AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

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CHAPTER 20

Public Opinion

CITIZENS influence government through public opinion. Their expression of opinion is as large as a presidential election and as small as the choice of the president for a one-school P.T.A. We have nurtured and been nurtured by the idea that people are right and their opinion should be respected.

Yet few of us ever say precisely what we mean by public opinion. It is often simply "public opinion, what the people think." Professors age sooner than their time from listening to students proclaim public opinion in class discussion. Everyone is an expert on public opinion, it seems, and anxious to state his opinion of what public opinion is. To some, public opinion seems, from their talk about it, to be a huge blob of Jello that responds to any pressure put upon it. To others it is a rigid line of citizens marching toward virtue or toward error, depending upon the views of the talker. A precise definition is always difficult—even the experts have a hard time in this case—but the conversation in a classroom would certainly be improved if all unprecise references to public opinion were ruled out of order.

Any definition of public opinion is likely to be chosen more for the working purpose of a particular need of time and place than to serve as a cosmic and immutable frame. For this time, place, and purpose, in this effort to see American government whole, we can say, as Harwood Childs said some years ago, that public opinion is any collection of individual opinions.[1] Within such a broad definition we have room to set up three main categories of public opinion.

1. Public opinion in its broadest sense is the whole way of life in the nation, or what social scientists call the "culture" of a people.
2. Public opinion is the prevalent mood of a people, or at least of a considerable portion of them.
3. Public opinion is the collection of individual opinions in a group of

[1] Harwood L. Childs, *Introduction to Public Opinion*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1940, p. 44. "If we are studying the opinions of the individual members of a forum audience it is quite as definitely a study of public opinion as if we were studying the opinions of the voters of the United States."

people whose attention is directed toward a common subject, purpose, like, or dislike.

1. CULTURE AS PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion in its broadest sense is the whole way of life in the nation, or what social scientists call the "culture" of a people.

The word "culture" in social science means, to repeat Webster's definition already used in Chapter 2 on the growth of government, "The complex of distinctive attainments, beliefs, traditions, etc., constituting the background of a . . . social group . . ." This definition in practice is merged with an additional one used by the cultural anthropologists, who, in the main, study preliterate (some say primitive) tribes. This additional definition is: "The trait complex manifested by a tribe or a separate unit of mankind." Taken together, the definitions allow us to speak in the one word of all that we have as our particular way of life and to speak of our culture as being different from the cultures of other units of mankind.

American public opinion in its basic and broadest sense is an expression of this American culture. Peter Odegard, in a book titled *The American Public Mind*, asked in the first sentence of the Preface, "Why do we behave like Americans?"[2] He then proceeded to chapters on the family and the church, on the schools, the press, political parties, pressure politics and propaganda, and motion pictures, radio, and books in his discussion of the forces that made us what we were in the 1920's. We do have an American public mind, and the forces that make it are also a product of it, the products of culture and the transmitters of the culture.

The accumulation of all we learn from family, church, school, groups of all sorts, and media of mass communication, as we conveniently refer to newspapers, magazines, books, movies, radio, and television in a telescoped term, governs life in America. When most of us share the same customs and beliefs, we expect all who would have our support to subscribe to the same customs and beliefs. A politician who wants our vote—or a merchant who wants our trade—must conform to the expectations that most of us acquire from our culture. He may not, for example, advocate with any hope of success that the private ownership of homes should be replaced by state ownership; that schools should be opened only to

[2] Peter Odegard, *The American Public Mind*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1930.

children from the highest-income families; that all religious denominations should be merged into one whose interpretation of Scripture would be decided by a federal commission under the chairmanship of the Librarian of Congress. He must, instead, do in most ways what is expected of the "normal" person by the majority of people in our society, who by their own conformity establish what is "normal."

Most of the actions of government in America can be explained only by constant reference to our culture. The "complex of distinctive attainments, beliefs, traditions, etc.," which constitutes our culture is at once the general command to government to do what we expect, the restraining order to say where government must stop, and the middle tolerance in which we allow government to do some things but not others and in which change is always seething. This public opinion from culture is so firmly held that it is taken for granted. No observant American needs to ask what the public thinks of the fundamental attainments, beliefs, traditions, customs, and hopes of the American people. If he has to ask, he is unable to understand the reply, to paraphrase Louis Armstrong's answer to a layman who asked him to define swing in jazz: "Man, if you got to ask what is it, you ain't gonna get it."

2. MOOD AS PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion is the prevalent mood of a people, or at least of a considerable portion of them.

Smaller than the total culture but larger than opinion directed at a particular subject is the public mood, a "Temper of mind; humor; esp., the sum of those mental dispositions which give the dominant emotional character or cast of mind . . ." The public mood changes usually as a result of an accumulation of events. It can be unstable or it can be the same for decades, but almost inevitably it will change sooner or later. Many times the public mood is not expressed clearly, but competent politicians and all others who live by pleasing the masses can sense the public mood.

Gabriel A. Almond, in a thoughtful discussion of the relation between public opinion and American foreign policy, recounts some changes in public mood.[3] One great change of mood has been the swing back and forth from isolationism to internationalism. During most of the nineteenth

[3] Gabriel A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1950, pp. 53–67.

century our mood was isolationist. We turned internationalist for World War I, but followed immediately with another mood of isolationism for the years between World War I and World War II. Then we went all out for international responsibility in World War II. Immediately the fighting stopped in World War II, a public mood of return to private affairs was so strong that we demobilized our military forces and our wartime civilian government agencies. Then we built them up again within a few years when the cold war with the Soviet Union produced another change of mood to internationalism. The public-policy makers charged with the conduct of foreign affairs were themselves so identified with these public moods that they apparently conformed to them in their own thinking.

