

Government: Lehnhart



EVALUATING GOVERNMENT: STATISTICS TELL THE STORY ...

Like Picasso's painting *Guernica*, statistics are open to interpretation. Your task is to find statistics that represent a significant point you want to make about government. It could be related to the economy, politics or justice. Choose any statistic that sheds light on how the country is doing in a given area and explain the point that you think the numbers represent. After you identify and evaluate the credibility of the source, give a counter argument or explain the possible weakness of the statistic. Does the statistic have a weakness or could the numbers be interpreted differently?

STEP 1 Reveal the fact or statistics.

Gallup Poll: Support for Death Penalty at Lowest Level Since 1972

Support for the death penalty in the United States is at its lowest level since November 1972, according to a Gallup poll released October 25. Gallup reported that 60% of respondents said they support capital punishment—off one percentage point from last year—while opposition remained at 37%, matching its highest level since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the death penalty in 1972. Support has dropped 9 points since 2007 and 20 points since its peak in 1994.

STEP 2 Interpret the numbers.

Support of the death penalty, currently legal in 31 states, is waning. Criticism from countries, especially from Europe and Canada, along with issues related to fairness and whether it is “painless” show Americans are less supportive of using death as the most severe punishment. This trend would indicate that at some point in the future states may revisit whether offering death as the ultimate punishment is a desired public outcome. One also has to wonder whether this would have any impact on the supreme court's interpretation.

STEP 3 Identify and evaluate the source.

Gallup, Inc. is an American research-based, global performance-management consulting company. Founded by George Gallup in 1935, the company became known for its public opinion polls conducted worldwide. It provides research and strategic consulting to large organizations in many countries, focusing on “analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems.” Gallup has 30 offices in more than 20 countries, employing about 2,000 people in four divisions: Gallup Poll, Gallup Consulting, Gallup University, and Gallup Press.

Clearly one of the leaders in the field Gallup is relied upon to deliver accurate information. However, any poll is subject to so many factors that it is not uncommon for them to get it wrong. In 2012 Gallup predicted Romney would beat Obama 49%-48%. In actuality Obama won 51% to 47%.

The methods in this survey were based on telephone interviews conducted Oct. 5-9, 2016, with a random sample of 1,017 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Each sample of national adults includes a minimum quota of 60% cellphone respondents and 40% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region.

STEP 4 Make an argument against your statistics.

While the poll is within industry standards, has a high confidence rank, and other polls (a Pew Poll found earlier this year that support for the death penalty had dropped to 49%) the fact remains that Americans are still in support. A look at historical support for the death penalty shows that it has risen and fallen over the years so this needs to be put into context. Can we make an assumption that this is leading Americans to eliminate the death penalty in the near future? Probably not. Will this have an effect on the Supreme Court? Doubtful. Bottom line is that a majority of Americans still support the death penalty.

Sources:


Gallup, Pew and Death Penalty Information Center

The above example should help you complete the assignment on the reverse side. Any aspect of government can be evaluated. Search for statistics in an area of interest to you. The economy, justice system, education, social issues, defense, income disparity and health care are some of the areas you can explore. Find some numbers, explain and evaluate them, and then argue against them. Your preparing for the next step which is to come up with an idea to create legislation related to your statistical research.

EVALUATING GOVERNMENT: STATISTICS TELL THE STORY ...

STEP 1  Reveal the fact or statistics.

STEP 2  Interpret the numbers.

STEP 3  Identify and evaluate the source.

STEP 4  Make an argument against your statistics.

Sources: