

## Public Opinion is not Public Policy

The winner in a political contest is determined by the number of effective activists and leaders on each side. This is strikingly clear when one considers the policies that stand firm despite public opinion against them. We have to understand that public opinion is not policy, find where our philosophy intersects with the interests of voters, and present candidates that sincerely champion both the interests of voters and our philosophy.

There are several significant cases where public opinion does not line up with public policy. Popular opposition to the war in Iraq hasn't stopped the continued stationing of our troops there. Policy in this case is decided by the pressure that the military industrial complex and certain war hawk interest groups apply. Everyone wants their taxes to be lower, but all we seem to get is tax hikes. The self interest of the government agencies and economic sectors dependent on tax dollars exert pressure against fiscal responsibility. In these circumstances, we have an opportunity to create pressure of our own and beat the prevailing interests. On the other hand, public opinion (even among Republican voters) is against the loosening of gun laws. Despite this, constitutional carry and SAPA legislation has become law because of the hard work of a small number of second amendment absolutists that spend time and money on the electoral and legislative process. The deciding factor in each of these cases is the activists and leaders on each side. We must remember that politics is the adjudication of power and policy will be decided by those that compete for that power.

Activists and leaders on both sides sometimes use public opinion to apply pressure to the political system and pass laws. Public opinion on its own does not decide policy. Not all public opinion is equally significant. Voters prioritize issues differently. It's possible for a voter to support a candidate because of alignment on certain issues significant to the voter while holding opposing views on other issues. Establishment politicians will go against public opinion when they estimate that it will not impact their overall electoral results. Legislators that align with our values will have to go beyond public opinion at times to champion the policy that our movement demands. Whereas populists seek to implement public opinion in policy no matter how bad the outcome is, we seek to leverage public opinion where it aligns with our philosophy and use our coalition to pass policy that is beyond public opinion. Several of our core policies have public support that provides the electoral base for the rest of our policies.

Our indirect path to power relies on the fact that we have a small base of ideologically passionate activists that can connect their philosophy to the issues that voters care about the most. It's our job to find the most significant issue that our philosophy can provide a solution to and to present a candidate that will sincerely champion that solution. Policies like school choice and tax cuts satisfy some of the most pressing concerns of the voter. Beyond a small set of immediate concerns, the voter may not care what else the candidate stands for. This is where we have to do our part to make sure that candidates also represent the rest of our ideals. By continuously contesting elections, we can build a coalition of principled legislators that have loyal voter bases and are willing to push important liberty issues whether they align with public opinion or not.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is something that would be policy if public opinion = public policy?
2. What factors influence public policy?
3. What advantages do we have in competing for the power to decide policy?
4. What is a liberty minded solution to a concern that people in our area have?
5. What are issues that are important to us as activists but not necessarily important to voters?