

## CHAPTER 18

## Interest Groups and Public Opinion

## ★ INTEREST GROUP ORGANIZATION

Thousands of interest groups try to influence government actions. These groups provide campaign funds to candidates. They also work to pass laws that benefit their members. Many people believe that interest groups help citizens communicate their goals and concerns to the government. Others contend that they exert undue influence.

Interest group leaders plan strategy, raise funds, and act as spokespersons for the group. They keep members of the group informed of their activities through mailings and telephone calls. Some people join interest groups to promote individual economic interests. Others join because the group supports their views on some aspect of public policy.

## TYPICAL INTEREST GROUPS

National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce	represent business groups
Committee on Political Education	represents the interests of union workers who belong to the AFL-CIO
American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Farmers' Union	organizations for large and small farmers respectively
American Bar Association and the American Medical Association	represent lawyers and doctors respectively
Sierra Club and the National Wildlife Federation	environmentalist organizations

Public interest groups seek policy goals that benefit the general public. Public Citizen, Inc., for example, focuses on consumer safety issues, while Common Cause tries to reform the political system.

Foreign governments and companies also have interest groups that seek military aid, economic aid, or favorable trade agreements.

**★ AFFECTING PUBLIC POLICY**

Interest groups try to influence policy through direct contact with government officials. This activity is called lobbying because the contact traditionally occurred in lobbies of capitol buildings. Interest groups hire people called lobbyists to make this contact. Most lobbyists are former government officials, lawyers, or public relations experts. Former lawmakers cannot become lobbyists within one year of leaving Congress.

A 1946 law required lobbyists to register and file semiannual reports with Congress. The law unfortunately, contained loopholes that Congress tried to

close by passing the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995. In addition the Senate now forbids members to accept any gift worth more than \$50 from a lobbyist.

Lobbyists provide policy makers with information supporting their group's position. They testify before congressional committees and try to influence voting when a bill reaches the floor. Lobbyists also help draft almost 50 percent of all legislation.

Interest groups also encourage their members to write letters urging government officials to support or oppose specific policies. Some create media

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(continued)

## CHAPTER 18 SUMMARY CONTINUED

### AFFECTING PUBLIC POLICY *(continued)*

advertisements to gain public support. Two factors limit the effectiveness of interest groups:

- Competition among groups with conflicting interests keeps any single group from dominating the lobbying process.
- Generally the larger the group, the more diverse its members' views are. This diversity prevents interest groups from adopting broad policy objectives.

In the 1970s Congress prohibited corporations and labor unions from making direct contributions to political campaigns. The government also set limits for political action committees (PACs)—organizations that raise money and provide financial support for a political candidate. Supreme Court rulings, however, limited government regulation of PACs. By the 1990s there were about 4,000 PACs spending over \$400 million on political campaigns.

Affiliated PACs have ties to corporations, unions, or trade groups. Independent PACs are interested in a particular cause, such as the environment.

### ★ SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

The term *public opinion* refers to the ideas and attitudes a significant number of Americans hold about government and political issues. Three factors characterize American public opinion: (1) The diversity of the population contributes to a range of opinions on many issues. (2) Citizens communicate with government through interest groups, letters, and opinion polls. (3) "A significant number of U.S. citizens" in the context of public opinion means enough people to make government officials listen.

Several forces contribute to political socialization, the process by which individuals acquire their political beliefs:

- **Family** More than two-thirds of adults in the U.S. favor the political party their parents supported.

- **Schools** Education instills knowledge and democratic values.
- **Peer Groups** Friends and associates influence an individual's opinions.
- **Economic and Social Status** Income, age, geographic region, race, and gender help shape political beliefs.
- **The Media** How the media depict groups can help discredit or reinforce stereotypes.

An ideology is a set of basic beliefs about government and society. Liberals believe the national government should be active in helping individuals and communities. Conservatives believe the government's role should be limited. Most voters identify themselves as moderates, which means their beliefs fall somewhere between liberal and conservative on most issues.