Public moods guide more than foreign policy, of course. Moods of "time for a change" brought the defeat of the Republican candidate for the Presidency in 1932 and the defeat of the Democratic candidate in 1952. Moods produced the campaigns against radicals in the years soon after World War I and again after World War II, and produced the contrasting tolerance of radical viewpoints in the 1930's. Moods allowed the persecution of pacifists in World War I but allowed conscientious objectors to go unmolested in World War II. Mood created in World War I a bitter, widespread hatred of the German people and a patriotic fervor for their defeat, and mood sent America through World War II with no fierce hatreds, no feverish chivalry, but only a calm determination to finish a grim, unpleasant job.

Moods govern the times when economy is demanded and the times when spending is less questioned, the times when taxes can be raised without objection and the times when taxes must be lowered. Moods allow loose morality in the personal practices of public officials for a season and then demand civic reform to punish the rascals. Moods in one season will forbid the government to draft all the young men and in another will accept the draft. Our history is filled with examples of the ebb and flow of public moods and their consequence in public policy. So is all history, as Ecclesiastes put it so many years ago:

> The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.
>
> To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
>
> A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
>
> A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

The times for government to do or to leave undone, the times when congressmen, presidents, and lesser men may make one decision or another, will depend upon the wind and the season of mood as public opinion.

3. GROUP EXPRESSION AS PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion is the collection of individual opinions in a group of people whose attention is directed toward a common subject, purpose, like, or dislike.

When we turn from the large expressions of culture and mood to the smaller expressions of particular opinions by particular groups, we see public opinion in more tangible form. Here it is associated with one or the other of two kinds of groups: (1) the unorganized individuals who are interested in the same thing and attentive to what is said about it, and (2) the organized group of individuals who have common interests and who take action as a group.

In discussing groups, we talk about publics as plural. For each opinion there is a public composed of the individuals who hold that particular opinion.

An individual will belong to many different publics and will change from some to others as his interests in subjects change. He will be interested in public schools, if his children are of school age, at the same time he is a member of the public with an interest in the deer season, if he is a hunter. He will be concerned with higher wages, if he is a wage earner; or with higher profits, if he owns the plant; but he is also a consumer and as such has an opinion toward the prices of things that he must buy.

He will belong to the public with an opinion against the importation of Mediterranean almonds, if he grows American almonds, but he will favor such importation if he is a candy manufacturer and buyer of almonds. If he grows cotton, he will favor policies that restrain the development of chemical fibers; but if he has an interest in chemical fibers, he will

favor the unrestrained flow of new textiles into markets once held by cotton. Producers of vegetable oils hold the opinion in their public that margarine should bear no special taxes and no rules against coloring at the factory, but producers of butter form a public that thinks otherwise.

The individuals in any such groups will also be members of varying numbers of other groups, unorganized and organized. Dairy farmers are concerned, in addition to their opposition to untaxed, colored margarine, with schools, roads, health laws, foreign policy, prices of feed, agricultural-support programs, the hunting season, taxes, or social security, and so are producers of vegetable oils. For many subjects at many different times, individuals will hold opinions in common with all their fellow citizens who are *interested* in and *attentive* to the same subjects. They form publics with opinions toward their various objects.

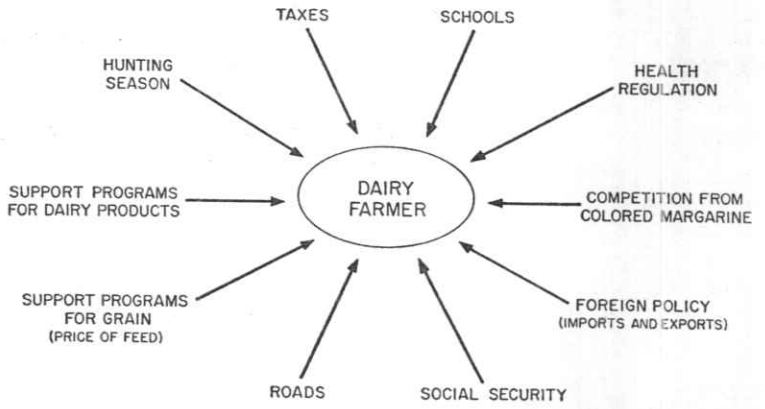

Fig. 20.1. No Man Has Only One Interest. A dairy farmer is a member of the anti-margarine interest group, but he is also a member of a number of other interest groups, both organized and unorganized, concerned with other subjects of governmental policy.

If such opinion groups, or publics, are *unorganized*, they consist of all the individuals wherever they may be who share an interest and attentiveness for the same subject at the same time. A group will exist and its weight will be felt whenever some action calls forth the opinion of the individuals who compose the unorganized group.

The expressions of unorganized groups are seen clearly in the realm of commercial entertainment, where the opinions of individuals who respond as unorganized publics either fill the movie houses or not for certain stars and films, or make a song a hit or leave it alone. Producers of commercial entertainment rise and fall by their ability to guess what the publics interested in the several kinds of entertainment will like or dislike. A public

that attends an all-Beethoven concert in Boston will not be the same as the public that becomes drugged into a coma by the heroic postclassical drama of a television wrestling match.

Unorganized publics operate as well in governmental affairs. Public-opinion polls reveal the opinion of an unorganized public. By asking questions of a sample of the adult population, the public-opinion polls establish what portion of unorganized people have an opinion and what it is toward one certain subject at one certain time. All who hold the same opinion are in this case a public. Unorganized publics also are revealed when individuals in significant numbers react spontaneously to some proposal that arouses their applause or their displeasure. Letters to congressmen, written from individual feeling and not at the suggestion of the officers of some organization, carry such expressions of public opinion. If a significant number of such letters appear, public officials know that an unorganized public exists for the one subject and the one time.

