



Minority pressure groups

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

The NAACP sponsors a variety of programs to make real the promise of America. Our programs are designed to ensure civil rights compliance, equitable treatment of all Americans under law, the attainment of educational excellence, access to health care, and economic empowerment.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the most established and influential of the black pressure groups. It now claims 500,000 members. In recent years, the Association has been particularly involved in 'voter empowerment' campaigns, and in the 2000 election played a role in increasing African-American voter turnout by 2 million. It lobbies to increase the flow of resources to the African-American communities. However, it has been criticised for its liberal politics and its close relationship with the Democratic Party. Its website can be found at www.naacp.org

Nation of Islam

The Nation of Islam is a radical black nationalist organisation. Its programme included the creation of a separate black nation on American soil and Malcolm X was among its members in the early 1960s. It has been led over the past three decades by Louis Farrakhan. It has been bitterly criticised by those who see it as anti-Semitic.

The organisation gained prominence again in 1995 although, to some extent, it turned away from politics. It initiated the Million Man March in Washington, DC. This was a 'day of atonement' for black men and participants pledged themselves to live in renewed ways. Although the project involved a number of prominent black figures, it did not lead to any long-term changes. The Nation of Islam's website can be found at www.noi.org

National Council of La Raza

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) was established in 1968. Its commitment is 'to reduce poverty and discrimination, and improve life opportunities for Hispanic Americans'. It provides assistance to Hispanic community-based organisations, especially those which serve low-income and disadvantaged Hispanics. It also lobbies on issues such as education, immigration, housing, health, employment and training and civil rights enforcement, so as 'to increase policy-maker and public understanding of Hispanic needs, and to encourage the adoption of programs and policies which equitably serve Hispanics'.

NCLR claims to have over 270 formal affiliates who together serve 40 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia, and a broader network of more than 30,000 groups and individuals. Its website can be found at www.nclr.org





Key issues in minority politics

Affirmative action

Although the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act brought **de jure** (or legal) segregation to an end in the southern states, African-Americans and other minorities continued to lag behind whites in terms of income, educational attainment and overall achievement. The emergence and growth of the women's movement highlighted the extent to which the most well-remunerated and prestigious occupations were the preserve of WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) males. Affirmative action is — according to its advocates — an attempt to level the playing field. In *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), the US Supreme Court accepted that race could be a factor (albeit among others) in determining university admissions. This provided a basis for limited forms of affirmative action.

Affirmative action calls for minorities and women to be given special consideration in employment, education and contracting decisions. In its 'soft' form, it calls for job advertisements to be targeted at minorities and women. In its 'hard' form, affirmative action involves the use of goals, timetables, quotas and set-asides. Set-asides ensure that a proportion of federal and state government contracts are awarded to minority-owned businesses.

There was, however, a backlash against the more rigorous forms of affirmative action. For his part, President Clinton sought to defend it, but within limits. In a celebrated comment, he said, 'mend it, but don't end it'. Conservatives remain opposed to affirmative action. It is, they assert, 'reverse discrimination'. Their arguments have won particular backing from angry white men who feel that they have been denied job opportunities. Nonetheless, in overall terms, minorities and women are disproportionately represented in lower-paid jobs. During the 1990s, the Supreme Court increasingly restricted the scope and use of affirmative action and set-asides.

Majority-minority districts

The under-representation of African-Americans and other minorities in Congress led to pressure for the creation of majority-minority districts. Created in accordance with the 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act and established in the aftermath of the 1990 census, majority-minority districts involved the redrawing of district boundaries so as to ensure that there was a clear majority of minority voters. As a consequence, the number of African-Americans serving in the House of Representatives increased by 50%, from 26 in 1990 to 39 in 1992.

However, in cases such as *Shaw v. Reno* (1993), the US Supreme Court saw such districts (some of which had bizarre geographical characteristics) as racial gerrymandering. Many of the districts that had been established early in the decade — and where race had played a critical role in determining their shape and size — were dissolved.

Immigration

Following the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, preference was given — within specified limits — to the immediate relatives of US citizens and relatives. This, critics have argued, has led to a process of **chain migration**. Once individuals had settled in the US, others were able to follow in their wake.



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Immigration into the USA, 1931-96

Year	Immigrants (thousands)
1931-40	528.40
1941-50	1,035.00
1951-60	2,515.50
1961-70	3,321.70
1971-80	4,493.30
1981-90	7,338.10
1991-96	6,146.20

Source: Stanley, H. W. and Niemi, R. G. (2000)
Vital Statistics on American Politics 1999-2000, CQ Press, p. 349.

Attitudes towards immigration cross the ideological divide. There are conservatives — such as those associated with the *Wall Street Journal* — who believe that open immigration would act as a spur to growth and prosperity. Others on the right fear that mass immigration would change the character of the USA; they emphasise its European origins and heritage. At the same time, while liberals have traditionally welcomed newcomers, the trade unions and many African-Americans fear that they would be undercut in the labour market.

