PRESSURE GROUPS AND THEIR IMPACT ON GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

DERRADJI BELKHEIR
University of El-Shahid Hama Lakhdar - El Oued, Algeria
derradji-belkheir@univ-eloued.dz

Abstract
Pressure groups (lobby) are considered effective means of exerting influence against governments, adopting pressure as a tool to compel them meet their demands. They can be defined in various forms, be they ethnic or political groups that unite in voluntary institutions, described as a group of individuals bound by certain social relationships, coming together to achieve common goals they advocate for. Effective groups are those that strive to achieve common objectives, such as non-governmental organizations and lobbying companies. Accordingly, they seek to influence government policies without bearing governmental responsibility, enabling them to direct public policy without direct governance, extending beyond mere participation in governance to becoming the de facto rulers of the state, influencing the government decision-making process without any clear legal cover or designation.

Keywords: Pressure Groups; Decision-Making Processes; Public Policies.

Introduction:

Pressure groups represent a practical model for direct influence on governmental bodies and state institutions worldwide. They manipulate the course of political decisions and manage conflicts to align public authorities' decisions with the interests or ideas of specific social groups. Pressure groups are a sector and activity in contemporary political science, delving into research to identify the forces that confront and manage the governmental apparatus, thus representing and achieving their interests. The existence of a political system with its institutions and structures requires the plurality of different forces, both formal and informal, including pressure groups that seek their interests. These groups appear in systems that have enacted laws and regulations guaranteeing their right to assembly, organization, and defense of individuals' public freedoms. These groups play a prominent role in shaping public policy despite not acquiring the status of official actors in the governance system, yet their influence surpasses that of official actors.

Many recent studies, particularly in the field of political sociology, have highlighted the existence of pressure groups with independent interests in most modern societies. These groups can be beneficial for achieving the public good, but they can also be harmful to society, exerting influence on constitutional bodies within the state to achieve political, social, or economic goals related to the interests of their members by any means necessary. They are thus a collection of individuals who come together around specific goals or characteristics, seeking to exert desired influences on the behavior of decision-makers or authorities to achieve their goals. The degree and type of pressure they exert vary according to the group's capabilities, level of organization, scope of activity, and reach, as well as its social status, primarily linked to the diversity of its branches and the strength of its relationships.

Pressure groups serve as a channel through which they exercise their sovereignty and practice democracy directed solely at protecting their interests. The effectiveness of these groups depends on various factors, including the financial power they wield, which often facilitates their achievement of goals. Additionally, the sheer number of members, who carry significant weight in influencing decisions, along with effective organization and the ability to spread nationwide, contribute to their success. There are several considerations through which to analyze these relationships within these groups and their influential importance in the political decision-making process. Their penetration into

political systems and decision-making institutions renders them immensely important in governmental activities and directing public policy, thus dominating the scene in directly influencing the government decision-making process.

Upon the above-stated, the following question can be raised: To what extent do pressure groups contribute to influencing government decision-making?

To answer this question, we divided this topic into two sections: The first section relates to the nature of pressure groups, attempting to define and identify their types, characteristics, and functions. The second section addresses the methods of pressure and their impact on government decision-making. In answering this question, we relied on the analytical method, where we collected information from various sources and analyzed it to extract the results.

i.   Concept of Pressure Groups

Pressure groups are associated with the active role they play within the political system in influencing the decisions of authority from outside it, without appearing in the political arena as a clear actor. They do not seek to attain power as political parties do; rather, their aim is to align the decisions of this authority with the ideas and interests of the groups they represent by forming coalitions in the form of lobbies that influence political life. Particularly, when these groups possess financial capability, they transform into entities that seek to defend the interests of their members by influencing the authority and its decisions.

In this part, we will address two aspects. Firstly, we will define pressure groups and their characteristics. Secondly, we will delve into the types of pressure groups and their functions.

1-Definition of Pressure Groups

Groups are a collection of individuals tasked with influencing legislators or official authorities for a specific cause. (1) Pressure is an analogous to interest, it is an attempt to influence individuals, legislation, or any activity aimed at control. (2) Thus, linguistically, pressure groups are defined as organized entities comprising individuals with common interests, engaging in political, social, or economic activities to directly or indirectly influence decision-making authorities (3).

The concept of group refers to any coalition of individuals sharing common characteristics, often referred to as a social class, encompassing various traits such as age, educational background, social status, and common goals or shared interests.(4) In the political sense, the concept of Pressure entails attempting to influence decision-makers within the political system to achieve their objectives according to their interests, indicating that within these groups, the concept of pressure is more closely associated with political operations (5).

