

Public Opinions



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Public

- **Gabriel Almond's three public:**

- **1. A general public** of a majority that **does not know or care about much beyond their immediate concerns**. For example, they show little interest in foreign policy unless the country is in a war or international crisis.
- **2. An attentive public of a minority** who are among the better educated and **who follow more abstract political concerns**, such as foreign policy. They are the audience the elite plays to; in turn, this attentive public passes on views that **mobilize the general public**.
- **3. A policy and opinion elite** of a **few highly influential people who are involved in politics**, often professionally. These people include civil society members, cultural elite and top journalists.

What is Public Opinion?

- *The **aggregation of people's views** about issues, situations, and public figures*
- polls
 - ▣ brief snapshot of feelings on a specific issue
- surveys
 - ▣ broad; usually done by trusted institution

Evaluation processes

- Daniel Kahneman-*Thinking, Fast and Slow*

- **System 1:**

- Fast, **automatic**, emotional, stereotypic, unconscious.
 - Most of public opinions reflect system 1 based opinions.

- **System 2:**

- Slow, **effortful**, logical, calculating, conscious.
 - People are lazy to use this effortful system

SYSTEM 1

Intuition & instinct

95%

Unconscious
Fast
Associative
Automatic pilot

SYSTEM 2

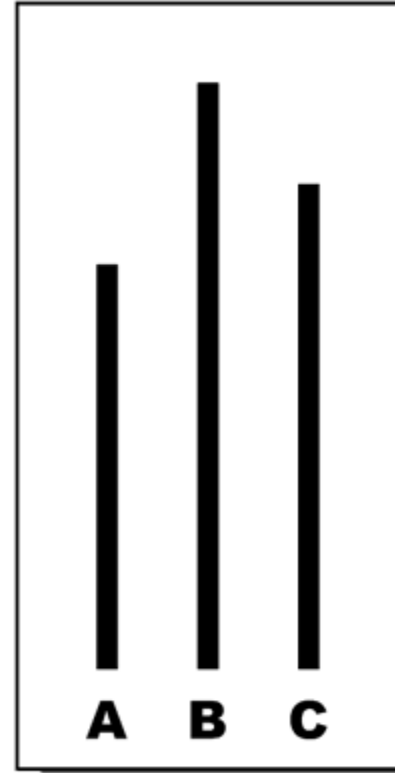
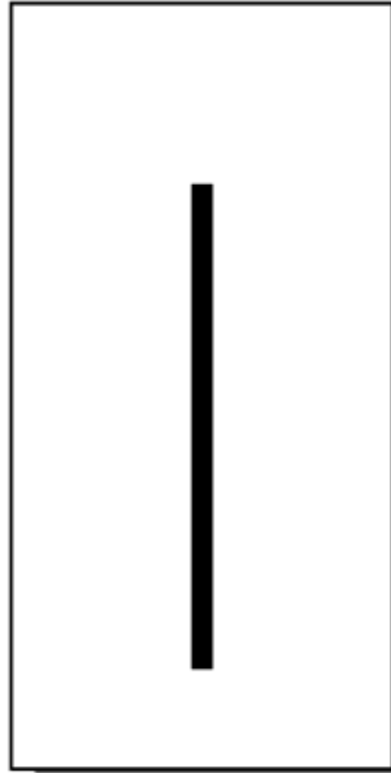
Rational thinking

