**INTEREST GROUP SYSTEMS**

*Types and Purposes*

**Linkage:** the state and society are connected to each other through political participation. Participation flows through political parties, *interest groups*, social movements and patron-client relations that convey demands from below to the state.

Interest groups develop when people with common interests organize for the purpose of influencing policy makers. Interest groups engage in many of the same activities as political parties: raising money, mobilizing voters, and campaigning for candidates in order to influence policy. But unlike political parties, interest groups do not nominate candidates to run for office.

The **United States** is among the countries that have what is called a *pluralist interest group system*. These are characterized by large numbers of interest groups that compete with each other for members and influence. *They have the following characteristics:*

- **Groups have to compete for members in order to survive and expand.** They all want to increase their market share and recruit members who can provide them with the money, staff, resources, and significance they need to be influential. This is especially important because pluralist interest groups enjoy no special relationship with the government. They do not participate in policy making but have to exert influence from the outside through lobbying policy makers.

- **Pluralist interest groups tend to capture a smaller share of their potential market because some people choose not to join.** They are less encompassing.

- **They tend to be decentralized.** They lack the authority to sanction their members and tell them what to do. For example, the AFL-CIO cannot require its affiliated unions, such as the United Auto Workers or the Machinists union, to support the same bills and candidates it has endorsed.

Other countries such as **Sweden** have *corporatist interest group systems* in which there are fewer but larger interest groups.
• These systems are more encompassing.

• They recruit a higher percentage of those who are eligible to join because membership is often compulsory, not optional.

• They also enjoy a monopoly over their market, reducing competition for members.

• They are more hierarchically organized with the authority to sanction their member’s behavior and they are often invited to participate in policy making by the state as insiders, not outsiders, as occurs with their pluralist counterparts.

• They are invited to negotiate directly with the government in return for complying with any agreement that is reached.

Corporatist and pluralist interest groups behave differently with policy making consequences. The pluralist interest group market is crowded with competing groups, which undermines their willingness to cooperate with each other. Internally, a lack of centralized control impedes efforts to operate efficiently. Both sap their collective strength. Corporatist interest groups, on the other hand, don’t have to outbid other groups to attract members. Hierarchy within corporatist interest groups is able to resolve problems of internal coordination that plague their pluralist counterparts. Finally, their encompassing memberships require them to synthesize the diverse interests of their members and articulate only the most general interest among them. This broadens the appeal of these groups. All of these qualities permit corporatist interest groups to unify and appeal to broader interests as well as use their limited resources more efficiently. As instruments of power and influence, fewer and bigger really is better.

Why are interest groups more plentiful in the US (pluralist system) than in Sweden (corporatist)?

>>State structures (federalism; divided government sharing powers) are more conducive to pressure group influence. The more power is dispersed within the state, the more opportunities for interests to apply pressure on it. Sweden (unitary state) has a more centralized policy-making structure.