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Q8(c)

What are pressure groups? Discuss their role in decision-making in democracy

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Politics and Society

Politics and Society: Nation, democracy and citizenship; Political parties, pressure groups, social and political elite; Regionalism and decentralization of politics; Secularization.

Core demand of the question

- Define pressure groups as organised interests that influence decisions without seeking office as their main aim
- **Discuss their role in Indian democracy:** information, aggregation, veto, and distortion
- Use unions, business chambers, caste sabhas, farm unions, NGOs
- Keep decision-making as the focus

Revision summary

Pressure groups influence public decisions without mainly seeking office.

Unions, chambers, caste sabhas, farm unions and NGOs are Indian types.

They aggregate demands, supply expertise and sometimes veto legislation.

The Rudolphs read **caste associations** as modern interest groups.

Informal poor are under-organised, so influence stays unequal.

Introduction

Pressure groups are organised bodies that try to **shape public decisions** without, as their main goal, forming the government. Trade unions, FICCI and CII, **caste associations**, farmers' unions, student bodies, and issue NGOs are Indian examples. In a democracy they can carry information and votes to decision-makers. They can also **capture** the state for a narrow interest. Their role is therefore double.

Body

What they do in decision-making

- **They aggregate demands:** a chamber drafts a tax memo; a union bargains a wage board; a caste mahasabha bargains on reservation lists. They supply expertise that bureaucracies lack. They veto: the 2020-21 farm unions blocked three laws; business lobbies slow labour reform; environmental groups delay projects through courts. **Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph** treated caste sabhas as modern pressure groups-the modernity of tradition. Panchayati Raj opened a local target for these groups.

Parties need them for funds and crowds; that is how they enter cabinets without being parties. Media campaigns and PIL are Indian tools of pressure.

Democratic gain and loss

- **Gain:** minorities, workers and farmers can be heard between elections. **Ambedkarite** organisations keep atrocity law on the agenda. Women's groups pushed Vishaka and POSH. Loss: moneyed groups out-shout slum dwellers; khaps pressure on marriage; communal organisations pressure policing. Unorganised informal labour has weak groups, so decision-making hears the mill union or the chamber more than the migrant.

- **Role in democracy: necessary intermediaries, unequal in power, sometimes a parallel government.** Regulation of lobbying, inner democracy in unions, and RTI are attempts to civilise that role. Without pressure groups, representative democracy is only a periodic vote. With only the strongest groups, it is a market of influence.

Decision-making in India also runs through **courts and regulators**. Environmental groups, industry chambers and campus unions all use PIL and public hearings. That is pressure as legal mobilisation. It can expand democracy (information, delay of harmful projects) or stall redistribution (endless litigation by those who can pay lawyers). The role is still decision-shaping, not office-seeking.

The 73rd Amendment, POSH committees, and farm-law repeal are all decision sites where pressure groups were visible. That is the empirical core of the answer.

Flow diagram

Pressure groups -> Demands expertise votes
 Demands expertise votes -> State decisions
 Unequal resources -> Skewed influence
 Skewed influence -> State decisions

Conclusion

Pressure groups are organised interests that seek to influence decisions rather than to sit as the cabinet. In Indian democracy they deepen voice and also skew it toward those who can organise money, caste and logistics. Their role in decision-making is indispensable and structurally unequal.

Facts & figures

FICCI / CII

Peak business associations that routinely consult on economic legislation.

Farm unions 2020-21

Pressure that produced repeal of Union farm laws.

Caste associations

Sabhas and samajs that lobby on reservation, temples and marriage-modern pressure on a traditional base.