



Research Article

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The role of education in shaping public opinion in Albania

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Abstract

Numerous research studies have associated the two variables - the educational level and public opinion creation. Various sociological and political studies interchangeably demonstrate how the creation of attitudes, affected by the function of the media and education, shapes public opinion on significant issues involving the lives of communities and individuals. Education promotes changing of attitudes and behavior, including the ability to accept new arguments and reflect on one's own experiences. This process can be prompted by exposure of new arguments and the ability to critically reflect on the available piece of information. In the history of Albania, there has been limited civic engagement regarding numerous issues. In this sense, main objective of this manuscript is the analysis and the way how education has shaped public opinion in Albania.

Keywords: education, analysis, public opinion, Albania.

1. Introduction

The Student Movement, among other things, contributed to the collapse of Albania's communist regime in the 1990s. The students' public opinion was that they were looking for "Albania like the rest of Europe". The 2013 chemical waste protest and the December 2018 student protest are examples of civil responses started by people that had an impact on public policies. The questions that arise are connected with the way how the public opinion can be used effectively to improve citizens' civil and political rights.

2. Literature review and methodology

In fully understanding the relationship between the level of education and the formation of the public opinion, it is necessary to evaluate a few key aspects such as:

- ***Citizenship and civic engagement***

Education level is closely associated with civic engagement and public opinion formation. Higher education may contribute to people's knowledge and ability to analyze and evaluate information, making them more eager to actively participate in debates and democratic processes. Citizenship embodies the "public" dimension of an individual's existence. People are able to engage in the life of their communities, with responsibilities as well as rights. As a result, citizen engagement is associated with the improvement of constitutional governance, reflected in the extend of political rights and civil freedoms (Heywood, 2002).

- ***Establishing perceptions and behaviours***

Establishing perceptions, interpreting people's behaviour as well as experiencing personal attraction are all examples of social cognition- the process of receiving and interpreting information about others. It is a way in which we are impacted by the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of others. How do humans establish their first impressions? When we make first impressions, we rely on schemas, which are a set of expectations and beliefs about situations. Impressions are also influenced by the sequence in which data is obtained. First impressions are the strongest (superior impact), maybe because we do not want to invest in the extra effort required to identify, analyze, or adjust them (Morris & Maisto, 2008).

Why are attitudes important? Attitude is a relatively strong organization of beliefs, emotions, and tendencies toward an object. Attitudes are essential because they frequently shape behavior. Attitudes are made up of three key components: (1) evaluative thoughts towards the attitude's object, (2) feelings toward that object, and (3) behavioral tendencies toward it. These three components are frequently, but not always, congruent with one another. Behavioral tendencies are connected to our predisposition to act in a specific way toward the object (Morris & Maisto, 2008).

Individuals' perceptions and attitudes are influenced by their social cognition and interactions with others. A high degree of education may help students acquire the critical and analytical skills required to create independent and informed opinions. What factors encourage a person to modify an action? When exciting behaviors, beliefs, or perceptions are presented, attitudes may change, a phenomenon known as cognitive dissonance. Attitudes can also change in response to attempts done during persuasion. The first step in persuading is to capture your audience's attention. The following step is to ensure that the audience understands and accepts the given message. Persuasion, according to the communication model, acts as a function of the source, the message itself, the means of communication, and the audience's characteristics (Morris & Maisto, 2008).

The correlation between attitudes and behavior is not always straightforward (Albarracin, Zanna, Johnson & Kumkale, 2005). Variables such as the intensity of the attitude, the simplicity it has to be remembered, how prominent the attitude is in a specific case, and how connected it is to the given behavior, all contribute to determining if a person would act on that attitude. Personality traits are also very

important (Rowatt, Franklin & Cotton, 2005). Some people, in a consequent way, align their behaviors with their attitudes, whilst others opt for more caution so as to behave correctly in a particular setting. As a result, some people's attitudes predict their behaviors better than others'.

Another significant factor is the relationship between curriculum and public opinion. It is critical to comprehend how the education and training of citizens in the educational system may impact the formation of attitudes and perceptions in society.