Thus, pressure groups are defined as organizations striving to achieve a common purpose through a specific method by utilizing their influence with decision-makers in the political system. These groups are not permanent entities but emerge when crystallizing their position regarding the intended purpose, and may disappear once it's achieved. They are small, organized factions within a larger group that influence its political course. (6) Moreover, they are recognized as organizations established to defend specific interests, exerting pressure on public authorities when necessary. Their objective is not to seize power but to obtain decisions that serve the interests of these organizations. (7)

2-Characteristics of Pressure Groups

Through the various definitions of pressure groups, we can discern their characteristics, which can be outlined as follows:

The presence of a group of individuals organized within a specific framework based on principles or a common set of interests. They possess influential power that expresses their needs and demands of their members, regardless of using violent means and irrespective of ideological affiliations (8).

Pressure groups work to influence the decision-making source, which is distributed between the legislative and executive branches of government, with their powers defined by their respective constitutions. Their focus lies in influencing the decision-making source (9).

Additionally, pressure groups operate to influence decision-makers without assuming responsibilities, as they are not political parties aiming to attain power.

3-Types and Functions of Pressure Groups

There are several classifications for pressure groups, depending on various considerations and criteria. They can be classified based on their organization, nature, scope of interest, objectives, or timing. Furthermore, they vary in terms of their functions. To go into details, we will first address the types of pressure groups, followed by an exploration of their functions.

3-1 Types of Pressure Groups

According to their nature, pressure groups can be classified into four types:

a. Political Interest Groups: These groups have pure political interests and are commonly referred to as lobbies, such as the Zionist lobby, which assists and protects Zionist interests.(10) They seek to establish continuous relationships with those in power and decision-makers by exerting continuous pressure through various forms to obtain privileges for their members.

b. Semi-Political Interest Groups: These groups include labor unions or business associations. Although their activities are not solely political, they cannot achieve their purposes without engaging in political activities.

c. Humanitarian and Charitable Interest Groups: These groups engage in activities related to human rights in general, including nature conservation associations and animal protection societies.

d. Professional Interest Groups: Their focus primarily lies in achieving the goals of individuals with a particular profession, such as bar associations and labor unions.(11)

According to their organization, they can be divided into two types:

a. Organized Interest Groups: These groups are structured and organized in their composition and membership, similar to political parties.

b. Unorganized Interest Groups: This is the predominant nature of most interest or pressure groups.

According to how long do they last, they are divided into two types:

a. Permanent Interest Groups: These groups express a permanent interest or goal, such as professional unions.

b. Temporary Interest Groups: These groups form to achieve a specific purpose or goal and disappear afterward, such as associations aiming to reduce prices of certain goods or advocate for a particular cause (12.)

According to the scope of interest, they are divided into two types:

a. Private Interest Groups: These groups focus on specific group interests, such as stamp collecting associations.

b. Public Interest Groups: These groups focus on public issues concerning the people, such as literacy promotion associations.

According to their objectives, they are divided into three types:

a. Principle or Program-Based Groups: These groups aim to achieve general, national, or nationalist goals, such as the European Union or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

b. Craft and Trade Groups: These are associated with specific goals, such as associations defending the rights of war victims or the elderly.

c. Groups with Subversive Goals: These rely on strikes, demonstrations, and rioting and lack organizational structure, with their activities predominantly characterized by spontaneity and violence.

According to allegiance, they are divided into two types:

a. National Interest Groups: These groups are bound to the nation, serving its interests and striving to serve the country's sons.

b. Foreign Interest Groups: These groups pledge allegiance to foreign entities, defending their interests and spending money for this purpose, such as the Zionist lobby in the United States, which serves Zionism and its entity in the occupied land and has no allegiance to America (13).[1]

3-2 Functions of Pressure Groups

The primary function of pressure groups is to gather the interests and demands of the groups they represent and present them to the authorities, working to achieve them. Additionally, they aim to gain public support to endorse the authorities' actions. These functions can be summarized as follows:

a- Acting as Alternatives to Political Parties: Pressure groups can serve as functional alternatives to political parties. These groups develop relationships with political parties to influence public policy in terms of their strength, audience size, and influence. They may also endorse preferred candidates from a specific political party and provide financial support. Thus, pressure groups can play a role as functional alternatives to political parties, such as labor unions, which express their demands by gathering workers' requests, recognized by the government as negotiating parties.(14)

b- Complementary Function: Pressure groups often exercise both overt and covert functions. Indirectly, they serve the existing system by regulating the means of demands. Sometimes, labor unions find themselves obliged to reach settlements on certain outstanding issues through strikes, leading to conflicts within these organizations, which view such integrative agreements as detrimental to their interests. (15)

c- Formulating Demands: This function bridges the gap between society and the political system, as pressure groups articulate their demands to political leaders who hold decision-making power. These demands can be explicit or mere slogans disseminated in the public opinion, either general or specific, or take the form of negotiation. The effectiveness of the results always depends on the approach adopted by pressure groups, as there is often a challenge in demonstrating the value of interests and translating them into political decisions (16).

