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Spring 2002
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 5. Your group will also turn in a five-page written report on your project on Friday, March 8. (Please submit a hard copy and then e-mail Steve and me an electronic version—virtually any format will do, except pdf.) 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.)

Statement about Collaboration

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

Grading

I will assign a letter grade to each group's project. That will be the grade you receive, plus or minus an adjustment that will be determined as follows: I will ask each member of the group to indicate the relative amount of effort each person contributed to the successful completion of the project. If someone in the group stands out as being a conspicuous over- or under-contributor to the group effort, that person's letter grade will be adjusted upward or downward as appropriate.

Project 1: Ballot Design and Voting Machines in Florida

Group: Johanson, Muniz, Priebe, Tappan

Background. In the 2000 presidential election controversy arose over voting technology malfunctions and ballot confusions. Policymakers and social scientists have attempted to understand the degree to which these problems affected the outcome of the election. Perhaps just as important, reformers have attempted to bring about changes in Florida so that problems won't happen again. In order to do that, it is important to parcel out responsibility for the problems in 2000 between, say, bad machines and bad ballot designs.

Question: What was the bigger problem in Florida in 2000, bad voting machines or bad ballot designs?

Possible explanations

Voting machines. Some machines may be more likely to fail to record a vote cast by a voter. A good example is problems with “dimpled chad,” which usually indicates that a voter intended to cast a vote for a candidate, but which will usually go uncounted because light doesn’t shine through the card. Punch cards are particularly prone to under-voting.

Ballot design. Some counties in Florida used ballot designs that many people thought were confusing to some voters. The best-known was the “butterfly ballot” in Palm Beach County, but some other counties ran a “caterpillar ballot,” in which candidate names were displayed across two columns. Both ballot designs (compared to a simple intuitive design, with candidates in one column) may encourage both more over-votes and more under-votes.

County demographics. Even if voting machines and ballot designs may seem to have affected whether voters’ votes were counted, the real problem might be that these problems just happened to coincide with counties that had an especially large number of voters who didn’t have much experience in voting, such as the young or highly mobile. Once properly accounted for, the previously-mentioned effects may have been spurious.

Data sources

Florida Division of Elections Web site. URL: <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/>. Contains a ton of downloadable data, including election returns from the 2000 general election in Florida. It also contains information about voting systems used in Florida. (As of January 29, 2002 the table that’s on the web site appears to have been accurate for the 2000 general election.)

National Opinion Research Center Florida Ballots Project Web site. A consortium of newspapers employed the National Opinion Research Center to review every over- and under-voted ballot in Florida. The Washington Post has run a number of articles on the data generated by this effort, and they can be viewed at

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/elections2000/recount/front.htm>. NORC has made the data available to the public for independent analysis. Among the data they published is a spreadsheet that records the format of the presidential ballot (if it was a “caterpillar ballot”) along with the voting technology used.

Demographics. The 2000 Census continues to be released. Basic demographic data for each county in Florida can be found on the census web site at www.census.gov.

Bibliographic sources

Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project. “A Preliminary Assessment of the Reliability of Existing Voting Equipment.” Also *Voting: What Is; What Could Be*. Two reports by the Caltech-MIT Voting Technology Project about the performance of voting technology nationwide. Among other things, the report introduce a way of thinking about the problem of voting technology performance empirically and a way of measuring performance.

Greg Adams and Chris Fastnow, “A Note on the Voting Irregularities in Palm Beach County, FL.” url: <http://madison.hss.cmu.edu/>. This web site contains pointers to a host of papers that analyzed voting irregularities in Florida.

Comments/hints. This is a typical quick-and-dirty analysis that political scientists are called on to do all the time. There has been some newspaper reportage on this subject, but very little social science. An important think to keep in mind is that voting machines are bought by local election officials and the ballots are designed by them. Local election officials vary considerably in how good they are. How good they are *may* depend on how well-endowed their counties are. And, how good they are may affect other (unmeasured) administrative practices in a county that might affect the “residual vote rate.” Therefore, getting a clean estimate of the independent effects of machines and ballot design may depend on getting good variables to control for the quality of local election administration.