Organized publics are more familiar. They consist of groups of individuals who, sharing the same interests and purposes, unite, elect officers, raise funds, pass resolutions, issue press releases, and take any of the other actions common as expressions of organized group opinions. Such groups are as small as the Audubon Society of a small city, concerned with public policy as it affects birds, and as large as the national organizations of farmers, workers, veterans, doctors, and businessmen, which sometimes can get their various members to stand as a whole on some issues of public policy. American government is profoundly affected by the work of pressure groups as spokesmen for the opinions of organized publics in thousands of different subjects. We shall examine them in Chapter 21.

WHAT MAKES PUBLIC OPINION?

Public opinion is any collection of individual opinions held toward the same subject. Individual opinions must be formed by individuals from sources or stimuli both within and without themselves.

For purpose of this discussion we can say that public opinion is formed by the following means, alone or in combinations:

1. The culture
2. The personality of individuals
3. The information and persuasion that come to the attention of individuals from their personal, uncalculated associations
4. The information and propaganda that come to the attention of individuals from the media of mass communication

1. THE CULTURE FORMS PUBLIC OPINION

Earlier in this chapter we discussed public opinion as an expression of the culture of a nation. Culture is also a source of public opinion, a force that forms individual opinions that add up to public opinions.

Opinions toward particular subjects, whether foreign policy or the next tax rates, will be framed in the beliefs, traditions, loyalties, and faiths that are held in the culture. Attitudes of confidence and courage in the face of threat come from our culture. Attitudes of generosity and a refusal to grab the property of others for our own advancement come from our teaching. Attitudes of freedom of individual choice, as opposed to the subordination of individuals to the state, are born in our culture. A high respect for the lives of individuals comes from our culture and has its direct expression in opinion whenever a whole community turns out to find a lost child or whenever the armed forces work unceasingly for the greater safety of individual soldiers, sailors, and airmen. (Some other cultures do not place great value upon individual life.) These are only examples of the attitudes that have their foundations in our culture and that form opinions toward particular subjects at particular times.

All those common experiences listed in Chapter 3—the experiences of bigness, violence, immigration, growth of population, change to an urban nation, mobility, wealth, ideas—alone and combined shape the opinions held by individual Americans toward any subject. They are portions of our culture.

2. PERSONALITY FORMS PUBLIC OPINION

The personal traits of individuals come in part from heredity, in part from other physiological conditions, and in part from the environment of the total culture. Each individual is a mixture of physical characteristics inherited from parents and grandparents (color of skin, hair, and eyes, height, etc.), of other physiological developments (diseases and their consequences, tendency toward good health or frequent illness when due to the body rather than the mind), and of traits that come largely from the culture or environment (fears, affections, loyalties, moral values, etc.).[4] The

[4] This, of course, is a vast oversimplification of the science of personality and makes some assumptions that at one time would have roused debate in the post-Darwin argument over heredity vs. environment. Now that the battleground is quiet, many of the valiant warriors gone to their rewards, perhaps the sweeping generalization above will be permitted.

way we think, the opinions we form as individuals to add to the opinion of others and thus to form public opinion, is determined by our individual personalities. We think as we are.

One general trait of personality, possessed by all of us, is that we think much of the time by "the pictures in our heads," as Walter Lippmann, who had read William James and John Dewey, pointed out more than thirty years ago.[5] We have already mentioned this fact of psychology in Chapter 17 in connection with the fallibility of witnesses in court. It is so significant in the formation of opinion that we should consider it again. Man, said Mr. Lippmann, cannot actually see all the world he knows about or all the people and things that affect him. So he learns to see in his

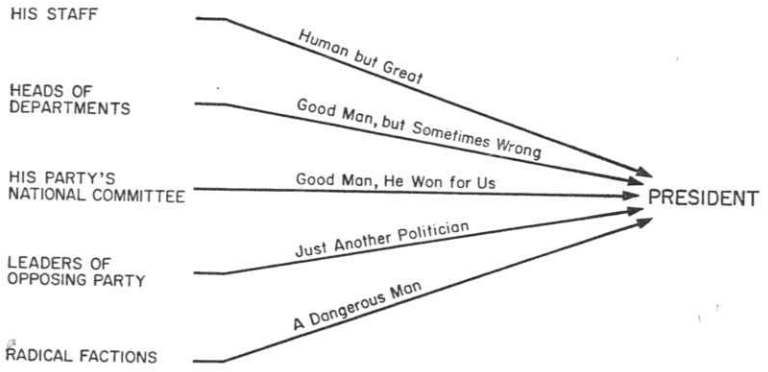

Fig. 20.2. Because of "Pictures in Our Heads," the President Will Appear to Different People in Different Ways. As one man doing certain things, he still will be described in several ways.

mind's eye the world, not necessarily as it really is, but as he visualizes it in the pictures made by himself or given to him, and not necessarily the result of accurate knowledge of facts. The pictures will vary from one individual to another, from one interest group to another, from one part of government to another.

Pictures in our heads become translated in our thinking to "stereotypes," literally molds that repeat or reproduce the same image without variation. Each of us will see the same facts as interpreted by our stereotypes. A President will appear as one man to his immediate staff, as another to his heads of departments, as another to his party's national committee, as quite a different man to the leaders of the opposition party, and as still another to the radical opposition, either right or left, which is con-

[5] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1922; Penguin Books, Inc., 1946, pp. 15–16 in the Penguin ed.

vinced that he is a dangerous man. His friends give him a halo; his opponents tarnish it; his radical enemies give him horns and a tail.