### ★ MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION ★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

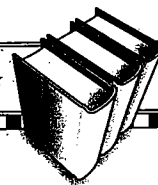
Opinion polls measure public attitudes. Straw polls are unscientific because they do not ensure that the sample, or group responding, accurately reflects the views of the public. Scientific polling involves three basic steps: (1) selecting a sample that is representative of a larger group; (2) wording the questions carefully; and (3) interpreting the results.

The larger group whose opinion is to be measured is called the "universe." Pollsters question a representative sample, or a small group typical of the universe. To select the small group, they use random sampling, a technique in which every person in the poll's universe has an equal chance of being selected.

A sampling error is a measurement of possible inaccuracy in the poll's results. A sampling error of 3 percent means that the opinion of the universe could be 3 percent higher or 3 percent lower than the sample. In a close election, sampling error can be a very significant factor.

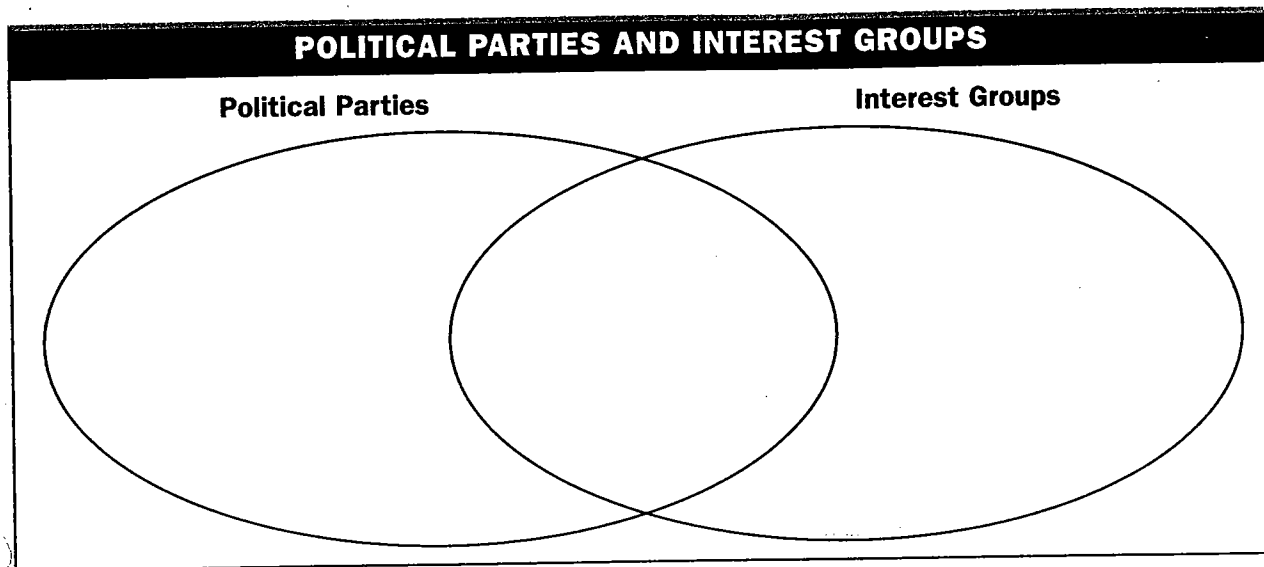
Since the wording can greatly influence people's responses to questions, scientific pollsters phrase their questions very carefully. Even scientific polls can be misleading. Individuals sometimes give what they think is the socially acceptable answer. Some respondents may pretend to have an informed opinion. At best polls provide only a snapshot of public opinion at the time.

# Guided Reading Activity 18-1



## Interest Group Organization

**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to complete this Venn diagram. Write the differences between political parties and interest groups in the outside sections of each oval and the similarities in the space where the two ovals overlap.



