GOVERNMENTS must concern themselves with the opinions of their citizens, if only to provide a basis for repression of disaffection. The persistent curiosity, and anxiety, of rulers about what their subjects say of them and of their actions are chronicled in the histories of secret police. Measures to satisfy such curiosity by soundings of opinion are often only an aspect of political persecution; they may also guide policies of persuasion calculated to convert discontent into cheerful acquiescence. And even in the least democratic regime opinion may influence the direction or tempo of substantive policy. Although a government may be erected on tyranny, to endure it needs the ungrudging support of substantial numbers of its people. If that support does not arise spontaneously, measures will be taken to stimulate it by tactical concessions to public opinion, by the management of opinion, or by both.¹

gitimacy for their authority in various sources—from divine right on down—but rarely did they place much store on the consent of the governed. The citizen's duty was to obey. Gradually over several centuries, from small beginnings in medieval towns to the American and French Revolutions, these rationalizations of authority were revised to ground the right to govern in the consent of the governed. The percolation of this idea into the mind of man generated an ethical imperative that gave a new color to the relations of governors and governed. The dynasties of Europe learned from Napoleon that they had to take into account the wishes of the governed in order to maintain their power, but the democratic doctrine assumed this to be a condition of governing rightly. In the nineteenth century the struggles for suffrage expansion and for parliamentary government led to the establishment of institutions appropriate to the belief that the mass of the people should in some way participate in the great decisions of state and thereby govern themselves. The bundle of ideas, beliefs, and emotions connected with this view had an appeal so universal and so powerful that modern dictatorships took over much of the symbolism, ritual, and semantics of democracy.

Progressivism and the Efflorescence of Faith in the Public. The ethical imperative that government heed the opinion of the public has its origins, thus, in democratic ideology as well as in the practical necessity that governments obtain the support of influential elements in society. The notion of government by public opinion, nourished on memories of government as exploitation of the mass of men by a few men, stirred millennial hopes of a lasting popular emancipation. By the enthronement of public opinion, governors could be brought to heel and the supposedly idealistic hopes of all men could be realized. Through the history of American political thought these ideas have flowed—at times thinly, as disillusionment set in; at times in flood, as democratic idealism flourished. Democratic hopes and expectations reached a great peak in the United States in the years before World War I, when the doughty Progressives fought their battles against privilege and preached the righteousness of the popular will. To see that the popular will prevailed, they contrived no end of means to involve the people in the process of government. Not only were officials to be elected; they were to be subject to recall by the voters. Legislators, long subservient to special interests, were to find themselves subject to a popular veto through a referendum on their acts. Or the people were to be free to take matters into their own hands and to initiate legislative action through the new instruments of direct de-

mocracy. The courts, regarded as the sturdiest bastion of the special interests, were to be subjected to the humiliation of a popular review of their constitutional decisions.

Disenchantment: Mr. Lippmann and the Straw Man. This heightened faith in the people proved to be a momentary exaltation, and it was dimmed, if not snuffed out, as Wilsonian idealism declined in the aftermath of World War I. In 1922 Walter Lippmann published his Public Opinion, in which he reappraised the function of public opinion in the democratic process. The years of Harding and Coolidge were not times to inspire high hopes in the future of the human race, and in 1925 Mr. Lippmann issued The Phantom Public, a volume whose title put more bluntly than did its argument a thesis severely deflating the role of the public.

What Mr. Lippmann did was to destroy a straw man. He did it thoroughly nonetheless. He refuted the more extravagant beliefs about the role of the average man in self-governance by citation of a few cold, hard facts. Whether these beliefs had ever been held save in the autointoxication of political oratory directed to the average man may be doubted. Yet Mr. Lippmann demolished whatever illusion existed that "the public" could be regarded as an omniscient and omniscient collectivity equipped to decide the affairs of state. The average person, Mr. Lippmann made clear, had little time for the affairs of state. He exhausted his energies earning a livelihood, and, once home from work, he was likely to take off his shoes and indulge his feet as he looked at the comics rather than to attempt to inform himself on the intricate pros and cons of the weighty matters currently confounding Washington. Even if he were willing to devote his spare time to the study of public issues, the information available to him was both inadequate and unenlightening. The newspapers of that day were no more dedicated to the clarification of public issues than are those of the present. Nor was the amorphous public, even if informed, capable of taking the initiative in any public action.

