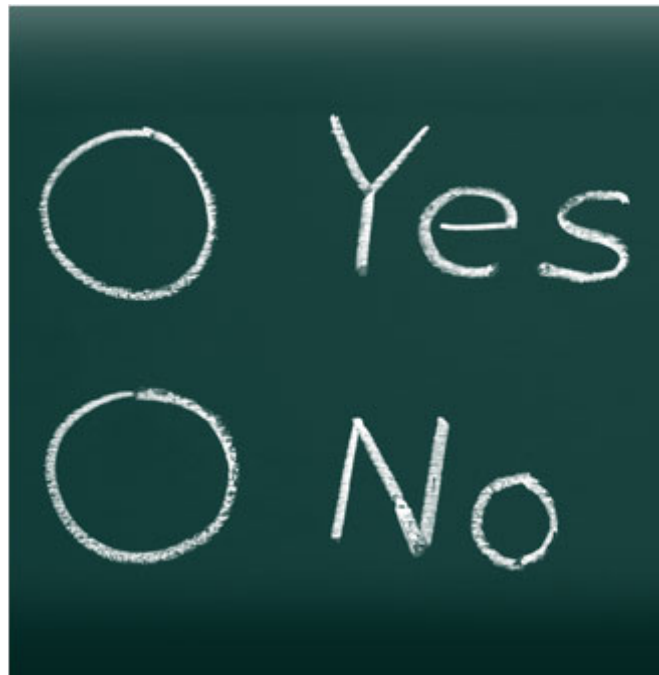


## ***Topic III***

# **The Media and Public Opinion**



## TOPIC III

# THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION

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## LESSON 1

### CAMPAIGN PRESS COVERAGE

#### LESSON OBJECTIVE

*The student will*

- analyze the amount and type of press coverage given to selected candidates.

#### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

##### **Activity 1**

- Handout 1.1 "Campaign Press Coverage"

##### **Activity 2**

- Handout 1.2 "Campaign Calendar"
- Handout 1.3 "Map of Georgia Counties"

#### STRATEGIES

##### **Activity 1**

##### **"What is the impact of media coverage on a candidate?"**

Divide the class into small groups based on the number of candidates running for election to a particular office. Have each student in the group monitor press coverage of one or two of the candidates using Handout 1.1, "Campaign Press Coverage," to record information. Students should follow the candidate in the newspaper and/or television for a period of one week. To compare candidate coverage in different media use the following formula: 4 inches of print = 1 minute of television or radio news. At the end of the week the groups should meet and compare their findings. Have each group answer the following questions: a) Which candidate received the most coverage? b) Why do you think this candidate received more coverage than his/her opponents for this office? c) Was the coverage helpful or harmful to the candidate? d) How much coverage did the issues receive? Personalities of the candidates? Their image? e) What is meant by the "love/hate" relationship between politicians and the press?

##### **Activity 2**

##### **"How do candidates attract media coverage?"**

Students should continue working in their small groups to complete this activity. Distribute Handout 1.2 "Campaign Calendar." Have students use the articles they collected on one candidate to record the following information on the correct date on the calendar: a) city/county visited; b) name of group/organization/individual to whom the candidate spoke.

**The Media and Public Opinion, Lesson 1 (continued)**

Also have students plot the campaign route their candidate traveled on a map of Georgia (Handout 1.3). Working in their groups, students should compare the candidates and answer such questions as: How many miles did they travel? Which candidate did the most traveling? Did the candidates speak to similar groups of voters or did they seek out different constituents?

**Activity 3**

**"How are decisions made by the media related to covering candidates?"**

Invite a newspaper or television reporter to speak to the class about what is involved in reporting on an election.

## **CAMPAIGN PRESS COVERAGE**

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*Candidate's Name and Office Sought*

Title of Article/News Story - \_\_\_\_\_

Source - \_\_\_\_\_ Date - \_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea of Story - \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Title of Article/News Story - \_\_\_\_\_

Source - \_\_\_\_\_ Date - \_\_\_\_\_

Main Idea of Story - \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

August 2014						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

# September 2014

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

# October 2014

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	





## TOPIC III

### MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION

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## LESSON 2

### PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

#### LESSON OBJECTIVES

*The student will*

- describe the influence of polls on voters.
- design, conduct, and tabulate a political poll.

#### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

##### **Activity 1**

- Handout 2.1 "Public Opinion Poll"

##### **Activity 2**

- Handout 2.2 "The Pulse of Democracy"

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Public opinion polling has become firmly established as part of every U.S. election. The technical details of formulating accurate polls have turned polling into a science. Campaign committees, independent pollsters and even the media use polls to learn what issues are of the greatest public concern, how the public feels about a candidate's performance and which candidates are most popular among voters.

The most well-known type of poll is a "preference" poll used to estimate a candidate's chances for victory and predict election results. A candidate's success in such a poll can make the difference in his or her fundraising efforts and organizational strength. A candidate who is far ahead in the polls early in the election process might not spend too much time or money campaigning. A candidate who is far behind might step up his campaign pace and try to reach as many voters as possible in order to turn the tide. If the majority of voters take a stand on an issue, candidates might change their positions and express the majority view in their speeches and ads. A candidate's rating in polls often changes as a result of his or her response to polls.

In conducting an activity where students conduct public opinion polls, it is important to discuss with them the importance of good sampling procedures. For example, the sampling procedure of the Gallup Poll is designed to produce samples which are representative of the U.S. civilian adult population. National survey results are based on interviews with a minimum of 1,500 adults.

## **Media and Public Opinion, Lesson 2 (continued)**

**Sampling Tolerance:** In interpreting survey results, it should be remembered all sample surveys are subject to sampling error, that is, the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole population had been interviewed. Samples of 1,500 have a tolerance within 3 percentage points 95 percent of the time. Certain population groups are not reported separately for many surveys because the number of persons in the sample is not enough to provide sufficiently accurate results.

**Survey Date:** The dates used in this report are the dates when the field work was done; generally one and one half or two weeks prior to publication dates. For some topics those where the time factor is unimportant interviewing dates are often more than two weeks prior to publication.

**Design of the Sample:** The design of the sample used by the Gallup Poll for its standard surveys of public opinion is that of a replicated probability sample down to the block level in the case of urban areas and to segments of townships in the case of rural areas.

After stratifying the nation geographically and by size of community in order to insure conformity of the sample with the latest available estimates by the Census Bureau of the distribution of the adult population, over 350 different sampling locations or areas (Census Tracts or Census Enumeration Districts) are selected on a mathematically random basis from within cities, towns, and counties which have in turn been selected on a mathematically random basis. The interviewers have no choice whatsoever concerning the part of the city, town, or county in which they conduct their interviews .

Approximately five interviews are conducted in each such randomly selected sampling point. Interviewers are given maps of the area to which they are assigned, with a starting point indicated; they are required to follow a specified direction. At each occupied dwelling unit, interviewers are instructed to select respondents by following a prescribed systematic method and by a male/female assignment. This procedure is followed until the assigned number of interviews has been completed.

Since this sampling procedure is designed to produce a sample which approximates the adult civilian population (18 and older) living in private households in the United States (that is, excluding those in prison and hospitals, hotels, religious and educational institutions, and on military reservations), the survey results can be applied to this population for the purpose of projecting percentages into number of people. The manner in which the sample is drawn also produces a sample which approximates the population of private

## **Media and Public Opinion, Lesson 2 (continued)**

households in the United States. Therefore, survey results can also be projected in terms of number of households when appropriate.

**Sampling Error:** In interpreting survey results, it should be remembered that all sample surveys are subject to sampling error, that is, the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the whole population surveyed had been interviewed. The size of such sampling errors depends largely on the number of interviews.

