

eign policy is insignificant.<sup>6</sup> Unraveling the role of the public and its beliefs in the making of U.S. foreign policy is not a simple task for as V. O. Key, Jr., found in *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, “the exploration of public attitudes is a pursuit of endless fascination—and frustration.”<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, three major points indicate that the traditional view is simplistic and incomplete. First, different types of publics exist: elite and mass publics. Second, members of the public hold different types of beliefs: opinions, ideological beliefs, and cultural values. Finally, the public exercises influence through a number of different behaviors: directly through polls, through participation in electoral and group politics, and, most indirectly, through political socialization (the informal process of human interaction by which Americans acquire their political beliefs). The traditional wisdom tends to focus predominantly on “public opinion,” that is, the level of influence that the opinions of the mass public have directly on policymakers, predominantly through the impact of polls. Yet, it ignores the role of the elite public, political ideology and culture, and the other ways in which the public influences domestic politics and the governmental policymaking process.<sup>8</sup>

The public’s overall role in U.S. foreign policy can only be understood in terms of the interaction of the different types of publics, beliefs, and behaviors. Chapters 12 and 13 focus on the public’s participation in electoral and group politics and its implications for foreign policy, followed by a discussion of the relationship between national security and the exercise of civil liberties in chapter 14. This chapter focuses on the beliefs that are held by members of the public and, in doing so, discusses the role of different types of publics and the different ways they influence U.S. foreign policy.

Whereas the traditional view limits itself to the study of public opinion, it is vital to examine American political ideology and political culture to understand fully the role of the public in the complex politics of U.S. foreign policy. American political culture sets the broad context within which the politics of U.S. foreign policy operates. The ideological beliefs of Americans further narrow what is possible and probable within domestic politics and the policymaking process. Finally, public opinion affects the foreign policy process as it fluctuates within the confines of American political culture and ideology. An examination of public opinion, political ideology, and political culture allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the public in U.S. foreign policy. It demonstrates that the beliefs of the public have experienced both continuity and change over time, and that this is quite significant for understanding the president’s ability to govern foreign policy and the tension between national security and democracy that has evolved during the cold war and post-Vietnam War years.

### PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion does play a role in the making of U.S. foreign policy. However, to assess its role one must be clear concerning the type of public most involved, the type of beliefs that opinions represent, and the type of influence most likely to be expressed. We begin with a discussion of the difference between elite and mass publics.

### Elite and Mass Publics

Typically, when people discuss the public they are referring to the mass of all Americans. It is easy to dismiss the public as an inconsequential actor in foreign policy at this level. The traditional wisdom, however, is misleading when it treats the "public" as a single, homogeneous entity. The United States is a complex and diverse society of over 250 million people. Certainly, not all Americans are inconsequential in American politics and the making of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore to better understand the role of the public, it is important to recognize at least two basic types of publics:<sup>9</sup>

1. The elite public;
2. The mass public.

The elite public may be distilled further into two general groupings: opinion leaders and the attentive public. **Opinion leaders** are "all members of the society who occupy positions which enable them regularly to transmit, either locally or nationally, opinions about any issue to unknown persons outside of their occupational field or about more than one class of issues to unknown professional colleagues."<sup>10</sup> National opinion leaders consist of people in various leadership positions throughout the country, such as major governmental and business leaders, well-known journalists, established professors and professionals, and other prominent individuals from different walks of life. Opinion leaders obviously constitute a very small percentage of people within American society. Although they never represent more than a few percent of the American public, the number of opinion leaders fluctuates depending upon each issue.

Opinion leaders generally are the people who are most informed about national and international affairs and whose ideas and views tend to be communicated broadly. This is not to say that the information and views they hold are correct; rather, it is that their understanding of the world tends to be more readily communicated to other members of society. In other words, opinion leaders tend to have great visibility throughout American society, and their views usually are considered more credible and legitimate by other members of society. This makes them opinion leaders, for their information and views carry weight and influence what other people in society and government believe about the world.

The **attentive public** refers to people who are also relatively attentive and informed about national and international affairs, but whose views are not as widely disseminated as those of opinion leaders. The size of the attentive public varies from issue to issue. For the most visible issues, the attentive public may be as large as one-fourth of the entire public. For most issues that do not receive wide media coverage, the attentive public may represent less than ten percent of the population. As with opinion leaders, this represents a minority of the larger public; but it is an important minority. Members of the attentive public tend to be invisible at the national and community levels, but among their peers they may act as opinion leaders. Thus, it is often said that the attentive public acts as local mediators between opinion leaders and the mass public.

Most Americans are not members of the elite public, but of the mass public. The **mass public** is the segment of the American population emphasized by the