Exit polls have long received attention for their ability to help media outlets predict the outcome of elections before state agencies completely tabulate the results. But, during the 2008 Iowa Caucuses, a different, related way to gauge public opinion—the entrance poll—gained prevalence. In an entrance poll, voters are asked about which candidate they are going to vote for and why before they walk into the actual caucus. These polls are favored in caucuses because their results can be released immediately after they are collected. This allows networks to predict what might happen in a caucus while the event is actually occurring.

During the 2008 Iowa Caucuses, five major television and cable networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and FOX News) and the Associated Press banded together to collect information through an agency known as the National Election Pool. This agency sent pollsters to 40 caucuses for each political party, a total of 80 different meetings. Polls were conducted in a very short period of time—as voters arrived at their precincts in the 60- to 90-minute window before the start of the caucus. This allowed their results to be quickly tabulated and analyzed while the caucuses were occurring.

Entrance polls in Iowa immediately set the tone for the 2008 contest, showing record numbers of first-time caucus-goers and young voters. They emphasized the importance of independent voters and correctly predicted strong support for Democratic candidate Barack Obama and Republican candidate Mike Huckabee, both of whom won their party’s caucuses.
Polling has been used to gauge public opinion on presidential elections since the early twentieth century. At left, George Gallup, the godfather of scientific polling, appears on a television program in 1948. At right, Iowa Caucus-goers register inside Waukee High School in Waukee, Iowa, in 2008. Many had first been surveyed by entrance pollers.

The 2008 entrance polls were notable for a number of other reasons as well. First, they were the first entrance polls to include a correction to take into account caucus-goers who refused to participate in the survey. This correction, which had previously been implemented in exit polls, required pollsters to collect the demographic information of all of the people who elected not to participate in the poll. This information was used to weight the collected data to accurately represent the population that came to the party caucus.

Second, the polling firms charged with conducting the entrance poll made a concerted effort to recruit and train a broader cross-section of interviewers. This, too, was directed at improving the representativeness of the sample; pollsters believed that people would be more likely to participate in a poll conducted by someone like them. In addition, two interviewers attended each caucus, an attempt to increase both diversity and ability to efficiently collect accurate data.

What Should I Know About . . .

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

🌟 11.1 Trace the development of modern public opinion research, p. 364.
🌟 11.2 Describe the methods for conducting and analyzing different types of public opinion polls, p. 368.
🌟 11.3 Assess the potential shortcomings of polling, p. 373.
🌟 11.4 Analyze the process by which people form political opinions, p. 375.
🌟 11.5 Evaluate the effects of public opinion on politics, p. 382.
In 1787, John Jay wrote glowingly of the sameness of the American people. He and the other authors of *The Federalist Papers* believed that Americans had more in common than not. Wrote Jay in *Federalist No. 2*, we are “one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in manners and customs.” Many of those who could vote in Jay’s time were of English heritage; almost all were Christian. Moreover, most believed that certain rights—such as freedom of speech, association, and religion—were rights that could not be revoked. Jay also spoke of shared public opinion and of the need for a national government that reflected American ideals.

Today, however, Americans are more diverse, and the growth of modern public opinion research has helped us to better understand Americans’ views on political issues and how they are shaped by our varying experiences and values. In part, this is simply because of the pervasiveness of polls. Not a week goes by that major cable news networks and major newspapers and news magazines do not poll Americans on something—from views on political issues such as the environment, race, and health care to their emotions, including happiness and stress. The commonality of polling has led to an increased need for the public to be able to interpret the often conflicting poll results.

In this chapter, we explore how polls are conducted and analyzed, as well as how Americans’ demographic and cultural experiences shape public opinion.

- First, we examine the roots of public opinion research.
- Second, we explore how public opinion polls are conducted and analyzed.
- Third, we investigate the shortcomings of polling.
- Fourth, we consider how we form political opinions.
- Finally, we describe the effects of public opinion on politics.

**ROOTS OF Public Opinion Research**

At first glance, public opinion seems to be a very straightforward concept: it is what the public thinks about a particular issue or set of issues at any point in time. Since the 1930s, governmental decision makers have relied heavily on public opinion polls—interviews with samples of citizens that are used to estimate the feelings and beliefs of the entire population. According to George Gallup (1901–1983), an Iowan who is considered the founder of modern-day polling, polls have played a key role in defining issues of concern to the public, shaping administrative decisions, and helping “speed up the process of democracy” in the United States.¹

Gallup further contended that leaders must constantly take public opinion—no matter how short-lived—into account. This does not mean that leaders must follow the public’s view slavishly; it does mean that they should have an available appraisal of public opinion and take some account of it in reaching their decisions.

Even though Gallup undoubtedly had a vested interest in fostering reliance on public opinion polls, his sentiments accurately reflect the feelings of many political thinkers concerning the role of public opinion in governance. Some commentators
argue that the government should do what a majority of the public wants done. Others argue that the public as a whole doesn’t have consistent day-to-day opinions on issues but that subgroups within the public often hold strong views on some issues. These pluralists believe that the government must allow for the expression of minority opinions and that democracy works best when different voices are allowed to fight it out in the public arena, echoing James Madison in Federalist No. 10.

The Earliest Public Opinion Research

As early as 1824, one Pennsylvania newspaper tried to predict the winner of that year’s presidential contest, showing Andrew Jackson leading over John Quincy Adams. In 1883, the Boston Globe sent reporters to selected election precincts to poll voters as they exited voting booths in an effort to predict the results of key contests. But, public opinion polling as we know it today did not begin to develop until the 1930s. Much of this growth was prompted by Walter Lippmann’s seminal work, Public Opinion (1922). In this book, Lippmann observed that research on public opinion was far too limited, especially in light of its importance. Researchers in a variety of disciplines, including political science, heeded Lippmann’s call to learn more about public opinion. Some tried to use scientific methods to measure political thought through the use of surveys or polls. As methods for gathering and interpreting data improved, survey data began to play an increasingly important role in all walks of life, from politics to retailing.

