



Our Electorate and Its Changes
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This past summer I worked alongside Professor Dan Hopkins in the political science department on various projects that dealt with understanding the electorate. When applying to PURM, Professor Hopkins' topics of interest attracted me because of its relevance to current events. I had always been curious about the demographics behind contested elections. As it is an election year, this interest only grew further and guided me toward the type of research I conducted this past summer. While the work I completed ranged from collecting and analyzing data, to drafting literature reviews, to assisting on a forthcoming book, the overarching topic involved changes in the electorate.

One part of the project was quantitative and looked at trends in recent elections. During the first couple of weeks Professor Hopkins took on a FiveThirtyEight piece, which looked at the primary election between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders and what that meant for the future of the Democratic Party. In order to support his argument that Sanders represented a left-leaning challenger to Clinton's more centrist appeal, I worked with his research team to acquire county-level data in past elections where a far left-leaning candidate opposed a more centered one, and determined the correlation between that particular race and the 2016 Democratic primary in the same location. Our results indeed showed positive correlation between the sets of candidates.

More qualitative projects, still along the same framework, involved literature reviews. Whether for Professor Hopkins' upcoming book or a different journal article, my two completed literature reviews on European far right populism and reactance theory allowed me to learn how to quickly synthesize information and determine which citations would prove most useful to the topic at hand. Even more importantly, I concluded this summer research experience having gained more insight into two modern topics on human behavior.

Initially, my hope was to acquire a deeper understanding of how the American electorate thinks about its representatives and how this framework would shape the 2016 presidential election. My experience not only encompassed this goal, but also surprised me in having more parallels to my intended concentration that I previously thought. One of my concentrations, decision processes, examines the rationale behind an individual's choice, usually interpreted in a business mindset. However, this summer allowed me to think about my concentration from a new perspective, combining my interest in politics with my studies at Penn.