

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Posc 105

INTEREST GROUPS

- I. THIS MORNING:
 - A. Summary
 - B. Film: "Washington's Other Scandal."
 - C. Types of decisions
 - 1. If time allows
 - D. Interest groups

- II. RECAP OF TERMS:
 - A. PACs
 - B. Campaign contributions limits
 - C. Soft money
 - D. Independent expenditures and committees
 - E. The film illustrates many of these

- III. LEVELS OF DECISION MAKING:
 - A. Policy categories
 - 1. Trunk: these policies determine a nation's political and economic agendas or a significant portion of them.
 - a. Affect the allocation of public resources.
 - b. Limit or predetermine range of choices
 - c. Subject of long-term discussion and policy making.
 - d. Examples:
 - (1) Balanced budget
 - (2) Containment
 - 2. Branch and twig decisions:
 - a. Implement trunk decisions.
 - b. Examples:
 - (1) Types of weapons systems.
 - 3. Other categories
 - a. "Neutral distributive"
 - (1) Allocates material and symbolic rewards
 - b. Re-distributive:
 - (1) Takes from one group and gives to another.
 - c. Symbolic
 - (1) Provide psychological rewards but do not redistribute goods.

- B. Generalizations:
 - 1. Corruption involves middle-level distributive decisions.
 - 2. Trunk decisions frequently made behind the scenes or “invisibly”

IV. INTEREST GROUP POLITICS:

- A. To understand American government, especially the “middle levels” of power one needs to appreciate the central role interest groups play in the political process.
- B. *Interest groups compared to political parties:
 - 1. Do not try to run government **as a whole**, only to protect the interests of their members.
 - 2. **Private**, not public, bodies and hence not accountable in the same way parties are.
 - 3. Do not run their own candidates for office.
 - a. They try to influence election outcomes, however.
- C. Generalizations:
 - 1. Most visible politics involves interest group conflict
 - 2. Interest group politics involves mostly “branch and twig” decisions and mid-range distributive policies.
- D. The American way of politics: interest group conflict or **pluralism**
 - 1. The belief in the legitimacy of groups: ours is a nation that places great value on private organizations and groups.
 - 2. Main “actors” or players are organized groups, not individuals or unified, organized political parties.
 - 3. Usually, several sets of groups on each side of an issue.
 - a. Politics involves creating coalitions.
 - 4. Groups struggle in many arenas (institutions) for favorable outcomes.
 - 5. Groups mobilize resources such as money, skills, organization, prestige.
 - 6. Groups **participate** in policy development and especially implementation.
 - 7. Tools: contact and access and favors (lobbying), public relations, “knowledge,” election contributions
 - 8. On paper the “system” remain relatively stable, “balanced,” open, representative

V. NEXT TIME:

- A. Interest groups
- B. Congress
- C. Reading:
 - 1. Keep working on *Debt and Deficits*. Help is on the way.
- D. Look at “Do Something!” for an assignment on campaign finance.