

An introduction to pressure groups



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This essay will offer a thorough definition of Pressure Groups. It will distinguish between specific types of Pressure Group and will highlight a number of detailed factors which make these political groups so successful.

A thorough Definition Generally speaking, there are two accepted categories capable of defining the pressure group...first, there's the 'interest group' or 'protection group' whose strategy is to act on behalf of individual people in particular roles, such as doctors or miners. Second, there's the 'promotional group' or just simply the 'pressure group'. The differences are usually displayed within the remits adopted by each branch.

Pressure groups do not seek to acquire power in the electoral sense, aiming instead to influence decisions and policies made within government. Political parties and pressure groups are concomitant factors within society's structure as both agencies reverberate with the People's voice as they hear it from their own angle. Pluralistic According to the pluralists (people who believe that society is a multi-party political arena, consisting of individual people chasing diverse political ideals) pressure groups are an essential factor of inter-party politics and are able to force issues that are sometimes swept under the carpet or, as on occasion, genuinely omitted from discussion. Pluralists believe that both styles of institution are indispensable. The regular political parties are the parties that run for election.

Equally important is the group that runs after them. The one doing the chasing is just as fundamental, as explained above, albeit briefly. Protect or Promote? These two words should run together...

but not as pressure groups. This distinction, however, is not always clear. The protective group's 'prime directive' is to satisfy its own agenda, to cater for its own whims. Trade unions come within the scope of this group, as do professional organisations, such as doctors, and employer's associations. The protective group has a common denominator, a bond of sorts. It could be the sharing of a similar job such as 'Window Cleaners Against Water', or 'Glaziers Against Glass'.

Residents Associations would fulfil the criteria as they have the common bond of residential status. Anything that creates a common purpose is the fundamental principle behind this group, and is the reason why people may choose to come together in order to affect or influence governmental policy. They have a common interest, hence interest groups. Promotional groups, on the other hand, are primarily less concerned with their own welfare. Instead choosing to promote a cause that they feel has been ignored or abandoned by those in authority. Groups such as 'Greenpeace', 'Friends of the Earth', 'RSPB', 'RSPCA', 'Amnesty International', to name but a few, are the groups that come under the 'promotional group' heading.

The reality of these two groups' individual remits is that they share similar traits. They are human orientated after all. To confront this confusion, a suggestion was proffered by Wyn Grant (1990), whereby the delegating of a pressure group title be determined by how far out on the governmental periphery that particular pressure group was. Inside OutIt could be argued that there is 'elitism' amongst the pressure groups.

This being due to the fact that some organisations are invited by ministers to comment on policy related issues. This is where all pressure group members want to be...inside, in the warm, not out in the cold. To have the ear of the Prime Minister, to whatever degree, is what pressure groups are all about.

The closer you are to the PM, the more chance you have of being heard, or more importantly, of being listened to. This offer of being considered an 'insider' is more likely for the protector groups as they may have specialist knowledge or may be experts in their own fields, such as doctors or lawyers. According to Grant (1990)..

." Promotional groups are less likely to be, though not exclusively, invited to meet with ministers or have access to government departments. These groups are known as 'outsiders'." (TAYLOR, P. ; YEO, A.

et al. 2000: 202)Even so, these 'outsiders' are likely to want to convince the government that they are worthy of being listened to. Such is the desire to get in on the action. Pressure Group SuccessAppropriate Electoral InfluenceThis can be measured in a number of ways..

. any electoral influence would be one deciding factor in the measuring of success. To covet sympathy for ex-offenders or the unemployed would appear less attractive than the elderly or the disabled. So, to identify 'targets' that will bring an appropriate response from the government would be an indicator of success. United FrontVisible competition within the ranks would be a bad sign, so a positive 'front,' seen by the government and the general public displaying all the signs of unity is a frontthat would be more

likely to denote success, whether or not it's actually the case. The need to create an 'air of success' is important.

The message of a pressure group and its impact on any decision maker's ideology is measured in terms of its relevance, so this needs to be considered. Membership A group whose members originate from a middle-class background will be more successful because the members are likely to be educated and articulate, have more precise organisational skills and have a better grasp of the intricate workings of the complex British political system. The flip-side would be that those from a less-than-advantaged background would be lacking the qualities mentioned, therefore would be less effective and less successful. When groups are competing for members, the government, upon seeing a disjointed faction, might adopt the 'divide & rule' policy which would reduce the chances of any group reaching their goal." For example, the teaching profession is represented by six different teaching unions and it is highly unlikely for all six to take the same line on government policy. This makes it easier for the government to ignore views it does not support.

" (TAYLOR, P. ; YEO, A. et al. 2000: 202) Resources Financial Financial resources serve a dual purpose.

.. they not only dictate the extent to which you can plan your strategies, but they also either allow or prevent you from employing staff. If you have only 5 members of staff, then you are less likely to be in a position to compete with a group who employs 60. In this respect you would be less successful.

Organisational Structure The organisation of a group can have either a

positive or a negative effect on the group's success, depending on how it is structured.

There are arguments for and against a decentralised structure in which the power of the group is spread throughout the body. Some members can act without consulting the rest, a bad move. Yet this structure does allow for information to be fed back from the grassroots to the centre, thereby strengthening the group, which would be an indicator of its success.