

# Teachers and Trump

November 5 2018

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Teachers felt immense pressure from school leaders and families to respond in a certain way—or not at all—in their classrooms following the 2016 presidential election, according to new research from Michigan State University.

The study, published in the *American Educational Research Journal*, addresses the widespread but often unspoken idea of political neutrality in the [classroom](#), and how that's not an effective teaching tactic, said lead researcher Alyssa Dunn, assistant professor of [teacher](#) education.

"There were many teachers who said they wanted to talk with students about the [election](#) and related issues but were also afraid of backlash," said Dunn, who conducted the nationwide questionnaire of more than 700 educators.

In the survey, some teachers said they felt election-related topics weren't appropriate in schools or weren't relevant to their subject. Others felt they shouldn't, or couldn't, share their political affiliations or feelings.

But the idea of neutrality, as this research indicates, doesn't always work in schools, because "education is inherently political," Dunn said.

She and her co-researchers argue that by remaining neutral, teachers are enacting the opposite of neutrality by "choosing to maintain the status quo and further marginalizing certain groups."

Dunn and her colleagues, Hannah Carson Baggett of Auburn University

and Beth Sondel of the University of Pittsburgh, say the election is just one example of a renewed call for all teachers to consider the ethics of neutrality in the classroom.

"Midterm voting and the impact of results are an opportunity for them to say, 'I'm not going to be neutral,'" Dunn said. "Knowing what [neutrality](#) means, and how it can be a disservice to students and to themselves, teachers can think about how to adapt their curriculum leading up to and after the midterms and other major events."

Dunn said many educators and administrators believe that because something is happening "outside of [school](#)," it isn't relevant in the classroom. But that mentality is an injustice, she argues, and undermines the fact that the classroom is part of the real world.

In a separate study using the same data, the scholars studied what teachers did—or didn't do—in the days after the election. In that study, teachers reported their students were experiencing political trauma.

**More information:** Alyssa Hadley Dunn et al, "I Don't Want to Come Off as Pushing an Agenda": How Contexts Shaped Teachers' Pedagogy in the Days After the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, *American Educational Research Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.3102/0002831218794892](https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218794892)

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: Teachers and Trump (2018, November 5) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-11-teachers-trump.html>

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