Who are Swing Voters? *Evidence from a Panel of Ticket Splitting in the 2024 Senate Elections*

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1 Motivation

Motivation

- Ticket splitting is a proxy for swing voter behavior
- 3 to 5 percent of voters split their ticket in congressional races
- Can data-driven campaigns target ticket splitters?

Relevant Literature

- Kim and Zilinsky,"Demographics Continue to Reveal Little About Voting and Partisanship", *Political Behavior*
- Gelman, Goel, Rivers and Rothschild, "The Mythical Swing Voter", *QJPS*
- Vavreck and Sides, *Nationscape*

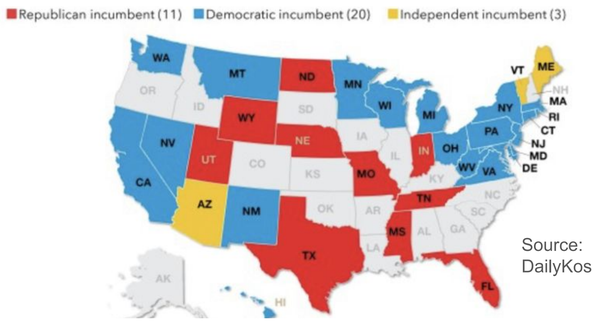
2 Data & Method

Stanford-Arizona-Yale YouGov Panel

- Nine waves from **February to December 2024**
- Respondents who enter the panel at some point: n = **8,776**
- Respondents who answer all 9 waves: n = **2,385**

Outcome

- y = 1 if panelist in November 20, 2024 reports votes for Trump and Democratic Senate candidate, *or* Kamala Harris and Republican Senate candidate
- y = 0 if panelist votes the same party



Source: DailyKos

Predictive Models

Demographics:

- Gender, Age, Education, Race, State, Turnout 2020

Party ID:

- Self reported Party Identification

Favorability:

- $\frac{\text{(Fav. of GOP Senate candidate - Fav. of Dem)}}{\text{(Fav. of Trump - Fav. of Harris)}}$ by $\frac{\text{Senator net favorability}}{\text{President net favorability}}$

3 Who are ticket splitters and what predicts ticket splitting?

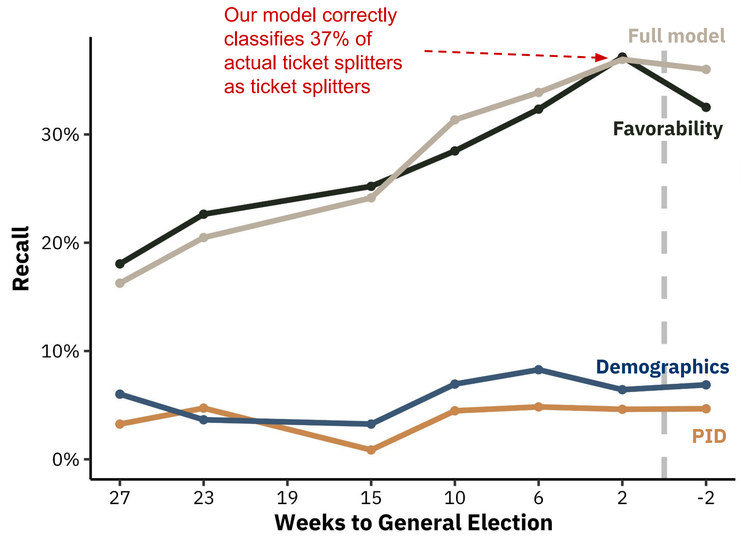
Table 1: Favorability Predicts Ticket Splitting

	Senate Candidates		
President	Favor Republican	Indifferent	Favor Democrat
Favor Trump (R)	**1%** (n = 956)	**9%** (n = 270)	**70%** (n = 27)
Indifferent	**10%** (n = 68)	**19%** (n = 113)	**42%** (n = 36)
Favor Harris (D)	**58%** (n = 12)	**8%** (n = 275)	**1%** (n = 1258)

Data: 2 weeks to General Election

Among voters who favored Trump and voted Democrat, 70% of them later split their ticket

Figure 1: Predictive Model Performance by Wave



- **Demographics** & **PID** remain stable predictors
- **Favorability** gains importance near Election Day.
- **Full model** performs just as good as **Favorability**

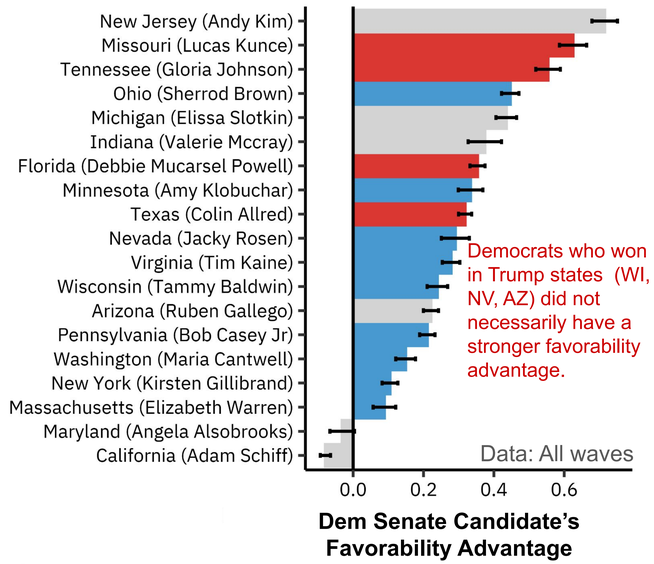
Computation of Recall:

- Sort respondents by predicted ticket splitting score Pr(y = 1)
- Classify the **top 5%** as classified ticket splitters

$$Recall = \frac{True\ Ticket\ Splitters\ Who\ are\ Classified\ as\ Such}{True\ Ticket\ Splitters}$$

4 Incumbency Analysis

Figure 2: Favorability by Incumbent's Party



Democrats who won in Trump states (WI, NV, AZ) did not necessarily have a stronger favorability advantage.

Outcome

- y = average(Fav. of Dem. Senate candidate - Fav. of Harris)
- Favorability Advantage ranges from -4 to 4
- Each state (across all waves) has more than 500 observations

5 Conclusion & Remarks

Conclusion

- As Election Day approaches, **prediction accuracy improves**
- **Differential Favorability** predicts ticket splitting; no other variable comes close
- Candidate **favorability differences** between Senate and presidential races do not explain Democratic success in Trump states

Next Steps

- Measurement error analysis
- Deeper variable importance analysis

Panel Principal Investigators

- Yale: Alan Gerber, Greg Huber
- Stanford: Doug Rivers
- ASU: Kim Fridkin, Patrick Kenney