEMENTS** Some interest groups recruit, endorse, and/or provide financial or other forms of support to political candidates. EMILY's List (EMILY stands for "Early money is like yeast—it makes the dough rise") was founded to support pro-choice Democratic women candidates, especially during party primary election contests. It now also recruits and trains candidates. In 2014, EMILY's List spent almost $40 million in direct contributions to candidates, volunteer mobilization, hiring campaign consultants, and funding for some direct media.

Candidate endorsements also play a prominent role in focusing voters' attention on candidates who advocate policies consistent with an interest group's beliefs. In addition, endorsements may help mobilize group members. Many members of groups supporting Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in 2012 provided much needed volunteers and enthusiasm.

**GETTING OUT THE VOTE** Many interest groups believe they can influence public policy by putting like-minded representatives in office. To that end, many groups across the ideological spectrum launch massive get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts. These include identifying prospective voters and transporting them to the polls. Well-financed interest groups often cast a wider net, producing issue-oriented ads for newspapers, radio, TV, and the Internet, designed to educate the public as well as increase voter interest in election outcomes.

**RATING THE CANDIDATES OR OFFICE HOLDERS** Many ideological groups rate candidates on a scale from 0 to 100 to help their members (and the general public) evaluate the voting records of members of Congress. They use these ratings to help their members and other voters make informed voting decisions. The American Conservative Union (conservative) and Americans for Democratic Action (liberal)—two groups at ideological polar extremes—are just two examples of groups that routinely rate candidates and members of Congress based on their votes on key issues.

**CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS** Corporations, labor unions, and interest groups may give money to political candidates in a number of ways. Organized interests are allowed to form political action committees (PACs) to raise money for direct contributions to political candidates in national elections. PAC money plays a significant role in the campaigns of many congressional incumbents, often averaging over half a House candidate's total spending. PACs generally contribute to those who have helped them before and who serve on committees or subcommittees that routinely consider legislation of concern to that group. In 2012, the average Senate candidate received $2.2 million from PACs, and the average House candidate received $745,000 (see Figure 15.2).

Some organized interests may also prefer to make campaign expenditures through Super PACs, 527s, or 501(c) groups. Money raised by these groups may not

