

Service Learning Project III

Hours 5

Defining Public Opinion

There is no one public opinion, because there are many different “publics.” In a nation of over 275 million people, there may be innumerable gradations of opinion on an issue. What we do is describe the distribution of opinions among the public about a particular question. Thus, we define public opinion as the aggregate of individual attitudes or beliefs shared by some portion of the adult population.

Often, the public holds quite a range of opinions on a topic, making it difficult to discern what kinds of policies most Americans might support. For example, as Congress debated passing legislation to regulate the tobacco industry, frequent polls asked Americans believed that smoking-related illness were the fault of the smokers themselves (67%), rather than of the companies (19%), yet Americans were divided evenly on whether private suits against the companies by those who had such illness should be limited. Americans generally approved of having tobacco companies help pay for health insurance for poor children but were not sure whether those companies should be banned from sponsoring sporting events.

How public opinion is made known in a democracy? In the case of the Vietnam War, it was made known by numerous antiwar protests, countless articles in magazines and newspapers, and continuing electronic media coverage of antiwar demonstrations. Normally, however, public opinion becomes known in a democracy through elections and, in some states, initiatives or referenda. Other ways are through lobbying and interest group activities, which are also used to influence public opinion. In the age of the Social media, Internet, citizens increasingly are able to send their opinions to government officials electronically.

Project Questions

Question1. Define Public Opinion in your own words.

Question2. What was happening domestically in the U.S. during the Vietnam War?

Question3. What are the two major factors, which constitutes for public opinion output?

Analytical Knowledge Questions:

Question4. Do you think it is morally acceptable to clone human beings and explain why?

Question5. Do you think it would be good thing or a bad thing for the tobacco companies in this country to be driven out of business by a lawsuit?

Question6. Will it be good or bad for the U.S. if China becomes a member of a World Trade Organization? Explain with your logics.