ii.   Pressure Methods and Their Impact on Government Decision-Making

Pressure groups employ various methods and means to achieve their objectives, ranging from persuasion to coercion depending on the situation and necessity. They also infiltrate the decision-making centers in public authorities and rely on funding as a driving force for their operations. All of these factors make government decisions subject to the agendas of these groups and serve their core goals and interests. To delve deeper into this topic, we divided this section into two parts: the first part addresses the methods of pressure, while the second part discusses the impact of pressure groups on government decision-making.

1- Pressure Methods

Pressure groups use diverse means to achieve their objectives, aiming to gain control over the political, economic, and social decision-making centers in the country. The most important methods used by pressure groups and influential forces range from persuasion, coercion, and funding as primary methods. Additionally, they exert pressure on the government and parliament while mobilizing public opinion.

1-1 Persuasion, Threat, and Funding

a- Persuasion:

Stakeholders use persuasion to gain loyalty and followership, convincing governments of their objectives through meetings, public gatherings, and various forms of media. They leverage their financial resources, expertise, and efforts to achieve their desired goals. These groups often enlist experienced individuals, such as retired judges, honest legislators, or former ministers, exploiting their good reputation for persuasion. They also influence government officials and parliament members by providing information, research, and studies, even if they are inaccurate. Additionally, they use trips, invitations for meetings, discussions, and persuasion.(17)

b- Threat:

One of the most significant methods of exerting pressure on official authorities is through threats, such as sending messages, telegrams, or conducting interviews with influential individuals. Threats can take various forms, including deprivation threats for parliament members who refuse future support, which may include punishments, crimes, violence, or creating financial and economic crises for governments. This can include inciting tax evasion, threatening to use strikes, mobilizing the streets, and organizing protest rallies.(18)

c- Funding:

Funding is a crucial method as companies and economic groups with substantial financial resources use it legally under the guise of aid or illegally through bribery, commissions, and gifts. They exploit the financial needs of some employees, as well as fund election campaigns for individual candidates and parties.

1-2 Pressuring the Government and Parliament and Mobilizing Public Opinion

a- Pressuring Government Authorities:

Pressure groups directly engage with relevant officials in the executive and administrative branches, starting from the head of state and ministers to senior officials. This is due to the importance of government authorities in issuing decisions, especially in economic and social aspects that concern various segments of society. These groups may seek to halt the implementation of a law, requesting the head of the executive authority not to approve it through messages and telegrams, or by urging the deletion or addition of certain provisions.(19)

b- Influencing Parliament Members:

Pressure groups establish relationships with the legislative authority through its members, committees, or leadership in hopes of obtaining laws that serve their interests, amending them, or abolishing them. This is done through hosting parties, offering gifts and bribes. In some cases, these groups support certain candidates and finance their election campaigns in hopes of their victory and benefiting from them.(20)

c- Mobilizing Public Opinion:

Governments rely on public support to maintain their position. Therefore, these pressure groups seek to mobilize and direct public opinion in ways that serve their interests. They issue newsletters, distribute them, hold seminars, lectures, and use various media to explain their perspective.

2- Influence of Pressure Groups on Government Decision-Making

Pressure groups, with the help of their supporters, work to influence the government in shaping its decisions and making its policies and projects serve the interests of these groups. We will detail this in the first subsection by examining how pressure groups accept government decisions, and in the second subsection, we will explore their impact through opposing government decisions.

2-1 Impact of Pressure Groups When Accepting Government Decisions

The government's acceptance, in general, and the institution that issued the decision in particular, of this kind of criticism and societal opposition does not imply weakness or blind submission to societal pressures. Nor should it lead to institutional stubbornness. Instead, it should push towards more professionalism, scientific methodology, and administrative professionalism when issuing subsequent government decisions and directives. Furthermore, it is possible to reconsider the decision itself in light of criticism and dissatisfaction, which may lead to its modification, refinement, or even its complete cancellation.

