Interest Groups Essay, Research Paper

Interest Groups are an important part of the law-making process in many countries. Ideally, they are highly organized groups, composed of citizens that lobby in different ways for a cause. There are literally thousands of different groups in the United States, each putting forth much time and effort for their supporters. This paper will discuss the different types of interest groups, as well as how and why they exist. Without these important groups, many benefits that people have, such as healthcare, wage raises, education, ect, are a direct result of political interest groups.

The first type of interest group is called an anomic group. These individual groups have almost no organization and put little effort into their coordination. They tend to evolve in times of political unrest, war, and elections. These groups, including lynch mobs and student and urban rioters, are often violent and short-lived, although very productive in their efforts.

Another type of interest group is referred to as nonassociational groups. They are the opposite of what many people think of as an interest group. For example, a member of a village community may seek the advice of one of the wiser, elder members of the community. This is why these types of groups exist more in underdeveloped countries rather than in the United States. An example from the United States would be a government issued opinion poll, in which our legislators will make decisions based on popular opinion. Even though these are not organized groups, they are still considered representative because they are randomly selected.

The third type is an institutional group. This type of group is based around some kind of institution, for example, a university, a military organization, or a police patrol unit. These groups will send lobbyists to actively promote their cause. Representatives will approach legislators directly and distribute materials related to their cause. They will also spend time communicating with those who will listen. Because these groups are associated with large, government-operated organizations, they must follow strict guidelines.

The most widely recognized type of interest group is referred to as associational. This is what most people envision when they picture a typical interest group. There are two different distinctions within this group: economic and noneconomic. Both of these types of groups are the backbone of interest groups. Economic groups rally around a shared economic interest, such as unions, truckers association, ect. A noneconomic group supports a non-profit organization, or a related cause, such as NAACP, environmental groups, ect. Noneconomic groups have a larger impact on policy making than economic groups. This is because the American parties tend to “straddle the fence” on issues more so than in other countries.

Interest groups have many tactics in approaching legislators in their district. It depends on the amount of power they wield and the amount of money they have. Many interest groups will put most of their money and effort into a political election campaign, hoping that getting a certain party or politician elected will promote their cause in the long run. Sometimes the groups’ experts are their greatest assets. For instance, having a doctor on board while trying to pass medical policy, or having a scientist’s opinion in a policy concerning an environmental issue, can be very beneficial. One way an economic group can influence policy is by threatening to disrupt the economy by withholding its contributions. This is often referred to as a “strike.” Everyone is familiar with how they work, and they are quite effective. Interest groups will also use the media to their advantage, by swaying the popular opinion, consequently affecting a vote. One tactic that is not used often is violence and rioting. Interest groups can also use litigation, or working within the court system, as a way to influence policy. This was the case in the reversal of segregated schooling in the Supreme Court system. Litigation is the form often used by the minority of the population for policies that affect their rights. Before the 1960’s, blacks did not have the right to vote, so they voiced their opinion through the court system.

Within the total organization of interest groups, there exist two dimensions in which most interest groups will fall. These are pluralism and neocorporatism. Pluralism is based on free competition between the groups. The dominating groups are typically the ones who influence most of the decisions in government. Their involvement in legislative influence is low compared to the neocorporatists, who are actively involved in policy making. They are invited by the legislators to take part in the governing process. Usually, one country will adopt one or the other of these abstractions, rarely both. Although neocorporatisim seems like the best option, it is very difficult to achieve successfully, because it depends on the “cooperative spirit” between the groups and their government.

Each interest group holds an important and specific purpose in government. Their activities can range from active rioting to sit-down negotiations and can be very complex in their organization. At one point or another, most people will be involved in some sort of interest group. This may be in the form of a donation to an environmental organization, joining a workforce union, or lobbying outside the congressional session. In a streaming web of politics and ethics, laws are created. Interest groups functions as the vehicle in which the government is alerted to the general populations’ concerns.