



## Characteristics of Interest Groups

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**Abstract:** *An organized interest group is a totality of many parts, which form its characteristics. The main characteristics of an interest group consist of its organization, membership, leadership, office, election system, constitution and finance. The ideology of an interest group provides the basis for its functions and activities. The activities of an interest group include security to its members, presentation of demands through seminars, workshops and conferences, maintenance of information bureau and participation of members in seminars and similar activities. The center point of group activities are the institutions of the government. It concentrates its activities on legislature, executive and judiciary. Besides, it also seeks support from political parties, like-minded institutions and persons. In a democratic system, an interest group has many opportunities for the pursuit of its interests.*

**Introduction-** An interest group consists of individuals with common interests. It works for some collective interests, which by its very nature benefit its members. Thus, a group is a totality of many interrelated parts, put together for achieving its objectives. These interrelated parts form the characteristics of an organized interest group. An organized interest group has the following characteristics:

**1. Organization-** Organizations are social units that come into existence with a specific purpose. These refer to a plan of action to ensure fulfillment of purposes that the groups set for realization. Organizations facilitate proper utilization of men, materials and money for the achievement of the goals. Organization is the relation of efforts and capacities of individuals and groups engaged in a common task in such a way as to secure the desired objectives with the least friction

and most satisfaction for whom the task is done and those engaged in the enterprise (Gaus). An organization is the frame through which organized effort is directed for achieving the objectives. Therefore, an organization refers to the formal grouping of men and their activities to facilitate the achievement of its objectives. It indicates the existence of significant values and attitudes of a group at the time of its creation. The organized interest groups have their own structural setup, which depends on the type of organization, its size, the volume of work, co-operation and functions. The organization consists of structure, working arrangement and relationship between members. The structural setup consists of legislature, executive, judicial and administrative bodies, as well as representative and electoral systems. It describes the communication flow and relationship between members. The organization presents through internal political, social

and economic life, which includes permanence, forms of leadership, membership criteria, distribution of authority and responsibility and methods of determining policy and ideology. The organizations are either unitary or federal in nature. A unitary interest group is a single organization with internal subdivisions to carry out functions. On the other hand, a federal group is an organization in which powers and functions are distributed among constituent units and the apex body. The organization of an interest group speaks of its periodic election, participation of members, elected representatives, written laws and conventions. This is characterized by legal status, primacy of structure, division of work, unity and cohesion. It facilitates determination of goals, nature of activities and coordination. It helps not only to know about the attitudes and views of its leaders and members, but also inform about strategies, techniques and tactics. Interest groups work on a plan, which provides inputs and feedbacks for the interest of members. It articulates the needs felt by its members. It is an index of a high frequency of interaction within a group. The existence of organization suggests a measure of permanence. It reflects acceptance of members, forms of leadership, distribution of responsibility and methods of determining policies.

**2. Membership** - An organized interest group owes memberships to those who have identical interests. There are two kinds of members: permanent and temporary. Permanent members have their sole interest within a group. Such members regularly contribute to the finances of the group. These members have a major voice in the management and administration of the group. They set the objectives of the group. The leadership of the group comes from this type of membership. The

temporary members include those who join the group according to their needs for a specific period. These members also make contributions to the finances of the group, but do not have a major say in the affairs of the group. Even then, such members influence the functioning of the group to a certain extent. Besides these two types of members, there may be non-member individuals who by their identical view of group remain its sympathizers. Truman names such members as 'fellow travelers' (Truman, 1951).

The interest group develops some formal procedure for regulating relation among members. The behavior of members determines the functioning of a group. The interactions produce differential results in the experience and behavior of individuals (Sheirf and Cantil, 1948). Changes take place within a group, with the increase or decrease in its membership. The changing attitude and behavior of the members divide the interest group into two categories: homogeneous and heterogeneous. The homogeneous group is that in which the interests of the members resemble totally with the interest of the group. In such a group there is no conflict and contradiction of interests among members. On the other hand, heterogeneous group is one in which internal situation is affected by the extent to which its membership overlaps with that of other groups (Truman, 1951). Non-homogeneity of membership gives rise to conflict of interests. Such conflicts, which stem from membership, produce disturbances which not only cause the temporary loss of interest, but also reduce participation. Individual differences among members influence the pattern of

group behavior. These differences occur because an individual has several interests at the same time, which forces him to become the member of several groups simultaneously. This behavior of individuals causes overlapping of membership. It affects group cohesion and unity. The effects of multiple memberships depend on the number of members of the group experiencing the conflict. Where the number is small, the consequences for the group depend on the roles played by members so affected. If these members are among the leaders, the effects are assumed to be disproportionately extensive, involving the possibilities of temporary or permanent schism (Truman, 1951). Voluntary interactions with unofficial norms and communication flow in many directions produce informal relationships among members, which have a bearing on the nature of the group. The effectiveness of an interest group largely rests on the nature of its membership. The large organized group with homogeneous membership produces desirable outputs. A group having heterogeneous members finds it difficult to fulfill the interests of its members. The fellow travelers provide support for claims of the group. Thus, the success of an interest group depends on the nature of its membership.

