

Assignment 1: Geodemographics and the US Presidential Election

Due Date: Thursday, October 20th by 11:59pm

Deliverable: Submit a single word document or PDF containing your responses on the course canvas site (short answer responses for questions A-I and a 1-2 page response for question 5 below)

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand where and how to procure demographic data
2. Become aware of demographic and political patterns in the United States
3. Learn to interpret demographic information in order to better understand real world events
4. Employ census data to answer a geodemographic question

Description:

Auguste Comte (1798-1857), a French philosopher, made the controversial claim that “demography is destiny.” Since then, demographers have been arguing the issue, with political elections being a key battleground for such debates.

FiveThirtyEight is a website, founded by Nate Silver, that examines politics, economics, and sports using statistical analysis to predict and understand outcomes. FiveThirtyEight has been covering the 2016 election and has built some interesting tools using geodemographic information to predict the election’s outcome. The site does a good job of breaking down what demographic groups they think are most relevant to the upcoming election and how shifts within particular demographics can affect the overall election.

The US Census is one of the most important sources of large-scale demographic information in the United States. A significant portion of geodemographic research in the United States relies heavily on census data. While I don’t know for sure, I would be highly surprised if FiveThirtyEight did not rely on census data for some of the information it inputs into its election models.

In this assignment you will be asked to engage with the statistical geodemographic tools and information presented on FiveThirtyEight.com and using data from the US census, conduct your own predictions about the outcome of the 2016 presidential race in a ‘battleground’ county.

Ohio is a quintessential swing state in national elections. Swing states, also known as battleground states or purple states, are states where neither democrat nor republican candidates have an overwhelming advantage. According to Politico.com, Stark County, OH, is one of the

top 25 counties to watch this election season. In the 2012 presidential election, 50% of voters voted for Barak Obama and 49% voted for Mitt Romney.

You will be asked to examine the geodemographic makeup of Stark County, OH. Using what you learned from FiveThirtyEight.com and census information about the county, your job will be to predict the outcome of the 2016 presidential race in that county. You will be submitting your prediction, backed up by geodemographic data, prior to the election and we will, as a class, see whose predictions were accurate once the final results are in.

Directions:

1. Read the short explanation of FiveThirtyEight's election projection tool at <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-demographics-will-shape-the-2016-election/>. Please watch the short film clip at the top of the article where FiveThirtyEight staff explain how to use "the 2016 Swing-O-Matic."
2. Play around with the tools and examine the graphics at <http://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2016-swing-the-election/>.
 - A. Which demographic groups tend to vote democrat in all 50 states? [.5 pt.]
 - B. Amongst non-college-educated white voters, Washington, DC stands out as an outlier. Why might Washington, DC's non-college-educated white population look different from that of the fifty states? Use the information on the page to justify your response. [1 pt.]
 - C. Donald Trump's campaign strategy seems to be targeting non-college-educated white voters. If non-college-educated white voter turnout increased by 10% and voters in that demographic group were 5% more likely to vote republican than estimates predict (everything else remaining equal), would that be enough to sway the election in his favor? [.5 pt]

Having examined the election projection model on FiveThirtyEight, let's now apply what we have learned there to what has been predicted to be a swing county, Stark County, OH. To do that, we need to first gather information about Stark County.

3. Visit factfinder.census.gov, select 'Guided Search' and click the 'Get Me Started' button.
4. We are interested in finding information about the people living in Stark County based on the categories established by FiveThirtyEight. Refer to questions D-H below for a reminder of those groups. See if you can find that information in the guided search. Remember that we need information about people, education, and race for Stark County, OH. You likely will not find a single table with all of this information, but you should be able to determine how many people (within a margin of error) fall into each of the five groups in Stark County and record those numbers.

D. College-Educated White Population:_____ [.5 pt.]

E. Non-College-Educated White Population:_____ [.5 pt.]

F. Black Population:_____ [.5 pt.]

G. Hispanic/Latino Population:_____ [.5 pt.]

H. Asian/Other Population:_____ [.5 pt.]

As you determine the population of Stark County, you may have to make some assumptions.

- I. What assumptions did you make in finding/calculating the number of people in each demographic group? [.5 pt.]
5. Based on what you learned looking at FiveThirtyEight and the demographics you just looked up, make a prediction about who is going to win (the popular vote) in Stark County, OH. Write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) response staking a claim and justifying your answer with demographic information about the county and overall trends about the voting patterns of different demographic groups. While there isn't one correct answer, you will be graded on how well you are able to justify your claims with the data. If you use any information not drawn from the census or from FiveThirtyEight.com, please be sure to cite it! [5 pts.]