

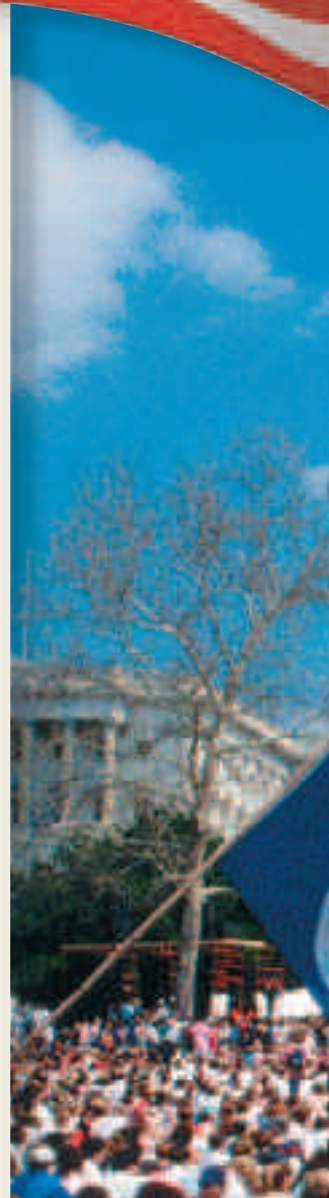
# Influencing Government

## ★ CITIZENSHIP AND YOU ★

In America, many different groups of people hold many different viewpoints. Some groups form to try to persuade government officials to support their views. These groups are exercising the important rights of freedom of speech and assembly. Find out what issues are most important to local environmentalists. Investigate an issue and form your own opinion about it. Contact a group that supports your opinion to see how you can help.



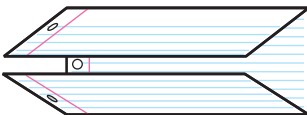
To learn more about interest groups and public opinion, view the **Democracy in Action** video lesson 18: Interest Groups and Public Opinion.



### FOLDABLES™ Study Organizer

**Summarizing Information Study Foldable** Make this foldable to help you take notes on groups, organizations, and institutions that influence our government.

**Step 1** Fold a sheet of paper into thirds from top to bottom.



**Step 2** Turn the paper horizontally, unfold, and label the three columns as shown.

INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT		
Public Opinion	Mass Media	Interest Groups

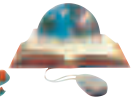
**Reading and Writing** Take notes as you read the chapter. Place your notes under the heads of the appropriate columns.

Americans voice their concerns at an Earth Day demonstration. ▶





**CIVICS**  
*Online*



**Chapter Overview** Visit the *Civics Today* Web site at [civ.glencoe.com](http://civ.glencoe.com) and click on **Chapter Overviews—Chapter 11** to preview chapter information.



**CLICK HERE**



**CONTENTS**



# Public Opinion

## GUIDE TO READING

### Main Idea

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.

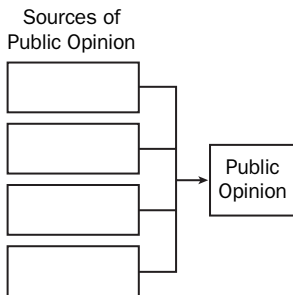
### Key Terms

public opinion, mass media, interest group, public opinion poll, pollster

### Reading Strategy

#### Analyzing Information

As you read, complete a graphic organizer like the one below by explaining the sources of public opinion.



### Read to Learn

- Why is public opinion important to politicians and government officials?
- How is public opinion formed?



## Americans in Action

One man's legacy is to be remembered as an "American public opinion statistician." When George H. Gallup founded the American Institute of Public Opinion in 1935, he probably had little idea that his now-famous Gallup Poll would be so widely recognized in our culture. Today the Gallup Organization is the world's largest management consulting firm. However, the Gallup Poll is most closely associated with public opinion surveys, especially those associated with presidential elections. It is perhaps difficult to determine whether Gallup's polls measure public opinion or shape public opinion.



George Gallup

## Forming Public Opinion

**Public opinion** includes the ideas and attitudes that most people hold about elected officials, candidates, government, and political issues. Public opinion plays a key role in a democracy.

For example, public opinion helps shape the decisions of every president. Presidents know they need the support of the public to carry out their programs. They also need the support of Congress. They are more likely to have this support if their public popularity is high.

Understanding public opinion can also help presidents time their decisions so they are most effective. Successful presidents have a good sense of when the public is ready for a new idea and when it is not. Franklin D. Roosevelt expressed this idea when he said, "I cannot go any faster than the people will let me."

The public opinion of Americans is not uniform, though. In fact, most Americans agree on very few issues. On any given issue, different groups of the "public" often hold different viewpoints. For example, some Americans support increasing the nation's military forces, while others strongly disagree and wish to decrease military spending. Between these two positions are many shades of opinions. Enough people must hold a particular opinion, however, to make government officials listen to them.



Where does public opinion come from? Why do people often hold widely differing opinions about a particular issue or government action?

## Personal Background

People's backgrounds and life experiences have a major influence on their opinions. Age, gender, income, race, religion, occupation, and place of residence play important roles. For example, a young, wealthy person who lives in a big city may have very different opinions about the government's role in providing social services than might a poor and elderly person who lives in a small town.

## The Mass Media

A medium is a mechanism of communication. (The plural form of the word is "media.") A letter you send to a friend, for example, is a private medium of communication between the two of you. Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, recordings, movies, and books are called the **mass media** because they communicate broadly to masses of people.

The mass media have a major influence on public opinion, providing powerful images

and political information that directly affect people's attitudes. For example, broadcasts of a protest rally in the nation's capital or the aftermath of a terrorist bombing can help shape viewers' opinions. The issues and events that the media cover and the way they cover them play a strong part in affecting public opinion.

## Public Officials

Political leaders and public officials may also strongly influence public opinion. When voters elect people to office, they are indicating that they trust those officials and rely on their opinions. Public officials state their views in speeches, news conferences, television appearances, and newspaper and magazine articles. In doing so, they hope to persuade as many people as possible to support their positions.

