

Implications of Pressure Groups in Democratic System

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Abstract

Pressure groups, in fact, are found among all types of people and all kinds of profession and in all countries where the right of voluntary association is recognized. Participation in the activities of these groups offers citizens and vested interests in a democratic polity to participate in governmental activities. These groups include labor unions, service unions, business and commercial groups, co-operatives, women, students, and other professional groups. These groups engage influential persons or agents which are often designated as “Lobbyists” to maintain close contact with different wings of the government of the day, political parties and public men and thus they constantly bring the group influence on public policy and administration. Press and other modern media of communication are utilized to create favorable public opinion for achieving their objectives. Group interests are thus the animating forces in the political process.

The exercise of political power consists to a great extent in the advancement of legitimate group objectives and in the mediation of conflicting and adverse group interests, and in the checking and restraint of group objective which may be politically harmful to the society at large.

Introduction

These pressure groups remain engaged in promoting their interests by attempting to influence the government rather than by directly nominating candidates and taking responsibility for the management of governmental affairs. They do not openly associate with one or the other of the political parties. Yet by and large pressure groups, as they seek to influence the exercise of public power, play a distinctive role: they supplement the party system and the formal instruments of government by serving as spokesmen for the special interests with society. As such pressure groups constitute one of the principal and powerful political factor in modern democratic.

Conceptual Implication

Pressure groups may be formed voluntarily and spontaneously because of a common objective or interest to accomplish a common practical aim. The extent to which a group is found attractive and personally gainful by its members is termed its cohesiveness. Members of pressure groups that rate high on cohesiveness find a high degree of satisfaction in being together and achieving their common interests. The morale of an interest group or pressure group is

reflected with optimism and confidence with which its members approach their common gains. Morale and cohesiveness are related to the kind of social, economic and political climate that prevails in a particular interest group. Pressure groups may be exclusive or inclusive, depending on their functions and goals. A pressure groups cohesiveness depends on the extent to which its members recognize and adhere to its norms, and any deviancy poses a threat to groups cohesiveness. Hence the strength and possibility of achieving any pressure groups objectives, ultimately depends upon a particular groups unity and cohesiveness among its members and groups common efforts as well as sacrifices. They constant forming and reforming of groups is fundamental to political and social conflict.

Multiplicity of political parties in modern democratic state does not prevent or restrict of growth of socio-economic ethnic and such other groups bringing pressure to bear on them. Men have different needs and interests which a state along cannot cater. So modern welfare state no doubt attempts to fulfill the common basic needs of its people. There still remains the need for achieving so many other sectarian or group needs which such group associations along can fulfill. Modern democratic states provide wide latitude and freedom to their citizens to form such association or groups to achieve their common interests. The success of such groups will ultimately depend upon the personality of their members, the legitimacy of their demands, the support which such groups

enjoy in public and the degree of vigor and single mindedness. A pressure groups is a such a powerful medium through which people with common interests and objectives may endeavor to influence the cause of public affairs by their group approach to decision-makers. A pressure group without attempting to capture formal control of government uses its persuasive powers to obtain political decisions in its favor. Also there may be groups which do not directly or indirectly try to control public affairs through political pressure, but they may gain so much public confidence and popularity that their interests cannot be ignored by political chiefs. Such groups may be linguistic, communalist religious etc. Hence today pressure groups are sometimes considered as healthy factors in political life if they over look national interest and confine themselves to their limited common interests. Thus, in a democratic polity and in a civil society wedded to the ideal of secularism, associations ensure an increase in the capacity and capabilities of the political system in development process.

Pressure groups effectively influence the power center without openly participating in the decision process. But it is an open secret that the lobby of pressure groups and interest groups pressurizes and sometimes compels the political decision-makers to decide matters and issues as per its vested interests. This becomes inevitable for the governing class or political party in power because democracy implies a maximum possible participation in the decision-making

process by various groups in a civil democratic society. These pressure groups are involved in fact, in the political and other stage of policy making processes. In many ways, a political party is the channel through which the various pressure groups seek realization of their voice in political affairs. Many party leaders have come from dominant pressure groups. The major pressure groups representing business, organized labour, the agrarian interests, the various professions and other interests. Whenever political reforms are proposed, such interests are often consulted and taken into confidence. Political parties to succeed in elections encompass the interests of pressure groups which are their party try to attain status and with all branches of the government and usually at all levels of the government. Lobbying consists of the activities and attempt of such groups to influence the minds of legislative and executive officials in regard to public issues, problems and policies. Public officials are more and more looking to these group interests for guidance in the formulation of public policy. Much of national policy is evolved by shifting and modifications of these group opinions.

Pressure groups influence the framers of public policy and government throughout the year and not merely on an election day. The trend and ultimate outcome of elections are determined to a great extent by the political forces of pressure groups on specific issues. Lobbying and pressure group politics offer avenues for the expression of public opinion. It should be remembered that democracy is always concerned

with the free discussion of political issues and ideas, with the freedom to resort to constitutional means for expressing the changing currents of opinion either individually or through an association or a group. Of the associations, pressure groups formed for ventilation of specific grievances or achievement of common socio-economic or political gains play a dominating role in modern democracies. Such pressure groups are prominent factors in the formation of initial political attitudes and also in their development. These groups use lobbying techniques and the other devices to influence public policy. Lobbying and election tactics are very closely tied with pressure groups in all countries. Those pressure groups assume greater political importance and significance which possess a higher degree of cohesiveness, internal discipline, and financial resources. In some democratic states where devices of direct democratic are in operation as in some states of U.S.A., Switzerland and other countries too if a pressure group or a particular interest groups fails to succeed in the fulfillment of its demands from the government, it can sponsor an initiative or constitutional amendment or demand a referendum to realize them.