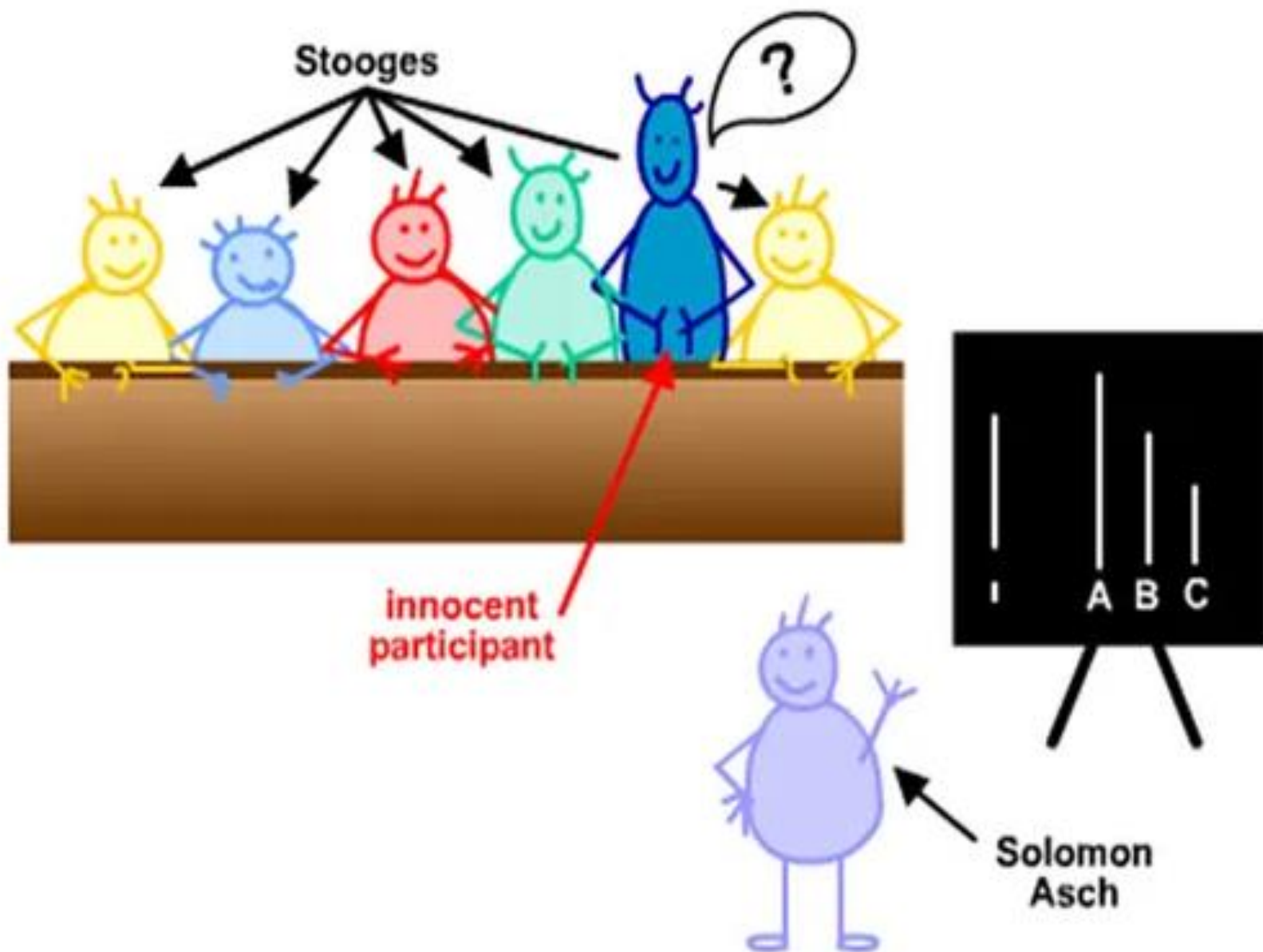
5%

Takes effort
Slow
Logical
Lazy
Indecisive



Source: Daniel Kahneman





System 1 works based on different biases

- **Conformity Bias**- when ones views are swayed too much by other.

Where do our Attitudes Come From?