### **STRATEGIES**

#### **Activity 1**

##### **"How are polls constructed?"**

Have each student in the class plan and conduct an opinion poll among ten friends, neighbors, relatives, or strangers who are eligible to vote in the 1998 election. Students should ask each person the questions listed on the chart (Handout 2.1) and record the responses. Indicate each respondent's sex by circling M (male) or F (female). Have individual students compile their responses in a summary sheet by constructing a table which illustrates the totals from the polling chart in percentages. The table can then be turned into a bar graph for quick analysis. Have students compare the results of their poll with polls published in the newspaper or by local television stations. Are the results consistent? Why or why not? Have them respond to the following: Are professional polls more accurate than your poll? Why do you think this is so? Possible reasons might be size of sample, sample error, timing of poll or phrasing of questions.

Have students construct tables which cross tabulate in percentages the responses to Questions 1 and 2, by sex, of your poll. Answer the following questions from your tables: Do more male Democrats support Republicans than female Democrats? Are more female Democrats and Republicans undecided in their vote than males?

#### **Activity 2**

##### **"How do candidates use polls to their advantage?"**

Have students read the paragraph (Handout 2.2) written by George Gallup and respond to the questions which follow. Use the article to discuss how polls are used by the candidates themselves.

## PUBLIC OPINION POLL QUESTIONS

1. If the election for governor of Georgia were held today, for whom would you vote?
2. On economic issues, with which political party's positions do you most often agree?
3. On education issues, with which political party's positions do you most often agree?  
(D=Democrat, R=Republican, O=Other, U=Undecided)

	<b>Question 1</b>				<b>Question 2</b>				<b>Question 3</b>			
	D	R	O	U	D	R	O	U	D	R	O	U
Respondent 1 M/F Age:												
Respondent 2 M/F Age:												
Respondent 3 M/F Age:												
Respondent 4 M/F Age:												
Respondent 5 M/F Age:												
Respondent 6 M/F Age:												
Respondent 7 M/F Age:												
Respondent 8 M/F Age:												
Respondent 9 M/F Age:												
Respondent 10 M/F Age:												

From the data on your polling chart, answer the following questions:

1. Which candidate received the most votes for governor?
2. On economic issues, which political party's position is most popular?
3. On education issues, which political party's position is the most popular?

## **THE PULSE OF DEMOCRACY**

Have the students read the following excerpt taken from THE PULSE OF DEMOCRACY: THE PUBLIC OPINION POLL AND HOW IT WORKS, by George Gallup and Saul Forbes Rae, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1940, p. 246.

Practical politicians occasionally criticize the public opinion polls, because they believe that measuring the pulse of democracy will do serious harm to the patient. It has frequently been asserted that public opinion polls are "dangerous," that they place the voting process in jeopardy by announcing the result before the electorate has expressed its will on Election Day, and reduce popular interest in the election itself. Many political observers express the fear that the polls create a "bandwagon" rush to whatever is presented as the popular side. Politicians appear to have devoted so much time and effort to swinging voters to their support by prophesying and publicizing ultimate victory that they have convinced themselves that this bandwagon technique is effective at all times and in all places.

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the two charges made against public opinion polls?
2. Do you believe that polls tend to destroy the democratic process? Why or why not?
3. What is the bandwagon theory?
4. Do you believe that the "losing" side is handicapped because voters want to get on the "bandwagon"? Why or why not?
5. Do you believe that the 2014 gubernatorial and congressional election in Georgia has been "dangerously influenced" by the predictions made by the television networks and pollsters? Why or why not?
6. Find examples of voter behavior which reveals evidence in support of the band wagon theory .
7. Find examples of voter behavior which negates the band wagon theory .

## TOPIC III

### MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION

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## LESSON 3

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

#### LESSON OBJECTIVES

The student will

- distinguish fact from opinion and recognize bias.
- discuss the influence of the media on public opinion.
- make predictions based on factual information.

#### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

##### Activity 1

Handout 3.2" Election Opinions and Facts"

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Newspapers can have an impact on an election through their editorials, political cartoons, Letters to the Editor, and endorsements. News articles present only facts and reporters are careful not to include their opinions in the stories they write. An **editorial** is a special column in the newspaper where it is proper to express opinions. Editorial writers give the newspaper's opinion on different topics including issues and candidates.

