

17.801
Spring 2001
Group Projects

Assignment summary

Working with your assigned group, answer the question posed to you. You will give a 15 minute presentation (with 5 minutes available for questions) on your work on March 6. Your group will also turn in a five-page written report on your project on Friday, March 9. The report should be in the form of a memo. It should describe how you measured the variables of interest to you, report where you gathered the data, and summarize your findings using the appropriate figures and tables. (The five-page limit includes tables and figures.)

Discussion Forum

To facilitate discussion and help, I have set up a discussion forum for 17.801. The general URL for the discussion forums is <http://forums.mit.edu/>. From there, click on Academic Conference, and then follow the hierarchy down to 17.801. You will notice that I've created a forum for each of the four projects. While it may be more convenient to simply exchange help via e-mail, or face-to-face, I would like each of you to try and use this forum when you can, so that we can streamline providing assistance. If you *do* decide to use e-mail instead, please copy me (cstewart@mit.edu) and jiyeon (jiyeon@mit.edu) on all messages. If you intend a message for one of us, make sure our e-mail address(es) is in the to: line.

Statement about Collaboration

You are encouraged to seek and extend as much help as you can, both within and between groups.

Project 1: African Americans in State Legislatures

Names: Victoria Anderson (vkanders), Michael Won (skeezy5), Melanie Wong (melaniew), Victor Yeung (vsyeung)

Background. A major problem of democracy in the United States has been ensuring racial inclusion within legislatures. Obviously, during the years of slavery and Jim Crow, the legal system, aided by officially-sanctioned violence, excluded African Americans from serving in American state legislatures in the South. Yet in the North, the presence of African Americans in legislatures was uncommon. Since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, positive exclusion of African Americans from the political process has been made illegal. Still, the presence of African Americans in bodies like legislatures is uneven across the country. Some people want to know why this is.

Question: What predicts the proportion of African Americans who serve in a State Legislature?

Possible explanations

Demographics. States with more African Americans in the electorate elect more African American legislators. Sorta like winning the lottery. A more complex demographic argument might state that state with more middle-class African Americans (or more African-American attorneys) would have more African American state legislator.

Civil Rights Act Enforcement Some states have to make special efforts not to dilute the voting strength of African Americans under the Civil Rights Act of 1965 (and subsequent amendments). If the law works, then the states that have to comply with the pre-clearance aspects of the Act should have more African Americans in their legislatures.

Size of constituencies. Smaller legislative districts allow particular political groups (classified by race, religion, etc.) to dominate those districts. Therefore, states with smaller districts should have more African Americans.

Data sources

Book of the States. In Dewey and Rotch libraries. Gives basic information about the structure of state governments.

Black Elected Officials. Regularly published by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Statistical Abstract of the United States. Annual published by the Census Bureau. Lots of demographic data. Lots of cross-references to original sources that have even more data.

Congressional Information Service. Summarizes legislative activity. Helpful to find out which are the pre-clearance states.

Bibliographic sources

Matland, R.E. and D.D. Brown. 1992. District Magnitudes Effect on Female Representation in United States State Legislatures. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, vol. 17, pp.469-492.

Comments/hints

The main issue here is the *unit of analysis*. Will you study all the states in a particular year, which is called a *cross-sectional* study? In this case, the unit of analysis is the state. Will you study one particular state over a number of years, which is called a *longitudinal* study? Here, the unit of analysis is the year. Or, will you combine the two, into something called a *panel design*, where the state-year is an observation?

Project 2: The rejection of Al Gore by Tennessee

Names: Melissa Edoh (medoh), Jessica Hall (jesshall), Dalié Jimenez (dalie), Matt Powell (mpowell)

Background. A common point of commentary following the 2000 presidential election is the fact that Al Gore did not carry his home state of Tennessee. Republicans have declared that this is evidence that he had grown out of touch with his people. Democrats have been embarrassingly quiet. Even though it may be embarrassing not to carry your home state, simply winning or losing a state is a pretty blunt measure of how well a candidate did in that state. After all, it is possible that Gore did better than he should have done, even losing the state. (Think of it this way: Suppose Gore had won the state by precisely one vote. Now, suppose he had lost the state by precisely one vote. Is the important thing that he won in one case and lost in the other? Or is it important that he got 50% of the vote, in both cases? I would argue the latter. In that case, I'm interested in knowing whether 50% of the vote is a lot or a little.)

Question: Why did Al Gore do so poorly in Tennessee in 2000?

Possible explanations

Ideology of Tennessee Conservative states were less likely to vote for Gore. Tennessee is a conservative state.

Home state advantage. Candidates do better than expected back home. It might actually be that Gore did better than he should have done, given how conservative Tennessee is.

Campaign visits. Gore might have taken Tennessee for granted, not campaigning there.

Data sources

Erikson, Wright, and McIver's *Statehouse Democracy* has estimates of state partisanship and ideology. The *World Almanac* reports state-level election returns.

News reports are going to be a source of information about campaign visits. Some web sites (like c-span.org) actually had a daily calendar that reported the states the candidates visited each day. If the site is still up and operating, check it out. Otherwise, newspaper accounts may need to be consulted to reconstruct the campaign schedule.

Bibliographic sources

Steven Rosenstone, *Forecasting Presidential Elections* (Yale University Press, 1983).

