

PRESSURE GROUPS

What is a Pressure Group?

A pressure group is an organized group of people that aims to influence public opinion or policies/actions of government. It is called so, as it attempts to bring a change in public policy by exerting pressure on the government. It acts as a liaison between the government and its members.

The pressure groups are also called interest groups or vested groups. They are different from the political parties, as they neither contest elections nor try to capture political power. They are concerned with specific programmes and issues and their activities are confined to the protection and promotion of the interests of their members by influencing the government.

These groups use various methods to achieve their aims including lobbying, research campaigns, media campaigns, policy briefs and polls.

Pressure groups are defined by the following key features:

- **External to the Govt.:** Pressure groups do not make policy decisions, but rather try to influence those who do (the policy-makers). In that sense, they are 'external' to government
- **Narrow Domain:** They typically have a narrow issue focus. In some cases, they may focus on a single issue (for instance opposing a planned road development)
- **Shared beliefs or interests:** Their members are united by either a shared belief in a particular cause or a common set of interests. People with different ideological and party preferences may thus work happily together as members of the same pressure group
- **Protection of interests:** Each pressure group organises itself keeping in view certain interests and thus tries to adopt the structure of power in the political systems. In every government and political party there are clashing interest groups. These groups try to dominate the political structure and to see that groups whose interests clash with theirs are suppressed
- **Use of modern as well as traditional means:** They try to follow modern means of exerting pressure, without fully giving up the traditional or old ways of operation. They adopt techniques like financing of political parties, sponsoring their close candidates at the time of elections and maintaining relations with the bureaucracy. Their traditional means include exploitation of caste, creed and religious feelings to promote their interests

NGOs fought for Dhongria Kond in Nimgiri hills
Visakha guidelines
MH Farmers long march
mazdoor bikan shekhi sangathan
India against corruption - Lokpal.
DISTHA NGO - A.J budget analysis - alloc for tribals.

Techniques Used By Pressure Groups

Pressure groups resort to three different techniques in securing their purposes.

- **Electioneering**: Placing in public office persons who are favourably disposed towards the interests the concerned pressure group seeks to promote.
- **Lobbying**: Persuading public officers, whether they are initially favourably disposed toward them or not, to adopt and enforce the policies that they think will prove most beneficial to their interests.
- **Propagandizing**: Influencing public opinion and thereby gaining an indirect influence over government, since the government in a democracy is substantially affected by public opinion.

Types of Pressure Groups

There are various ways to classify pressure groups on the basis of their structure and organization such as-

- i. **Interest Groups and Cause Groups**
- ii. **Insider and outsider groups**

i. Interest and Cause Groups

The interest/cause classification is based on the purpose of the group in question. It therefore reflects the nature of the group's goals, the kind of people who belong to it, and their motivation for joining.

Interest groups (sometimes called 'sectional', 'protective' or 'functional' groups) are groups that represent a particular section of society: workers, employers, consumers, an ethnic or religious group, and so on.











Interest groups have the following features:

- They are concerned to protect or advance the interests of their members.
- Membership is limited to people in a particular occupation, career or economic position.
- Members are motivated by material self-interest.

Trade unions, business corporations, trade associations and professional bodies are the prime examples of this type of group. They are called 'sectional' groups because they represent a particular section of the population. Some of the examples of interest groups are **FICCI, CII, AITUC** etc.

While sometimes, the terms interest groups and pressure groups are used interchangeably, there are following differences between the two:

Cause group

Interest Group	Pressure Group
 Formally <u>organized</u>	 Strictly <u>Structured</u>
 <u>Interest-oriented</u>	 <u>Pressure-focused</u>
 <u>May or may not influence the policies of the government</u>	 <u>Must influence the policies of government</u>
 <u>Softer in outlook</u>	 <u>Harsher in attitude</u>
 <u>More or less protective</u>	 <u>Protective and Promotive</u>

eg: IAS association.

CII

Cause groups (sometimes called 'promotional', 'attitude' or 'issue' groups) are groups that are based on shared attitudes or values, rather than the common interests of its members. The causes they seek to advance are many and various. They range from charity activities, poverty reduction, education and the environment, to human rights, transparency in governance etc.

(eg) PETA, PUCL

Cause groups have the following features:

- They seek to advance particular ideals or principles.
- Membership is open to all.
- Members are motivated by moral or altruistic concerns (the betterment of others).

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) can be cited as a prime example of a cause group as it seeks to promote transparency in governance, for example, by creating pressure for the introduction of right to information to citizens. Other examples could be PETA, India against Corruption etc.