Literary Digest, a popular magazine that first began national presidential polling in 1916, was a pioneer in the use of the straw poll, an unscientific survey used to gauge public opinion, to predict the popular vote, which it did in a victory for Woodrow Wilson. Its polling methods were hailed widely as “amazingly right” and “uncannily accurate.” In 1936, however, its luck ran out. Literary Digest predicted that Republican Alfred M. Landon would beat incumbent President Franklin D. Roosevelt by a margin of 57 percent to 43 percent of the popular vote. Roosevelt, however, won in a landslide election, receiving 62.5 percent of the popular vote and carrying all but two states.

Literary Digest’s 1936 straw poll had three fatal errors. First, its sample, a subset of the whole population selected to be questioned for the purposes of prediction or gauging opinion, was drawn from telephone directories and lists of automobile owners. This technique oversampled the upper middle class and the wealthy, groups heavily Republican in political orientation. Moreover, in 1936, voting polarized along class lines. Thus, the oversampling of wealthy Republicans was particularly problematic because it severely underestimated the Democratic vote.

Public Opinion on Global Warming

In December 2009, the Pew Global Attitudes Project released a survey on international opinions about global warming at the same time that the world’s leaders met in Copenhagen, Denmark, to negotiate a treaty dealing with climate change (ultimately the treaty negotiations were unsuccessful). In the United States, only 44 percent of those surveyed said that global warming was a major problem, yet 64 percent agreed that protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it meant slower growth and lost jobs. The table shows the survey results from other countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Is Global Warming a Major Problem (%)</th>
<th>Is Environmental Protection a Priority (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

■ How might you explain the differences in national public opinion about the seriousness of global warming? How does U.S. public opinion on this subject compare to other countries?

■ Why might some countries not see global warming as a serious problem but believe environmental protection should be a priority, even if it results in slower growth and lost jobs?

■ How should world leaders balance concerns about climate change and the environment?


straw poll
Unscientific survey used to gauge public opinion on a variety of issues and policies.

sample
A subset of the whole population selected to be questioned for the purposes of prediction or gauging opinion.
Literary Digest's second problem was timing. Questionnaires were mailed in early September. It did not measure the changes in public sentiment that occurred as the election drew closer.

Its third error occurred because of a problem we now call self-selection. Only highly motivated individuals sent back the cards—a mere 22 percent of those surveyed responded. Those who respond to mail surveys (or today, online surveys) are quite different from the general electorate; they often are wealthier and better educated and care more fervently about issues. Literary Digest, then, failed to observe one of the now well-known cardinal rules of survey sampling: "One cannot allow the respondents to select themselves into the sample."3

The Gallup Organization

At least one pollster, however, correctly predicted the results of the 1936 election: George Gallup. Gallup had written his dissertation in psychology at the University of Iowa on how to measure the readership of newspapers. He then expanded his research to study public opinion about politics. He was so confident about his methods that he gave all of his newspaper clients a money-back guarantee: if his poll predictions weren’t closer to the actual election outcome than those of the highly acclaimed Literary Digest, he would refund their money. Although Gallup underpredicted Roosevelt’s victory by nearly 7 percent, the fact that he got the winner right was what everyone remembered, especially given Literary Digest’s dramatic miscalculation.

Through the late 1940s, polling techniques became more sophisticated. The number of polling groups also dramatically increased, as businesses and politicians began to rely on polling information to market products and candidates. But, in 1948,
the polling industry suffered a severe, although fleeting, setback when Gallup and many other pollsters incorrectly predicted that Thomas E. Dewey would defeat President Harry S Truman. Nevertheless, as revealed in Figure 11.1, the Gallup Organization continues to predict the winners of the presidential popular vote successfully. In 2008, for example, Gallup correctly predicted not only the winner but also Barack Obama’s share of the popular vote.

The National Election Studies

Recent efforts to measure public opinion also have been aided by social science surveys such as the National Election Studies (NES), conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan since 1952. NES surveys focus on the political attitudes and the behavior of the electorate, and they include questions about how respondents voted, their party affiliation, and their opinions of major political parties and candidates.石头

Is polling always accurate? Not only did advance polls in 1948 predict that Republican nominee Thomas E. Dewey would defeat Democratic incumbent President Harry S Truman, but based on early and incomplete vote tallies, some newspapers’ early editions published the day after the election declared Dewey the winner. Here a triumphant Truman holds aloft the Chicago Daily Tribune.
Figure 11.1 How successful has the Gallup Poll been?
As seen here, Gallup’s final predictions have been remarkably accurate. Furthermore, in each of the years where there is a significant discrepancy between Gallup’s prediction and the election’s outcome, there was a prominent third candidate. In 1948, Strom Thurmond ran on the Dixiecrat ticket; in 1980, John Anderson ran as the American Independent Party candidate; in 1992, Ross Perot ran as an independent.


candidates. In addition, NES surveys include questions about interest in politics and political participation.

These surveys are conducted before and after midterm and presidential elections and often include many of the same questions. This format enables researchers to compile long-term studies of the electorate and facilitates political scientists’ understanding of how and why people vote and participate in politics.

Conducting and Analyzing Public Opinion Polls

11.2 . . . Describe the methods for conducting and analyzing different types of public opinion polls.

The polling process most often begins when someone says, “Let’s find out about X and Y.” Potential candidates for local office may want to know how many people have heard of them (the device used to find out is called a name recognition survey). Better-known candidates contemplating running for higher office might want to know how they might fare against an incumbent. Polls also can be used to gauge how effective particular ads are or if a candidate is being well (or negatively) perceived by the public. Political scientists have found that public opinion polls are critical to successful presidents and their staffs, who use polls to “create favorable legislative environment(s) to pass the presidential agenda, to win reelection, and to be judged favorably by history.”

\[ \text{Percentage of votes for winning candidates} \]

\[ \text{Final percentage of votes for winning candidates} \]

\[ \text{Gallup’s final pre-election predictions since 1936} \]

\[ \text{Percentage} \]

\[ \text{Gallup’s final pre-election predictions since 1936} \]

\[ \text{Final percentage of votes for winning candidates} \]

\[ \text{Percentage} \]

\[ \text{Gallup’s final pre-election predictions since 1936} \]

\[ \text{Final percentage of votes for winning candidates} \]

\[ \text{Percentage} \]

\[ \text{Gallup’s final pre-election predictions since 1936} \]

\[ \text{Final percentage of votes for winning candidates} \]

\[ \text{Percentage} \]

\[ \text{Gallup’s final pre-election predictions since 1936} \]