Project II: Improving Voter Registration Practices

Group: Horst, Larson, Tahk

Background. To vote in the United States you must be registered. Unlike most democratic nations, in the U.S. registration happens in the states, not at the national level, and each state is different. Considerable research has shown that various requirements of state voter registration laws serve as barriers to people voting, and that these registration barriers account for a significant amount of the reason why Americans vote at lower levels than citizens in other democracies. One problem that often emerges in using voter registration lists is that people frequently move; when they do, they often don't update their voter registration. This in turn often leads to confusion on Election Day, among voters and election officials. To overcome this problem, a number of commissions have recommended that states create centralized voter registration rolls, to at least make sharing registration information within states easier when people move.

Questions. Do voters in states with statewide registration systems report fewer problems voting than voters in states without them?

Possible explanations.

Voter registration systems. It's intuitively obvious that states that centralize their voter registration record keeping, voters should have fewer problems with voters actually voting.

Other registration laws. States with centralized voter registration databases may have other provisions as well that are associated with solving registration problems. One such provision is something called "provisional ballots." Therefore, having a voter registration system may simply be one indicator of having several mechanisms of easing registration problems.

Demographics. States with centralized voter registration lists may have higher levels of education and lower levels of mobility, which should independently make it easier for voters to vote. If central-registration states have lower levels of voter frustration with registration, it's because of those demographics, not centralized registration, per se.

Data sources

Statistical Abstract of the United States. Published yearly. Tons of information about elections, including registration and turnout levels by state.

National Conference of State Legislatures web site. You'll find tons of tables that summarize state provisions for elections.

Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement. Every two years the Census Bureau asks participants in its monthly Current Population Survey (which is mainly used to calculate unemployment statistics) about whether they voted on

election day and, if they didn't, why they didn't. You can get this data through the Harvard-MIT Data Center.

Bibliographic sources

- Wolfinger, Raymond E., David P. Glass, and Peverill Squire. 1990. "Predictors of Electoral Turnout: An International Comparison." *Policy Studies Review* 9: 551–574.
- Powell, G. Bingham. 1986. "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 80:17–43.
- Jackman, Robert W. 1987. "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies." *American Political Science Review* 81: 405-423.
- Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project. "A Preliminary Assessment of the Reliability of Existing Voting Equipment." Also *Voting: What Is; What Could Be*. Two reports by the Caltech-MIT Voting Technology Project about the performance of voting technology nationwide. Among other things, the report discusses voter registration problems and makes recommendations about possible reforms.

Comments/hints. Two things here. First, I've left undefined certain important concepts that you'll need to think about measuring. For instance, summaries of state registration laws you will find may not always categorize those laws cleanly. The Census Bureau data may not allow you to measure as cleanly as you would like "voter frustration with registration laws." Second, the most likely source for your dependent variable, the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey is enormous and you'll have to pay attention to subsetting the data.

Project III: Who Signed the Kyoto Protocols?

Group: Pae, Seale, Strickling, Wildstrom

Background. The United Nations has been sponsoring a process for many decades attempting to get nations to control the emission of greenhouse gases. Negotiations have led to a number of agreements and treaties, most notably the 1992 U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The United States is a signatory to both agreements, but has not ratified the Kyoto agreement—and is unlikely to do so.

Question. Why is the United States unwilling to ratify the Kyoto Protocols?

Possible explanations.

Self interest. Because the United States is the number one emitter of greenhouse gasses, it has the most to lose.

Public opinion. US citizens are less friendly toward the environment and/or willing than the citizens of other nations to support a global agreement such as the Kyoto Protocol.

