The Book

red state
blue state
rich state
poor state

Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

Andrew Gelman
Should the Democrats move left on economic policy?

Andrew Gelman and Jeff Cai
Columbia University

6 Aug 2008
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Or maybe the Democrats should move to the right?

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Median voter theorem

Where should the Democrats go to win the most votes?
Politicians are optimizers: they should already be at their optimal positions

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Alternative model: Equilibrium

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Extending the models: multiple dimensions

Where will the Democrats win the most votes?

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Should the Democrats Move Left?
Extending the model: measurement error

- Voters don’t know (or disagree) on where the candidates stand
- Something like 30% of voters thought Kerry was more “conservative” than Bush
- It no longer makes sense to be just next to the other party
- Return to median voter picture
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Data from National Election Study: October, 2004

- Scores based on respondent’s placement on 3 economic issues and 3 social issues
  - Perception of George W. Bush
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Placements of Bush, Kerry, and self

Perceptions of Bush

Perceptions of Kerry

Respondents’ positions

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Should the Democrats Move Left?
Predict views of Bush, Kerry

- Modeling perceived candidate issue positions given self-placements
  - Extreme partisans view Kerry as more liberal and view Bush as more conservative
  - Moderates tend to view both candidates as moderates
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Predict vote using perceived ideological distances from Bush, Kerry

- Economic and social distances; for voter $i$:
  - $(\text{dist.}E)_i = (\text{econ}_{i\text{Bush}} - \text{econ}_{i\text{self}})^2 - (\text{econ}_{i\text{Kerry}} - \text{econ}_{i\text{self}})^2$
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Predict your vote preference

Separate logistic regressions for self-declared Democrats, Independents, Republicans

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The question
The theory
The data and model
Results

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Simulate hypothetical shifts

4 kinds of shift:

- Bush could move on economics or on social policy
- Kerry could move on economics or on social policy

For each shift:

- Shift the model of the perceived positions of candidates
- Run the model of votes given distances
- Sum over all the survey respondents
- Compare to unadjusted survey data
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What would happen if . . . ?

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Should the Democrats Move Left?
Conclusions

- Weaknesses of our study
  - Data limitations
  - Extrapolation
- Other election years?
- Summary: candidates' economic policies
- Also evidence from Congress: median voter theorem is not the whole story
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Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

poor state

blue state

red state

rich state
Data from National Election Study: October, 2004

- Economic issues:
  - Government spending
  - Government provide economic environment for job security
  - Defense spending

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Estimated positions of voters, congressmembers

Entire U.S.

Ideological Position

(liberal) (conservative)

Voters

House

Senate

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Should the Democrats Move Left?
Voters in red and blue states

Average ideologies of different groups of voters

Democratic States

Battleground States

Republican States

Average score on social issues

Average score on economic issues
The moderate benefits of moderation in Congress

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