

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Polling the Nations

By **Infobase**

Guide to Lessons, Activities, and Project Ideas



Overview

This educator guide will help you give students the tools they need to investigate, analyze, and think critically about the most important challenges facing the world. You can teach them the skills for pro/con discussions, debates, persuasive writing assignments, graphing exercises, numerical assignments, presentations, and reports.

Ideal For:

Research, debates, and discussions

Recommended For:

K-12 Schools & Districts, Public Libraries, Universities and Colleges

Lessons/Activities/Projects: 10

Product: Polling the Nations by Infobase

Type: Research Database

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Why Polling Matters

Polls are essential parts of contemporary life. By providing vital information on public opinion, they help shape national policy, political discourse, and major legislation. Modern democratic countries could not function without polls. By informing citizens, leaders, students, and educators what broad swaths of the population believe about specific issues and ideas, they can steer the economy, influence elections, and determine the direction of society.

They give both a snapshot in time (e.g, what did voters think about capital punishment in 1994 and 2024?) and reveal major trends across years (e.g., how have attitudes toward gun control or the U.S.'s role in the Middle East changed over the past few decades?). Unlike other forms of information, such as articles, broadcasts, and speeches, polls are objective and unbiased.

What Students Can Learn

The information gained from polls is especially useful in pro/con discussions, debates, persuasive writing assignments, graphing exercises, numerical assignments, presentations, and reports.



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Polling the Nations

Polling the Nations by Infobase is a research database that brings together thousands of polls on hundreds of topics going back more than a third of a century, giving students the tools they need to investigate, analyze, and think critically about the important challenges facing the world.

“University and research libraries will want it in their collections.”

Choice

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- ◆ 750k+ poll questions
- ◆ 18k+ surveys in the U.S. and abroad
- ◆ 1k+ aggregated sources
- ◆ Primary sources of raw data unfiltered by ideology or political slant
- ◆ Gathering information since 1986









Student & Educator Benefits

Polling the Nations is a valuable resource for students and educators in a wide array of courses and subjects. Polls cover all 50 states, dozens of U.S. cities and electoral districts, Canadian provinces, and more than 100 countries around the world.

BREAKING NEWS

- ◆ Presidential Campaigns
- ◆ Supreme Court Decisions
- ◆ Congressional Actions
- ◆ Wars
- ◆ Natural Disasters

TOPICS

- ◆ Affirmative Action
- ◆ Climate Change
- ◆ Criminal Justice Reform
- ◆ Drugs
- ◆ Foreign Policy
- ◆ Immigration
- ◆ Race Relations
- ◆ Voting Rights

PUBLIC OPINION

- ◆ China
- ◆ Israel
- ◆ The Palestinian Territories
- ◆ Russia
- ◆ And more than 100 other countries

Ideal for teaching math skills. This includes graphing, computational fluency, statistical comparison, and percentages. By presenting information numerically, polls show how figures can convey both meaning and context to improve symbolic reasoning.

Excellent resources for visual learners. Polling illustrates how pictorial content—graphs, raw data, etc.—can teach and illuminate ideas as effectively as text.

Enhance both critical thinking and mathematical skills. Polling the Nations provides essential context on a vast range of contemporary and historical topics and subjects.