A few important aspects and correlations are as follows:

- **The impact of curricula on the cultivation of values and attitudes.** School and university curricula have a significant role in cultivating the values and attitudes of students. The inclusion of subjects such as history, geography, social sciences, and political studies can help build a culture of informed and conscious criticism. Curricula that teach in-depth understanding of society, politics, and economics may encourage people to engage in public debates and establish their independent opinions (Woolfolk, 2011).

- **Preparation for active participation in political and social life.** A rich and diverse curriculum can help students understand the political and social structures of society. Topics like democracy, fundamental rights, and civic responsibilities can encourage active and informed participation in democratic processes (Woolfolk, 2011).

- **Criticism and critical analysis.** Curricula that teach analytical skills as well as critical thinking while assessing information have the capacity to cultivate citizens who can understand and evaluate many arguments while developing independent attitudes. This may influence how people view and interpret current events and policy (Woolfolk, 2011).

- **Efforts to promote diversity and inclusion:** Curricula that reflects social and cultural diversity have the potential to raise awareness and empathy for various viewpoints. This can help shape a larger and more inclusive public opinion (Woolfolk, 2011).

- **The Impact of Technology on Learning and Information.** The advancement of technology in education provides new opportunities to increase access and quality of learning. The use of digital platforms and information technology tools can increase students' access to novel and diverse knowledge, boosting their ability to develop educated attitudes.

In order to guarantee an effective relationship between curricula and public opinion, educational systems must offer a diverse variety of topics and discussions that reflect social and political realities. This would contribute to the preparation of a new generation of people capable of comprehending, analyzing, and contributing to the development of their society.

3. The changing of attitudes and behaviour

How do we develop our attitudes? Where do they come from? Many of our core attitudes stem from direct and early personal experience (Jaccard & Blanton, 2005).

The media, particularly television, has a significant impact on the development of attitudes. Television bombards us with messages, not just for news and entertainment, but also for commercial purposes.

The message itself and the manner in which it is conveyed both impact its understanding and acceptance. The persuasive communication model highlights four aspects for achieving these goals: the source, the message itself, the means of communication, and the viewers' characteristics. The actors of persuasion focus on each of these elements while hoping to alter our attitudes (Giddens, 2007).

The effectiveness of a persuasive communication is defined first by its source, the author or communicator who appeals to the audience to accept the message. Credibility is noteworthy at least initially (Ito, 2002; Jain & Posavac, 2001).

However, we often forget the source while remembering the information. It is no surprise that this is known as the sleep effect (Kumkale & Albaracin, 2004).

In cases we are interested in the message, the message itself has greater impact on whether or not we alter our attitudes (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986b). Studies have shown that we frequently reject messages that simply contradict our own viewpoints. Messages are more effective when they provide all sides of an issue as well as new arguments rather than repeating old cliches that have been already heard. If the message produces tremendous concern, the audience may choose to disregard it (Worchel, Cooper, Goethals, & Olson, 1999).

When it comes to decide on a persuasive medium, the written material is more suited in helping people grasp complicated arguments, but video recordings and live presentations are more effective for an audience which has already grasped the central point of the argument (Chaiken and Eagly, 1976). However, face-to-face calls or teachings from our personal experience have the biggest impact.

Certain personality traits make some persons more susceptible to attitude alteration than others. People with low self-esteem are more easily influenced, especially when the message is complex and difficult to grasp. People with high intelligence are more unaffected by persuasion because they are more likely to take into account counterarguments (Morris and Maisto, 2008).

4. The role of media and the sources of information

The media has a crucial role in forming public opinion by disseminating facts and interpretations that impact attitudes and opinions. The capacity to assess and identify reliable sources of information is influenced by one's degree of education (Giddens, 2007).

- **Manipulation and disinformation.** In the age of the Internet and social media, manipulating public opinion and spreading disinformation has reached high levels. Groups, with or without interested people, can use internet platforms to propagate false information, distort perceptions, and influence public attitudes (McNair, 2009).
- **Emotional factors and stereotypes.** Emotions and preconceptions frequently

impact public opinion in contrast to objective and factual analysis. This might result in strong and dogmatic attitudes that do not represent objective reality (Morris & Maisto, 2008).