The New Machiavellians: Barnums and Cabals. Blows from other sources also battered the idyllic vision of the guidance of affairs by the opinions of a virtuous public. In the decades after World War I
beliefs in the ability of propagandists to manipulate public attitudes grew apace. New theories of psychology brought new conceptions of the nature of man, conceptions that made him a nonrational creature of subconscious urges and external suggestion. During World War I itself the propagandists took great strides in the development of their art. The belief that the people could readily be manipulated by the mass media became even more widely held later as radio and television attracted vast audiences. Propagandists and advertising men encouraged the acceptance of the most exaggerated estimates of their powers. Given enough money, they could sell soap, cigarettes, policies, presidential candidates, even monstrous and nonfunctional automobiles. As a group at bottom professionally dedicated to the dissemination of falsehood (we need not blink so obvious a fact), the advertising fraternity had few inhibitions against the propagation of myths that inflated its own capabilities. Eventually the image of public opinion as an irresistible giant yielded to the image of the all-powerful opinion manipulators, engineers of consent and molders of mass opinion.

Obviously no conception of American politics that placed at the apex of power advertising men and public-relations counselors—insecure, ulcer-ridden hucksters—could satisfy for long. A more elegant theory of politics was needed. Mr. C. Wright Mills brought the theoretical evolution full circle in the 1950’s as he expounded the role and function of the “power elite.” Behind all the constitutional trappings and the self-important activities of most politicians and other front men, he thought he perceived a clique of the big rich, the corporate bosses, the military brass, and a few key politicians. By their consultations and maneuvers this group, if we may caricature Mr. Mills—and he invites caricature—fixes the principal lines of national policy. Behind them trail the lesser men: the press, the radio and TV, and the minor politicians. Then in due course the public tags along.

*New Situational Limits to Public Opinion. Without doubt the conditions affecting the relations between government and public opinion have been radically altered during the past half-century. The means for informing and influencing the public have undergone a transformation. With the concentration in large corporations, in labor unions, and in other organizations of the powers of private decision formerly widely dispersed has come a parallel concentration of the power of autonomous political decision into relatively fewer hands. With the growth in range of governmental functions and the increase in their complexity, the average man is, or at least is said to be, more and more bewildered, or repelled, by questions of public policy. With the movement of decision to Washington and with the growth in salience of foreign policy questions, matters of public policy are less and less intimately relevant to the experience and knowledge of most people. With the extension of the curtail of secrecy over wider areas, the public is denied information and thereby the opportunity for meaningful criticism of public policy.

Despite all these developments, it is too early to conclude that governments can ignore public opinion or that democratic government amounts only to a hoax, a ritual whose performance serves only to delude the people and thereby to convert them into willing subjects of the powers that be. The most superficial comparison of American public policy in 1900 and in 1960 indicates that there have been changes of no little consequence for the average man. Not all these policy innovations have been willed by a power elite of 100 or 200 persons; nor have they been entirely unconnected with mass sentiment. Unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy, all the talk about democracy is nonsense. As Lasswell has said, the “open interplay of opinion and policy is the distinguishing mark of popular rule.” Yet the sharp definition of the role of public opinion as it affects different kinds of policies under different types of situations presents an analytical problem of extraordinary difficulty. That problem, however, should not lead us to ignore, or to deny, the phenomenon of the conduct of enormous governmental operations in a manner that by and large wins the support of a citizenry of millions and is in the main in accord with their preferences. Given control of the apparatus of authority, to govern is easy; but to govern without heavy reliance on the machinery of coercion is a high art.