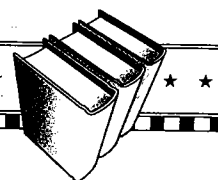
**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to identify the following interest groups:

- National Association of Manufacturers \_\_\_\_\_
- AFL-CIO \_\_\_\_\_
- Committee on Political Education \_\_\_\_\_
- American Farm Bureau Federation \_\_\_\_\_
- American Bar Association \_\_\_\_\_
- Public Citizen, Inc. \_\_\_\_\_
- National Governors' Association \_\_\_\_\_

**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to complete this list.

HOW INTEREST GROUPS SERVE THEIR MEMBERS	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

# **Guided Reading Activity 18-2** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



## **Affecting Public Policy**

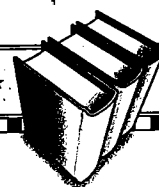
**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to complete the following sentences.

1. Lobbyists are defined as \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
2. The main work of lobbyists is to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Three groups of people from which many lobbyists come are \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Three services that lobbyists provide to lawmakers are \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. However, House and Senate rules restrict \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to complete this chart.

THE WORK OF INTEREST GROUPS AND PACs		
How they gain support	How they are limited	How they began
Laws governing PACs	Kinds of PACs	How PACs spend their money

# Guided Reading Activity 18-3



## Shaping Public Opinion

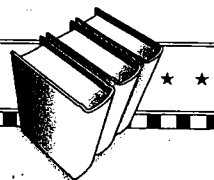
**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to match the items involving public opinion. Write the letter of the correct answer in the space provided.

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| _____ 1. The ideas and attitudes held by a significant number of U.S. citizens about government and political issues | <b>A.</b> significant numbers |
| _____ 2. Groups of people hold different opinions on almost every issue  | <b>B.</b> private opinion     |
| _____ 3. People's ideas are expressed to government individually or in public opinion polls                          | <b>C.</b> diversity           |
| _____ 4. Enough people hold a particular opinion to make government officials listen to them                         | <b>D.</b> public opinion      |
| _____ 5. Personal preferences  | <b>E.</b> communication       |

**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to complete this chart by explaining and giving an example of each influence.

THE PRINCIPAL INFLUENCES ON POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION		
Family and home influence	Schools	Peer groups
Social characteristics	The mass media	Other influences

# Guided Reading Activity 18-4 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



## Measuring Public Opinion

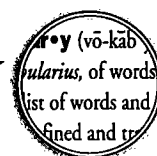
**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to complete this chart. In each space define the method for gauging public opinion. Then include one example or problem connected with the use of that method.

TRADITIONAL METHODS OF GAUGING PUBLIC OPINION					
political party organizations	interest groups	the mass media	letter writing	electronic access	straw polls
problem	problem	problem	problem	problem	problem

**★DIRECTIONS** Use the information in your textbook to identify the following terms associated with the practice of polling to gauge public opinion.

1. the three steps used in scientific polling: \_\_\_\_\_
2. universe: \_\_\_\_\_
3. representative sample: \_\_\_\_\_
4. random sampling: \_\_\_\_\_
5. sampling error: \_\_\_\_\_
6. cluster sample: \_\_\_\_\_
7. factors used in adjusting the results of a poll: \_\_\_\_\_
8. a problem with polls conducted by mail: \_\_\_\_\_
9. a problem with polls conducted by telephone: \_\_\_\_\_
10. three problems pollsters have with interpreting the results of a poll: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Activity 18



## Interest Groups and Public Opinion

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**DIRECTIONS** → Write terms from the list below that fit each description.

representative sample	political culture	universe	public opinion
lobbyist	mass media	interest group	sampling error
random sampling	cluster sample	peer group	public-interest group