A recognition of this trait of personal behavior will help explain the formation of public opinion. It may be disturbing. So much of our theory of politics first assumed that men as individuals were interested, informed, judicious, and wise in opinions which were based upon accurate analysis of the facts. Then the modern psychologists came along to say that individual citizens will see the facts in terms of their preconceived stereotypes. The people's decisions are still the best ones, it can be argued, since their stereotypes are just as trustworthy as anyone else's. But at the same time this psychology has destroyed older and easier explanations of social behavior.

That man sought pleasure and tried to avoid pain was one such explanation that fell. Another was that man made all his decisions for economic gain, and so history and politics were no more than the reflections of economic interests in conflict. Under the new hypothesis of public opinion, grown from the new psychology, we now say that individuals form their opinions for all kinds of reasons, emotional as well as economic, and they see persons, problems, and issues in public affairs in their own individual ways in terms of their own individual preconceptions.

Only thus can we explain why a President can be seen in such extremely different opinions. He is the same man; the facts about him are seen differently by different people.

Precise analysis, impartiality, and the logical assessment of facts, as a general rule, impress only a few in the realm of political discussion. Professional students and public officials may take heed, but they too must reckon with the stereotypes of individuals in the publics with which they deal. Most others will approach public issues with their vision already prepared by their stereotypes. Listen to the next conversation about public affairs to see the stereotypes at work. Listen especially to see how facts, whether accurate or made up, are used to support arguments on all sides and how facts are interpreted differently by different individuals.

The particular experiences of individuals form their stereotypes. The people they know, their relations with others; the lessons taught by family, church, and school; the lines of career and what they bring of success or failure—all these shape the preconceptions of the individual who faces a question and forms an opinion in public affairs. Added to this psychological trait are the inherited and other psychological characteristics to mold the total personality that forms the opinions of an individual.

Personalities, as we all know from common observation, tend to group in types, although frequently we think here, too, more in stereotypes than

from accurate observation. There is the agitator type who leads causes against authority, the cautious conservative who prefers to avoid change if he can do so, the restless advocate of trial and error, the sour citizen who distrusts all who take an active part in public affairs and thinks that they are after some gain for themselves, the tireless citizen who spends time beyond the call of duty in public affairs, the indifferent citizen who retreats into escapes of all kinds and refuses to take an interest in public affairs.

In the pioneer and still unique earlier work of Harold D. Lasswell, he listed some of the popular, layman's types of political personalities before discussing a systematic psychoanalytic approach to the definition of personality in relation to political types. Such categories as "bureaucrat," "liberal," "conservative," "Communist," "reformer," "revolutionary," "martyr," "demagogue," "agitator," "propagandist," "reformer," "sorehead," or "fanatic" have long been a part of our common observation.[6] The persons of these types are found among private citizens and among public officials. Each one forms his opinion under the influence of his personality and adds it to the opinions of others to form a public opinion.

For emphasis, one point that emerges from the discussion of personality and opinion should be mentioned separately here. The fact that personality affects opinions, added to the fact that we think according to the pictures in our heads, means that most of us respond as much without reasoning as with reasoning when we form our opinions. We act nonrationally. This is nothing new or reprehensible; it is simply a way of saying that we behave like human beings, and as human beings have always behaved. Our emotions enter our opinions. If we used only reason in reaching public opinion, we would be the completely rational man who never existed on earth outside the remote theories of some philosophers.

Only by understanding this fact of nonrational behavior—call it human nature if you like—can we ever understand the formation of public opinion as collections of individual opinions. We accept this particularly when we try to understand the impact of the information and propaganda that come to the attention of individuals. Not alone the precise accuracy of statement but also the impression left with receptive individuals by information and propaganda are important. Many people do not follow the strict rules

[6] Harold D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1930, Chap. IV. In subsequent work Lasswell has stressed the results in personality and politics of whether the culture, including the relations of the individual with other persons, indulged or deprived the individual of satisfactions for his needs and desires. See his *The Analysis of Political Behavior, An Empirical Approach*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1947, pp. 195–234; and *Power and Personality*, New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1948.

of logic or the rigid exactness of evidence. The arguments that most appeal to these people are the ones that reach emotions as well as minds; that appeal to prejudices as well as to a respect for accuracy.

3. PERSONAL ASSOCIATIONS FORM OPINIONS

The uncalculated exposure of individuals to information and persuasion in their personal associations is familiar to all of us. Your opinion of the President, of war or peace, of professors and courses, of deans and student leaders, of events and plans for events, will be formed, certainly in part, by what you hear from other people. Conversations transmit facts and ideas. The individual who has listened, attentive to the subject, and formed an opinion, becomes thereby a member of the public that has an opinion for that subject. We say that "word-of-mouth" information and propaganda influence opinion.

It is almost impossible to capture for analysis the content of word-of-mouth communication. The speed, breadth, and consequence in opinions can be measured, however, when certain content is deliberately put into circulation and followed. Thus a rumor, as a type of propaganda, can be started deliberately and its spread and consequence observed. If rumors, like other propaganda, conform to the interests of the people to be reached, they will spread according to the importance of their content and the difficulty of proving or disproving the alleged facts.[7]

Word-of-mouth propaganda, based upon rumors that conform to the interest of everyone and designed to shock the receivers, shows up in nearly every American presidential campaign. We call it the "whispering campaign." For example, during the past thirty years presidential candidates have been variously charged in word-of-mouth propaganda with taking orders directly from the Pope, with being unfaithful to their wives, with having wives who are unfaithful to them, with neglecting their parents' graves, with having wives who drink too much, and with having lost their minds but being manipulated by associates. (A presidential candidate is faced with a hopeless choice. If he denies a rumor, he gives open recognition to it. If he lets it run its course, he can be damaged. Candidates usually ignore whispering campaigns.)

