

Growing Voters and Election 2008

Grades: 9-12

Activity Title: Know Your Counties: Recognize Patterns and Predict the Vote

Overview:

There is a famous saying in politics which is that “all politics is local”. In this activity students have the chance to look very closely at the local vote for President. The free online data available shows election results over time and broken down into counties, which makes it possible for students to quickly investigate their own state in detail. These numbers also give students a solid basis of prediction for the Fall vote.

Objectives

- * Students will do online research and data analysis to form their own predictions.
- * Students will become aware that Presidential voting patterns have considerable inertia; once established, they do not change dramatically unless there are significant impacting changes or events.
- * Students will be able to identify significant impacting changes or events that potentially modify voting patterns:
 - immigration, migration
 - extraordinary events (e.g., war, economic challenges, natural disasters, scandals).
- * Students become aware of demographic and economic differences within counties which are correlated to voting patterns.

Activity:

1. Have teams of students choose two counties of the same state to review. Counties should be as different as possible in terms of demographics, economics, and geography. At the website below, click on **Results for an Individual State** (there is a drop-down box) and then click again on the state to bring up results by county <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/datagraph.php?fips=0&year=2004&f=0&off=0&elect=0>
2. Review results from the 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 Presidential elections by county from the website below.

3. Predict % of vote for each of the major candidates in each of the two countries in the 2008 Presidential election.
4. Rank student teams as to accuracy of prediction when November results come in.

Key website:

<http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/datagraph.php?fips=1&year=2004&off=0&elect=0&f=0>

*grateful credit to Bruce Ledgerwood, Cambridge MA, for contributing this activity.