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\[ \text{Percentage} \]

\[ \text{Gallup’s final pre-election predictions since 1936} \]

\[ \text{Final percentage of votes for winning candidates} \]

\[ \text{Percentage} \]
Types of Polls

As polling has become increasingly sophisticated and networks, newspapers, and magazines compete with each other to report the most up-to-the-minute changes in public opinion on issues or politicians, new types of polls have been suggested and put into use. Each type of poll has contributed to our knowledge of public opinion and its role in the political process. In addition to traditional telephone polls, organizations may use exit polls, tracking polls, Internet polls, and the entrance polls described in the opening vignette. In addition, some political operatives use polls called push polls to try to influence public opinion.

**TRADITIONAL TELEPHONE POLLS**  As landline telephones became common in most American homes, pollsters saw a tremendous opportunity to conduct surveys in an expeditious manner. Early on, most people were excited to be asked about their views on political issues, and they welcomed phone calls to this end. In recent years, however, telephone polls have been more difficult to conduct, both due to the growth in cell phones and peoples’ increasing unwillingness to be contacted by outsiders. Today, many pollsters use random-digit dialing with the help of computers to contact both listed and unlisted landline and cell phone numbers. Results are generally adjusted to make sure the sample accurately reflects the demographic factors of the actual population.

**EXIT POLLS**  Exit polls are conducted as voters leave selected polling places on Election Day. Generally, large news organizations send pollsters to selected precincts to sample every tenth voter as he or she emerges from the polling site. The results of these polls are used to help the media predict the outcome of key races, often just a few minutes after the polls close in a particular state and generally before voters in other areas—sometimes in a later time zone—have cast their ballots. They also provide an independent assessment of why voters supported particular candidates by asking a series of demographic and issue questions.

**TRACKING POLLS**  During the 1992 presidential elections, tracking polls, which were taken on a daily basis by some news organizations, were first introduced to allow presidential candidates to monitor short-term campaign developments and the effects of their campaign strategies. Today, tracking polls involve small samples (usually of registered voters contacted at certain times of day) and are conducted every twenty-four hours. The results are then combined into moving three- to five-day averages. (To learn more about tracking polls, see Figure 11.2.)

**INTERNET POLLS**  Well-established pollster John Zogby was among the first to use a scientific Internet survey. Zogby regularly queries over 3,000 representative volunteers (selected using the sampling techniques discussed later in this chapter) on a host of issues. Zogby, Harris Interactive, and other Internet pollsters using scientific sampling strategies have had relatively effective records in predicting election outcomes and gauging opinions on numerous issues of importance to the American public.

Contrasting sharply with scientific Internet surveys are the unscientific Web polls that allow anyone to weigh in on a topic. Such polls are common on many Web sites, such as CNN.com and ESPN.com. These polls resemble a straw poll in terms of sampling and thus produce results that are largely inconclusive and of interest only to a limited number of people.

**PUSH POLLS**  All good polls for political candidates contain questions intended to produce information that helps campaigns judge their own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of their opponents. They might, for example, ask if you would be more likely to vote for candidate X if you knew that candidate was a strong environmentalist. These kinds of questions are accepted as an essential part of any poll, but there are concerns as to where to draw the line. Questions that go over the line are called push polls and often are a result of ulterior motives. Push polls are designed to give...
respondents some negative or even untruthful information about a candidate’s opponent to push them away from that candidate and toward the one paying for the poll. Reputable polling firms eschew these tactics. A typical push poll might ask a question such as “If you knew Candidate X beat his wife, would you vote for him?” Push poll takers don’t even bother to record the responses because they are irrelevant. The questions are designed simply to push as many voters away from a candidate as possible. Although campaign organizations generally deny conducting push polls, research shows that more than three-quarters of political candidates have been a subject of push polling. Push poll calls are made to thousands; legitimate polls survey much smaller samples.

**Conducting Polls**

The methods used for polling take many forms. Still, most social scientists place the greatest stock in systematic analyses conducted using telephone or person-to-person surveys. No matter which method is used, serious pollsters or polling firms must make several decisions before polling the public. These include determining the content and phrasing of the questions, selecting the sample, and deciding how to go about contacting respondents. (To learn more about a newer method for contacting respondents, see Politics Now: Gubernatorial “Robo-Poll” Turns Out to Be the Only Right Poll.)

**DETERMINING THE CONTENT AND PHRASING THE QUESTIONS** The first thing candidates, political groups, or news organizations must consider when deciding to use a poll is what questions they want answered. Determining the content of a survey is critical to obtaining the desired results, and for that reason, candidates, companies, and news organizations generally rely on pollsters. Polls may ask, for example, about job performance, demographics, and specific issue areas. Special care must be taken in constructing the questions to be asked. For example, if your professor asked you, “Do you think my grading procedures are fair?” rather than asking, “In general, how fair do you think the grading is in your American Politics course?” you might give
Conducting and Analyzing Public Opinion Polls

Gubernatorial “Robo-Poll” Turns Out to Be the Only Right Poll

By Aaron Deslatte

Political watchers have been bombarded with polls this summer, but most of them failed to predict Rick Scott’s upset win in the Republican gubernatorial primary.

Despite all the fingers on the pulse of the state’s unique electorate, the only public polling firm that accurately predicted Scott’s win in the final week was a Democratic-allied firm from North Carolina called Public Policy Polling (which does the dreaded “robo calls.”)

PPP put out the only survey over the weekend that showed Scott leading, 47 percent-to-40 percent. The final tally: Scott 46.4 percent, Bill McCollum 43.4 percent.

Now, conventional pollsters argue that robo-polling—“Press 1 for McCollum, 2 for Scott”—is flawed because you don’t know who’s pushing the buttons, though live interviewers can introduce their own bias in survey results . . .

