

Mass Media and Public Opinion

SECTION 1

THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

TEXT SUMMARY

Public opinion refers to the attitudes of a significant number of people about **public affairs**, or matters of government and politics that concern the people at large. Political socialization is the process by which people learn ideas and develop opinions about issues. Many factors play a part in this process.

Family and education are two of the most important factors in political socialization. Children pick up fundamental attitudes from their families. Schools teach children the value of the American political system and train them to become good citizens.

Other important factors in developing political opinions include occupation and race. Additionally, the **mass media**—those means of communication that

reach many people simultaneously, such as newspapers, television, and the Internet—have a huge effect on the formation of public opinion.

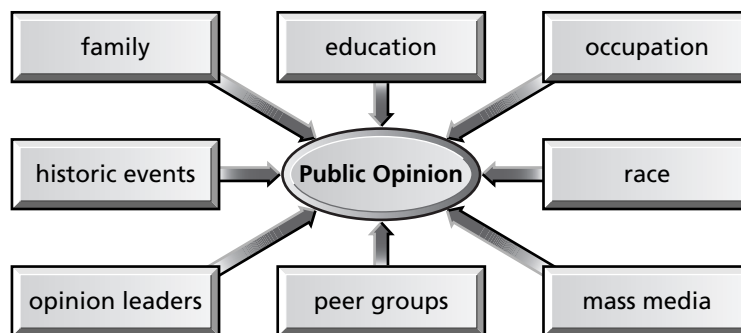
Peer groups are the groups of people with whom one regularly associates, including friends, neighbors, classmates, and co-workers. Members of peer groups usually share political opinions.

Public opinions are also affected by the views expressed by **opinion leaders**—those people who can strongly influence the views of others. Historic events, such as wars, affect people's lives and thus can also influence public opinion.

THE BIG IDEA

Several factors, including family and education, help to shape a person's opinions about public affairs.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Factors That Shape Public Opinion



Many factors play a part in shaping public opinion.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is public opinion?
2. **Diagram Skills** List three factors that influence public opinion.