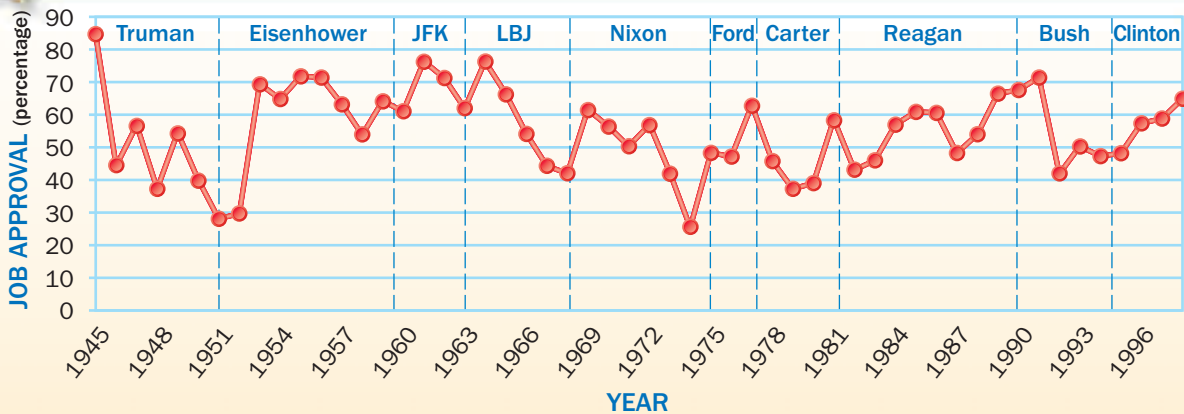
## Interest Groups

People who share a point of view about an issue sometimes unite to promote their beliefs. They form what is called an **interest group**. Interest groups work at influencing public opinion by trying to persuade people—including public officials—toward their point of view. For instance,



**Expressing Views** In these demonstrations, groups of Americans express their views about animal rights and Medicare. **Why do people unite to promote their beliefs?**

## Gallup Poll: Presidential Job Approval, 1945–1998



Source: The Gallup Organization, 2002.

### Analyzing Graphs

This line graph summarizes the results of 50 years of Gallup polls that asked the question “Do you approve or disapprove of the way (the president) is handling his job as president?” Which president on the chart won the highest public approval ratings?

groups that try to protect animals from harm make people aware of the treatment of animals used for laboratory testing and for making fur coats. Such groups hope to change people’s attitudes about buying products tested on animals or wearing fur coats.

**Reading Check** **Describing** Why are government officials interested in public opinion?

## Components of Public Opinion

Political scientists and public opinion experts often describe public opinion in terms of three features: direction, intensity, and stability. Here is what they mean.

### Direction

One key question is whether public opinion on any given topic is positive or negative. For example, are people for or against spending more money on national defense? Do people support or oppose a cut in taxes? On most topics, public opinion is

mixed, with some people expressing positive opinions, and other people holding negative opinions.

### Intensity

This refers to the strength of opinion on a given issue. Generally, Americans do not have intense opinions about most political topics. When they do have strong feelings, however, many are often willing to act upon them by voting for or against a candidate, working in an election campaign, or even participating in demonstrations.

### Stability

Experts explain that the stability of public opinion—meaning how firmly people hold their views—may differ greatly from issue to issue. People’s opinions are less likely to change when they have a firm belief about a topic. For example, most people’s opinions about civil rights are more stable than are their opinions about political candidates. In many campaigns, especially for

president, voters change their minds many times before Election Day. Thus, public opinion on candidates is relatively unstable.

**Reading Check** **Explaining** Why is public opinion on political candidates considered unstable?

## Measuring Public Opinion

How do political leaders, interest groups, and others find out what the public's opinion is on an issue? One way to measure public opinion is by looking at election results. If voters elect a particular candidate to office, presumably many of them agree with the candidate's ideas and proposals. Measuring public opinion by looking at election results is not always reliable, though. People vote for particular candidates for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they liked how a candidate looked, or they voted a straight ticket. Election results show only a broad measure of public opinion.

A more accurate measure is to ask individuals to answer questions in a survey, or a **public opinion poll**. Today hundreds of organizations conduct public opinion polls. Every major elected official uses polls to closely monitor public opinion. Most presidents, for example, have a specialist—a **pollster**—whose job is to conduct polls regularly. The pollster measures the president's popularity or public attitudes toward a White House proposal, such as a possible tax increase.

## Random Samples

Modern polling organizations have made a science out of taking polls. Pollsters usually question a group of people selected at random from all over the United States. Such a sample, often of about 1,500 people, will usually include both men and women of nearly all races, incomes, ages,

and viewpoints. A well-constructed sample will reflect the characteristics of the entire population so that it can present a reasonably accurate picture of public opinion.

To find out what people really think, pollsters must be careful how they word their questions. By changing the wording of the questions, pollsters can manipulate the process to get nearly any answers they want. For example, the question “Do you

## STREETLAW™ The Law and You

### Commission on Violent Video Games

A video game called “Death” has just been released. It contains cutting-edge technology and popular music, and many stores have run out of copies to sell because it is in such high demand.



Two groups of citizens have waged campaigns to ban violent video games like “Death.” There are also two groups that do not want the government to make the sale of these games illegal. The issue has raised considerable public interest, and the government has established a commission to consider and decide how to deal with the issue. The following groups have been invited to give their input at a public meeting of the government commissioners: Group A: Concerned Parents, Group B: Women Against Violence, Group C: Artists for the First Amendment, Group D: Businesses Against Government Interference.

### ★ BE AN ACTIVE CITIZEN ★

Select five people in the class to be the government commissioners, who will decide how they will run the meeting. Divide the rest of the class into the four groups above. Each group should give a three-minute presentation to the commission. After the commissioners have heard all the arguments, they should take a vote and explain their decision.

favor cutting taxes?” might produce one kind of answer from a person. “Do you favor cutting taxes if it means letting poor people go hungry?” might make the same person respond differently. When they are considering poll results, thoughtful citizens, as well as legislators, should ask themselves whether the questions were fair and unbiased.

