



CHAPTER 12

Civil Society, Interest Groups, and the Media

The chapter opens with an account of the recent prominence of civil society in political commentary and analysis. This arises from its connection with largely peaceful revolutions in countries like the Philippines and the former communist states of Eastern Europe. Non-governmental organizations, which are increasingly important for students of politics, are also regarded as key representatives of civil society. However, the term *civil society* is itself controversial; it is difficult to translate into some languages, and in Islamic states it is often associated with the concept of Westernization.

The chapter proceeds to discuss interest groups, which represent a major component of civil society. The diversity of such groups is demonstrated: they can either focus on single issues, or embrace the whole policy spectrum; they can represent the selfish interests of members, or work for humanitarian causes; they might address policy questions (like poverty) that affect every country, or they might organize around an issue that affects a specific locality. In some states, the most powerful interest groups have enjoyed very close relationships with government; this arrangement, known as “corporatism,” is critically analyzed.

The chapter also introduces the concept of infrapolitics and subaltern studies, which examine informal relations of power among non-elites and subordinated groups in society. The second section of the chapter discusses the influence of the media and new technologies such as the Internet. Various theories of media influence are discussed, and the increased use of new technologies for public participation is subjected to critical scrutiny. The chapter concludes with the question as to whether or not the increased use of new technologies is indicative of an emerging network society or network world.

Chapter Outline

- **Civil Society**
- **Interest Groups**
- **Modern Corporatism**
- **Infrapolitics and Subaltern Studies: The State Viewed from Below**
- **The Impact of the Media**
- **The Challenge of New Technologies**
- **Conclusion**

Key Terms

Anarchy	Interest group	Outsider groups
Authoritarian	International civil society	Perestroika
Civil society	Modern corporatism	Public space
Good governance	New technologies	Subaltern studies
Infrapolitics	Non-governmental organization (NGO)	
Insider groups		

Discussion Questions

1. What is civil society and why should we pay any attention to it? Does it work for the benefit of society? How or how not?
2. Do interest groups further or hinder politics in a democratic society? Do they serve to unite or divide a society? Use examples to explain your answer.
3. What are the traditional roles of the media in their relationship with the state? Is this role still important, or has it changed? How?
4. Some argue that the media reflect reality, while others argue that the media create reality. What do you think and why? What evidence supports or undermines your position?
5. Would the rise of an electronically mediated “direct democracy” be a good idea? Why or why not? How might it work?
6. Explain the proliferation of new technologies in politics. With your response, provide an example or two from this chapter.
7. Why are interest groups important to political participation?

Further Resources

- <http://front.moveon.org/>
Home page of moveon.org, one of the sites credited with the success of the 2008 Obama campaign due to its use of new Internet-based fundraising tactics
- <http://www.cnn.com/POLITICS/>
CNN Politics home page
- <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/index.html>
FOX News Politics home page
- <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/>
Home page for the Fraser Institute, a Calgary based right wing think tank
- <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/> Home page for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a left-wing think tank with its national headquarters in Ottawa
- <https://wikileaks.org/>
WikiLeaks is a controversial library of political documents and more and was founded by Julian Assange.
- <http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2016-05/general/dates.html>
Citizen Lab is affiliated with the University of Toronto and focuses on the intersection of Information Communication Technologies, human rights, and global security.
- <http://www.idlenomore.ca/>
Idle No More website. From the website you can see that there are still organized efforts.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets in the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Ken, K. (2015). *#IdleNoMore: And the Remaking of Canada*. Regina: University of Regina Press.
- Mandiberg, M., ed. (2012). *The Social Media Reader*. NY: New York University Press.