

## Structure

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## 21.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- analyse the role of pressure groups in democratic politics;
- explain the types of pressure groups; and
- compare the Indian and Western pressure groups.

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## 21.1 INTRODUCTION

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In democratic politics, pressure groups are organisations which attempt to influence the government. The International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences describes the groups as representing the interest of the sections into which a society is divided. With advanced specialisation groups will be more numerous and specialised. Such groups represent interest of various sections of society viz., farmers, labourers, government employees, businessmen, professional people and even students. Pressure groups are also known as interest groups.

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## 21.2 MEANING OF PRESSURE GROUPS

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Pressure groups are organised associations, unions or organisation of people having common interest. Their aim is to seek better conditions for their members through organised efforts. They try to influence the legislature, executive and other decision makers to have decisions made in their favour.

According to V.O.Key, a striking feature of American politics is the extent to which political parties are supplemented by private associations formed to influence public policy. These organisations are commonly called pressure groups. David B.Truman defines an interest group as “a shared attitude group that makes certain claims upon the other groups in the society.” One of the major trends in democratic political process is the increasing role of pressure groups. Herman Finer viewed that it is perhaps now an axiom of political science that, where political parties are weak in principles and organisation, the pressure groups will flourish; where pressure groups are strong, political parties will be feeble; and

where political parties are strong, pressure groups will be curbed. In the context of the USA, the rigid nature of its constitution, the doctrine of separation of powers, difficulties of conveying the grievances of the people to the government, etc. contribute to the growth of pressure groups in American politics. American pressure groups are not much influenced by the political parties whereas in Britain pressure groups implicitly or explicitly have attachment with political parties.

Indian political parties are weak in principles and organisation. Therefore, pressure groups are supposed to be very significant in the functioning of the Indian Political System. In parliamentary system of government, pressure groups exert pressure mainly on the executive with the assumption that legislature is under the control of executive. Here executive includes both the political and permanent executive.

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## 21.3 ROLE OF PRESSURE GROUPS

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Group activities are generally more effective than individual activities. Therefore, pressure groups play a vital role in a democratic society in terms of influencing the government for expressing the common concern of a section of society and promote their interest. The vitality of the pressure groups is mainly determined by their ability to influence the government. Influencing the government involves influencing the public policy decision makers, law makers, implementers of policies and decisions, etc. The role of pressure groups is closely connected with politics. Here our assumption is that power is an essential element of politics which implies the study of influence. In this context Harold D. Lasswell in his early work on politics, uses the subtitle, "who gets what, when, how?" and says that, "the study of politics is the study of influences and influential." In view of this understanding, the state of pressure groups in democratic countries constitutes an important dimension of the study of politics because the primary objective of any pressure group is to influence the government on a specific public policy issue or problem.

Pressure groups do not contest elections and they may not have political programmes. Pressure groups informally attempt to influence the government on a specific public policy issue of a section of society.

Freedom of association is generally found in all democratic societies. This is required in order to identify and promote common interest or well-being of the people through the collective activities. This is regarded as the basic factor which tends to the establishment of pressure groups. So, pressure groups play a crucial role in interest formation and interest aggregation.

Pressure groups play the mediatory role between the people and government. They balance the national interest and interest of individuals. Generally interests of the common people are not organised. Pressure groups contribute to give concrete shape to the interests of people. This role of pressure groups is significant in interest formation as well as interest aggregation. The groups have to move demands before the government based on the difficulties or grievances of people. Interest formation may occur through the reactions of groups of people on issues of public importance like GATT, Nuclear explosion, reservation policy, environmental issues, price rise, regional imbalances, rural development program, etc.

According to Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell, converting the demands into policy alternatives is interest aggregation. In this process also, pressure groups play a significant role in terms of identifying possible policy alternatives or options. They also explain the pros and cons of each policy alternative which is a very

helpful information for the policy makers to select the best alternative. This role of pressure groups is to provide inputs to public policy making. On the whole, pressure groups contribute to democratise the public policy making and law making.

When it is found that political parties cannot adequately represent the aspirations of the people, pressure groups become the devices for representing the aspirations of the people. In this sense, pressure groups perform the representation function.

In a welfare state, the growing functions of government may tend to affect the responsive capability of the political system. Besides the members of government may not be able to get sufficient time to get all the details of a particular issue of public importance as the political elites are preoccupied in the political activities. In view of these, pressure groups are essential to make the political system respond to the aspirations of people and provide the details of a particular policy issue of public importance to the ruling political elites. This will contribute to work out development activities very effectively.

### Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the meaning and role of pressure groups in democratic politics.

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## 21.4 TECHNIQUES OF PRESSURE GROUPS

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The main techniques of pressure groups are manipulating public opinion, persuading legislators and administrators, etc. When some project, as for instance the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) in Gujarat, and the Kaiga project in Karnataka, are likely to affect the interest of a section and region, pressure groups attempt to promote environmental awareness by providing the necessary information to the concerned people. This role of pressure groups tends to change the public attitude towards a specific issue. The extent of influence of pressure groups on government is mainly determined by their position to represent public opinion. Hence it is necessary on the part of pressure groups to influence the process of formation of public opinion. As a consequence, pressure groups seem to manipulate public opinion.