Yet, in the end, PPP was more accurate than conventional pollsters. PPP director Tim Jensen said his best guess was he got better results because his shop used a looser screen for the voters it sampled, calling general election GOP voters instead of past primary voters.

“If the folks who voted [Tuesday] had been exactly the same as the folks who voted in the 2006 primary, I imagine McCollum would have won,” Jensen said . . . “But there were hundreds of thousands more people voting . . . than in 2006 and my sense is the newbies went strongly for Scott . . .”

Brad Coker, managing director of Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, is one of several pollsters whose surveys failed to correctly call the race. Coker’s last poll, released on the Saturday before election day and based on interviews with 500 likely Republican primary voters between Aug. 17 and 19, had McCollum up by 9 points, 45-to-36 . . .

. . . We asked Coker where he thought he went wrong. After noting that this was the first time in 26 years that the leader in his final poll didn’t win, Coker said a final cash infusion from Scott may have played a role in influencing undecided voters in the five days between when the poll was in the field and the election.

“Going into the final weekend, many voters remained conflicted. This was reflected by the high negatives each candidate had,” Coker told us. “Many couldn’t seem to settle on which one was the lesser of two evils, as the ugly tone of the campaign had turned them off . . .”

a slightly different answer. The wording of the first question tends to put you on the spot and personalize the grading style; the second question is more neutral. Even more obvious differences appear in the real world of polling, especially when interested groups want a poll to yield particular results. Responses to highly emotional issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and affirmative action often are skewed depending on the wording of a particular question. Even in unbiased polls, how a question is worded can skew results, as reflected in Figure 11.3, a New York Times/CBS News Poll on whether homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the military.

SELECTING THE SAMPLE  Once the decision is made to take a poll, pollsters must determine the universe, or the entire group whose attitudes they wish to measure. This universe could be all Americans, all voters, all city residents, all Hispanics, or all Republicans. In a perfect world, each individual would be asked to give an opinion,
but such comprehensive polling is not practical. Consequently, pollsters take a sample of the universe in which they are interested. One way to obtain this sample is by random sampling. This method of selection gives each potential voter or adult approximately the same chance of being selected.

Simple random, nonstratified samples, however are not very useful at predicting voting because they may undersample or oversample key populations that are not likely to vote. To avoid these problems, reputable polling organizations use stratified sampling (the most rigorous sampling technique) based on census data that provide the number of residences in an area and their location. Researchers divide the population into several sampling regions. They then randomly select subgroups to sample in proportion to the total national population. Once certain primary sampling units are chosen, they often are used for many years, because it is cheaper for polling companies to train interviewers to work in fixed areas.

About twenty respondents from each primary sampling unit are picked to be interviewed; this total is 600 to 1,000 respondents. Large, sophisticated surveys such as the National Election Studies and the University of Chicago's General Social Survey attempt to sample from lists of persons living in each household in a sampling unit. The key to the success of the stratified sampling method is not to let people volunteer to be interviewed—volunteers as a group often have different opinions from those who do not volunteer.

**Figure 11.3 Why does question wording matter?**


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly favor</th>
<th>Somewhat favor</th>
<th>Somewhat oppose</th>
<th>Strongly oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly favor</th>
<th>Somewhat favor</th>
<th>Somewhat oppose</th>
<th>Strongly oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Doonesbury**

...AND A NATIONAL SURVEY, COMMISSIONED ESPECIALLY FOR THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY, FOUND THAT A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS DO NOT SUPPORT MORE RESTRICTIVE ANTI-SMOKING MEASURES!

YOU’VE BEEN LISTENING TO THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF DEAR OLD DAD, RECENTLY ANOINTED COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR FOR THE R.J. REYNOLDS COMPANY!

YOU KNOW, DAD, THIS POLL CONTRACTS EVERY OTHER SURVEY IN RECENT YEARS. MIND IF I TAKE A LOOK?

“BE MY GUEST!”

“DO YOU FAVOR GESTURE-TYPE POLICE TACTICS TO PREVENT SMOKING IN PUBLIC?” OHHH, SURE, WE COULD QUILBLE OVER WORDING...

**How does a survey’s sponsor affect poll results?** Sponsors may work with polling firms to write questions that skew survey results in their favor. Thus, it is always important to examine who paid for a poll.
CONTACTING RESPONDENTS  After selecting the methodology to conduct the poll, the next question is how to contact those to be surveyed. Telephone polls are the most frequently used mechanism by which to gauge the temper of the electorate. The most common form of telephone polls are random-digit dialing surveys, in which a computer randomly selects telephone numbers to be dialed. In spite of some problems (such as the fact that many people do not want to be bothered or do not have landline phones), most polls done for newspapers and news magazines are conducted in this way. Pollsters are exempt from federal and state do-not-call lists because poll-taking is a form of constitutionally protected speech.

Individual, person-to-person interviews are conducted by some groups, such as the National Election Studies. Some analysts favor such in-person surveys, but others argue that the unintended influence of the questioner or pollster is an important source of errors. How the pollster dresses, relates to the person being interviewed, and asks the questions can affect responses. Some of these factors, such as tone of voice or accent, can also affect the results of telephone surveys.

Analyzing the Data

Analyzing the collected data is a critical step in the polling process. The analysis reveals the implications of the data for public policy and political campaigns. When conducting their analysis, a polling group must consider how the choices they made throughout the process have affected their ultimate results. Two of the most serious concerns are the margin of error and sampling error.

MARGIN OF ERROR  All polls contain errors. Typically, the margin of error in a sample of 1,000 will be about 4 percent. If you ask 1,000 people “Do you like ice cream?” and 52 percent say yes and 48 percent say no, the results are too close to tell whether more people like ice cream than not. Why? Because the margin of error implies that somewhere between 56 percent (52 + 4) and 48 percent (52 − 4) of the people like ice cream, while between 52 percent (48 + 4) and 44 percent (48 − 4) do not. The margin of error in a close election makes predictions very difficult.

SAMPLING ERROR  The accuracy of any poll depends on the quality of the sample that was drawn. Small samples, if properly drawn, can be very accurate if each unit in the universe has an equal opportunity to be sampled. If a pollster, for example, fails to sample certain populations, his or her results may reflect that shortcoming. Often the opinions of the poor and homeless are underrepresented because insufficient attention is given to making certain that these groups are sampled representatively.