Word-of-mouth transmission of information and propaganda can be ob-

[7] Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, "An Analysis of Rumor," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 10, 1946–1947, pp. 501–517. For a fuller discussion of rumor, see the same authors' *The Psychology of Rumor*, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1947.

served casually, if not with scientific precision, in any hour of life. No man is alone. If others are not present in the flesh, they are present in our minds, in revery, and their influence is constant. Always they press in with information and opinion. And often with persuasion.

4. THE MASS MEDIA FORM OPINION

By far the largest volume and widest distribution of information and propaganda in America are transmitted by the media of mass circulation, the newspapers, magazines, posters, books, motion pictures, radio, and television. As a people we are blanketed with news, discussion, and opinion. Bernard Berelson examined various studies of our reading and listening habits to reach in 1949 this summary:

> About 90–95 percent of adult Americans listen to the radio fifteen minutes a day or more.
>
> About 85–90 percent read one or more newspapers more or less regularly.
>
> About 60–70 percent read one or more magazines more or less regularly.
>
> About 45–50 percent see a motion picture once every two weeks or oftener.
>
> About 25–30 percent read one or more books a month.[8]

By January, 1955, television sets in 74.1 percent of the nation's dwelling units could be added as sources of information and propaganda.

If an American absorbed all the information and propaganda that come his way, he would be the best-informed citizen in the world. If he absorbed this glut of facts and ideas as a whole, without discrimination, he would also go crazy! The diet would range in one day from war to local events, from foreign policy to football, from the President's budget message to the latest developments on the comic page, from exhortation to farmers in the early morning air to conflicting claims of cigarettes in the evening air. Any man of sense may be exposed to the gamut, but he shelters himself from most of it as carefully as he protects himself from a too-bright sun in the desert.

As a result, we get the recurrent demonstration that Americans are not informed on the details of subjects that have been presented in the mass media. By and large over the years, only about one-fourth of American adults show that they know even a bare minimum of details about foreign affairs and only about one-third know any details of other, nonforeign public affairs.[9] This does not mean that citizens are unintelligent but only that they do not select and retain much detailed information about civic affairs in general. Instead they pay attention only to those issues that concern them.

For this reason of selection by sensible citizens, the information and propaganda in mass media reach effectively only those who are already waiting to hear or read them. The number of politically interested and informed citizens just about doubles in presidential campaigns, from one-third to two-thirds of all adults. For those who pay close attention in presidential campaigns, the mass media aid perception of the issues. And those who do not pay close attention still know from their exposure to the mass media that the political issues exist, and they learn something, even though not much, from the mere presence of the information and propaganda.[10]

[8] Bernard Berelson and Lester Asheim, *The Library's Public, A Report of the Public Library Inquiry*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1949, p. 6.

INFORMATION OR PROPAGANDA OR BOTH

We need now an interlude of definition. One of the most bothersome demands of social discourse is the necessity to distinguish between information and propaganda. Usually the two merge when considered as an influence upon an individual. Few of us can ever say whether a particular opinion of our own was reached as a result of receiving information or propaganda or both. Definitions, in this case, must be brief and arbitrary for this particular time, place, and purpose.

Information, as used here, includes all those facts and ideas that are encountered casually but consciously by an individual and that impress him when he is forming an opinion. Thus if you meet a friend from another state in a presidential election year, and if he tells you in idle conversation that in his state unemployment is rising and farm prices are declining, you have received information. If you begin to form an opinion against the President in office, you have been influenced by information. Your friend was reporting rather than propagandizing. He did not

[9] Martin Kriesberg, "Dark Areas of Ignorance," in Lester Markel and others, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1949.

[10] Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides*, Evanston, Ill., Row, Peterson & Co., 1954, pp. 30–31; Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting, A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1954, pp. 227–229, 240–245. The first of these books analyzes why people voted as they did in the presidential election of 1952; the second does the same for the presidential election of 1948.

deliberately seek you out to promote an opinion; he did not carefully select the facts that he would bring to you and carefully leave out all facts that might hurt his cause. He told you what he had observed as a matter of friendly but uncalculated conversation.

The same kind of information appears in the newspapers, magazines, movies, radio, television, and books whenever the editors, writers, or producers of the medium take the initiative to include it without any deliberate motive on their part to influence opinion. For example, when an editor, writer, or producer of a mass medium says, "We will get and use this story because it is interesting or entertaining to our mass audience," he will offer as a result information. He has not said, "We will get and use carefully selected facts and ideas to persuade our audience to think a certain way."

Propaganda consists of selected facts and ideas, disseminated by persons who have a definite motive and who want to persuade others. The most significant distinctions of propaganda are *selection* and *persuasion*, both practiced deliberately for a purpose that is known to the propagandist. If your friend from out of town sought you out to tell you only certain facts, and perhaps facts so highly selected that they gave a distorted picture, for the purpose of swinging your vote, he was a propagandist and not a companion in casual, nonpurposive conversation. If an editor, writer, or producer of a mass medium chooses facts and ideas for a consciously held purpose of persuading his audience to accept a certain opinion, he is a propagandist. Whenever he disseminates facts and ideas chosen by others for the purpose of persuasion, he is serving as a means of transmitting propaganda.

Now several conclusions follow these definitions. First, both information and propaganda may appear in the same medium of communication. It might even be said that the most effective propaganda is *news* that is *caused to happen* for the purpose of propaganda. A President makes for a purpose a statement of selected facts and opinion. His statement is carried as news in the newspapers, in radio and television news broadcasts, and perhaps in the newsreels. It is still propaganda because the President as a propagandist selected the facts for a purpose and persuasion was his motive.

