

Political Campaign Donations and their Effect on Election Outcome

*Money can't buy you love, but can it
buy you a seat in Congress?*

Context

- *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Committee*
(2010)

Research Question

- To what extent does PAC expenditure influence the outcome of a federal election?

Data

- Center for Responsive Politics Campaign Finance data tables
- 2012 federal election cycle
- Prediction variable: 'win'
- Features of interest: 'distid_run', 'amount', 'pacs_unique', 'pacs_total'

Data

| | Win | No_pacs_bin | Incumbent | Amount | Pac_id_unique | Pac_id_total |
|---------------|------|-------------|-----------|--------|---------------|--------------|
| Win | 1.00 | 0.02 | 0.73 | 0.09 | 0.70 | 0.26 |
| No_pacs_bin | 0.02 | 1.00 | 0.05 | -0.00 | -0.00 | -0.00 |
| incumbent | 0.73 | 0.05 | 1.00 | 0.09 | 0.76 | 0.27 |
| amount | 0.09 | -0.00 | 0.09 | 1.00 | 0.20 | 0.92 |
| Pac_id_unqiue | 0.70 | -0.00 | 0.76 | 0.20 | 1.00 | 0.44 |
| Pac_id_total | 0.26 | -0.00 | 0.27 | 0.92 | 0.44 | 1.00 |