2 · Conceptions and Distinctions

Among philosophers, publicists, and spare-time commentators on public affairs, the discussion of public opinion is conducted with style. Aphorisms, epigrams, axioms, and figures embellish the verbal display. One can, with Pascal, christen public opinion the “Queen of the World.” One can observe, with the authors of *The Federalist*, that “all government rests on opinion” or, with Hume, that it is “on opinion only that government is founded.” One can assert that governments derive their powers from the “consent of the governed” or can picture

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public opinion as "a giant who is fickle and ignorant yet still has a giant's strength, and may use it with frightful effect." 8

Such metaphors serve principally to ornament prose rather than to enlighten the reader about the nature of public opinion. Yet the discussion of public opinion becomes murky when meticulous scholars try to define their conceptions and to form distinctions that enable them to make statements that seem to fit the observable realities of the interaction of public opinion and government. This murkiness by no means flows solely from the incomprehensibility of men of learning. To speak with precision of public opinion is a task not unlike coming to grips with the Holy Ghost. Public opinion, Leiserson notes, "has come to refer to a sort of secular idol, and is a 'god-term' to which citizens, scientists, and office-holders alike pay allegiance, partly as an act of faith, partly as a matter of observation, partly as a condition of sanity." 6 Nevertheless, a brief review of some of the conceptions and distinctions that have been developed by scholars in their discussions of the topic should be of value as an aid in orientation.

Public As Organic Entity. Some speculators on public opinion have imagined the public to be a semiorganized entity that in some way or another could move through stages of initiation and debate and reach a recognizable collective decision on an issue. The images of the city-state and of the New England town meeting often color such attempts to form a conception of the reality of public opinion in the modern state. The intricate structure of the nation-state cannot easily be grasped, and some students seek in the processes of opinion formation the equivalent of the citizenry gathered in the town hall or in the market place to discuss, debate, and settle public issues. In its simplest form this analogous thinking personifies the public: "The public expects"; "The public demands"; "Public opinion swept away all opposition." 7 Perhaps a comparable conception is concealed in the assertion that public opinion is "a deeply persuasive organic force," which "articulates and formulates not only the deliberate judgments of the rational elements within the collectivity but the evanescent common will, which somehow integrates and momentarily crystallizes the sporadic sentiments and loyalties of the masses of the population." 8


1: Introduction

Some observers, in their search for a conception to encompass the public opinion process as a whole, produce statements more complex than the town-meeting analogy but not fundamentally different in kind. An image emerges of a rudimentary organism consisting of individuals and groups linked together by mass communications, which centers its attention on an issue, discusses and deliberates, and in some mysterious way proceeds to a decision. A public becomes a social entity, different from a mob and not the same as a mass. Thus, Young notes that "in terms of stability and degree of institutionalization, . . . a public is a transitory, amorphous, and relatively unstructured association of individuals with certain interests in common." 9 From the conception of the "public" as a social entity it is but a short step to the attempt to identify some pattern or behavior through which the entity travels to reach decision or to form public opinion on an issue. Analysis in such terms is called the study of the dynamics of opinion formation, in contrast with the study of opinion as static (or at a moment in time). On occasions the process is likened to individual action in response to a problem. "Public opinion then becomes a form of group thinking, and the process bears more than an analogous relation to the individual's complete act of thought." 10 Or a sequence of steps is suggested as a standard pattern through which the public moves in the formation of opinion—for example, the rise of an issue, discussion and deliberation, and arrival at a decision. 11

More is lost than is gained in understanding by the organismic view of the public. Occasionally, in relatively small communities, citizen concern and involvement over an issue may be widespread and community consideration may move in close articulation with the mechanisms of authority to a decision that can realistically be said to be a decision by public opinion. At far rarer intervals great national populations may be swept by a common concern about a momentous issue with a similar result. Yet ordinarily a decision is made not by the public but by officials after greater or a lesser consideration of the opinion of the public or of parts of the public.

