

# Do voters use social network data to make strategic voting decisions?

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# Strategic voting

- What is it?
  - A person who votes strategically votes for her second choice candidate because her first choice candidate has little chance of winning.
- Why is it important?
  - As part of the mechanism for Duverger's Law—if voters vote strategically, two parties should result in first-past-the-post electoral systems.

# Strategic voting, Duverger's Law and Information

- Work by Cox (1993) suggests that strategic voting only leads to Duverger's Law if voters have enough information about the election
  - Specifically, they must know what the relative placement of the candidates is
- Work by Blais and Turgeon (2004) on 1988 Canadian parliamentary election demonstrates that voters don't always have this information

# What kinds of information might voters use?

- Elites (Lago 2008, Merolla 2009)
- Campaign contributions (Felsenthal et al 1988)
- History (Forsythe et al, Lago 2008)

# What about information from the group of people with whom you discuss politics?

- Do people use the information that they gather from political discussants to make strategic decisions about how to vote?

# Social networks and politics

- Many have posited the role that social networks play in providing political information, but people assume that the use of this information is relatively unsophisticated

# 1992 Presidential Elections

- Clinton (43%), Bush (37%), Perot (19%)
- Using the Comparative National Election Project

# Measuring the influence of information

- Two measures used to determine the role of strategic considerations:
  - Perot's distance from contention: how far a candidate is from the second placed candidate
    - The greater Perot's D from C, the worse his strategic position
  - Competitiveness: the difference between the first and second placed candidates
- Took these measurements for both the individual's social network and the state they are a resident of

# Results

Multinomial Logit: Vote choice in 1992 American Presidential Elections  
Base Category: Perot

Perot	versus	versus
	Clinton	Bush
State:		
Distance from Contention	.035	.058*
Competitiveness	.004	-.017
Network:		
Distance from Contention	.017**	.018**
Competitiveness	-.005	-.005
Feeling Therm-Perot	-1.13**	-1.124**
Party ID	-.495	-.996**
Constant	7.343**	7.089**

# Potential Problems

- Data problem:
  - Limited number of surveys with network information
- Causality:
  - Are voters really using the information strategically, or is it pressure, etc?