What if everyone voted?

And what the answer tells us about voter suppression

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What is a "data journalist"?

What is a "data journalist"?

A "data journalist" is just like a "regular" journalist who relies on their own skills in empiricism to tell a story.

Process:

1. Find a story

2. Find a data-driven angle in said story

3. Analyze data with statistics programs (Excel, STATA, Python, R)

4. Convey information (with words and graphics)

What if everyone voted?

Guiding questions

1. How many Democrats and Republicans are there?

Given data constraints, we're really asking: How many Clinton and Trump voters are there?

2. How are they distributed geographically?

The answer lets us assign Electoral College votes.

Data

1. Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES): A survey of 64,000 Americans

Includes demographic data and 2016 vote choice for 40,000+ validated voters

2. American Community Survey (ACS): A Census Bureau survey of 175,000 Americans

Includes the same demographic data as the CCES 32,640 “cells”

Method

1. Train a predictive model on CCES data

- Multi-level logistic regression
- Predict vote choice with: age, gender, race, education, region and interactions between them

2. Use the model to predict voting habits for every eligible American

Via “post-stratification” on the ACS

ACS Post-stratification

1. Each "type" of person gets their own "cell":

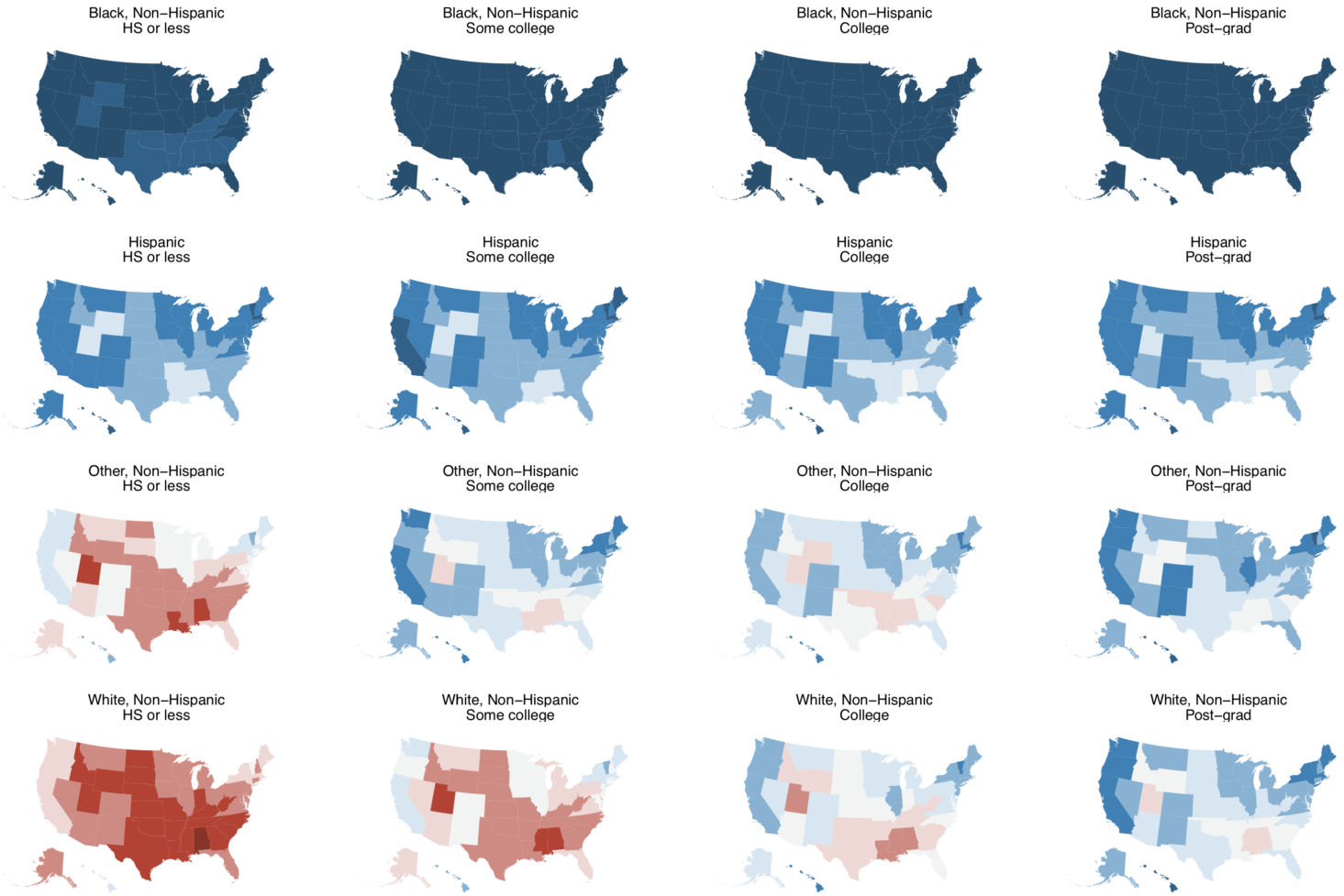
- One cell for white men ages 18-30 without college degrees who live in the Northeast
- Another for white men ages 18-30 without college degrees who live in the South
- Another for non-white men ages 18-30 without college degrees who live in the Northeast
- etc.

