

Public opinion issues



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Public opinion can be simply defined as the ideologies, perceptions or even information held by individual people of a democratic country that its government or politicians should not neglect if at all it wants to succeed. In this context success may mean a good regime or winning an election respectively. Though not taken seriously by the regimes that existed before the twentieth century, public opinion is today regarded a vital factor in politics. Modern politicians have taken it seriously to an extent of some employing staff to manage and mobilize it.

In America, public opinion is seen to have changed the dimension of politics. In fact, the peoples views on how the aspiring candidates would address their needs are sought by pollsters and the results released through the press and media. Public debates are also held where the agendas and policies of politicians then subjected to the reactions of the public.

The past century has seen opinion polls play an active role in the American politics. Although it is not free from shortcomings, it is believed that the polls represent to a greater extent, the sentiments of the public. According to Berinsky, the ‘ don’t know’ responses which are common during the scientific polling is a systematic process intended to ignore particular interests from the public opinion. Thus surveys may reflect the dictatorial shortcomings those remaining forms of participation politically and even create new problems.

Internet Polling

America is one of the countries that enjoyed opinion polling far before others could adopt the technique. This is because, unlike many countries in Africa

where internet accessibility is a problem even till the current century, most Americans had access to the internet. Getting their opinion through scientific polling is therefore easy. The major shortcoming associated with sampling the population is also solved. Since through opinion of the public, policy makers and politicians to know whether or not the citizens are satisfied with their service delivery, the national priorities they perceive their take towards the economy and political preferences. It is very important that those conducting these scientific polls must adhere to ethics of professionalism and practices. (Stimson, J. A. 2004).

Even though the past governments argued that through polling the behavior of the electorates and thus results are influenced thereby undermining democracy. Opinion leaders have since revised their tools and ways of analyzing that are free from biasness. They have made sure that their interpretations are limited to only the data available and not to provide judgment from the unavailable data. The degree to which the outcome of a sample population is applied to the whole population depends on two fundamentals. First, the sample under study is large enough then it is taken to be a representation of the entire population. Second, the sample should be randomly selected from the population to ensure no biasness. This is by ensuring that all those in the target population have equal chances of being selected.

Unlike in many African countries, where only a group of elite people who live in urban areas can have access to internet facilities, almost all the population in America have access to internet facilities thus making internet polling very meaningful in their democracy.

Public opinion is normally used by the media to report important new stories. According to Professor J. Lewis polling data is used by the media also to construct public opinion. Public opinion provides a different way of thinking about how politics, the public and the media relate. This is by providing the media's role in accepting politicians, Americans perceptions towards politics among others. The common knowledge held by people that America is a conservative is well displayed by public opinion which has seen political elites emphasize on building industrial military complex. (Casey, S. 2001).

Role of public opinion to policy makers

Public opinion can be used by policy makers to collect views of citizens on the problems they are facing. This is through the partnership contracts that they enter with research firms e. g. The International Republican Institute (IRI) which has conducted more than 200 national public opinion polls in 40 countries around the world is known to partner with renowned pollsters. e. g. The American Petcher Polls.(Bennett & Barber, J. D. 1980).

Other policy makers and governments of different countries are urged to make use of findings from these researches in making decisions, identifying and communicating policies together with evaluating programs that exist. Opinion polls in this case bridge the gap of information that exists in the government, grassroots and other institutions.

Through Public opinion, countries' worldviews and priorities can be known. A very good example is the study conducted to determine the Americans attitude towards foreign policy, where a series of studies to determine how much Americans trusted other countries found that they were suspicious

about the outside world. From previous studies also, Americans were seen to have held this attitude from back 1990s. (Stimson, J. A. 2004).