Shortcomings of Polling

11.3  ... Assess the potential shortcomings of polling.

The information derived from public opinion polls has become an important part of governance. When the results of a poll are accurate, they express the feelings of the electorate and help guide policy makers. However, when the results of a poll are inaccurate, disastrous consequences often result. For example, during the 2000 presidential election, Voter News Service (VNS), the conglomerate organization that provided the major networks with their exit poll data, made a host of errors in estimating the results of the election in Florida, which led news organizations to call the election for Al Gore. Not only did VNS fail to estimate the number of voters accurately, but it also used an inaccurate exit poll model and incorrectly estimated the number of Africanamerican voters.
Limited Respondent Options

Famed political scientist V. O. Key Jr. was among the first social scientists to note the problem of limited respondent options. He cautioned students of public opinion to take care that their questions adequately allowed respondents the appropriate range for which they could register their opinions. Simple yes-no (or approve-disapprove) questions may not be sufficient to measure the temperature of the public. For example, if you are asked “How do you like this class?” and are given only like or dislike options, your full sentiments may not be tapped if you like the class very much or feel only so-so about it.

Thus, the National Election Studies use “feeling thermometer” questions, wherein respondents provide a response from 0 to 100 about how they “feel” about a particular issue. These types of questions, however, are too lengthy and unwieldy for polling organizations that seek quick answers.
Lack of Information

Public opinion polls may also be inaccurate when they attempt to gauge attitudes toward issues about which the public has little information. Most academic public opinion research organizations, such as the National Election Studies, use some kind of filter question that first asks respondents whether or not they have thought about the question. These screening procedures generally allow survey researchers to exclude as many as 20 percent of their respondents, especially on complex issues such as the federal budget. Questions on more personal issues such as moral values, drugs, crime, race, and women’s role in society get far fewer “no opinion” or “don’t know” responses.

Difficulty Measuring Intensity

Another shortcoming of polls concerns their inability to measure intensity of feeling about particular issues. Whereas a respondent might answer affirmatively to any question, it is likely that his or her feelings about issues such as abortion, the death penalty, or support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are much more intense than are his or her feelings about the Electoral College or types of voting machines used.

Lack of Interest in Political Issues

When we are faced with policies that don’t affect us personally and don’t involve moral issues, we often have difficulty forming an opinion. Foreign policy is an area in which this phenomenon is especially true. Most Americans often know little of the world around them. Unless major issues of national importance are involved, American public opinion on foreign affairs is likely to be volatile in the wake of any new information. In contrast, most Americans are more interested in domestic policy issues such as health care, bank bailouts, and employment, issues that have a greater impact on their daily lives. (To learn more about public opinion on one political issue, see Analyzing Visuals: Public Opinion on the Iraq War.)

Forming Political Opinions

11.4 Analyze the process by which people form political opinions.

Political scientists believe that many of our attitudes about issues are grounded in our political values. The process through which individuals acquire their beliefs is known as political socialization. Demographic characteristics, family, school, peers, the mass media, and political leaders are often important influences or agents of political socialization.
Demographic Characteristics

Most demographic characteristics are ones over which individuals have little control. But, at birth, demographic characteristics begin to affect you and your political values. Below, we discuss some of the major demographic characteristics that pollsters routinely query. These include gender, race and ethnicity, age, and religion.

**GENDER** From the time that the earliest public opinion polls were taken, women have held more liberal attitudes than men about social welfare issues such as education, juvenile justice, capital punishment, and the environment. Public opinion polls have also found that women hold more negative views about war and military intervention than men. Some analysts suggest that women’s more nurturing nature and their prominent role as mothers lead women to have more liberal attitudes on issues affecting the family or children. Research by political scientists, however, finds no support for a maternal explanation. (To learn more about the gender gap, see Table 11.1.)

**RACE AND ETHNICITY** Another reliable predictor of people’s political attitudes is their race or ethnicity. Differences in political socialization appear at a very early age. Young African American children, for example, generally show very positive feelings about American society and political processes, but this attachment lessens considerably over time. Historically, black children have had less positive views of the president than white children. The election of Barack Obama to the presidency should produce dramatic changes in these views.

Race and ethnicity are exceptionally important factors in the study of public opinion. The direction and intensity of African American and Hispanic opinions on a variety of hot-button issues often are quite different from those of whites. For example, whites are much more likely to support the war in Iraq than are blacks or Hispanics. Likewise, differences can be seen in other issue areas. Guaranteeing government-sponsored health insurance, for example, is a hot-button issue with Hispanic voters, with 61 percent favoring it. Hispanics also favor bilingual education and liberalized immigration policies. Asian and Pacific Island Americans, as well as American Indians, often respond differently to issues than do whites.

**AGE** Age seems to have a decided effect on political socialization. Our view of the proper role of government, for example, often depends on the era in which we were born and our individual experiences with a variety of social, political, and economic forces. Older people, for example, continue to be affected by having lived through the Great Depression and World War II.

One political scientist predicts that as Baby Boomers age, the age gap in political beliefs about political issues, especially governmental programs, will increase. Young

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favor a woman’s ability to obtain an abortion as a matter of choice</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve of the way the U.S. government is handling the war in Iraq</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree that controlling and reducing illegal immigration is an important policy goal</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor allowing people to put a portion of Social Security payroll taxes into personal retirement accounts that would be invested in stocks and bonds</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree that newer lifestyles are breaking down society</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted for Barack Obama in 2008</td>
<td>49*</td>
<td>56*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data compiled and analyzed by Jon L. Weakley from the 2008 American National Election Study.
*From CNN exit polling data, November 5, 2008.
people, for example, resist higher taxes to fund Medicare, while the elderly resist all efforts to limit Medicare or Social Security. In states such as Florida, to which many northern retirees have flocked seeking relief from cold winters and high taxes, the elderly have voted as a bloc to defeat school tax increases and to pass tax breaks for themselves.

