

Why are some  
pressure groups  
more successful than  
others?



Why are some pressure groups more successful than others? A pressure group is a group of people with specific aims and interests.

Also known as interest groups, lobby groups or protest groups, they try to influence political decision makers such as MPs and councillors to influence local or national policy and/or legislation. They seek to do so, either to protect interests of members (e. g. Trade Unions, NUT) or promote a cause (e. g. Greenpeace or RSPCA).

Not all pressure groups are as successful as others, and there are many reasons for this. One important area which determines the pressure group success is whether they have a good relationship with the government, or relevant authority (e. g. local council). Insider pressure groups (such as the BMA and the Law Society), are more likely to be able to directly influence policy. Insider pressure groups are often consulted on regulations in their area.

Outsider pressure groups (such as the Fathers 4 Justice and CND) are unlikely to be able to take advantage of this influence, since there are generally not involved within legislative procedures. This is often due to their use of violent or illegal methods of protest. Another major contributing factor towards the success of a pressure group is to do with media. Pressure groups with the support of the media, and the wider public, have more chance of pressurising the government, to follow the pressure groups advice, however it can also have a off-putting effect if the media show the pressure group in a negative way. For example, if the Labour Government (1997) had refused to pass the amendment to the firearms act, campaigned for by Snowdrop, for

the 4 years of their first term then it is possible that considerable pressure would have built up, possibly leading to their removal from office. This shows the importance of the media and public opinion to the success of a pressure group.

Leadership of the pressure group is very important, and celebrity leadership can enhance the public image of the pressure group. The financial situation of a pressure group is another factor that can greatly affect the success or failure of the pressure group. This can mean the funds or what to do with the funds. Without suitable funds pressure groups are unlikely to be able to successfully campaign. For example the Make Poverty History campaign would not have been able to raise the awareness of poverty in the way that they have, if they have not had a reasonable amount of money. The size of the group is also important.

made from p. groups. The size of the group is important as a government is more likely to respond to larger pressure groups than smaller ones, as there are more potential votes to be won or lost. A good example of this would be the pressure group ' Friends of the Earth' (FOE). The main reason why this pressure group has had a huge success is that they have many branches all around the country and a huge number in size. There are more than 200 local groups in the FOE network in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including the Channel Islands and Isle of Man.

Another main factor to their success is that the FOE campaigns join forces with other groups nationally and internationally. The organisation of pressure groups is often behind the action that is done to help their cause, for

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example a high amount of staff, a strong management structure, and a network for recruiting new members. Strong organisation can help achieve the pressure groups aims, these are big advantages over smaller, less formal and organised movements. The countryside alliance in 1998 organised a massive demonstration in London, proving their attentiveness, and amount of organisational skills. Moreover, different tactics are used by pressure groups, which can add to the success of the group as a whole.

Paid political consultants offer to act as intermediaries between pressure groups and parliament. Lobbyists have three main functions. Firstly, to provide groups with political information and secondly to bring groups into contact with MPs or officials and vice versa. Thirdly, to persuade MPs or officials to back a particular issue or cause. For example, The ‘ Snowdrop Campaign’ in 1996 used lobbying as a tactic to gain support for their ideas.

This seemed to be effective, as there was a resulting gun amnesty, where 160, 000 guns were handed in. Each pressure group is reliant on the public’s opinion. If the public opinion is good toward a particular issue or group, many MP’s are inclined to listen to the group with public support. For example, equal pay for women. Therefore, public opinion is one of the most important factors in why some pressure groups are more successful than others, Also, if the public widely agree with the cause of a pressure group, the bigger the possible demonstration may be.

In conclusion, the evidence above suggests that some pressure groups are more successful than others. There are many different factors that make a pressure group successful, including media coverage, finances, size of group,

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tactics used, public opinion and relationship with government, therefore a combination of these will ensure that you have a successful pressure group.