

INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT

HOW CAN YOU INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT?

Individually?

- Contact MP or MLA
- Write letters to civil servants (run day-to-day operations of govt)
- Blog
- Call radio show

In a group?

- **Pressure group**: share interest; organized to influence govt policy
- Some are institutionalized like: Assembly of First Nations
- Some are issue-oriented like a group trying to install a traffic light or stop construction at a certain West Van high school...

EXERTING MORE INFLUENCE

- **LOBBYISTS** – people paid to try to influence key decision makers like **bureaucrats** (non-elected govt officials) in the **public service** (govt administrators) or politicians
 - Often former high-ranking members of the public service with influential connections

Big Question: What's the **danger**? Is it **democratic**?

-insiders can persuade govt to put in place policies that are not necessarily in the public interest

-if pressure groups, which represent minority rights are too successful, it puts democracy at risk because...

...the wishes of the majority may not be heard

THE COURTS

- Interest groups and individuals will use the courts to influence govt and effect change
- Courts must interpret laws w/i context of Constitution and Charter
- Courts can only strike down laws, can't replace them – only govt can do that

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

- Traditional media – gives chance for politicians and political commentators to get their message out – **brand recognition**
 - Politicians also get feedback from citizens
 - Media can also frame an issue by focusing on what generates the most public interest
 - **spin doctors** – coach candidates on what to say (**talking points**) and make sure they look good
- Social media – blogs, Facebook, means more people are involved in the conversation

POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff

What is the message of the cartoonist?
How effective are attack ads?
Why might politicians use negative ads instead of positive ones?

[Here's an NDP ad on the Conservatives](#)



CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

- **The Big Question:** What if you feel the actions of the govt are unethical or undemocratic? Is it ever acceptable to break the law as a way of protesting government action?

Civil Disobedience: intentionally breaking laws which protesting laws one considers unjust.

Can you think of any great moral leaders who exercised this practice?

Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela

Principles of Civil Disobedience

- 1. Should not involve violence**
- 2. Should be directed against laws that are seriously harmful**
- 3. Willingness to face punishment to show strength in one's beliefs.**