



Influencing Government

Interest groups use several strategies to influence government. The amount of influence that interest groups have on government is a major issue of concern for many people today. At the same time, millions of citizens rely on interest groups to make their voices heard.

Lobbying for Support

Interest groups hire **lobbyists** to meet with members of the government and discuss the group's issues and concerns. Lobbyists say that their job is to provide information to decision makers. The information lobbyists provide has been carefully chosen to persuade the audience to take one side of an issue. Lawmakers have to be aware of the **bias** in the lobbyists' messages and consider both sides before they make any decision.

Bias: favoring one view over another.



"K Street" is commonly used to describe lobbyists in Washington, DC. Many of the major lobbying groups have offices on this street.

Endorsing Candidates

During elections, some interest groups may **endorse**, or officially support, candidates. Groups choose a candidate to support based on what the candidate has done in the past and where the candidate stands on issues important to the group. Once the candidate is in office, he or she may introduce new bills, support existing laws, or use influence on important committees. In return, the interest group encourages its members to vote for that person in the next election. In addition, the interest group may donate money to the candidate's election campaign.

Raising Money

Interest groups raise money to support their efforts to influence the government. This creates the concern that interests groups can "buy" candidates by contributing lots of money to the candidate's election campaign. Once in office, such a candidate might be more concerned about pleasing the interest group than representing the voters. Because of this, there are strict rules about how interest groups may collect and donate money to political campaigns. Those that do must form a **political action committee** (PAC) that follows strict government rules about giving money to political candidates.

Not everyone agrees about what kinds of rules interest groups should have to follow. Some people fear that campaign financing laws limit the ability of people to support the causes they care about. Others fear that interest groups have grown to have more influence on government than the public at large. They believe the groups should be controlled. The debate continues as some interest groups and wealthy individuals who support them find **loopholes**, or ways around, the campaign finance laws.

Strategies for Influencing Government:

Inform the public and elected officials about issues that matter to the group.



Donate money to political campaigns in exchange for support by the candidate.

Endorse a candidate running for office and suggest that the group's members vote for him or her.



Interest Groups

Name: _____

Vocabulary. Match the term to the correct definition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| ___1. interest | A) favoring one view or another |
| ___2. advocate | B) attention paid to something |
| ___3. political action committee | C) to promote or support |
| ___4. interest group | D) collection of opinions or attitudes |
| ___5. bias | E) represent interest groups and communicate with officials |
| ___6. campaign financing | F) how money is earned to pay for political campaigns |
| ___7. lobbyist | G) organizations that help interest groups raise money for campaigns |
| ___8. public opinion | H) a group of people who work to influence government about a set of issues |



How Do You Lobby? Read each interest group lobby activity and decide if it is an example of informing (I), donating money (D), or endorsing a candidate running for office (E).

- | | |
|---|---|
| ___9. Representatives interview a candidate to see if he or she will support the group's position on nuclear plants. If so, the group will back this candidate. | ___12. Lobbyists visit with members of Congress and local officials to share their reasons for supporting or opposing an upcoming bill. |
| ___10. Volunteers from a teen health interest group go into schools and educate students about the dangers of underage drinking. | ___13. Once a candidate has been endorsed, members of an interest group help raise donations to help the candidate's campaign. |
| ___11. An interest group runs an ad that supports a candidate running for office. | ___14. A group runs TV and radio ads about an issue in order to raise public concern and spur the public to action. |

Just the Facts? Look at how two different interest groups address the same question. Draw a line matching each group to the answer it would give.

Question: Do guns in the home increase or decrease security in the home?

The Groups

The National Rifle Association (NRA) works to preserve law-abiding citizens' right to buy, have, and use firearms for legitimate purposes.



The Brady Campaign works to prevent gun violence. It was responsible for passing the Brady Bill in 1993, which required a five-day waiting period and a background check before someone can buy a handgun.



The Answers


Guns in the home are 22 times more likely to be used in a criminal, unintentional, or suicide-related shooting than in self-defense. When someone is home, a gun is used for protection in less than 2% of home invasion crimes.

Guns are used for protection 2.5 million times each year. Guns are used three to five times more often to stop crimes than to commit them.


Interest Groups

Name: _____


Who's Interested? Cut off the bottom half of the page and separate the cards. Place the description of the law or action taken by the government beneath the interest group most likely to have supported the policy.



The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization.



The AARP works to improve the quality of life for people age 50 and older and help them with issues they face.



The American Medical Association works to promote the art and science of medicine and to improve public health.

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Matching Activity



Cut along the dotted line!

<p>The nation's second national park, Yosemite, was created in 1905 after this group lobbied President Theodore Roosevelt and the California legislature.</p>	<p>This group encourages funding for research and educational programs about the health effects of abusing alcohol and tobacco.</p>	<p>Members of this organization lobby Congress to protect Social Security, Medicare, and other retirement programs.</p>
<p>This group supported the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), which protects older Americans from being discriminated against in the workplace.</p>	<p>This organization works to stop the construction of nuclear power plants until the government passes more safety and environmental regulations.</p>	<p>This organization supported a 2009 law that bans tobacco ads within 1,000 feet of schools and playgrounds and also stops tobacco companies from sponsoring sports events.</p>

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Who's Interested? Activity