How do pressure groups achieve success?

Insider status can be vital in the success of a pressure group. If political decision makers decide that it is to their advantage to consult with a pressure group then the group's influence will be guaranteed. As a result of their specialist knowledge, groups such as the British Medical Association (BMA), the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) or the National Farmers' Union (NFU) will all be called on by governments. Since the administrations of Tony Blair (1997–2007) all governments have been keen to advance the rights of gay people and so, it could be argued, groups such as the LGBT Foundation are also achieving insider status as vital sources of information.

Whether a pressure group can claim insider status can also be determined by political circumstances. In the 1970s, trade unions in Britain were so powerful that Jack Jones, the general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) was often called 'the most powerful man in Britain' for the influence he wielded with prime ministers. Given the growing significance of environmental issues, contemporary politicians have become more likely to consult environmental groups for specialist information. Friends of the Earth, for example, is now regularly contacted by the Scottish government on its environmental strategy. Michael Gove, as environment secretary, has also been congratulated by the chief executive of Friends of the Earth, Craig Bennett, 'for listening to the experts' when deciding to ban bee-harming pesticides.

Stretch and challenge

The smoking debate

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) was established in 1971 and its campaigns have achieved significant successes such as banning smoking in enclosed workplaces, pubs and restaurants, removing displays of tobacco from the point of sale and introducing plain packaging with explicit images of the harm that tobacco can do. These successes have been facilitated by research by the BMA on the risks of smoking and the support of Parliament for stronger restrictions. In 2014, for example, a ban on smoking in cars containing children passed the House of Commons by 376 to 107 votes.

ASH has been considerably more successful than its main adversary FOREST (Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking). What factors best explain the comparative success of ASH and the more limited success of FOREST?

The political bias of the government will also determine which pressure groups are able to claim insider status. Trade unions which contribute funds to the Labour Party will be more likely to exercise insider influence during a left-wing Labour government than during a Conservative government.

Conversely, pressure groups which represent big business, such as the Institute of Directors, or ones which emphasise small government, such as the Taxpayers' Alliance, will be more influential during a Conservative administration.

Wealthy pressure groups which seek to access decision-making bodies will run offices as close as possible to those points of access. Brussels and Strasbourg are therefore full of the offices of powerful lobbying firms which seek to influence EU policy, while in the UK powerful pressure groups will often base their offices in key points of access such as London. The independent decision-making power of the London mayor also means that London is a prime point of contact for pressure groups. The devolution of decision-making powers has further meant that groups such as Friends of the Earth and ASH run offices in Edinburgh and Cardiff. The CBI has offices in leading commercial centres across the UK.

Other pressure groups seek to influence government by taking their case directly to the public. This can be because, like Greenpeace, they are reluctant to engage too closely with government since this could

compromise their principles. It can also be because they do not have the necessary funds to directly lobby decision makers and so focus on mobilising support through real and online campaigns and high profile media events. Celebrity endorsement can provide an especially effective way of generating positive media coverage.

Social media provide new opportunities for pressure groups to engage with the public. Groups such as Amnesty International, Oxfam and Friends of the Earth all appreciate the importance of having a considerable internet influence since this is where people increasingly access and spread ideas. Facebook, Twitter and hashtag campaigns provide a valuable way of keeping the public informed of a pressure group's activities and its website will usually provide opportunities to donate and sign online petitions, as well as up-to-date information on getting involved in national and regional campaigns.

This way of mobilising public support has been called a 'clickocracy', since the internet enables the public to engage with pressure groups purely online. 38 Degrees, for example, was established in 2009 and provides a forum for its members to quickly choose and launch their own online campaigns. Its slogan is 'People, Power, Change' and it can focus public attention on local issues such as protecting green spaces or on national campaigns such as encouraging the government to introduce a drinks-container recycling scheme.

Some pressure groups can choose to engage in civil disobedience in order to achieve their aims. This is a risky strategy, but it can create immediate publicity and even give rise to so much disruption that the government decides to back down or negotiate. In 1867, riots in Hyde Park demanding the extension of the franchise quickened the pace of parliamentary reform. In March 1990, the extraordinary violence of the poll tax riots in Trafalgar Square further undermined an already weakened Margaret Thatcher, contributing to her resignation in November and to her successor, John Major, swiftly abandoning the tax.