Information and propaganda can even be mixed in the same report of an event. Radio and television offer the clearest example of this, for no effort is made to disguise the propaganda of advertising. A description of the football game in the Rose Bowl is information; the urgent advice to buy certain razor blades is propaganda. The mixture becomes more subtle

when we try to analyze news. A fire is reported as information; but if the chief of the fire department uses the occasion to point out his need for more firemen and more equipment, propaganda has entered the report. The result of a battle is information; the carefully worded communiqué may be propaganda.

Second, there is nothing inherently "good" or "evil" in propaganda. The motive behind it and the opinion that it seeks to create measure its morality. Good citizens who raise funds for the police boys' club and the March of Dimes use propaganda. So do the ladies who try to attract people to church suppers, the groups that collect toys for crippled children, the devoted citizens who campaign for blood donors, the groups that seek donations for community chests, and the business firms that use their advertising in part for public service. Bad citizens use propaganda to sponsor hate campaigns, to favor the nation's enemies, to promote excessively selfish gains for the very few, to undermine confidence in our common beliefs and in each other. The device of propaganda can be used for high purpose or low and is in itself as amoral as gunpowder, which can be used either for pleasant displays or for murder.

In final analysis, the person who is receiving propaganda must judge whether its use is good or bad. This judgment is not always easy. Lies are mixed with truths in much of the propaganda we receive. The skilled propagandist can always blend enough truth with his falsehoods to make the whole appear to be true. A reader and listener finds it difficult to detect the lies. Yet in a democracy we musk risk the danger of lies rather than risk the greater danger of having any particular person or group define the truth for all of us. No one has yet discovered, and never will, the way to take the risks out of democracy.

Third, the facts and ideas that *come into the focus of attention* of the individual are the significant ones to shape his opinion. None of us has the time or ability, as we have said earlier, to master all the facts and ideas that flow around us in the endless stream of mass communication. No citizen can begin to know about, much less understand, all issues of public policy. To do so, he would have to earn a living, then go home to read every news story about public questions, plus a book of serious discussion. Then he would have to talk the matter over with experts and other fellow citizens. He would have to know about every public issue, from the management of the neighborhood school to the conduct of war in far lands, from the state's deer population to the size of the national budget.

Instead of attempting to be omnicompetent, each citizen focuses attention upon a few items in the floodstream of facts and ideas. To participate

in a public opinion, the individual must be attentive and must have an opinion. Unless the individual is attentive, hence interested, he will not listen to information and propaganda.

If we consider what comes to the focus of attention of individuals, we begin to grasp the particular facts and ideas, in both information and propaganda, which have some influence in the formation of the opinion of the individuals exposed.

ON RECOGNIZING PROPAGANDA

The chief requisite for one who would identify propaganda is a skeptical mind. When the mind is skeptical, it will challenge everything that tries to persuade it. The skeptical mind will never assume that a statement is true or that it is false, but only that it should be weighed and chosen for the end of understanding.

Another requisite of the citizen who would detect propaganda is an awareness that it can be found anywhere, but, except for plain advertising, it never comes labeled. Persuasion is mixed into education, certainly in the lower grades and often in the upper grades, including some college classes. While the schools teach skills, they are also used as a medium for propaganda.[11] Propaganda is also to be found in sermons; conversations; the daily news; feature films; newsreels; the speeches, reports, and news releases of public officials; in books and pamphlets; and even, on occasion, in the arts of painting, music, or drama. An aware citizen must expect to come across propaganda wherever he turns and must be able to recognize it.

The best way to analyze what comes to the focus of attention is to ask with the skeptical mind: "From what is being said here and now, *who* says *what*, *how*, to *whom*, with what *effect*?"[12] For ordinary detection the wary citizen need ask only part of the question: "*Who* is saying *what* to

[11] Leonard W. Doob, *Public Opinion and Propaganda*, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1948, pp. 232–240.

[12] Professional social scientists divide their study of propaganda into the elements of this question, as this sentence from the introduction to a series of analyses will show. "When studies are focused upon 'who,' we speak of control analysis [that is, who controls the output of the propaganda]; if they deal primarily with 'what,' it is content analysis; if 'how,' it is media analysis; if 'whom,' it is audience analysis; and if 'effect,' it is, of course, effect analysis." Harold D. Lasswell, Daniel Lerner, and Ithiel de Sola Pool, *The Comparative Study of Symbols, An Introduction*, Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1952, p. 12.

whom?" This much will make him aware of propaganda when he encounters it. If he wants to study propaganda more deeply, he will add "how" and "with what effect." Precise research must be conducted to get a full answer to any part of the question, but any citizen can learn a lot for his own purpose of understanding by a casual look at the whole process of propaganda, from "who" through "says what," "how," "to whom," and "with what effect."

SOURCE →	CONTENT →	MEDIA →
Interest group	Facts	Newspaper
Business firm	Ideas	Magazines
Party	Opinions	Radio
Government	Symbols	Television
Individual	Slogans	Movies
		Pamphlets
		Books
		Letters
		Word of mouth

AUDIENCE →	RESULTS
Organized groups	Change in opinions of the audience
Opinion groups	No change
Opinion leaders	
Individuals who might become interested	
Public officials doing certain work	
Everyone who can be reached	

Still another requisite of the citizen who seeks to recognize propaganda is to become aware of *symbols* and *slogans*, for these are to propaganda what corpuscles are to the blood.

A symbol in this sense, to return to Webster's dictionary, is "That which stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental but not intentional resemblance; esp., a visible sign of something invisible, as an idea, a quality or totality such as a state or a church; an emblem; as, the lion is the *symbol* of courage; the cross is the *symbol* of Christianity."

