

UNDER PRESSURE



Teacher Instructions

This activity helps students to understand the power of pressure groups in US politics and also the methods/processes that allow that pressure and influence to be checked.

Students should be issued with the 'factors' sheet – they then need to group the factors into those that increase the power of pressure groups and those that reduce the power of pressure groups. This activity can proceed in one of two ways. Either students write 'increase' or 'decrease' next to the factor on their sheet, or they write up the factors onto the 'pressure boiler' sheet – the factors increasing pressure go inside the 'boiler' and those reducing pressure go into the plumber's toolbox. Alternatively, the factors can be cut up and stuck on to the 'pressure boiler' sheet. Students often find images and the act of transcribing information helpful in terms of memory.

Extension questions

- 1** Is the activity of pressure groups good or bad on balance?
- 2** Find out about:
 - a** The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
 - b** League of Women Voters
 - c** The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
 - d** League of Conservation Voters (LCV)
 - e** National Association of Realtors
 - f** National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- 3** What is the influence of the National Rifle Association on Congress and gun control legislation?
- 4** What are the major differences and similarities between pressure group activity in the UK and the US?



Under Pressure

Pressure Group Factors Sheet

Decide whether each of the following factors causes an increase or a decrease in the power of pressure groups in US politics.

For most issues, there are countervailing pressure groups, for example, pro-choice and pro-life pressure groups in the US abortion debate.

There are thousands of pressure groups, all campaigning strongly in support of their viewpoint.

Pressure groups with strong finances, such as corporate interest groups or groups that are concerned with the interests of the wealthy, have more influence, according to elite theory.

Government influence in areas such as health and the environment has increased, so pressure groups have become more specialist and knowledgeable.

Government has become increasingly complex and so the expert knowledge from lobbying by pressure groups is relied upon by government

Pressure groups wield greater influence over government than individuals because of their collective action

Pressure groups may have influence in one part of government e.g. the Senate but not elsewhere

The massive increase in the number and size of pressure groups in the US has resulted in a situation where the government is overwhelmed by the demands; this is hyper-pluralism.

The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) limits the amount of money that pressure groups can donate to election candidates.

The US political system is highly fragmented with many different access points for pressure groups, in terms of committees and sub-committees

Some pressure groups gain access to elected politicians by donating money to their election campaigns

There are so many pressure groups that there is likely to be contradiction in viewpoints and aims.

Pressure groups are able to directly lobby the Executive Office of the President and encourage the President to use his power of veto

US citizens are strongly aware of their rights under the Constitution and use this to their advantage to increase the power of pressure groups.

The media is always keen to uncover scandal and pressure groups come under great scrutiny.

All lobbyists must be registered with government, so that their actions are transparent and open to scrutiny.

The political party system in the US is very weak, giving pressure groups greater power and influence over Senators and Representatives

Pressure groups often try to influence the Supreme Court either by giving evidence, bringing test cases or influencing presidential selection of judges

It is illegal for pressure groups to offer bribes to members of Congress

Pressure groups can operate and lobby at both federal and state level

Some pressure groups are very large, for example, the American Association of Retired People has 40m members

Many pressure groups hire former members of Congress and make use of their knowledge and contacts.

The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act 2007 tightened regulations on lobbying activity and banned them from giving gifts to members of Congress

Some pressure groups form one part of an iron triangle in which they are linked with a government department and a congressional committee

Pressure groups try to influence public opinion through media campaigns, exerting an indirect influence on politicians e.g. the Calorie Control Council (with Coca-Cola) campaigned against the proposed ban on saccharin sweeteners

Pressure groups may try to take direct action and organise demonstrations; these can be very effective e.g. the Civil Rights campaigns and the Occupy movement

It can be argued that members of Congress do not like to speak out against powerful interest groups because they will be targeted for defeat in the funding battles for election.

The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act 2007 prevents former Senators and Senate staff from lobbying the Senate for 1 year after leaving their former employment.

Pressure groups may bring together different parts of US society to achieve a common goal e.g. reduction in piracy of CDs, DVDs, and software

Most pressure groups maintain offices in Washington D.C. and state capitals to be close to the political action and improve their access to politicians

Many pressure groups publish 'scorecards' of politicians, to highlight whether the behaviour/voting of those politicians is as they would like

Pressure groups pay for adverts in public policy journals such as 'National Journal' that has a strong circulation amongst staff at the White House and executive departments

The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act 2007 has increased the financial penalty for violations of the Lobby Disclosure Act.

Pressure groups increase the level of accountability for Congress and the Executive

