



Public Policy: Research Guide

Community, Citizenship, Civil Rights: Library Resources (click links to run Subject searches in IC Library catalog)

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Selected Public Policy Issues: Library Resources

(click links to run Subject searches in IC Library catalog)

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Public Policy Issues: Database Resources (articles)

Note: When researching current social issues you may, in addition to the scholarly journals that will provide the most substantive information, also consult magazine articles for their greater currency. Remember that magazines are more likely than either scholarly journals or newspapers to have distinct political affiliations, of which you should be aware to critically evaluate your sources. Below are some broad categorizations of my own:

Liberal journals include *Mother Jones, Village Voice, The Nation, The Progressive, Washington Monthly, Utne Reader, Tikkum, Dissent, American Prospect, New York Review of Books, New Leader, Rolling Stone, Z Magazine, New Statesman* (British), *Guardian Weekly* (British).

Conservative journals include *American Spectator, National Review, Weekly Standard, American Enterprise, Commentary, American Outlook, Policy Review* and *The Spectator* (British).

Moderate/Conservative: *Atlantic Monthly, The Economist.*

Moderate/Liberal: *Harpers, New Republic.*

And if you don't believe me, take a look at *Yahoo's* lists of "[conservative](#)" and "[progressive](#)" magazines.

General OneFile is the most user friendly of our comprehensive databases--covering virtually any topic from a wide range of disciplinary angles. Use the default Subject search to find an appropriate Subject Heading for your topic and then open the "Subdivisions" link underneath. These help you focus on a particular aspect or academic discipline--for example, "Economic Aspects," "Ethical Aspects," "Forecasts and Trends," "History," "Media Coverage," "Political Aspects," "Psychological Aspects," and "Social Aspects."

If the best available Subdivision is still too broad, open the set of articles and add Keywords in the "Search within these Results" slot at the upper left.

User Advisory: When viewing any retrieval set in *General OneFile*, note that you are viewing only the Magazines and must click on the "Academic Journals" or "News" tabs to see those resources.

ProQuest--another comprehensive database with substantial full text. When opening click on "Continue"--there's usually no need to select particular sources--and at the home page click the "More Search Options" tab to see all the available search fields.

Note that you can limit your retrieval by "Document Type," including "Cover story," "Editorial," or "Interview."

Above each set of retrievals *ProQuest* will display related Subject searches to either broaden or narrow your focus.

User Advisory: *ProQuest* is fussy about entering Subject searches in the designated slots. If your subject is a person, enter the name--last name first--in the Person slot; if a named group of any kind--the Catholic Church, Microsoft, the New York Mets, the Democratic Party, the Rolling Stones--enter it in Co/Org; if a place enter it in Location.

SocINDEX: As the name implies, an excellent database for social issues. Click on the "Subject Terms" link above the search slots to find which Subject Headings will work here. Double click any Heading for a list of broader, narrower, and related Subject Terms.

CQ Researcher: *CQ* (Congressional Quarterly) *Researcher* publishes weekly reports devoted to a single issue in the news, including health, criminal justice, international affairs, education, the environment, technology, and the economy. Each report provides an "Overview," "Background," "Current Situation," "Outlook," "Pro/Con," and "Chronology." Try Keyword searches on "poverty" or "crime" or "gangs" or "inner cities."

LexisNexis News:

Our best national, international, and local newspaper coverage. Don't settle for the default "General" search--choose "News." Then change the default "Anywhere in document" search to "In headline & lead paragraphs" (this is a Keyword search of 100% full text and if you search "anywhere" you'll get too many minor hits). Use the "Specify date" limit to narrow results--*LexisNexis* becomes cranky if you retrieve more than 3000 documents.

If you click on the "Sources" tab at the top of the screen and then open the "News" folder below, you will arrive at an alphabetical list of news sources that includes every state. By checking boxes for state news sources you can compare, for example, coverage of a social issue in a red state and a blue state--gun control in Texas versus Vermont.

