

Special Interests & Public Policy

Time Requirement--Approximately four class periods plus an extra day for poll taking.

Part I - Read and discuss in class - Federalist #10 by James Madison.

- What did James Madison say he meant by faction [ie. interest group]?
- What danger to American representative democracy and freedom did Madison believe factions represented?
- What solution did Madison see to the dangers of factions?
- Do we still have factions today? What do we call them? What are some examples of modern factions? Modern estimates suggest that there are more than 20,000 interest groups in America today. What would James Madison think of this? Did his concerns turn out to be true?

Part II - Assignment

Use the poll form on pages 3 and 4 to get an idea of the groups people belong to in your school community. Have each student ask the poll questions of ten adults. Make sure everyone asks different adults. Give students two days to collect data.

Have students do the poll on themselves in class. It will be interesting to see how the students and adults compare in their answers.

A more complete list of special advocacy groups and what they believe in can be found on the Internet at Political Advocacy Groups: Alphabetical List of All Groups <http://www.csuchico.edu/kcfount/alpha.html> Collect and tabulate results.

Part III. - Opinion Poll

Discuss the results on your opinion poll. Discuss answers to the questions below.

- What conclusions can you draw from your poll?
- Do members of groups seem to recognize that they are part of "special interests?"
- Are special interest groups protected by the 1st amendment's "freedom of speech and association?" Should they be?
- What limitations, if any, should be placed on the activities of special interest groups?
 - lobbying?
 - forming political action committees to elect candidates with like views?

- spending money on campaigns?
- joining law suits as amicus curiae before the appellate courts to argue for the groups view of issues?
- testifying before legislative committees?
- have individuals, acting alone, lost the ability to persuade legislators to vote one way or another on legislation?

Part IV – Project Vote Smart

Using the Project Vote Smart web site determine if there are any interest group evaluations of the voting record of the legislator who is coming to visit you.

Part V – Legislator's visit

Invite a local legislator to come and speak to your group.

- Conduct a PRESS CONFERENCE with the legislator asking the legislator questions about the role of special interests in your state legislature.
- Each student should prepare at least three questions, in writing, to ask the legislator. Use your poll results to see what the legislator thinks of what you have found.

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Opinion Poll

Check each of the following that apply: Adult Male _____ Female _____

Are you a member of any of the following groups?

American Association of Retired Persons AARP _____
Mothers Against Drunk Driving MADD _____

National Rifle Association _____

Sierra Club _____

National Education Association _____

Common Cause _____

American Federation of Teachers _____

National Wilderness Society _____

AFL- CIO _____

Operation Rescue _____

Teamsters _____

American Civil Liberties Union ACLU _____

American Medical Association _____

Amnesty International _____

American Bar Association _____

B'nai B'rith _____

Chamber of Commerce _____

Christian Coalition _____

National Organization for Women _____

Children's Defense Fund _____

League of Women Voters _____

Focus on the Family _____

National Association for the Advancement of
Colored People - NAACP _____

Handgun Control, Inc. _____

National Right to Life Organization _____

Veterans of Foreign Wars _____

National Association of Government Employees

There are many other groups that are not on our list. Do you belong to any groups that are not on the list? _____

Names:

Do you find any groups on this list with which you agree, even if you are not a member?

Yes ___ No _____

Do you consider yourself a member of any special interest groups?

Yes ___ No _____

Do you think special interest groups are a problem in today's society?

Yes ___ No _____

Do you think special interest groups have more influence on your state legislature than you do? Yes ___ No _____

Should special interest groups be allowed to send lobbyists to Congress and to the state legislature? Yes ___ No _____

Would you agree with the following statement? Yes ___ No _____

Interest groups are actually just another way for American citizens to organize themselves and express and advance their views in society.

Do you think interest groups help the legislators make laws? Yes ___ No _____

Do you think interest groups make it harder for legislators to make laws? Yes ___ No _____