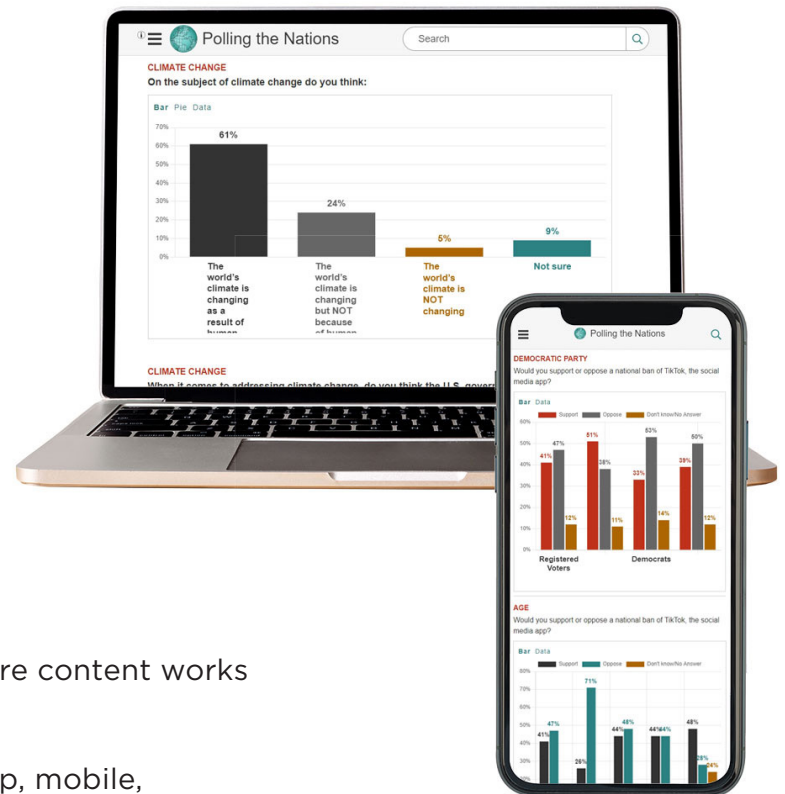
- ◆ Civics
- ◆ Cultural Studies
- ◆ Current Events
- ◆ Economics
- ◆ Government
- ◆ History
- ◆ Media Literacy
- ◆ Political Science
- ◆ Social Studies
- ◆ Sociology



Getting Started

Digital Features and Highlights

- ◆ Interactive tools enable users to manipulate how the data in each poll display, empowering them to customize content for reports and presentations.
- ◆ “My Content” feature allows users to save and organize polls for future reference.
- ◆ Simple, easy-to-use page tools enable users to print, download, and send polls electronically.
- ◆ Page tools provide dynamic citations in MLA and Chicago formats, with EasyBib export functionality.
- ◆ Each poll has a sharable persistent record URL.
- ◆ Accessibility tools and updated VPAT ensure content works for all users.
- ◆ Responsive design supports use on desktop, mobile, and tablet devices, as well as in Google Classroom.



Poll Questions

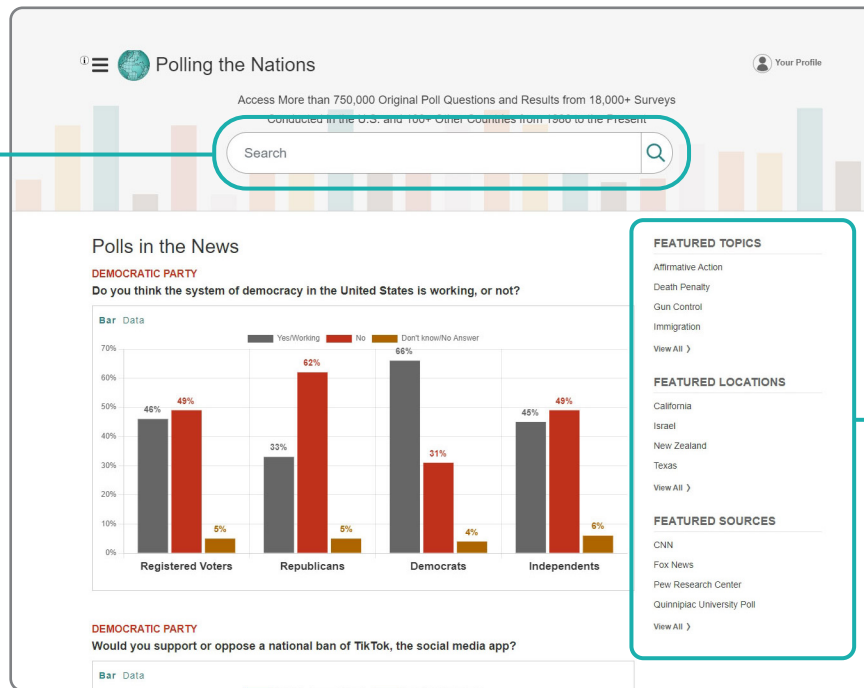
- ◆ Include the source, date, sample size, location, and method—all the essential information students need to interpret, analyze, and understand them.
- ◆ Can be displayed in multiple formats: bar graph, pie chart, and raw data.
- ◆ Full color display, providing both visual appeal and clarity of content.
- ◆ Provide not just individual poll questions, but also the entire poll from which the question was asked. This enables students and educators to view every poll in its entirety and in context.

