

Concept of Public Opinion and Democracy

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Abstract - The political natures of its data and the extent to which it may vitalize democratic politics theory have both been neglected at times by public opinion research. Bernard Berelson, president of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, reaffirms the fundamental requirements of a democratic politics and explains how opinion research can help a democracy to know itself, evaluate its achievements, and bring its practices closer to its fundamental ideals. As a result of the Elmira study, Mr. Berelson's interest in this subject has grown and is expressed in that study. The term "public opinion" refers to the views of the general public that are expressed in an unstructured manner and try to way public policy.

Keywords - Public Opinion, Democracy, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

Any legislation or policy in the nation is based on the opinion of the people. Even while this aspect of social feedback may be found in all communities, democratic countries throughout the world seem to have the most of it. However, realizing and comprehending what the general public's perspective actually is is critical. John Locke invented the phrase "public opinion" in the 17th century. However, Locke was not the first to propose the idea. 'The voice of the people' or 'Vox populi' is a comparable Latin term. Currently, the term "public opinion" is defined as the sum total of people's opinions on political topics, policies, institutions, and persons. Public opinion and pressure organizations are two distinct entities that must be distinguished. Through the accumulation of citizens' observations, public opinion may influence policy. Through direct contact with lawmakers, pressure organizations try to influence legislation.

A democracy relies on public opinion since the people themselves have the greatest amount of political sway. Public opinion should be taken into consideration when a government official decides what to do next. (1) This is not to argue that politicians always follow the will of the people. The statistical frequency of political discontent is unquestionably higher today than say, 500 years ago. However, even the most aloof politicians must keep their constituents happy. In order to keep the status quo in place, political parties are required to maintain a certain level of public support, which is vulnerable to manipulation through the media and other means. That does not, however, mean that public opinion has a 'good social function' in and of itself. One of the most famous American journalists, Grantland Rice, famously stated, "A intelligent man

makes his own conclusions, a stupid guy follows the general opinion," It is critical to comprehend the broad influences on public opinion. Social class, education, geography, age, gender, and ethnicity are only few of these factors. Society does not exist as a single entity. It consists of a number of different parts. The members of each component have diverse perspectives on the world because of the unique problems they confront. As an example, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Sindh oppose the construction of the Kalabagh Dam, whereas Punjab is the only province to favor it. It's because of these various viewpoints that there are competing societal perspectives that seek to enlarge the "political" realm. There are more chances for a worldview to be adopted into regional or national policy if its advocates can get more space for their argument. (2) The foundation of a state is formed on the support of its citizens. A constitution is a product of the people's joint decision. Public opinion, like the state and the constitution, is a vital biological construct.

Meaning of Public Opinion

A consensus exists on the importance of public opinion in government. Bryce describes it this way: "Opinion has long held sway as the most important and decisive factor in human affairs. A government's existence has always and must always relied on the majority's tacit acceptance, if not their love or support." People submit to authoritarian rule because of deference, habit, or fear of repression in non-democratic regimes. When it comes to democracy, public opinion plays an important role in determining how the government is run. Writings differ on the nature of popular opinion, however. If the idea of democracy is accepted and the function of opinion in the

development of public policy is assumed, the question of "What public?" and "whose opinion?" is still up for debate. It is possible for a political "public" to be anything from an unruly mob to a well-articulated group. A person's "opinion" might be created and conveyed in a reasonable or irrational manner. Similar issues with the idea of popular opinion have sparked significant debates in the past. (3)

Concept of Public Opinion

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the classic idea of popular opinion became generally recognized in the United States. When it came to topics like taxes, labor laws, and foreign policy, it was founded around the simple assumption that several million people could get together and establish a public opinion. "The sense and sentiments of society, inherently irresistible exhibiting their strength everywhere," is what Lieber meant when he said that "the letter and life of law is a mere husk" when he talked about the power of public opinion. In this way, public opinion implies the existence of a united, homogeneous public in the background. Those are the assumptions made by Rousseau in his theory of a society of men who are generally informed on honesty, actively engaged in their own political interests, and free of fractional affiliations. Clearly, he thought of public opinion as a single entity that could not be divided. A variety of contemporary authors have expressed ideas that are somewhat similar. There should be no ambiguity as to what we mean by "public" opinion because it is, according to long-established use, the view of a community or the people, as noted by E.M. Sait. (4)

When an apparent majority of persons share a particular set of viewpoints, we may say that a public opinion has formed. "The word (public opinion) is usually used to indicate the aggregates of men's ideas on subjects that affect or interest the community," says Bryce. "The collective opinion of a country, consisting of several currents of thought and feelings, each of which represents or supports a particular point of view, doctrine, or practical proposition. Those with greater numbers or greater intensity of conceptions behind them build stronger currents, and when one is clearly the strongest, it begins to be dubbed public opinion par excellence, being assumed to symbolize the ideas presumed to be held by the majority of people. (5)

Nature of Public Opinion

In recent years, the idea of popular opinion in political theory has been thoroughly examined. Even still, no one can agree on what it means or does, and discussions on it have "frequently introduced confusion rather than illuminated" because of the lack of analytical clarity. After the establishment of democracy, the idea of "public opinion" began to gain traction. Government policies gradually became the

function of opinion rather than force because of constitutionally guaranteed liberties, elections, political parties, etc., and the means for the expression of opinion such as constitutionally guaranteed liberties, elections, political parties, etc., were at hand. As a result, the notion of popular opinion is a direct descendant of democratic governance.

