

TRANSPARENCY: A KEY STRATEGIC FACTOR IN RESTRAINING UNDUE INFLUENCE OF INTEREST GROUPS IN POLICY MAKING

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ABSTRACT

In the center of the government, public policy is unavoidable. Interest group lobbying and policymaking are connected, since it is becoming more widely acknowledged that the impact of new and harmful interest groups on policymaking is corrupt and illegitimate. This article aims to shed some light on some facts and figures regarding the involvement of interest groups in the decision-making process, to curb their undue influence, and to raise the golden power of transparency as a crucial tool for protecting policymakers from the pressures and evil tendencies of interest groups and preventing them from favoring any particular interest group over others. And among the many rules that nations around the world have adopted in an effort to encourage transparency and accountability in decision-making are regulations on lobbying, conflict of interest, asset disclosure, competition, as well as on freedom of information. These regulations aim to reduce the undue influence of administrative and policy makers at the expense of the public interest.

Keywords: Policy, interest groups, strategic factor, citizens, transparency.

Introduction

In every aspect of human activity, politics and interests are inextricably linked. All political systems, even democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian ones, are fundamentally based on interests, which are a constant, enduring, and pervasive element. Additionally, interest groups exist at all governmental levels—national, state, provincial, and local—and they have a growing influence on world events. It is also important to note that administrative organizations and private interest groups now serve as the primary sources of policy ideas, with legislative bodies serving as the primary determinants of public policy along with administrative and private groups.

Politics and interests are intricately intertwined in all facets of human action. Interests, which are a permanent, enduring, and ubiquitous aspect, constitute the underlying basis of all political systems, including democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian ones. Additionally, there are interest groups at every level of government—national, state, provincial, and local—and they are starting to have a bigger impact on global affairs. The key sources of policy ideas nowadays are administrative organizations and private interest groups, with legislative bodies functioning as the primary determinants of public policy together with administrative and private groupings. This is significant.

Definition of terms

Citizen

According to Longman dictionary of contemporary English, a citizen is someone who legally [belongs](#) to a particular country and has rights and [responsibilities](#) there, whether they are living there or not. A citizen is someone who has been given full rights and obligations as a member of a country or political community either by their place of birth, the nationality of one or both parents, or by naturalization.

Interest groups

Interest groups, also known as special interest groups, advocacy groups, or pressure groups, are associations of people or organizations that are typically formally established and that aim to sway public policy in their favor based on one or more shared concerns. All interest groups share the desire to influence governmental policy in order to advance their causes or themselves. Their objective may be a policy that only benefits a specific set of people or one sector of society (such as government subsidies for farmers) or a policy that furthers a more general public objective (such as improving air quality). By exerting pressure on decision-makers to change policy outcomes in their favor, they try to lobby in order to achieve their goals. Interest groups may be classified according to their motivation:

- (i) economic, including individual corporations and business organizations;
- (ii) professional, including professional groups such as trade unions and farmers;
- (iii) identity groups like religious community
- (iv) Public interest, including human rights groups, environmental groups, among others (Chari; Hogan; Murphy, 2010).

Interest groups are a natural outgrowth of the communities of interest that exist in all societies, from narrow groups such as the Japan Eraser Manufacturers Association to broad groups such as the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO) and to even broader organizations such as the military. Furthermore, interest groups exist at all levels of government—national, state, provincial, and local—and increasingly they have occupied an important role in international affairs. This broad definition, increasingly used by scholars, contrasts with older, narrower ones that include only private associations that have a distinct, formal organization, such as Italy’s Confindustria (General Confederation of Industry), the United States’ National Education Association, and Guatemala’s Mutual Support Group (human rights organization). One problem with such a narrow definition is that many formally organized entities are not private. The most important lobbying forces in any society are the various entities of government: national, regional, and local government agencies and institutions such as the military. Another reason to opt for a broad definition is that in all societies there are many informal groups that are, in effect, interest groups but would not be covered by the narrower definition. For example, in all political systems there are influential groups of political and professional elites that may not be recognized as formal groups but are nonetheless crucial in informally influencing public policy.

