

Lesson Plan: Exploring American Political Ideologies through Polling Data

Subject: U.S. Government and Politics

Unit/Topic: How polling can help teach us about American political ideologies and beliefs.

Grade: 9-12

Measurable Student Learning Outcomes/Goals:

- **Unit:** American political ideologies and beliefs
 - **Objectives:**
 - Understand how American political beliefs are shaped and how they influence the creation of public policies.
 - Utilize and understand the role of data analysis in investigating American attitudes about government and politics.
 - Develop the ability to interpret and connect data to political science concepts.
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AP Government Themes/Big Ideas:

- Methods of political analysis
 - Competing policy-making interests
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AP Government Discipline-Specific Practices/Skills:

- Skill: Data Analysis
- Skill 2: Analyzes sourcing and the situation of primary and secondary sources.

Lesson Description and Overview:

This lesson plan aligns with the AP Government and Politics course requirements, focusing on American political ideologies and beliefs. Students will use polling data to investigate Americans' political beliefs and ideologies by examining real polling data. The lesson enhances understanding of how changing societal and political trends can be tracked using public opinion data, offering a complementary context-based perspective. Additionally, the lesson includes recent sources and integrates diversity components to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to learning.

Activities and Assignments:

This lesson plan is to be completed over multiple meeting times.

Pre-Lesson:

- **Review the Roper Center Lesson POLLING101:** [Polling Basics Assignment](#).

Lesson Introduction/Warm-Up:

- **Activity Objective:** Gauge students' knowledge and opinions on public opinion/polling data.
- **Discussion Prompt:** Why is polling data essential in contemporary society? Consider examples of political marketing and social issues.
- **Interactive Activity:**
 - Give students sticky notes to write down 1 or 2 ideas within 10 minutes.
 - Post notes on a board or wall, have one student read them out loud and another take notes.
 - Keep this list for a debrief discussion at the end of the lesson.

Activities:

Activity 1: Poll/Data Analysis:

- **Materials:** Laptops or Devices with Internet Access
- **Instructions:**
 - Place students in pairs or small groups.
 - Direct students to the Roper Center's iPoll database [iPoll Database](#) to learn about public opinion on major political issues during elections.
 - For this activity, students should focus on the 1980 election year, select one question/survey to review, analyze the data, write their findings, and create a data graph.
 - Include information like key findings, trends, patterns, interpret results, address how the poll was used, and identify any bias.
 - Present findings to the class.
 - **Additional Sources and Activities:**
 - [Pew Research Center - American Political Divides](#): Discuss the current state of political divides in the U.S. and how recent events have influenced public opinion.
 - [Gallup - Presidential Job Approval Center](#): Explore how presidential approval ratings have changed over time in the U.S. and reflect on the influence of these ratings on public opinion.
 - **Diversity Components:**
 - **Data Analysis:** Focus on differences in opinions across various demographics, including race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status.
 - **Discussion Prompts:** How do political opinions vary across different social groups? What factors contribute to these differences?

Activity 2: Campaign Weathervane Online Interactive Game:

- **Instructions:**
 - Direct students to the Roper Center's Campaign Weathervane online interactive game [Campaign Weathervane](#).
 - Complete the activity for any available year between 1960-2020.

- Debrief discussion on what was learned from the game about the connection between politics, policies, polling, and elections or other events.
- **Diversity Components:**
 - **Activity Inclusion:** Ensure polling topics cover diverse issues, such as racial justice, economic inequality, immigration, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Activity 3: Create Your Own Poll:

- **Materials:** Laptops or Devices with Internet Access, Survey Creation Tool (e.g., Google Forms, SurveyMonkey)
- **Instructions:**
 - Students create their own public opinion polls.
 - Select a topic of interest, design polls using a survey creation tool, and consider ethical implications of data collection.
 - Survey the public and collect data (online or printed surveys).
 - Interpret and analyze data, look for trends and patterns.
 - Present findings to the class with a short presentation.
 - **Diversity Components:**
 - **Data Analysis:** Focus on differences in opinions across various demographics, including race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Activity 4: Connecting to Secondary Sources:

- **Instructions:**
 - Find opinion pieces from news articles or favorite social media political commentators.
 - In pairs, analyze the writer or commentator's arguments, consider how they respond to differing perspectives.
 - Discuss how comments relate to polling data or current events, and if polling data is used to push arguments, analyze how it is used.
 - **Diversity Components:**
 - **Case Studies:** Use case studies that highlight diverse voices and perspectives in American politics.

Reflection:

- **Instructions:**

- Provide students with an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned about polling and its impact on society.
- Write a reflection piece or participate in a class discussion sharing thoughts, insights, and personal connections to the topic.
- Identify scenarios where polling data might be relevant, discuss how understanding polling methodologies can help critically evaluate information and form informed opinions.
- Reflect on using polling data to assess government policies' effectiveness or understand social attitudes toward past and current social issues.
- Discuss responsibilities of being informed citizens who engage in dialogue and decision-making processes based on reliable information.
- Consider how to be informed and active participants in societal discourse.
- **Diversity Components:**
 - **Reflection:** Encourage students to reflect on their own identities and how these influence their political beliefs and engagement.

Additional Resources:

- [Classroom Materials | Roper Center for Public Opinion Research](#)
- [Polling Tips | Center for Teaching Innovation - Cornell University](#)
- [Teaching Hard History | Southern Poverty Law Center](#)
- [How Public History Can Reshape Our Views of the Past | Harvard Gazette](#)
- [The New York Times - Diversity and Political Opinions](#)