Money and Influence

Trace how groups seek to shape elections and laws

SS24.USG.8 "Describe how special interest groups and political action committees develop, how they function, and how their campaign contributions affect state and national elections..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways groups try to shape a law, circle two ways they affect elections, and number the two court rulings. Use your marks to trace how influence can move from an election to a policy decision.

From Drug Prices to Election Ads

1. Voters concerned about drug costs organized through groups such as AARP. A special interest group forms when people join to press a common policy position. It can gather stories, meet with lawmakers, and ask members to contact elected officials. AARP supported the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, which authorized Medicare to negotiate prices for selected drugs. Pharmaceutical industry group PhRMA opposed that policy. These competing efforts show how groups seek access to lawmakers, but neither group's position alone explains the law's final wording.

2. Election spending offers another route to influence. A traditional political action committee, or PAC, pools eligible donors' money and can give limited amounts directly to candidates under federal law. Groups may establish PACs to back candidates who share their goals. In Buckley v. Valeo (1976), the Supreme Court upheld limits on direct contributions but rejected limits on independent election spending. In Citizens United v. FEC (2010), it ruled that corporations and unions may fund independent election messages, not direct contributions to candidates.

3. After Citizens United and a related appeals court ruling, super PACs could raise unlimited funds for ads independent of candidates. These ads can shape what voters hear in state and national races, while wealthy donors gain a louder voice. Super PACs cannot contribute directly to candidates or coordinate ads with campaigns. Electing allies may improve a group's policy prospects, but a bill still requires legislative votes. Compare lobbying records and proposed changes to a bill before claiming a group influenced its final text.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could AARP's members try to shape the drug-price policy without donating to candidates?

2. How do traditional PAC contributions differ from super PAC election spending?

3. What did each Supreme Court ruling in the passage preserve or permit?

4. Why does AARP's support not prove it caused the drug-price law? What evidence would help assess its influence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A state considers a law requiring ticket sellers to disclose fees before checkout. In four or five sentences, explain how a consumer group could form, lobby for the bill, and use a PAC or super PAC in an election; connect one Supreme Court ruling to its spending options and name evidence needed to assess its influence on the law.

ANSWER KEY

Money and Influence

GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways groups try to shape a law, circle two ways they affect elections, and number the two court rulings. Use your marks to trace how influence can move from an election to a policy decision. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could AARP's members try to shape the drug-price policy without donating to candidates?	**They could share their experiences, meet with lawmakers, or contact elected officials to support Medicare drug-price negotiation.**
2	How do traditional PAC contributions differ from super PAC election spending?	**Traditional PACs can give limited amounts directly to candidates. Super PACs can raise unlimited funds for independent ads but cannot contribute directly to candidates or coordinate ads with campaigns.**
3	What did each Supreme Court ruling in the passage preserve or permit?	**Buckley upheld limits on direct contributions but rejected limits on independent election spending. Citizens United permitted corporations and unions to fund independent election messages, not direct candidate contributions.**
4	Why does AARP's support not prove it caused the drug-price law? What evidence would help assess its influence?	**A law requires many votes and negotiations. Lobbying records and proposed bill changes could help show whether AARP influenced its final text.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Ticket buyers could form a group to push for fee disclosure. Members could testify at hearings and urge lawmakers to support the bill. They could create a super PAC that raises unlimited funds for independent ads supporting state candidates who favor disclosure. Citizens United protected independent election messages funded by corporations and unions, although a super PAC could not coordinate its ads with candidates. To assess the group's influence on the law, I would compare its testimony and proposed wording with bill revisions and lawmakers' statements.

Accept other passage-supported lobbying methods and evidence. For the open task, check that the spending method matches the stated court ruling and that the student does not treat support or spending alone as proof of policy influence.