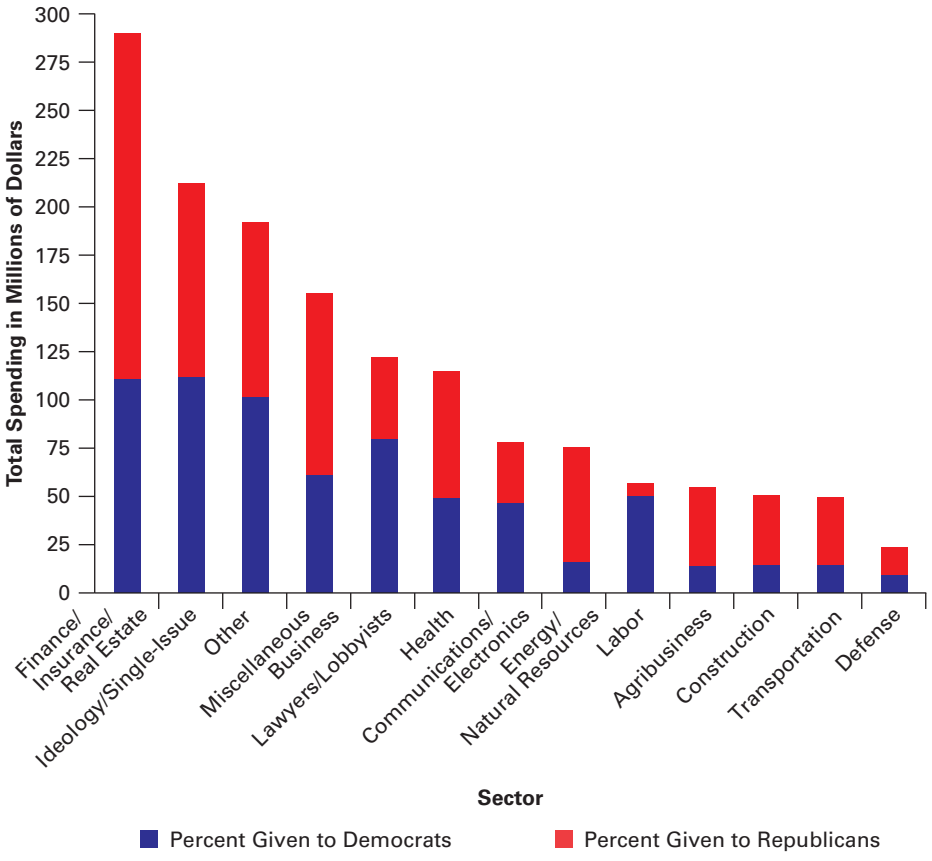



**FIGURE 15.2** HOW MUCH MONEY DO INTEREST GROUPS GIVE TO PARTIES AND CANDIDATES?
Political action committees play an important role in national elections. The amount of money they give to candidates and parties and how it is allocated between Democrats and Republicans varies widely over interest group sectors.

**SOURCE:** Center for Responsive Politics, http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/index.php (data through October 15, 2014).

be given to or spent in coordination with a candidate's campaign. However, it may be used for issue advocacy, which may help a group's preferred candidate indirectly. These groups have been major players in recent elections, spending over $660 million in 2012.

# What Makes Interest Groups Successful?

**15.4** Analyze the factors that make an interest group successful.

All of the groups discussed in this chapter have one characteristic in common: they all want to shape the public agenda, whether by helping to elect candidates, maintaining the status quo, or obtaining favorable legislation or judicial rulings from national, state, and local governments.[30] For powerful groups, simply making sure that certain issues never get discussed may be the goal. In contrast, those attempting to bring attention to other issues, such as racial equality in the United States, succeed when the issue becomes front-page news and citizens place pressure on government leaders to address the issue.

# Explore Your World

Interest groups—often called nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) beyond the boundaries of the United States—play a significant role in world politics. Most states, as well as the European Union, United Nations, and other intergovernmental organizations, face heavy lobbying from corporate interests and citizen activists. Some of these NGOs are specific to the challenges faced within one country. Others transcend national boundaries and work to increase the global standard of living and bring attention to the interconnected nature of our modern world.


Oxfam was founded in 1942 in Great Britain as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief. The goal of the organization at its inception was to distribute food to occupied nations during World War II. Today, the organization works to fight poverty and hunger around the world by providing disaster relief, lobbying governments, and increasing food security and water hygiene.

A Shell Oil executive established the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (now known simply as BRAC) in 1972, soon after that country's independence. Today, it is an important development organization, providing microcredit to individuals in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. The group also works to combat poverty and improve citizens' standard of living in other ways.

## CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How can international NGOs have both positive and negative effects on the citizens they attempt to serve?
2. What lobbying tactics might these groups find most successful in raising attention to their causes? What governmental agencies should they lobby?
3. Can you think of other interest groups that are successful on an international or global scale? What are they, and why are they successful?

Groups succeed when they win legislation, court cases, or even elections individually or in coalition with other groups.[31] They also are successful when their leaders become elected officials or policy makers in any of the three branches of the government. For example, Representative Rosa DeLauro (D–CT) was a former political director of EMILY's List. And, President Barack Obama worked as a grassroots community organizer for a variety of Chicago-based groups.

Political scientists have studied several phenomena that contribute in varying degrees—individually and collectively—to particular groups' successes. These include leaders, funding and patrons, and a solid membership base.

## Leaders

Interest group theorists frequently acknowledge the key role of leaders in the formation, viability, and success of interest groups while noting that leaders often vary from rank-and-file members on various policies.[32] Without the powerful pen of William Lloyd Garrison in the 1830s, who knows whether the abolition movement would have been as successful? Other notable leaders include Frances Willard of the WCTU; Marian Wright Edelman, who founded the Children's Defense Fund; and Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition.

The role of an interest-group leader is similar to that of an entrepreneur in the business world. Leaders of groups must find ways to attract members. As in the marketing of a new product, an interest-group leader must offer something attractive to entice members to join. Potential members of the group must be convinced that the benefits of joining outweigh the costs. Union members, for example, must be persuaded that the union's winning higher wages and concessions for them will offset the cost of their union dues.

## Funding and Patrons

Advertising, litigating, and lobbying are expensive. Without financiers, few public interest groups could survive their initial start-up periods. To remain in business, many interest groups rely on membership dues, direct-mail solicitations, special events, and patrons.


WHO ARE INTEREST GROUP LEADERS?