Interest groups	Cause groups
 <u>Defend interests</u>	 <u>Promote a cause</u>
 <u>Closed membership</u>	 <u>Open membership</u>
 <u>Material concerns - a group 'of'</u>	 <u>Moral concerns - a group 'for'</u>
 <u>Benefit members only</u>	 <u>Benefit others or wide society</u>

(eg) Naomada
Bachao
Andolan

eg: CII
IAS Assn.

eg: Farmer's association
Trade union

ii. Insiders and Outsiders





The insider/outsider distinction is based on a group's relationship to government. It therefore affects both the strategies adopted by a group and its status i.e. whether or not it is considered 'legitimate' or 'established'.

Insider groups are groups that are consulted on a regular basis by government. They operate 'inside' the decision-making process. They may also sit on government policy committees and agencies and have links to parliamentary select committees.

Therefore, the insider pressure groups have a better chance of creating an impact on how the policy shapes up, as they are consulted at various stages of policy formulation. Some of the examples of insider groups are **National Advisory Council, CII** etc.

Outsider groups, on the other hand, are the ones that are not so closely involved with the decision makers and who find it harder to get their voices heard in the higher echelons of policy making. They are kept, or choose to remain, at arm's length from government.

They therefore try to exert influence indirectly via the mass media or through public opinion campaigns. One of the examples of an outsider group is the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR)** which has been pushing for reforms in the way representatives are elected by the citizens of India.

Insider groups	Outsider groups
 <u>Access to policy-makers</u>	 <u>No/limited access to policy-makers</u>
 <u>(Often) low profile</u>	 <u>High profile</u>
 <u>Mainstream goals</u>	 <u>Radical goals</u>
 <u>Strong leadership</u>	 <u>Strong grass-roots</u>

Pressure Groups in India

- **Business Groups** – Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), Federation of All India Food grain Dealers Association (FAIFDA), etc
- **Trade Unions** – All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)
- **Professional Groups** – Indian Medical Association (IMA), Bar Council of India (BCI), All India Federation of University and College Teachers (AIFUCT)

- **Agrarian Groups**- All India Kisan Sabha, Bhartiya Kisan Union, etc
- **Student's Organisations**- Students Federation of India (SFI), Akhila Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), All India Students Federation (AISF), National Students Union of India (NSUI)
- **Religious Groups** – Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Jamaat-e-Islami, etc.
- **Caste Groups** – Harijan Sevak Sangh, Nadar Caste Association, etc
- **Linguistic Groups** – Tamil Sangh, Andhra Maha Sabha, etc
- **Tribal Groups** – National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), Tribal National Volunteers (TNU) in Tripura, United Mizo federal org, Tribal League of Assam, etc.
- **Ideology based Groups** – Narmada Bachao Andolan, Chipko Movement, Women's Rights Organisation, India Against Corruption etc.
- **Anomic Groups** - Naxalite Groups, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Dal Khalsa, etc.

Roles/Functions of Pressure Groups

Pressure groups carry out a range of functions including:

Representation : Pressure groups provide a mouthpiece for groups and interests that are not adequately represented through the electoral process or by political parties. This occurs, in part, because groups are concerned with the specific rather than the general.

In other words, while the political parties attempt to broaden their appeal in order to attract all voters, the pressure groups articulate the views or interests of particular groups and focus on specific causes. It has even been argued that pressure groups provide an alternative to the formal representative process through what has been called **functional representation**

Interest Articulation: Pressure Groups bring the demands and needs of the people to the notice of the decision-makers. The process by which the claims of the people get crystallized and articulated is called interest articulation.

Agents of Political Socialisation: Pressure groups are agents of political socialisation in so far as they influence the orientations of the people towards the political process. These groups play a vital role as two-way communication links between the people and the government.

Pressure groups play a **vital role in the legislative process**, not only as important structures of interest articulation, but also as active agencies engaged in lobbying with the legislators for securing desired laws or amendments in laws and policies of the government.

Role in Judicial Administration: Pressure Groups try to use the judicial system for securing and safeguarding their interests. Interest groups often seek access to the court for redressal of their grievances against the government as well as for getting declared a particular decision or policy as unconstitutional. (e.g.) NOTA

Education : Much of what the public knows about politics is through pressure groups of one kind or another. Many pressure groups operate largely through their ability to communicate with the public and raise political consciousness. Groups, therefore, often devote significant resources to carry out research, maintaining websites, commenting on government policy and using high-profile academics, scientists and even celebrities to get their views across. An emphasis is therefore placed on cultivating expert authority.

