Project 1: Finding and Evaluating Election and Precinct Data (2+ hours)

Goals:
- Gain familiarity with the "data environment" – sources of geospatial and tabular election data
- Learn to differentiate between different terms used for precincts and other political boundaries
- Develop a basic understanding of data quality: what is useful data for us and what's too good to be true

Part I. Reviewing data sources for Hawai'i (2:15-2:35pm)

Zoom logistics: Everyone should **participate**. One person should **drive**, meaning share their screen and navigate between this worksheet and any searches. Another person should **facilitate**, in this case meaning making sure the cohort answers all worksheet questions and identifying sticking points.

MGGG already has data for Hawai'i. However, the state has well-organized data that should give you a sense of how precinct data and election results data are described, so it's a good introduction.

1. Brainstorm: What are some search terms you can use to find precinct data for a state?
   a. to get you started: precinct map, precinct shapefile, voting precincts

2. Use a search engine of your choice to search for Hawai'i precinct data using the terms you brainstormed. You should find the precinct data fairly quickly (it will be in the first few results of most searches!).
   a. What site(s) did you find? Paste a URL.
   b. What organization posts the precinct data (i.e., what office is the website part of)?

3. When was the shapefile last updated?

4. Download and open the shapefile in QGIS! What are precincts called in it? What are some precinct names, and what is some of the other information contained in the file (you don't need to explain everything, but describe a few highlights)?

5. Now, let's turn to election results tabular data. Brainstorm: What are some search terms you can use to find election results data for a state?

6. Where can you find election results?
   a. ...what's the URL?
   b. ...What organization posts election results data (i.e., what office is the website part of)?

7. What election results are available?
    a. What years are available?
    b. What are some of the elections (e.g., presidential)?

8. Reflect: What might some limits to the data quality? For instance, is there information you're interested in that isn't there?
    a. ...for the precinct shapefile?
    b. ...for the election tabular data?

General Hint: if you're having trouble, the one tricky thing is that you're looking for a precinct shapefile and statewide election results, not an individual precinct or results in one place. However, if you find a site that will tell you where a precinct is based on an address, it's a good sign that a precinct file exists.

Part II. Reviewing data sources for ___[your state here]___. (2:35-4:00pm)

> Zoom logistics: Rotate **facilitators** and **drivers** (someone who hasn't done either). Once you've got the hang of it, feel free to turn your cameras and microphones off except to check in with each other.

Assignments:
- *Cohort A: Puerto Rico*
- *Cohort B: Alabama*
- *Cohort C: New York*
- *Cohort D: North Dakota*
- *Cohort E: South Dakota*
- *Cohort EXAMPLE: West Virginia*

MGGG doesn't have data for any of the project states. This means that data for these states will probably be more difficult to find. Precinct boundary files or maps are probably not available at the state level, in which case you'll have to search by county!

1. Return to step one of Part I. Expand your list based on Part I and on any ideas you came up with since. This might seem basic, but coming up with good search terms is a really important part of the process. What else did you come up with?

2. Take notes as you go and fill out this spreadsheet for your state, as follows…

3. State search results: General section. Use the terms from the previous question to search for state-level data.

a. What are precincts called in your state? Or, do they not have a common name (there is often variation, but do a few searches to check)?

b. What is the website for the Department of Elections, and/or the Secretary of State if there is not a Department of Elections?

c. If you have questions about election results and/or precinct data, who might be a good person to contact? If it looks like there's a specific person, note them for column D. If not, put a general contact for the Department of Elections and/or Secretary of State.

d. Does the state have a GIS data commons?

e. If the state does have a GIS data commons, what department/organizational unit is it associated with?

f. If the state does have a GIS data commons, what are some of the datasets it has?

4. State search results: Election results section. Can you find election results by precinct?

a. If so, take a look at the results, then fill out columns E, F, G, and H. For column H, include any additional notes that didn't fit into columns E, F, and G. Also specify if it looks like there are countywide precincts, and whether absentee votes are separated from precincts. This information will be useful in Project 4.

b. If not, specify n/a in the "Election Results" section. We'll reach out to these states using the contact information you specified, as necessary.

5. State search results: Precinct boundaries section. Can you find a trustworthy state precinct shapefile?

a. *Note: this is highly unlikely, so don't spend more than a few minutes searching. We've been in touch with many of these states and know that they don't, but things might have changed since our last contact, and it's good practice!*

b. If so, AMAZING. Fill out columns J-M.

c. If not, put "n/a" in the "Precinct boundaries" section, and then fill out the rest of the "State search results" for your state.

6. Then, copy and paste the "Counties stub" to make another sheet in the same file, renaming the copy to "[Your state] Counties." Begin doing searches by counties. You aren't expected to complete this during this project, but we'll likely return to it later.

a. You can get a list of counties and FIPS codes from Wikipedia, but if you prefer another source, go for it.

b. *Note: the contact information here is super important, as we'll often reach out to folks at the county level to confirm whether the posted files are up to date, etc. If you search and only find one contact, though, it's fine!*

7. Reflect: what is the state's data environment? Fill in the google slides for your state and get ready to present on them. Choose 1-2 people to present for your group.

Part III. Discuss (4:00-4:20)

We will take turns presenting on and comparing data environments for each state.