**3. Leadership-** A combination of several factors such as size, number and complexity of functions separate the individual members more and more from the personal connections with the group. To provide this link, there is a need for leadership. Thus, leadership is the most important component of an organized group because it directs the group as a

whole towards desired objectives. Actually, leadership refers to the quality of the behavior of individuals, whereby they guide people in their activities in an organized effort (Bernard, 1948). The decision-making authority resides in the hands of leaders who are either elected by the members or nominated. These leaders are known as policy makers of the group. They take decisions to establish goals, collect resources and monitor progress. The decision makers guide to channel the efforts of members in the activities of the group. Besides this, they not only pursue the matter with the concerned authorities, but also take decisions regarding the technique for the pursuit. They present the claims of the group in an authoritative manner. The leadership ensures that interest groups that can exercise influence and effective political pressure are represented in the bargaining processes. It maintains cohesion within a group by framing disciplinary regulations. Generally, interest groups believe in democratic style of leadership which allows members to participate in decision-making process. The group theory of leadership believes that members extend support and co-operation as long as the leaders fulfill their interests. The support of permanent and temporary members and fellow travelers depend on the quality and success of the leaders. The leadership attempts to fulfill the expectations of members and the objectives of the group.

**4. Office-** An organized interest group maintains its office, which acts as an administrative block. Organized groups have their offices in big cities. The office is

supposed to be a symbol of its prestige. In federally organized groups, the constituent units also have offices in at convenient places. *Ad hoc* offices are also maintained according to needs of the group. The offices have both permanent and temporary staff.

**5. Election System-** Generally, interest groups believe in the democratic and representative process. Hence, election to various posts for a fixed tenure becomes essential. The constitution of a group outlines electoral process. Generally, elections are held at regular periods. Members who regularly contribute to the group have not only voting rights, but also right to contest. The participation of members in the elections is the major determinant of the effectiveness of a group.

**6. Constitution-** The interest groups function in accordance with well-formulated rules and regulations that are written in their constitutions and charters. These charters mainly include objectives, membership rules, electoral processes and structural and functional setup of the group.

**7. Finance-** Finance is an essential requirement to maintain and run the offices for making an interest group effectively functional. The major source of finance is regular contribution from its members. Besides, groups also find out other means of additional income through hiring of its premises and auditoriums, organizing exhibitions and fairs, selling its publications and providing services etc.

**8. Ideology-** The ideology of an interest group provides meaning and reason for its existence. It suggests the activities by which the group should be evaluated. The ideology provides a group the basis for its

functions, activities and support. Therefore, every interest group supports an ideology that is suitable to its objectives and methods. It not only strengthens its basis of existence, but also legitimizes its functioning. The major ideologies prevalent among the interest groups are conservatism, capitalism, democracy, liberalism, socialism, Marxism, anarchism and altruism.

Activities of the Organized Interest Groups  
The objectives of an organized group are to secure the proper consideration of questions pertaining to its interests. To achieve its objectives, an interest group engages itself in several activities. These activities mainly provide the following:

**(i)** Security to its members to realize their existence through participation in the group. The group not only acts as a link between the members and the authorities, but also works for some collective interest that by its very nature will benefit its members.

**(ii)** Organizes seminars, workshops, conferences, symposia and open house discussions to place its view points and demands. Besides this, it also participates in similar activities organized by other interest groups, agencies and institutions. These activities provide it a platform to put forward its ideology and outlook.

**(iii)** Maintains its information bureau through which information is collected, processed and presented to the group management to help it in making better decisions. Besides this, the information is furnished to different governmental, semi-governmental and private institutions. Such information not only provides rational ground for the justification of its issues, but also suggests remedies for the concerned issues.

(iv) The centers of group activities are the institutions of the government. The activities are made to exert influence on the government in order to promote interests. The activities on the part of the group may not cause an influence unless it makes access to one or more points of decision-making authorities. As access to government is basically a matter of relationship with the individuals who occupy influential governmental positions, the group has a stake in the matter who is to occupy the offices with which they are concerned (Truman, 1951). This is why access becomes the facilitating objective of an interest group. In the process of generating influence, the group first identifies the appropriate persons and then determines whether access will be useful. In this connection, the political parties are helpful factors in determining its choices. It attempts to promote the nominations of its choices for the election. The group does not desire access to a person but to a position that commands a measure of institutionalized power. Though a group participates in elections, it hardly admits it. Generally, an interest group claims that it is keeping out of politics. It avoids identification with any political party or group. Its contribution to the political parties remains secret. The group activities in an election include nominations of its choice, inclusion of its demands in the programs and election manifestoes of political parties and indirect assistance in election campaigning. This is designed to put in power a bloc of elected officials of their choices.

