

Chapter 5

Public Opinion

The Dilemma

- The Founders intended the leaders of the republic to be insulated from the pressures of the political instability of the parliamentary system.
- The Founders did not want the elected leaders to be shackled to the ignorant presumptions of the people.
- The Founders' experience with the English Parliament led them to create legislatures where legislators had fixed terms.
- In the parliamentary system the Prime Minister is elected by a majority of the majority party of the legislative body as a whole.
- If that party loses its majority or the majority of the majority party choose to remove the prime minister, the prime minister loses his/her office.
- The fixed term would allow the electorate to decide as to whether the decisions their elected officials had made were wise and warranted re-election.

Founder's Intent

- They wanted elected leaders to be able to act freely and only eventually be held accountable; a republic.
- Enough time would elapse to see if their decisions were correct
- On then, once time elapsed, would they be held accountable.
- Once again the Founders did not totally trust the wisdom of the people.
- The Electoral College is a remnant of that distrust.
- The Founders wanted the people to have time to see whether the decisions made by their representatives were wise.
- The wisdom of their decisions would be evident only in time.

The Founders and Public Opinion

- In the beginning the President was not elected directly by the people.
- The Electoral College is a remnant of that intended insulation
- The direct election of the electors unintentionally changed the equation.
- Changed it for most presidential elections.

- The Electoral College in its present form no longer serves the purpose intended by the Founders.
- It was intended to be the primary form of selection.
- The emergence of the popular vote has rendered the Electoral College redundant and counter-productive.
- Each state has electors equal to the number of senators it sends to Washington, which is two in every instance, and the number of members of the House of Representatives from that state.
- This exaggerates the number of electoral votes the presidential candidate who wins an individual state gets if those votes are spread out among the lesser populated states.
- The Founders put many of these provisions into the Constitution to entice the Southern states to sign on to the new agreement.
- What was evident from the Southerners' insistence that slaves be counted in determining representation in the Congress was that they were fearful of being overwhelmed by the more populous northeast.
- Wyoming's 2000 population = 493,782 with 3 electoral votes— two because of Senators.
- Montana's 2000 population = 917,621 with 3 electoral votes— two because of Senators.
- If the electoral college was based on strictly on population without the addition of two senators for each state, then in 2000 Governor Bush would have lost the electoral college also.
- 56 of President Bush's 2000 electoral votes came from non-population based senate apportioned electors. Vice President Gore got 44 votes from non-population based electoral votes.
- Governor Bush defeated Vice-President Gore 271 to 266 electoral votes.

The U.S. Senate was Appointed

- Like the House of Lords in the British Parliament the Senate was appointed
- They were appointed by the respective state legislatures
- Meant to represent the states more than people; represent the elite.
- The 17th Amendment passed in 1913 established direct election of Senate.
- At the writing of the American Constitution in 1789 England's House of Commons was directly elected by male landowners and the House of Lords was appointed by the king.
- In many of the colonies there were two houses as there was in England.
- In England the House of Commons was intended to represent the interests of the landowning classes while the House of Lords was supposed to represent the interests of the monarchy and the royal classes.
- In America, one body was intended to represent the interests of the landowning middle class while the upper house, the Senate, was intended to represent the interests of the intellectuals and the other groups that made up the elite.

- The Founders believed having Senators appointed would accomplish that fact.

Public Opinion in History

- Public opinion has always played a role in the formation of national political policy
- Before formal scientific polls it was expressed in newspapers, letters and in public meetings
- Lincoln used the Emancipation Proclamation to rally public sentiment.
 - Before there were scientific polls politicians listened to the people directly or sought to gauge public opinion by news articles.
 - Until President Lincoln was assassinated, some presidents had days where the general public could visit them in the White House to lodge complaints and discuss important issues.
 - The press, which were generally owned by wealthy business interests, also supposedly represented public opinion.
 - The Emancipation Proclamation was unenforceable.
 - It applied only to those states in rebellion. It excluded the slave-owning states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia.
 - As Union troops conquered regions of the South the slaves there were liberated.