LexisNexis Law Reviews:

Choose "Legal." Many issues have legal ramifications and result in court cases. In reviewing these cases, legal scholars wrestle with the issues, making law reviews a good resource for analysis and discussion of a wide range of topics. Click on the "Legal" button at the top of the *LexisNexis* home page to access the law reviews. Since this is a Keyword search of full text, the best way to guarantee articles that don't just mention but actually discuss your search terms is to use the "atleast" command. For example: atleast7(crime and "inner cities") or atleast7(crime and "public housing") will return only articles in which these words and phrases are used 7 times--an indication that they are a central concern.

ScienceDirect: Don't let the name mislead you—this is not only our best science database but also encompasses the social sciences. Because it's a large database with a great deal of full text, the absence of Subject searching means that your Keyword searches will often retrieve large sets of articles, many of which mention but don't discuss your search term(s). One way around this is to limit your initial search to the "Abstract" field—where the main concepts of an article will be articulated. Once you have found an article that sounds on-target, click the "Related Articles" link beneath the citation. This will open a range of articles on the same topic.

CINAHL is a health literature database with excellent resources and a very helpful search interface--if you know how to approach it. Whatever your topic, first find the "CINAHL Heading" for it--the link is above the search slots. When you've found the right heading--whether Alzheimer's Disease, Obesity, or Doping in Sports--click on it and a list of subheadings will open on the right--among them Diagnosis, Drug Therapy, Ethical Issues, Prevention, Prognosis, Risk factors, Therapy, and Transmission. By ticking any of these boxes you can add them to the main Subject search, which you can then run by clicking "Search Database" at the top of the screen.

CIAO takes you beyond the usual newspaper, magazine, and journal articles by delivering full text of the policy briefs, case studies, and working papers issued by government groups, research institutes, and think tanks. These often provide very substantial analysis of issues. And although the emphasis is on "international affairs," there is plenty of coverage of particular national stories as they play out on the world stage.

Do not settle for the single search slot on the home page--open the "Advanced Search" just below it.

Also on the home page note the "CIAO Focus" for the month. Each month CIAO selects the best materials on a single issue and provides the links as a Focus feature. At the bottom of the Focus column is a link to the "Archive," where you will find nine years of these topical resources.

CIAO User Advisory: As described above *CIAO* provides access to the reports of research institutes/think tanks--many of which have political/ideological affiliations. An organization called [SourceWatch](#) can help you to identify such ties and alert you to any political agenda the research was intended to serve.

Polling the Nations, like CIAO, takes you beyond newspaper, magazine, and journal articles--but in the opposite direction. Rather than expert analysis, *Polling the Nations* provides data on popular opinion from 1986 to the present. Click on "Begin Search" and then take advantage of the drop-down menu of available "Topics." You can also specify the "Universe" or geographic location of the poll, but the bulk of the polling information here is from North America and Western Europe.

User Advisory: Begin by searching on a Topic without place or date limits--to see the full extent of available data. If this proves sufficiently large, then add desired limits by location, date, or polling source. All these limits can dramatically reduce your retrievals--which is why it's a good idea first to establish the full extent of polling data on a given topic.

Note: Limited to 4 simultaneous users (not usually a problem).

ERIC: A disciplinary database in Education—at all levels. The field of Education has its own set of Subject Headings so be sure to check the "Thesaurus" here. ERIC provides access not only to relevant journal literature (citations for these end in a number preceded by EJ—ERIC Journal), but also to research published directly to ERIC (citations for these end in a number preceded by ED—ERIC Document

PsycINFO: The American Psychological Association use their own Subject vocabulary (called "Descriptors"), so a visit to the "Thesaurus" below the search slots is a good idea. If you find an article on exactly what you want, be sure to check the assigned "Descriptors" on the right of the citation for more ideas about useful search terms.

JSTOR has very good full-text coverage of scholarly journals. There is no Subject searching, but you can enter effective keyword searches such as—poverty and crime and (Chicago or Baltimore).

JSTOR access to journal articles begins 2-4 years prior to the present--so don't look for any criticism from the last couple of years--but coverage always extends back to the first issue of each journal--in some cases into the 19th century and beyond. This allows you, for instance, to compare ideas about aesthetics beauty from early and late in the twentieth century. And if you want to target a time period, just set a "Date Range."

ATLA: Our religion and theology database, where you will find many articles discussing the spiritual ramifications of living in a consumer society/economy.