Formation of Pressure Groups

A pressure group is formed around a person of magnetic attraction who enjoys the confidences of the members and exerts a powerful force in welding and keeping together the diverse elements in the group. Attractive and popular leadership helps to increase the morale of the group

as it matures. Also large organizations employ highly qualified experts whose business is to keep their members informed and to explain complex issues in simple terms and also the means to be adopted to achieve their group objectives. In fact, the publicity directed toward the government and the public has become a major function of the work of the officials or leaders of pressure groups. The increased use of publicity and public techniques by organized groups has very much benefited the pressure groups to create a strong and favorable political atmosphere in their favor. The use of modern methods of direct popular control such as referendums, the strike votes taken by some groups and periodic elections are potential instruments of democratic control. The organized groups make most of their efforts in contacting directly the influential persons, agencies, and committees which offer the greatest opportunity for meeting specific demands of pressure groups.

Pressure groups help to focus attention on the dereliction and lapses on the part of public authorities and to compel public action. These activities have an important and on the whole favorable and salutary impact on the policy of the government by exercising control and surveillance over public policies and administration. In connection with the obligation to keep the general public informed of matters within their jurisdiction, the group agencies carry on extensive propaganda and information services through press releases, speeches and other publications. In many cases such

informational activities are conducted pursuant to directions of the group and government gives cognizance to the great organized pressure groups within a democratic society. The government too has the equal responsibility of speaking a such issues or demands. The government son its part is not always captive to the sectional private interest and does not surrender to weak force of private interests. We believe that government must lead and follow its own policy and political commitments at the time of elections, but at the same time we also recognize that there are limits both political and moral beyond which neither government or legislature may go beyond. The number and variety of pressure groups which from time to time attempt to influence public policy in their interests is legion. The charge that different pressure groups are of varied and unequal influence is easy to make, but a remedy to check misuse of pressure politics is not so easy to fine. It is difficult to create a system whereby all types of pressure groups could be equally represented at all times in all the major wings of government. How the varied pressure groups sand the conflicts amongst them should be harmonized and the ultimate common welfare of all sections of people be protected from the excesses of political power concentrated in and irresponsibility displayed by various pressure groups is one of the great tasks of and challenge to modern democracy which ultimately stands for establishing a welfare state. The task of government in a popular type of government is to effect adjustments or coordination among

the various pressure groups which at any given time are pressing for realization. Sometimes, very influential pressure groups seem exercising forms of such private type of political authority which differ little from recognized governmental authority.

Pressure groups wield significant power in the political decision of democratic states. Their power is involved at several points in the institution of government. At times their influence on the activities of formal government may be so powerful politically that they may in fact control the exercise of public authority. Pressure groups are often in alliance with a political party both visibly and sometimes invisibly and they also make all efforts to influence the elections. The most popular and convenient medium of pressure group is propagandas in its favor through modern media of mass communication. The government too is very receptive to the demands of all such groups, because if democracy is to survive, it can only as survive by striking a proper balance amongst various pressure groups. Whatever the form of political process, the pressure groups undoubtedly play an important role in the formation of public opinion and public policy. They often succeed in coercing the government to take action in their favor. The powerful pressure group not only try to coerce the state to achieve their objectives, but they often seek to erode the public policies of the state by influencing the decisions of the government. In some political systems having multiple parties as in France, some of the political parties are,

in actual operation, nothing but pressure groups. Also, in some countries some of the political parties are, in actual functioning more agents of political parties in as far as they give greater importance and publicity to the respective political goals of the parties rather than to the accomplishment of their own interests. For example, Trade Unions in India are very closely associated with political parties. However, the primary function of any pressure group ultimately remains to influence the governmental decisions at all levels. Also, the way a pressure group articulates its common interests and desires, is an important determinant of its effectiveness. A pressure group gains strength and political efficacy when its common interest expresses the convincing demands in public interest. Thus, a pressure group influence in influencing and shaping public policy is ultimately conditioned by its political ability to identify its sectional interest with the common public interest. A pressure group while pursuing its sectional advantage and interest must make efforts to win general public confidence that it is seeking common public welfare. Since the multifarious needs, socio-economic and other common political requirements are multiplying in a modern welfare states, the emergence of pressure groups too has become the feature of almost all modern democratic states.

The political role of pressure groups is growing immense in modern politics. Outside the normal channels of party politics, well organized and well-financed pressure groups are able to exercise a great influence on the

government, yet their attitudes are equally shared with non-political patterns of social interaction. They are involved both in the formal and informal activities of government. Organized pressure groups have powerful voice in the political process. Associations of individuals interacting on the basis of shared attitudes and exerting claims upon other pressure groups in the society find in the institutions of government an important means of achieving their objectives. Such well organized groups visibly or invisibly become a part of the governmental institution as are political parties and the various organs of the government. Pressure groups always seek access to the key points of political decisions within these institutions. Governmental decisions often reflect the effective access or political approach by such pressure groups. The diversity of an individual's activities of interests involve him in a variety of present day potential pressure groups. Despite the large number of pressure groups formed in modern society not all groups, or interests are organized. Many groups, for example, families or petty business do not operate as pressure groups. These unorganized interests are reflected in the various socio-economic institutions of modern society and with varying degrees of effectiveness the governmental agencies do recognize the claims of these unorganized interest groups which function as pressure groups and serve as a balance wheel in a democratic political system are powerful political forces of democratic polity. Key remarks that many such interest groups tend to develop

behind the nonpartisan façade to perform the function of recruiting, and backing candidates. These nonpartisan political groupings may be most transient and rudimentary. In many nonpartisan jurisdictions the issues generate a politic of quick low temperature.

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