## Polls and Democracy

Some people believe that public-opinion polling supports democracy. Polling, they argue, allows officeholders to keep in touch with citizens’ changing ideas about issues. With polls, officials do not have to wait until the next election to see if the people approve or disapprove of government policies.

Critics of polling, however, claim it makes our elected officials more concerned with following the public rather than exercising political leadership. Many people also worry that polls are distorting elections. The media conduct polls constantly during campaigns so they can report who is

ahead. Critics argue that these polls treat an election like a horse race, ignoring the candidates’ views on issues to concentrate on who is winning at the moment. Furthermore, polls may discourage people from voting. If they show one candidate far ahead of another, some people may decide not to bother voting because they think the election has already been won or lost.

The Framers of the Constitution sought to create a representative democracy that provided for popular rule, but also insulated government leaders from the shifting whims of public opinion. Research has shown that the Framers succeeded. Our government is responsive to public opinion—to the wishes of the people. However, public opinion is not the only influence on public policy. Interest groups, political parties, the mass media, other institutions of government, and individuals also shape public policy.

### Reading Check

#### Explaining

Why is measuring public opinion by using election results considered unreliable?

## SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

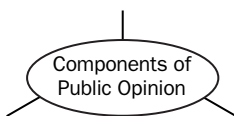
**1. Key Terms** Define the following terms and use them correctly in complete sentences: **public opinion**, **mass media**, **interest group**, **public opinion poll**, **pollster**.

#### Reviewing Main Ideas

- 2. Identify** People who organize to influence public opinion about a particular issue have formed what?
- 3. Describe** In polling, what are random samples? Why must pollsters carefully create the questions they ask?

### Critical Thinking

- 4. Making Judgments** Do you think political polling supports or distorts democracy? Explain your opinion.
- 5. Summarizing Information** In a graphic organizer like the one below, describe the features or components of public opinion.



### Analyzing Visuals

- 6. Compare** Review the line graph on page 260. Which president enjoyed greater public approval, Truman or Eisenhower? Which president received the lowest approval ratings?

### ★ BE AN ACTIVE CITIZEN ★

- 7. Survey** Select an issue of importance to you and develop four or five polling questions about it. Conduct a poll of your classmates using the questions that you developed. Tally the results.



# Landmark Supreme Court Case Studies

## Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier



A student holds up the Hazelwood school paper.

### Background of the Case

Hazelwood East High School near St. Louis, Missouri, sponsored a student newspaper as part of its journalism classes. Before each issue went to the printer, the journalism teacher submitted the pages to Principal Robert Reynolds for review.

Reynolds objected to two articles he read in the pages for an issue. One article discussed three pregnant students. The other described a certain student's experience with divorcing parents. Although actual names were not used, Reynolds felt readers could easily identify the featured individuals. Reynolds cancelled the two pages on which the articles appeared.

Kathy Kuhlmeier and two other students who worked on the newspaper sued the school. They claimed their First Amendment rights had been denied.

### The Decision

Relying on the Supreme Court's earlier *Tinker* decision, a lower court upheld Kuhlmeier's claim. On January 8, 1988, however, the Supreme Court

**The Supreme Court's 1969 ruling in *Tinker v. Des Moines* affirmed students' First Amendment rights to freedom of expression in public schools (see the *Tinker* decision in Chapter 4, page 108). How far did those rights extend?**

reversed this ruling. The Court did not overturn *Tinker*. Instead it drew a sharp line between individual expression—as in the wearing of armbands in *Tinker*—and the content of a school-sponsored newspaper. Justice Byron R. White wrote for the 6–3 majority:

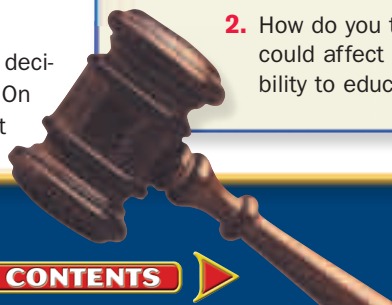
*A school must be able to set high standards for the student speech that is disseminated [distributed] under its [sponsorship] . . . and may refuse to disseminate student speech that does not meet those standards.*

### Why It Matters

Although students still have some First Amendment protections, the *Hazelwood* decision brought on cries of censorship among advocates of free speech and student interest groups. The Student Press Law Center reports that a number of schools, fearing lawsuits, have done away with student newspapers. Schools have also applied the *Hazelwood* decision to prevent the publication of student yearbooks, stop stage performances, and censor the content of Internet Web pages.

### Analyzing the Court Decision

1. What distinction did the Court draw between the free-speech issues in *Tinker* and *Hazelwood*?
2. How do you think *Hazelwood* could affect a school's responsibility to educate?





# The Mass Media

## GUIDE TO READING

### Main Idea

The mass media—both print and electronic—play a vital role in politics and government in the United States, linking the people to their elected officials.

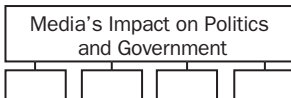
### Key Terms

print media, electronic media, public agenda, leak, prior restraint, libel

### Reading Strategy

#### Organizing Information

As you read, note the impact of the media on politics and government by completing a graphic organizer like the one below.



### Read to Learn

- What are the types of mass media?
- How do the media influence politics and government?



## Americans in Action

“I purposely went to vote early in the day, before the news programs started telling me who was winning.” Florida resident Lora Axtell was certain of her vote. Her husband Fred, on the other hand, was undecided and wanted to see how the returns were coming in. The Axtells live in one of Florida’s nine counties that are in the central time zone. After hearing the network news anchors analyze the returns from polls in the eastern time zone, Fred went to vote. It seemed that Al Gore was running well ahead, so Fred cast his vote for Ralph Nader. Gore didn’t seem to need his vote, and by voting for Nader, Fred felt he was making a statement. Fred was upset to discover, many hours later, that the networks had called the election prematurely. Perhaps Al Gore had really needed his vote after all.



