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Pressure groups in the USA.....

- Before delivery of this section read and precis chapter 4 of Bennett, *US Government and Politics*

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**A quick recap.....**

How do pressure groups differ from political parties? Compose a list of all the differences you can think of.

- What does insider/outsider mean in relation to pressure groups?
- What does the cause/sectional distinction mean?
- What is an 'institutional' group and what is a 'membership' group?

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**Key questions.....**

- What is and should be the role of pressure groups in a representative democracy?
- Do they help or hinder democracy?
- Why are some groups more successful than others?
- Why are some groups more powerful than others?
- Is the US political system favourable to pressure group activity? If so, why?

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**Pressure groups in the USA.**

- There are many aspects of the US political system which provide opportunities for pressure groups to exert influence:
- Numerous 'access points' of government (federal and state levels)
- Autonomy of Congressional committees
- Lack of strict party discipline

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Pressure groups past and present...

- Video extract: “Bowling for Columbine” – NRA and anti-gun campaigners.
- What rights are these groups campaigning for?
- Are these institutional or membership groups?
- Would the changes they want need to take place at a federal, state, or local level?

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Some pressure groups in the USA....

- What do the following stand for?
- NAACP
- AFL/CIO
- ACLU
- AMA
- Using these examples and others compose a list of different institutional and membership groups in the USA with a note beside each on what they do.

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Functions of pressure groups.....

- Representative function
- Aiding citizen participation
- Enhancing public education
- Agenda building/setting
- Programme monitoring
- Break up into three groups. Each group to consider a pressure group (boxes 4.1) and consider to what extent it fulfils the above functions.

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### Role play

- Break into groups:
- Group 1: Advisors to the president
- Group 2: AARP/United Seniors Association
- Group 3: The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America
- Group 4: AFL-CIO.

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### Role play

- The scenario: The drug companies are lobbying for legislation that would give them control over any prescription drug programme for senior citizens.
- Pressure groups: plan your arguments. How will you convince the President to take your side?
- Presidential advisors: what factors will influence your decision?

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### Pressure group methods.....

- Four groups to research and present to the class on a different pressure group method. Each group must assess the effectiveness of the campaign method.
- 1. Electioneering.
- 2. Lobbying.
- 3. Publicity.
- 4. Organising grassroots activities.

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### Access points

- All three branches of the federal government provide access points for pressure groups (e.g. Amicus curiae).
- Explain what the different state and federal access points are.

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### Impact of pressure groups....

- Study each of the policy areas in which pressure groups have had an impact (Civil Rights for African-Americans, Environmental protection etc.) on pages 162-165.
- Make a list of each policy area, the pressure group/s involved, and the significant cases/legislation.

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### Thought experiment 1

- Imagine you are the President. Your Treasury secretary advises you to make cuts in federal spending to save the economy. You are weak in the opinion polls. The spending areas under review are:
  - 1. Affirmative action programmes
  - 2. The Environmental Protection Agency
  - 3. Abortion clinics
  - 4. The Firearm Regulatory Authority (fictional)
  - 5. Medicare

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### Thought experiment 1 (continued)

- You must get rid of one, cut spending in two, maintain spending in one, and raise spending in one.
- Explain the reasons for your choices.

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### Who to lobby?

- As experts on US politics, imagine you have been asked by a number of pressure groups to tell them which branch of government they should prioritise in terms of lobbying.
- Pick out the most suitable branch of government for each pressure group (Congress, President, Supreme Court, State government) in terms of their suitability for lobbying by that pressure group. Write down and explain your reasons.

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### Regulation of pressure groups.....

- How does the first amendment protect pressure groups?
- What did the 1946 Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act do?
- After Watergate and 'Abscam' the 1970s saw greater regulation of how pressure groups finance political campaigns. How?
- Democrats have forced changes through Congress. How?

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### Honest Leadership and Open Government Act 2007

- Recreate Box 4.4 from page 171 showing the main provisions of the democrat sponsored Act.

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### Political Action Committees

- Political Action Committees (PACs) are organisations set up by corporations, labour unions etc to gain political influence.
- As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1999 some 1,567 PACs were active in national politics.
- PAC' s donate money to Congressional candidates who they think will support policies favourable to them.
- In 2006 mid-term elections were the first since the McCain- Feingold law. However there was a 25% increase in campaign spending, which mush of this on PACS.
- In 2006 United Parcel Service gave \$1.9 million to help campaign funds.

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### What makes a pressure group powerful?

- Voting power/size of organisation
- Economic influence/power
- Connection with moral/religious beliefs of politicians
- Connection with US foreign policy goals
- Organising efficiency
- Media support

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### Pressure groups and democracy

- An argument against pressure groups.....  
“Suppose you go to Washington and try to get at your government. You will always find that while you are politely listened to, the men really consulted are the men with the biggest stake – the big bankers, the big manufacturers, the big masters of commerce” – Woodrow Wilson

Is this still true today (i.e. Bush and oil corporations)?

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### Arguments against pressure groups

1. The ‘iron-triangle syndrome’ . What is this?
2. The ‘revolving door syndrome’ . What is this?
3. Money buys unfair influence.
4. Public interest, not special interests, should come first.
5. Pressure groups can deploy violent ‘direct action’ .

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### Pressure groups and democracy

- Arguments for pressure groups.....  
“Concededly, each interest group is biased; but their role.....is not unlike the advocacy of lawyers in court which has proven so successful in resolving judicial controversies” - John F. Kennedy

What does JFK mean by this? Why is it an argument in favour of pressure groups?

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### Arguments for pressure groups

1. Provide legislators/bureaucrats with useful information.
2. Broaden opportunities for citizen participation.
3. Keeps government accountable.

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### Pressure groups on trial.....

- 'This class believes that pressure groups have enhanced US democracy'
- One group to argue in favour of this statement, one group to argue against.
- Each group to prepare/plan/research their arguments beforehand using articles provided.

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### Just a minute.....

- A chance to recap what we have learnt...
- Each student picks out a question from 1-6 on page 180.
- Each student attempts to discuss their question for 60 seconds (plan first).
- Other students must listen for deviation, hesitation and repetition.
- The top three (who lasted the longest) then see who out of them can last the longest.

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Exam question.....

- 'Assess the view that pressure groups are too powerful in the USA'
- Plan your answer individually
- Be prepared to feedback your plan to the whole group when we plan the answer collectively.

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