

This of public opinion.
statistical analysis is



This is an understandable quid pro quo between the organisers and those who had been hired. The vehicles of publicity and propaganda manipulate opinion rather than deal with truth. The facts are suppressed and falsehood is preached. The result is that the masses do not possess adequate and factual knowledge on issues which demand their opinion. Bryce suggested an empirical method of ascertaining public opinion.

He pointed out that the best method for the investigator was to go about and freely mingle with the people to assess their views on public questions.

Majority of opinion alone was not enough for Bryce to make it a public. Nor should it be sectarian and sectional. A public opinion must, for all intents and purposes, be for the good of the community. But here, too, the basic question, how to ascertain public opinion, remains unanswered. Rationality and intensity of opinion that go together to make it public cannot be quantitatively measured and the qualitative measurement is as elusive as the quantitative.

During recent times statistical or quantitative method has been used in ascertaining the flow and extent of public opinion. Statistical analysis is as old as Plato, but as a field of scientific investigation it is only a generation old. In some Western countries 'public opinion polls' or 'Gallup Polls' are held to assess the opinion of the people on the performance and policies of the government and the holders of office and on matters of public importance. Even a slight drift in public opinion is investigated and its repercussions on the opinion and behaviour of the people are examined and the likely results anticipated. But the success of the statistical method importantly depends upon the sampling technique adopted by the

investigator, the nature of questions asked, the manner of conducting the interview and total detachment of the person who makes the enquiry. Lowell has correctly said that statistics, like real pies are good if you know the person who made them, and are sure of the ingredients as " by themselves they are strangely likely to mislead, because unless the subject is understood in all its bearings some element can easily be left out of account which wholly falsifies the result.

" If precision in ascertaining public opinion is lacking, its pulse can, no doubt, be felt accurately. By-elections are the barometer of public opinion as they indicate the drift and the extent to which a party has risen or fallen in popular esteem and the support it is likely to receive from the electorate at the following general election. All parties trim their political sails to every wind of popular opinion and adjust their policies accordingly. The party in power, particularly, keeps a ' weather eye' on popular reactions on the measures it adopts and the policies it pursues. A clear drift of electoral opinion from its support may even sow a spirit of rebellion before which even a government with vast majority is impotent. Nor the party in power is insensitive to the reactions of its followers. A legislator tenderly nurses his constituency and keeps himself abreast of the direction in which opinion of his constituents moves. If he feels that the popularity of the ruling party is receding, he becomes clamorous, because it means a fall in his electoral support and dim chances of his re-election.

Thus, a democratic government works against a background of constant outside appraisal which also finds its echo in the lobbies of the legislature and it is the primary function of party whips to keep informed on trends of

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opinion both in and outside, the legislature and to warn party managers of the reasons of its unpopularity and drift. Disagreement is a necessary condition of politics and if politics is not to disappear in chaos there needs to be both recognised limits to disagreement and the measure of agreement to ensure orderly conduct of society. As a result, from clash of opinion with opinion emerges the spirit of tolerance, a sense of give and take to demarcate the area of agreement. Thus, emerges consensus or adjustment of various opinions on certain fundamentals. The consensus so reached brings satisfaction to all the segments of opinion, because their views and interests had been considered and given due weight in the formulation of public policy. A consensus-oriented policy is representative of different shades of opinion which are politically articulate.

Anderson points out, " The agencies wielding political power respond to all politically oriented influences. Opinions expressed by well-organized, competently led segment of the public will always be carefully weighed in the scales with other such petitions. The result of this compromise of influence will be reflected in public policy," and that epitomises the meaning of public opinion.