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Math 23c

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A one-page document that discusses ethical issues raised by conclusions reached from analysis of the data.

For our project, we worked with data collected by the American National Election Survey, which conducts huge surveys before and after federal elections. We used their 2016 data.

As with all analysis of political data, what can be accomplished from the knowledge gained from the survey can be extremely problematic. Generally, it can allow people who would not have otherwise won elected office to take office and do bad things. It can incentivize politicians to lie about their beliefs because of their insights from the data.

Specifically, our analysis of voters’ beliefs about whether Obama is a Muslim raised some concerns. We found that over 40% of Republican voters and even 14% of Democratic voters (with a view on the topic) agreed that Obama is probably a Muslim. Politicians may be incentivized to cater to these beliefs, regardless of whether or not the candidate believes that Obama is a Muslim. Furthermore, this statement can be harmful to our political discourse, misleading, and encourage hatred toward particular groups.

More broadly, our ability to model a Trump vote based on totally apolitical data could create a politics based not on policy or helping the country but on specific cultural issues with little relevance to the actual task of governing. We found that there was a significant correlation between not voting for Trump and watching Modern Family. You might imagine candidates trying to use pop-culture to sway otherwise apathetic voters to support causes they do not really support.