Making Election Data Great Again:
choosing the right data for the job

Jeremy Darrington
Politics Librarian, Princeton University Library
North Carolina Library Association’s Help! I’m an Accidental Government Information Librarian webinar series
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Introduction

- Federalism and the election data challenge
Absentee ballot usage in the 2008 election

2008 presidential winners by precinct, Cincinnati. From the 2008 Stanford Election Atlas
Introduction

- Federalism and the election data challenge
- Will discuss primarily data on electoral returns, but also data on voter turnout and administration of elections
- See my Elections and Voting Data Guide for more information and links: http://libguides.princeton.edu/elections
Electoral returns overview

- Types of sources that report electoral returns data
  - Official sources (e.g., Boards/Divisions of Elections)
  - Unofficial sources (e.g., news sites using AP data)
  - Voter surveys (e.g., ANES, National Exit Day polls)
- Questions to ask yourself or your patrons
  - What office?
  - What year(s)?
  - Which jurisdictions and at which geographic level?
  - What format?
Election returns: Presidential

- **State-level:**

- **County-level:**
  - [CQ Voting and Elections Collection](CQ Voting and Elections Collection) (1920–; subscription)
  - [Dave Leip’s US Election Atlas](Dave Leip’s US Election Atlas) (1912–; some states back to 1884; subscription)
  - Note: Democrats are represented in red and Republicans in blue. Click on County Data (Table) to cut and paste to a spreadsheet.
  - [OpenElections](OpenElections) (in process; by county and precinct, generally 2000-2014)
  - [U.S. Historical Election Returns Datasets, 1788-1990](U.S. Historical Election Returns Datasets, 1788-1990) (ICPSR series 59; be sure to look at codebooks for most recent years to understand variable naming convention)

- **Congressional district-level:**
  - [Polidata](Polidata) (1992–2012; purchase, but cheap.)
**Election returns: Presidential**

- **Primaries**
  - [CQ Voting and Elections Collection](#) (by state, years vary widely)
  - [Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections](#) (by county 1992–present; also can be purchased as spreadsheets)
  - I’m (slowly) working on a project to produce a data collection of these
Election returns: Congressional

- CQ Voting and Elections Collection
  - Senate general elections (by state 1914–; by county 1968–)
  - House general elections (by Congressional District 1822–)
- House County & Congressional District Level Vote Data
  - House general elections (1992-2014) by state, county, and congressional district. Also includes registration and turnout. Spreadsheets from Dave Leip (purchase)
- U.S. Historical Election Returns Datasets, 1788-1990 (ICPSR)
- Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA)
  - House general elections, 1788–present. Available in Stata, SPSS, and raw data formats. Data come from the ICPSR collection, but subsetting feature makes this more accessible for selecting specific years.
- Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections
  - Senate—general (1990– by county)
**Election returns:**

**Congressional**

- **Primaries**
  - [CQ Voting and Elections Collection](#)
    - Senate primary elections (by state 1920–; popular nonbinding vote for some states 1908-1912)
    - House primaries (by Congressional District 1994–)
  - [U.S. House Primary Election Results (1956-2010)](#)
    - Primary election returns from all Democratic and Republican primaries for the House of Representatives for 1956-2010 at the congressional district level. (Compiled from the America Votes series.) Also includes district-specific variables, as well as data about candidate backgrounds and gender for recent years.
  - [OpenElections](#)
    - House and Senate primaries (in process; by county and precinct, generally 2000-2014)
  - [Southern Primary and General Election Data, 1920-1972](#)
    - Includes Senate primary elections in 11 southern states—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—1920-1972 (by county and state). (ICPSR)
Election returns: Gubernatorial

- CQ Voting and Elections Collection
  - General elections (by state 1824–; by county 1967–)
  - Primaries, by state (some states 1920–)
- U.S. Historical Election Returns Datasets, 1788-1990
  - General elections (1788–1990). (ICPSR)
- OpenElections
  - General and primary elections (in process; by county and precinct, generally 2000-2014)
- Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections
  - Governor—general (1990– by county)
Election returns: Precinct Data

- **Harvard Election Data Archive**
  - Presidential and Congressional elections, various years between 2002-2012. Usually includes gubernatorial elections and sometimes statewide offices as well. Geo-referenced to US Census Voting Tabulation Districts for comparison to Census data at low levels.

  - Presidential and Congressional election returns for all states plus D.C. Many states have an additional file with results matched to racial data from the 2000 Census, and some include returns for various statewide offices or initiatives. Results are in Excel.

  - All elections at and above State House, along with party registration and other variables, in each state for the roughly 170,000 precincts nationwide. Data has also been merged with many demographic and socioeconomic variables from Census data. Data can be downloaded to a variety of formats.

