

**Lesson Plan:** What's the connection between Public Opinion and US History<sup>1</sup>

**Subject:** U.S. History

**Unit/Topic:** Civil Rights, Presidential Elections, Public Opinion

**Grade:** 9-12

**Measurable Student Learning Outcomes/Goals:**

*Theme 5: politics and power (PCE)*

This theme focuses on how different social and political groups have influenced society and government in the United States and how political beliefs and institutions have changed over time.

*AP Historical Thinking Skills:*

Skill 1 identifies and explains historical developments and processes.

Skill 2 analyzes sourcing and the situation of primary and secondary sources.

Skill 4 analyzes the context of historical events, developments, or processes.

*AP History Reasoning Processes*

This lesson has been developed to align with the AP history reasoning process 1, comparison, and reasoning process 2, causation.

- Making Connections:
  - Understand the significance of polling data in understanding shifts in societal and political trends
  - Remember major historical events and developments of the past, and correlate them with the changes in public opinion evident in polling data
- Apply the skills of analyzing and interpreting polling data to study significant events in US history
- Analyze the influence of significant events on the public's perception and opinion, as shown in polling data
- Evaluate the changing influence of politics and power on public opinion over time by observing trends in polling data
- Create insightful historical arguments based on comparisons, causations, and continuations and changes observed in polling data

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson plan is intended for use in AP U.S. History courses, advanced US History Courses, or dual enrollment history courses.

## Primary Instructional Techniques

- Looking for patterns
- Matching claims and evidence
- Interpreting data by creating data representations.

## Lesson Description and Overview:

This Lesson plan was developed to align closely with the AP U.S. history course requirements. The College Board states that within the AP U.S. history course, students will “investigate significant events, individuals, developments, and processes in nine historical periods from 1491 to present. Students are expected to develop and use the same skills and methods employed by historians: analyzing primary and secondary sources; Developing historical arguments; Making historical connections; And utilizing reasoning about comparison, causation, and continuity and change”. Additionally, “the course aligns itself with eight themes to make connections among historical developments in different times and places.”

For this Lesson plan, instructors will focus on one specific AP U.S. History thematic element: politics and power. Students will learn how to use polling data to investigate significant events, developments, and processes throughout the history of the United States. Students will learn to analyze and interpret polling data critically by covering various events, from political elections and civil rights movements to shifts in public opinion on diverse issues. The lesson aims at enhancing understanding of how changing societal and political trends can be tracked using public opinion data, offering a complementary context-based perspective to traditional historical narratives.

## Activities and Assignments

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

### *Pre-Lesson*

*Review the Roper Center Lesson POLLING101*

[https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/polling\\_basics\\_assignment.pdf](https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/polling_basics_assignment.pdf)

### *Lesson Introduction/Warm-Up*

This activity aims to gauge students' knowledge and opinions on public opinion/polling data. Begin the lesson by asking students to share why polling data is essential in contemporary society. Please encourage them to consider political, marketing, and social issues examples.

1. Example Discussion Prompt: how has polling data been used by political or social campaigns to shape their strategies and policies, or how is it used by businesses to understand consumer preferences? Have student note responses.
2. Example Interactive Discussion Activity: Give students sticky notes and ask them to write down 1 or 2 ideas within 10 minutes, then have a stick on the board or a wall. Once everyone has posted their stick note, select one student to read them out loud and another to take notes. Keep this list to use in a debrief discussion at the end of the lesson.

### *Activities:*

Activity 1: Have the class create a timeline of significant historical events or developments from 1944-Present. Highlight the events related to civil rights and civil rights movements. Discuss with students what they know about the civil rights movement in the 1960s and where they found this information. Examples of Guiding Questions for Students: How did the civil rights issue divide people in the U.S. along party and regional lines? What do you think the impact of public opinion was on federal and state policy choices? Why might a member of Congress vote against public opinion on civil rights issues?

Activity 2, Poll Analysis: After completing Activity 1, Place students in pairs or small groups. Direct students to the Roper Centers iPoll database <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/> to learn about public opinion on civil rights. Should focus on any year between 1960-2020. Then select one question/survey to review. Try the keyword “civil rights.” Ask students to analyze the data, write their findings, and create a data graph. Ask students to include information like key findings, trends, and patterns (e.g., what did different groups say?) and interpret the results. Students can also address how the poll was used, what bias they noticed, and present their findings to the class.

*Instructors note: If necessary, select the focus year for students, for example, 1968 or 2020. There is a lot of data available. Alternatively, you can allow students to pick years of interest to them. This allows for a more student-centered discussion.*

Activity 3: After reviewing iPoll data, direct students to the Roper Centers Campaign Weathervane online interactive game. <https://roper-weathervane.s3.amazonaws.com/index.html> Have students complete the activity for any available year between 1960-2020. After students complete the game, have a debrief discussion on what they learned from the game. What can this activity teach us about the connection between politics, policies, polling, and civil rights or other historical events?

### *Reflection*

Provide students with an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned about polling and its impact on society. Have them write a reflection piece or participate in a class discussion where they share their thoughts, insights, and personal connections to the topic. They can identify scenarios where polling data might be relevant and discuss how understanding polling methodologies can help them critically evaluate information and form informed opinions. Students should reflect on how they might use polling data to assess the effectiveness of government policies or to understand social attitudes toward past and current social issues. They can also discuss the responsibilities of being informed citizens who engage in dialogue and decision-making processes based on reliable information. Please encourage them to consider how they can be informed and active participants in societal discourse.

## **Additional Resources**

*Classroom Materials | Roper Center for Public Opinion Research*

<http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/learn/classroom-materials>

Classroom Materials. Today's students are preparing to enter a world in which data literacy – finding, analyzing, interpreting, and describing data – is essential for academic and career success. The Roper Center's archive of public opinion data allows educators to integrate data into the curriculum in [...]

*Polling tips | Center for Teaching Innovation - Cornell University*

<https://teaching.cornell.edu/classroom-polling/polling-tips>

You can use classroom polling to: bring active learning to a lecture to help students become less passive, more active learners. Help students engage with content and assess their knowledge. Discover student misconceptions or assumptions. Encourage problem-solving. Solicit feedback and perspectives. Draw student predictions.

*Teaching Hard History | Southern Poverty Law Center*

<https://www.splcenter.org/20180131/teaching-hard-history>

January 31, 2018, Kate Shuster. Part I: How Slavery is Taught Today Part II: Why We Must Change Part III: How We Investigated the Issue Part IV: Conclusions and Recommendations

*How public history can reshape our views of the past*

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/08/how-public-history-can-reshape-our-views-of-the-past/>

Tiya Miles details how public history can reshape our beliefs of the past. Tiya Miles believes a better understanding of the past is as likely to be found in a formal archive, a National Park, or a conversation with an elderly relative as in the classroom. Miles, who received a bachelor's degree in Afro-American studies from Harvard in 1992, joined the faculty in 2018 as professor of history and Radcliffe Alumnae Professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study[...]