The term interest rather than interest group is often used to denote broad or less-formalized political constituencies, such as the agricultural interest and the environmental interest—segments of society that may include many formal interest groups. Similarly, interest is often

used when considering government entities working to influence other governments (e.g., a local government seeking to secure funding from the national government). In authoritarian and developing societies, where formal interest groups are restricted or not as well developed, interest is often used to designate broader groupings such as government elites and tribal leaders.

Interests and interest groups in all types of political systems can be placed broadly in five categories: economic interests, cause groups, public interests, private and public institutional interests, and non-associational groups and interests.

Common Characteristics and the Importance of Interest Groups

Most interest groups are not formed for political purposes. They usually develop to promote programs and disseminate information to enhance the professional, business, social, or a vocational interest of their members. Much of this activity is nonpolitical, as when the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) provides low-cost life insurance for its members or when the American Automobile Association (AAA) negotiates discounts with service providers for its members, Academic Senior staff Union of University(ASSU) is demanding for salary increments, Nigerian medical Association (NBA) demanding for better living of the medical doctors , Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) at the for front for the observance of the rule of the law and human rights, Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) demanding for retention of fuel subsidy , national association of Nigerian students (NANS) fighting to end the strike . But many of such interest groups enter the political arena when they believe there is no other way to protect their interests or because they want to secure government funding. In their nonpolitical role, interest groups may have several functions, but, when they become enmeshed in the political sphere, they have one overriding goal: to gain favorable outcomes from public policy decisions. In the political realm, interest groups perform important functions, particularly in a democracy but also in an authoritarian regime. These include aggregating and representing the interests of groups of individuals in a way that a single individual would not be able to do, helping to facilitate government by providing policy makers with information that is essential to making laws, and educating their members on issues and perhaps giving them political experience for entering politics. In addition to providing this political experience, groups sometimes actively recruit candidates for public office, with the hope that once elected these individuals will support their cause.

Interest groups in most democracies are also a source of financial support for election campaigns. In the United States the development of political action committees (PACs) after World War II was geared to providing money to candidates running for public office. In Western Europe, campaign funding is provided by many interest groups, particularly trade unions for social democratic parties as in Sweden and Germany. Mass parties in authoritarian regimes also often rely on interest groups for support. For example, in Argentina Juan Perón used the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), the trade union peak association, to gain and maintain the presidency of that country from 1946 to 1955. In addition to financial resources, members of interest groups are important resources for grassroots campaigning, such as operating telephone banks to call prospective voters, canvassing neighbor hoods door-to-door, and organizing get-out-the-vote efforts on Election Day.

Policy

Policy is a law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments and other institutions. Policy decisions are frequently reflected in resource allocations. Health can be influenced by policies in many different sectors. For example, transportation policies can encourage physical activity (pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly community design); policies in schools can improve nutritional content of school meals.

Public policy refers to the actions taken by government — its decisions that are intended to solve problems and improve the quality of life for its citizens. At the federal level, public policies are enacted to regulate industry and business, to protect citizens at home and abroad, to aid state and city governments and people such as the poor through funding programs, and to encourage social goals. The main idea of creating policy is to improve life for members of the public. Officials design policies that move the public closer to a desired state or public goal. Even if the ideas come from outside government, the creation of policy falls to public officials. Policy is what the government says and does about perceived problems.

R.B. Ripley, G.A. Franklin, (1987) Policymaking is how the government decides what will be done about perceived problems. Policymaking is a process of interaction among governmental and non-governmental actors; policy is the outcome of that interaction. Broadly speaking, one can place the actors in the state and local government policymaking process into one of two broad categories: institutional actors and non-institutional actors. Public policy is used to address problems of societies and issues that are of public concern. Meir and Bohte (2007) defined policy as a purposive course of action followed by actors or sets of actors usually related with government on a problem or matters of public concern. Ikelegbe (2006) explained policy to mean a course of action or a programme of actions, which is chosen from among several alternatives by certain actors in response to certain problems. Once taken, it guides behaviour, activities and practices and provides a framework for present and future decisions. Policies are formulated by certain actors to achieve certain goals and they consist of certain courses of actions to be taken in certain processes.

The institutional actors involved in the public policy process are governments and governmental agencies that deal with public affairs — including legislative bodies, executive departments, and the judicial branch. Depending on the policy issue in question, there are often state and local, as well as national-level institutions involved in policy issues arising in our federal system of government.

The non-institutional actors involved in the policy process, a principal focus can include political parties (e.g., Republicans and Democrats), interest groups (e.g., the National Rifle Association, the Sierra Club, the National Organization for Women), social movements (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement, the Environmental Movement), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (e.g., the League of Women Voters, Project Vote Smart), and the mass media (e.g., newspapers, radio, television, the Internet), and individual citizens. These potential actors are fiercely independent of the government and have different types of resources at their disposal, and employ varying strategies in their efforts to influence state and local public policy.

The Influence of Interest Groups on Policy Making Process

These groups are effective regarding government policy or legislation and there are several reasons as to why these groups are effective such as their status and electoral power. Among those reasons according to Maddox (1991) is their influence is their organizational, structural and financial situations. In this regard, a well-organized and financially strong group can appeal more effectively than any other disadvantaged group which lacks money, expertise and coherence. Their influence is determined if the group can use their social power or their ability while passing or keeping others from passing a legislation. As a result of the above impetus Interest groups play an important role throughout the process of decision-making by seeking to influence policy outcomes through the bureaucracy, politicians, governmental officials and the population, warning them about problems, opportunities, and policy options (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993; Kingdon 1995). Pluralism and neo-corporatism are the two primary theories that have been put forward to explain the interest group influence on public policy. Pluralists argue that the most realistic description of politics and policy making is a marketplace with more or less perfect competition. In theory, in this political marketplace many (or plural) perspectives—are represented by individuals, political parties, and interest groups and interests—competing to have their views heard by government and their favoured policies enacted. Neo-corporatism is a much more structured theory of interest group activity than pluralism. The neo-corporatist model focuses on keeping costs and inflation in check so that the country can be competitive in international trade and maintain and enhance the domestic standard of living.

Research conducted in the United States provides major insights into the factors that determine interest group influence. Money is important in explaining the influence (or lack thereof) of interest groups, but, contrary to what might be believed by the public, it is not simply money that determines political clout. Factors determining the influence of individual interest groups include the group's financial resources, the managerial and political skills of its leaders, the size and cohesiveness of its membership, and political timing—presenting an issue when the political climate is right. Three factors appear to be of particular importance:

1. How much influence a group has depends on the extent to which government officials need the group. The more elected or appointed public officials who rely on an interest, business, or organization, the greater its leverage will be over government. Some corporations may have a presence in many districts throughout the country, and decisions that affect them will affect employment in those districts, thus making it likely that members of the legislature from those districts will be favorably predisposed to legislation that the group supports. Moreover, many interest groups provide major financial backing to political campaigns; the more widely dispersed its funds are in a country, state, or local jurisdiction, the more likely that legislators will listen to the concerns of that group.
2. Lobbyist–policy-maker relations are also important in explaining the relative power of an interest group, since it is at this point that the demands of the group are conveyed to government. The more skillful the lobbyists are in forging personal contact with government officials, the more successful the group is likely to be. As noted earlier, this is the case in both democratic and authoritarian systems alike. In the United States, political scientists have identified phenomena known as “iron triangles” and “policy

niches” in regard to lobbyist–policy-maker relations. In such cases, lobbyists, members of the legislature, and, in particular, members of the key committees work together to get policy enacted. These arrangements typify a form of elitism with privileged access leading to established lobbyist–policy-maker relationships that gives “insiders” an upper hand in influencing public policy.

- 3 The relative level of organized opposition to a group is essential to understanding the success or failure of that group. The more intense the opposition to a group’s cause, the more difficult it will be to achieve its goals. Some groups have natural political enemies (e.g., environmentalists versus developers and corporations versus labour unions). Other interests, such as those advocating stricter laws against domestic violence and child abuse, have little opposition, though such groups may be limited by the other factors that determine influence, such as a lack of financial resources.

