Forecasting the 2020 US Presidential Elections: A State-Level Forecast Code Book

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Introduction

This work aims to provide a codebook, which will later be used to forecast the 2020 US Presidential Election with a state-level structural model approach. Inspired by the work of Jerôme & Jerôme-Speziari (2016), we stick to a political economy model, with unemployment rates to operationalize economic performance and the Gallup June Poll to measure political popularity. In the following, we will briefly introduce our data and offer a detailed description of each variable.

Data

The dataset contains data on US Presidential elections between 1948 and 2016 at the state-level with one observation per election per state. Data were compiled by the following main sources:

- American Presidency Project (APP), 2020
  - Variables: year, state, state_po, incumbent_candidate, incumbent_party, challenger, incumbent2pv, democrat2pv, PopV_Inc,PopV_Dem
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2020
  - Variables: d_unemployment
- Gallup Presidential Job Approval Center (Gallup), 2020
  - Variables: Gallup_approv_jun
- Own Coding
  - Variables: Cooks_PVI, College, dem

Therefore, our set of data consists of fifteen variables with one value for each election year since 1948. Please note that d_unemployment data were only available since 1980 and that we could not calculate the Cooks_PVI index values for 1948 and 1952 due its calculation procedure.

Variables

The following tables provide a detailed overview of variables which we use in our structural model. The first column refers to the shortened variable, name which can also be found in our .csv data, R scripts etc.. The second column represents a short description for each variable. The third column then provides an exemplary value for each variable, whereas the fourth column presents the source, we retrieved the data.

Variable	Description	Example	Source
year	Year in which the respective Presidential election was held	2012	APP (2020)
state	Name of the US state	*Alaska*	APP (2020)
state_po	Identification code of the state name according to US postal codes	*AL*	APP (2020)
incumbent_party	Party of the incumbent President	*Democrats*	APP (2020)
incumbent_candidate	The candidate of the party of the incumbent President	$Ford, Gerald$	APP (2020)
challenger	The candidate of the largest opposition party, respectively the Democrats or the Repulicans	$Gore, Al$	APP (2020)
Rerunning	Binary variable indicating whether incumbent is running again for presidency	1	Self-Coding based on APP (2020)
incumbent2pv	Two-party vote share of the incumbent party within each state	0.493321998	Self-Calculation based on APP (2020)
$PopV\_Inc$	Total number or percentage of votes cast for the incumbent by voters in the 50 states and Washing-ton, D.C.	0.5232558	APP (2020)
$PopV\_Dem$	Total number or percentage of votes cast for the democratic candidate by voters in the 50 states and Washington, D.C.	0.5232558	APP (2020)
democrat2pv	Two-party vote share of the Democrats within each state	0.59223301	APP (2020)

Table 1: Variable Descriptions I

Variable	Description	Example	Source
Cooks_PVI	Measurement of how strongly a United States congressional district or state leans toward the Democratic or Republican Party, compared to the nation as a whole with negative values pointing to a republican dominated state and vice versa	0.059141896	APP (2020)
d_unemployment	2-month net change in the seasonally adjusted statewide unemployment rate in June (end of the 2nd quarter) in the election year	−0.7	BSL (2020)
gallup_approv_jun	Percentage of respondents, who approve a particular (political) person or program, scaled between 0 and 100, with an value of 0 indicating no approval and an value of 100 complete approval	52	Gallup (2020)
College	Total number of Electoral College Seats within each state	34	Self-Coding based on APP (2020)

Table 2: Variable Descriptions II

References

American Presidency Project (2020): People Listing. The American Presidency Project.

- `https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/presidents`; last checked on 15. August 2020

Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020): Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

- `https://www.bls.gov/lau/data.htm`; last checked on 04. September 2020

Gallup Presidential Job Approval Center (2020)

- `https://news.gallup.com/interactives/185273/presidential-job-approval-center.aspx`; last checked on 04. September 2020

Jerôme, B., Jerôme-Speziari, V. (2016). State-Level Forecasts for the 2016 US Presidential Elections: Political Economy Model Predicts Hillary Clinton Victory. *PS: Political Science Politics*, 49(4), 680-686.