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Data Visualization
Team Project Problem Statement

U.S. Voter Discrepancy and Disenfranchisement

The foundation of a representative democracy is the vote of its citizens. The government can only truly claim to represent the people when all citizens are able to exercise their right to vote. Certainly, some individuals may make a personal choice not to vote, but this too is an expression of their right. However, obstacles may arise which discourage an individual from voting. These obstacles may be intentional, such as laws or regulations meant to exclude, or they could simply be unintended consequences based on practices or norms thought to be fair. Regardless the result is voter suppression and it undermines the integrity and validity of our elections and government.

According to research, while young people, poor people and Hispanics are often singled out for low voting rates, there are millions of other non-voters in every demographic group. In fact, the majority of people who didn't vote in 2012 presidential election were white, middle-income and middle-aged. Among voters with little education, African-Americans are 1.7 times more likely to vote than whites. Even when statistics are adjusted for income and education, there are large gaps among rates for whites, blacks and Hispanics in the United States. There are also group dynamics that influence voting rates across racial and ethnic lines. Black voters, particularly women, have the highest turnout rates over all.

Several other reasons play an important role in this regard. Voter identification laws disproportionately affect non-white and Democratic voters in large parts of the USA. In 2016, 6.1 million people of voting age were made ineligible to vote by felon voting laws. The people affected by these laws are minorities. The African-American voting rights in the United States also does not have a glorious history, particularly in the south. According to The Sentencing Project, in all but two US states incarcerated felons, those on parole or probation, or those post-incarceration cannot vote. The process to re-apply for voting rights is tedious and opaque in some states. Thus, laws prohibiting felons from voting has a disproportionate impact on African-Americans as they are incarcerated at higher rates than whites.

In our project we will be exploring the potential impacts of these various policies and conditions on voter turnout and outcomes during the 2016 US Presidential election. Using county level

demographics and voting data combined with state level policies and practices, we will explore how these factors interact. Our goal in this exploration is to understand what affects voter turnout or suppression and how these factors can impact the results of a close election. We will then share our exploration through sound data visualization.

Sources of information for this project that we have gathered so far include:
1. 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Data
   https://www.kaggle.com/stevepalley/2016uspresidentialvotebycounty/data
   a. This dataset contains the total number of votes each candidate received in each county across the country, there are over 18,000 rows.
2. 2016 Demographics Data from the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau, built out from their fact finder dataset. The data we downloaded consists of over 3000 counties with about 50 variables covered by these three categories:
   a. Ethnicity - African American, Asian, Native American, Hispanic, White, Pacific Islander, Other
   b. Labor - Income, Unemployment, form of transportation to work by percentage of population, type of work split into 5 categories by percentage of population, poverty rate
   c. Education - percentage of population to attain various levels of education, percentage of population classified as disabled
3. Information from the National Conference of State Legislatures on vote by mail, early voting, voter ID laws, and automatic voter registration for each state.
4. Poll times by state.
5. Information from The Sentencing Project on felony disenfranchisement laws and impacted populations by state.

The general outline of this team project moving forward will be as follows:

By May 12th, we will integrate and merge the data we've collected. Pulling together the the multiple demographics datasets with the election data. This will most likely be done in python and well documented to be reproducible by others.

By May 26th, we will have the first version of our data product. This initial version will contain at least three interesting findings of the voter discrepancies and disenfranchisement surrounding the 2016 presidential election. Again this will be well documented with the steps needed to wrangle the data and produce the visualization.

By June 9th, we will showcase, to the class, the improvements we've made to our data product.

Finally, by June 12th, we will upload our revised version of our project in a reproducible file along with a short video describing our key findings.