The Pros and Cons of Interest Group Influence

Interest group’s influence on policy making is not a corrupt or illegitimate activity per se, but a key element of the decision-making process (Zinnbauer, 2009). However, the advantages and disadvantages of interest group influence will depend on how much power such interest groups have as well as on how power is distributed among them (Dur; Bievre, 2007) A disproportionate influence of business groups, for example, can lead to undue influence or even state capture. In this context, the relationship between policymakers and interest groups walk a fine ethical line that separates participatory democracy from undue influence.

Pros Potential Benefits of Interest Group

There is little evidence of the concrete benefits that could be brought by interest groups influence on decision making. In general, interest groups may improve policy-making by providing valuable knowledge and insight data on specific issues. They also represent interests which may be negatively and involuntarily impacted by a poorly deliberated public policy (OECD, 2009). Moreover, as such groups keep track of legislative and regulatory processes, they also have an important role in holding government accountable (OECD, 2009). In addition, Campos and Giovannoni (2008) have shown that in transition countries, interest group influence through lobbying is found to be an alternative instrument of political influence vis-à-vis corruption. In this context, their findings are that lobbying, if adequately regulated, is a much more effective instrument than corruption for exerting political influence and that lobbying is also a much stronger explanatory factor than corruption for firm performance. Previous studies have also shown that the extent of lobbying increases with income, and that firms belonging to a lobby group are significantly less likely to pay bribes. On the other hand, in politically less stable countries, firms are more likely to bribe and less likely to join a lobby group (Campos, Giovannoni, 2006).

Determinants of Influence of Interest Group on the Policy Making

Based on the literature available concerning interest group influence and its determinants, the more developed literature from the USA provided the aforementioned broad groups of determinants already perceived in the EU cases with: 1) issue characteristics; 2) interest group resources; 3) political institutions; and 4) interest group strategies. The issue characteristics seem to be an important factor to understand when an interest group is more likely to be

successful in its purposes. According to some scholars (Dür 2008; Mahoney 2007; 2007), interest groups are less likely to be successful in their undertaking when the issue has far-reaching policy implications. The reason for that is that issues with a big scope entail a significant number of vested interests and this situation might lead to so many different points of view that policy-makers would not be able to follow a single opinion. In addition to that, a noticeable issue (highly salient) is likely to deliver a similar trend, when it comes to the lack of success of an interest group. It is justified, according to Mahoney (2007a; 2007b), because if this issue has a high level of public awareness then policy-makers will be more likely to follow the public opinion than the interest group opinion.

Another relevant issue characteristic, closely related to the others already mentioned, that should also be taken into consideration is the presence of countervailing forces. The latter gives rise to an increasing number of opposed visions (highly conflicting environment) that diminish the probability of success in influencing policy.

When it comes to the interest group resources, the literature (Hojnacki and Kimball 1999; Dür 2008c; Eising 2007; Mahoney 2007a; 2007b) points out that financial resources, size of the staff team, membership representation, the tactics employed (direct and indirect), and the type of influence exerted should play a role. In other words, a well-funded association might employ more tactics, put more money into an issue and/or even assign more specialists to a case. Thus, with these characteristics, it is more likely that interest groups succeed in influencing policy. The staff size, according to Mahoney (2007a), might be a strong indicator of the level of financial resources, as well as the membership size, which can indicate the level of legitimacy of an interest group. Therefore, a well-endowed association with a high degree of legitimacy is more likely to influence policy outcome than another interest group with small representation and scarce financial resources. In order to succeed in influencing policy, interest groups rely on different lobbying tactics: direct and indirect. The former means presenting research or technical information, contacting government officials to present viewpoint, helping to draft legislation, speaking to congressional leaders, lobbying members of the committees, and supporting candidates with work or personnel. Indirect lobbying, on the other hand, is related to the engagement in protests or demonstrations, running campaigns, speaking with the press, setting up congresses, mobilizing public awareness, and making public endorsements of candidates likely to favour your position (Victor 2007; Mahoney 2007a).

In accordance with Victor (2007), interest groups are more likely to spend their efforts by means of direct lobbying rather than indirect lobbying, since they have the opportunity to deal with some debates face-to-face. However, Hojnacki and Kimball (1999) advocate that the choice for lobbying tactics depends upon other factors, including the interest groups' resources.