Pressure groups have friends and allies in the legislatures as in the case of American Congress and the Indian Parliament. Influence of pressure groups is through the legislators for making specific provisions or deleting some provision in legislation. This involves lobbying and it is particularly influential in the USA.

Pressure groups attempt to influence the process of implementation of decisions through the administrators. Besides, pressure groups adopt the technique of

influencing the government through public interest litigation in courts of law. When we talk of the techniques of the pressure groups, we should take into account the political form in which the pressures are to be exercised. In the U.S., the pressure are exercised in the presidential form. In India, they are to be exercised in the context of the cabinet form of government. The methods of pressure groups in India may be said to be ill-defined and, to some extent, crude. The methods of the American pressure groups are highly developed and routine. In the U.S, the need for the pressure groups is felt greatly because the executive is separate from the legislature and both of them of course are separate from the judiciary. In India, the co-ordination between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary is well defined. The judiciary is independent but does not have the powers of judicial review as wide as in the U.S. In India, the judiciary is asserting its position under the influence of the pressure groups which are bringing before it the public interest litigation which is seen clearly in case of environmental pressure groups and economic pressure groups. Medha Patkar and her associates have exercised a vast amount of pressure on the executive at the state and central level over the question of the Narmada dam and particularly the resettlement of the people affected by the dam. There are pressure groups which have been working on the problems of daily wage workers and women and many of them are exercising pressure by bringing their cases before the courts in the form of public interest litigation. Even in the limited context of municipal government, as in case of Bombay, citizens are taking cases to the high courts to exert pressure on the municipal authorities to clean streets and undertake environmental measure. In the context of India, as in several developing countries, these techniques are new. Therefore the pressure groups have to work hard to organise the members of the public in order to be effective in relation to government and public administration. In active cities like Pune, citizens have gone to the extent of bringing back the transferred commissioner in the teeth of opposition of the state government.

### Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the techniques adopted by the pressure groups in different forms of government?

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## 21.5 PRESSURE GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

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Pressure groups and political parties constitute very important structure of a political system. Both pressure groups and political parties are extra-constitutional agencies and play a crucial role in the political process. Sometimes, pressure groups become political parties. In Maharashtra, the Shiva Sena was a pressure group and it has now become a political party. Similarly, the Karnataka Rajya Sangh (KRRS) in Karnataka, was initially a pressure group. After sometime, the KRRS became a political party in Karnataka.

Pressure groups may give rise to political parties. The cultural and religious pressure group (the RSS) gave rise to the establishment of Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951. The Indian political parties have corresponding students' organisations namely, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Students Federation of India (SFI), All-India Students Federations (AISF), etc. which are regarded as pressure groups of students affiliated with one party or the other. There can be pressure groups within a political party. The Seva Dal was a unit of the Indian National Congress before independence and it was working as a pressure group. After independence, the Seva Dal has continued to be a pressure group but it is not so effective now as in pre-independence days.

A political party is a larger organisation, while a pressure group is comparatively a small organisation. The main objective of a political party is to come to power whereas the main concern of a pressure group is to influence the government for promoting its specific interest. However, political parties have to represent the aggregate of diverse interests of the people. That is why pressure groups are regarded as non-political. Parties put up their candidates, try to win maximum number of seats in the legislature and form government, if possible. Pressure Groups do not, on their own, do any of these things.

A political party requires an ideology which enables it to have an identity. Pressure groups do not need ideology and sometimes they may be subjected to the influence of an ideology.

### Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.  
 ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) How are pressure groups different from political parties?

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## 21.6 TYPES OF PRESSURE GROUPS

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Rationale and methods of operation of various pressure groups may not basically vary from one country to another country. The generalisations that can be made are broadly applicable to understanding of the working of pressure groups in various countries. The origin of pressure groups is diverse since they represent a particular dimension of interests like economic, social and political interests. Pressure groups exist for protecting or promoting particular interest(s).

Pressure groups can be broadly classified into the following categories :

- 1) Business Groups
- 2) Labour Organisations
- 3) Farmers' Groups
- 4) Professional Groups
- 5) Religious Groups

### 1) Business Groups

Businessmen are generally well-organised and their concern would be to get reasonable restrictions imposed on the production and distribution of goods, import and export of commodities, determination of price of commodities, etc. There are business groups like the National Association of Manufacturers in the USA, the Federation of British Industries, the National Council of French Employers, the Federation of German Industry, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), etc.

In India the British merchants established the Chamber of Commerce in 1830s. In 1926, it was decided to establish a national Indian business organisation. In the following year the same business organisation became the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The support of the wealthy businessman like G.D.Birla made this business group an important and influential force. In addition to the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry there are other national business groups namely the All-India Manufacturers' Organisation, the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India etc. These business groups keep in touch with political parties and contribute to party funds and some candidates in elections are financed by the businessmen.

The primary function of any business group is to protect its business interests like opposing tax increase, minimum control on labour, etc.

