



Public Influence on Elections

We have discussed the importance of political parties and mass media in elections. Now we are going to turn our attention to another important component in the political process- us! We are very important to this process because we participate in politics, we voice our opinion on important issues and we join interest groups. By taking these actions, we influence both elections and the policies that our elected officials carry out. Without our participation, our democracy would not be able to function properly.

Public Participation in Politics

O We Vote

O As citizens it is our responsibility to vote. This is our voice in our democratic government. When we participate in elections we increase our chances of getting represented by a candidate who we feel will best support and carry out our ideas and interests. We also participate by campaigning for the candidates we support. We contribute money to candidates we would like to see get elected.

O We Voice Our Opinions

O As citizens, we express our opinions to our government in a variety of ways. We petition our government through letter writing and sometimes we demonstrate against a certain policy. We are encouraged to communicate with our representatives because they like to know what we are thinking. Public opinion helps government officials know what types of legislation to support. It also helps their campaign for election. For example, if we think that a clean environment is important, they will address that in their campaign and they will support legislation of that nature if they are elected to office.

O We Join Interest Groups

O As citizens, we join interest groups. Interest groups are an integral part of the political system. Interest groups are organizations that seek to influence government policy and elections. Interest groups work together to promote their ideas.

Interest Groups, Lobbyists and PACs Influence Elections



Interest Groups

Interest groups play an important role in elections by supporting the candidate that they believe will support their cause. Interest groups often run their own ad campaigns for a candidate. They are very active in communicating with candidates and their endorsement means a lot to candidates who benefit from the recognition.

- **Economic Interest Groups:** American Federation of Teachers, **Single Issue Interest Groups:** Sierra Club, Wildlife Association
- **Public Interest Groups:** The League of Women Voters,

Lobbyists

Lobbyists are **individuals** hired by interest groups who communicate with government officials in order to affect public policy. They participate in the election process by supporting and communicating with a particular candidate that their group believes will most benefit their cause.



PACs

Interest groups **channel their contributions to an election campaign through political action committees**. PACs contribute large sums of money to those candidates that the interest group believes will support their cause. This money is considered “soft money” and is used by candidates to pay for campaign ads. PACs. PAC contributions have become increasingly important due to the restrictions on the amounts of money that individuals are allowed to contribute.