Here, pressure groups play a role in supporting the government in pursuing its decisions (21), using all their political, economic, and media means, which gives those decisions popular support. Because the more there is agreement between the government and pressure groups, the more these groups ensure the realization of their interests. In return, the government ensures stability, gains public satisfaction, and consequently stays in power. Additionally, this pushes towards more calmness, deliberation, balance, and research when issuing further decisions and directives, especially those that touch upon sensitive areas in societal mentality and national public opinion.(22)

2-2 Impact of Pressure Groups When Opposing Government Decisions

All officials in any country should bear in mind that their decisions, orientations, and policies are primarily aimed at serving the public interest. A large part of government actions is based on safeguarding the interests of society and serving it. Therefore, one of the most important criteria for achieving the public interest from those decisions is based on public satisfaction. However, it is important to note that public satisfaction often depends on emotional and individual inclinations. Here, the official role comes in balancing and regulating these interests between the interests of society and the government, which may conflict at times. This is a common occurrence in all countries worldwide.

Moreover, with technological advancements, the information revolution, and the development of communication and virtual communication means, individuals, especially the poorer classes, have gained the right to express their opinions and ideas. They have also gained access to tools and sources of power capable of creating a balance between the government's media power and public opinion on the other side. Pressure groups exploit these elements to pressure the government and act as opposition as long as these decisions do not serve their interests and goals. They monitor the government's work, follow its political practices, expose its mistakes to public opinion, criticize the actions of government members, embarrass them politically by following them in parliament, and encourage citizens to join them in the pressure system through various media, social, and financial means to force the government to submit to them or cancel those decisions or modify them to align with the goals of those groups.(23)

Additionally, it's crucial to note that internal or national government decisions are no longer entirely independent, as often claimed. This is evident when we know that all countries are bound by various international institutions, agreements, and treaties. This necessitates aligning internal decisions with those international legal obligations, such as in trade agreements and human rights-related agreements. Consequently, modern governments face a plethora of societal pressures resulting from the transformation of some soft power tools into the hands of individuals and civil society institutions. This is in addition to the comprehensive shift in ideas, interests, and opposition media methods against the government by many categories within the state itself, especially political, economic, and religious groups, as well as the pressures exerted from abroad or due to those international legal commitments, resulting in the expansion of the circle of influence on government decisions, especially those that intersect with the interests of individuals and powerful groups inside and outside the country.(24)

Conclusion:

In our study, we aimed to shed light on the dimensions, nature, types, and means of pressure groups. These groups influence political decisions without being under a clear umbrella. Pressure groups may comprise members from conflicting parties, but their most important characteristic is that they do not seek to assume power or governance in the country. Instead, they aim to achieve one goal: meeting their demands or realizing their interests by any means necessary.

The relationship between pressure groups and power-holders is governed solely by interest. If otherwise, various pressure groups resort to diverse methods of dealing with authority. Negotiation and persuasion may be used as dialogue methods in addressing lingering problems. However, if they collide with an uncooperative or unsupportive government, their methods may shift towards financial threats by buying loyalties or removing opponents from sensitive political positions and securing loyalists. This can be accomplished through various media and stirring public opinion by spreading rumors and chaos.

Today, pressure groups are among the most important and influential entities due to their influence, organizational capabilities, financial resources, active membership, and wide media coverage. They have become the driving force in shaping the course of public policy in countries, harnessing sufficient awareness of the strengths and weaknesses within the state and society. They employ all of this in their favor in dealing with power centers, avoiding confrontation and attempting to win their goodwill to achieve their interests.

Among the most important findings:

- Pressure groups are often unclear and do not appear in an organized form.
- Pressure groups are interconnected based on goals and interests.
- Pressure groups have the ability to influence government decisions and policies.
- Pressure groups constitute a soft power capable of mobilizing public opinion positively or negatively according to their plans and goals.

As for the suggestions we recommend in this regard:

- Enhance transparency: Governments can increase the level of transparency in their decisions and actions.
- Promote public awareness: Political education and active citizenship can play a vital role in reducing the impact of pressure groups.
- Encourage interaction and dialogue: Governments can encourage more interaction with citizens and non-governmental organizations. Open and constructive dialogue can contribute to a better understanding of people's needs and opinions.
- Review regulations and policies: There may be old regulations or policies that need reevaluation. Some regulations may be ineffective or lacking in fairness, and reviewing and updating them can reduce the impact of pressure groups.
- Strengthen democratic principles: Reinforcing genuine democratic principles can reduce the impact of illegitimate interventions. Ensuring the neutrality of the judiciary, freedom of the press, and human rights can limit undue pressure on the government.
- Enhance partnerships between sectors: Governments can build partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental organizations to work together on solving economic and social problems. Cooperation among different parties can contribute to achieving balance in the decision-making process.

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