Trade unions can, of course, deploy industrial action. The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) has, for example, called strikes in order to try to stop the introduction of driver-only operated trains which would jeopardise the jobs of conductors, as well as, the union argues, jeopardising passenger safety.

Why are some pressure groups more successful than others?

A useful mnemonic to understand the factors that contribute to pressure group success is RIPE:

- Resources
- Ideological compatibility with the government
- Popularity
- Expertise

A pressure group does not have to fulfil all of these criteria in order to be successful. However, it will have to demonstrate at least one of them if it is to achieve its objectives. For example, Migration Watch UK cultivated links with Theresa May's government because of their shared commitment to reducing immigration into the UK. The expertise of the BMA provides it with guaranteed insider status under any government, while the considerable resources of the Conservative and Labour Friends of Israel enable them to cultivate influence at Westminster.

However, if a pressure group does not fulfil any of these criteria then it is unlikely to be successful. Plane Stupid has opposed a third runway at Heathrow, and Stop HS2 opposes the new high-speed rail link between

Birmingham and London, but both have failed because they have not been able to persuade the government that they have a powerful enough case or significant enough support.

plane stupid

How do pressure groups achieve success?

The trouble with Referendums

More direct democracy? Not so fast. There's a reason it backfired in the United Kingdom.

By Kristi Lowe and Kelsi Suter (6/7/16)

After Britain's decision to leave the European Union via popular referendum last month (June 2016), political turmoil ensued. But don't let the near-collapse of the British government make you think governments will be dissuaded from using this form of supposedly direct democracy in future: Referendums are more popular than ever. In fact, Britain's is just the latest in a recent surge in Europe, and, despite its much-fretted-over results, it seems to have set the stage for even more to come: speculation has already begun that France, Italy, the Netherlands and others may soon follow suit.

It's easy to see why. Referendums, which bypass elected representatives by submitting a proposed law or public measure to a direct popular vote, let citizens vent their frustrations with the powerful elites that run their governments. Today, when large groups are complaining of exclusion from politics, and when frustration with immigration, globalization, perceived disenfranchisement and elitism have fuelled the rise of Donald Trump in the United States and nationalist groups across Europe, referendums are a particularly useful mechanism for politicians who want to make sure their people feel heard. Many leaders view them as a safety valve for populist anger.

But, in our experience working on referendum campaigns around the world with a major polling firm, we have learned that referendums are vulnerable to a number of serious flaws — flaws which call into question claims that referendums are a more direct form of democracy than other types of elections, and which should make governments think twice before offering them.

Here are a few important things to consider:

Confusion can hijack referendums

The irony of a referendum is that while it typically asks voters to check a simple "yes" or "no," it is actually one of the most complicated forms of voting: The policy issues at stake are complex; the wording of the question on the ballot is often technical; during the campaign, voters are often bombarded with information from political players and advocacy groups they have never hear of. There is a reason why "If you don't know, vote no" is a common slogan in these referendum campaigns.

At worst, this confusion allows voters to turn the question they are being asked into a different question they would prefer to answer. For instance, in the 2015 Greece referendum on the bailout package, the people had to vote on an extremely complex and technical question about public finance. Greek voters were perplexed about what would happen if they voted yes or no, and they were given just over a week to make a decision. Even with 61 percent voting against the bailout, many were unsure how to interpret the results. Was this a rejection of austerity, a rejection of European institutions, or did the complex ballot wording leave the meaning too open to voters' interpretation to say?

A June 7 constitutional referendum on gender equality in the Bahamas provides another example of confusion hijacking the vote. In this conservative, Christian country, rumors spread that voting "yes" could lead to same-sex marriage, even though the issues on the ballot were only about gender equality and its role in citizenship rights. By Election Day, many were not voting on whether they supported equal rights for men and women, but whether they supported same-sex marriage and LGBT rights. Ultimately, 79 percent voted against the gender non-discrimination bill.

Lower participation means they are often not truly democratic

Studies have shown that referendums usually inspire lower turnouts than general elections — and how much lower is hard for pollsters like us to predict. This means that despite their resemblance to direct democracy in action, referendum results often depend less on the true balance of public opinion and more on which side has the more energized supporters. If the idea is to let the people decide, the truth is that minority opinions can easily take the wheel. Politicians offering up referendums cannot assume that mainstream views will prevail.