A **political cartoon** is also a statement of opinion. The cartoonist expresses an opinion or the newspaper's opinion on an issue by drawing instead of writing. Political cartoons use caricatures, symbols, and humor to portray certain ideas, groups or countries in such a way as to get an emotional response from readers.

Newspapers also run **Letters to the Editor** to allow readers to give their opinions on community issues or events. Most newspapers will print your opinions if you put them in the form of a Letter to the Editor.

Right before an election editorials are often written in support of a particular candidate or issue. This is called an **endorsement**. Competing newspapers might endorse different candidates or take opposite stands on an issue

#### STRATEGIES

##### Activity 1

**"How do newspapers inform and influence voters?"**

Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the candidates for a national, state, or local office to research. Have students find a newspaper

### **Media and Public Opinion, Lesson 3 (continued)**

editorial, a political cartoon, two opposing Letters to the Editor and an endorsement relating to the candidate. Students should use this information to complete Handout 3.1 and then compare their findings with students in the other groups who studied a different candidate. Follow up activities could center on each of the four types of newspaper articles:

**Political Cartoons** - Watch the political cartoons in your newspaper and collect as many caricatures of candidates as you can. Or collect cartoons that deal with specific issues. Then draw a political cartoon expressing your own opinion about a particular candidate or issue.

**Editorials** - Choose an editorial from your newspaper. What portion of the editorial is fact? What portion is opinion? Do you agree or disagree with the opinion statements contained in the editorial? Did the editorial writers employ a propaganda technique in an attempt to sway readers in their opinion?

**Letters to the Editor** - Survey the Letters to the Editor in your newspaper for several weeks. Which candidates or issues do local citizens most often write about? Do they most often write in support of, or in opposition to, the candidates or issues? Choose one of the letters to answer, either supporting or opposing the view it expresses. Mail your letter to the newspaper.

**Endorsements** - How much of an impact does a newspaper's endorsements of a candidate have on the voters? Make a list of all the candidates endorsed by your newspaper for various offices. Did the reasons given for the endorsements relate to the candidates' qualifications, image, the issues or all three? After the election, see how many of the endorsed candidates won. Special interest groups and private citizens frequently **endorse** political candidates just as newspapers do. But these endorsements are not carried on the editorial pages of newspapers, they are reported as news articles or run as ads. Find an article indicating a particular interest group's endorsement of a candidate or issue involved in the election. Why you think this particular group decided on their endorsement.

#### **Activity 2**

##### **"Who do you think will win the election?"**

Based on a thorough analysis of media coverage, campaign spending, and poll results, have students predict who will win the election. Have students (in groups or individually) to defend their predictions based on factual references.

## ELECTION OPINIONS AND FACTS

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Candidate

Directions: Look in your newspaper and find an editorial, an endorsement, a political cartoon and two opposing Letters to the Editor about one of the candidates for national, state, or local office. Use these articles to complete the worksheet below.

POLITICAL CARTOON		
Devices used ( <i>check all that apply</i> ):		
Examples of <b>Symbols:</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	Examples of <b>Caricature(s):</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	Examples of <b>Sarcasm/Irony:</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Cartoonist's Opinion: <input type="checkbox"/> Supports Candidate <input type="checkbox"/> Opposes Candidate		

EDITORIAL	
Facts	Opinions
_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Editor's Position: <input type="checkbox"/> Supports Candidate <input type="checkbox"/> Opposes Candidate	



<b>LETTER TO THE EDITOR</b>	
<b>Main points from the Letter Supporting the Candidate</b>	<b>Main points from the Letter Opposing the Candidate</b>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
Based on: <input type="checkbox"/> Fact <input type="checkbox"/> Opinion	Based on: <input type="checkbox"/> Fact <input type="checkbox"/> Opinion

<b>ENDORSEMENT</b>	
<b>Propaganda technique(s) used:</b>	<b>Example(s):</b>