- **The lack of accurate and concise information.** In certain circumstances, public opinion may be formed based on limited or generic data, making it difficult to combine in-depth analysis as well as different purposes (McNair, 2009).
- **Unequal representation and lack of diversity of attitudes.** In some cases, some groups or social perspectives may be underrepresented in public opinion, resulting in the absence of the existence of key attitudes or raising the likelihood of conflict and inequality (McNair, 2009).
- **The influence of the media and lobbying groups' interests.** The media and different lobbying groups may shape public opinion as well as public agendas, resulting in conflicting and mixed views.

Technology has had a significant influence on the development and dissemination of public opinion in the modern era. Some key aspects of technology's influence on public opinion include:

- **The broad access and speedy spread of information.** Modern technology, such as the Internet and social media, has enabled individuals to quickly and easily obtain information from all over the world. This has influenced in an increased transparency and information exchange, enabling people to be more informed and participate in public discussions (Giddens, 2007).
- **The democratization of expression and participation.** Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have made accessible the expressing of opinions. Individuals may instantly communicate their views, ideas, and attitudes to a large audience, which opens up conversations and encourages public opinion on a variety of subjects (Heywood, 2002).
- **The impact of news screening and distribution.** Technology has also created challenges for news screening and authenticity. Disinformation and fake news may spread rapidly via social media, creating some type of conflict and distortion in public opinion (McNair, 2009).
- **The mobilization and organisation of protests.** Technology has been an important instrument for organizing protests and social movements. Interest groups may rapidly mobilize to express their opposition to certain policies or events via social media and communication apps (Heywood, 2002).
- **The personalization of the user's experience.** Personalization algorithms on online platforms can polarize public opinion by enabling individuals to experience a "river of information" that suits their tastes, resulting in informational blockings and disagreement in the examination of objective data.
- **Screening and analysis of public opinion:** Data analysis technologies have made it easier to track and assess public opinion quickly and effectively. Social data and opinion analysis can give valuable information about individuals' perspectives and trends on multiple topics (Giddens, 2007).

To take full advantage of technology's potential to give a good impact on public

opinion, it is critical to address the challenges and risks associated with this potential such as data security, freedom of speech protection, and the use of technology to boost civil engagement and democratic discussion.

5. The educational responsibility of the government

Evaluating political systems is challenging since each performance indicator is quite complex. Popular approval and accountability, as well as a shared culture and mutual respect for authority, can all help to create stability. Policies aimed at ensuring equal distribution could hinder wealth generation. The growth of citizen rights has the potential to undermine civil obligation and the feeling of the community. The expansion of a democratic government may result in the decline of individual freedom or personal autonomy (Heywood, 2002).

The discussion of the government's role and responsibilities in citizen education encompasses a number of ideological discussions concerning the power and limitations of the government's engagement in the population's educational process. Regardless of the active criticism addressed towards the civil society's rather conformist nature and the lack of power of public citizen opinion to affect political events and national governance issues, more and more effort is being made in this regard. We have progressively entered a period of qualitative improvement in democracy. Civil society and citizens have learned that they may now openly discuss any issue, and that no regular governmental or parliamentary power is immune to criticism (Tushi, 2014).

Does the government have educational responsibilities? In political sociology, there are different solutions. Liberals and conservators use different approaches. Conservators advocate for a limited redimensioning of the government's educational role and responsibilities for the education of its citizens, as well as the educational strengthening of social "discipline institutions," among others (Tushi, 2014).

6. Conclusion

These aspects demonstrate that the education level may have a fundamental influence on how public opinion is shaped and how individuals participate in the country's political and social life. Education promotes engaged and knowledgeable citizens, which are the foundations of a free and democratic society. Politics is a major issue of public opinion in Albania. Political changes, reforms, the fight against corruption, integration into the European Union, and relations with countries nearby are some of the topics that spark heated arguments and shape citizens' attitudes. The economy and trade market conditions are the most important issues for the majority of citizens. Unemployment rates, economic growth, inflation, and living conditions all have a significant impact on public opinion. The struggle against corruption and the independence of the judiciary system are major topics in public opinion. Citizens are profoundly concerned about the amount of corruption and the independence of

the judiciary: Albania's membership in the European Union and relations with other nations are also debated topics in public opinion.

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