

Instructor Notes

Title: Who will win the 2020 Presidential election?

Disciplines/Courses: This project can be used in political science courses from introductory American politics course to more advanced courses on campaigns and elections.

Degree of Difficulty: M (moderate).

Resources/Background Needed: This project requires statistical analysis of election data where the dependent variable is the incumbent party's percentage of the popular vote. Please see below for links to political and economic data sources. The independent variables will vary by the model used by the students but will include a measure of candidate popularity, economic performance, and incumbency. The main model used will be OLS regression and the software required is JASP. It would be great if students had some knowledge of statistics but it is not required for this project. Additionally, students should have some understanding about the fundamentals of elections as well as public opinion polls. Those topics should be covered before or in conjunction with this project.

Election results data: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections>

Presidential Approval Rating Data: <https://news.gallup.com/interactives/185273/presidential-job-approval-center.aspx>

Candidate Approval Rating Data: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/110548/gallup-presidential-election-trial-heat-trends.aspx>

Economic Data: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org>

About running group projects: To ensure that each group member participates and contributes to the project. The instructor should distribute a survey to each member of the group asking them to evaluate themselves and their partners in how much they contributed to the overall group effort. This survey is for the instructor only to modify the final group project grade if necessary, to reflect the contributions of each group member.

Open ended questions:

- What did you learn from this project?
- How important are election “fundamentals” compared to campaigns?
- How important are election “fundamentals” compared to the charisma/personality of individual candidates?
- How important is the possible disconnect between the popular vote and the electoral college vote for the quality of American democracy?

Special instructions and assumptions: This specific project works best during a Presidential election year but can easily be modified to predictions about which party will win control

Congress during mid-term elections. Additionally, if data is available, can be used to predict Governor elections

Revisions and continuation: The project can be updated after every Presidential election. Additionally, different models can be introduced as well as using the Electoral College vote as the dependent variable instead of the popular vote. Another option is to do a separate analysis for each of the 50 states and thereby predict the Electoral College result. This is dependent on data availability and also may require each student group to analyze a handful of states and have the class bring their results together to determine the final Electoral College outcome.