Election 2000

## Types of Media

In modern America the mass media play an important role in influencing politics and government. They also form a link between the people and elected officials.

**Print media** consist of newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and books. The **electronic media** are radio, television, and the Internet. In the United States, most media outlets are private businesses, run to make a profit. For that reason, media managers often decide what news to run based on what will attract the most viewers, listeners, or readers. The larger the audience, the more money the media can charge for advertising.

Television has become the most important medium for American politics at every level. Ninety-eight percent of American homes have a TV. People have come to rely on TV for news and political information.

More than 70 percent of adults read newspapers, spending an average of about three and a half hours a week on them. Newspapers—and weekly newsmagazines—provide far deeper coverage of current events than does television.

The Internet allows people to get their news and ideas electronically whenever they wish. Internet users can get much more information than is possible from brief radio and television reports.

**Reading Check** **Defining** What does the print media include?

## The Media's Impact on Politics and Government

It is hard to imagine modern politics without the mass media. The media have a major impact on public opinion, on the public agenda, on campaigns and elections, and on how politicians perform.



## Setting the Public Agenda

Countless problems and issues compete for the government's attention. The ones that receive the most time, money, and effort from government leaders make up what is often called the **public agenda**. The media have great influence on which problems governments consider important. When the media publicize a problem, such as pollution, people begin to worry about it and to expect that government officials will deal with the problem. The media have the power to define some issues as problems while others go unnoticed.

## Candidates and Elections

The modern media, especially television, are making it possible for some people to run for office who might never have done so in an earlier time. Previously candidates

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**TV and Leaders** The first televised presidential debates occurred in 1960. They pitted a campaign-weary Richard Nixon against a youthful and witty John F. Kennedy. Kennedy won the election. After the terrorist attacks in 2001, President Bush appeared on national TV and calmly reassured the public. **Why do you think a government leader's manner on TV is important to public opinion?**





**From Star to Politician** Former President Ronald Reagan (above) and Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura (right) were movie and television celebrities before entering the world of politics. **How does TV help former celebrities during campaigns for elections?**

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were usually experienced politicians who had spent many years working their way up through their political party. Today sports and show business celebrities with little or no political experience can quickly move into major political positions.

## Elected Officials

Journalists and politicians have a complicated relationship. They need one another, yet they often clash. One presidential assistant explained it this way: “Politicians live—and sometimes die—by the press. The press lives by politicians.”

Elected officials want the media to show them as hardworking and effective leaders. They also rely on the media to communicate information to the public about government activities and decisions. With the help of professional media assistants called press secretaries, they hold news conferences, give interviews, and stage media events such as a visit to a new housing project or to the site of a disaster.

Officials may also secretly pass on, or **leak**, information to friendly reporters about proposed actions. Leaks allow them to test

public reaction to a proposal without having to acknowledge that the government is considering it. If the public reacts favorably, the government might officially move ahead with the idea. If the public reaction is negative, they can quietly drop it. Politicians also use leaks to make competing officials look bad, to change public opinion on an issue, or to gain favor with a reporter. For example, officials may leak information to expose corruption or to get top government leaders and the media to pay attention to a problem.

Leaking information is part of political life. Many journalists go along with the practice because they benefit from being able to report “inside” information. When they can get hot news from politicians and “scoop” their rivals—break a story first—they become more successful as journalists. President Lyndon B. Johnson understood the game. He once told a reporter, “You help me and I’ll help make you a big man in your profession.”

## Watchdog Role

The mass media play an important “watchdog” role over government activities. Journalists are eager to expose government



waste or corruption. They know that stories about government misconduct will attract a large audience. Throughout American history the media have served both their own interests and the public interest by exposing corruption and warning of mistakes or misconduct in government.

A more recent trend in journalism, however, has been to erase the dividing line between politicians' official actions and their private lives. Throughout much of American history, newspapers reported freely on the official deeds and misdeeds of politicians but steered clear of anything personal. In the past few decades, however, the media have stopped honoring this distinction. Now, they often look eagerly for personal scandals not only regarding politicians, but even regarding their families. Some critics condemn the media for this practice and claim that it could drive good people out of politics.

## Media and National Security

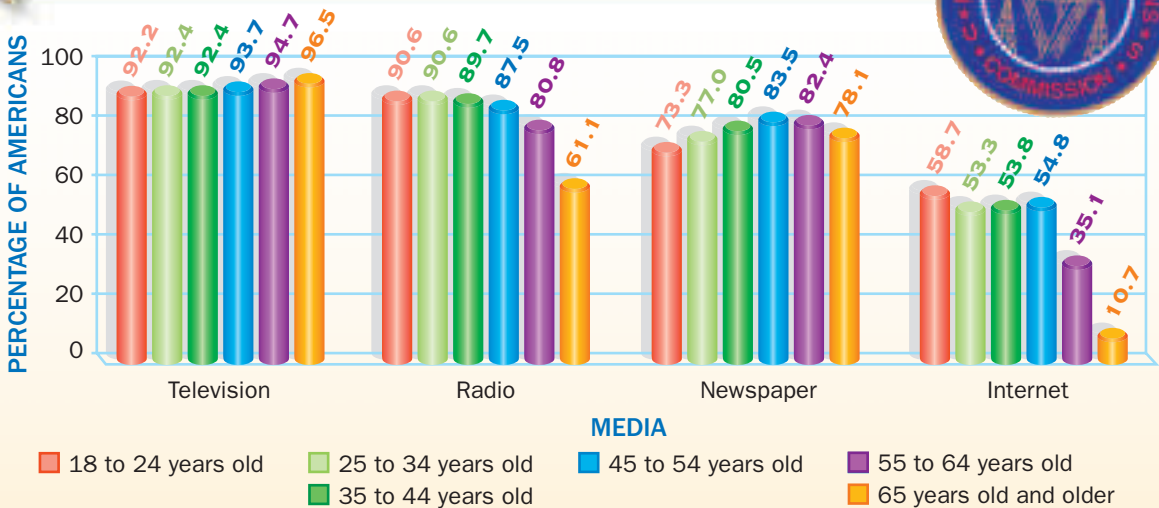
There is a tension between the American citizens' need for information and the need for the government to keep secrets to protect national security. These tensions are especially evident in foreign affairs in which intelligence information and military secrets are involved. The government can control information the media reports by classifying information as secret and limiting press coverage of military actions. For example, during the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the conflict in Afghanistan starting in 2001, the Defense Department limited the media's access to battlefields and knowledge of military maneuvers. Most reporters covering the events had to rely upon official briefings to gain information about military progress.