Shaping Public Opinion

- Presidents have sometimes manipulated public to justify actions which might have hidden motives.
- Sometimes the hidden motives were legitimate, sometimes they were not.
- The Mexican War (1846-1848)
- The Spanish-American War (1898).
 - The Mexican War (1846-1848) was totally fabricated to grant America the opportunity to take the Mexican land which now comprises California, New Mexico, Arizona, and part of Colorado.
 - The official reasoning was given that the Mexican president refused to see the American ambassador.
 - The actual reason was that politicians from slave states were clamoring for more land where slave ownership could expand.
 - Slave importation had been prohibited but slave owners could increase profits by literally “breeding” slaves for sale in other American markets.

- Also when slave holding farmers sought to sell their land to more successful slave holding operators, they wanted there to be land where they could start over and continue this form of enterprise.
- The Spanish-American War (1898) was promoted by American business interests that sought to have access to Cuban natural resources and export products only grown in Cuba.
- American companies which sought to buy Cuban sugarcane influenced newspapers that in turn influenced American politicians.
- There was also a Cuban independence movement.

Isolationism and the public sentiment

- Sinking of the *Maine* was for public relations consumption.
- The U.S. increases anti-German sentiment with the sinking of *Lusitania*.
- The terrorist attack on American soil leaves no real enemy state to retaliate against.
- America has used phony attacks to whip public opinion up in favor of war.
- In all likelihood, the *U.S.S. Maine* was sunk by an explosion which was an accident.
- If it was sabotage it was not Spain but rather Cuban revolutionaries hoping Spain would be blamed for the explosion, which it was.
- The *Lusitania* was sunk May 7, 1915 by a German U-boat, of the passengers 761 were rescued, while 1,198 perished.
- But the German embassy had run a full page advertisement in a New York newspaper warning American passengers that the boat was open to attack.
- History has proven that the *Lusitania* was carrying armaments to England and therefore was within Germany's right to attack it.

The Media and Public Opinion

- Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and the Isolationists
- Truman and MacArthur
- Public Opinion and Senator Joseph McCarthy.
- Vietnam and public opinion.
- The Media and Public Opinion.
- These are examples of presidential manipulation of public opinion.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Isolationists

- Isolationists so strong that FDR had to go behind their back

- Charles Lindbergh leads movement
- Some American isolationists were overtly pro-German or pro-Fascist
- The attack on Pearl Harbor ended isolationist hold
- When isolationism originates from the right wing of American politics it is not considered unpatriotic. Is this a double standard?
- American hero Charles Lindbergh, an American of German descent, leads a pro-Nazi movement that attempts to stop the United States from entering the ongoing war on France and England's side.
- President Roosevelt and the military leadership expected a Japanese attack on American interests which would lead to war, but they expected the attack to be somewhere in the Philippines.
- Slandorous interpretations of history by extreme right wing sources claim President Roosevelt knew the attack would come at Pearl Harbor and let it happen anyhow.
- It's like claiming that President Bush knew of the attack on Washington and New York would happen and did nothing.

Truman and MacArthur

- MacArthur was a war hero from WWII
- He believed that insulated him from presidential authority
- Polls showed he was extremely popular
- MacArthur believed he could use popularity to disobey president
- President Truman fired Gen. MacArthur for insubordination.
- General MacArthur had an enormous ego.
- Whereas General Eisenhower always showed himself as working with other military leaders far from the battle, General MacArthur had photos taken which made it look like he was just behind the attacking American soldiers and marines.
- He said in his memoirs that the president's job is to select the generals and then let them do as they see fit.
- General MacArthur wanted to use nuclear weapons against the Chinese if they attacked on behalf of the North Koreans, and President Truman, fearful this would launch World War III, would not let him.

Public Opinion and Senator Joseph McCarthy

- Popular Senator from Wisconsin has national political ambitions
- Offers America a simplistic answer to Communism's international success

- Tramples on the civil rights of many Americans
- Ultimately he goes too far on television.
- Conservatism and some forms of extreme left wing philosophies attempt to offer simplistic solutions to complex issues and problems.
- This tendency spawns (or is caused by) simplistic interpretations of history and historical events.
- Communism emerges from the economic failings of *laissez-faire* capitalism, that is, capitalism without a conscience.
- Rather than acknowledging how the failings of capitalism can fuel a desire to overturn the system which capitalism represents, Senator McCarthy saw everything as the result of international conspiracies.
- Senator McCarthy saw the emergence of Communism in China and in Russia, and Communism's expansion into neighboring countries, as the product of Communists working in the American State Department.
- He saw the presence of Communists in the State Department as an indication that there were Communists in critical areas of the nation.
- Senator McCarthy was representative of a movement that believed that movies which depicted the plight of the working poor, e.g. *Grapes of Wrath*, were examples of the fact that Communists run Hollywood.
- During the depths of the Great Depression there were only 70,000 member in the American Communist Party.
- Many members were young people who eventually left the party when they learned of the extreme and pro-Russian policies of the party, or when the economic conditions of the crisis began to lesson.
- Senator McCarthy and Congressman Richard Nixon form "Un-American Activities" committees in Congress to investigate so-called Communist conspiracies throughout America.
- Many careers, from movie actors, actresses, directors, and support staff, were ruined along with librarians, teachers and other non-celebrity people.
- The accusation was that they were Communists. A few had been Communists briefly when they were young, an extremely small minority were still active in the party or openly sympathetic, but most were everyday Americans who merely expressed concern over economic injustice.

Vietnam and public opinion

- Television has become an integral part of American life
- The World War II generation is too old to fight but young enough to be making policy.

- If America is to be convinced that a war is justified it must resemble WWII.
- In World War II the journalists were in the military.
- The policy which led to the Vietnam War was based on the World War II model which saw all expansion of Communism as Russian and Chinese imperialism, which was the case before and immediately following WWII.
- The Vietnam situation was different. It was a war of liberation from colonial domination by the Vietnamese in which the movement which sought to end colonialism had adopted Communism.

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

- The government reports an attack on the U.S. Navy in the Gulf of Tonkin
- Looking for another Pearl Harbor, *Lusitania*, or *Maine*
- Only two Senators vote against resolution
- The resolution seen as quasi-declaration of war; a Constitutional justification.
- The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was seen as tantamount to a declaration of war.
- Congress, which is charged by the Constitution with being the only branch which can declare war, relinquished its responsibility and allowed the president to wage war without an official war declaration.
- The Founders would not likely agree that was what they intended.
- They were aware that many wars were started by monarchs over issues which were either frivolous or otherwise unnecessary.
- They knew it was the common people who died in war, never the monarchs who sought the violence, and rarely members of the royal classes.
- 58,202 Americans died in Vietnam War.
- During the Korean War President Truman sent troops into battle without Congressional approval. He sent them while Congress was in recess.
- 36,516 Americans died in the Korean War.

What Happened in the Gulf of Tonkin?

- History has shown that the first attack was justified because U.S. was in North Vietnamese waters despite our denials
- The second attack never happened; a false radar echo
- The attack which justified sending 500,000 Americans to Vietnam was a sham.
- In the first instance the American Navy lied about its position to the international press. Subsequent accounts proved Americans were well within the international boundaries of North Vietnam.

- Subsequent to the events, interview of crew members in the so-called second attack indicated that it was not an attack but rather merely a radar “blip” or false echo.
- The government reported it as an attack and American journalists accepted the government version of events as news and passed on the account.
- The bogus account had the desired impact.

The First Televised War

- The first war to be televised extensively
- A free press contradicts official government propaganda
- The American people can see with their own eyes that things aren't going well
- U.S. will never allow the press a free reign again.
- Just like the Civil Rights movement, for Americans to see on television actual events, that is, combat with young American men dying in front of the camera, would have an impact on public opinion.
- This is why since the Vietnam War the press has been greatly restricted in its access to the battlefield.
- Most of the reports by the military that all was going well in the fighting proved either totally false or exaggerated.
- Statistics as to how many North Vietnamese soldiers and Viet Cong were killed proved to be greatly inflated.
- The press would see the facts and hear from the troops the actual story.

The Last Televised War

- The U.S. military did not allow the press free access during Operation Desert Storm
- Press were forced into pools where coverage was provided by a journalist who was shepherded by a military official
- That journalist would share notes with others.
- Most of the military leaders of the two Iraqi wars had been young officers in Vietnam.
- The so-called “embedded” journalists in this most recent war with Iraq was a clever innovation which was similar to what transpired in World War II where journalist were actually in the military and assigned to specific units.
- The journalists would see events from only the perspective of the military and be unable to venture out on their own to see what actually were the facts.