In response to this problem, some countries require turnout thresholds in order to protect against minority views skewing results. But while this may solve that problem, these thresholds are also problematic — they are arbitrary, encourage nonparticipation for those who oppose a measure and can make interpreting results difficult. An April 2016 Italy referendum on offshore drilling and a February 2015 Slovakia referendum on banning same-sex marriage failed to drum up enough voters to pass; analysts will never know how many stayed home out of apathy, and how many out of strategy.

Referendums can shine a spotlight on fringe movements

Many smart referendum campaigns unite support across partisan lines, so as not to become a protest vote against the current government. The downside for governments is that this can leave room for fringe groups to take up opposition space and grab widespread attention. The recent referendum in the Netherlands, in which 61 percent voted against ratifying an association agreement with Ukraine, is a good example. Extreme or marginal figures like the far-right anti-Islam parliamentarian Geert Wilders, the Socialist Party and the satirical shock blog *GeenStijl* gained a mainstream following and media attention — and Wilders' party, the PVV, is topping opinion polls in the wake of Brexit. The Dutch government, which called for the referendum and supports the agreement, has been left in the unenviable position of negotiating a ratification deal (the referendum was non-binding) without majority support.

We saw many of these factors at work in the U.K.'s recent referendum. It was clear that confusion clouded the referendum process when many voters expressed regret over their votes. The core issues of leaving the European Union were obscured when the then UKIP leader Nigel Farage made populist anger around immigration the center of the Leave campaign, and when his campaign dubiously promised to send the £350 million a week it said was being sent to the EU to the National Health Service instead (a promise he has since walked back). The campaign went from being about a whole spate of complex issues to a few hot-button issues. One important way Brexit was different from these above rules for referendums, though, was that turnout was actually quite high.

None of this is to say that referendums are always pernicious. They can unite voters across political lines, and provide leaders a mandate for divisive issues. Ireland's 2015 same-sex marriage referendum — the first time a country adopted marriage equality by national referendum — was an inspiring and important milestone in the world's changing attitudes on the issue. The government decided to put the decision to the people, and instead of stoking negative rage, the public narrative was generally positive. Politicians from all major parties spoke eloquently about their own families and children — some even coming out themselves — and young people rang their grannies to discuss the vote.

But the Brexit outcome shows that politicians may want to think twice before turning to referendums as an easy solution for populist frustrations. Direct democracy is often anything but direct.

Kristi Lowe and Kelsi Suter are a vice president and senior associate, respectively, at Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, a global polling and campaign management consultancy.

1. **What is the core argument of this article?**

2. Identify and explain 3 issues with the use of referendums (use examples if you can)

3. What is your opinion on referendums? Are they a positive feature of our democracy?

Q2	Match the correct term to the description	Correct Term
A	An election system where the winning candidate has more votes than any other.	
B	A statement, often in a pamphlet, stating a party's policies if successfully elected.	
C	An election system where the votes cast directly relate to the seats gained.	
D	The legal authority for a winning party to carry out its policies following election success.	
E	Where two or more parties form a government.	

1. Election manifesto 2. Election mandate 3. Plurality 4.Coalition 5. Proportionate representation

Q3:	Fill in the missing words

Elections make a fundamental contribution to democratic _____. Because _____ democracy (a form of government in which political decisions are made directly by the entire body of citizens) is impractical in most modern societies, democratic government must be conducted through _____. Elections enable voters to select leaders and to hold them _____ for their performance in office.

Accountability can be undermined when elected leaders do not seem to care whether they are re-elected or when one party or is so _____ that there is effectively no choice for voters among alternative candidates, parties, or policies. Nevertheless, the possibility of controlling leaders by requiring them to submit to regular and periodic elections helps to solve the problem of succession in _____ and thus contributes to the continuation of democracy. Moreover, where the electoral process is _____ and forces candidates or parties to expose their records and future plans to popular scrutiny, elections serve as forums for the discussion of public issues. Elections thus provide political education for citizens and ensure the _____ of democratic governments to the will of the people.

Elections also reinforce the stability and legitimacy of the political community; elections link citizens to each other and thereby reinforce community. As a result, elections help to facilitate social and political integration.

Finally, elections can help people to feel important; participation in an election may reinforce their _____and self-respect. Voting gives people an opportunity to have their say and, through expressing _____, to satisfy their need to feel a sense of belonging. Even non-voting i.e. _____ satisfies the need of some people to express their alienation from the political community. For precisely these reasons, the long battle for the right to vote and the demand for equality in electoral participation can be viewed as the manifestation of a profound human craving for personal fulfilment.

