Chapter Seven:
Interest Groups
Learning Outcomes

1. Describe the basic characteristics of interest groups and how they are sometimes related to social movements.

2. Provide three major reasons why Americans join interest groups.

3. List the major types of interest groups, especially those with economic motivations.
4. Evaluate the factors that make some interest groups especially powerful.

5. Discuss interest group strategies, differentiating between direct and indirect techniques.

6. Describe the main ways in which lobbyists are regulated.

7. Consider interest groups in terms of elite theory and pluralism.
A Natural Phenomenon

- Americans join to solve civic problems, establish social relationships and represent economic/political interests
- More than two-thirds of all Americans belong to at least one group
Interest Groups and Social Movements

- Seeks change in political, economic or social system
- First expression of discontent with system
  - Civil rights movement
  - Women’s suffrage
Why Do Americans Join Interest Groups?

- Political theorist Mancur Olson said it’s not rational for individuals to join most groups
  - Collective good
  - Latent interests
  - Free rider problem
Why Do Americans Join Interest Groups?

- Solidary incentives
- Material incentives
- Purposive incentives
Types of Interest Groups

- **Economic interest groups** are the most common type
  - Business interest groups
  - Agricultural interest groups
  - Labor interest groups
  - Public employee unions
  - Interest groups of professionals
  - The unorganized poor
Agricultural Subsidies as a Percent of Production Value


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Decline in Union Membership, 1948 to Present


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Types of Interest Groups

- Environmental interest groups
  - National Audubon Society (1905)
  - National expansion of environmental groups in 1970s
  - Global warming is focus for many
Types of Interest Groups

- Public-interest groups
  - Consumer movement and Ralph Nader
  - Public-interest legal foundations
  - Common Cause
  - League of Women Voters
Types of Interest Groups

- Other interest groups
  - Single issue groups (National Right to Life Committee)
  - Ideological groups (Americans for Tax Reform)
  - Identity groups (AARP, NOW, NAACP)
  - Foreign interest groups
What Makes an Interest Group Powerful?

- Size and resources
- Leadership
- Cohesiveness
Interest Group Strategies

- Direct techniques
  - Lobbying
  - Publicizing legislative ratings
  - Building alliances
  - Campaign assistance
    - *Citizens United v. FEC*
Interest Group Strategies

- Indirect techniques
  - Generating public pressure
    - Climate control
  - Constituents as lobbyists
  - Unconventional forms of pressure
    - Marches, rallies and demonstrations
    - Boycotts
Regulating Lobbyists

- Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act (1946)
  - *United States v. Harriss*
  - Few lobbyists registered, no reporting requirements

  - Further defines lobbyist
  - Registration and reporting requirements
  - New rules on gifts and travel
Regulating Lobbyists

- Lobbying scandals and reforms of 2007
  - Democratic House tightens rules (2007)
  - Honest Leadership and Open Government Act
  - Republican House bans targeted earmarks (2011)

- Recent developments
Most interest groups have middle class or upper-class bias

Elitist or pluralist?

Interest group influence

- Not all groups have equal influence
- Most successful target single issue
- Complicated by former ties to Congress
Do Americans understand the role that lobbyists play in the political process? If so, why is the word lobbyist associated with ill feelings?
Have the interest groups spawned by mass movements lost their original purpose? How have interest groups adapted to the changing world and causes?
Are you a member of an interest group? If so, what type of interest group(s) are you a member of? What incentives attracted you?
Are interest groups the key to the sustainability of the republic? Was Madison correct, or did he underestimate the power of organized interests?
Which factor is most important in determining what makes an interest group powerful? Why?
Though public interest groups advocate for the national good, do you believe that individuals at the top of these organizations are concerned with self-promotion and have a hidden agenda?
Should foreign governments be banned from lobbying Capitol Hill and hiring ex-legislators?
Which techniques are more successful at reaching policymakers and swaying public opinion? Do you prefer indirect or direct techniques for issue advocacy?
Are today’s boycotts, marches, and demonstrations just as important as they were in the 1800s, 1950s, and 1970s?
If reformers truly want to ban lobbying, why can’t they seem to pass comprehensive legislation to ban lobbyists from the legislative branch?