**Reading Check Explaining** Why would a government official leak information to the media?

FCC seal



## Americans' Use of Mass Media



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000*.

### Analyzing Graphs

The majority of Americans consider television their main source of news and information. Which age group of Americans watches the most television? Which group accesses the Internet the most?



**Student Web Activity** Visit [civ.glencoe.com](http://civ.glencoe.com) and click on **Student Web Activities—Chapter 11** to learn more about the influence of the mass media on government.

## Protecting the Media

Democracy requires a free flow of information and ideas. In the United States the government plays an important role in protecting the ability of the mass media to operate freely.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states, in part, “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom . . . of the press.” Today, “press” in this usage refers not only to print media, but to radio, television, and the Internet as well.

The Supreme Court has ruled that the key to this First Amendment protection is freedom from **prior restraint**, or government censorship of material *before* it is published. Generally the government cannot tell the media what or what not to publish. This means that reporters and editors are free to decide what they will say, even if it is unpopular or embarrassing to the government or to individual politicians.

Freedom of the press is not, however, completely unlimited. For example, no one is free to publish false information that will harm someone’s reputation. This is called **libel**. Anyone who believes a story has

damaged him or her may sue for libel. Unlike ordinary people, however, government officials rarely win libel lawsuits. In 1964 the Supreme Court ruled that public officials must prove actual malice—meaning that the publisher either knew that the material was false or showed a reckless disregard for the truth.

The federal government does have some power to regulate the broadcast media. This is because the government decides who gets access to the limited number of airwaves available for radio and television broadcasting. One way the government regulates broadcasting is through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FCC is a regulatory commission of the federal bureaucracy. The FCC cannot censor broadcasts, but it can penalize stations that violate its rules.

**Reading Check Describing** How does the First Amendment protect the media?

## SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

**1. Key Terms** Write a sentence or short paragraph about mass media using each of these terms: **print media, electronic media, public agenda, leak, prior restraint, libel.**

### Reviewing Main Ideas

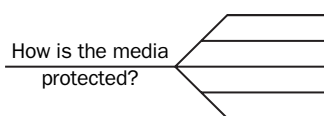
- 2. Compare** Do more people get their news from electronic or print media?
- 3. Explain** How does the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulate the broadcast media?

### Critical Thinking

- 4. Drawing Conclusions** Do you think that reporters should be prohibited from writing about a politician’s private life or family? Why or why not?

### 5. Summarizing Information

Explain how the media are protected in the United States by completing a graphic organizer like the one below.



### Analyzing Visuals

- 6. Interpret** Review the bar graph on page 267. Which group of Americans reads the most newspapers? What is the most popular form of mass media?

### ★BE AN ACTIVE CITIZEN★

- 7. Research** Interview or write to a local newspaper editor to find out what precautions the newspaper takes to prevent libel suits. Share the information you obtain with the class.

# Citizenship SKILLBUILDER

## Analyzing News Media

### Why Learn This Skill?

Following the news is pretty easy in this high-tech media era. Click on the radio, TV, or the Internet. Pick up a newspaper or magazine. You can get your fill of current events on countless topics. However, you need to examine your sources of information. Some may have biases that blur the facts. Careful analysis can help you find the true facts and become a well-informed citizen.

### Learning the Skill

To analyze the news media, follow these steps:

- Know the source and the author of the article. They should have solid credentials and reputations for accuracy.
- Be alert for nonfactual comments in news stories. A valid news story describes events without revealing the reporter's opinions or feelings about them.
- Identify opinion pieces. Writers on editorial pages in print media and many TV commentators are paid for their opinions, not necessarily for reporting facts. Ask yourself whether the news is presented in an even-handed and thorough way.

### Practicing the Skill

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions as you analyze the news report on this page.

- 1 What might be the source of this news report? Is this source generally acknowledged as trustworthy?
- 2 List two points of information from the story.
- 3 What opinion is expressed in the story?
- 4 Explain how you would rate the news value of this article.

People are increasingly spending more time online but not at the cost of family relationships or social activities, says a study to be released Thursday. . . . Jeffrey Cole, director of the UCLA Center for Communication Policy . . . conducted the survey. . . . Internet users watch 4.5 hours less of TV per week than non-Internet users. . . . More Americans than ever are now online, . . . according to the study. And contrary to early warnings sounded by some social scientists, the UCLA survey shows overwhelmingly that Internet usage does not take away from normal family activities. Some 97.3 percent of those surveyed said they spend about the same or more time with their family members since being connected to the Internet. . . .

Overall, online shopping [continues] strong. . . . All this is beneficial to both the public and the private sector, Cole says. . . . Those surveyed . . . said they would buy less if there's a sales tax allowed on Internet sales, a [thought] that lawmakers might want to know . . . as the issue is a subject of congressional deliberation. . . .

### Applying the Skill

Read a newspaper editorial aimed at influencing the government. Give at least one example of how the writer weaves fact and opinion together.



Practice key skills with Glencoe's **Skillbuilder Interactive CD-ROM, Level 1.**



# Interest Groups

## GUIDE TO READING

### Main Idea

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

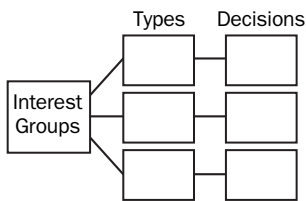
### Key Terms

public interest group, public policy, political action committee (PAC), lobbyist

### Reading Strategy

#### Organizing Information

As you read, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by listing various types of interest groups and the kinds of decisions they attempt to influence.



