

## Question 1: Write short notes on the Public opinion.

### Public Opinion

#### Definition:

*Lord Bryce defines it thus:* Public Opinion is "the aggregate of the views men hold regarding matters that affect or interest the community. Thus understood, it is a congeries of all sorts of discrepant notions, beliefs, prejudices, aspirations. It is confused, incoherent, amorphous, varying from day to day and week to week. But in the midst of this diversity and confusion every question, as it rises into importance, is subjected to a process of consolidation and clarification until there emerge and take definite shape certain views or sets of interconnected views, each held and advocated in common by bodies of citizens."

V.O. Key, an American behavioural political scientist, defines public opinion as "those opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed."

In short, public opinion needs four things: individual opinions + a public issue + communication media + relationship of influence between leaders and the led. Harold Lasswell called the influencing leaders as the influential.

#### Public Opinion or Majority Opinion:

Public opinion is often equated with majority opinion, but in reality, it is not necessarily so. It arises from various minority views competing for acceptance and becomes genuine public opinion only when it serves the common good and ensures national welfare. A mere majority is insufficient unless the minority willingly accepts it out of conviction rather than fear or coercion. True public opinion must be based on intelligence, informed judgment, and regard for public welfare, rather than ignorance or force. Unanimity is not required; what matters is that it reflects the broader interests of the nation. As Willoughby notes, public opinion emerges not from all members of society, but from those capable of thoughtful judgment on issues of general interest.

#### Public opinion is of two kinds:

**Social opinion** deals with issues of social importance, such as fads, fashions, and public attitudes toward film stars, often shaped by commercial enterprises through advertisements and publicity campaigns. Governments usually have little influence over it, except in totalitarian or ideological states.

**Political opinion** is the main concern of Political Science, as it relates to governance, policies, and matters of national importance.

#### Characteristics of Public Opinion:

## **1. Living Issues of Politics**

Public opinion is always related to current political or social issues that divide people into groups or parties. It deals with controversial and debatable matters that concern society.

## **2. Non-identifiable Group**

Public opinion does not require people to be in direct contact. It exists when individuals, even unknown to each other, share the same views or desires, forming a collective opinion.

## **3. Widely-held Opinions**

Public opinion is not always the opinion of the majority or of everyone. Sometimes minority views carry more weight if they are expressed effectively, especially when others are divided or apathetic.

## **4. Pooling of Differing Opinions**

Public opinion is not the total of everyone's views. Many are indifferent, some hold firm or shifting opinions, and not everyone has an opinion on every issue. Out of this variety, a public opinion may emerge on issues that particularly attract interest.

## **5. Intensity of Opinions**

Which opinion becomes public opinion depends on how strongly groups hold it. Even a smaller group's view can dominate if expressed with intensity. Public opinion often reflects the stance of dominant groups with wealth, education, prestige, or influence. Expressed opinions usually outweigh unexpressed ones.

## **6. Informed Opinion**

Informed views matter more than uninformed ones. Elites, due to education, experience, organization, and ability, tend to shape public opinion more effectively than the general public.

## **7. Continuity and Change in Public Opinion**

Public opinion can remain stable or change over time. Stability is often maintained by religion, ideology, nationalism, and racialism, while change is driven by modernity, rationality, secularism, science, technology, urbanization, and education. If change factors dominate, public opinion shifts quickly; if stability factors prevail, it remains persistent.

### **How is Public Opinion formed?**

According to Lord Bryce, three classes of persons have to do with the making of public opinion. They may be described as the thinkers, propagators and the mass of people.

### **(1) Public Leaders and Thinkers:**

Public Leaders and Thinkers are people who devote their lives to politics and public affairs. They may be professional politicians, legislators, journalists, or active private citizens who seriously follow political issues. Although they form only a very small part of the population, their role is very important because they create and shape public opinion. They know the facts, think deeply, and present arguments through speeches, writings, and the press to influence others. In modern democracies, especially in countries like the USA, powerful organized groups, institutions, and corporations also act as makers of public opinion, treating it like a product to be manufactured. Since there are many types of leaders and thinkers, public opinion often includes a wide variety of different and opposing views.

### **(2) Propagators and Moulders of Public Opinion.**

Propagators and Moulders of Public Opinion are people who regularly read newspapers, political writings, listen to speeches, and follow broadcasts to stay updated on public issues. They form judgments on facts and refine the ideas of public leaders, becoming moulders rather than originators of opinion. Most belong to parties but are usually fair-minded, considering different views without blind partisanship. Their honesty, impartiality, and political intelligence make them the real makers of strong public opinion. This group includes party members, pressure groups, and others interested in politics, and the quality of public opinion largely depends on them.

### **(3) Masses of People:**

Masses of People form the largest group, generally indifferent to politics, reading little and thinking less about public affairs. Whatever opinions they hold are usually borrowed from leaders, propagators, or their social surroundings. They often follow a leader or movement not out of political understanding, but because of personal admiration or emotional attachment. This class neither creates nor shapes opinion but adds to its volume through sheer numbers. Its size varies by country but is always very large, and in democracies, it makes up most of the electorate.

### **Importance of Public Opinion in Modern States:**

In modern democracies, all power comes from the people, and they exercise it mainly through voting and public opinion. Public opinion is very important because it keeps the ruling party under control, guides the government in using power wisely, and prevents it from becoming oppressive. A wise government always pays attention to the people's voice, because strong and active public opinion supports the government when it is right and criticizes it when it is wrong. In this way, public opinion acts like a watchdog and is the first essential condition for the success of democracy.

However, public opinion also has weaknesses. While earlier thinkers believed people made logical and fair political decisions, in reality, opinions are often shaped by propaganda, political campaigns, media, family, culture, and personal experiences. This makes opinions inconsistent and sometimes emotional rather than rational. In developing countries, foreign powers also try to influence public opinion through propaganda. Thus, while public opinion is necessary for democracy, it can be easily influenced and misused.

## **Conclusion**

Public opinion is a dynamic force in modern politics — it can legitimize governments, constrain policies, and even topple regimes. In states like Pakistan, while elites dominate decision-making, public sentiment remains an indispensable factor in shaping democratic legitimacy and long-term policy direction.