1. **Evaluate the influence of pressure groups on the political system.**

**You should refer to pressure groups in Scotland, the UK, or both in your answer.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Pressure groups that are effective* | *Pressure groups that are less effective* |
| Pressure groups are non-governmental organisations who try to influence government policy. Insider pressure groups are ones that have a close working relationship with the Government and often have expertise that the Government rely on when setting policy or considering changes to laws – e.g. the British Medical Association (BMA) -respected and knowledgeable health professionals – were invited before and gave evidence to UK Health Select Committee on dangers of passive smoking when Govt were considering a ban. The BMA recommended a smoking ban and the UK Government then banned smoking in public places in 2006. The fact that the Government not only consulted with the BMA, but acted upon their advice is a clear demonstration of their influence.  | Outsider groups are ones that Government does not consult closely with, either because they are a protest group not interested in a close working relationship with government, or they cannot offer the Government expert information – e.g. Fathers 4 Justice, a fathers’ rights organisation, do not ‘have the ear’ of government and so often resort to ‘direct’ and sometimes illegal action – e.g. scaling Buckingham Palace as publicity stunt to gain media attention and throwing purple powder at then PM Tony Blair during 2004 PMQs. These tactics may generate publicity, but they are unlikely to lead to influencing policy as they can turn the media, public and Government against the group if they see them as immature and wasting police time and taxpayers’ money. They have so far failed to force significant changes in the law. |
| PGs more successful when they have media support. E.g. In February 2014 the Guardian newspaper backed a petition by the group ‘Equality Now’ who campaign against violence to women, urging the then Education Minister Michael Gove to take action against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). As a result of the petition, which attracted 250,000 signatures, Gove promised to write to all schools reminding them to raise awareness of the issue and to remind schools of their duty to be pro-active in protecting school girls from this practice. Gove also agreed to consider how FGM can be taught in schools in an age-appropriate way. Comparing this successful campaign with the less successful Fathers 4 Justice campaign points to a clear conclusion; generating media publicity is not enough, it has to be positive media publicity. People do not necessarily have to join organised pressure groups to influence. A loose coalition of similarly minded groups or large collections of individuals can influence so long as their views coincide with media agreement. In 2015, following the publication of a picture of a young Syrian boy called Aylan Kurdi washed up drowned on a beach in Turkey after his family had attempted to reach Greece, the mood of the UK public turned more sympathetic to refugees and even usually right wing, anti immigrant newspapers like the Sun urged the Government to take action. Over 400,000 Brits signed a petition urging the Prime Minister to accept more refugees into Britain, and days later he announced Britain would take in up to 20,000 more refugees from refugee camps in Syria by 2020. This example shows that the UK political system can be open to influence, but the circumstances must all align.  | Smaller, less well-resourced and less privileged groups cannot influence in the same way larger, well resourced and privileged groups can –e.g. Republic campaign for abolition of monarchy in the UK, but at time of Queen’s diamond jubilee celebrations in June 2012, which were positively covered by BBC, a Guardian poll show record popularity for monarchy – 69% said Britain would not be better off without a monarchy. No immediate plans to abolish the monarchy so Republic unsuccessful. At time of Queen’s Jubilee, Republic themselves claimed to have just 25,000 members. The Government know this does not represent significant numbers of voters so do not feel that they have to accommodate or listen to their views.  |
| Large, well-resourced, well-organised and privileged groups – e.g. Confederation of British Industry (CBI), an insider group, represents over 200,000 UK businesses and are often courted by Government. Prime Ministers and Chancellors often attend CBI meetings and dinners. CBI campaign for business friendly policies such as lower corporation taxes and Chancellor George Osborne’s 2015 budget lowered corporation tax to 18% by 2020 perhaps as a result of CBI influence. It has been lowered every year since 2010 even though the UK already has the lowest rate in the G20, showing the power of the CBI. If it wasn’t they may threaten to take their businesses out of the CBI, so the Govt feel they must listen to them.   | Overall, clearly not all pressure groups influence the political system. Large membership obviously helps, but it is not a necessary precondition for a successful pressure group. More important is insider or privileged status, as evidenced by the BMA and CBI, both courted by the Govt as a result of their respected status and financial power respectively. A final important point to make is that pressure group influence is largely dependent on the Government of the day. Trade unions campaigning for stronger workers’ rights have historically enjoyed close ties with the Labour party, but have found more right wing Conservative Governments ideologically unsympathetic to their cause, and so their influence is directly linked to and may change with who is in power.  |