### 2) Labour Organisations

In the USA trade union politics began with the establishment of the American Federation of Labour in 1886. There are labour organisations like the communist dominated Confederation of Christian Trade Unions in France, German Confederation of Trade Unions, Transport and General Workers' Union in England, Indian National Trade Union Congress, etc. The labour organisations are concerned with payment of adequate wages and emoluments, reasonable working hours and conditions of service, compensation in case of some accident, etc. They are often associated with one party or the other.

In India the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC), the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh have links with political parties like the Congress (I), Communist parties, the Socialist Party, the BJP etc. All these trade unions are regarded as major Indian Labour Organisations.

### 3) Farmers' Groups

Farmers' groups are basically concerned with protecting the interest of farmers from adverse effects of modernisation and getting facilities of modernisation to the farmers. These include continuation of subsidy to the farmers, minimum price for agricultural products, etc. In the USA, the farmers' groups like American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Grange, the National Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Union of America are regarded as very important farmers' groups for getting their just dues from the government. In India, we have farmers' groups like Karnataka Rajya Raith Sangh, Setkari Sangh of Sharad Joshi in Maharashtra and similar organisation of Mahendra Singh Tikait in UP.

### 4) Professional Organisations

Professional organisations are mainly concerned with the service conditions and other facilities for their respective professions. Associations like teachers'



association, medical association, bar association, etc. are regarded as pressure groups based on their professions. The American Association of University Teachers, All-India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations, the American Bar Association, the Indian Political Science Association, the British Medical Association are some of the examples of professional pressure groups.

**5) Religious Organisations**

Religious pressure groups generally attempt to protect the interest of a particular religion. In the USA, the National Council of Churches is a religious pressure group. The other religious pressure groups are the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, etc. In the Indian context, the caste and communal associations can be categorised as religious pressure groups. In Indian politics, caste associations are increasingly getting prominence and becoming very influential.

**Check Your Progress 4**

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) Describe the various types of pressure groups.

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**21.7 COMPARISON OF INDIAN AND WESTERN PRESSURE GROUPS**

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Both India and Western countries are democracies. But within western countries there are differences between Presidential and Parliamentary forms of government. India though a parliamentary democracy differs from such countries of the West in terms of developmental levels. Therefore there are some differences in the role of pressure groups.

Firstly, the American pressure groups are regarded as the fourth organ of the government but the Indian pressure groups are not yet able to play such significant role in politics.

Secondly, in India and Great Britain the cabinet and civil service are the main targets of pressure groups for lobbying purposes rather than the parliament. However, the targets of American pressure groups are the Congress and its committees rather than the President for lobbying purposes.

Thirdly, Indian pressure groups based on caste, religion, region, etc. are more powerful than the modern groups like business organisations.

Fourthly, a significant feature of American pressure groups is that in the USA pressure groups take interest in foreign policy issues while in India pressure groups do not seem to have interest in foreign policy matters. Comparatively, the Indian pressure groups are concerned more with domestic policy issues and problems, and less with foreign policy matters.

However in general, despite the differences, democratic politics presupposes the crucial role of pressure groups for serving the interests of different sections of society.

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## 21.8 LET US SUM UP

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Pressure groups play a vital role in democratic politics in terms of representing and promoting the aspirations of the people. The significance of pressure groups is mainly determined by the political parties, the forms of government, attitudes of people towards politics, the nature of leadership etc.

Pressure groups are different from political parties mainly because their main purpose is to secure maximum advantage for their members whose interests are common. Political parties contest elections to legislative bodies, and those who get majority form the government and control the administration. Pressure groups do not seek political power. They only try to influence the decision-makers.

There are different types of pressure groups, such as business groups, labour organisations (trade unions), farmers' associations, professional groups (e.g. bar associations, medical associations, teachers associations and chartered accountants groups), and religious groups. Some of the pressure groups associate themselves directly, or indirectly, with one political party or the other, without formally joining it.

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## 21.9 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

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V.O.Key, *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups*, New York, Thomas & Crowell Company, 1969, p.18.

Herman Finer, *Theory and Practice of Modern Government*, Delhi, Surjeet, 1977.

*Pressure Groups in Indian Politics*, New Delhi : Radiant Publishers, 1980, p.38.

Verinder Grover (Ed.) *Politics of Influence, Violence and Pressure Groups*, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publication, 1990.

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## 21.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) These are groups of people organised to achieve a common goal. They try to influence decision-makers to seek maximum concessions for their members. (See Sections 21.2 and 21.3)

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Manipulation of public opinion, persuading legislators and administrators. They have their friends in legislatures and administration. They often offer benefits to decision-makers to favour their groups. (See Section 21.4)

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Political parties have clear and distinct ideologies, pressure groups merely promote the collective interests of their groups. Parties seek political power



and contest elections; groups do not. Groups only exercise influence or pressure over the decision makers. (See Section 21.5)

#### Check Your Progress 4

- 1) They are mainly labour (trade) unions, business groups, farmers groups, religious groups and professional groups, such as doctors' associations, bar (lawyers') associations, teachers organisations, traders groups, etc. (See section 21.6)