Policy Implementation : The role of some pressure groups extends beyond trying to shape the content of public policy to playing a role in putting the policy into practice. Not only do such links further blur the distinction between groups and government, but they also give the groups in question clear leverage when it comes to influencing the content of policy.

Are Pressure Groups Becoming More Powerful?

The rise of pressure-group power

Those who argue that pressure groups have become more powerful usually draw attention to one of three developments:

① **The growth of cause groups** - Looked at simply in terms of political participation, groups certainly appear to be becoming more important. This is best demonstrated by the growth of cause groups in particular. Some of the reasons cited for increase in the number of pressure groups are:

- Increased leisure time, both in terms of the shorter working week and more early retirement, has increased the number of people with time to devote to such activities
- Higher educational standards have increased the numbers of people with the organisational skills to contribute to pressure groups.

② **Changes in gender roles** have removed many of the barriers to participation by women in pressure group activity

③ **Membership of political parties has declined.** It has been argued that this reflects the failure of the political parties adequately to reflect the needs of different groups of people in society, and that cause groups offer a more promising route for bringing about political change

social media influence
(e.g.) Me too movement

The widening of access points through devolution – A variety of pressure groups have benefited from the fact that new pressure points have emerged in politics, such as:

73rd
HR Act
RTI

- I. Devolution has allowed pressure groups to exert influence through the local/grassroots level, especially after the 73rd/74th Constitutional Amendment Act.
- II. The passage of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, has substantially increased pressure-group activity focused on the courts. This has especially benefited groups that represent the interests of religious or ethnic minorities, and groups that have an interest in civil liberties issues (such as Liberty).
- III. Similarly, the Right to Information Act, 2005 has also enabled more pressure groups to grow stronger and ask tough questions to those in power.

Globalization - Globalization has strengthened pressure groups in a number of ways. In particular, there is general agreement that business groups have become more powerful in a global age. This is because they are easily able to relocate production and investment, so exerting greater leverage on national governments. Such trends have strengthened pressures on governments, for instance, to cut business taxes and reduce corporate regulation.

Another feature of globalization has been the emergence of NGOs, such as the World Development Movement and the World Social Forum, as major actors on the global stage. Some 2,400 NGOs, for example, took part in the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Pressure groups and deepening of democracy

1. **Supplement electoral democracy** - Pluralists often highlight the advantages of group representation over representation through elections and political parties
2. **Pressure groups keep government in touch with public opinion in-between elections** - IAC's anti-corruption movement was one such example where the pressure groups made the government aware of rising sentiment in general public against corruption in public life.
3. **Pressure groups give a political voice to minority groups and articulate concerns** that are overlooked by political parties. Pressure groups are therefore often more effective in articulating concerns about issues such as the environment, civil liberties, global poverty, violence against women and the plight of the elderly.

For Eg - Women's organizations such as SEWA, NCW have campaigned for women-friendly laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

4. **Widen political participation** - The level of political participation is an important indicator of the health of democracy. Democracy, at heart, means government by the people. Pressure groups have become increasingly effective agents of political

participation

5. **Ensure competition and debate** - Pressure groups help to promote democracy by widening the distribution of political power. They do this, in part, because these pressure groups compete against one another
6. **Promote education**- Pressure groups promote political debates, discussions and arguments. In so doing, they create a better-informed and more educated electorate

Pressure groups – antithetical to democracy ?

Some political scientists and politicians have taken the view that pressure groups are non-democratic, or even anti-democratic, in the sense that they intervene in the political process, which is based on electoral accountability.

A 2014 Intelligence Bureau report had also highlighted that foreign-funded NGOs were “negatively impacting economic development” in India. The ways in which the pressure groups threaten democracy are listed below:

1. **Increase political inequality** - A central argument against the pluralist image of group politics is that, far from dispersing power more widely and empowering ordinary citizens, pressure groups tend to empower the already powerful. They therefore increase, rather than reduce, political inequality.
2. **Exert ‘behind the scenes’ influence** - Regardless of which groups are most powerful, pressure-group influence is exerted in a way that is not subject to scrutiny and public accountability.
3. **Exercise non-legitimate power** - Critics have questioned whether pressure groups exercise rightful or legitimate power in any circumstances. This is because, unlike conventional politicians, pressure-group leaders have not been elected. Pressure groups are therefore not publicly accountable, meaning that the influence they exert is not democratically legitimate.
4. **Lead to the tyranny of the minority** - Pressure groups, by their very nature, represent minorities rather than majorities. For pluralists, of course, this is one of their strengths. Pressure groups help to prevent a ‘tyranny of the majority’ that is, perhaps, one of the inevitable features of electoral democracy

Pressure Groups in India

Nature of Pressure Groups in India

The different types of pressure groups found in India are *business groups, trade unions, peasant groups, student groups, teachers' association, caste and religious associations, women's associations*, etc.

