

Exit Polling Project¹

Polling Workshops: October 23, 25, 30 and November 1

Exit Polling: November 6

Analysis Workshops: November 8, 13, and 15

Final Paper: Due Tuesday, December 11 @ 5:00 PM

This is the most significant project for the course, and it is designed to give you first-hand experience in campaigns and elections – as a witness to the electoral process, and as a sophisticated analyst of it. The project will consist of three parts, described below.

#1 - Designing and conducting an exit poll

Exit polls are surveys given to actual voters, as they leave their voting precinct. They are commonly used by media outlets and scholars to evaluate why voters participate in an election and support a given candidate. We are going to design and conduct our own exit poll, with actual voters, in order to perform our own original analysis.

First, each student will develop his/her own hypothesis about a relevant aspect of the 2018 elections. For example, you might develop a hypothesis that women who voted for Donald Trump in 2016 are more likely to defect and vote for Democrats than men (DUE in class on Tuesday, October 23).

Next, we will work together as a class to develop an actual survey (~2 pages long) including all the questions necessary to evaluate each student's hypothesis. This will give students practical experience in survey design, including deciding which questions to include, how to word them, and how to order them in the survey.

Finally, each student will go to a polling precinct on Election Day (November 6) – or, if schedules do not permit this, then on a preceding day for early voting – and collect responses from actual voters. (Participation is required unless you are working on a campaign.)

I will provide you with all of the information and materials necessary to conduct exit polling – including printed surveys, survey equipment, polling locations, standards of conduct, etc. – in advance, during our designated exit polling workshops. I realize this is a new, and perhaps intimidating, experience, so I will do all I can to help make it successful for you.

#2 - Data analysis

After the exit polls are completed, we will work together – during a series of workshops after the election– to code responses in order to create a single dataset of survey responses, and then to introduce methods of statistical analysis that you can use to test your previously-proposed hypothesis. I am allotting significant class time for this purpose, so that you will have ample opportunity to work alongside one another in conducting your analysis and ask me any questions you may have. Also, the reading will be significantly lighter during this period. I will make time available to meet for office hours then.

¹ This project was adapted from Christopher Devine at the University of Dayton.

#3 – Final paper

As the final step in this project, you will submit – in lieu of a final exam – a 4-page paper² explaining your research. This paper will consist of the following components:

1. An **introduction** stating your hypothesis, and the relevant variables that you are testing.
2. A **literature review** explaining the basis for your proposed hypothesis. Specifically, you will review evidence from our course material, as well as any relevant outside sources, justifying why you would expect this hypothesis to be accurate. In this section, you must provide at least three (3) citations in MLA or APA format that provide relevant evidence (e.g., statistics, facts, quotes) that support this expectation. At least one of these citations must come from an assigned course reading.
3. A detailed **description of the data** used to test your hypothesis, including: a) how/where/when the survey responses were collected; b) how many responses were collected; c) which specific questions you are using to test your hypothesis; d) how these questions have been coded to create the variables necessary to test your hypothesis.
4. An explanation of the **results of your analysis**, including: a) the statistical test that you conducted in order to evaluate the hypothesis; b) the specific results of this analysis, including presentation of the data in a table, chart, or other visual format; c) whether, and why, you interpret these results as supporting or not supporting your hypothesis.
5. A thoughtful **reflection** on the significance of your research. In particular: How does your research help us to understand what happened in the 2016 election, or – in a broader sense – the dynamics of parties, campaigns, and/or elections? What could be done in future research to build upon or clarify the results of your analysis? Is there anything that, if you had a second shot at this research, you would have done differently to better evaluate your hypothesis (e.g., ask the question differently, provide different response options, etc.)?

Note: It does not matter, in terms of your grade or how you should feel about the results of this analysis, whether the evidence supports or does not support your hypothesis. What matters is that you propose a reasonable hypothesis and provide adequate justification for it. If the evidence does not bear out your reasonable expectations, then that is interesting in itself. Indeed, some of the most valuable research comes from showing that things we expect to be true are not. A final rubric and formatting guide will be posted on Pilot later in the semester.

Exit Poll Components (worth 40% of your final grade)

10% - Preliminary Exit Poll Assignment – due in class on Tuesday, October 23.

10% - Participation in Exit Polling – all students are expected to work at one of the polling locations for 2 hours on Election Day or on an early voting day.

Polling Locations:

Election Day

WSU Nutter Center Berry Room, 3640 Colonel Glenn Hwy, Dayton, OH 45435

Antioch University Midwest, 900 Dayton St, Yellow Springs, OH 45387

Beavercreek Nazarene Church, 1850 N. Fairfield Rd., Beavercreek, OH, 45432

Early Voting

Montgomery County Board of Elections, 451 W. Third St., Dayton, OH 45402

Hours: October 27 and November 3 (8:00 – 4:00), November 4 (1:00 – 5:00), and
November 5 (8:00 – 2:00)

10% - Participation in data analysis workshops on November 8, 13, 15, and 20.

70% - Final Paper due Tuesday, December 11 at 5:00 PM.

² You should write roughly 4 pages worth of text. Papers may be longer if you are using tables or figures.