**Public Opinion**

Politicians and government officials at all levels pay close attention to public opinion because they know that public support is necessary to stay in office and achieve their goals.

I. Forming Public Opinion

A. Public Opinion includes the ideas and attitudes that most people hold about elected

officials, candidates, government and political issues.

1. Shapes the decisions of every president

a. They need support of the people in order to carry out their programs

b. Also need support of congress, congress will support if people support

2. Understanding public opinion allows Presidents to time the people

a. people are ready for the ideas he/she is proposing

3. Public opinion of Americans is NOT uniform

a. different groups hold different views about policies

i.e. gay rights, abortion, military spending

B. Where does Public Opinion come from?

**Why are government officials interested in public opinion?**

II. Components of Public Opinion

1. Direction: positive or negative
   1. Are people for or against spending more money on national defense?
   2. Do people support or oppose a cut in taxes?
2. Intensity
   1. Strength of opinion on a given issue
      1. when people have strong feelings they are willing to act upon them by voting for or against a candidate.
3. Stability
   1. How firmly people hold their views
      1. people’s opinions are less likely to change when they have a firm belief about a topic.

**Why is public opinion on political candidates considered unstable?**

III. How do we measure public opinion?

1. Looking at election results
   1. not the most accurate way to measure public opinion
      1. vote for candidate for a variety of reasons
2. Public opinion poll – survey
   1. most Presidents have a specialist – pollster
      1. job is to conduct polls regularly

IV. How are polls conducted?

1. Random samples
   1. people chosen at random from the entire country
      1. well constructed sample will reflect the characteristics of the entire population
2. Carefully worded questions
   1. Idea is to create fair and unbiased questions
      1. Do you favor cutting taxes if it means letting poor people go hungry?
3. Poll and democracy
   1. Some people argue that polls support democracy
      1. allows officials to know when people change their opinions about issues
   2. Critics argue that elected officials are more concerned about the public’s opinion than doing their job

**\*People who organize to influence public opinion about a particular issue have formed what?**

**\*In polling what are random factors?**

**Mass Media**

In modern society, the mass media play a huge effect on the people. The media helps form public opinion, helps inform the public of the goings on in government, and keeps watch over the government to ensure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities.

I. Types of Mass Media

\*The mass media include both print and electronic media. Types of these include: newspapers, magazines, books, news letters, radio, TV, movies, and the internet.

II. The Media’s Impact on Politics & Government

\*\*\* How is the Media protected and why should the media be protected?

The media is protected by the first amendment. With the first amendment, freedom of the press, is vital to the country to ensure that the media can keep the public safe and free from governmental abuses. It must remain protected to ensure a continuing of society and **help secure the blessings of liberty** as herd in the Preamble to the Constitution.

**Interest Groups**

Citizens join together in various kinds of interest groups in order to pool their skills, resources, and knowledge to influence those decisions made by government officials.

1. Types of Interest Groups
   1. Economic Interest Groups: An organization that supports economic interests.

Examples:Tobacco Institute, US Chamber of Commerce

* 1. Other Interest Groups: Various ethnic, age or gender organizations.

Examples: NAACP, NOW, AARP,

* 1. Public Interest Groups: organizations that support causes that affect the lives of Americans in general.

Examples: Common Cause, League of Women Voters

1. Influencing Government
2. Techniques of Interest Groups – Propaganda Types

All interest groups want to influence government and increase their membership. They use the mass media to help spread their idea, and spread propaganda to help influence public opinion.

* 1. Endorsements: having a well known and liked person support a candidate.
  2. Stacked Cards: presenting only one side of the argument and telling all that is either good or bad about a candidate.
  3. Name Calling: giving and opponent an unpleasant label.
  4. Glittering Generality: a statement that sounds good but is truly meaningless.
  5. Symbols: having symbols in their commercials for appearances sake – like subliminal advertising.
  6. Just Plain Folks: showing that a candidate is simply a ‘normal person’ like everyone else
  7. The Bandwagon: showing that ‘everyone loves candidate A, so should you!’

1. Regulation of Interest Groups

The US Constitution guarantees Americans the right to participate in interest groups, both the federal and state governments may pass laws regulating their activities.

* 1. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971: limits the amount of money PACs may contribute to a candidate’s election for national office.
  2. The Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act: requires that lobbyists must register with the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Secretary of the Senate.
  3. Lobbyists are required to disclose who hired them, how much they are paid, and how they spend money related to their work. States have passed similar laws.
  4. These laws are not very effective because the law does not provide any means of enforcement.
  5. There is a waiting period for any former official to become a lobbyist in most states.