

INTEREST GROUPS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND LEGAL MECHANISMS IN UZBEKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the role of interest groups in modern public administration and political processes, as well as the mechanisms through which they influence public policy formation and decision-making. Interest groups may influence the activities of public authorities through various forms, represent the interests of their members or particular social groups, and provide public institutions with expertise and relevant information in the development of public decisions. The study also examines the concept of lobbying as one of the institutional forms of interest representation. The experience of the United States and the European Union is compared with the existing legal mechanisms of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Particular attention is paid to the issues of balancing interests in public administration, transparency, public participation, and the prevention of conflicts of interest.

Keywords: Interest groups, public administration, political process, political influence, interest representation, lobbying, public participation, transparency, conflict of interest, public policy.

INTRODUCTION

Modern public administration is closely linked to the existence of diverse interests within society and their representation in public policy. Citizens, business entities, professional associations, non-governmental organizations, research centres, and other social groups seek to communicate their interests to public authorities and participate in the development of public decisions.

In political science, such groups are commonly studied as interest groups. Their principal characteristic is that they do not seek to obtain political power directly; rather, they aim to represent specific interests in public policy and administrative decision-making.

The activities of interest groups are significant for democratic governance in two respects. On the one hand, they can provide public authorities with information about the needs, problems, and proposals of different segments of society. On the other hand, if a particular group possesses substantially greater political or economic resources than others, there is a risk of disproportionate influence on public decisions.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), in its 2021 report *Lobbying in the 21st Century: Transparency, Integrity and Access*, notes that the influence of interest groups on public policy can improve the quality of policymaking by providing expertise, identifying needs, and presenting evidence. At the same time, the organisation

emphasises that undue or disproportionate influence may adversely affect the impartiality of public decisions and public trust in government institutions. [1]

Therefore, studying the participation of interest groups in political processes involves not only examining political influence but also addressing transparency, accountability, and the maintenance of a balance between competing interests in public administration.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Concept of Interest Groups and Their Role in Public Administration

An interest group is an association of individuals or organisations that share a common interest and seek to advance that interest by influencing public policy and government decisions.

Interest groups differ from political parties. While political parties generally seek to shape the composition of government and exercise political representation, interest groups tend to focus more specifically on promoting particular issues or interests.

Examples of such groups include business associations, professional organisations, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, environmental organisations, research centres, consumer organisations, and other similar entities.

Their participation in public administration can take several forms. These include submitting proposals to public authorities, providing expert opinions, participating in public consultations, expressing views on legislative proposals, drawing attention to particular issues through the mass media, and maintaining dialogue with government institutions.

Thus, interest groups can become important channels of communication and information exchange between the state and society.

2. Mechanisms Through Which Interest Groups Influence Political Decisions

Interest groups may influence public policy either directly or indirectly.

Direct forms of influence include meetings with public authorities and officials, formal proposals, expert opinions, comments on draft legislation, and other forms of institutional dialogue.

Indirect influence may be exercised through shaping public opinion, publishing research, and using mass media and digital platforms.

The development of digital technologies has made this process more complex. According to the OECD, contemporary mechanisms of influence are no longer limited to traditional meetings but also encompass social networks, non-governmental organisations, think tanks, and other information channels. [2]

In this context, the central issue is not whether influence exists, but how transparent, lawful, and accountable that influence is.

Interest groups can identify problems in particular sectors for public authorities, provide information about the practical consequences of existing regulations, and propose alternative

solutions. In this respect, they can serve as an additional source of expertise in the policymaking process.

3. Lobbying as an Institutional Form of Interest Representation

The concept of lobbying is particularly important when examining the activities of interest groups. Lobbying can be understood as the organised activities of interested parties aimed at influencing public policy, legislation, or administrative decisions.

The OECD regards lobbying as a means of influencing governments and providing them with information. Its 2021 study indicates that lobbying can serve as a mechanism through which interest groups communicate their expertise, legitimate needs, and supporting evidence to public authorities.

Accordingly, while interest groups constitute a broader concept, lobbying represents one of the specific organisational forms through which such groups or their representatives seek to influence government decisions.

At the same time, lobbying should not be equated with unlawful influence. The representation of legitimate interests, the provision of expert information to public authorities, and open dialogue can be normal mechanisms of democratic governance. Problems arise when interests are promoted covertly, conflicts of interest are concealed, or government decisions are influenced unlawfully.

4. The United States Experience: Interest Representation and Transparency

The United States is one of the countries with a historically significant experience in the legal regulation of interest groups and lobbying activities.

In the United States, the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 was enacted on 19 December 1995. Its principal objective was to ensure the disclosure of information concerning lobbying activities intended to influence decisions of the federal government. The Act established requirements for the registration and disclosure of information about lobbyists and their clients. [3]

An important aspect of this approach is that the activity of communicating interests to public authorities is not automatically regarded as unlawful. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the transparency of such activities and the public's ability to obtain information about the entities involved.