As for the level of conflict between interest groups and policy-makers, Michalowitz (2007) argues that a potential conflict may arise when interest groups exert directional influence. It means that if they try to change the political core of a legislative act the level of conflict might increase, becoming more difficult to influence policy. However, when interest groups exert influence without touching the core content of a legislative act (technical influence) the level

of conflict tends to be lower and it therefore becomes easier to influence. Thus, the likelihood of attaining influence is higher when interest groups exert technical influence. The political institution characteristics cited by Dür (2008c) should play a role in this influence process, affecting the degree of interest group influence. According to Mahoney (2007a) the degree of democratic accountability of a political system might have a significant impact on the level of influence attained. This author points out that the more accountable the political system, the higher the likelihood of the political institutions taking into consideration the opinion of organized groups. The less accountable the political systems, the lower the likelihood that political institutions will take society's voice into account.

In addition to this, before trying any attempt at influence, all the stages of the policy-making process (external environment) and also the resources available to interest groups to wield influence have to be considered strategically. Victor (2007) believes that the interest group's strategy is quite relevant in the policy making and in order to be successful and affirms that "groups spend their resources strategically", therefore, the likelihood of influencing policies is higher when interest groups' resources are spent strategically.

Interest Group and Their Lobbying Strategies

In order to accomplish their goals, interest groups develop a strategy or plan of action and execute it through specific tactics. The particular strategies developed and the specific tactics used, however, vary widely both among and within political systems. These attempts to influence policy-making may take place through different mechanisms, including direct communication with government officials, participation in public hearings, drafting reports to member of the government on specific policy issues, as well as through media comment (Chari, Hogan; Murphy, 2010). Such groups may also have different type of resources to influence policy-making, such as campaign funding, expertise on policy issues, information on the opinion of other policy-makers (Dur; Bievre, 2007). As discussed above, lobbying involves working to bring pressure to bear on policy makers to gain some favour. However, there are important factors of particular in shaping lobbying strategies and tactics:

One is whether the political system is democratic or authoritarian. Because there generally are few restrictions on interest groups in democratic societies, they have more options available (e.g., hiring lobbyists, using the press, and staging public demonstrations). Thus, strategies and tactics are more formalized and open than in authoritarian societies, where they must be more ad hoc and less publicly visible.

A second factor is the structure of the policy process. As indicated above, in democratic parliamentary systems, where the executive is drawn from the major political party or party coalition in the parliament (e.g., Finland, India, and Ireland), the legislative branch is less important than the prime minister and the cabinet in policy making. In contrast, because of the power placed in the U.S. Congress and state legislatures, the United States is one of the few countries in which legislative lobbying is a major strategy of interest groups. The courts in most parliamentary systems also play a minor role in policy making. Again, in contrast, in the United States the separation-of-powers system has provided the courts, which have the power to invalidate legislation, with a major role in policy making, and, as a result, litigation strategies are often vital to American interest groups.

A third factor is political culture as it relates to group activity and lobbying. In the United States, for example, the use of contract lobbyists—those hired by contract specifically to lobby government—are much more accepted than in most other Western democracies, including those of the European Union, where public officials usually prefer to deal directly with the members of the concerned group, organization, or business. Interest groups may directly, or indirectly through consultants/lawyers (the so-called professional lobbyists) seek to affect legislative action. These attempts to influence policy-making may take place through different mechanisms, including direct communication with government officials, participation in public hearings, drafting reports to member of the government on specific policy issues, as well as through media comment (Chari, Hogan; Murphy, 2010). Such groups may also have different type of resources to influence policy-making, such as campaign funding, expertise on policy issues, information on the opinion of other policy-makers (Dur; Bievre, 2007).

The Tactics Used By Interest or Pressure Groups

According to Martini (2001), interest or pressure groups use some legal or illegitimate tactics to reach their purposes. Aitken et al., Campos and Giovannoni (2008) note that these groups organize meetings, give advertisements; write letters to the editor and interview spokespersons on current affair programs on television or radio. They also design public activities to draw attention of the public and the media. For this reason, politically they acquire status, organize campaigns in elections either directly or indirectly, negotiate with other groups, build alliances and attract members and funds.

