Public opinion and foreign policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann consensus.

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**Abstract**

This article surveys and assesses theories and research on public opinion and foreign policy. Most of the evidence is drawn from the literature on the United States. Three twentieth-century wars have had a significant impact on theory and scholarship. World War I—the first public relations war—and
postwar efforts to create a new international order directed much attention
to the nature of public opinion and its impact on foreign affairs, issues on
which realists and liberals came to quite different conclusions. The period
surrounding World War II coincided with the development of scientific
polling. Much of the attention during and immediately after the war focused
on the extent to which the public might support or oppose an
internationalist American role. Extensive research during the first two
decades after World War II yielded a broad agreement (the “Almond-
Lippmann consensus”) on three propositions about public opinion: (1) it is
volatile and thus provides inadequate foundations for stable and effective
foreign policies, (2) it lacks coherence or structure, but (3) in the final
analysis, it has little if any impact on foreign policy. The Vietnam War and its
aftermath stimulated a new outburst of research activity on public opinion
and foreign policy, much of which has challenged each of these three
propositions. The article concludes with suggestions for further research
efforts, including: (1) case studies employing archival sources to assess
more directly the impact of public opinion, (2) cross-national studies, (3)
development of standard questions in order to encourage better cumulation
of survey results, and (4) research that will enable us to distinguish findings
that are time-and context-bound from those that transcend the Cold War
period.

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