

The term public opinion



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The term public opinion, as observed by many, is very much popular during the election period and or during those times wherein critical decisions are made or critical issues are dealt with in a manner that not everybody in the society agrees with. It is defined by any lexicon, as the aggregate of individual views, beliefs, and attitudes toward a certain issue.

Public opinion can actually serve as a tool for people, especially those who are part of the governing body, in deciding on which would be the best option and or courses of action to undertake. To illustrate, during the election season, public opinion serves as a medium for people to decide on whom to vote.

This is so because with the aid of public opinion, individuals gain access to various types of information pertaining to every electoral candidate (i. e. educational background, professional training, projects, etc.), thus enabling them to assess who will be the right candidate to for a particular key position. Public opinion may also serve as an acceptability measure for proposed laws and public policies.

Public opinion has four distinct characteristics to wit: direction, stability, intensity, and saliency. Direction, as a characteristic of public opinion, allows individuals to predict the most likely results of a certain issue, concern, and the like.

To illustrate, during elections, an individual may be able to predict the probable outcome for presidential elections simply by relying on statistical data, i. e. 40 percent in favor of Mr. X and 60 percent in favor of Mr. Y. Thus it can be said that direction would refer to the proportion of the population that holds a particular view.

Stability on the other hand, refers to the trends exhibited by the series of data on directions. Taking the elections as an example, knowledge on stability allows us to have a gut-feel or enables us to predict the most likely results of the said activity by means of reading the trends signified by the series of fluctuations of poll results.

As for intensity, intensity would refer to the depth of feeling towards a certain issue and or concern. To illustrate, in the case of approving a house bill to become a law, the strong support to make the said house bill into a law exhibits how depth the feeling is towards that house bill or it can also be assumed that since there is a very strong support towards the passing of the bill, then the said house bill must be very important to each individual of the society and or the groups that will benefit most from its provisions.

Lastly, saliency, this characteristic of public opinion allows us to assess how likely the people will act on the basis of their opinions.

There are three agents of political socialization that influences the political views and attitudes held by every individual. This includes the family, schools, and the mass media.