Special Interests:

Who are they and what do they want?
What is an “interest group”?

• An interest group is an organization of people with similar policy goals that tries to influence the political process to try to achieve those goals.

• Interest groups try to influence every branch of gov’t and every level of gov’t.

• Lawsuits, lobbying, helping to write legislation, initiative process, etc.
Roots of American Interest Groups

• Interest groups have been around since our inception
• James Madison argued for a proliferation of groups (factions) so that no one group could seize power
• As society has evolved, so have interest groups
Examples

- Workers rights/safety reforms = unions
- Suffrage for women/push for women’s rights = women’s groups; Women’s Christian Temperance Union; NOW
- Civil rights for minority groups = NAACP
- Business interests = Chamber of Commerce
Gaining Access and Influence

- PAC’s = used to raise money to support candidates during campaign season; goal is to buy access
- Lobbying = most common form of trying to influence policy
- Colleges, gov’t agencies, corporations, unions, foreign countries—all hire lobbyists to represent their interests
- A lobbyist is someone whose task it is to influence legislation or policymaking
- Movie = Miss Sloane (2016)
Techniques Used to Influence the Decision Makers

Direct Techniques:
• Private meetings
• Testifying at hearings
• Drafting legislation
• Hosting social gatherings
• Providing policy positions
• Endorsing candidates
• Attack Ads

Indirect Techniques:
• Raising public awareness through media: 
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXopxsIf1E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXopxsIf1E)
• Holding events to gain media attention
• Using testimonials from ordinary citizens
• Building alliances with other like-minded groups
Local Community-Based Groups

- Sometimes interest groups are locally-based groups
- Community organizing efforts
- Tara Parrish
- Centro Latino
What Makes an Interest Group Successful?

Three factors:

1. Leaders – Having prominent leaders who are respected in their field or that are high profile

2. Funding – It takes money to get your message out

3. Membership – The larger the group, the more influence they will have (+ organization)
Remember the three theories?

- Pluralism
- Hyperpluralism
- Elitism
Criticisms of Interest Groups

• Focus too much on narrow issues
• Narrow focus can lead to gridlock in gov’t
• Plays to people’s emotions, not their logical side
• They have become too influential!
Important things to keep in mind!
Interest groups do play an important role:

• Promote interest in public affairs
• Can provide useful information
• [https://www.ama-assn.org/](https://www.ama-assn.org/)
• Serve as watchdogs
• [https://www.aclu.org/](https://www.aclu.org/)
• [https://www.concordcoalition.org/](https://www.concordcoalition.org/)
• Represent the interests of certain groups of citizens
• Final Thought = Each of us is a special interest!