

PUBLIC OPINION: The preferences expressed by people on issues, policies and individuals

- Must be expressed (not latent)
- An attitude is not actual behavior
- Not necessarily **stable, intense or salient**
- Helps individuals organize and make sense of the world
- Selective **exposure, attention, perception**

SCHEMA THEORY

A cognitive structure of “organized prior knowledge, abstracted from experience with specific instances.”

This guides “the processing of new information and the retrieval of stored information” (Conover, 1984).

- Self-Schemas generally attract individuals to particular groups
- Individuals basically become members of a group with shared experience (salient distinctions)
- Leads to “political awareness, or ideology, regarding the group’s relative positions in society, and a commitment to collective action aimed at realizing the group’s interests.”

ATTITUDE FORMATION: SOCIALIZATION

Family

Peer Group

School

Church

TV/media

Organizations

Political Leaders

FACTORS SHAPING PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Economic Class

Education

Sectionalism

Race/Ethnicity

Religion

Gender

Age

IDEOLOGY: An organized set of beliefs concerning social goals and the best governmental arrangements for achieving them.

Americans tend to be less ideological

Experiences often pull Americans in multiple ways

Social change affects belief structures (aging, world view changes, economic advancement)

IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC OPINION:

Gauge on America (what we believe and expect)

Sets some parameters on debate and policy action

Issue publics – groups with particular interest or societal position – must be considered

Opinion leaders can shape public attitudes