Session 4: Wednesday 10/22/2015, 1:30-2:30pm

Location: Jackson

Session Title: 2016 Elections and Data by Voter Precincts

Organizer: Leah Hendey

Primary Notetaker: Katya A.

Participants: John Killeen, Eleanor Tutt, Mike Schramm, Salma Abadin, Shahrukh Farooq, Anthony Galvan, Claire Leblanc, Andrew Bowen, Liz Monk, Jeff Matson, Charlotte-Anne Lucas, Crystal Martinez

Anthony: Dallas had historically low voting rates, single digit participations rates. 42,000 people voted for mayor and half of the city council. There were several run-offs because every vote counted.

Leah: DataSpark (ProvPlan) did youth voting map patterns and released before their election to promote absentee voting and do some advocacy around those issues when people can’t take off time of work to vote. Will share that when it comes out.

Andrew: How many people tabulate data at the voter precinct level? Just Leah/NeighborhoodInfo DC…

Mike: Something interesting is that Ohio had a statewide referendum to look at gerrymandering. It would be interesting to do stuff precinct wise do illustrate that issue. You need to show something statewide rather than just the city because the untold story is that the local districts are done in the same way, but that’s much less visible.

Andrew: We want to bring the issue of redistricting to split communities up, bring them to people at the congressional level and at the city council level. The way we draw our city council lines are not right. We want to talk about the way we make those lines. Do we want to pack or crack districts? What if we want geographically homogenous neighborhoods.

Mike: Book called Bushmanders and Bullwinkles about the change in the 90s starting to create these finely tuned political districts thanks to block level data.

Andrew: Kind of shifting to discussing how we define neighborhoods, we should bring it back to the individuals and what these geographies mean?

Anthony: The voter level turnout data in Ohio was very easily accessible, including what precinct you’re in. We get that data in Texas, but it’s harder to get and I think there’s an opportunity to marry that to parcel level data. I want to match it to parcels and maybe just look at how far people live from their voting locations and then look at turnout as a function of distance from voting location? Illinois used to have it where you could vote anywhere. In Dallas, we have it in schools, but the high school where I vote has metal detectors, and I know I don’t have to, but maybe not everyone knows that and how intimidating is it to walk up there and see a metal detector.

Mike: My voting location is a church and they post a lot that is campaigning and intimidating to actually even get in the door.

Eleanor: There is a statistic that 50% of people don’t live in the same neighborhood as their voting precinct, and some precincts’ polling places are actually police stations so that could be a huge deterrent.

John: We could do something like what Anthony is talking about because we have voting data?

Anthony: You could also look at whether voting places are close to houses as opposed to the apartments because you’re missing the apartments’ vote.

Andrew: The goal is to package these statistics to make people interested in the fact that these things are issues, and make it look like here is how we can make things different. What is turnout is higher when libraries are the polling places instead of police stations?

Eleanor: We got voter data once because people were doing participatory budgeting, and there’s a huge difference between people turning out at voting in elections and who was turning out for participatory budgeting.

Leah: We could make a huge difference if we could say the turnout is higher when people have a job or lower when people travel three hours to go to work, etc.

John: Could get into specialized corners of this and when people are commuting far from their home place, maybe it would be more convenient if the polling place was near their workplace. Then also other things like do people have cars, close to transit?

Anthony: Campaigns buy vote chasing data on who’s a hard R and a hard D to send campaign materials to. On the day people request their mail ballots, campaigns are able to track that and send a postcard for the candidate arrives at the same time.

Charlotte: In the county where I live, we have 82% registration, but 12% so they still have issues getting people to the polls.

John: Barring buying an expensive dataset, it would be nice to have summarized data.

Anthony: In Ohio, there’s also a practice called voter flushing where halfway through the day, they post a list at the precinct that shows everyone who hasn’t voted yet on a list and then people show up and call the people who haven’t voted. You could potentially harness that as well if you could just scan that data and analyze it later.

Charlotte: Can we talk about why people don’t vote?

John: We have talked about distance to vote.

Charlotte: In Texas there is an app that tells you the closest polling place to where you’re standing so that’s good. In San Antonio, there’s a group that does early voting in one specific place which skews the distance study idea. But the reason people tell the Census that they don’t vote is that they don’t have enough time.

Shahrukh: It would be great to do a study on turnout and the characteristics of voting places, like whether open times and availability would that change the effectiveness.

Crystal: Will be interesting to see how Uber and Lyft transport people on voting day?

Anthony: But then you get into where do shuttles pick up and where do they not pick up?

[I missed something]

Anthony: In Summit County, they actually don’t have electronic early voting, so they were giving people vote by mail ballots on paper, then they were put in a box and treated like an absentee ballot.

Salma: In Wisconsin, Scott Walker limited the number of hours that voting places could be open and restricted a lot of other availability. People have been showing up in opposition.

Charlotte: In Wisconsin it seems like they said yes we had great voter turnout but look who we elected twice.

Anthony: The electronic devices can also be really confusing for the elderly who want to use the machines.

Charlotte: Heard someone suggested that voting lessons should be a part of high school civics and the voting age could be lowered if students were more educated on how to vote.

Crystal: One thing I’ve noticed is that people vote along family lines rather than knowing how to vote.

Leah: In Providence, you can register when you get your driver’s license when you’re 16 so you can’t vote, but you can be registered when you turn 18.

John: Andrew do you have any ideas about how to use that individual record data that you mentioned before?

Andrew: We all live with people who don’t vote for some reason or another and getting an idea of the barriers to access of any kind, I don’t know how to use that.

Anthony: It sounds like everyone has access to aggregated precinct data, and if we look at everything by precinct types that would be helpful, but it would be better to look at what the polling place actually is. The physical address would just be that you could look it up unless you have parcel data.

Charlotte: You could work with it the way people use find my polling place.

Anthony: Right, but you could look at that even if you didn’t have voter data.

John: Talking about what we have in terms of ACS data can get this analysis rolling might help to then work on proximity, etc.

Charlotte: Does anyone else have school board or other elections that aren’t in November?

Austin’s school elections went from 10 to 40% with the change to spring.

Anthony: Our school board are in the summer, but those are separate from city council, etc.

Jeff: Our municipal elections are in odd years, not even on the national year.

NNIPHQ will send around notes and connect a group around elections/voter data.