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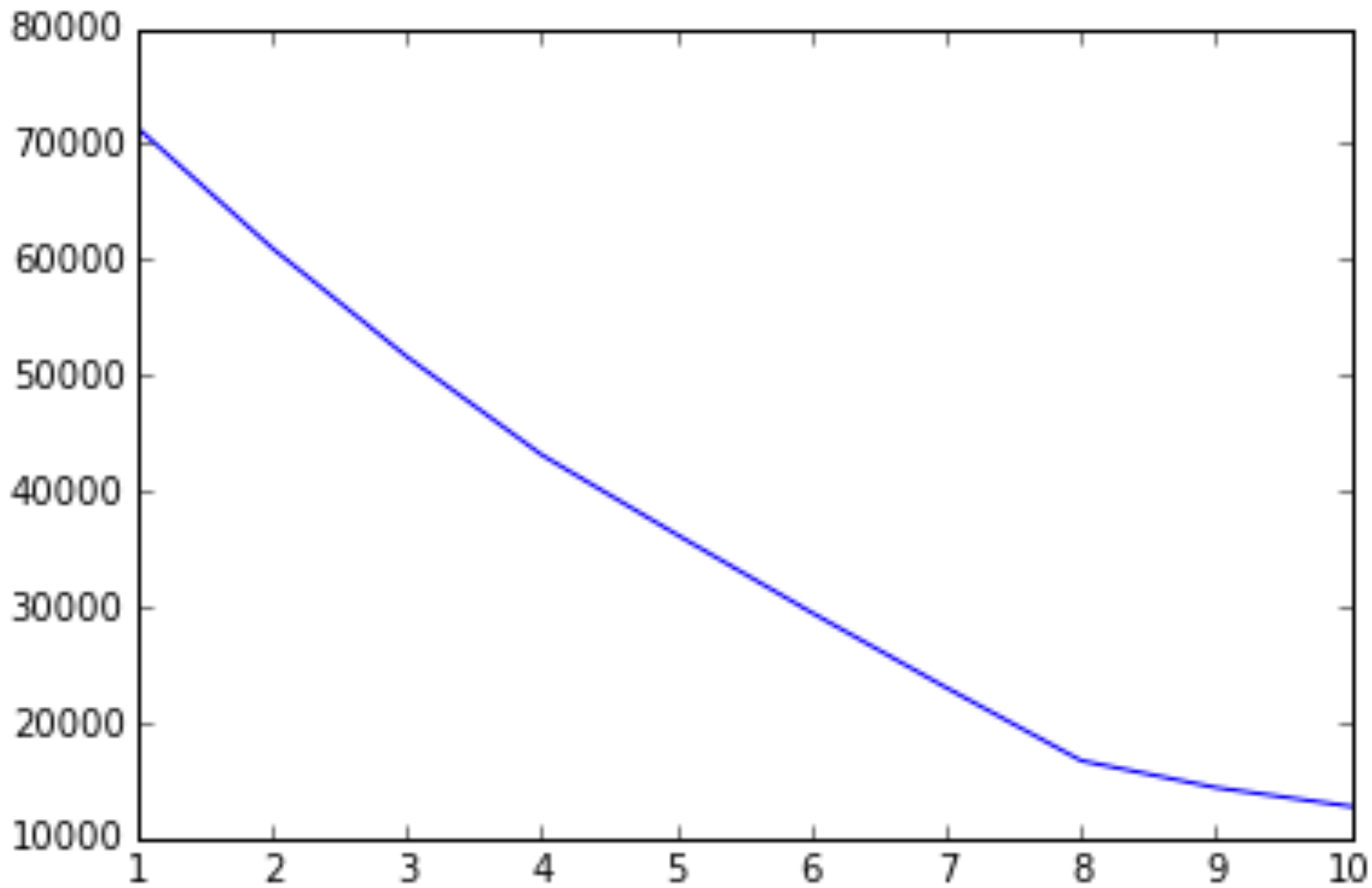
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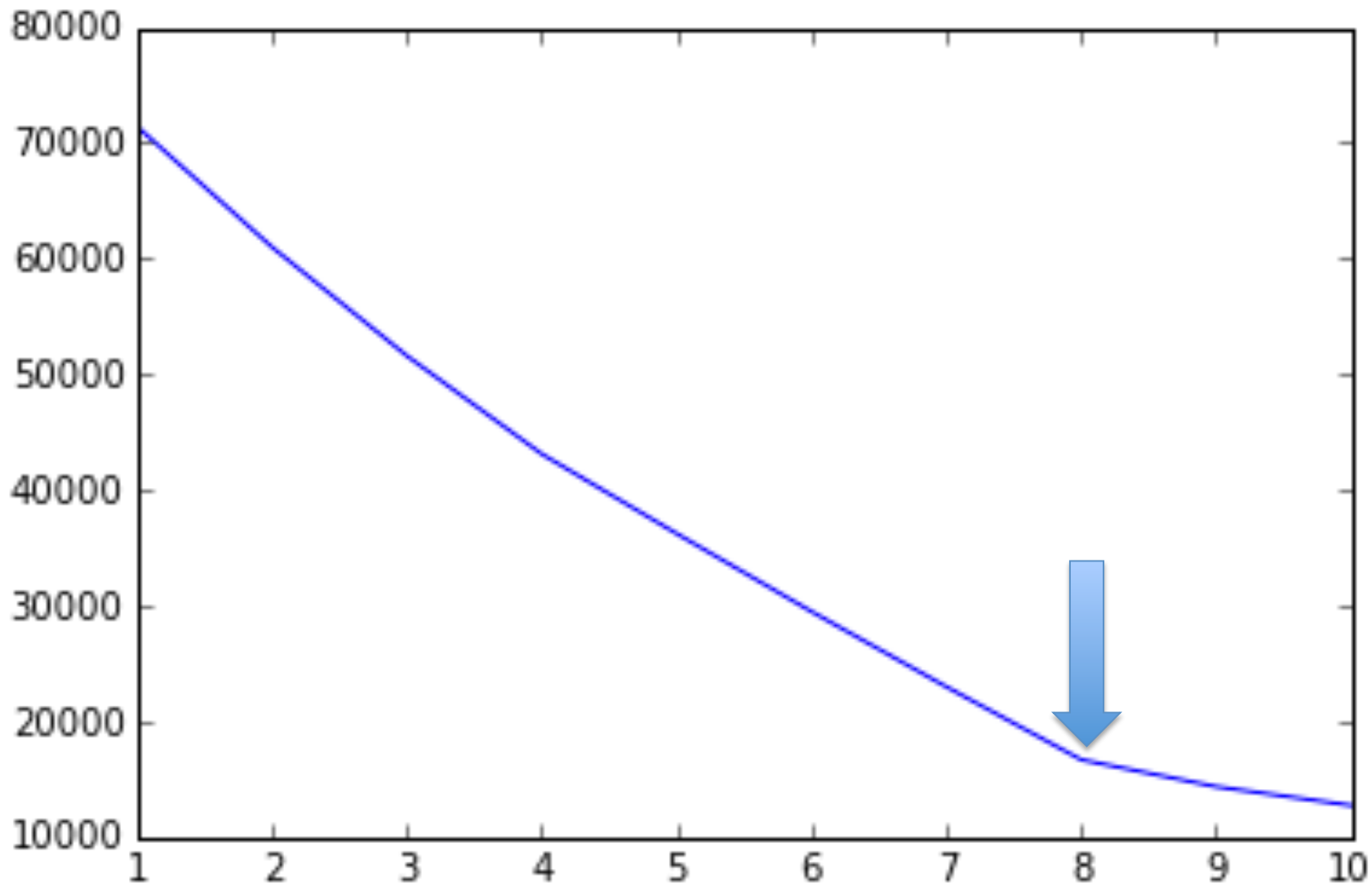
Analysis

- Best model run – Random Forest with clusters
- Prediction precision – 84%
- Most important features:
 1. Pac_id_unique
 2. Pac_id_total
 3. Amount
 4. Incumbent[T1]

Clusters



Clusters



Clusters

1. Incumbent Congressmen and Senators (575)
2. Romney vs. Obama (2)
3. “Deez Nuts” (65)

Synthesis

- Unique PACs donating

Synthesis

- Unique PACs donating

3x

Synthesis

- Incumbency

Synthesis

- Incumbency

2.5x

Synthesis

- Not as influential:
 - Amount
 - Party affiliation

Result

- Can money really buy you an election victory?

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- Can money really buy you an election victory?
- Answer: Money is important, but it is more important that you have lots of friends!