Special Publics and the General Public. While the organismic conceptions of the public and of the opinion process may be of more poetic than practical utility, other distinctions developed by students of public opinion persist.

lic opinion serve as handy aids to thought on the subject. There is, for example, the distinction between special publics and the general public. At one time it was the custom to speak of the “public.” In due course it became evident that on only a few questions did the entire citizenry have an opinion. The notion of special publics was contrived to describe those segments of the public with views about particular issues, problems, or other questions of public concern. In actual politics one issue engages the attention of one subdivision of the population, while another arouses the interest of another group, and a third question involves still another special public. This distinction between general and special publics does, of course, do violence to the basic idea that “the” public shall prevail; it also warps the meaning of the term “public.” Yet the usage mirrors the facts of political life and, incidentally, creates a problem for the public opinion theorist. He sometimes copes with the difficulty by the assertion that when the concern of a small special public prevails, it does so with the tacit consent of the general public.

Blumer deals in a different way with the problem created by the existence of special publics. He remarks that public opinion may be “different from the opinion of any of the groups in the public. It can be thought of, perhaps, as a composite opinion formed out of the several opinions that are held in the public; or better, as the central tendency set by the striving of these separate opinions and, consequently, as being shaped by the relative strength and play of opposition among them.” Blumer thus brings together the opinions of the special publics into something of a weighted average that takes into account both the numbers holding different kinds of opinions (or no opinion) and the strength of the holders of opinion. Whether this notion has validity, the question of who has what kind of opinion is of basic significance in a consideration of interactions between public and government.

Public and Private Opinion. There are opinions and opinions; their number is as numerous as the kinds of objects about which men have preferences and beliefs. On what range of topics may opinion be considered to be public? Not all opinions of the public, even when widely held within the population, are to be properly regarded as public opinion. It may be assumed that opinions about the desirability of tailfins on Chevrolets are not public opinions, or that preferences for striped or solid white toothpaste fall outside the concern of the student of public

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opinion. On the other hand, opinion about the length of automobile tailfins may become public opinion if the question becomes one of whether the length of nonfunctional automobile ornamentation has become a public nuisance by its pressure on the available parking acreage. Goldhamer suggests that an opinion is public “if it attaches to an object of public concern.” The content of the phrase, “object of public concern,” may vary from time to time with the changing scope of governmental action, or it may differ from society to society.

Many American students of public opinion have limited themselves to a narrow range of public opinion; they have tended to regard public opinion as concerned with substantive issues of public policy. That focus results from the basic tenet that public opinion should determine public policy, but it excludes a range of opinions of undoubted political relevance. Opinions about candidates, views about political parties, attitudes about the performance of governments, basic assumptions about what is right and proper in public affairs, and general beliefs and expectations about the place of government in society are also opinions of political relevance, as would be such opinions or states of mind as are embraced by the term “national morale.”

Characteristics of Public Opinion. The differentiation between opinions about public objects and about private objects crudely defines the outer limits of the opinion sphere that may be regarded as public. It leaves untouched the question of the characteristics of public opinion. In recent decades considerable scholarly effort has been devoted, principally by social psychologists, to ascertaining the characteristics of public opinion. In an earlier day the practice was to treat the direction of opinion in simple pro and con categories. The majority could be described as for or against, as voting yes or no. The psychometricians have made it clear that a pro-and-con categorization of opinion often conceals wide gradations in opinion. They have contrived scales to measure opinion in its dimension of direction. For example, a division of people who support and oppose government ownership of industry does not provide a useful indication of the nature of public opinion on the question of government policy toward economic activity. Views on economic policy may be arranged along a scale from the extreme left to the extreme right. The opinion of an individual may be located at any one of many points along such a scale. One person may favor governmental ownership of all the means of production; another may be satisfied with a large dose of governmental regulation; still another
may prefer only the most limited control of the economy; and others may wish to abolish whatever controls exist. The determination of the distribution of the population along such scales measuring the direction of opinion makes possible a more informed estimate of the nature of public opinion, in its dimension of direction, than did earlier and cruder conceptions.