The Dewey Debacle

- In 1948 polls indicate that Governor Thomas Dewey of New York will defeat President Truman.
- Polls conducted by telephone
- In 1948 most poor do not have telephones
- The poor can vote, and they do.
- Polls are not always correct.
- In 2000, polls which showed V.P. Gore carrying Florida actually counted what people believed they had done. Thousands had voted erroneously for other candidates in what proved to be a confusing ballot.
- In 2002, polls underestimated Republican turnout. Pollsters underestimated the impact of President Bush's involvement in off-year elections during wartime.
- In 2004, many exit polls counted too many women in their sample and gave inaccurate data showing that Senator Kerry had done better than he actually did.
- Exit polls use projected samples to determine which voters interviewed to count in the final tabulation.

Most polls are biased

- Polling is a craft which can be manipulated to alter outcome
- Even when polls seek to be unbiased there can be flaws in some aspect of the process
- Zogby Poll of Utica notes that more Democrats are home evenings
- The reality is often reflected when multiple polls have the same outcome.
- Polling has become a sophisticated science.
- It is important to know the bias of the poll and use the information skeptically.
- Find pollsters that historically do not have a bias and use them as a base line for other polls.

The Art is in the questions

- Polling questions can be crafted to skew the results.
- Especially when sponsored by some advocacy group
- Polls can be used to re-enforce positions not really held by polled
- Find out who sponsored the poll.
- Questions can be formulated which confuse the person question or force them to make simplistic "either/or" decisions which skew the results in the favor of the bias.

- Questions can be formulated which confuse the respondent as to what are the real issues.

Abortion rights surveys

- Both sides claim that America is with them
- The reality is that most Americans are in the middle
- They don't oppose all abortions and they don't believe in unrestricted access.
- With regards to abortion rights, both sides of the issue claim they hold the support of a majority of Americans.
- The actual fact is that most Americans are "in the middle."
- "In the middle" means most Americans find abortion an undesirable act, but one which is permitted by the constitutionally-implied right to privacy up until the fetus is a certain age (that is, after the first trimester).
- In summary, most Americans believe that abortions cannot be unrestricted but at the same time cannot all be made illegal.
- The Supreme Court's opinion in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) reflected this complex view of the issue.

Give them what they want

- Lately polls have been used to craft positions or programs
- The Republican *Contract with America* is the product of countless focus groups
- Focus groups are merely small polls.
- Focus groups are meant to be representative of the population as a whole.
- A specific form of polling called a focus group has been used to craft wording on specific and controversial issues.
- Definition- "Focus groups" are small groups selected from a broader population and interviewed through facilitator-led discussions, for opinions and emotional responses about a particular subject. Focus groups are a common market research tool used in commerce and in politics. Results are qualitative and are not statistically significant.

Semantics over Substance

- The *Contract with America* will use the polls to craft the wording of the platform
- There is some doubt as to whether the substance really matches the polls results
- The wording of the contract/platform is shaped to match the concern of the electorate.
- Names for legislation are often the product of focus groups.

- In some instance the name of the legislation have little or no relationship with the actual purpose of the law

The Norm for Washington

- Candidates of both parties employ these tactics.
- The Republicans might have used it more extensively in 1994
- Clinton used these tactics
- It's now the norm in federal and most state elections.
- The actual wording of speeches are determined by focus groups in some instances.
- Wording to avoid is often the product of focus group research.

Polls Reinforce Bias

- The Founders believed that the elected officials should be leaders
- Simply reflecting what the people want is not leading
- Pandering to prejudices and misconceptions is not leading
- The goal become solely to be re-elected not to lead
- Polling has allowed politicians to craft wording which obscure the issues and mislead the voters.
- Polling has produced a generation of politicians who are reluctant to follow their consciences but instead are constrained to the opinions of the majority of their constituents.

Isolationism in 2000

- Presidential candidate Pat Buchanan expresses isolationist tradition in 2000
- They suggest we have no business in Bosnia.
- Should we help Russia enter democracy?
- Are all the former Soviet nuclear bombs accounted for?
- The Republicans in Congress refused to support President Clinton's efforts to pacify the former Yugoslavia and end the genocide there.
- Many of the same politicians who were refused to support military intervention in the former Yugoslavia to end genocide, support the war in Iraq.
- Most former Isolationist now are unilateralists.
- Some isolationists, like former Republican presidential candidate Patrick Buchannan, are still isolationists and though conservative oppose the war in Iraq.