

Carroll College Exit Polls

INTRODUCTION AND USER GUIDE

Since the fall of 2014, students in a Carroll College class on Elections have been running exit polls on Election Day. We covered the “midterm” elections in November 2014, the general elections in November 2016, and also the May 2017 special election to fill Montana’s lone seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

We use single-page surveys with the questions designed by Carroll students and Dr. Street, who teaches in the Political Science department. We cover polling places across Lewis and Clark County, with the locations sampled at random (but with the likelihood of appearing in the sample designed to be proportional to the share of the county’s electorate that is registered to vote at each polling place). The survey does not cover the people who opt to vote by mail.

Students ask people to participate as the voters leave the polling place. Those who opt to take part take a clipboard so that they can fill out the survey in private if they like. Students are trained to approach the very next person who exits the polling place, once the clipboard is available again, so as to avoid showing any preference for polling certain kinds of voter. We have been delighted that so many people are willing to participate—an average of about 800 each year!

Students then write research papers based on the data collected, allowing them to test out their ideas about why people vote the way they do, and also to apply the statistical tools that they have learned in class to understand real-world data.

If you have any questions about the project, please contact Dr. Alex Street, astreet@carroll.edu