(v) The organized interest group concentrates its activities on the rule-making bodies. It attempts to win friends in the legislature. In fact, an interest group tries to win friends in the legislature. This bloc works for the group proposing and

enacting rules favorable to its interests. Besides this, the group urges its bloc members to participate regularly in deliberations concerned with the issues of the group. Overlapping membership of legislators give privileged access of the interest group, whether the membership is formal or of the fellow travelers variety (Truman, 1951). Simultaneously, a group attempts to an alliance with other groups in order to strengthen its position in the law-making body. Most of the legislature work is done through legislative committees. Therefore, an interest group attempts to get an access to the committees. It makes an attempt for the inclusion of its legislative bloc members in the committees. Besides, it tries to win friendships of the committee members. Access to a committee's majority or even to a chairman may give a group advantage in the legislative process. Therefore, the activities of a group are centered around legislative committees. An interest group collaborates with other interest groups in the legislative procedures. This form of mutual assistance among interest groups is called log rolling, which involves a group providing support to a proposal that bears no relation to its own objectives, but helps the objectives of another group. In return, the group receives similar support from the group it has assisted. The other form of mutual assistance among groups is alliance. The alliance, whether formal or informal, involves the development of a common strategy among several groups in pursuit of a policy that bears some substantive relation to the interest of each (Truman, 1951). Thus, a group's activities in legislatures include formation of blocs and alliances, log rolling, inclusion of its members in the committees and participation in legislative deliberations.

(vi) As executives, both political and

bent upon concentrating their activities around the executives and administration. The discretionary powers rest on an executive who can twist the laws during their implementation so as to favor the interests of a group. Their expert advice to the administration facilitates the way for the policy formulation and implementation. An interest group arranges regular meeting with the executive heads and administrators. Besides, it presents memoranda and letters to the concerned officials. Invitations to the members of the executive and administration in meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences have become a common feature of the activities of an interest group. In order to support their view points, a group provides data to the concerned officials through seminars, workshops and conferences.

(vii) Generally, in democracies the power of interpretation of laws and executive actions lies with the judicial organs. An interest group in its failure to win favor at the legislative or the executive level involves itself in litigation. A group uses judicial organs as a last resort. In case of its failure at one level, the group appeals at the higher courts. It attempts to know the attitudes of the members of the judiciary by studying their background. Then, it makes efforts to place its plea in the bench of judges having similar background or sympathetic consideration for its interests. Thus, an interest group asserts its claims not only on the institutions of the government, but also on the system. An interest group exists to fulfill the desires of those who comprise them, to achieve their choices, attain their goals and propagate their ideology. It articulates and channels the demands of its members to the elected and appointed officials. An interest group is a collection of people who are organized to work for some common interests with a

particular identification. The identity is based on the nature of its interests. It cooperates to relate and stabilize the interaction amongst its members. The position of an interest group in the social structure is equated with the extent to which its objectives and methods are congruent with the prevailing values of the society, and the degree of influence access to the institutions of the government depend on the factors: (i) relating to the position of the group; (ii) associated with internal characteristics of the group; and (iii) peculiar to the governmental institutions (Truman, 1951).

The continuous shifting of members weakens a group and lowers its position in the society. The effectiveness of a group is reduced in relation to other groups if practices and pronouncements of leadership are successfully contradicted and resented by some of its members in collaboration with opposing groups. Every group is identified by its ideology and values. The activities and techniques of opposing groups may compel an interest group to make alterations in its values for the realisation of its interests. These shifts and alterations in terms of values and methods produce disturbances that weaken the cohesion of the group. An interest group faces the problems of temporary loss of interest among active members, reduced participation, shifting of members to other groups, instability and lack of cohesion. It attempts to neutralise those reasons which raise such problems. For this, it makes efforts to increase its effectiveness by exerting continuous pressure on the institutions of the government. The process of interest articulation depends on the socio-economic and political environment. In a democratic system, a group has more

opportunities for the pursuit of its interests with demands than that in an autocratic system. Besides, the social setup of the society, values prevalent in the society, economic and social problems, the process of political participation, political socialisation and modernisation, the ideologies of political parties, the rules and regulations and policies of the government, political instability or stability. The behaviour of the bureaucrats and tempo of social, political, economic, educational and cultural changes and development affect the interests, techniques, attitudes and viewpoints of an interest group. An interest group has to keep in mind these factors. It has to adjust its interests with that of the interests of the society. Thus, interest group's actions vary according to the

different applying values in the society. The working of interest groups is dictated by the convenience, support and opposition to its interests.

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