Characteristics of Public Opinion

There's no such thing as public opinion, and it's not even the view of the majority. It's a common belief shared by most people, and its goal is to spotlight everyone's well-being. A huge majority of individuals agree with this widely held mainstream view. A concern for the well-being of everyone is not an issue for minorities. (6)

The following characteristics are always present in the public's perception:

- **General Agreement:** It's a point of view on which the majority of people agree.
- **Rational/Logical:** Public opinion is based on a solid foundation of facts. It's a logical conclusion. Logic and reason can prove the veracity of this claim.
- **General Welfare:** Every decision that affects the broader public is influenced by this principle: to better the lives of everyone.
- **Related to all aspect of life:** Regardless of the topic, the public's views might range from the political to the social to the economic to the cultural.
- **Upholds Morality:** No matter what, the principles of our society are always upheld by the majority of the population. Never does morality oppose ethics.
- **Not an Imposed Opinion:** It is not possible to force one's views on the general public. As the population has grown, so has the agreement that this is true.
- **Neither Destructive nor Negative:** Negative and damaging public opinion is never generated. As a result, its message is usually one of hope and well-being for the general people.
- **Based on Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression:** Right to free speech is a precondition for public opinion's emergence.
- **Basis of Democracy:** In a democracy, the will of the people has a determining influence. Everything the democratic government does is guided by what the people think. Only when supported by the people can the government remain in power and carry out its duties effectively.

- **Real Sanction behind Laws of the State:** A democratic state's laws and policies are governed by the will of the people. The foundation of a democracy is the supremacy of public opinion, which expresses the sovereignty of the people.

Importance of public opinion in a democracy

Democracy necessitates the ability to listen. As a citizen, you have the right to be heard by your elected officials. With that, public trust in government and its institutions is built. That is what legitimizes democracy. A healthy community cannot function without the ability to communicate freely, both in terms of speaking and listening, with openness to the other person's point of view. Members of the public can voice their displeasure with politicians who fail to listen to them and vote them out of office if they don't take their views into consideration. Involve the general people in the decision-making process by presenting the opinions of the majority to government officials. When making policy decisions, leaders frequently check in with the public, especially if they are in the midst of an election campaign. Public opinion is conveyed in a variety of ways through many organizations, institutions, and groups that play a key role in shaping and expressing public opinion. People and organizations from all walks of life play a significant role in shaping and expressing public opinion in every society. (7)

Significance and Role of Public Opinion

It is widely believed that effective democratic communication relies on the input of the general public. Citizens' opinions are expressed in public opinion. Because no government can afford to ignore this, we must take action now. Even tyrants may be shaken by a strong and powerful public opinion. The democratic system's strength resides in its respect for the people's mental power. For the sake of resolving common issues, free and fair dialogue is required. In order to achieve this democratic ideal, public opinion becomes extremely important. It increases public awareness and encourages people to consider topics from several perspectives. Here is a way to convey the importance and function of public opinion: (8)

- **Guide to the Government:** The government is guided by public opinion when it comes to making policy decisions. In general, governments work to fulfill the promises they make to the people during elections and rely on the mandate they obtain from those who voted for them.
- **Helping in Law Making:** The government is constantly influenced by popular opinion, and it takes this into account when crafting legislation for the benefit of all citizens. The views of the general public on a wide range of problems have a significant impact on

government policy. In the present circumstances, public opinion aids the government in enacting legislation.

- **Acts as a Watchdog:** It's up to the people to keep an eye on things. It keeps the government in check and prevents it from becoming careless. Public criticism of the government's misguided policies keeps it on its toes, and this is good for democracy. The government is aware of the fact that if it goes against the preferences of the people, it will not be reelected or re-elected in the future.
- **Protects the Rights & Liberties:** The voice of the people serves as a watchdog for individual liberty and rights. People in a democratic country have the freedom to express their views about the government however they see fit. Making better use of this privilege not only drives the government, but also keeps it engaged in protecting and defending citizens' rights and liberties.
- **Acts as a Powerful Force in International Sphere:** The influence of the general public is becoming increasingly important on a global scale. In reality, popular opinion has a significant impact on international affairs. As a result of globalization, concerns such as human rights and environmental preservation are held accountable to public opinion by the worldwide community. Terrorism, child labor, etc. Because of this, governments keep an eye on popular opinion throughout the world as well. Governments in democracies simply cannot afford to disregard the will of the people.

