

## LESSON 6

# Political Polling

**Objective:** Examine the roll of polling in elections and assess information provided by polls.

**Handouts:** (22) Polls - Backgrounder; (23) First Things First; (24) Gallup Online Survey  
(25) Polls - Sources

### A. Warm-up

What should an informed voter know today? Or, since we last met, what have you heard (read or seen) about the election?

Have your views changed about what issues are most important in this election? Explain.

### B. About Polling

Definition: A survey, sometimes called a poll, is a study of what people think or believe about a topic or question. Surveys are usually done by questionnaire, interview, or observation. Public opinion polls are useful in tracing people's views on important social issues. Polls are used to assess people's preferences in political races, and the results are used to predict election results. Surveys are often employed in marketing and advertising research to measure and predict consumer's reaction to products.

The key concept to bear in mind when analyzing poll data is that public opinion on a given topic cannot be understood by using only a single poll question asked a single time. It is necessary to measure opinion along several different dimensions, to review attitudes based on a variety of different wordings, to verify findings on the basis of multiple askings, and to pay attention to changes in opinion over time (see Polls - Backgrounder, Handout 22).

### C. Activities

Back to the issues, using First Things First, Handout 23, conduct a poll in class. Individually, each student will answer the questions then, as a group, tally the results. Was there a shift in priorities? Consider whether would it make a difference if the poll was conducted in person or on the phone; consider the effect of appearance, voice, and gender. What about the order in which the questions are asked or how the question is framed? Other factors?

Gallup Online Survey, Handout 24, may be done in class as a springboard for discussion or used as online homework.

Track Public Opinion on an Issue. Explore the Gallup Poll site, [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com) (see Handout 25), and identify information on a social issue or concern. Trace the history of public opinion related to your issue. Create a timeline showing changes in opinion over time. Identify key turning points in public opinion. Speculate on reasons for these changes.

### D. Extended Activities

#### Homework / Journal Entry

Informed voters should know \_\_\_\_\_ about polls.

Scan the front page or the election coverage section of the newspaper. List all references to polls and state why it is or is not important to the article.

Take an online poll: First Things First (#23), or Gallup's (#24).