

Literature review: effective role of interest groups on the american electorate

[Literature](#)



Weese 1 John DeWeese PS 372 Leising 15 October 2012 Literature Review It is apparent that interest groups have evolved over time with the changing nature of the American political system. We know that regardless of the beneficiary or detrimental effect they may have on our democracy, that they do play specific roles in policy formation, the election process, and voter identification and turnout.

This section seeks to examine the positive and negative characteristics and theories that exist in accordance with interest groups, show defined areas of inconsistencies within those theories, and provide insight into new theoretical criteria for the study of the political effectiveness of interest groups in the American democratic system. We know from the literature that the main goal of interest groups is to exercise their power in order to gain political benefits (prenhall).

Dominant interest groups within the United States are mainly economical and occupational, but there are several varieties of minority groups, ideological groups, religious groups, etc. ... In comparing the roles of interest groups over time, the literature found that the efforts of interest groups over the past few decades have become far more significant, as they have become more involved in the political process through the use of political action committees (prenhall).

This verifies that interest groups have played a major role in the election process over the past DeWeese 2 few decades, as well as the fact that they have highly influenced voter identification through either specific interests or public interests. Some key characteristics defined in the literature, when assessing the effectiveness of these interest groups, were the current status <https://assignbuster.com/literature-review-effective-role-of-interest-groups-on-the-american-electorate/>

of a given society at a certain time, the typology of the interest group, and the cost and benefit factor associated with them.

In relation, each of these key concepts for measuring interest groups directly affects one another. In a study conducted from the literature, it clearly shows an exceptional rise in the number of consumer and child welfare interest groups from the years 1900-1980 (Imig 262). Based on this information, we can see that the changing social environment has brought about a rise in special, consumer interest groups that are far more concerned with maximizing their income, while minimizing their costs.

Based on the empirical evidence provided in the literature, we can examine the different existing theories on the roles of interest groups on public policy and the election process. First, " the interest groups promote debate and discussion, thus creating a better uniform and more educated electorate, and improving the quality of public policy (Mazingaizo). " Interest groups do seek to involve their major issues heavily during general elections, when those issues will be at the forefront of political debate, thus exercising their power on the response of certain candidates.

A similar theory expressed in the literature contends that, " many voters' interests and concerns are deeply affected by public policy, and hence citizens seek to represent their views more frequently and on more issues than the electoral process can accommodate (Etzioni 182). " Therefore, it is the interest groups that can provide such representation. Both of these theories examined DeWeese 3 in the literature are uniform, in that they see the roles of interest groups as beneficial to the election process and policy formation.

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In contrast, another existing theory within the literature states that, “ While public interest groups provide an important type of representation otherwise absent from decision making forums, public interest groups gain and lose influence in a highly constrained context (Imig 266). ” In comparison to the other theories, this theory suggests that we would be more beneficial to look at the development of interest groups in relation to the political context of society, rather than trying to explain the American political system as a dependent variable of public interest.

The literature explains that public interest groups ultimately oppose the natural ideal of a democracy, and have contributed to the political decay and deinstitutionalization of America. Based on the studies and graphs presented here, this theory is supported by a greater amount of empirical data, yet as we have learned, political science is not one strictly based on raw data and finite materials. So, after examining just a few theories found throughout the literature, we have observed certain similarities and inconsistencies regarding the beneficial nature of interest groups.

The literature was consistent throughout in stating that interest groups change and evolve with the changes in the social environment, yet there were inconsistencies in the positive and negative nature these groups play. There were also inconsistencies in the literature based on different forms of interest groups. Where some of these theories examined single interest groups, constituent-represented interest groups, and public interest groups, others focused only on the overall spectrum of public interest groups.

This creates a problem when attempting to explain how the roles of interest groups are affecting the election process, and voter identification and turnout, as it exists currently. Therefore, it is my belief that we should further examine the views based on the interest groups affecting the political environment in the short term, since that is the true question we are trying looking to find. Though the literature has provided us with a solid framework of theories and evidence so far, it is lacking in evidence from the perspective of the voter.

So much concern has been placed on the cause and effect of interest groups driving policy, yet I believe it would be beneficial to further examine the impression a voter has in relation to the importance of interest groups when deciding which candidate or party to side with. Furthermore, it raises the question of whether or not it's interest groups that are influencing voters in order to gain their political goals, or if they are exercising their power on the politicians, in return for their constituency's support?

Also, it would be beneficial to examine the relationships between interest groups and the administrative, legislative, and judicial branches in comparison to one another. The literature that has been examined contains so much information that is quite difficult to break it down into concise points, yet I feel that by researching this topic, we will gain a more transparent understanding of how and why politicians are elected, why they make some of the decisions they do, and the mental logic behind what our fellow citizens are thinking when they cast a vote on election day.

I am not saying that the political role of interest groups will explain this entire phenomenon, but I do believe they play a very important role in <https://assignbuster.com/literature-review-effective-role-of-interest-groups-on-the-american-electorate/>

shaping some of these key issues in our current political DeWeese 5 system. Based on what we know, and what we will find, it will then be up to us to decide whether or not these groups exercise a positive or negative effect on our society. Works Cited Etzioni, Amitai. " Special Interest Groups Versus Constituency Representation. " Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change.

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