Product Content Organization & Use

- ◆ The **homepage** showcases current high-interest polls.

The **search bar**—always visible at the top of every page—makes finding polls quick and easy.

Right rail highlights the three main filter index pages.



Every poll is organized by **topic**, **location**, and **source**, making navigation fast and simple. These filters can be accessed from either the right rail of the homepage or the three-line drop-down menu. This makes accessing polls quicker and more intuitive. Students and educators can also combine these filters to further streamline their search.

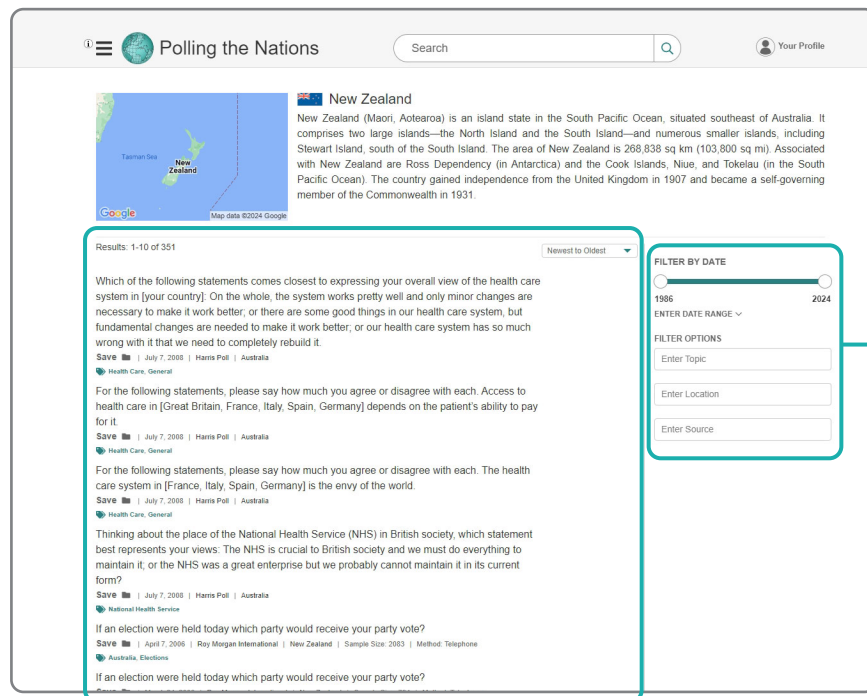
Topics: Find thousands of topics and subtopics to help readers refine searches.

Locations: Has hundreds of places indicating specific geographic areas where polls were conducted, enabling students and educators to compare results from state to state or country to country.

Sources: Features data from more than 1,000 organizations whose polls are aggregated in the database. These include companies and polling groups from across the country and around the globe.

- ◆ Each filter page (Topics, Locations, and Sources) highlights high-interest subjects in a banner across the top. Many of these highlighted subjects include a background article to help students and educators assess and contextualize the polls.
- ◆ Updated regularly so students and educators always have access to the latest polls—and can quickly compare them to older ones.

The **date filter** on the right rail allows students and educators to quickly refine the parameters of their search to a specific year (e.g., 2001) or set of years (e.g., 1990–1999 or 2017–2021). A special “date range” filter allows users to further customize their search by exact date, past year, past month, etc.



Because students and educators usually want to see the most relevant and robust polls, the default display of poll results is by relevance. Users can customize the display by newest to oldest or A–Z. This gives students and educators the power to curate the information in whatever format they wish.

