

WEEK 5

PUBLIC OPINION

Public opinion may be defined as the collective beliefs, judgments or views held by the majority of citizens of a country about public polity or action of the government. It therefore, refers to what members of the public think or feel about government proposed policy or action already taken by the government.

The level of literacy and political participation in a country determines how people will be interested in public issues.

FORMATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

1. Through elections: Political parties educate the people on important public issues during campaigns, rallies etc. and by this, opinions are formed.
2. Through mass media: It can be formed through mass media (Radio, Newspapers, Television) etc.
3. Through pressure groups and political parties: This can be done through their manifestoes, conferences, debate etc.
4. Through lectures: It can be formed through holding of lectures where ideas on matters of public importance are expressed.
5. Individual's influence: Members of the community, friend and relatives can also influence one's opinion about public issues.

FUNCTIONS/ IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC OPINION

1. Public opinion helps the government to formulate adequate policies that will meet the demand and alleviate the suffering of the people.
2. The people's problems, needs and desire are known to the government through public opinion.
3. Public opinion helps the government to be watchful over its actions or activities as it relates to the people.
4. Public opinion helps the government to know the feeling of the people concerning its policies and activities.
5. It determines the extent of support the people have for such government.

DEMERITS OF PUBLIC OPINION

1. Public opinion can easily be manipulated by those who have access to mass media to their favour.
2. It is difficult to measure the opinion of the people on a particular issue.
3. Public opinion may be the views of very few powerful and influential people in the society.
4. It may give wrong, confusing and distortful picture on a given issue.
5. It is not often reliable and therefore not advisable for the government to rely on it.
6. It wastes time and money in trying to ascertain public opinion.
7. It may cause political instability as a result of protest and demonstration against an action of government termed to be against public opinion.

Assignment

Give two examples of public opinion you have heard or experienced in Nigeria.

