

- 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 universal health insurance
 - b. The public is more likely to get its way when it favors status quo v. change
Table 11.1, p. 305
 - 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. 306
 2. State level:
 - a. Useful opinion & presidential-vote data available at:
<http://www.surveyusa.com/50StateTracking.html>
 - (1) Bush violated wire-tap restrictions? (Feb. 06)
 - (2) Immigrants take jobs from Americans? (Dec. 05)
 - (3) Country headed in right or wrong direction? (Oct. 05)
 - (4) Pro-life or pro-choice? (Sep. 05)
 - (5) Corporal punishment OK to discipline children? (Aug. 05)
 - (6) Government should have no say on gay marriage? (Jul. 05)
 - (7) Military draft needed? (Jun. 05)
 - b. Political ideology of residents correlates with ideological balance of major state laws
Figure 11.2, p. 307
 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

II. Interpreting the public's role in democracy

A. 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)

B. Other related theories for the public's lack of interest, participation, & influence in politics

1. Incompetent
2. Rational disengagement
3. Manipulation by elites
4. Contentment

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