

# Chapter Summary

## Public Opinion and Government

### Lesson 1 *Forming Public Opinion*

- Public opinion, or strong opinion that is shared by many people, influences how public officials act. Public opinion determines how effectively the president can carry out his or her programs.
- Public opinion is not just one point of view. Different groups have different points of view.
- Factors that affect people's opinions include their personal experiences, age, gender, race, income, and occupation.
- Opinions can be shaped by what people read in newspapers and on the Internet and by what they see on television and hear from interest groups.
- Public opinion is described in terms of direction (positive or negative), intensity (strength of opinion), and stability (whether people will change their minds).
- Public opinion is measured with polls, or surveys that ask people about particular issues or a particular public official. Good polls ask fair and unbiased questions and include a diverse group of people.

### Lesson 2 *The Mass Media*

- Most Americans get news from print or electronic mass media.
- Most media outlets are private businesses and cover news that will attract the greatest number of listeners. The stories the media choose to focus on can shape the public agenda.
- Politicians use the media to test public reaction to their ideas, and the media use politicians as sources of news stories.
- Mass media play a watchdog role by monitoring government and exposing corruption and wrongdoing.
- The government can classify certain information, making it off-limits to reporters.
- The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects freedom of the press and prohibits censorship. It is illegal, however, to publish false information that will harm someone's reputation (libel).

# Chapter Summary

## Public Opinion and Government

### Lesson 2 *The Mass Media, Cont.*

- Some states have shield laws that protect reporters' sources by allowing them to be kept secret.
- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates broadcast media.

### Lesson 3 *Interest Groups and Lobbying*

- The First Amendment gives people the right to join interest groups.
- Interest groups are made up of people who share a common cause or characteristic.
- Some private interest groups have common economic or business interests; others may be concerned about a particular issue.
- Public-interest groups work to benefit certain large segments of society.
- Some interest groups try to influence the decisions of government leaders by supporting certain candidates. Many form political action committees (PACs) to raise money for the candidates they support.
- Other interest groups try to affect public policy by bringing cases to court or by lobbying lawmakers.
- Interest groups communicate with the public to shape public opinion. They can provide useful information, but citizens should be aware that the information interest groups provide is often biased.
- Interest groups and lobbyists are regulated by federal, state, and local law. Regulations include limits on campaign contributions, required disclosure of the names of contributors, and a waiting period before lawmakers who leave office can become lobbyists.