

The Political System

Section 1



MAIN IDEA

Political leaders and interest groups find many ways to shape public opinion and influence the beliefs of American citizens.

Key Terms

public opinion total of the opinions held concerning a particular issue

mass media forms of communication that transmit information to large numbers of people

propaganda ideas that are spread to influence people

poll survey intended to measure public opinion

Academic Vocabulary

influence to change, or have an effect on

factor a cause

Section Summary

PUBLIC OPINION AND HOW IT IS SHAPED

The opinions of voters influence how government officials act and work because these officials are employed by the people. If voters are unhappy, they will not re-hire a leader during the next election cycle. Because people hold diverse opinions regarding issues of public interest, political leaders often respond to the majority opinion known as **public opinion** or the total of opinions held concerning a particular issue.

People's opinions are influenced by many factors, including family, friends, experiences, mass media, and propaganda. **Mass media** includes books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet. These forms of communication provide information to large numbers of people. Consumers must understand the difference between fact and opinion when using mass media as a

Circle the factors that influence people's opinions regarding issues of public interest.

Section 1, *continued*

source. They must make sure that the information is truthful and reliable before they form opinions.

Some people use the mass media to spread **propaganda**, or information that is intended to influence people to buy something, believe something, or act in a certain way. If propaganda is concealed, makers present information as fact without revealing sources. If propaganda is revealed, makers acknowledge to consumers their intent to influence. In such cases, makers reveal who is financing the message.

How might consumers protect themselves from concealed propaganda?

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

There are six propaganda techniques. In a testimonial, a famous person supports a product, idea, or person. Someone using the bandwagon technique suggests that a product, idea, or person is popular and trendy. A speaker may use name calling by putting a negative label on an opposing product, idea, or person. A speaker may also use glittering generalities, or words that are positive but meaningless, such as, “I stand for freedom.” Speakers may use a plain-folks appeal to suggest that they share commonalities with consumers or voters. Finally, a speaker may use card stacking or an approach that presents only one side of an issue.

Underline the six propaganda techniques.

MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

To find out about voters’ opinions, government leaders and mass media conduct **polls** by asking questions of the public. They try to get a sample that represents the public’s opinion on an issue.

Why is it important for pollsters to interview people who represent the public?

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Synthesizing Choose an issue important in your school. Design a poll to find out what people in school think about this issue. What questions will you ask to define people’s opinions? Whom will you poll to get a representative sample?

Section 1, *continued*

DIRECTIONS Look at each set of terms below. On the line provided, write the letter of the term that does not relate to the others.

- _____ 1. a. newspaper
b. Internet
c. mass media
d. bandwagon
- _____ 2. a. propaganda
b. testimonial
c. magazine
d. card stacking
- _____ 3. a. survey
b. poll
c. name calling
d. public opinion

DIRECTIONS Write **T** or **F** on the line to tell whether each statement is true or false.

- _____ 4. Public opinion is influenced by mass media and propaganda.
- _____ 5. Public opinion is measured by factors.
- _____ 6. Propaganda includes plain-folks appeals, radio, and television.
- _____ 7. Mass media includes magazines, card stacking, and name calling.
- _____ 8. To be accurate, a poll must be based on a representative sample.