Lessons, Activities, and Project Ideas

Getting Students Started / Summarizing Information

- ◆ Have students review the topics and choose one that interests them. This topic could be anything from immigration, gun control, or capital punishment to artificial intelligence, social media, or homework. Note that major topics will offer more robust results. Instruct students to choose five poll questions on their topic. These can be from a single year or multiple years.
- ◆ What position do respondents take on the issue? Are they closely divided, or does one position clearly dominate? Some questions might take a simple pro/con or support/oppose approach, while others may offer a range of responses or degrees of support or opposition. What does this reveal about people's attitudes? In sum, what do these five questions reveal about public opinion?
- ◆ Have students write a paper summarizing the results of the poll questions that compares and contrasts the various responses and viewpoints. The paper should also include some of the polls.



Conduct a Poll: Compare Class Opinion to Public Opinion

Working in pairs or groups, instruct students to conduct a poll on a major contemporary issue that interests them. First, have them review Polling the Nations' homepage, which features a broad range of current polls in the news. These provide critical information on people's attitudes on hot-button topics in today's world. Instruct them to choose one of these questions and then find three others in the database on the same topic, preferably recent ones. (Note: Polls on the homepage change frequently, so advise them to save the ones they want.) Show students how to use the date filter on the right rail. Students may also choose a question that's not on the homepage, but make sure it was asked

within the past year. Guide students to record who or what group was being polled in each question: People from the United States? People from a specific state or city? or People from another country? Then, instruct students to poll their classmates using the identical questions. When they have completed their poll, have them tabulate the results in the same format—bar graph or both bar and pie graphs—as the original Polling the Nations questions. Instruct students to present their findings to the class and conduct a discussion. How do the opinions and viewpoints of your class compare with the group that was surveyed? What might account for these similarities or differences?

Presidential Elections

Americans will be voting for a president later this year, as they do every four years. Although it is impossible to predict who will win, pollsters regularly ask people which candidate they prefer and if they approve of the current president. Presidential approval ratings are often indicative of whether the president or his or her political party will win the next election. Choose one past presidential election. Use Polling the Nations to find 10 poll questions on that election relating to the campaign, the candidates, or presidential approval. Then, research the election and find out who won. Did the poll results predict who would win? Based on your findings, how accurate do you consider polls to be: very accurate, somewhat accurate, somewhat inaccurate, or very inaccurate? Explain why.



Create a Social Media Account

Working in pairs or groups, have students design and populate an imaginary social media account for a hot-button issue in contemporary society. The account can be for an existing platform such as Facebook, Instagram, or X (formerly Twitter) or for an imaginary one. In either case, students should research the issue and write a brief overview explaining its importance and why people have differing views on it. Then instruct students to select 5-10 poll questions on the issue that shed light on it and how people's views have either changed (or not changed) over time or revealed various nuances.

Knowing Your State or Jurisdiction

Find polls related to your state or jurisdiction; they can be found by going to “Browse Locations.” Either assign a poll or have students select a poll in your state or jurisdiction. Have them review the questions—but not the results—of the poll topic and select five of the ones they would like to answer. Have them write down the five questions and then answer them honestly. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers; they are merely giving an opinion or stating a viewpoint. When they are done answering the questions, instruct them to review the results of the poll to see how the poll respondents' answers compare to theirs. Did their responses match or differ from those of the poll respondents? Or was there a mix of responses? Have students write a paragraph explaining their responses and results and how they matched or differed from those of people in their state or jurisdiction.



Create Your Own Poll

Working in pairs or groups, instruct students to create their own poll on a subject that interests them. It could be on politics, such as a proposed law or the next presidential election; on economics, such as taxes or the minimum wage; or on a school-related issue, such as homework or school lunches. It could also be on a totally different subject, such as sports, music, video games, or movies. Then have them write five questions on the topic.