Closely related to the conception of direction of opinion are ideas about the qualities or properties of opinion. Intensity of opinion is one of these qualities. A person may be an extreme conservative or radical on the scale of direction of opinion, but he may care a great deal, a little, or scarcely at all about that opinion; that is, opinions may vary in the intensity with which they are held. Obviously the incidence of opinion intensity within the electorate about an issue or problem is of basic importance for politics. An issue that arouses only opinion of low intensity may receive only the slightest attention, while one that stirs opinions of high intensity among even relatively small numbers of people may be placed high on the governmental agenda. Another quality of opinion of some importance is its stability. An individual, for example, may have a view, expressed on the basis of little or no information, which may readily be changed. On the other hand, an opinion may be so firmly held that it is not easily altered. Issues that relate to opinions of high stability widely held within the population present radically different problems for government than do those matters on which opinion is unstable.

Students of public opinion often differentiate between opinion and custom. Utilizing this distinction, public opinion concerns those issues whose solution is not more or less automatically provided by custom or by the expectations shared predominantly by members of the group. Public opinion, then, concerns live issues. Park said that public opinion emerges when action is in process; it is opinion “before it has been capitalized and, so to speak, funded in the form of dogma, doctrine, or law.” The exclusion from public opinion of the settled attitudes of the community unduly narrows the meaning of the term. Governments must pay heed to the mores, the customs, the “funded” or the “standing” opinions quite as much as to the effervescence of today’s popular discussion. The distinction between opinion and custom really amounts to a differentiation between qualities of opinions.

Prerequisites for the Existence of Public Opinion. Students of public opinion have also sought to identify those broad conditions under which public opinion could sensibly be said to exist as a force in government. Democratic theorists that they were, they specified democratic conditions as a prerequisite for even the existence of public opinion. Freedom of speech and discussion, for example, are said to be prerequisites, since it is by public discussion that opinion is formed. Closely associated with this condition is that of the free availability of information about public issues and public questions; those problems handled by government in secrecy can scarcely be a subject of informed public debate.

Opinion theorists almost uniformly place emphasis on the importance of the existence of a consensus on fundamentals as a basis for the settlement of the differences involved in the development of a prevailing opinion on transient issues. Otherwise, government cannot be founded upon public opinion. “There is,” says MacIver, “no public opinion unless an area of common ground lies underneath and supports the differences of opinion, finding expression in the traditions and conventions and behavior patterns characteristic of the folk.” Similarly, Park argued that there needs to be within the public “a general understanding and a community of interest among all parties sufficient to make discussion possible.”

In keeping with this general vein of thought, Lowell sharply restricted the content of the term “public opinion.” In his system the views of people generally on public questions of all sorts did not constitute public opinion. For a “real” public opinion to exist, it had to be a community opinion. Thus, when two highwaymen meet a traveler on a dark road and propose to relieve him of his wallet, it would be incorrect to say that a public opinion existed favorable to a redistribution of property. Public opinion, Lowell thought, need not be a unanimous opinion, but it should create an “obligation moral or political on the part of the majority,” an obligation, at least under certain conditions, to submit. He laid great stress on the grounds of consensus as a basis for public opinion. “A body of men are politically capable of a public opinion only so far as they are agreed upon the ends and aims of government and upon the principles by which those ends shall be attained.” No public opinion could exist in nations with large minorities unwilling to abide by majority decision. Moreover, public opinion could exist only when “the bulk of the people are in a position to determine of their own knowledge or by weighing a substantial part of the facts required for a rational decision,” or when the

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question involves an issue of "apparent harmony or contradiction with settled convictions." 8

It seems clear that consensus does not have to prevail for opinions to exist to which governments must accord weight. Yet the emphasis on consensus identifies special problems in governments that accord deference to public opinion. If the public is to project its opinions into public policy, some sectors of the public must be prepared to accept actions distasteful to them. The limits of the general consensus may fix the limits within which widespread participation in public affairs may lead to decisions distasteful yet acceptable to those whose opinions do not prevail.

3 A Working View of Public Opinion

For purposes of political analysis one need not strain painfully toward the formation of a theoretical representation of an eerie entity called "public opinion." One need not seek to find "the" public embodied in some kind of amorphous social structure that goes through recurring patterns of action as it reaches a decision. "Public opinion" in this discussion may simply be taken to mean those opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed. Governments may be compelled toward action or inaction by such opinion; in other instances they may ignore it, perhaps at their peril; they may attempt to alter it; or they may divert or pacify it. So defined, opinion may be shared by many or by few people. It may be the veriest whim, or it may be a settled conviction. The opinion may represent a general agreement formed after the widest discussion; it may be far less firmly founded. It may even be contingent opinion—that is, estimates by decision makers of probable responses to actions they consider taking. Whatever the character or distribution of opinion, governments may need to estimate its nature as an incident to many of their actions. 9

Probably any regime needs to heed at least some opinions outside the government; yet the range of opinions that enter into the calculations of governments obviously varies among societies with their political norms and customs.

This view of public opinion resembles the conceptions of several

9 The conception of public opinion advanced here, it is cheerfully conceded, is difficult to apply in research. If one is to know what opinions governments heed, one must know the inner thoughts of presidents, congressmen, and other officials. It is even more difficult to know what opinions prudent governments should heed for the sake of the success of their policies or even for their survival.

other commentators. Speier defines, for the purposes of historical analysis, "public opinion" as "opinions on matters of concern to the nation freely and publicly expressed by men outside the government who claim a right that their opinions should influence or determine the actions, personnel, or structure of their government." 1 Wirth observed that the "decisive part of public opinion, then, is the organization of views on issues that exercise an impact upon those who are in a position to make decisions." 2 In the context of a criticism of those pollsters who regard all the responses obtained by their interviewers as public opinion, Blumer remarks that "the character of public opinion in terms of meaningful operation must be sought in the array of views and positions which enter into the consideration of those who have to take action on public opinion." 3

Virtues and Consequences of a Broad View of Opinion. The adoption of a broad, and somewhat vague, conception of public opinion has consequences for a general survey of the field. While it permits an avoidance of some analytical problems, it also brings within the range of the discussion an extremely wide variety of phenomena. When public opinion is regarded as those opinions that may influence government, it is unnecessary to assume that "the public" exists as any particular sort of loosely structured association or other ghostly sociological entity. On a given question the operative public may consist of a highly structured association, while on another matter opinions may be diffused through a wide public that lacks any special organization. The form of the public concerned about subsidies to maritime shipping could plausibly be expected to differ radically from that of the public concerned about honesty in public office. On one issue the public may consist of one sector of the population; on another, of a quite different sector. Not much overlap would be expected between those deeply interested in policy toward upland game and those concerned about practices in the licensing of plumbers. Or publics may be differentiated by the nature of their involvement in public questions. Almond speaks of the "mass public" and the "attentive public." The mass public, informed by the mass media, pays heed to the tone of discussion of issues and responds by moods of apprehension or complacency. The attentive public, a far smaller group, follows public issues

in an analytical manner, is relatively well informed, and constitutes a critical audience for the discussion of public affairs.

To emphasize, in the definition of opinion, relevance for government is to bring opinions with widely varying properties or qualities within our range of concern. Lowell limited opinion to "the acceptance of one among two or more inconsistent views which are capable of being accepted by a rational mind as true." By "opinion" Young means "a belief or conviction more verifiable and stronger in intensity than a mere hunch or impression but less strong than truly verifiable or positive knowledge." Under the present conception no such restricted view of opinion is necessary. Lightly held views and transient anxieties, prejudices, preferences, demands, and convictions all have their relevance for governmental action. Nor need the common distinction between opinion and the mores exclude a set of attitudes from our range of interest. Some students of public opinion conclude that they need to concern themselves only with those contentious issues about which opinion is in process of formation and that settled matters—the mores, the enduring attitudes, the customs—are beyond their purview. Although these distinctions between types of citizen outlook are analytically useful, governments must take both kinds of views into account. The prescriptions of custom may control particular actions; particular actions may aim to modify custom, an objective best undertaken after reflection about the probable public response.