**RELIGION** Political scientists have found significant evidence that religion affects the political beliefs and behaviors of the American citizenry. As discussed in chapter 1, many American ideals, including hard work and personal responsibility, are rooted in our nation’s Protestant heritage. These ideals have affected the public policies adopted by our government; they may be one reason why the United States has a less developed welfare state than many other industrialized democracies.

Our individual attitudes toward political issues are also shaped by our religious beliefs. Evangelical Christians and Catholics, for example, may be more supportive of programs that provide aid to parochial schools, even if it comes at the expense of lowering the wall of separation between church and state. Similarly, Jewish Americans are likely to be more supportive of aid to Israel—a policy that is at odds with Muslim Americans’ support for a Palestinian state.

### Family, Peers, and School

The influence of the family on political socialization can be traced to two factors: communication and receptivity. Children, especially during their preschool years, spend tremendous amounts of time with their parents; early on, they learn their parents’ political values, even though these concepts may be vague. One study found that the most important visible public figures for children under the age of ten were police officers and, to a much lesser extent, the president. Young children almost uniformly view both as “helpful.” But, by the age of ten or eleven, children become more selective in their perceptions of the president. By this age, children raised in Democratic households are much more likely to be critical of a Republican president than are those raised in Republican households, and vice versa.

A child’s peers—that is, children about the same age—also seem to have an important effect on the socialization process. While parental influences are greatest from birth to age five, a child’s peer group becomes increasingly important as the child gets older, especially as he or she gets into middle school or high school. Groups such as the Girl Scouts of the USA recognize the effect of peer pressure and are trying to influence more young women to participate in, and have a positive view of, politics. The Girl Scouts’ Ms. President merit badge encourages girls as young as five to learn “herstory” and to emulate women leaders.

Researchers report mixed findings concerning the role of schools in the political socialization process. There is no question that, in elementary school, children are taught respect for their nation and its symbols. Most school days
Join the DEBATE Should Civics Be Taught in American High Schools?

A civic education is an essential component of political socialization. Most democratic societies have some form of civic education, if only to teach citizens social norms, virtues, and the “rules of the game” of the democratic process. From the time you entered the first grade, you received elements of a civic education: reciting the Pledge of Allegiance every morning, learning about the Revolutionary War, the founding of our country, the Constitution, the struggle for civil rights, and so on. But in spite of these efforts, the effectiveness of civic education in the United States has been questioned. According to one study, only about one-quarter of all high school seniors reached proficiency in their American political knowledge.⁴

French political commentator Alexis de Tocqueville argued that without common values and virtues, there can be no common action or social stability. Thinking about your own experiences, how effective were the civics courses you took in school? Did they expand your knowledge and understanding of democratic processes and political participation? Or were they token courses of little relevance or help in understanding the American political system? What is the best way to teach American history, government, and political principles so that all who have contributed to the American experiment are recognized? Is a common civic education necessary, or should political socialization be left to the family? What can be done to increase interest in democratic politics and participation, and how can civic knowledge be restored to the American electorate?

To develop an ARGUMENT FOR teaching civics in American high schools, think about how:

- **Political participation, political socialization, and civic education are related.** In what ways does knowledge of democratic institutions and processes increase involvement in the American political process? How did your civic education in elementary and high school affect your understanding of the political process and increase your political engagement?
- **Civic education plays an important role in a democratic society.** How does civic education increase cooperation, tolerance of dissent and opposing views, and political compromise? How might this prepare students for the realities of pluralistic democratic life?
- **Civic education complements political socialization.** If schools do not provide for a common, basic understanding of political processes in the United States, who will? How would the common myths and beliefs that provide the foundation for political culture be transmitted outside of the schools?

To develop an ARGUMENT AGAINST teaching civics in American high schools, think about how:

- **Civic education is innately biased.** In a free, multicultural society, should certain values and social views be pressed upon individuals? Should schools determine what social values are central to a civic education? How might teaching one viewpoint stifle the diversity of cultures and political views that strengthen American democracy?
- **Schools have more important responsibilities.** Given the competing demands placed on schools today, including budgetary constraints, growing enrollments, and standardized testing, can schools realistically be expected to also focus on civic education? Given these constraints, can schools do an effective job of civic education?
- **Responsibility for teaching civics should fall to the family.** Should something as important as civic education be left to schools, which have to balance a number of competing educational goals? Why might other agents of political socialization, such as the family or religious establishments, be better suited to bear primary responsibility for civic education?

⁴ National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/civics/.
begin with the Pledge of Allegiance, and patriotism and respect for country are important components of most school curricula. Support for flag and country create a foundation for national allegiance that prevails despite the negative views about politicians and government institutions that many Americans develop later in life. (To learn more about schools and the socialization process, see Join the Debate: Should Civics Be Taught in American High Schools?).

The *Weekly Reader*, read by elementary students nationwide, not only attempts to present young students with newsworthy stories but also tries to foster political awareness and a sense of civic duty. In presidential election years, students get the opportunity to vote for actual presidential candidates in the nationwide *Weekly Reader* election. These elections, which have been held since 1956, have been remarkably accurate. *Weekly Reader* has been wrong only once, in the 1992 election of Bill Clinton. These returns were skewed by prominent independent candidate Ross Perot.

High schools also can be important agents of political socialization. They continue the elementary school tradition of building good citizens and often reinforce textbook learning with trips to the state or national capital. They also offer courses on current U.S. affairs. Many high schools impose a compulsory service learning requirement, which some studies report positively affects later political participation.13

At the college level, teaching style often changes. Many college courses and texts like this one are designed in part to provide you with the information necessary to think critically about issues of major political consequence. It is common in college for students to be called on to question the appropriateness of certain political actions or to discuss underlying reasons for certain political or policy decisions. Therefore, most researchers believe that college has a liberalizing effect on students. Since the 1920s, studies have shown that students become more liberal each year they are in college. (To learn more about the ideology of first-year college students, see Figure 11.4.)

How do you get young women to think about careers in politics? The Girl Scouts of the USA offers a Ms. President badge for social action. Farheen Hakeem, shown right, leads a Girl Scout troop in Minneapolis.