Encourage them to give respondents different types of questions. Some, for example, could be “like” or “dislike” (or “support” or “oppose”) a certain candidate, musical group, or ice cream flavor. Others could have a spectrum of answers, such as “like very much” (or “strongly support”), “like somewhat” (or “somewhat support”), “like a little” (or “slightly support”), “dislike very much” (or “strongly oppose”), “dislike somewhat” (or “somewhat oppose”), or “dislike a little” (or “slightly oppose”). Then, have them conduct the poll among their classmates, family, or other group. When they are done, instruct them to create a record of each poll, like those in Polling the Nations. Each poll should include the date conducted, date published (or completed), sample size (number of people polled), location, and method (in-person interview, telephone, etc.). The results of each poll question should be converted into percentages and presented in both raw data format and a bar or pie graph.



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Using Polls to Understand Recent Presidents

Public opinion plays a critical role in every president's term in office, helping to shape the president's policies and actions. Polling the Nations offers hundreds of polls on every recent president, including Ronald Reagan (R, 1981–89), George H. W. Bush (R, 1989–93), Bill Clinton (D, 1993–2001), George W. Bush (R, 2001–09), Barack Obama (D, 2009–17), Donald Trump (R, 2017–21), and Joe Biden (D, 2021–25). Instruct students to choose one of these presidents and identify 5–10 poll questions taken about them during their administration. Do these questions suggest that the president—or his policies—met with approval? Are the policies the student chose still a matter of public debate? Guide the student to find another question on the same policy during a different president's term in office. How do the results differ? Instruct each student to write a paragraph presenting their findings that assesses the popularity or unpopularity of the president and the policies he promoted.

Time for a Timeline

Working alone or in pairs, have students create a timeline of an ongoing issue that has been surveyed many times in the past four decades. Instruct them to download at least 10 questions on the subject that reveal different aspects or details related to it. Questions should range over as many years as possible and preferably across decades. Instruct students to place their findings in a timeline and present the timeline to the rest of the class.



Recognizing Bias

Although polls are objective in presenting basic numerical data, bias can still creep in and affect results. For example, consider the following three questions: 1) Do you support or oppose the death penalty? 2) With murder rates rising in your community,

do you think that convicted killers should be executed? 3) With DNA testing having exonerated many death row prisoners in recent years, do you think capital punishment should be abolished? All three questions are asking essentially the same thing but in different ways that can shape how people respond. Working in pairs or groups, instruct students to devise two polls. Poll 1 should consist of five questions, each one as simple and straightforward as possible. Poll 2 should use the same underlying questions, but advise students to add context and additional information to each one. Have students administer Poll 1 to one group of students or other people, and Poll 2 to a different group. Then have them compare the two sets of results. Did the way they worded the questions produce different results? How does this suggest that bias can influence data?

Understanding Sample Sizes

Most polls in Polling the Nations provide their sample size—the number of people who were polled. Generally, the larger the sample size, the more accurate the results. To understand this concept, instruct students to create a poll of about five questions on any topic or topics they wish. Have them administer the poll to just three classmates. Then, have them administer the identical poll to 20 other classmates or people in your school. Instruct students to present the results of the two polls they conducted in both graphic format (bar or pie graphs) and data format. Then, have them analyze their findings. Are the two sets of poll results similar or different? Which one do they believe provides a more accurate portrayal of their class or school? Why?



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About Infobase

Infobase is an educational solutions provider facilitating the connection between content, people, and the learning experiences that empower all users to evolve personally and professionally throughout their lives. Infobase delivers award-winning multimedia reference content, online tools and technology, and professional development and training solutions to the school, academic, and public library communities. Enabled by such well-known brands as Facts On File, Learn360, Credo, The Mailbox®, Films Media Group, Bloom's, Ferguson's, Omnigraphics, CareerEco, and Vault, Infobase provides students, educators, librarians, parents, and professionals with a broad range of solutions they need to inspire, enable, and inform lifelong learners. For more than 80 years, Infobase has been a reliable, authoritative resource providing flexible options for accessing educational content whether in school, at the library, or at home. To learn more, visit www.infobase.com.

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