Data sources

Ingerhart, Richard et al. 2000 *World Values Surveys and European Values Surveys* [computer file] ICPSR version. This data file holds answers to questions asked of international samples over three time periods (1981-4, 1990-3, 1995-7). It is a frequently used source of cross-national individual-level attitudes and behaviors.

United Nations. 2001. *World Statistics Pocketbook*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Series V, No 21.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 1999. *National Climate Policies and the Kyoto Protocol*.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2000. *OECD in Figures Statistics on the Member Countries 2000*

Platts Global Energy, a specialist energy market reporting company of the McGraw Hill Companies for over 75 years, is another good source. See their recent Kyoto coverage at <http://www.platts.com/kyoto/index.shtml>.

Bibliographic sources

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) official web site:
<http://unfccc.int/> and especially <http://unfccc.int/resource/convkp.html>

Roberts, J. Timmons. 1996. "Predicting Participation in Environmental Treaties: A World-System Analysis." *Sociological Inquiry* vol. 66, pp. 38-57.

Dietz, Thomas and Linda Kalof. 1992. "Environmentalism among Nation States." *Social Indicators Research* vol. 26, pp. 353-366.

Comments/hints. The data task here is to amass the appropriate data across a wide variety of countries which will vary in how well they produce and report statistics. On the analysis side, the task is to think about a more general model of why nations might support or oppose a treaty regulating the environment. Test that statistical model and then see how well it predicts the United States. You will want to be flexible in how you measure the dependent variable. It might be appropriate simply to generate a dummy variable (0,1) indicating ratification or not. A strategy that gets more information into the variable may be to code the date on which the protocols were signed.

Project IV: Was Gore Hurt by Being Associated with the Clinton Legacy?

Group: Amjad, Brodkin, Martin, Nazemi

Background. A number of commentators remarked in 2000 that voters were suffering from “Clinton fatigue.” Although voters expressed very high approval ratings for Clinton, his personal scandals particularly irritated voters, and they were looking forward to getting rid of him. Other commentators suggested that this “Clinton Fatigue” took votes away from Gore, who was (supposedly) unable to properly distance himself from the negative aspects of the Clinton legacy.

Question. Was Gore hurt by the Clinton legacy in 2000?

Possible explanations.

Clinton fatigue. Some voters really disliked Clinton and his policy or moral legacy.

Those voters were particularly likely to punish Gore for their dislike of Clinton.

The standard partisan model. Voters come with robust partisan attachments. Voters with Clinton fatigue were Republicans and conservatives who couldn’t be expected to support Gore any way.

Data sources

Burns, Nancy, Donald R. Kinder, Steven J. Rosenstone, Virginia Sapiro, and the National Election Studies. 2001. American National Election Study 2000 [computer file] ICPSR version. This data file holds answers to questions asked of a national sample of US citizens about the 2000 elections. It is a frequently used source of individual-level attitudes and behaviors in elections.

H.W. Stanley, H.W. and Niemi, R.G. 2000. Vital Statistics on American Politics 1999/2000.

Bibliographic sources

Kinder, Donald R and Kiewiet, D. Roderick. 1981. "Sociotropic Politics: the American Case" British Journal of Political Science, Vol 11, Issue 2, 129-161

Nelson, Michael (ed) 2000. The Elections of 2000. Chapter 3 - Nelson, Michael. "The Election: Ordinary Politics, Extraordinary Outcome."

Campbell, James. 2000. The American Campaign U.S. Presidential Campaigns and the National Vote Chapter 1.

Holbrook, Thomas. 1996. Do Campaigns Matter? Chapter 2.

Comments/hints. The real task here is to think first about a general statistical model of support for presidential candidates and then build onto that measures of “Clinton fatigue.” The good news is that the National Election Study data file has lots of questions that you could use. The bad news is that the National Election Study data file has lots of questions that you could use. You will need to be judicious and disciplined in thinking about how you can use the questionnaire (which is pretty unwieldy to use) to answer this question.