1. Three related terms: one refers to a group of people who share common goals and organize to influence government; a second refers to a group of people who seek policy goals that it believes will benefit American society; and a third refers to a representative of groups that try to influence government policy by making direct contact with lawmakers or other government leaders. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Two related terms: one refers to the ideas and attitudes a significant number of Americans hold about government and political issues, and the second refers to a set of basic values and beliefs that most citizens share about a nation and its government. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Two related terms: one refers to the group of people who are to be represented in a poll; the second refers to a small group of people typical to that group. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Three related terms: one refers to a polling technique in which everyone to be represented has an equal chance of being selected; a second refers to a polling technique which groups people by geographical divisions; and a third refers to a measurement of how much the group of people studied in a poll may differ from the larger group it represents. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Two related terms: Both play an important role in political socialization. One refers to an individual's close friends, church, synagogue, club, and work groups; the other refers to television, radio, newspapers, magazines, recordings, movies, and books. \_\_\_\_\_

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**DIRECTIONS** → Use each of the following terms correctly in a complete sentence. Write the sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

lobbying

biased sample

# Reteaching Activity



## Interest Groups and Public Opinion

### DIRECTIONS

Fill in the outline below by writing the letters of the items that could belong under each heading.

#### I. Power and Purpose of Interest Groups

#### II. Responsibilities of Interest Group Leaders

#### III. Role of Lobbyists

#### IV. Origins and Powers of Political Action Committees

#### V. Contributing Factors to Political Socialization

#### VI. Methods of Gauging Public Opinion

- A. Children learn many of their early political opinions from their parents.
- B. They support candidates, but unlike political parties, do not nominate them for election.
- C. They sometimes testify before congressional committees.
- D. These individuals plan strategy, raise money, and oversee all financial decisions.
- E. Citizens can react almost immediately to events and government decisions by reaching members of Congress and the White House by E-mail or by fax.
- F. They keep the members informed of a group's activities, act as speakers for the group, and try to improve the group's image in the media.
- G. They meet with legislators and provide them with useful information.
- H. The media provide political information and images that can directly influence political attitudes.
- I. By representing large numbers of citizens, these groups have strong bargaining positions. In addition, they draw from the financial resources and expertise of their many members.

- J. These individuals draft as many as fifty percent of all legislative bills.
- K. The main law regulating these groups is the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971.
- L. In the past, reading newspapers or talking with voters helped elected officials determine the public mood.
- M. In *Buckley v. Valeo*, the Court ruled that different divisions of a corporation or different union locals can set up as many of these groups as they wish.
- N. By unifying the members of their organizations, they strengthen the political power of the group.
- O. Students learn about their nation, its history, and its political system.
- P. They help promote individuals' economic self-interests and provide social interaction based on their members' common beliefs, values, or attitudes.
- Q. Federal campaign finance reform laws of 1974 encouraged an increase in the number of these groups.
- R. Through much of American history, local and state party organizations were a reliable source of information about voters' attitudes.



# CHAPTER SUMMARY Activity



## Interest Groups and Public Opinion

**DIRECTIONS** Match each term in Column A with the statement that best applies to it in Column B. Write the correct letters in the space provided.

### COLUMN A

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. public interest group
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. lobbyists
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. affiliated PAC
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. independent PAC
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. public opinion
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. ideology
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. liberal
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. representative sample
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. random sampling
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. universe

### COLUMN B

- A. Ideas and attitudes about government and political issues
- B. Insures that every person in the poll's universe has an equal chance of being selected
- C. A belief that the national government should actively help individuals and communities
- D. Individuals who try to influence public policy through direct contact with government officials
- E. A set of basic beliefs about government and society
- F. PACs with ties to corporations, unions, or trade groups
- G. The larger group whose opinion is being measured in a poll
- H. Organization which seeks policy goals that will benefit the general public
- I. A small group typical of the larger group whose opinion is being measured
- J. A PAC interested in a particular cause

**Organizing Information** Write the name of each interest group near the type of political action committee which it best represents.

### Political Action Committees

**Affiliated**

**Independent**

- Committee on Political Information
- National Association of Manufacturers
- Chamber of Commerce
- National Wildlife Federation
- Sierra Club
- Common Cause

**Critical Thinking** Answer the following question on a separate sheet of paper.

11. What kinds of information do you think lobbyists might be required to include in the reports they file with Congress?