The major agencies of Public Opinion

- **Press: Newspapers, periodicals:** Public opinion is heavily influenced by magazines and the print media as a whole. As a result, editorials, feature articles, and news analyses play a significant role in shaping and expressing public opinion on a variety of critical topics.
- **Legislature:** The elected representatives of the people compose the legislative body. Members of the political establishment are present for this meeting. It serves as both a reflection of popular sentiment and a vehicle for citizens to formulate and express their views. Making and reflecting public opinion depends on legislative discussions, publishing of legislative debate records, and opinions stated by members of Congress, both inside and outside the legislature. (9)
- **Public Meetings and Rebates:** To hold meetings, processions, and protests on any matter of public significance or concern is a fundamental right in every democracy. Meetings of the public, in and

of themselves, are a means of shaping public opinion.

- **Political Parties:** Political parties are responsible for educating the public about politics. People can learn about the government's accomplishments, shortcomings, omissions and blunders with the use of these documents. Each political party aims to influence the public opinion in its own direction. Meetings, agitations, marches and other forms of protest are organized by it to raise awareness of public concerns. Everything you do has an impact on public opinion. Political parties play a vital role in articulating and aggregating interests and communicating politics. These have a significant impact on public perception.
- **Radio, T.V., and Internet:** Radio, television, and the Internet all play important roles in shaping public opinion in today's information-driven world. Public opinion is formed in part as a result of discussions and debates heard and seen on radio and television. These are political education institutions. When used in elections, they can influence public opinion in two ways: by shaping it and by reshaping it.
- **Educational Institutions:** Classroom lectures, presentations, gatherings, and seminars of all sorts are held in educational institutions. Participation in these gatherings and assemblies by prominent leaders, researchers, and authors has the effect of influencing students' and instructors' perspectives via the interchange of ideas. (10)

Public Opinion and Public Policy

In a democracy, public opinion serves as a source of information for policymakers. For government officials, opinion polls are a convenient way to get a quick snapshot of the public's thoughts on important issues. When making policy decisions, leaders frequently check in with the public, especially if they are in the midst of an election campaign. There is a wide range of viewpoints on the influence of public opinion on policymaking. Public opinion, according to academics and politicians, should direct public policy in order to honor the will of the people. Voter opinion surveys are crucial to ensuring democratic administration. "Surveys create exactly what democracy is meant to produce fair representation of all citizens," says political scientist Sidney Verba. (11) As a result, the sample survey is organized in such a way that each person has an equal opportunity of participating in and a voice while participating. Accordingly, politicians at the federal, state, and municipal levels should pay special attention to what the public thinks while drafting legislation. Some people don't believe that leaders should consider the views of the general population while making choices. They point out that many people are ill-informed about current events, and

their polling responses are based on irrational beliefs. He highlighted that ruling by popular vote isn't always the greatest option. Decisions about public policy should not be based just on the desire of the people, but on good principles backed by experts. According to this idea, pollsters and their followers are running the country, rather than leaders with integrity and principle. (12)

As a contrast, public judgment is a sort of public opinion that takes into account the spectrum of opinions and weighs the potential repercussions of policy recommendations. When it comes to public opinion, individuals must be well-educated about the topic at hand and discuss the merits of various proposals before making an informed decision. According to Pew Research Center polls from 2011, the public prefers stricter immigration policies and improved border security enforcement. While this may seem counterintuitive, individuals tend to support more lenient immigration policies when they exercise public judgment and think about the repercussions of their actions. Deliberative polling: is a method that allows the public to think about topics and their connection to public policy in greater detail. Many people are ill-informed because of a lack of time to learn about the problems they care about. It was first used in 1988 and is now widely used to assess public sentiment throughout the world.

CONCLUSION

After the establishment of democracy, the idea of "public opinion" began to gain traction. Government policies gradually became the function of opinion rather than force because of constitutionally guaranteed liberties, elections, political parties, etc., and the means for the expression of opinion such as constitutionally guaranteed liberties, elections, political parties, etc., were at hand. As a result, the notion of popular opinion is a direct descendant of democratic governance. The importance of public opinion in political dynamics is based on its power to influence the government. In a democracy, the role of public opinion is determined by the outcome of the battle between belief and fact. As a result of the nuanced manipulation of opinion-forming processes by interested organizations, a fundamental divergence has arisen in modern times between what people think to be and what they actually believe is. People's emotions and preconceived notions are routinely appealed to in order to distort the truth. When just a powerful group or a capitalist controls the primary opinion-forming outlets like newspapers and radio, the process of fact-corruption is complete. Consequently, the public's opinion contributes to a democracy and government that is based on, for, and owned by the citizens.

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