**The Mass Media**

The media have been taking on a growing role as socialization agents. Adult Americans spend over thirty-five hours a week in front of their television sets; children spend more than fifty-three hours. And, Americans spend an average of thirteen hours a week on the Internet.14 Television has a tremendous impact on how people view politics, government, and politicians. Television can serve to enlighten voters and encourage voter turnout. MTV began coverage of presidential campaigns in 1992. Its “Choose or Lose” and “Rock the Vote” campaigns are designed to change the usually abysmal turnout rates of young voters.
Over the years, more and more Americans have turned away from traditional sources of news such as nightly news broadcasts on the major networks and daily newspapers in favor of different outlets. In 2008, one study estimated that the same percentage of viewers watched alternative sources such as The Tonight Show, The Late Show, or The Daily Show as watched more traditional cable news such as CNN or FOX News.\(^{15}\) TV talk shows, talk radio, online magazines, and blogs are important sources of information about politics for many, yet the information that people get from these sources often is skewed. This may affect the way that these citizens process political information and form opinions on public policy, as well as their receptiveness to new ideas. (To learn more about the news media, see chapter 15.)

**Cues from Leaders or Opinion Makers**

Given the visibility of political leaders and their access to the media, it is easy to see the important role they play in influencing value formation. Political leaders, members of the news media, and a host of other experts have regular opportunities to influence public opinion because of the lack of deep conviction with which most Americans hold many of their political beliefs.

The president, especially, is often in a position to mold public opinion through effective use of the bully pulpit, as discussed in chapter 8. One political commentator emphasizes the support of a group of citizens—called followers—who are inclined to rally to the support of the president no matter what he does.\(^{16}\)

The president’s strength, especially in the area of foreign affairs (where public information is lowest), derives from the majesty of his office and his singular position as head of state. Recognizing this phenomenon, presidents often take to
television in an effort to drum up support for their programs. President Barack Obama took his case for health care reform directly to the public, urging citizens to support his efforts.

**Political Knowledge**

Political knowledge and political participation have a reciprocal effect on one another—an increase in one will increase the other. Knowledge about the political system is essential to successful political involvement, which, in turn, teaches citizens about politics and increases their interest in public affairs. And, although few citizens know everything about all of the candidates and issues in a particular election, they can, and often do, know enough to impose their views and values as to the general direction the nation should take.

This is true despite the fact that most Americans’ level of knowledge about history and politics is quite low. (To learn more about political knowledge, see Table 11.2.) According to the Department of Education, today’s college graduates have less civic knowledge than high school graduates did fifty years ago. Americans also don’t appear to know much about foreign policy; some critics would even argue that many Americans are geographically illiterate. An astounding 88 percent of young Americans could not find Afghanistan on a map, and 6 percent of all Americans could not locate the United States.

There are also significant gender differences in political knowledge. For example, one 2004 study done by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that men were consistently more able than women to identify the candidates’ issue positions. This gender gap in knowledge, which has existed for the last fifty years, perplexes scholars, because women consistently vote in higher numbers than males of similar income and education levels.

### Table 11.2 What is the extent of Americans’ political knowledge?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Percentage Unable to Identify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vice President (2008)</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Governor (2007)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker of the House (2008)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Prime Minister (2008)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (2008)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Pew Research Center for People & The Press, 2007; data compiled by Jon L. Weakley from the 2008 American National Election Study.

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**World Public Opinion and Governance**

A 2008 poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org asked respondents in several countries whether government leaders should pay attention to public opinion polls when making decisions. Eighty-one percent of Americans said that government leaders should pay attention to public opinion polls, while only fifty-six percent of those in India felt similarly. Data from this same poll, however, indicated that in many cases citizens do not believe their governments actually pay attention to public opinion. Eighty-three percent of Americans surveyed felt the country should pay greater attention to the will of the people, and 97 percent of Egyptians felt similarly about their country. The table shows the responses of some of the countries surveyed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Government Leaders Should Pay Attention to Public Opinion (%)</th>
<th>Country Should Be Governed According to the Will of the People (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Why might a larger percentage of South Koreans, than citizens of any other country listed, believe their government leaders should pay attention to public opinion polls when making important decisions? Similarly, what might explain the large percentage of Egyptian citizens who believe their country needs to pay greater attention to the will of the people?
- Is it possible for governments to listen too much to the public? Is there ever a time when governments should not listen to the will of the people?
- How much attention should the U.S. government pay to world public opinion about U.S. policies?

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Evaluate the effects of public opinion on politics.

As early as the founding period, the authors of *The Federalist Papers* noted that “all government rests on public opinion,” and as a result, public opinion inevitably influences the actions of politicians and public officials. The public’s perception of the need for change, for example, was the driving force behind the victory of Senator Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential campaign. (To learn more about the Framers and public opinion, see *The Living Constitution: Article I, Section 3, Clause 1 and Seventeenth Amendment*.)

Andrew Kohut, the president of the Pew Research Center, argues that the public has become more of a critical player in national and international politics in the past three decades for a variety of reasons. Key among them is the rise in the number of polls regularly conducted and reported upon, as revealed in Figure 11.5.

According to Kohut, it is impossible to find any major policy proposal for which polling has not “played a significant, even critical role.”20 Another observer of public opinion polls says, “Polls have become more important and necessary in news writing and presentation, to the point that their significance overwhelms the phenomena they are supposed to be measuring or supplementing.”21 Kohut offers several well-known cases that show the interaction between public opinion as reported in polling data and policy and politics. These include President Bill Clinton’s high public opinion ratings in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal. When it appeared

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*Figure 11.5* How have references to public opinion polls in the news increased over time?


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*How susceptible are polls to short-term forces?* This cartoon is a humorous take on the frequent fluctuations of public opinion as the electorate responds to changing events.
The Framers of the Constitution were skeptical of the influence public opinion might have on politics. This is one of the reasons that they crafted such a deliberate system of government with both separation of powers and checks and balances. It was also the primary motivating factor behind the creation of the Electoral College to select the president, as discussed in chapter 13.