Adapted from: https://www.britannica.com/topic/election-political-science/Functions-of-elections

Select from: dominant competitive representatives abstention governance leadership responsiveness accountable direct self-esteem partisanship

Task 1 - Identify the arguments for and against

Task 2 - Answer the essay below

Evaluate the view that 16 and 17 year olds in the UK should have the right to vote. You must consider this view and the alternative to this view in a balanced way.

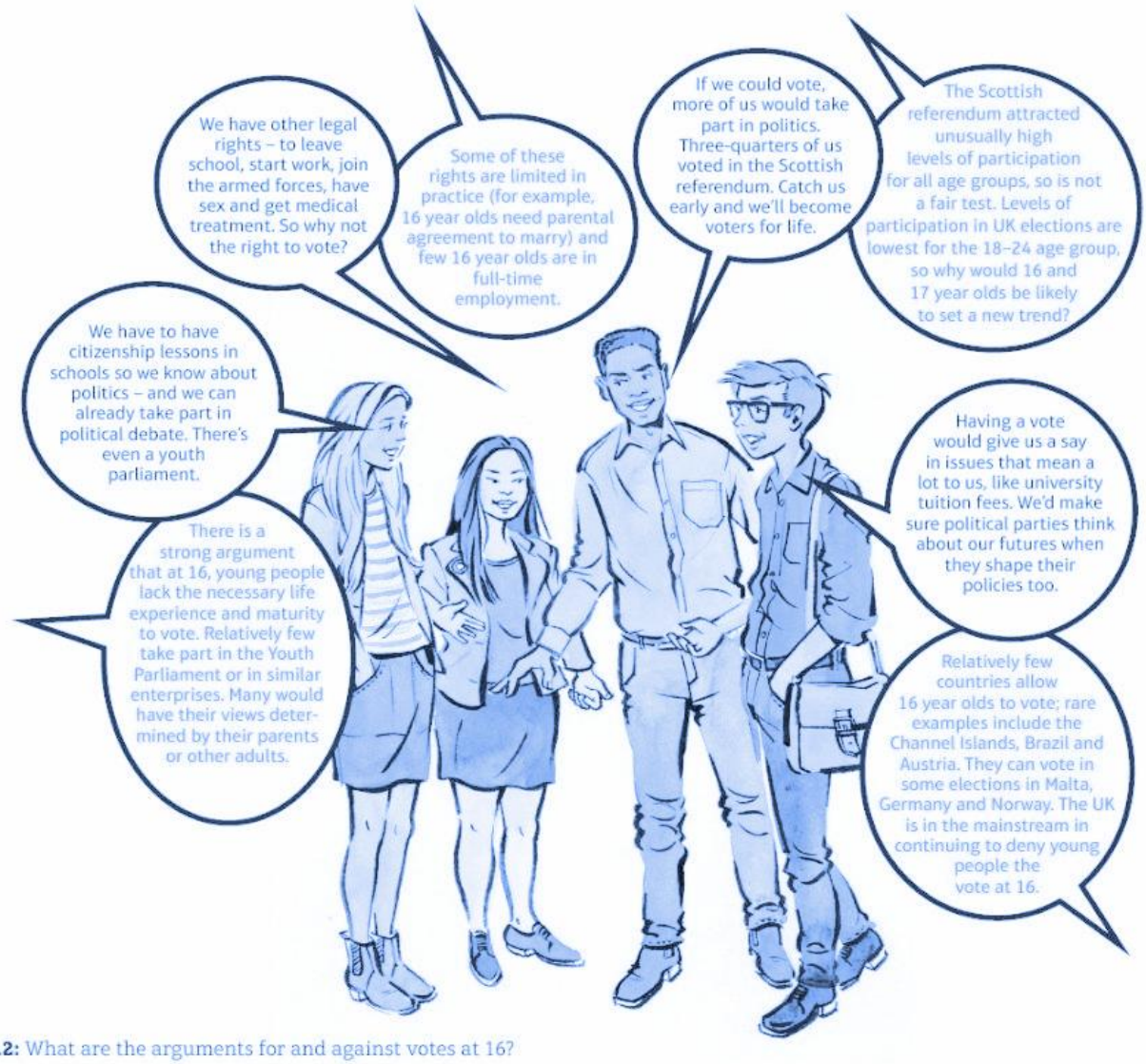

Figure 2.2: What are the arguments for and against votes at 16?