

Honors Thesis Proposal

The Effect of Belief of Victory on Third Party Vote Share:

How Evan McMullin Actually Won Utah in 2016

By

Purpose

I participated in the 2016 Utah Colleges Exit Poll and placed a question on the survey asking voters if they would change their vote if they thought a third-party candidate would have a chance to win the state of Utah. Based on preliminary runs of the data, Evan McMullin would have won the state of Utah. My project will be to check my findings, write it up, and submit my findings to political science conferences.

Project Importance

Utah voters were cross pressured by traditional party voting, the perceived morality of the candidates, and third party options in the 2016 election. As it currently stands, this was the closest a third party candidate has come to getting votes in the Electoral College since the 1960's. The fact that Evan McMullin would have won votes in the Electoral College if people had voted their true preference is significant and would shed new light on the validity of Duverger's Law. This will also give hope to third party candidates going forward as they will understand a barrier that people have about voting for them.

Project Overview

I have done a preliminary literature review, primarily reviewing articles on Duverger's Law. Duverger's Law "proposes that the simple-majority single-ballot system favors the two-

party system.”¹ In short, in a “winner take all” system, people will coalesce to either of two parties. A third party does not do well in a winner take all system. One of the theories we discussed in class is that Duverger’s Law works because people don’t believe a third party will have a chance in that election. To prove that, we asked the question “Would you vote for a third-party candidate if you thought that candidate had a chance of winning?” We had a sample size, for that question, of over 7,000, which is large enough that the results will be accurate within a small confidence interval. I have done basic runs of that data. In those initial runs, I found which Trump voters said that they would have voter for a third-party candidate if they believed that candidate would win. I call those Trump voters “weak Trump voters.” I subtracted those votes from Donald Trump and awarded them proportionately, based on which vote percentages they had earned in the election, to Evan McMullin, Gary Johnson, and Jill Stein. I found that just by changing weak Trump voters to a third-party preference, Evan McMullin would have won the state of Utah. I have not yet done the same thing for weak Clinton voters, which will further widen McMullin’s margin of victory. This analysis can be done fairly simply on STATA. I will also look for qualitative statements so that this is both a reflection on Duverger’s Law and a case study.

Qualifications of Thesis Committee

Faculty Advisor, Distinguished Professor David B. Magleby: Professor Magleby started the Exit Poll at BYU in 1982 and has been involved since then and has become recognized as one of the most premier pollsters in the nation. I worked closely with him doing it last year and he has

¹ Riker, William H. “The Two-Party System and Duverger’s Law: An Essay on the History of Political Science,” *The American Political Science Review* 76, no. 4 (December 1982): 753-766

agreed to be my mentor. He is widely published and can guide me along the process of taking a research paper from start to finish.

Faculty Reader, Assistant Professor Joshua Gubler: I am currently in a class taught by Professor Gubler. Professor Gubler sets a high standard for his class and grades our papers as if we were submitting them to the State Department. At the start of this semester he offered to take time out of his schedule to meet with us individually to tutor us on our writing skills. As such, he has agreed to be the reader of my thesis. I look forward to receiving feedback from him and becoming a better writer this year.

Department Honors Coordinator, Assistant Professor John Holbein: Professor Holdbein is the Honors Coordinator for the Political Science Department. While I have never taken a class from him, I have heard good things about him from his students. I look forward to working with him.

Project Timeline

Thesis Proposal Submitted: September 22

Rough Draft of Short Version: October 20

Second Draft of Short Version: November 3

Final Draft of Short Version: November 10

Rough Draft Long Version: December 1

Second Draft Long Version: January 12

Third Draft Long Version: February 2

Thesis Defense Information Form: February 9

Final Draft of Long Version: February 16. I will send it to Print and Mail Services that day, unless that is something the Honors Office does.

Department Deadline for Honors Thesis: March 16

Culminating Experience

There are multiple journals I plan on submitting my article to. They include BYU's Sigma Magazine and the Midwest Political Science Association Conference (MPSA). The MPSA Conference has a specific section for undergraduate posters, which I will apply to. I know that Professor Magleby will help me find other conferences to submit my findings to.