Business Groups

- The Business Groups are the most important and organised pressure groups in India. They are also most effective. They are **independent of the political parties** that exist and they have enough resources with which they can safeguard their interests. Business associations have existed in India even before Independence.
- The **important business groups** include the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and industry (FICCI) and Associated Chamber of Commerce.

Trade Unions

- The trade unions in India have been **present since even before the Independence** such as the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), which was established in 1920 and the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) established in 1947.
- Trade Unions in India are **closely affiliated with the political parties**; many national political parties have got their own federations of trade unions.
- India has witnessed the trade unions resorting to demonstrations, during the disinvestment by the government in public sector undertakings over the past few years.

Peasant Organisations

- The rise of peasants groups in India has been mainly due to factors such as abolition of Zamindari System and other land reform measures, implementation of Panchayati Raj, and Green Revolution Movement.

They gained huge power since 1960s. Although, the peasant organisations such as the All India Kisan Sabha (1936) have been existing since pre- independence

- Different parties have got their own peasant organisations. **Like the trade unions, there is no peasant organisation, which may be independent of party control**, though at the state level, their organisations are non-political, independent of the political parties and homogenous.

- Even though there are some important All India Kisan Associations like All India Kisan Congress, All India Kisan Kamgar Sammelan, Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, peasant groups have been mainly organised on territorial basis rather than on all-India basis.
- The **Bharatiya Kisan Party (BKP)** in Western U.P. is considered the most significant pressure group. The **interplay of language, caste factor, weak financial positions, etc.** have been greatly responsible for lack of emergence of multiple national level peasants' pressure groups.

Student Organisations

- The student organisations in India have acted as pressure groups both prior to Independence and after Independence. Some **pre-independence student organisations** were the All Bengal Students Association formed in 1928 and All India Students Federation (AISF) in 1936.

Community Associations

- There are various community associations in India. These community groups are organised on the basis of caste, class and religion.

Some examples of **caste organisations** are Scheduled Caste Federation, Backward Caste Federation, etc.

Civil Society Organizations

- India has a very large number of **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** i.e. organizations established by citizens of the country, to pursue certain interests. Many of these organizations act as pressure groups on the government, to promote implementation of policies in their areas of concerns.

Limitations of Pressure Group

** Inequality*

Focus of the pressure groups: In India, organised groups largely influence the administrative process rather than the formulation of policy. This is dangerous as a gap is created between policy formulation and implementation.

Issues raised by pressure groups: Many a time issues dominated by caste and religion eclipse those related to socio-economic interests. The result is that instead of serving a useful purpose in the political administrative process, they are reduced to work for narrow selfish interests.

Lack of resources: Many of the groups have a very short life because of the lack of resources. This explains the reason for the mushroom growth of pressure groups as well as their withering away as it becomes difficult to sustain the interest of the persons, initially attracted to form these pressure groups.

Serving political interests: In a country like India, the tendency to politicise every issue, whether it has social, economic, cultural import, restricts the scope, working, and effectiveness of pressure groups. Instead of exerting influence on political process, the pressure groups become tools and implements to subserve political interests.

Low level of internal democracy: Pressure groups have a low level of internal democracy, creating the possibility that they express the views of their leaders and not their members.

Comparison of Indian and Western Pressure Groups

India and most countries of the West are democracies with either Presidential or Parliamentary form of government. India, a parliamentary democracy, differs from countries of the West in terms of development. Therefore, there are some **differences** in the role of pressure groups.

* *Some regressive pressure groups based on caste etc*

- **Significance of pressure groups:** 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.
- **Targets of pressure groups:** 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.
- **Themes or issues raised:** Indian pressure groups based on caste, religion, region, etc. are more powerful than the modern groups such as business organisations.
- **Foreign policy:** A significant feature of American pressure groups is that their 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.

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

Conclusion

Pressure groups are now considered as an helpful and indispensable element of the democratic process. The society has become highly complex and individuals cannot pursue their interests on their own. They need the support of other fellow beings in order to gain greater bargaining power. This gives rise to pressure groups based on common interest.

*2012 protest against
Kudankulam NPP PB Report
foreign funded protests.*

How does the activities pursued by pressure groups influence policy making. Discuss with specific reference to the role they play in polity.