

Influencing Government

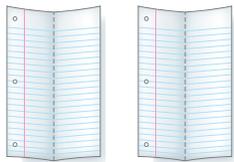
TOPIC SUMMARY

Public opinion includes the ideas and attitudes that most people hold. Politicians and government officials know that public support is necessary to stay in office. Candidates often use polls to measure public opinion. Mass media, including newspapers, movies, and Internet sites, also play a vital role in politics and government. Media can play a “watchdog” role over government activities. The U.S. Constitution protects freedom of the press, but government may regulate the media to some degree. Interest groups are another important part of our democratic process. Their primary goal is to influence public policy. Interest groups may promote particular economic, environmental, or social programs. They may influence policy by contributing to candidates’ campaigns, bringing cases to court, or lobbying government officials.

FOLDABLES™ Study Organizer

Comparing Information Study Foldable *This Foldable will help students compare the ideas and attitudes that influence government representatives in their decision making.*

Step 1 *Fold two sheets of paper in half from top to bottom.*



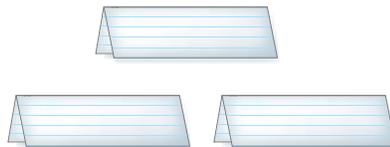
Step 2 *Cut each sheet of paper in half the long way. Fold in half again.*



Reading and Writing

Take notes and compare how public opinion, the mass media, and interest groups influences decisions in government.

Step 3 *Place three of the folded papers one on top of each other and label the top side of each: Public Opinion, The Mass Media, and Interest Groups.*



Step 4 *Staple the sheets together at the left end.*



TOPIC ACTIVITY IDEAS

Creating a Poster

Have students create the Study Foldable above, labeling the tabs as directed. Have students write facts on each tab about public opinion, the mass media, and interest groups. Then have student groups use information from the Foldable to create a poster about the ways in which citizens may influence government decision makers. Students’ posters should include illustrations, photographs, news clippings or other visual examples that show the ways in which public opinion, mass media, and interest groups can influence policy.

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Have students use the Foldable to analyze the coverage of an issue by three different types of mass media. Students should scan newspapers and magazines to find a topic that is currently being debated in government. They should examine the print media's coverage of the issue. Then, students should use other research sources to determine how the same issue has been covered in at least two other forms of media. Students' Foldables should be labeled with the three types of selected media, for example, *Television*, *Internet*, and *Newspaper*. Beneath each appropriate tab, students should list the similarities and differences among the types of coverage. When students have completed the Foldable, ask them to explain which type of media coverage they thought was most effective.



SUMMARIZING

Have students use the Foldable to review different types of interest groups. Students should label the Foldable with the three categories of interest groups discussed in the text: *Economic Interest Groups*, *Special Causes*, and *Public Interest Groups*. Ask students to list details in the Foldable about each type of interest group noted in the text. Then challenge students to use the library or other resources to find additional examples of interest groups in each of the categories. When students have completed the Foldable, compile their findings into three cumulative lists.



Student Study Tip

Explain that students should consider the motivation of groups and individuals when they read about political events and interest groups. Encourage students to question why people or groups support particular causes and to look for more than one reason that groups are working to influence government.