

SECTION 1

## THE NATURE OF INTEREST GROUPS

### TEXT SUMMARY

An **interest group** is a private organization whose members share views. It tries to promote its interests by influencing **public policy**, or the goals a government sets and the actions it takes to meet them. Interest groups work at the federal, State, and local levels.

Interest groups and political parties both exist for political purposes, but their goals differ. Political parties care mostly about *who* takes part in government, while interest groups care mostly about *what* the government does—especially on certain issues.

The role of interest groups in politics is controversial. In their favor, they stimulate interest in **public affairs**, or issues that concern the people at large. They offer people a chance to participate in

politics and find others who may not live near them but who do share their views. They often provide useful information to the government, while also keeping close tabs on it. Since they compete with one another, interest groups often limit each other's extremes.

Interest groups are criticized for having more influence than they deserve based on the worth of their causes or the number of people they represent. It can be hard to tell how many people an interest group represents. Some interest groups do not represent the views of all the people for whom they claim to speak. Finally, some interest groups do engage in dishonest behavior.

### THE BIG IDEA

**Interest groups offer Americans an important means of influencing U.S. public policy.**

### GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Are Interest Groups Good or Bad?

Interest Groups	
Positives	Negatives
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>help stimulate interest in public affairs</li> <li>are based on shared views, not shared geography</li> <li>provide information to government</li> <li>keep tabs on government</li> <li>can limit each other's extremes</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>can have more influence than they deserve</li> <li>difficult to figure out how many people they represent</li> <li>some do not represent the views of all the people for whom they claim to speak</li> <li>some engage in dishonest behavior</li> </ol>

The political power of interest groups is viewed both positively and negatively.

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

- What is an interest group?
- Chart Skills** Name two positive contributions of interest groups.