

- I. Assessing the impact of public opinion on policy
 - A. [Public-opinion/public-policy] linkage models
 1. Rational-activist model: the public votes for candidates who share their views
 2. Parties model: the public votes for a party whose policy platform shares their views
 3. Interest-groups model: the public supports pressure groups that share their views
 4. Instructed delegate [role-playing] model: policy-makers follow the views of their constituents to get re-elected
 5. Shared-values model: pluralistic elites reflect the diverse interests in society [Robert A. Dahl]
 - B. Evidence
 1. Federal level:
 - a. An intense minority can often defeat an apathetic majority: e.g., AMA opposition to Medicare/Medicaid that delayed adoption from 1930s until 1965
 - (1) However, the AMA supported the 2010 passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and (as of Nov. 2011) still supports the individual mandate provision
 - (2) Major health-insurance PACs also support the individual mandate but oppose other provisions that require public justification of rate hikes and prohibitions on annual limits on health benefits
 - b. The public is more likely to get its way when it favors status quo v. change
Table 11.1, p. 325
 - c. Some of the correlation between public support and public policy can be spurious; i.e., political elites can “educate” the public to support policies that the elite have enacted for their own self-interest even though those policies are not in the public’s interest; e.g., repeal of the “death tax” [that applies to only those few inheriting over \$2 million]
 - d. Strongest correlations between public opinion and public policy:
 - (1) Defense spending
 - (2) Domestic spending
 - (3) Shifts in the public’s “mood” correlate with shifts in the ideological balance of major laws enacted by Congress Figure 11.1, p. 326
 2. State level:
 - a. Useful opinion & presidential-vote data available at:
<http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>
 - b. Political ideology of residents correlates with ideological balance of major state laws
Figure 11.2, p. 328
 3. Local level: little (and contradictory) evidence on opinion/policy correlation
 - C. An opinion-policy connection
 1. Evidence is incomplete
 2. Public opinion is often uninformed, unenlightened, or simply wrong – e.g., public perception of the severity of street crime correlates more with media coverage than with objective data
 - D. Do all opinions count equally?
 1. Political influence is directly related to socioeconomic status: especially income, education, and occupational strata
 2. Socioeconomic status is directly related to:
 - a. Political interest
 - b. Political knowledge
 - c. Political participation

- II. Interpreting the public's role in democracy
 - A. Four theories for the mass public's lack of interest, participation, & influence in politics
 - 1. Mass-public incompetent
 - 2. Mass-public rational disengagement
 - 3. Mass-public manipulation by elites
 - 4. Mass-public contentment
 - B. Evaluation: two basic competing theories:
 - 1. Power-elite theory
 - a. Unequal abilities and resources [money, information, access, efficacy, interest] accounts for differences in political influence or power
 - b. This is a good thing: Plato (425 BC), Edmund Burke (1770), (Alexander Hamilton (1787), Thomas Dye & Harmon Ziegler (1987)
 - c. This is a bad thing: Karl Marx (1848), C. Wright Mills (1956)
 - 2. Pluralist theory
 - a. Overlapping group memberships lead to bargaining and compromise, which gives us the best approximation of the common good
 - b. This is a good thing: James Madison (1787), David Truman (1951), Robert A. Dahl (1961)
- III. Expansion of political participation
 - A. Outcomes
 - 1. Can be good if the public is informed and rational
 - 2. Can be bad if the public is "hasty and passionate" and hence, unwilling to bargain and compromise with those who disagree with them
 - B. Mechanisms
 - 1. Increase amount and quality of information
 - a. News media
 - b. Public-interest groups
 - 2. Increase information-processing skills of the public
 - a. Pre-collegiate education
 - b. Collegiate education
 - 3. Expand opportunities to participate
 - a. Reduce barriers to election turnout
 - b. Reform campaign finance
 - c. Expand forms of direct democracy
 - (1) Initiative
 - (2) Referendum
 - (3) Recall
 - C. The desirability of increasing public participation is:
 - 1. Negative when low levels of public participation help to check hasty & passionate majorities
 - 2. Positive when enduring majorities are needed to check tyrannical elites