### Read to Learn

- What types of interest groups attempt to influence decision making?
- How do interest groups try to influence government?



## Americans in Action

All special programs at Longwood Middle School were to be discontinued. Students' grades had fallen on the last standardized tests, and all resources were to be spent on hiring additional teachers to raise students' grades. Pat Vesper wanted her children to continue playing in the band and on a soccer team. Dozens of parents flooded the school board office with telephone calls and e-mails, expressing their anger. After a month, everyone was still angry, but nothing had been accomplished. Then Vesper and several other parents drafted a letter to the school board. In the letter, the parents requested an open meeting with the school board to discuss any possible alternatives. The school board granted the parents' request.



A school soccer team

## Types of Interest Groups

Whereas Pat Vesper couldn't achieve much alone, when she worked within a united team, the school board listened. Vesper and those who joined her formed an interest group. As you recall from Section 1, interest groups are groups of people who share a point of view and unite to promote their viewpoints. By their very nature, interest groups are biased; that is, they support a particular viewpoint. To be biased is the opposite of being impartial—considering all viewpoints equally. Citizens join or support interest groups, also called special-interest groups, because they believe that by pooling their resources—time, money, and skills—they can increase their chances of influencing decision makers. An individual may belong to many different interest groups at the same time. For example, a person may belong to a labor union, the Gray Panthers—who protect the interests of older Americans—and also contribute to the National Wildlife Federation. The First Amendment protects your right to belong to interest groups by guaranteeing “the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government.”

## Economic Interest Groups

Some of the largest and most powerful interest groups in the United States are based on economic interests. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which promotes free enterprise, is one of the largest, with more than 200,000 members. Others represent specific types of businesses, such as the Tobacco Institute, which represents cigarette manufacturers. Such groups try to influence government decisions on issues that affect their industry, like taxes, new safety regulations, or the rules for winning government contracts.

Other interest groups, especially labor unions, work to promote the economic interests of workers. They are concerned with wages, working conditions, benefits such as pensions, and medical care for workers. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), an alliance of labor unions, is the largest of these groups. Professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and accountants have their own interest groups. The American Medical Association, for instance, represents doctors.

## Other Interest Groups

People have also organized to promote an ethnic group, age group, or gender. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress of Racial Equality work to improve the lives of African Americans. The National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Women's Political Caucus represent women's interests. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the National Council of Senior Citizens promote the interests of older Americans.

Another category of interest groups covers those working for special causes. For example, the Sierra Club and the National Wildlife Federation are concerned with protecting nature and wildlife.

## Public Interest Groups

All the interest groups described so far are considered private groups because they promote only the special interests of their own members. Some groups, however, work to benefit all, or at least most, of society. These are **public interest groups**. These groups support causes that affect the lives of Americans in general.

One example is Common Cause. This organization has 250,000 members and works to promote the common needs of all citizens. For example, it has fought for legislation to control pollution, to reform election campaign practices, and to protect consumers. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, or impartial, group that promotes voting and educates voters about candidates and issues.

**Reading Check** **Comparing** What is the difference between private and public interest groups?

**The NFL** The National Football Players Association is an AFL-CIO union. **What is the AFL-CIO?**



## Influencing Government

Interest groups are an important part of our democratic process because their primary goal is to influence **public policy**, which is the course of action the government takes in response to an issue or problem. To do this, interest groups focus their efforts on elections, the courts, and lawmakers.

### Election Activities

Some groups use political resources to support certain candidates at election time. For example, the Sierra Club might back candidates who support laws to protect nature and oppose those who disagree with its beliefs.

Many interest groups, including most labor unions and a large number of corporations and trade associations, have formed **political action committees (PACs)**.

PACs collect money from the members of their groups and use it to support some candidates and oppose others. (Read more about how PACs influence elections in Chapter 10.)

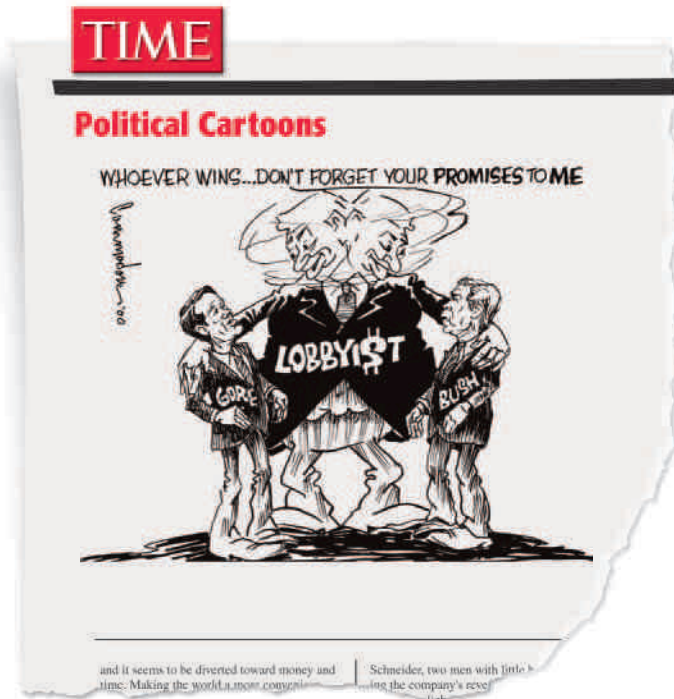
### Going to Court

Interest groups also try to influence public policy by bringing cases to court. For example, when a law—in the opinion of an interest group—is not being properly enforced, the group may sue the party who is breaking the law. A group may also use the courts to argue that a law or government policy is unconstitutional. For example, Public Citizen, Inc., a consumer group led by Ralph Nader, has brought suits against various companies for violating consumer protection laws.

### Lobbying Lawmakers

Interest groups use lobbyists to help them influence government officials, especially national and state legislators. **Lobbyists** are representatives of interest groups who contact lawmakers or other government officials directly to influence their policy making. Lobbyists operate at all levels of government—local, state, and national. Lobbyists may be volunteers or paid employees whose job is to persuade government officials to support their interest group's policies.