2. We know how many voters in that "cell" live in each state

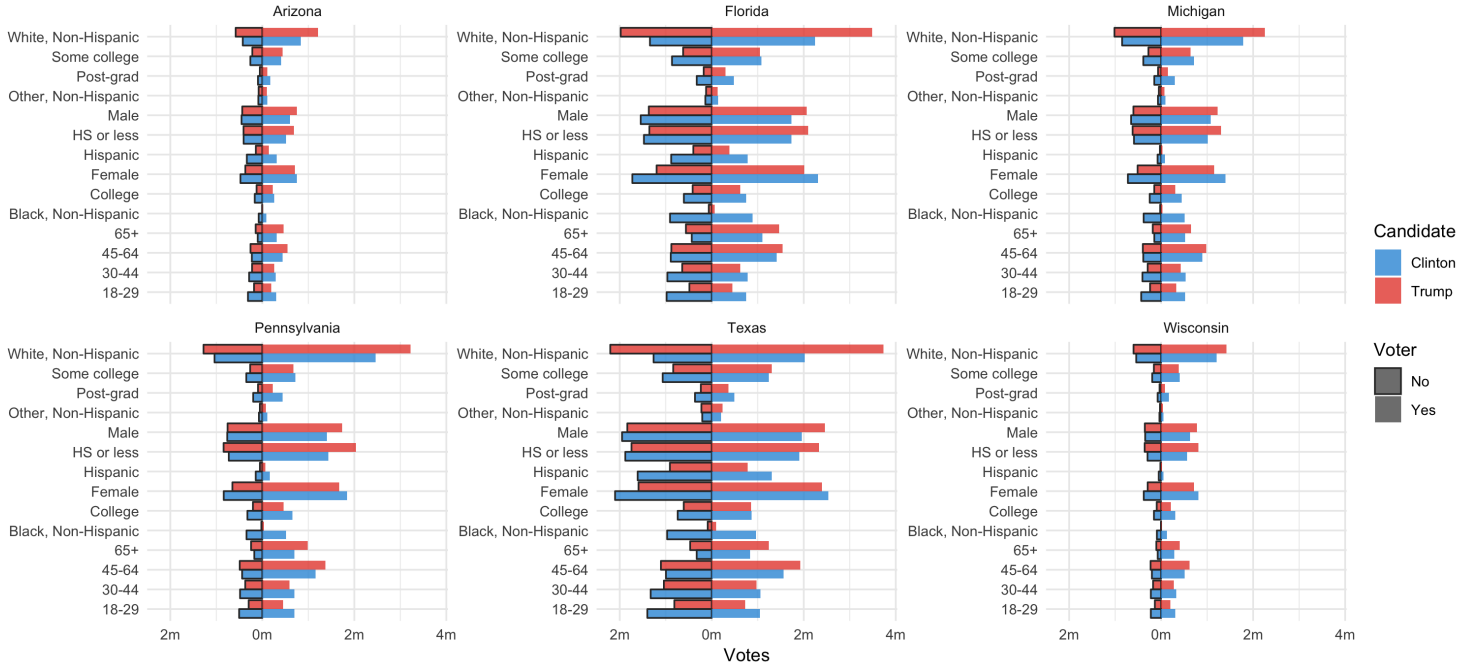
3. So we can say that x and y% of each "cell" vote for Clinton or Trump, then add up

- For example, a Latino female age 18-30 with a college degree in Texas is 85% likely to vote for a Democrat for president (White man 65+ is 80% Republican)

Results


Black, Non–Hispanic
HS or less
Black, Non–Hispanic
Some college
Black, Non–Hispanic
College
Black, Non–Hispanic
Post–grad
Hispanic
HS or less
Hispanic
Some college
Hispanic
College
Hispanic
Post–grad
Other, Non–Hispanic
HS or less
Other, Non–Hispanic
Some college
Other, Non–Hispanic
College
Other, Non–Hispanic
Post–grad
White, Non–Hispanic
HS or less
White, Non–Hispanic
Some college
White, Non–Hispanic
College
White, Non–Hispanic
Post–grad

Results


Arizona
Florida
Michigan
Pennsylvania
Texas
Wisconsin
White, Non-Hispanic
Some college
Post-grad
Other, Non-Hispanic
Male
HS or less
Hispanic
Female
College
Black, Non-Hispanic
65+
45-64
30-44
18-29
2m
0m
2m
4m
Votes
Candidate
Clinton
Trump
Voter
No
Yes

Results: If everyone voted

What does this tell us about voter suppression?