- **OpenElections**
  - Presidential, Congressional, gubernatorial, and state legislative elections, generally 2000–2014. The project is still in process, but they've begun posting raw CSV files with precinct-level data for many states.
Election returns: Statewide

- **State Legislative Election Returns, 1967-2010**
  - State legislative general election and (some) primary returns (1967-2010) at the legislative district level. Variables include district designations, year and month of election, type of district (SMD, multimember, etc.), and candidate attributes such as incumbency status, party and vote total. (ICPSR)

- **Electoral Returns for Statewide Offices in the United States, 1874-1952**
  - Returns for various statewide offices, e.g., lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, etc. (by county)
  - Covers California, Colorado, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (various years, 1874-1952). (ICPSR)

- **A New Nation Votes: American Election Returns, 1787-1825**
  - Searchable collection of early American election returns, including elections for state House and Senate, governor, and more. Narrow by state, year, office, jurisdiction, party, and/or election type. Full datasets for each state can also be downloaded in .tsv format.

- **Our Campaigns: State Office Elections**
  - Site with election results for a variety of statewide offices, including governor, in many cases covering much of the 20th century. Results are in HTML tables. Data are contributed by volunteers and aren't generally sourced.

- **OpenElections**
  - Includes general, primary, and special elections to state legislative office (in process; by county and precinct, generally 2000-2014).
Election returns: Local

- **Local Elections in America Project (LEAP)**
  - Includes elections to a wide variety of county and city offices. Covers jurisdictions across more than 20 states with some temporal coverage back to 1970. LEAP is not fully operational yet, but interested academic users may contact the PIs directly for access to data.

- **California Elections Data Archive (CEDA)**
  - CEDA summarizes candidate and ballot measure results for county, city, community college and school district elections. Data in Excel. 1995–

- **Kentucky State Board of Elections**
  - A nice example of a state board of elections that provides election returns for local elections. Includes precinct level data for city and county offices for recent years (2010–). Data in .csv, .txt, and XML.

- **A New Nation Votes: American Election Returns, 1787–1825**
  - Searchable collection of early American election returns, including elections for state House and Senate, governor, sheriffs, commissioners, city councils, mayors, and much more. Narrow by state, year, office, jurisdiction, party, and election type. Full datasets for each state can also be downloaded.
Voter turnout

Source: http://www.electproject.org/national-1789-present
Voter turnout

Source: http://pudl.princeton.edu/objects/9593tv27m
Voter turnout

- **Census Bureau's Voting and Registration Supplement (VRS) Data**
  - November supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) provides results on reported voting and registration in presidential and congressional elections broken down by various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Does not include reported partisan vote. Detailed tables in Excel or .csv, including historical time series from 1960s-. Data extracts from the VRS can be made through [IPUMS-CPS](#) (1962-).

- **Presidential Voter Registration & Turnout Data, 1992–2014**

- **Voter Turnout Based on Voter Eligible Population (VEP), 1980–**
  - National and state turnout rates for the voting-eligible population (VEP) and voting age population (VAP) for the 1980-2014 November general elections. Also, national turnout rates for presidential and midterm general elections, 1787-2012. Data in Excel format. Compiled by Prof. Michael McDonald of the University of Florida.

- **Voter Turnout in the United States, 1788–2009**
  - Comprehensive turnout statistics for general and primary elections for presidential, congressional, and state gubernatorial races. Extensive tables (.xls or .csv) provide state level figures (including partisan turnout) grouped by office or election type in 20 year chunks. Also includes chronologies of major events and election law changes affecting turnout. (CQ Press ebook; purchase)

- **African American Electorate: A Statistical History**
  - A major work on the electoral history of African American voters from the Colonial era to the present. Includes both essays analyzing data collections and historical context as well as numerous tables (.xls or .csv) on African American voting, registration, turnout, and other measures both nationally and in various states. (CQ Press ebook; purchase)
Electoral Administration

- **Measuring Elections Dataverse**
  - Collection of major datasets useful to studying the administration and performance of U.S. elections, including:
    - Pew Elections Performance Index (EPI) 2008–2014
    - Census Bureau's Voting and Registration Supplement (VRS) to the Current Population Survey 2000–2012

- **Federal Voting Assistance Program Surveys**
  - Post-election surveys with extensive set of questions on voting experience of voters residing outside the US (active duty military and spouses, overseas citizens). Generally 2008–present.

- **Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2005+**
  - Some questions on voting experience

- **National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), 2000-2008**
  - Some questions on voting experience and nominating systems.
Other election resources

- See Elections Guide
  http://libguides.princeton.edu/elections
  for resources on:
  - Election statistics and references
  - Campaigns and campaign organizations
  - Party platforms and documents
  - Coverage (including video) of national nominating conventions and convention ballots
  - Election maps, visualizations, and boundaries
  - Data from prediction markets