Most communication consists in large part of symbols. We use a word or a phrase to designate a whole complex of facts that will be familiar to all in our same culture so that all of us respond with the same mental pictures. If someone says "spring fever," we all know the feeling, and there is no need to describe the interrelations of temperature, humidity, the growth of grass and leaves, the blooming of flowers, the good feeling that comes from glandular and emotional change, and the fine laziness of warm sun. If someone says "liberty," to get back to politics, we do not

need to ask what it means. It means the right to dispute with public officials, the right to vote, the right to oppose oppressive government.

It is perhaps easier to learn what symbols are by examining those from another culture. In the propaganda of the Soviet Union and the Communist party, symbols designed to arouse hostility on the part of Communists are "capitalism," "imperialism," "plutocracy," and "idealism." Symbols that arouse favorable responses among Communists are "world revolution," "dictatorship of the proletariat," "collectivism," or "class struggle."[13] In the strange world of Communism, practically all official discourse is in the symbols of propaganda, whether the Communists are talking to the world outside, to themselves, or to the people who live under Communism without being party members.

So it was that, in the purge of 1952, the American mission in Berlin compiled a working list of the "isms" which were used in Communist propaganda as symbols of crime by Communists who had formerly been in good standing.[14] Included in the "thought crimes" of that year and that purge were "Zionism," favoring the Jews and the new state of Israel; "cosmopolitanism," seeing something good in countries other than the Soviet Union; "objectivism," trying to be objective; "neutralism," taking no positive role in party activities; "practicism," taking a practical view instead of relying upon party theory; and many others.

Slogans are the statements of opinion which catch on in the minds of enough people so that they become currency for communication. They need merely to be stated, and all who agree with the opinion will respond favorably. No explanation and no defense are needed. Some examples of slogans will make their use clear: "Time for a change," "nothing to fear but fear itself," "54–40 or fight," "give me liberty or give me death," "not one cent for tribute," "America for the Americans," "less government in business, more business in government."

In most propaganda, symbols and slogans are intermingled. Symbols are used to evoke certain preselected responses at the same time slogans are inserted to impress those who can be expected to share the opinion expressed in the slogan, and perhaps to capture some new members for the audience. Some examples from propaganda within the United States will illustrate an approach to the internal content of propaganda as a way of analyzing it.

A pamphlet, *A Father's Message to Our New President*, was distributed by the management to the employees of at least one industrial plant about

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[14] Associated Press dispatch from Berlin, *Milwaukee Journal*, January 25, 1953.

the time of the election of President Eisenhower in 1952.[15] It led into an argument for less government intervention in business and for lower taxes by use of the symbols and slogans "one father to another," "our boys," "opportunity to make a better life" in direct contrast to "birth-to-death security" imposed by government, "sons dying in Korea" as a result of "lack of clear-cut foreign policy," a choice between "freedom and opportunity" and "socialism," and a choice between "more government in business" or "more business in government."

When the main argument was reached in a series of seven "road-blocks to prosperity," the symbols and slogans introduced earlier were repeated and some new ones added, such as, "private opportunity system," "tax policies which destroy incentive," "profit as incentive which makes the private opportunity system work," "instability of the dollar," "benefits for all from full output of our production system," and "monopolistic union practices supported by government."

A labor statement on the theme of taxes was headed by a slogan.[16] It was, "Most taxes are fair enough, while most prices are too high." This was followed by an article in which symbols of hostility were "pre-Hoover Rugged Individualists" (the capital letters were in the original to draw attention), "National Association of Manufacturers," and "Big Business Monopolies." A symbol to evoke favor was "FDR" in connection with the slogan "nothing to fear but fear itself." Other symbols of favorable response were "Old Age Pensions," "Unemployment Compensation," "Housing," and "the TVA." And some other slogans were "government is the biggest cooperative of them all," "prices are a tax you pay for a service," "taxes are a wholesale cost; prices are high profit retail," and "taxation without representation."

The professional social scientist can group symbols into categories, then count their appearance through time in mass communication to ascertain changes in the content of either information or propaganda. Thus studies have been made of the symbols of internationalism and of democracy as they appeared for some sixty years in editorials of five newspapers of great prestige: *The Times* of Great Britain, *The New York Times* of the United States, *Izvestia* of Russia, *Le Temps* of France, and the *Frank-*

[15] A speech delivered by H. E. Humphrey, president, United States Rubber Company, at the annual meeting of the Fifth Avenue Association, New York, September 30, 1952. It was distributed by Good Reading Rack Service, 76 Ninth Avenue, New York 11, N.Y.

[16] *UAW-CIO Ammunition*, official publication of the Education Department, International Union, United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, April, 1950.

furter Zeitung or *Völkischer Beobachter* of Germany.[17] It is reasonably established that the trend of the United States away from isolationism and of the Soviet Union toward isolationism was shown in the content of the editorials in prestige papers, and it follows that the systematic analysis of the symbol content of communication directed at large numbers of people will reflect at the time a trend that is occurring.

But ordinary citizens are not social scientists. Of what use is the awareness of symbols to them? It gives them a handy tool to aid in their recognition of propaganda. If they read or hear such terms as "warmongers," "giveaway programs," "socialism," "taxes-that-destroy-incentive," profiteers," "labor racketeers," "monopoly," "Wall Street," "rugged individualism," and other similar symbols, they can be fairly sure that they are hearing propaganda, and they can apply their skeptical minds to detect who is saying what to whom, how, for what purpose. Once aware of propaganda, a citizen need not be influenced unconsciously by it. The person who becomes discriminating in his reading and listening, so that he does not accept without question all that he reads and hears, will be among the truly educated citizens in the world and will enjoy the pride of self-confidence in his own judgment. He will have escaped from blind living by stereotypes, clichés, slogans, and the flood of symbols.

