

Winners and Losers: Electoral Rhetoric and Democratic Norms

Research Assistant project summary | University of Texas at Austin, Department of Government | Faculty supervisor: Prof. Bethany L. Albertson | Summer 2024

Role Research Assistant	Public artifact type Sanitized portfolio brief	Raw data status Not publicly disclosed
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Project Context

This faculty research project examined how U.S. political candidates communicate after electoral victory and defeat, with special attention to democratic legitimacy, concession behavior, unity appeals, claims of voter fraud, lawsuits, recounts, and references to democratic norms. My work supported the construction and organization of a candidate-level coding file and related open-ended response materials for broader analysis.

Election coverage	Coding level	Research materials	Response data
2000-2024 U.S. elections, including presidential, Senate, gubernatorial, and House races	Candidate-level records with winner/loser status, party, margin, flip, and incumbent fields	Victory/concession statements, transcript links, news reporting, recount notes, and lawsuit context	Open-ended response data organized internally; raw responses excluded from this public summary

Research Contributions

- Collected and organized candidate outcome information across multiple election types, including candidate names, party, incumbent status, vote share, electoral margins, and winner/loser indicators.
- Located and logged public statements and reporting connected to victory, concession, recount, and litigation contexts.
- Applied qualitative coding indicators for democratic-norm language, including unity appeals, references to democracy, voter-fraud claims, lawsuit potential, recount references, and communication with opposing candidates.
- Helped structure open-ended response materials for future analysis while preserving the distinction between public election-source data and nonpublic research materials.

Skills Demonstrated

Dataset construction	Qualitative coding	Election research	Source verification
Research documentation	Democratic-norm indicators	Spreadsheet data management	Confidentiality judgment

Sanitized Representative Coding Table

The table below shows the type of structure I worked with. Candidate names, source URLs, and raw response text are omitted; values are illustrative of the public-facing coding schema rather than a release of the underlying research dataset.

Year	Office	Role	Party	Margin	Statement coded	Democratic-norm indicators
2020	President	Winner	Dem.	4.5 pp	Victory statement	Unity; democracy; no fraud/lawsuit/recount claim
2020	President	Loser	Rep.	4.5 pp	Post-election materials	Fraud/litigation context tracked separately
2016	President	Loser	Dem.	2.1 pp	Concession statement	Unity; democracy; spoke with opponent
2022	House	Loser	Dem.	<1 pp	Concession / reporting	Unity; recount context; opponent contact
2022	House	Winner	Rep.	<1 pp	Statement / reporting	Recount context; source type noted
2018	Senate	Winner/Loser	Mixed	Varies	Public source review	Statement availability and legal challenge fields coded

Data Dictionary and Methodological Summary

Public-facing explanation of the coding structure and research value of the assistantship contribution.

Data Dictionary

Category	Representative fields	Purpose
Candidate/outcome fields	Year, office, district, candidate, party, incumbent, vote share, margin, winner, flip	Establishes the electoral context for comparing rhetoric by winner/loser status and race competitiveness.
Statement availability	Separate election-night speech; formal declaration of victory or defeat; transcript or reporting source	Documents whether candidates made an analyzable public statement and the type of source supporting the coding decision.
Democratic-norm language	Call for unity; tribute to democracy; communication with opposing candidate	Captures rhetoric that affirms democratic legitimacy, peaceful competition, and cross-partisan recognition.
Contest/dispute indicators	Voter fraud, lawsuit potential, recount, concession timing, recount details	Tracks rhetoric and circumstances that may challenge or complicate acceptance of election outcomes.
Source documentation	Speech links, news links, notes, recount/litigation context	Supports auditability and allows future researchers to verify coding decisions.
Open-ended responses	Participant ID, category indicators, all-text response field	Organized internally for broader research use; raw text is not included in this public artifact.

Why This Project Matters

The project connects election outcomes to public rhetoric about legitimacy, conflict, concession, and democratic norms. For a political science researcher, the value of the work is methodological as much as substantive: the coding file transforms scattered speeches, statements, news reports, and open-ended responses into structured fields that can support systematic analysis.

My contribution was not to claim ownership over the broader research agenda. It was to support the research infrastructure: identifying relevant cases, locating sources, applying consistent coding categories, maintaining a usable dataset, and preserving notes that make later analysis easier to verify.

Disclosure and confidentiality note

The raw workbook, source-level coding decisions, and open-ended response data are not included in this public portfolio artifact because they are part of Prof. Albertson's broader research project. This document summarizes my research responsibilities, methods, and skills without releasing internal research data or participant response text.

Suggested Use on LinkedIn

Add this as a Featured file or attach it to the LinkedIn Project entry. Do not attach the raw spreadsheet unless the faculty supervisor explicitly authorizes public release.