

Pressure Groups

Introduction

- A pressure group is a group of people who are organised actively for promoting and defending their common interest. 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.
- The pressure groups influence the policy-making and policy implementation in the government through legal and legitimate methods like lobbying, correspondence, publicity, propagandising, petitioning, public debating, maintaining contacts with their legislators and so forth.

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.

Characteristics of Pressure Groups

- **Based on Certain Interests:** Each pressure group organises itself keeping in view certain interests and thus tries to adopt the structure of power in the political systems.
- **Use of Modern as well as Traditional Means:** They adopt techniques like financing of political parties, sponsoring their close candidates at the time of elections and keeping the bureaucracy also satisfied. Their traditional means include exploitation of caste, creed and religious feelings to promote their interests.
- **Resulting Out of Increasing Pressure and Demands on Resources:** Scarcity of resources, claims and counterclaims on the resources from different and competing sections of the society leads to the rise of pressure groups.
- **Inadequacies of Political Parties:** Pressure groups are primarily a consequence of inadequacies of the political parties.
- **Represent Changing Consciousness:** For instance the increase in the food production or industrial goods does bring a change in the way individuals and groups look at the world. The stagnation in production leads to fatalism but increase in production leads to demands, protests and formation of new pressure groups.

Types of Pressure Groups

- **Institutional Interest Groups:** These groups are formally organised which consist of professionally employed persons. They are a part of government machinery and try to exert their

influence. These groups include political parties, legislatures, armies, bureaucracies, etc. Whenever such an association raises protest it does so by constitutional means and in accordance with the rules and regulations.

Example: IAS Association, IPS Association, State civil services association, etc.

- **Associational Interest Groups** : These are organised specialised groups formed for interest articulation, but to pursue limited goals. These include trade unions, organisations of businessmen and industrialists and civic groups.

Some examples of Associational Interest Groups in India are Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Indian Chamber of Commerce, Trade Unions such as AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress), Teachers Associations, Students Associations such as National Students Union of India (NSUI) etc.

- **Anomic Interest Groups**: By anomic pressure groups we mean more or less a spontaneous breakthrough into the political system from the society such as riots, demonstrations, assassinations and the like.
- **Non-Associational Interest Groups**: These are the kinship and lineage groups and ethnic, regional, status and class groups that articulate interests on the basis of individuals, family and religious heads. These groups have informal structure. These include caste groups, language groups, etc.

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 Foodgrain Dealers Association (FAIFDA), etc
- **Trade Unions** - All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Bharatiya 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, Bharatiya Kisan Union, etc
- **Student's Organisations**- 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.

Functions, Role & Importance of Pressure Groups

- **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.

Right from the time of preparation of election manifestos of various political parties to the passing of laws by the legislators, the pressure groups remain associated with the process of rule-making.

- **Pressure Groups and Administration:** Pressure Groups are actively involved with the process of administration. Through lobbying with the bureaucracy, the pressure groups are usually in a position to influence the process of policy implementation.
- **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.
- Pressure groups play a leading role in the **formulation of public opinion**. Each pressure group is continuously engaged in evaluating all such laws, rules, decisions and policies which have a direct or indirect bearing on the interests it represents. It always places the pros and cons not only before its members but also before the general public for eliciting popular support as well as for catching the attention of the government.

They try to gain public support and sympathy for their goals and their activity by carrying out information campaigns, organising meetings, file petitions, etc. Most of these groups try to influence the media into giving attention to these issues.

- Pressure groups help in **improving the quality of government**. Consultation with affected groups is the rational way to make decisions in a free society. It makes government more efficient by enhancing the quality of the decision making process - the information and advice provided by these groups helps to improve the quality of government policy and legislation.
- Freely operating pressure groups are essential to the effective functioning of liberal democracy.

They serve as a vital intermediary institutions between government and society;

They assist in the dispersal of political power;

They provide important counterweights to balance the concentration of power.

- Pressure groups enable few concerns and issues to reach the political agenda, thereby **facilitating social progress and preventing social stagnation**. For example, the women's and environmentalist movements.
- Pressure groups **increase social cohesion and political stability** by providing a 'safety-valve' outlet for individual and collective grievances and demands.
- Pressure groups complement the work of opposition political parties by exposing the bad policies and wrongdoings of the government. Pressure groups thereby **improve the accountability of decision makers** to electorates.
- Pressure groups help to educate people, compile data and provide specific information to policy makers, thus they work as an informal source of information. Active constructive participation of numerous groups in polity helps to reconcile general interest with individual group interests.

Shortcomings of Pressure Groups

- **Narrow selfish interests:** Unlike the pressure groups in the developed countries of the West, where these are invariably organised to safeguard economic, social, cultural interests, etc. in India these groups are organised around religious, regional and ethnic issues. Many a time factors of caste and religion eclipse the socioeconomic 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.
- **Misuse of power:** Instead of the pressure groups exerting influence on political process, they become tools and implements to subserve political interests.
- **Instability:** Most pressure groups do not have autonomous existence; they are unstable and lack commitment, their loyalties shift with political situations which threatens general welfare. They many a times resort to unconstitutional means like violence. Naxalite movement started in 1967 in West Bengal is one such example.
- **Propagating extremism:** Pressure groups can allow too much influence over the government from unelected extremist minority groups, which in turn could lead to unpopular consequences.

Conclusion

- Pressure groups are now considered as an indispensable and helpful 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 interests.

- Democratic politics has to be politics through consultation, through negotiation and some amount of bargaining is also involved. Thus, it is very essential for the government to consult these organised groups at the time of policy formulation and implementation.