Voter suppression

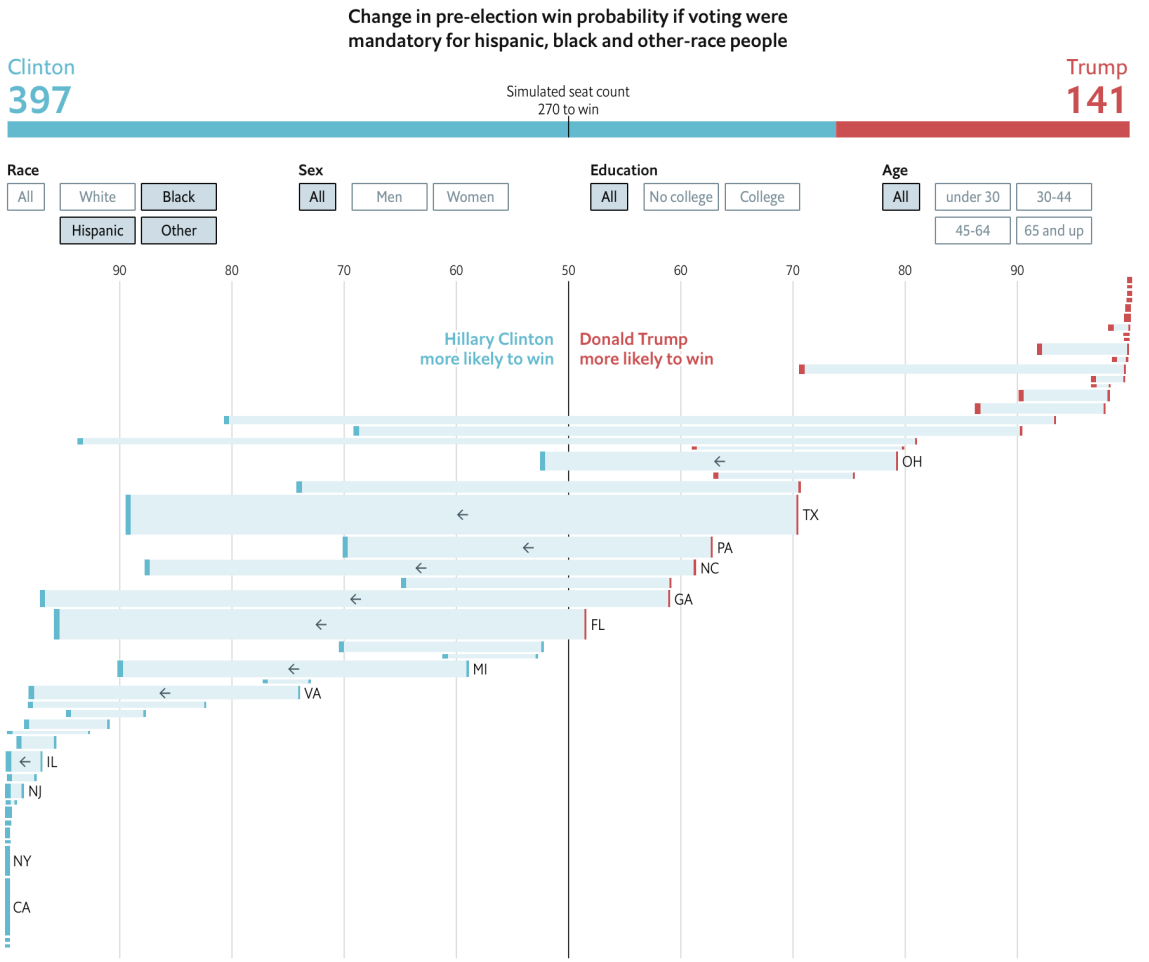
- We can modify the percentage of each group that turns out to vote, then re-predict the election

- What if only all whites vote?
- All non-whites?
- Whites without degrees? Etc.

