
TWELVE FACTORS DETERMINING THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL INTEREST GROUPS

1. The degree of necessity of the group or organization's services and resources to public officials: The more government needs the group or organization the greater its leverage will be. This can be in the form of needing votes, information, campaign funds, support on other issues. Plus, the more dependent on a group, organization or sector of society, the more these entities can use sanctions against government to achieve its goals, through strikes, withholding cooperation or campaign contributions, etc. This government need is a major source of business power in the states.

2. Members of Interest Groups-policy maker relations: The closeness and trust between members of an advocacy team and policy makers, as well as public officials' dependence on advocacy groups for information, campaign contributions, etc. The more skillful the advocate the more successful the group is likely to be. It is building up and solidifying personal contacts, trust and credibility that is often the key to successful advocacy.

3. Whether the group's focus is primarily defensive or promotional: Because it is much easier to stop than to promote a policy, the so-called "advantage of the defense" gives groups like business when, for example, they work to prevent tax hikes and regulations, an advantage over groups such as environmentalists, that often attempt to promote policies.

4. The extent and strength of group opposition: Obviously, the greater the opposition to a group or its cause the more difficult it will be to achieve its goals. Some groups are natural political enemies, such as environmentalists and developers, and in many cases business and labor. Other interests such as dentists and those advocating for stricter laws against domestic violence and child abuse, have little opposition.

5. Legitimacy of the group and its demands—how these are perceived by the public and public officials: A group must be perceived as politically legitimate, but there are degrees of legitimacy and the acceptance of groups and their demands. Most groups advocating violence are seen as illegitimate. Others, like doctors and groups advocating against drunk drivers, are given high levels of legitimacy. Still others, like labor unions, are viewed as legitimate, but their demands may sometimes be viewed unfavorably.

6. Group financial resources: While money by itself does not translate into political power, it is the most liquid of all resources and can be used to hire staff, make campaign contributions, mount media and grassroots campaigns, and so on.

7. Political, organizational and managerial skill of group leaders:

Advocacy campaigns in any society require organizational and managerial skill—the ability to orient group resources for political purposes—plus knowledge of the political process, particularly its power points. Having group leaders with these skills is an essential element of success.

8. Political cohesiveness of the membership: The more united the group the more likely it is to have its issue dealt with. Public officials are unlikely to take action if they see a group is divided. An essential element of group leadership is ensuring this cohesiveness.

9. Size and geographical distribution of group membership: Generally, the larger and more geographically spread is the membership of an organization in a governmental jurisdiction, the more pressure it can bring to bear on more public officials and especially elected officials.

10. Potential for the group to enter into coalitions with other groups: When a group is able to join forces with another group or groups, it can potentially overcome its deficiencies in one or more of the previous eight factors.

11. Extent of group autonomy in political strategizing: While the flexibility to join or leave a coalition can enhance a group's power, the less a group is in charge of strategy and tactics, its potential for achieving its goals may be compromised or not addressed at all. This is why many businesses and local governments have begun to advocate on their own in recent years, while often remaining members of their broader trade or local government association.

12. Timing and the political climate: There are times when it is politically propitious to act on an issue and times when it is not. Making judgments on this is part of the skill of group leaders. For example, unless a group has a major power base, it is not politically wise to propose major increases in funding for a program in times of declining government revenues or cutbacks in state spending.

Source: Developed by the authors from the original Hrebenar-Thomas study and its five up-dates.