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Government and Political Institutions

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF PRESSURE GROUP**

To mount pressure is to conceive someone or to coerce a person to doing something. Pressure group is the formal or organized body with a common interest whose fundamental aim is to put pressure on any governmental institutions with the goal of influencing government policies and laws to its advantage. It is an association of a group of people with common interest who try to achieve their aim or interest by an influence in government. Pressure Groups promote its interest by regarding an issue and is referred to as **“The Fundamental Representative”.** This is the idea on which various pressure groups representing different sectors in the society based on their functions, usually done through their occupations or professions.

Pressure group according to **“Anifowose”** (1999) can be described as “interest groups, Lobby groups or even protest groups”Oyeleye(1998) claimed that pressure groups came into existence to complement enhance or even to protect the interest of their members or groups. However the concept of pressure group cannot be explained without the theory, that is according to **“Authur.F.Bentley”** who described pressure groups as “the basis of political life and the rejection of static abstraction”.

**The Aim of Pressure Group:** What the pressure groups seek to achieve is to ensure the government does their biddings. They put pressure through the right channels and means and are able to make the government listen to them. Also, these groups influence both public policy, administration and even go extra miles to determine political structures and forms of government. These groups could be religious, business orientated, gender-sensitive, economic or social among others.

**Examples of Pressure Group:** Some of pressure groups in Nigeria are: ASUU (Academic Staff Union For University), Afenifere, Oodua People’s Congress (representing the Yoruba tribe), Arewa Consultative Forum, Arewa People’s Congress (representing the Hausa tribe), Nigerian Bar Association of Nigeria (NBA), Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC).

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRESSURE GROUPS AND POLITICAL PARTIES.**

* Political parties seek to gain governmental powers while pressure groups aims at influencing political decisions rather than seeking political powers
* Political parties have a wide range of policies while the pressure groups narrow their goals
* Pressure groups are not accountable for their actions while the political parties are held accountable for all their actions

These differences however does not mean that the political parties and pressure groups do not have anything in common because they actually do. Pressure groups and political parties also relate or work hand-in-hand to achieve certain social changes.

Pressure groups is put in place to checkmate and make democracy better, also to compensate for the tyranny of majority of people, to treat the gaps in democratic process to inform debates, to encourage participations and to enhance good accountability. It can be noted that despite the pressure groups having their importance in the nation, there can be some downside which may be sometimes caused by their own selfish interests which will lead to pressure being mounted to alter the directions of the government decisions without considering the government’s limited resources.

**TYPES OF PRESSURE GROUPS**

* Interest Groups: This group is also seen as sectional groups, representing the people in the society. For instance, the trade Units- CBI (Confederation of British Industry) also known as the Voice of business in the country, and in Nigeria, Convention on Business Integration(CBI).
* Cause Groups: These groups are promotion groups that seek to promote causes like Charities and environmental groups. Any pressure groups that champions or represent social movement is also seen as “cause group” even the group lacks the formal structure. They are aimed at achieving a single objective, like protesting about the expansions of airports, seaports etc. An example of this type of group is the **“Amnesty International”** which campaigns for the need to end human right abuses.
* Insider and Outsider Groups: The insider groups are regularly consulted by the government. They have regular access to minister or legislators. Although, an insider group may have a high or low profile but their aim is still to have influence on government’s mission and visions. A good example is **“The Nigerian Bar Association”.** An outsider group on the other hand have no access to the government but have other ways to make impact. An example is **“the Animal Liberation Front”** which champions rights of animals. However, these groups change from time to time based on the party or government in power
* Anomic Groups: These groups have unpredictable actions and behaviors as they work based on the moment and situation in the society. They are not guided by any appropriate behavioral style and can act violently sometimes. Protests, rioting, strikes, revolution are some ways in which they mount pressure.
* Association Groups and Non-Associational Groups: The associational groups are usually registered with appropriate authorities in the state or country. These groups have their registered offices, constitutions etc. The Non-Associational groups are without a formal organization. Their arrangement and gathering are by the virtue of kinship or family attachments ,social traditions etc.

**FUNCTIONS OF PRESSURE GROUPS**

1. Pressure groups serves as a link between the government and the people it governs
2. Pressure groups promotes public participation in the activities of the government
3. They serve as a source of information to the government.
4. Curtailing of Dictatorial Tendencies
5. Pressure groups champion the rights of the under-privileged, especially promotional pressure groups
6. Pressure groups are instrumental in mounting of pressure on government so that they can implement policies that are of benefit to the citizens
7. They adopt variety of strategies to achieve their goals including lobbying of elected officials, mediation advocacy, and direct political actions like organized protest.