Public Policy Issues: Web Resources

If you wish to see how your topic is discussed at conservative and liberal think tanks, here are some online sites that discuss a wide range of public policy issues.

Conservative:

[National Center for Public Policy Research](#):

[Heritage Foundation](#):

[Cato Institute](#):

[American Conservative Union](#);

[Federalist Society](#):

[Christian Coalition](#):

[Focus on the Family](#):

Liberal:

[Institute for Policy Studies](#)

[People for the American Way](#)

[Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting](#)

[PublicEye: Political Research Associates](#)

[American Civil Liberties Union](#):

[Amnesty International](#)

[National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#)

For a more comprehensive list of think tanks and research institutes, alerting you to any political agenda, use [SourceWatch](#).

Web sites:

(**Note:** The best Web sources will depend on what issue interests you, but below you will find a good gateway to public policy resources, several think tanks with well-organized social research, and two of the best sources for relevant statistical data.)

[Public Policy Issues and Groups](#): From Vanderbilt University, a good gateway to online resources across a wide spectrum of public policy issues.

[Pew Research Center](#): The Pew Research Center conducts nonpartisan public opinion polling and social science research and is an outstanding resource for social issues and public policy information. Use the "Topics" index and the "Projects of the Center" to navigate--as well as the "Site Search."

[National Center for Policy Analysis: Policy Issues](#): Leading think tank that takes a "free enterprise" approach to public policy issues.

[Brookings Institute: Topics](#): Another leading think tank, sometimes characterized as liberal, with information on a wide range of social/political issues.

Rand Corporation: Core Research Areas: A gateway to the topics Rand designates as vital to public policy debate. Also note the “Hot Topics” links at the lower right of the page.

World Values Survey: Political, social, and cultural data on the values and beliefs of over 80 societies worldwide--including the United States--since 1981. A great site, but it can be a challenge to navigate. See my [user guide](#) (pdf).

Statistical Resources on the Web: from the University of Michigan, the largest and best gateway to facts and figures available on the Web by subject.

FedStats: The United States government provides the raw data and statistics used in much social science research and public policy debate, so why not sample it yourself. *FedStats* is a good gateway and the “Topic Links A-Z” is a particularly helpful means of accessing this information.

Web Search Engines:

With *Google* you should be using the more flexible [Advanced](#) search where you can target the most authoritative domains: edu, org, gov.

An excellent alternative search engine is [Ask.com](#), which performs “clustering” on the results of most searches, offering you links to Pro or Con Web sites, in the case of controversial issues.

Web Directories:

To find some of the most authoritative Web resources on a topic, use Web directories, where all the Web pages have been selected and annotated by editors:

[Open Directory Project](#)
[Librarians' Index to the Internet](#)

And what about . . ?

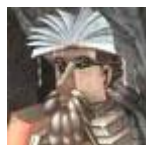
Wikipedia: Predictable but unreliable. Anyone who registers can add articles and anyone who visits the site can rewrite them. To quote Wikipedia’s article on “Wikipedia”: “The authors need not have any expertise or formal qualifications in the subjects which they edit” and “Wikipedia contains no formal peer review process for fact-checking, and the editors themselves may not be well-versed in the topics they write about .”

Google Scholar: Reliable but unpredictable. Retrieves books, scholarly articles, and Web documents, but most are not available full text or free on the Web. Its coverage of books and journals is unpredictable, but it may be useful in identifying resources that you can then access through the IC Library collection or through the IC library’s subscription databases (Google Scholar provides links to the IC catalog and subscription databases if accessed via the campus network).

MLA Citation Assistance

NoodleBib: NoodleBib provides online forms to build MLA or APA citations for any type of resource. NoodleBib guides you through data entry for every citation, then takes care of punctuation, alphabetization and formatting, producing a polished source list for import into Word.

MLA: Cite Like the Devil: My own comprehensive guide to the newly revised MLA citation style. There are three pdf guides here: Books (in print, from databases, on the Web); newspaper, magazine, and journal articles (in print, from databases, on the Web); and miscellaneous Web and multimedia.



Dr. Brian Saunders, Humanities Librarian, Ithaca College Library, February 2009