- The Family
- Peers
- Education
- Group differences:
 - ▣ Age
 - ▣ Tribe
 - ▣ Religion
 - ▣ Social class

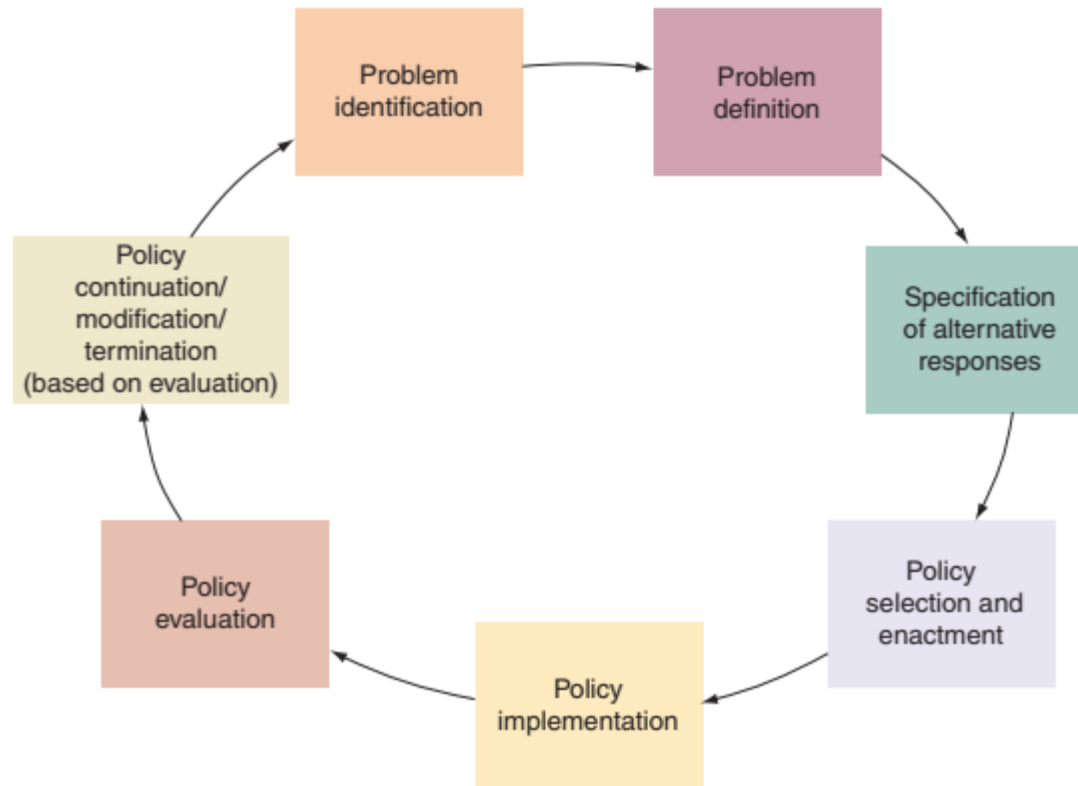
Why is Public Opinion Important?

- Can help provide:
 - ▣ **legitimacy**- higher approval rating = more legitimacy for policy/initiatives
 - ▣ **accountability**- help politicians gauge how the public feels about them
 - ▣ **input in the policy-making process**- policy-makers responsive to public

Public opinions and public policy

- A **public policy** is *any decision or action by a governmental authority that results in the allocation of something that is valued.*
- In **democratic** context, **public opinion** **significantly** contributes to shape public policy.

States of public policy



Stages of public policy and public opinion

- **1. Problem identification** – based on public demand, policy makers may consider some issues or may drop some issues for further actions.
- **2. Problem definition-** what seem to be the causes of the problem, and to define desired outcomes. Public opinion shapes these definitions.
- **3. Specification of alternatives:** at this state alternatives are identified to addresses the problem.



Stages of public policy and public opinion

- **4. Policy Selection-** try to assess the possible **cost and benefits** from the options and select the best suitable option. During this cost-benefit analysis, citizens concerned contribute a significant role. For example- Coal mining.
- **5. Implementation-** for many policies, people and their opinions are considered to **increase the legitimacy and the effectiveness** of the policy.
- **6. Evaluation-** as a main stakeholder of public policy, **citizens' feedback** is always an important defining factor.