The term “lobbyist” dates from the 1830s, when it was applied to people who waited in the lobbies of statehouses to ask politicians for favors. Today lobbyists use a variety of strategies to influence lawmakers. Lobbyists have a good understanding of how the government functions. They know where to go and whom to see. The federal government and each state government have hundreds of departments,



**Analyzing Visuals** Lobbyists play an active role on Capitol Hill, where they attempt to persuade lawmakers to support the interests of specialized groups of voters. **Is the cartoonist expressing a favorable or unfavorable opinion of lobbyists? How do you know?**



offices, and agencies, but a good lobbyist knows which department to contact about a particular concern. They are also talented public relations agents who know how to make friends and talk persuasively.

Information is one of the lobbyist's most important resources. Lawmakers need up-to-date information about public issues. The most effective lobbyists are able to supply to lawmakers useful information that helps their own cases. They suggest solutions to problems and issues. Lobbyists sometimes prepare their own drafts of bills for lawmakers to consider and even testify in legislative hearings on bills. All of these activities provide lawmakers with a tremendous amount of information. This is important because lawmakers deal with thousands of bills each year.

The job of lobbyists does not end once a law is enacted. Their interest groups are also concerned with making sure the laws are carried out, enforced, and upheld in court. For example, if an oil exploration bill is approved, environmental groups are likely to watch the whole operation carefully. They want to make sure the oil companies observe any provisions aimed at protecting the environment. If not, lobbyists for the environmental groups will lobby various government departments or agencies to see that the law is enforced.


**Reading Check** **Concluding** Why might a lawmaker want to interact with a lobbyist?

## Techniques of Interest Groups

All interest groups want to influence public opinion both to increase their memberships and to convince people of the importance of their causes. Many use direct-mail campaigns to recruit members. They target potential members by using subscriber or membership mailing lists from magazines or groups with a similar viewpoint.

# American Biographies

## Ethel Percy Andrus (1884–1967)



Ethel Percy Andrus spent her life as an educator, becoming the first female principal of a California high school at age 32. When she retired at age 60 in 1944, Andrus volunteered to direct California's Retired Teachers Association. What she discovered troubled her. Many retired teachers struggled to survive on small pensions, often with no health insurance.

Andrus decided to form retired teachers into an alliance that would force lawmakers to listen to them. In 1947 she founded the National Retired Teachers Association. In 1956 the organization won the first health insurance program for educators over age 65. Two years later, Andrus founded the American Association for Retired Persons, now known as the AARP.

Under the direction of Andrus, the AARP became a powerful lobby, focused on meeting the needs of all Americans over age 50. Today the AARP has more than 34 million members. The AARP advises governments on age-related issues and protects programs like Social Security. Staffed mostly by volunteers, the AARP tries to fulfill the motto given to it by Andrus: "To Serve; Not to be Served!"

★★★★

Interest groups also advertise on television and radio, and in newspapers and magazines. Maybe you've seen the ads urging you to drink milk, buy American-made products, or eat pork. Trade associations sponsor these types of ads. Interest groups also stage protests and organize public events to get coverage in the media. Interest groups use propaganda techniques to promote a particular viewpoint or idea. To avoid

being misled, citizens need to recognize the following types of propaganda:

- **Endorsements**

The idea behind endorsements is that if people admire the person endorsing a candidate or product, they will support the candidate or product, too.

- **Stacked Cards**

Card stacking is a technique that presents only one side of the issue, often by distorting the facts.

- **Name-Calling**

Name-calling is an attempt to turn people against an opponent or an idea by using an unpleasant label or description for that person or idea.

- **Glittering Generality**

A glittering generality is a statement that sounds good but is essentially meaningless.

- **Symbols**

Political candidates and interest groups use and misuse symbols when appealing to the public.

- **Just Plain Folks**

Political campaigns often use many photographs of candidates wearing hard hats, talking to factory workers, eating pizza or tacos, or even milking cows. The idea of the plain-folks appeal is to make people think that the candidate is just like them, with the same desires and concerns.

- **The Bandwagon**

Getting on the bandwagon means convincing people that everyone else agrees with the interest group's viewpoint or that everyone is going to vote for a certain candidate. This technique tries to appeal to many people's desire to be on the winning team.

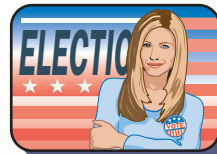
## Types of Propaganda Techniques

### NAME-CALLING



"Candidate A is a dangerous extremist."

### ENDORSEMENT



Popular movie star says, "I'm voting for Candidate A and so should you."

### GLITTERING GENERALITY



"Candidate A is the one who will bring us peace and prosperity."

### THE BANDWAGON



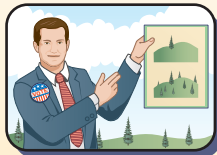
"Polls show our candidate is pulling ahead, and we expect to win in a landslide."

### JUST PLAIN FOLKS



"My parents were ordinary, hardworking people, and they taught me those values."

### STACKED CARDS



"Candidate A has the best record on the environment."

### SYMBOLS



"I pledge allegiance . . ."

## Evaluating Charts

Interest groups and political parties use various techniques to promote their causes. **How does name-calling differ from the other techniques?**

## Regulation of Interest Groups

Although the Constitution guarantees Americans the right to participate in interest groups, state and federal governments may pass laws regulating their activities. (In the past, lobbying was criticized because some lobbyists tried to win legislators' votes by providing them with fancy meals and gifts.) For example, the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 limits the amount of money PACs may contribute to candidates for national office. The Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act, passed in 1946, states that any person hired as a lobbyist to influence Congress must register with the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Secretary of the Senate. Lobbyists are required to disclose who hired them, how much they are paid, and how they spend money related to their work. State governments have passed similar laws. These laws have not been very effective, though, because they apply only to people whose primary job is lobbying. People who claim that only a small part of their time is spent lobbying are not required to register. As a result, only about

one-fifth to one-quarter of all lobbyists are registered. Also, the law does not provide any means of enforcement.

