

**Political Science 17.267**  
**Democracy in America**  
**Fall 2013**

**Public Opinion Essay**

In this paper, please analyze public opinion on a salient policy issue (e.g., same-sex marriage or the Affordable Care Act). Your paper should do the following:

- 1) Describe theoretical factors that might explain variation in public opinion on this issue. Be sure to apply the theories we've discussed over the past few class sessions.
- 2) Examine public opinion data from at least two different surveys (ideally, from different points in time). Analyze whether the data lines up with the theoretical factors you described in the first part of your paper.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the possible sources of public opinion data include:

- Roper Center for Public Opinion Research
- Pew Center for the People and Press
- New York Times (Google for articles on your policy issue)
- Washington Post (Google for articles on your policy issue)

In writing your essay, remember to:

- State your analysis clearly and succinctly. In the body of the essay, support your analysis with clear reasoning and persuasive evidence.
- For quotations and the citation of specific information, use embedded citations (Smith 2004) in the text, with a reference list at the end of the essay.
- Produce a final version that is in 12-point type and double spaced, has one-inch margins, and *does not exceed* three pages. If you wish, you may also include a table or figure on fourth page. All pages must be numbered.
- *Leave yourself enough time to write more than one draft.* Before doing a final round of edits, remember to look at the writing tips in the syllabus. You might want to share your paper with a friend who is not in this class to receive comments on clarity and persuasiveness.
- Submit a Word document. And turn your essay in before the deadline. As noted on the syllabus, I will deduct points from essays that are turned in late.

---

<sup>1</sup> This will likely require you to find data that breaks down public opinion based on the theoretical factors you argued should be important in part (1).

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

17.267 Democracy in America  
Fall 2013

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.