As president of the Children's Defense Fund, Marian Wright Edelman continues to fight against child poverty and for better health care. Since the group's establishment in 1973, Edelman has been an active, public face for the cause she represents.

**patron**
A person who finances a group or individual activity.

**free rider problem**
Potential members fail to join a group because they can get the benefit, or collective good, sought by the group without contributing the effort.

Charismatic leaders often are especially effective fundraisers and recruiters of new members. In addition, governments, foundations, and wealthy individuals can serve as **patrons,** providing crucial start-up funds for groups, especially public interest groups.[33]

## Members

Organizations usually comprise three kinds of members. At the top are a relatively small number of leaders who devote most of their energies to the single group. The second tier of members generally is involved psychologically as well as organizationally. They are the workers of the group—they attend meetings, pay dues, and chair committees to see that things get done. In the bottom tier are the rank-and-file members who don't actively participate. They pay their dues and call themselves group members, but they do little more. Most group members fall into this last category.

Survey data have consistently revealed that group membership is drawn primarily from people with higher income and education levels.[34] Individuals who are wealthier can afford to belong to more organizations because they have more money and, often, more leisure time. Money and education also are associated with greater confidence that one's actions will bring results, a further incentive to devote time to organizing or supporting interest groups. These elites also are often more involved in politics and hold stronger opinions on many political issues.

People who do belong to groups often join more than one. Overlapping memberships can affect the cohesiveness of a group. Imagine, for example, that you are an officer in the College Republicans. If you call a meeting, people may not attend because they have academic, athletic, or social obligations. Divided loyalties and multiple group memberships frequently affect the success of a group, especially if any one group has too many members who simply fall into the dues-paying category.

Groups vary tremendously in their ability to enroll what are called potential members. According to Mancur Olson, all groups provide a collective good.[35] If one union member at a factory gets a raise, for example, all other workers at that factory will, too. Therefore, those who don't join or work for the benefit of the group still reap the rewards of the group's activity. The downside of this phenomenon is called the **free rider problem.** As Olson asserts, potential members may be unlikely to join a group because they realize that they will receive many of the benefits the group achieves, regardless of their participation. Not only is it irrational for free riders to join any group, but the bigger the group, the greater the free rider problem.

Groups attempt to overcome the free rider problem in numerous ways. One method used by many groups is providing a variety of material benefits to convince potential members to join. The American Automobile Association (better known as AAA), for example, offers roadside assistance and trip-planning services to its members. Similarly, AARP offers a wide range of discount programs to its 37 million members over the age of fifty. Many of those members do not necessarily support all of the group's positions but simply want to take advantage of its discounts.

Individuals may also choose to join groups when their rights are threatened. Membership in a group may be necessary to establish credibility in a field, as well. Many lawyers, for example, join local bar associations for this reason.

In addition, groups may form alliances with others to help overcome the free rider problem. These alliances have important implications.[36] For example, farmers and farmers' markets across the country join the Farmers' Market Coalition to raise local and national awareness of the importance of sustainable agriculture.

Interest groups also carve out policy niches to differentiate themselves to potential members as well as policy makers. One study of gay and lesbian groups, for example, found that they avoided direct competition by developing different issue niches.[37] Some concentrate on litigation; others lobby for marriage law reform or open inclusion of gays in the military.

Small groups often have an organizational advantage because, for example, in a small group such as the National Governors Association, any individual's share of the collective good may be great enough to make it rational for him or her to join. Patrons,


HOW DO INTEREST GROUPS CONVINCE POTENTIAL MEMBERS TO BECOME DUES-PAYING MEMBERS?

AARP has been particularly successful at motivating its pool of potential members to join, in large part because it offers a variety of material benefits. Here, AARP members in Michigan hold a rally advocating the importation of cheaper prescription drugs from Canada, just across the bridge shown in the background.

be they large foundations such as the Koch Family Foundations or individuals such as wealthy financier George Soros, often eliminate the free rider problem for public interest groups.[38] They make the costs of joining minimal because they contribute much of the group's necessary financial support.[39]

# Toward Reform: Regulating Interest Groups and Lobbyists

**15.5** Explain reform efforts geared toward regulating interest groups and lobbyists.

For the first 150 years of our nation's history, federal lobbying practices went unregulated. While the courts remain largely free of lobbying regulations, reforms have altered the state of affairs in Congress and the executive branch.

## Regulating Congressional Lobbyists

In 1946, in an effort to limit the power of lobbyists, Congress passed the Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act, which required anyone hired to lobby any member of Congress to register and file quarterly financial reports. For years, few lobbyists actually filed these reports and numerous good-government groups continued to argue for the strengthening of lobbying laws.

By 1995, public opinion polls began to show that Americans believed the votes of members of Congress were available to the highest bidder. Thus, in late 1995, Congress passed the first effort to regulate lobbying since the 1946 act. The Lobbying Disclosure Act employed a strict definition of lobbyist (one who devotes at least 20 percent of a client's or employer's time to lobbying activities). It also required lobbyists to: (1) register

**Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007**
Lobbying reform banning gifts to members of Congress and their staffs, toughening disclosure requirements, and increasing time limits on moving from the federal government to the private sector.

with the clerk of the House and the secretary of the Senate; (2) report their clients and issues and the agency or house they lobbied; and (3) estimate the amount they are paid by each client. These reporting requirements made it easier for watchdog groups or the media to monitor lobbying activities. In fact, a comprehensive analysis by the Center for Responsive Politics revealed that by the end of 2013, 12,357 lobbyists were registered. Nearly $6 million was spent on lobbying for every member of Congress.[40]

After lobbyist Jack Abramoff pleaded guilty to extensive corruption charges in 2006, Congress pledged to reexamine the role of lobbyists in the legislative process. After the Democrats took control of both houses of Congress in 2007 in the wake of a variety of lobbying scandals, Congress attempted to remedy this problem by passing the **Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007.** Among the act's key provisions were a ban on gifts and honoraria to members of Congress and their staffs, tougher disclosure requirements, and longer time limits on moving from the federal government to the private lobbying sector. Many observers complained, however, that the law did not go far enough. In particular, many commentators were critical of the fact that the ban on gifts applied only to private lobbyists. Thus, state and local agencies and public universities, for example, are still free to offer tickets for football and basketball games, as well as to provide meals and travel.[41]

## Regulating Executive Branch Lobbyists

Formal lobbying of the executive branch is governed by some restrictions in the 1995 Lobbying Disclosure Act as well as updates contained in the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act. Executive branch employees are also constrained by the 1978 Ethics in Government Act. Enacted in the wake of the Watergate scandal, this legislation attempted to curtail questionable moves by barring members of the executive branch from representing any clients before their agency for two years after leaving governmental service. Thus, someone who worked in air pollution policy for the Environmental Protection Agency and then went to work for the Environmental Defense Fund would have to wait two years before lobbying his or her old agency.

More recently, the Obama administration has implemented reforms that bring congressional-style lobbying regulation to the executive branch. In regulations put into place on his first day on the job, Barack Obama limited aides leaving the White House from lobbying executive agencies within two years. He also banned members of the administration from accepting gifts from lobbyists.

## Regulating Judicial Branch Lobbyists

There are few formal regulations on interest group participation before the Supreme Court. Though interested parties must ask the Court for permission to file an *amicus curiae* brief, in practice, the great majority of these petitions are granted. In recent years, activists have called for reform to the case sponsorship and oral advocacy processes before the Court, but to no avail. Similarly, a number of nonprofit and good government groups have suggested that there need to be additional restrictions on groups' access to judges in "legal education" sessions—many of which are held at fancy resorts at little to no cost to the judges. Congress and the judiciary have also failed to put these regulations in place.

# Review the Chapter

## Roots of the American Interest Group System

**15.1** Trace the roots of the American interest group system, p. 424.

An organized interest is a collection of people or groups with shared attitudes who make claims on government. Political scientists approach the development of interest groups from a number of theoretical perspectives, including pluralist theory and the transactions approach. Interest groups can be classified in a variety of ways, based on their functions and membership.

## The Development of American Interest Groups

**15.2** Describe the historical development of American interest groups, p. 427.

Interest groups did not begin to emerge in the United States until the 1830s. From 1890 to 1920, the Progressive movement dominated. The 1960s saw the rise of a wide variety of liberal interest groups. During the 1970s and 1980s, legions of conservatives formed new groups to counteract those efforts. Business groups, corporations, and unions also established their presence in Washington, D.C., during this time.