One additional way the Framers attempted to temper the influence of public opinion on politics was by placing the selection of senators in the hands of state legislators, as stipulated in Article I, section 3, clause 1 of the Constitution. Legislators, the Framers believed, would be more experienced in political activity and less subject to the effects of campaigning and the whims of the citizenry; thus, they would be more deliberate in their selection of qualified individuals to serve in the Senate.

But, experience proved that this was not always the case. Senators often were chosen on the basis of partisanship and other political alliances. In the early 1900s, Progressive reformers lobbied for an amendment to the Constitution that would remove the selection of senators from the state legislatures and place it in the hands of the citizens. This reform was eventually enacted as the Seventeenth Amendment.

Today, members of both the House of Representatives and the Senate are elected (and reelected) directly by the people. As a result, members of Congress closely monitor their constituents’ opinions on a range of political issues. They use phone calls, letters, and e-mails from citizens, as well as the results of public opinion polls conducted nationally and within their states and districts to help them accomplish this task.

Despite this attention to public opinion, representatives and senators continue to fulfill the deliberate role envisioned by the Framers. They do not always enact the policies that public opinion seems to favor. For example, majorities of Americans oppose the Iraq War and support withdrawing troops from Iraq as soon as possible. Yet, complete withdrawal of all peacekeeping and ground troops remains a distant possibility.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS
1. Which system of selecting senators do you favor? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
2. How closely should members of Congress monitor public opinion? How much weight should these opinions have on their voting behavior?
3. Should public opinion matter more in some issue areas than others? If so, on which issues should it matter more? Less?

What Should I Have LEARNED?

Now that you have read this chapter, you should be able to:

11.1 Trace the development of modern public opinion research, p. 364.
Public opinion is what the public thinks about an issue or a particular set of issues. Polls are used to estimate public opinion. Almost since the beginning of the United States, various attempts have been made to influence public opinion about particular issues or to sway elections. Literary Digest first began national presidential polling in 1916, using unscientific straw polls. Modern-day polling did not begin until the 1930s. George Gallup was the first to use scientific polling methods to determine public opinion.

11.2 Describe the methods for conducting and analyzing different types of public opinion polls, p. 368.
The different types of polls include traditional telephone polls, entrance and exit polls, tracking polls, Internet polls, and push polls. Those who conduct polls must first determine what questions they want answered and how those questions should be phrased. Then they must determine the sample, or subset of the group whose attitudes they wish to measure, and finally they must determine the method for contacting respondents. Once the poll results are in, they must be analyzed, which includes determining the margin of error and the sampling error of the poll.

11.3 Assess the potential shortcomings of polling, p. 373.
Polls may have several shortcomings that lead them to be inaccurate, including not having enough respondent options to reflect public opinion on an issue, polling those who lack the information necessary to accurately respond, inability to measure the intensity of public opinion on an issue, and the public’s lack of interest in political issues.

11.4 Analyze the process by which people form political opinions, p. 375.
The first step in forming opinions occurs through a process known as political socialization. Demographic characteristics—including gender, race, ethnicity, age, and religion—as well as family, school, and peers all affect how we view political events and issues. The views of other people, the media, and cues from leaders and opinion makers also affect our ultimate opinions about political matters.

11.5 Evaluate the effects of public opinion on politics, p. 382.
Knowledge of the public’s views on issues is often used by politicians to tailor campaigns or to drive policy decisions.

Test Yourself: Public Opinion and Political Socialization

11.1 Trace the development of modern public opinion research, p. 364.
Which of the following was NOT a primary reason that early public opinion polling was inaccurate?
A. Samples were compiled from telephone directories.
B. Self-selection created survey bias.
C. Newspaper clients received monetary benefits from survey miscalculations, driving them to skew results.
D. The timing of surveys prevented measurement of public sentiment closer to elections.
E. Only automobile owners were sampled in surveys, creating an unrepresentative sample of the general population.

11.2 Describe the methods for conducting and analyzing different types of public opinion polls, p. 368.
The method of selection that gives each person in a group an equal chance of being selected for a survey is known as
A. random sampling.
B. stratified sampling.
C. self-selection.
D. tracking survey samples.
E. margin of error.

11.3 Assess the potential shortcomings of polling, p. 373.
Why do many Americans hold somewhat volatile public opinions about foreign affairs?
A. They have little interest in foreign policy and thus base their opinions on few sources.
B. The racial divide leads Americans to ignore foreign affairs.
C. Survey questions about foreign affairs often are crafted with either yes-no or agree-disagree answer options.
D. Foreign affairs matter to Americans; they hold strong feelings about the happenings around the world.
E. Americans do not hold volatile opinions about foreign affairs or foreign policy.

11.4 Analyze the process by which people form political opinions, p. 375.
Which of the following is a major weakness of public opinion polls?
A. Only elite opinion is measured.
B. Polls are unable to measure the intensity of respondent’s opinions.
C. Polls have very large margins of error.
D. Polls have too many respondent options.
E. Minority groups are often over-sampled.

11.5 Evaluate the effects of public opinion on politics, p. 382.
The process through which an individual acquires a particular political orientation is known as?
A. Juvenile politicization
B. Political acclimation
C. Acquisition
D. Public opinion
E. Political socialization
Essay Questions
1. How have surveying techniques improved over time?
2. What is the margin of error? Why is it important?
3. What are some of the driving forces behind a person’s political socialization?
4. Why do women tend to hold different public opinions than do men, and how do they differ?
5. What are some specific examples that suggest public opinion on issues may drive politicians’ actions?

Key Terms
- exit polls, p. 369
- margin of error, p. 373
- political socialization, p. 375
- public opinion, p. 364
- public opinion polls, p. 364
- push polls, p. 369
- random sampling, p. 372
- sample, p. 365
- stratified sampling, p. 373
- straw polls, p. 372
- tracking polls, p. 369

To Learn More on Public Opinion and Political Socialization

In the Library


On the Web
To learn more about the history of the Gallup Organization and poll trends, go to www.gallup.com.
To learn more about state and national political polling results, go to Real Clear Politics at www.realclearpolitics.com/polls/.
To learn more about the National Election Studies (NES), including the history of this public opinion research project, go to www.electionstudies.org.
To learn more about the most recent Roper Center polls, go to the Roper Center’s public opinion archives at www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.