

Political Science 4211
Voting & Elections in the United States
Research (15%)

We benefit immensely from being in the midst of an election season, especially being on a college campus. This assignment is worth 15% of your final grade. This assignment requires students to *research* voting & elections.

Research is the scientific approach to answering questions about the world using the scientific method.

Objective: Students are to conduct their own original research on the 2018 midterm elections.

Deadline: Monday, November 26 (Week 14) at the beginning of class

Directions:

- (1) Choose a local or campus election event to attend
- (2) Generate your own thoughtful question about voting and elections
- (3) Decide upon a method to collect evidence at the election event
- (4) Attend the event, collect evidence to answer your question, keep detailed notes

Final Deliverable for Assignment:

Due November 26, submit a short 2-4-page research report where you outline:

- Research question,
- Method of data collection,
- Evidence, and
- Findings

Frequently Asked Questions:

What are some examples of local or campus election events? There are a number of different events this semester: **Voter Registration Day** on Tuesday, September 25; **Trump's First Two Years** on Thursday, October 4, 12:00-1:00pm, Orion AB; **CPP Election Fair** on Tuesday, October 9, 12:00-6:00pm, Ursa Minor; **Election Forum** on Thursday, November 1, 12:00-1:00pm, Andromeda Suite; **LA County Polling Station** on Tuesday, November 4, 7:00am-8:00pm, Andromeda Suite – There will undoubtedly be more events on campus, but you can also attend other election events off-campus in your local community. If you have questions about whether or not an event will qualify, please ask.

What sorts of questions should I be asking? It is up to you. The only requirement is that the question be centered on voting and elections. Secondary to that, you need to make sure that your question should lend itself to the gathering of evidence. Thus, you should think about your research question in conjunction with

What are some methods used to collect evidence? There are quite a few methods you can use to gather evidence in hoping to answer your question. Since the requirement is to attend these events in *real time*, I would think about conducting your own **ethnography**—or **observations**. This type of fieldwork necessitates observing some sort of behavior and taking notes detailed regarding that behavior in hopes of answering that research question. The observations could be detailed descriptions of the event or you could definitely devise something more quantitative in nature. Details about these observations would constitute your evidence for the project. Otherwise, you could conduct your own short **survey** where you draft a questionnaire and have folks answer questions about their experience attending this event. Surveying anywhere from 8-10 people for this exercise should be sufficient. The results of the survey would constitute the evidence for the project. Some folks might elect to do a few in-person **interviews** with someone who attends the event. Interviewing anywhere from 1-2 folks for this exercise should be sufficient. Quotes from these interviews would constitute evidence for this project. If you have ideas for other methods or if you have questions about how this works, please come see me in office hours.

Will I be graded on the quality of research? No. I realize that we have limited time and resources. Gathering evidence in this way is admittedly difficult and I will be fairly relaxed about my expectations regarding both the quality and quantity of evidence you collect. However, I am looking for: first, the professionalism of your report including organization and clarity; and second, thoughtful analysis in service of the research question you initially pose. Good research is indicative of hard work and detailed analysis. It is easy to see when someone is “phoning it in” or waiting until the last minute.

Is this a formal paper assignment? Not necessarily. I am expecting a *research report* and not a formal essay. Thus, I do not expect your research report to be written in formal prose. However, it may be useful to think of this as gathering preliminary evidence for a bigger research project. In order to get funding for that project, you need to submit a short preliminary report justifying the need to further investigate this question. Again, you should pay attention to the professionalism and thoughtfulness of your analysis. Thus, you should not write in bulletpoints or incomplete sentences.