Moreover, Byrt (1990) and Milbrath (1989) underline that these groups use tactics such as testimony at hearings, direct or indirect contacts with officials, participation in coalition with others, helping to implement policy, discussion with journalists, assistance in the drafting of legislation, inspiring letter-writing campaigns, mounting grassroots lobbying campaigns, advertising in the media, contribution of work or personnel to the electoral campaign and public endorsements of candidates

Lobbying Regulation

Interest organizations' primary purpose is to further political objectives. Groups get involved in politics because they wish to see their objectives achieved. Interest groups work to achieve a variety of policy objectives. To do this, they may contact the media, lobby politicians and bureaucrats, or participate in protest actions. Actually, a variety of operations are carried out by interest groups in an effort to increase their political power, which makes the policy maker ineffectual. Unlawful influence is a more subtle form of corruption since interest groups frequently use legal procedures to affect the way decisions are made. For instance, they may legitimately fund political campaigns, do research, and host events while anticipating favorable outcomes in return. It is also possible to exert undue influence by assuring decision-makers of lucrative future employment in exchange for their support. When the state is seized, businesses and people use illegal payments (such as bribes to lawmakers and illegal contributions during elections, among other things) to shape and influence the creation of laws and regulations. Therefore, the regulation of lobbying strikes a balance between the practical requirement to combat improper special interest influence and the constitutional right to petition. As a result, non-intrusive techniques like lobbyist registration and public

disclosure of their lobbying expenses are used in lobbying reform. In order to ensure that interest group actions are more accountable and transparent, mandatory lobbying registries are essential. Systems for registering lobbyists should ideally provide the public publication of the names of the lobbyists, as well as information about their clients, issue areas, goals, and tactics. Strong oversight and enforcement systems will also be needed for effective implementation (Zinnbauer, 2009). Some nations, including Taiwan in the East and South East Asian region, have laws governing lobbying (Chari, Hogan, and Murphy, 2010). This lobbying rule was adopted in 2007, and it became effective in 2008. Any oral or written communication to members of the legislative or executive branch about the creation, amendment, or repeal of policies or laws is referred to as lobbying in the Act. The President, Vice President, and senior members of national and municipal governments are among the officials who fall under the purview of the statute. In accordance with the legislation, lobbyists must register their activity and disclose their expenses to the relevant agencies. Additionally, within seven days, officials are required to report on their interactions with lobbyists. The law also governs employment after public service. The three years following their term in office, the President, Vice President, political appointees, and heads of municipal governments are prohibited from personally lobbying or advocating on behalf of others. United States and Canada are two other nations that have enacted various restrictions to help counteract the harmful influence of interest groups on policy-making. These regulations range from those governing lobbying and conflicts of interest to those governing access to information.

United States

The Lobbying Disclosure Act (1995) requires the mandatory registry of lobbyists or any organization employing a lobbyist with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of the Representatives. Lobbyists must disclose a wide range of information, such as their identities and of their organizations, identities and business addresses of clients, issues lobbied on (with specifics on pieces of legislation), as well as their income (per client) and total lobbying expenditures every three months. The law also requires that all registrations and reports are made available for public inspection over the Internet as soon as technically practicable after the report is filed. In terms of preventing conflict of interest, the US establishes a separate system for persons occupying high level positions. In the Executive branch, the Office of Government Ethics (OGE) is responsible for the various Codes of Conduct and statutory restrictions, and at the federal level, the Ethics in Government Act requires that candidates for elected offices, elected officials and high-level appointed officials submit a publicly available personal financial report (OECD,2011). The Act establishes three types of reports:

- (i) New entrant/nominee: due within 30 days after assuming;
- (ii) Incumbent: due annually, no later than the May 15th following the covered calendar year, and;
- (iii) Termination: due on or before the 30th day after leaving a covered position.

The reports must contain information on sources and amounts of income, assets, liabilities, gifts, reimbursements and fiduciary and employment positions held outside the government, agreements and arrangements regarding future employments, and the names of major clients (persons or organizations) for whom personal services were performed for compensation in excess of a specified threshold amount.