What do think?

☐ Corruption and voting?

How voters decide: Three theories

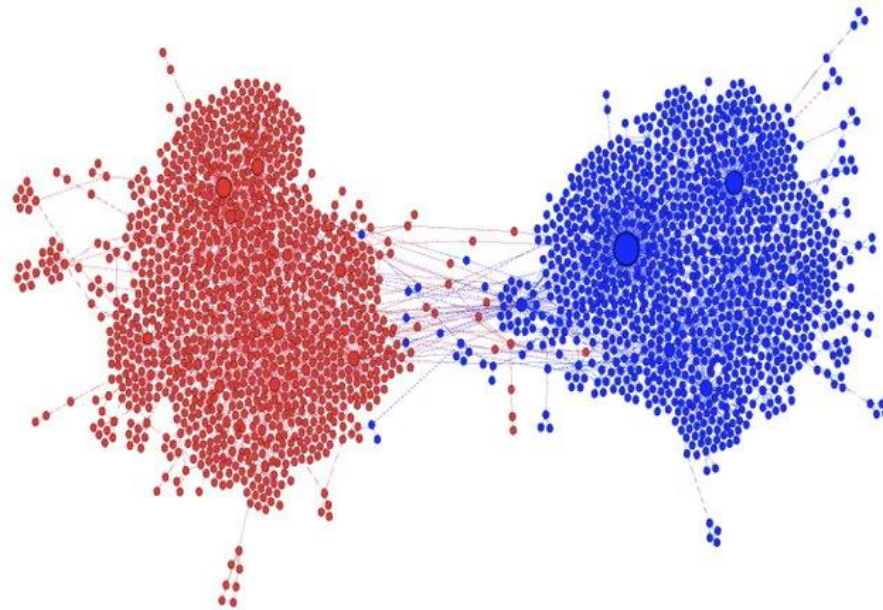
- Economic model/Rational choice model: **benefits of voting**-preferred policy enacted.
- Psychological model: **psychological attachment** to one party.
- Sociological model: stress the **group** basis of voting.
Example: voting based on tribe.

Public opinion and online platform

- Use of social media to expose corruption- going '**viral**' has huge effect.
- '**Echo chambers**' creates a situation where **like-minded people reinforce each other's opinion**, but **do not get exposed to the views of** the opposing side.
- Fake news, bot, social media algorithms are further enforcing the problem .
- Different biases-
 - ▣ **Confirmation Bias**- refers to how people primarily search for bits of evidence that **back up their opinions**.
 - ▣ **Attribution bias or self-serving bias** (We generally attribute our own **accomplishments to our skill and personality**, and our **failures to external factors**)
 - ▣ **Coverage Bias**- it is a form of **media bias** where **certain politicians or topics are disproportionately covered**

Echo-chamber formation

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Source: Kumar et al., 2018

Public opinion and online platform

- Defining our political reality and creating distrust
- Populism, Trump, Brexit
- **Brexit** referendum : UK sends **£350m** a week to the EU
- **'#IAmHere'** campaign: people trying to make Facebook a nicer place

Suggested readings

- Danziger, J. N., & Smith, C. A. (2016). *Understanding the political world: A comparative introduction to political science*. Boston :Pearson, pp. 234-239.
- Roskin, M. G., Cord, R. L., Medeiros, J. A., & Jones, W. S. (2016). ***Political Science: An Introduction*** (14th Edition). Upper Saddle River: Pearson. **(Chapter 07)**
- Martin HarropWilliam L. Miller (1987). *Elections and Voters A comparative introduction*; London: Red Globe Press, pp. 130-170.
- Different biases:
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/11-cognitive-biases-that-influence-political-outcomes>

Q?