Federal and state laws also require a waiting period before former government officials can become lobbyists. The terms of these laws vary from state to state. A typical law might bar a former state legislator from lobbying the legislature for two years after leaving office. These laws are meant to prevent ex-public officials from taking unfair advantage of inside knowledge and friendships with former associates on behalf of interest groups. These laws have proved inadequate, especially at the federal level.

Some people argue that interest groups and lobbyists have too much say in government. Critics claim that campaign contributions give interest groups improper influence over officeholders. Others, however, point out that, by themselves, most citizens can have little effect on government officials, but as members of an effective interest group, with skilled lobbyists, citizens can increase their influence.

**Reading Check Explaining** Why has lobbying been criticized in the past?

### SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

#### Checking for Understanding

**1. Key Terms** Define the following terms and use them in sentences related to interest groups: **public interest group**, **public policy**, **political action committee (PAC)**, **lobbyist**.

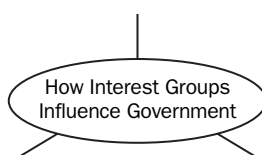
#### Reviewing Main Ideas

- 2. Explain** What was the purpose of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971?
- 3. Conclude** With what kind of issues would public interest groups be most likely concerned? Give an example.

#### Critical Thinking

**4. Making Comparisons** Compare and contrast the benefits and dangers of interest groups and lobbyists in our political system.

**5. Summarizing Information** Complete a web diagram like the one below to show how interest groups influence governmental decision making.



#### Analyzing Visuals

**6. Identify** Review the chart on page 274. Which technique is a group using when it lists all the advantages of supporting its cause, but fails to list any disadvantages?

#### ★ BE AN ACTIVE CITIZEN ★

**7. Research** Contact a large corporation that has a presence in your community. Find out how many lobbyists they employ and what kinds of issues they deal with.



# Assessment & Activities

## Review to Learn

### Section 1

- Public opinion helps shape the decisions of government officials.
- A person's background, the mass media, public officials, and interest groups all play a role in shaping public opinion.



### Section 2

- There are two types of mass media—print and electronic.
- The mass media help set the public agenda, publicize candidates, and present information to the public.
- The mass media also monitor government activities.



### Section 3

- Economic interest groups, public interest groups, and private groups like the NAACP, AARP, and environmental groups all influence government decision making.

## FOLDABLES™

### Study Organizer

#### Using Your Foldables Study Organizer

Form groups of about five students. Place your desks in a circle. Then each person in the circle, in turn, describes one way that the government is influenced, using the completed foldable.

## Reviewing Key Terms

Write the chapter key term that matches each clue below.

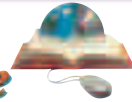
1. often hired by interest groups to help them influence government officials
2. ideas and attitudes that most people hold about elected officials and political issues
3. government censorship of material before it is published
4. television, radio, newspapers, magazines, recordings, movies, and books
5. publishing false information that harms a person's reputation
6. actions taken by government leaders to resolve a problem or issue
7. people who share a point of view about an issue and join together
8. problems that government leaders consider most important and receive the most attention
9. surveys of individuals that ask questions about issues or candidates
10. organizations that collect money from members of their group and use it to support some candidates and oppose others

## Reviewing Main Ideas

11. Why do people form interest groups?
12. Why do some people criticize public opinion polls?
13. What factors can influence a person's opinion on particular issues?
14. What impact do the mass media have on politics and government in the United States?
15. What role does the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) have in regulating the media?
16. What do political action committees (PACs) do?
17. What are the main tasks of lobbyists?
18. What are the provisions of the Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act of 1946?

CLICK HERE

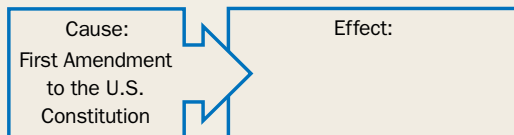
**CIVICS**  
*Online*



**Self-Check Quiz** Visit the *Civics Today* Web site at [civ.glencoe.com](http://civ.glencoe.com) and click on **Self-Check Quizzes—Chapter 11** to prepare for the chapter test.

## Critical Thinking

- Analyzing Information** What role do you think public opinion polls should play in the political process? Explain.
- Cause and Effect** In a chart like the one below, determine the effect of constitutional protections as they relate to the media.



## Practicing Skills

**Analyzing News Media** Find a report of a recent political opinion poll on the Internet or in a newsmagazine or newspaper and answer the following questions.

- What is the poll about and when was it conducted?
- What specific questions were asked? Can you think of a way that these questions might be phrased that would be less biased?
- Summarize the results of the poll in sentence form.

## Analyzing Visuals

- Examine the photograph that opens the chapter on page 257. What actions are taking place in the photo? What type of interest group is most likely sponsoring these actions? Why do you think these citizens are taking these actions? What do you think they hope to accomplish?



## Economics Activity

- On the Internet, go to [www.opensecrets.org/lobbyists/](http://www.opensecrets.org/lobbyists/). Look at the chart “Total Lobbyist Spending (in Millions).” In 1999 what industry spent the most on lobbying? Which spent the least? Why do you think industries spend such large amounts of money on lobbyists each year?

## ★ CITIZENSHIP COOPERATIVE ACTIVITY ★

- Form groups of four or five and select an issue in your community. Assume the role of a lobbyist working for a group that supports your position on the issue. Develop a plan for lobbying. The plan should include a clear statement of your position, a list of officials you would lobby, and an outline of your presentation.



## Technology Activity

- Think about a political or social issue in which you are interested. Then do an Internet search to find an interest group related to the issue that you might want to join. Create a visual presentation about the group.



## Standardized Test Practice

**Directions:** Choose the answer that *best* completes the following statement.

\_\_\_\_\_ influence public policy by identifying issues, making political contributions, and lobbying government officials.

- A The mass media
- B Interest groups
- C Pollsters
- D Random samples

## Test-Taking Tip

Define each answer choice as best as you can before answering the question. Which definition best fits the statement?