Canada

A fairly rigorous lobbying law is in place in Canada. For a period of five years after leaving office, members of the government are prohibited from lobbying the Federal Government under the Lobbying Law. Additionally, it is required and made public that organizations and people classified as lobbyists register. To ensure that "lobbying is done ethically and with the highest standards with a view to conserving and enhancing public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity, and impartiality of government decision making," a lobbyist code of conduct was also formed. Both the lobbying law and the code of conduct must be put into effect and enforced by the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying.

Adam J. Newmark, "Measuring State Legislative Lobbying Regulation, 1990–2003." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* (2005): 182–191; Nownes and Newmark, "Interest Groups in the States." The 1995 Lobbying Disclosure Act defined who can and cannot lobby, and requires lobbyists and interest groups to register with the federal government. Nownes, *Interest Groups in American Politics*. The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 further increased restrictions on lobbying. For example, the act prohibited contact between members of Congress and lobbyists who were the spouses of other Congress members. The laws broadened the definition of lobbyist and require detailed disclosure of spending on lobbying activity including who is lobbied and what bills are of interest. In addition, President Obama's Executive Order 13490 prohibited appointees in the executive branch from accepting gifts from lobbyists and banned them from participating in matters, including the drafting of any contracts or regulations, involving the appointee's former clients or employer for a period of two years. The states also have their own registration requirements, with some defining lobbying broadly and others more narrowly.

Second, the federal and state governments prohibit certain activities like providing gifts to lawmakers and compensating lobbyists with commissions for successful lobbying. Many activities are prohibited to prevent accusations of vote buying or currying favor with lawmakers. Some states, for example, have strict limits on how much money lobbyists can spend on lobbying lawmakers, or on the value of gifts lawmakers can accept from lobbyists. According to the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act, lobbyists must certify that they have not violated the law regarding gift giving, and the penalty for knowingly violating the law increased from a fine of \$50,000 to one of \$200,000. Also, revolving door laws also prevent lawmakers from lobbying government immediately after leaving public office. Members of the House of Representatives cannot register to lobby for a year after they leave office, while senators have a two-year "cooling off" period before they can officially lobby. Former cabinet secretaries must wait the same period of time after leaving their positions before lobbying the department of which they had been the head. These laws are designed to restrict former lawmakers from using their connections in government to give them an advantage when lobbying.

Third, governments require varying levels of disclosure about the amount of money spent on lobbying efforts. The logic here is that lawmakers will think twice about accepting money from controversial donors. The other advantage to disclosure requirements is that they promote transparency. Many have argued that the public has a right to know where candidates get their money. Candidates may be reluctant to accept contributions from donors

affiliated with unpopular interests such as hate groups. This was one of the key purposes of the Lobbying Disclosure Act and comparable laws at the state level.

Finally, there are penalties for violating the law. Lobbyists and, in some cases, government officials can be fined, banned from lobbying, or even sentenced to prison. While state and federal laws spell out what activities are legal and illegal, the attorneys general and prosecutors responsible for enforcing lobbying regulations may be understaffed, have limited budgets, or face backlogs of work, making it difficult for them to investigate or prosecute alleged transgressions. We know the laws prevent lobbyists from engaging in certain behaviors, such as by limiting campaign contributions or preventing the provision of certain gifts to lawmakers.

Conclusion

Every interest groups has some political agendas, and they provide support and work with the government closely in order to realize their political agendas and for their own member's' interests. Interest groups seem to be an important tool in the process of policy making, their participation, in an organized way, may be stronger and they on increasing of exerting influence on the topic desired. The Interest group influence through lobbying may be found to be an alternative instrument of political influence vis-à-vis corruption if not properly monitored. However, it is quite difficult to completely understand how interest groups might influence policy outcome, particularly when it might be exerted throughout the whole process of decision-making. Transparency is the best key and *sine qua non* to ensure that policy-makers do not give preferential treatment for specific interest groups. Regulations on lobbying, conflict of interest, asset disclosure, competition, as well as, on freedom of information are among the wide range of rules adopted by countries across the world to increase transparency and accountability in decision making. Malen (2001) mentions that although judgments about the relative power of interest groups vary, there is reason to believe interest groups, and at all levels of the system are important that they should abide the regulation of the law.

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