## What Do Interest Groups Do?

**15.3** Identify several strategies and tactics used by organized interests, p. 433.

Interest groups often fill voids left by the major political parties and give Americans opportunities to make organized claims on government. The most common activity of interest groups is lobbying, which takes many forms. Groups routinely pressure members of Congress and their staffs, the president and the bureaucracy, and the courts; they use a variety of techniques to educate and stimulate the public to pressure key governmental decision makers. Interest groups also attempt to influence the outcome of elections; some run their own candidates for office. Others rate elected officials to inform their members how particular legislators stand on issues of importance to them. Political action committees (PACs), a way for some groups to contribute money to candidates for office, are another means of gaining support from elected officials and ensuring that supportive officials stay in office.

## What Makes Interest Groups Successful?

**15.4** Analyze the factors that make an interest group successful, p. 439.

Interest group success can be measured in a variety of ways, including a group's ability to get its issues on the public agenda, winning key pieces of legislation in Congress or executive branch or judicial rulings, or backing successful candidates. Several factors contribute to interest group success, including leaders and patrons, funding, and committed members.

## Toward Reform: Regulating Interest Groups and Lobbyists

**15.5** Explain reform efforts geared toward regulating interest groups and lobbyists, p. 443.

Not until 1946 did Congress pass any laws regulating federal lobbying. Those laws were largely ineffective and were successfully challenged as violations of the First Amendment. In 1995, Congress passed the Lobbying Disclosure Act, which required lobbyists to register with both houses of Congress. By 2007, a rash of scandals resulted in sweeping reforms called the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, which dramatically limited what lobbyists can do. The executive branch is regulated by the 1978 Ethics in Government Act. Lobbying the judiciary is largely unregulated.

# Learn the Terms

**Study** and **Review** the **Flashcards**

civic virtue, p. 424
collective good, p. 425
disturbance theory, p. 424
economic interest group, p. 427
free rider problem, p. 442
Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007, p. 444
interest group, p. 424
lobbying, p. 434
lobbyist, p. 429
patron, p. 442
pluralist theory, p. 424
political action committee (PAC), p. 427
public interest group, p. 425
social capital, p. 424
trade association, p. 430
transactions theory, p. 425

# Test Yourself

**Study** and **Review** the **Practice Tests**

**1.** Which theory of group politics emphasizes the distribution of political power among a wide array of diffuse interests?

**a.** Pluralist theory
**b.** Transactions theory
**c.** Social capital theory
**d.** Elite theory
**e.** Disturbance theory

**2.** Interest groups that are formed with the primary goal of engaging in campaigns and elections are known as

**a.** citizen campaign associations.
**b.** public interest groups.
**c.** economic groups.
**d.** political action committees.
**e.** governmental organizations.

**3.** Many interest groups established in the 1830s shared a common tradition in the

**a.** women's rights movement.
**b.** Christian revival.
**c.** temperance movement.
**d.** development of the economy.
**e.** growth of political campaigns.

**4.** Many Progressive era groups placed pressure on the national government to begin

**a.** regulating business.
**b.** funding small businesses.
**c.** lowering taxes.
**d.** cutting budgets.
**e.** increasing political patronage.

**5.** Interest groups may participate in the courts by:

**a.** directly lobbying justices.
**b.** giving campaign contributions to federal judges.
**c.** filing friend of the court briefs.
**d.** submitting formal comments on judicial decisions.
**e.** writing proposed legislation.

**6.** Which of the following can a political action committee NOT do?

**a.** Endorse candidates
**b.** Produce advertisements for like-minded candidates
**c.** Rate candidates or elected officials
**d.** Make financial contributions to candidates
**e.** Coordinate expenditures with a candidate's campaign

**7.** Most interest group members fall into which of the following categories?

**a.** Leaders
**b.** Active participants
**c.** Lobbyists
**d.** Those who pay dues, but do not actively participate within the group
**e.** Politically disengaged

**8.** What is the term for an individual who reaps the benefits of an interest group's activity without actually having membership in the group?

**a.** Patron
**b.** Free rider
**c.** Lobbyist
**d.** Constituent
**e.** Elite

**9.** Which of the three branches of government still remain largely free of lobbying regulations?

- **a.** Executive
- **b.** Judicial
- **c.** Legislative
- **d.** Executive and legislative
- **e.** Executive and judicial

**10.** The 1978 Ethics in Government Act was passed as a result of

- **a.** U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.
- **b.** the economic recession.
- **c.** the Watergate scandal.
- **d.** Great Society legislation.
- **e.** the Arab oil embargo.