- Democrats do better when non-whites turnout; Republicans have a vested interest in keeping turnout rates low

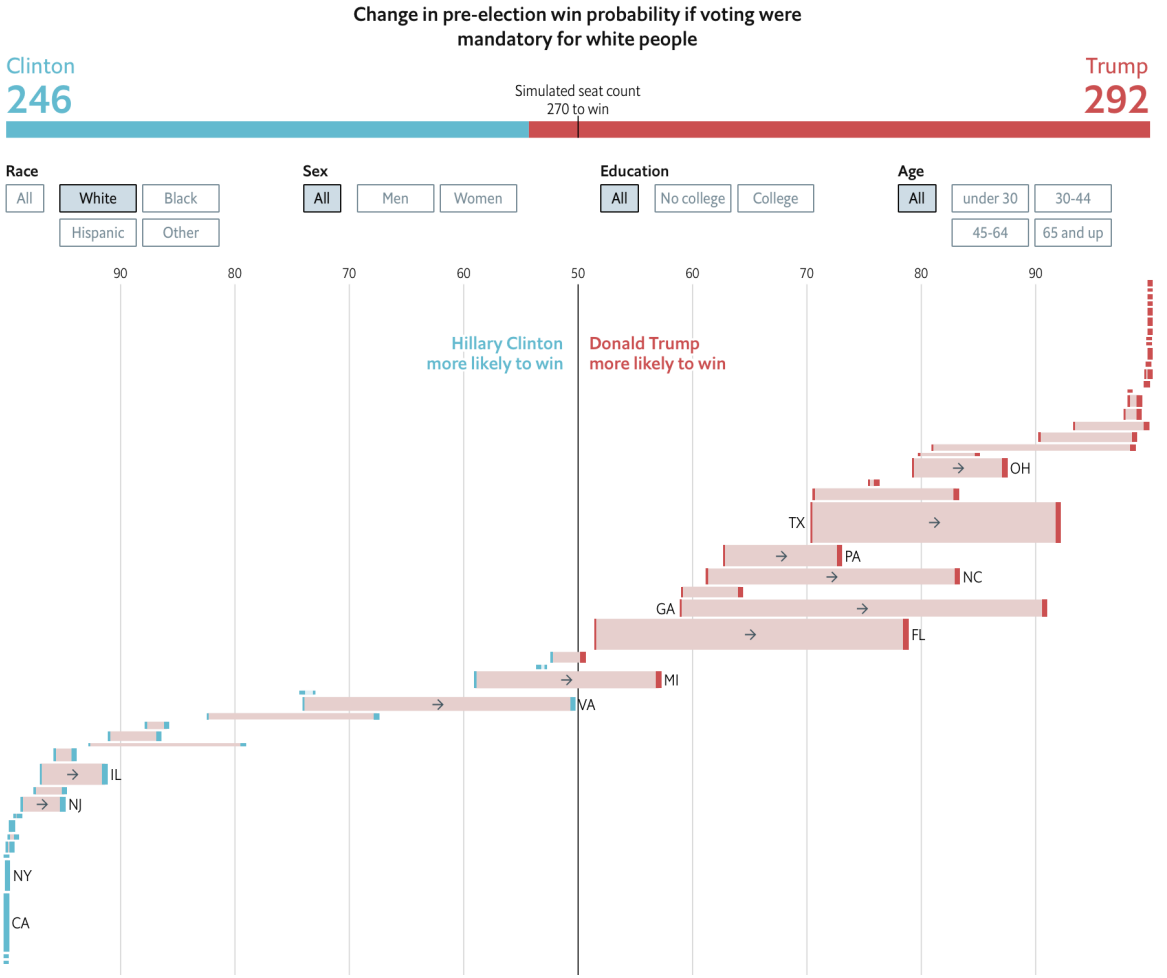
- Especially in southern states with large minority populations
- Their efforts to move voting locations off-campus—TX almost removed the FAC as a precinct after 2018—also have political consequences

Suppression of white votes



*Maine and Nebraska are treated as if they gave all their electoral votes to the state-wide winner

Suppression of non-white votes



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Considerations

What this doesn't tell us:

- That Clinton/Trump/Abrams/etc would have won if certain x, y or z restrictions had been put in place
- Downstream effects (AKA party positions and coalition changes)

The balancing act:

- There are a ton of white, non-college educated voters in the Midwest that tilt national scales if we increase turnout
  - Especially because increases in turnout are not uniform
  - And because of their geographic distribution, small relative increases in white turnout can tip the Electoral College to Republicans (see: 2016)
  - But on the other hand, some organizations are explicitly targeting non-whites and young voters for turnout purposes

Thank you!

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These slides were made with the `xaringan` *package for R from Yihui Xie. They are available online at https://www.thecrosstab.com/slides/2019-09-30-utaustin/*