Another significant development was the enactment of the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 on 14 September 2007. This Act aimed to increase transparency in the legislative process, strengthen certain reporting requirements relating to lobbying activities, and reinforce certain restrictions governing relationships between public officials and entities representing particular interests. [4]

The United States experience demonstrates that, rather than prohibiting interest representation altogether, its transparency and accountability can be strengthened through specific legal mechanisms.

5. Interest Representation and Institutional Dialogue in the European Union

In the European Union, the Transparency Register is one of the important instruments used to facilitate the participation of interest groups in political processes.

According to official information published by the European Commission, the register provides information about organisations and interest representatives seeking to influence policymaking and legislative processes within the institutions of the European Union. It provides the public with information about the interests being promoted, the entities representing those interests and, where applicable, relevant financial information.

In the European Union, transparency regarding meetings between public institutions and interest representatives is also important. The European Commission uses mechanisms to publish information about meetings between Commissioners, their cabinets, senior management officials, and interest representatives. Under the applicable arrangements, registration in the Transparency Register is required for representatives participating in certain meetings concerning the development and implementation of policies or legislation. [5] This approach does not exclude dialogue between public authorities and interest groups. Instead, it seeks to make such dialogue visible and accessible to public scrutiny.

6. Legal Mechanisms for Interest Representation in Uzbekistan

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, it would be inaccurate to describe the participation of interest groups in public administration as being governed by a separate, dedicated law on interest groups or lobbying. Therefore, it is more appropriate to analyse this issue through the existing legal mechanisms governing public oversight, the development of regulatory legal acts, public participation, and conflicts of interest.

One important legal foundation is the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. O'RQ-474, "On Public Oversight," dated 12 April 2018. This law regulates relations associated with the exercise of public oversight over the activities of public authorities. Public oversight provides an institutional basis for interested citizens and civil society institutions to express their views and submit proposals concerning the activities of public authorities. [6]

Another important legal foundation is the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. O'RQ-682, "On Normative Legal Acts," dated 20 April 2021. This law regulates the processes of planning, drafting, reviewing, coordinating, adopting, and publishing normative legal acts. [7]

Preventing conflicts of interest is also particularly important in the context of the influence that interest groups may exert on government decisions. On 5 June 2024, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. O'RQ-931, "On Conflicts of Interest," was adopted. This law aims to identify and regulate potential conflicts between personal interests and official duties in public administration. It entered into force on 6 December 2024. [8]

These mechanisms do not directly regulate the activities of interest groups as a formal lobbying institution. Nevertheless, they provide an important institutional foundation for public participation, legal certainty, transparency, and the prevention of conflicts of interest in the development and adoption of government decisions.

7. A Comparative Analysis of Interest Group Activities

A comparative examination of the experiences of the United States, the European Union, and Uzbekistan demonstrates that mechanisms for communicating interests to public authorities develop differently under different political and legal conditions.

In the United States model, registration and disclosure mechanisms play an important role in ensuring the transparency of interest representation and lobbying activities. The Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 and the Honest Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007 represent key legal milestones in this area.

In the European Union, the Transparency Register provides public information about organisations representing interests, the interests they promote, and relevant financial information. In addition, certain meetings between the European Commission and interest representatives are subject to transparency requirements.

In Uzbekistan, the communication of interests to public authorities takes place within the framework of other legal mechanisms. Public oversight, the processes involved in drafting normative legal acts, and mechanisms for regulating conflicts of interest are particularly important in this regard.

Directly transferring one country's practices to another is not necessarily appropriate, since political institutions, legal traditions, and models of public administration differ. Nevertheless, several principles are important across all these approaches: transparency, accountability, the prevention of conflicts of interest, and the provision of lawful opportunities for interested parties to participate in political processes.

CONCLUSION

Interest groups have emerged as important participants in communication between the state and society in modern public administration. By conveying the needs of their members or particular social groups to public authorities, providing expert information, and communicating information about the practical consequences of political decisions, they can contribute to the policymaking process.

At the same time, the influence of interest groups on political processes must remain transparent and accountable. The excessive advantage enjoyed by certain groups with substantial resources over other interested parties may affect the balance of interests within political processes. Therefore, transparency, equal opportunities, and integrity are essential principles in interest representation.

International experience demonstrates that there is no single universal model for regulating institutional forms of interest representation. In the United States, mechanisms such as registration and information disclosure have been established. In the European Union, these include the Transparency Register and requirements for the transparency of certain meetings. In Uzbekistan, legal mechanisms concerning public oversight, the development of normative legal acts, and the prevention of conflicts of interest provide a basis for analysing this process. From this perspective, further improving the exchange of interests between the state and society in Uzbekistan requires continued attention to expanding practical opportunities for public participation, developing mechanisms for incorporating expert knowledge and the views of interested parties into the policymaking process, preventing conflicts of interest, and

ensuring transparency in decision-making. These remain important areas for both academic research and practical policy development.

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