James E. Campbell. 1992. Forecasting the Presidential Vote in the States. *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 36, pp. 386-407.

Comments/hints

The important thing here is to develop a statistical model of presidential votes in the states, and then to see how Gore did, compared to that model. Both Rosenstone and Campbell provide examples. Start with Rosenstone and Campbell as guides, but be more creative.

Project 3: Freshman Drinking

Names: Ambreen Amjad (ambreen), Karl Erdmann (kerdmann), Vidya Kadiyam (vidya), Anand Patel (asp)

Background. For the past four years, MIT has been engaged in a spirited discussion of drinking on campus, where freshmen live, and the relationship between the two. Some students claim that the decision to move freshmen on campus in 2002 was driven by a desire to cut the level of drinking on campus, especially by freshmen. Let us assume this is true. If so, then an important thing to know is whether campuses that require freshmen to live on campus have lower drinking rates than those who live on campus.

Question: When freshmen live on campus, do they drink less than when freshmen live off campus?

Possible explanations for drinking

Past experience. Whether you drank in high school. Whether your parents drank. Etc.

Academic pressures. Students in more serious majors, like art history, avoid drinking in order to study; students in easy majors, like aeronautical engineering, drink because they can get away with it academically.

Living environment. Living in the controlled environment of a campus dormitory is less conducive to drinking than living in the less controlled, off-campus environment.

Deterrent effect of educational programs. Students who live on campuses that have active alcohol awareness programs are less likely to drink than those who live on campuses without such programs.

Data sources

Wechsler, Henry. 1996. *Alcohol Use and Abuse among American College Students, 1993* [Computer file]. ICPSR version. Boston, MA: Harvard School of Public Health [producer], 1993. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 1996. This data file holds answers to questions asked on a survey of college students about their drinking behavior. It is the standard data set on this subject.

Bibliographic sources

David Abel. 2001. Study Lauds Effectiveness of Substance-free Dorms. *Boston Globe*, Feb. 7, 2001, p. A4.

Wechsler H, Davenport A, Dowdall G, Moeykens B, and Castillo S. 1994. Health and Behavioral Consequences of Binge Drinking in College: a National Survey of Students at 140 Campuses. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol 272, pp. 1672-1677.

Wechsler H, Lee JE, Kuo M, Lee H. 2000. College Binge Drinking in the 1990's: A Continuing Problem: Results of the Harvard School of Public Health 1999 College Alcohol Study. *Journal of American College Health*, vol. 48, pp. 199-210.

Wechsler H, Kelley K, Weitzman E, San Giovanni JP, Sebring M. What Colleges Are Doing About Student Binge Drinking: A Survey of College Administrators. *Journal of American College Health*, vol. 28, pp. 219-233.

Comments/hints

One issue is going to be managing the data set. Download the data set, along with the codebook, from the Harvard-MIT data center (visit the 17.801 web page and follow the link). You will discover that the data set does not directly measure whether freshmen live on campus of the schools in the study. And, if you call the Wechsler group

at Harvard, they won't tell you what the campuses are. Use creativity in seeing if you can generate the important housing policy variable using the data in the data set.

Project 4: Support for Refunding Tolls in Massachusetts

Names: Roger Ford (raf), Michael Freedman (mfreed), Allison Horst (ajhorst), Rory Pheiffer (rpp)

Background. In the 2000 election, Massachusetts voters responded to a referendum on the ballot to make tolls paid on Massachusetts roads, bridges, and tunnels from state income taxes. The voters defeated the initiative on a vote of 1.1 million to 1.5 million. The campaign that was waged pitted displeasure among toll-payers against those who wished to see the revenues go toward governmental projects.

Possible explanations

Self-interest. Drivers like it. Commuters hate it.

Ideology. Liberals hate deductibility. Conservatives like it. The stronger your hatred of taxes, the more you want to return taxes and fees to citizens.

Party. Democrats hate it (they like taxes and tolls); Republicans love it (they hate taxes and tolls).

Revenue need. Voters in poorer communities of the state, which rely on state revenues to bolster local tax collections, are less likely to support efforts to refund income taxes to (presumably) wealthier communities.

Data sources

Massachusetts Electoral Statistics (P.D. 43). Published every two years.

Massachusetts Elections Division. Part of the Secretary of State's Office.

Census Bureau. The Census bureau has tons of reports about economics and demographics. Some are reported at the county level, others at the place (i.e., town or city) level. The *County and City Data Book* is the most basic. The Decennial Census has the most comprehensive rental information at the local level. Roche Library has most of the census publications at MIT. Also check out the Census Bureau Web site (www.census.gov).

Bibliographic sources

Stephen Ansolabehere, James M. Snyder, and Jonathan Woon, "Why Did a Majority of Californians Vote to Limit Their Own Power?" Paper presented at the 1999 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. [Note: The first two authors are MIT faculty members and the third is a former MIT undergraduate who took 17.801 two years ago and is now a graduate student at Stanford.]

Discussion/hints

Take advantage of the fact that most statistics about Massachusetts are reported at the *town* (351 of them) level, rather than at the county level. You will need to think creatively about measuring ideology of the towns.

Measuring partisanship is also going to be trickier than you think. Finally, note that in 2000, the toll measure was #6 on the ballot. You might want to investigate whether certain types of communities' voters were more likely to give up and stop voting (called "roll off") before getting to #6 than others.