These comments on the qualities of "opinion" bring within the limits of that term a considerable range of views—from whim to conviction to custom—but the term acquires an even broader connotation by mention of the objects about which opinion may be considered "public." The most common assumption is that public opinion concerns issues of substantive policy; yet our emphasis on opinions to which governments need to pay heed requires attention to opinions about many objects other than issues. Indeed, a contented—or discontented—people may have opinions that are most relevant politically but in the main about matters other than concrete issues. They may be exercised about economic conditions; they may have anxieties about the threat of war. In either case their views may not be, at least for most people, centered sharply on well-defined policy issues. Or people may have images of institutions or expectations about institutional performance or evaluations of public personnel—all questions of the most direct relevance for governmental actions though not formulated as policy issues.

Although all regimes must pay heed to the opinions of their peoples, obviously in democratic orders opinion plays a different role than in dictatorial states. When the doctrine prevails that citizens have a right to be heard and governments have a duty to hear, private opinion may have an impact on most major public actions. For the maximum participation of the public (or the publics) a practice of disclosure or notice of prospective actions and of announcement of the considerations underlying actions must be followed. Freedom of association and freedom of expression of opinion on public matters need also to exist. For these reasons, public opinion is sometimes regarded as that opinion communicated to the government. Yet, in practice, governments may (and often do) give weight to latent opinion; in advance of action, they need to estimate the kinds of opinions that may be expressed if a given course is followed or proposed. Hence, communication of views to the government is not essential to transform opinion into public opinion, although communication may be the general rule.

The Plan of Analysis. The chapters that follow will treat those aspects of public opinion and the processes of its formation and expression that are of major concern to government, with primary attention to American government. The chapters of Part I will be concerned with the simple distribution of opinions. That is, they will treat the typical forms that opinions of the population take when they are distributed along attitude scales. In one instance, for example, the opinions of most people may cluster closely together on an attitude scale, a condition indicative of widespread popular agreement on a question. But in another instance the opinion distribution may be marked by a clear bipolarization. Obviously these different types of distribution create radically different opinion contexts for governmental action.

Another group of chapters will deal with what we may call the structural distribution of opinions. Opinions about issues or about other political objects may be distributed among different kinds and sorts of people in differing ways. In the geographical distribution of opinions the bases are found for sectional differences within politics. In the differential incidence of opinions among occupations and classes are found the bases for other kinds of political tensions.

A third part of the analysis will concern the properties of opinion. Far more information is available on the distribution of opinions than about their properties. Yet the properties of opinion are of prime importance in the governing process. On some questions opin-
ions may be so lightly held by the citizenry that they have only the slightest impact upon public action. In other instances even a small part of the population may hold a position so tenaciously that it may block, if not direct, public action. The chapters on the properties of opinion will summarize the available information, scant though it is, on these characteristics of public attitudes.

For an understanding of the place of opinion in the governing process, some knowledge of the processes of formation of opinion is essential. Hence another cluster of chapters will treat the formation of opinion. The scheme of analysis will be to treat some of the principal agencies and institutions influential in the formation of attitudes and opinion—the family, the school, the mass media—and to attempt to delineate their roles and to estimate their strengths and weaknesses as formers of opinion. In truth, all those influences that go to make a person what he is have a hand in the formation of opinion. The analysis will necessarily be selective among these influences, with the object of identifying the sources of influence that seem most immediately significant politically.

Although governments at times may be so sensitive that they can anticipate opinion before they act, opinion commonly gains its influence by being communicated to government. A concluding group of chapters will be concerned with the linkage of government and opinion. While the tie between government and opinion often consists of informal communications between citizenry and functionary, there have also developed specialized institutions and procedures whose function is, among other things, to shape, organize, and represent opinion to government. The chief objects of attention in these chapters will be those institutions, such as political parties and pressure groups.