

SOS POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
M.A.POL.SC.204
SUBJECT NAME:COMPARATIVE POLITICS

UNIT-IV
TOPIC NAME:PUBLIC OPINION

WHAT IS PUBLIC OPINION?

Public opinion is the measure of what the public thinks about a particular issue, party, or individual political figure. Historically, it's been pretty difficult to accurately measure what the public thinks about a particular issue. However, most forms of democracy are based on the understanding that the government will function with the interests of their people in mind. We can find an acknowledgment of the people's role in many historical documents, including the Constitution of the United States, which begins with the phrase 'We, the People.' This 1940s poster from the National Archives highlights the importance of public opinion in policymaking .



DEFINING PUBLIC OPINION

What exactly is public opinion? Scholars do not agree on a single definition of public opinion. The concept means different things depending on how one defines “the public” and assumptions about whose opinion should or does count the most—individuals,

Public opinion can be defined most generically as the sum of many individual opinions. More specific notions of public opinion place greater weight on individual, majority, group, or elite opinion when considering policy decisions.



CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC OPINION

1. Aggregate of views which men hold regarding matters that affect the community.”
However, such as aggregate must have for its basis the welfare of the community and only then can it be recognized and respected as public opinion.
2. In the words of Dr. Beni Prasad, “Opinion may be regarded as truly public opinion when it is motivated by regard for the welfare of the whole of society.”
3. According to Carol, “In its common use Public Opinion refers to the composite reaction of the general public.”
4. Lowell defines Public Opinion, : “In order that opinion may be public, majority is not enough and unanimity is not required, but the opinion must be such that while the minorities may not share it but they feel bound by conviction and not by fear to accept it.”

NATURE OF PUBLIC OPINION

Nature of Public Opinion. During the greater part of human history government was viewed as something exalted and mysterious, beyond the comprehension of the masses. The authority of rulers was believed to be of divine origin, and the people were expected to give reverence and obedience, not to question or criticize the acts of those in authority. With the spread of democracy, government came to be viewed as a means by which the best interests of the people could be served, and the officials of government as public servants selected to express and carry out the popular will.



WHERE DOES PUBLIC OPINION COME FROM?

There's a lot of things that come into play when discussing how people form opinions. Developing your opinions about issues affecting the world around you is a lifelong process that social scientists call political socialization. You'll have different life factors than everyone else, but for most people, factors like family beliefs, peer beliefs, education, religious beliefs, and media depictions have the greatest impact on their political opinions.

The primacy tendency, or the theory that impressions acquired during childhood are the most long-lasting and influential, guides many studies of public opinion. For example, if your parents or other authority figures, like teachers, regularly included you in patriotic activities such as the Fourth of July or the Pledge of Allegiance, social scientists would conclude that you are more likely to be patriotic and supportive of the U.S. government as an adult.



EQUALITY OF INDIVIDUAL OPINIONS

Public opinion can be viewed as the collection of individual opinions, where all opinions deserve equal treatment regardless of whether the individuals expressing them are knowledgeable about an issue or not. Thus, public opinion is the aggregation of preferences of people from all segments of society.

MAJORITY OPINION

Another perspective maintains that public opinion is the opinion held by the most people on an issue. In a democracy, the opinions of the majority are the ones that should count the most and should guide government leaders' decision making



DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC OPINION

Political scientist Harold Lasswell once noted, "The open interplay of opinion and policy is the distinguishing mark of popular rule." Harold D. Lasswell, *Democracy through Public Opinion* (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Company, 1941), 15. Public opinion plays a number of important roles in a representative democracy. Leaders can take public opinion into account when making laws and formulating policy. Public opinion can act as a check on leadership, as the members of the public can express their dissatisfaction with politicians who refuse to take their opinions into account and vote them out of office.



PUBLIC OPINION AND PUBLIC POLICY

One purpose of public opinion in a democracy is to inform public policymaking. Opinion polls provide a mechanism for succinctly presenting the views of the mass public to government leaders who are making decisions that will affect society. Leaders often monitor the public pulse when making policy decisions, especially when they face an election campaign.

PUBLIC JUDGMENT

Public judgment, in contrast, is a special type of public opinion where people carefully consider the important issues of the day, contemplate the range of viewpoints, and weigh the consequences of policy prescriptions.



POLLING THE PUBLIC

Public opinion polling has a long history in the United States. Polls are ubiquitous in American political life. In 2007, there were nearly 5,500 polling organizations in the United States, an increase of over 1,500 organizations in ten years. Kirby Gödel, “Public Opinion Polling in a Digital Age: Meaning and Measurement,” in *Political Polling in the Digital Age*, ed. Kirby Gödel (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2011), 11–27. Every day the public is polled about topics ranging from their views about taxes and the federal budget, their opinions about the environment and global warming, and whether or not a principal has the right to prevent students from bringing their lunches to school.

Polls vary greatly in terms of their quality, content, and purpose. Reliable public opinion data are gathered by reputable commercial polling organizations, nonpartisan think tanks, academic institutions, government agencies, and news organizations. Misleading information about public opinion can result from quick polls that do not employ appropriate data-gathering techniques.



PUBLIC OPINION IN THE INFORMATION AGE

The media's use of public opinion data has a long history. The press depends on polls as a source of information for its stories, and polling organizations need the media to publicize their results. For almost two centuries, the press has commissioned polls from professional organizations or sponsored their own in-house polling operations. Today, major news organizations join with well-established polling firms to measure public opinion. USA Today and CNN work with the Gallup organization to field opinion polls.

In the information age, the press's use of opinion polls has flourished as it is easy and more cost-effective to collect opinion information. Digital polls are a quick way to get people to express their views and to exchange opinions with others. These polls can be taken online, on an electronic tablet, or on a cell phone. The potential for polls to not only measure public opinion but also influence opinion has increased.



MEDIA DEPICTIONS

The results of public opinion polls are prominently depicted in all forms of media. News organizations regularly include poll results in their stories about political issues, events, and leaders. Poll results released by the press, candidate organizations, and political parties feature prominently during elections in news stories, commentary, and campaign media. Political websites and blogs offer quick polls where people can record their views on myriad topics instantaneously. These poll results are depicted as colorful sidebars that attract audiences' attention. Poll results frequently run on the ticker on cable television news broadcasts and on media organization websites.



MEDIA INTERACTIONS

Elites and the mass public use public opinion polls in a variety of ways. Opinion leaders use poll results to convey information to others who rely on their guidance when making political decisions. Digital media have not only created more opportunities for the public to share their opinions but have also made it possible for average citizens to field their own polls and collect opinion data.

OPINION LEADERS

An opinion leader is a broker who imparts information about politics and government to other people. Opinion leaders are attentive to media messages and pass on information in a simplified format to people who pay less attention to politics.



DIGITAL POLLS AND FORUMS

The opportunities for the public to express their opinions through the media have skyrocketed in the information age. The interactive features of digital media make it easy for people to express their views and share their opinions with others. Quick polls can be incorporated into just about any news or political site, and they can be shared virally through social media and e-mail. Online forums allow people to post their views and react to the opinions of others.

LIVE POLLS

Live polls record people's reactions to a speech, debate, or event in real time. The results of live polls are displayed below images of the event as it takes place, which allows viewers to see fluctuations in opinion over time.



VIDEO CLIP

MEDIA CONSEQUENCES

THE ECHO CHAMBER



THANK YOU

