

Chapter Summary

Public Opinion and Government

Lesson 1 *Forming Public Opinion*

- Public opinion, or strong opinion that is shared by many people, influences how public officials act. Public opinion determines how effectively the president can carry out his or her programs.
- Public opinion is not just one point of view. Different groups have different points of view.
- Factors that affect people's opinions include their personal experiences, age, gender, race, income, and occupation.
- Opinions can be shaped by what people read in newspapers and on the Internet and by what they see on television and hear from interest groups.
- Public opinion is described in terms of direction (positive or negative), intensity (strength of opinion), and stability (whether people will change their minds).
- Public opinion is measured with polls, or surveys that ask people about particular issues or a particular public official. Good polls ask fair and unbiased questions and include a diverse group of people.

Lesson 2 *The Mass Media*

- Most Americans get news from print or electronic mass media.
- Most media outlets are private businesses and cover news that will attract the greatest number of listeners. The stories the media choose to focus on can shape the public agenda.
- Politicians use the media to test public reaction to their ideas, and the media use politicians as sources of news stories.
- Mass media play a watchdog role by monitoring government and exposing corruption and wrongdoing.
- The government can classify certain information, making it off-limits to reporters.
- The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects freedom of the press and prohibits censorship. It is illegal, however, to publish false information that will harm someone's reputation (libel).

Chapter Summary



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Public Opinion and Government

Lesson 2 *The Mass Media, Cont.*

- Some states have shield laws that protect reporters' sources by allowing them to be kept secret.
- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates broadcast media.

Lesson 3 *Interest Groups and Lobbying*

- The First Amendment gives people the right to join interest groups.
- Interest groups are made up of people who share a common cause or characteristic.
- Some private interest groups have common economic or business interests; others may be concerned about a particular issue.
- Public-interest groups work to benefit certain large segments of society.
- Some interest groups try to influence the decisions of government leaders by supporting certain candidates. Many form political action committees (PACs) to raise money for the candidates they support.
- Other interest groups try to affect public policy by bringing cases to court or by lobbying lawmakers.
- Interest groups communicate with the public to shape public opinion. They can provide useful information, but citizens should be aware that the information interest groups provide is often biased.
- Interest groups and lobbyists are regulated by federal, state, and local law. Regulations include limits on campaign contributions, required disclosure of the names of contributors, and a waiting period before lawmakers who leave office can become lobbyists.