Again, it is not easy. One difficulty comes in the fact that propagandists with varying motives use the same symbols in their appeals. Both Communists and democrats use the symbol "peace," but a world of difference lies in their approaches to peace, the Communists meaning peace under Communism and the democrats meaning peace under democracy. An educated citizen then must spot the symbols and also analyze who is using them for what motive.

Another difficulty comes from the fact that propaganda alone is never the whole force in politics. It represents other conditions, actions, and motives, and the educated citizen must be aware also of the situation in which the propaganda appears. He must do supplementary reading and analysis, in other words, before he can use the analysis of propaganda in his thinking. Despite these difficulties, some citizens acquire great insight into the political process. They know how to think realistically about political affairs. They may be factory workers, farmers, housewives, woodsmen, day laborers, bankers, industrial managers, students, preachers, politicians, or civil servants; their status and amount of schooling are no indicator of their ability to recognize propaganda.

[17] Ithiel de Sola Pool and others, *Symbols of Internationalism* (1951), *Symbols of Democracy* (1952); see also *The Prestige Papers* (1952); all published Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press.

OPINION FOLLOWERS AND OPINION LEADERS

Active citizens fall into two main groups, those who are members of opinion groups and follow the opinion and those who are leaders of opinion.

The first form the backbone of public opinion. They will have enough interest in a particular subject to have an opinion toward it. They will act upon that opinion whenever the time comes, as in an election or in an appeal to "write your congressmen." They attend meetings to hear discussion; they sign petitions, march in parades, write letters, vote on resolutions; they go to the polls and vote. In short, these citizens who are members of opinion groups do whatever is called for to "stand up and be counted" for the side they favor.

Opinion leaders take the extra trouble to spread their views to others. They do this at work, in church meetings, at the lunch hour in a factory, in conversations with friends, in small talk at social gatherings, wherever communication takes place. No special title is held; no distinctive decoration is worn by the opinion leader. He may never have finished grade school or he may be a college graduate; he may be rich or poor; he may be a factory worker or an office worker. Wealth, sex, social position, age, or type of work has no control over who becomes an opinion leader. Any individual in his association with other individuals can be an opinion leader by the mere act of being one.

The combination of followers and leaders makes effective public opinion, issue by issue, group by group, organized and unorganized. When public officials raise antennae to catch the public opinion toward some particular question, the waves they receive will come from those groups of like-minded citizens who have an opinion on the question.

THE EFFECT OF PUBLIC OPINION UPON PUBLIC OFFICIALS

All public officials who hold any responsibility whatsoever have a concern for public opinion, whether they be legislators, judges, or executive officials. In our system of government, all are enjoined to serve the public and, as honest men who want to do their jobs well, they try to keep abreast of what the public that is concerned with their work thinks about it. In the case of elected officials, the stern reckoning of the polls com-

pels them to try to please as many voters as they can and to displease as few as possible.

Public officials use all sorts of means to keep in touch with what people are thinking about various questions. They have no one method. Letters from citizens are respected when they say something original and do not represent merely part of an organized campaign. Conversations with trusted friends who say what they think the public thinks carry weight if the friend has a record of good judgment. Other devices are familiar to all of us, for example, the way a respected newspaper emphasizes or fails to emphasize an event, the resolutions passed by organized groups, the speakers who appeared for and against a proposition at the last convention of an organized group, the judgment of other public officials toward the same question, the leaning of known opinion leaders in a community, occasionally the straw polls that are taken on questions, the predetermined stand of certain groups when there is no possibility that they will change, the views of party workers who have attained special skill in "sizing up" public opinion.

Always public officials know that only a portion of all the people will be interested in any one question and the rest will be acquiescent in the outcome, and politics consists partly in knowing who speaks for what and how strong his voice. Officials wend their way among conflicting opinions, measuring the forces that surround them, making the decisions that they think will do the most good for the most people and at the same time arouse the minimum of hostility.

CHAPTER 21

Pressure Groups

ANYONE who takes an interest in civic work in the United States can easily become very busy indeed with organizations. A housewife answers the phone around 10 A.M. It is the chairman of the Tenth District home-canvass committee for the community chest, seeking volunteer canvassers. The canvassers will meet for lunch the following Friday to receive instructions. The housewife makes a note of the meeting on her calendar, hanging beside the phone, and a note in her head that perhaps six afternoons and some evenings will be taken by the canvass.

She is also a member of two parent-teacher associations, one for the elementary school where her younger son is in sixth grade and the other for the junior high school where her older son is in eighth grade. At least once a month she goes to a meeting to discuss needs of the schools. Twice a year she bakes cakes for the sales that raise money for school equipment not provided by public funds. One year she was a "room mother" and spent a lot of time collecting favors for a class party.

She is also a member of the League of Women Voters. Every two weeks her unit meets in some member's home to discuss a public issue in order to decide where the members stand as individuals. Once a month the city-wide league meets for a similar purpose. Before an election, the candidates for office appear before the city league meeting to state their positions. They know the power of women as voters and as opinion leaders.

She is also a member of the social-action committee of her church. Moreover, she was elected secretary for this year, and she finds the unfamiliar duty of writing up the minutes one of her most bothersome jobs. She cannot feel right about them if "they don't sound like minutes," and she has a hard time making minutes sound like minutes. This church committee has agreed to sponsor a displaced person from Latvia. The secretary has some six letters a month to write in connection with the Latvian. Each letter bothers her because she is not used to writing to people she doesn't know.

On the whole, the lady works steadily and hard. She volunteers to be