Closeness Counts: Increasing Precision and Reducing Errors in Mass Election Predictions

Online Appendix

1. SURVEY DETAILS

1.1. *Recruitment*

Our module was embedded in an online survey administered to a national sample of approximately 2,700 U.S. citizens from 17 to 31 October 2012. Subjects were recruited across the United States through Survey Sampling International (SSI) based on a constructed target population that matched the census population of U.S. adults (age 18 and above) on age, education, income, and geography. Subjects were linked to an online survey platform (Qualtrics) where our module was hosted.

1.2. *Demographic profile of respondents*

Table A1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of our respondents. We include benchmark means for each variable from the 2012 ANES and the 2010 Census. A comparison of our sample against these benchmarks shows our sample is reasonably representative of the population.

Table A1: Demographic profile of survey respondents.

	SSI Sample					Benchmark	
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	**Mean**	Source
Republican	**0.37**	0.48	0	1	2,717	**0.34**	ANES
Democrat	**0.47**	0.5	0	1	2,717	**0.53**	ANES
Independent	**0.16**	0.37	0	1	2,717	**0.13**	ANES
Political knowledge	**0.53**	0.32	0	1	2,698	**0.55**	ANES
Some college	**0.31**	0.46	0	1	2,717	**0.28**	Census
Bachelors	**0.19**	0.39	0	1	2,717	**0.18**	Census
Post-graduate	**0.18**	0.38	0	1	2,717	**0.09**	Census
Income	**55,000**	25,000	1	19	2,634	**53,000**	Census
Turnout	**0.81**	0.39	0	1	2,716	**0.80**	ANES
Age	**47.52**	16.37	18	90	2,715	**47.84**	Census
Female	**0.60**	0.49	0	1	2,716	**0.52**	Census
Black	**0.09**	0.28	0	1	2,717	**0.12**	Census
Other race	**0.11**	0.31	0	1	2,717	**0.08**	Census

Notes: The ANES included three questions about factual knowledge of politics that were not the same as the ones we use in our survey; knowledge for both surveys is the proportion of correct answers. Census statistics are calculated for ages 18 and older only. For income, we report the median and mean absolute deviation from our sample.

Prediction measures

- Winner prediction

    - Thinking about the upcoming presidential election, do you think Mitt Romney or Barack Obama will win the election?

        * Mitt Romney definitely will be president
        * Mitt Romney probably will be president
        * Mitt Romney and Barack Obama have an equal chance of being president
        * Barack Obama probably will be president
        * Barack Obama definitely will be president

- Voteshare prediction

    - Now we have some questions about your expectations regarding the outcome of the upcoming presidential election. Different political observers and polling companies have predicted different outcomes for the 2012 U.S. presidential election.

Thinking about only the votes cast for the two major parties, what percentage of the vote do you think Barack Obama and Mitt Romney will each receive in the **NATIONAL VOTE**?

Barack Obama	0
Mitt Romney	0
Total	0

Partisanship

- Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a...

    - Democrat
    - Republican
    - Independent
    - Other Party

- [if chose Democrat] Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat?

  – Strong

  – Not very strong

- [if chose Republican] Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?

  – Strong

  – Not very strong

- [if chose Independent or Other Party] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

  – Closer to the Republican Party

  – Closer to the Democratic Party

  – Neither

Vote Intention An unrelated module on our survey sought to test the effect of ballot design on vote choice. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. The first condition asked respondents to vote for one of four candidates. In the second condition, respondents were asked to rank the candidates from most to least preferred. In the third condition, respondents were asked to cast a vote either or against a particular candidate. We include screenshots of each condition, as well as how we code an Obama vote in each, below.

- Control

  PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

  Vote for the candidates that you want as President and Vice President.

  Choose One Option Only:

  ☐ Barack Obama / Joe Biden – DEMOCRATIC PARTY
  ☐ Mitt Romney / Paul Ryan – REPUBLICAN PARTY
  ☐ Gary Johnson / Jim Gray – LIBERTARIAN PARTY
  ☐ Jill Stein / Cheri Honkala – GREEN PARTY

  – Obama vote = 1 if Obama selected, 0 if Romney selected. All other responses coded missing on this variable.

- Alternative ballot A

PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Rank the candidates from **"1"** (**FIRST CHOICE**) to **"4"** (**LAST CHOICE**)

Write **"1"** next to your **FIRST CHOICE** for President and Vice President
Write **"2"** next to your **SECOND CHOICE**
Write **"3"** next to your **THIRD CHOICE**
Write **"4"** next to your **LAST CHOICE**

- Barack Obama / Joe Biden – DEMOCRATIC PARTY
- Mitt Romney / Paul Ryan – REPUBLICAN PARTY
- Gary Johnson / Jim Gray – LIBERTARIAN PARTY
- Jill Stein / Cheri Honkala – GREEN PARTY

– Obama vote = 1 if first choice is Obama, 0 if first choice is Romney. All other responses coded missing on this variable.

- Alternative ballot B

PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Vote **FOR** the candidates that you want as President and Vice President
OR
Vote **AGAINST** the candidates that you do **NOT** want as President and Vice President

Choose One Option Only:

- ☐ VOTE FOR Barack Obama / Joe Biden – DEMOCRATIC PARTY
- ☐ VOTE FOR Mitt Romney / Paul Ryan – REPUBLICAN PARTY
- ☐ VOTE FOR Gary Johnson / Jim Gray – LIBERTARIAN PARTY
- ☐ VOTE FOR Jill Stein / Cheri Honkala – GREEN PARTY
- ☐ VOTE AGAINST Barack Obama / Joe Biden – DEMOCRATIC PARTY
- ☐ VOTE AGAINST Mitt Romney / Paul Ryan – REPUBLICAN PARTY
- ☐ VOTE AGAINST Gary Johnson / Jim Gray – LIBERTARIAN PARTY
- ☐ VOTE AGAINST Jill Stein / Cheri Honkala – GREEN PARTY

– Obama vote = 1 if positive vote for Obama, 0 if positive vote for Romney. All other responses coded missing on this variable.

Political knowledge

- In the next part of this study, you will be asked several factual questions about politics and public policy. Many people don't know the answers to these questions, but it is helpful for us if you answer, even if you're not sure what the correct answer is. We encourage you to take a guess on every questio . Please just give your best guess. Do not look up the answers in a book or on the internet.

  – The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counts a person as unemployed if they are not employed at any job and are looking for work. By this definition, what percentage of Americans was unemployed in September of 2012?

    * Around 4 percent
    * Around 6 percent

* Around 8 percent
* Around 15 percent
* Around 20 percent

– Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to Federal Courts?

* The President
* Congress
* The Supreme Court

– Do you know what job or political office is currently held by Timothy Geither? Is it:

* House Republican Leader
* Treasury Secretary
* Senate Majority Leader
* Chairman of the Federal Reserve
* President Obama's Press Secretary

– Do you know what job or political office is currently held by John Boehner? Is it:

* Speaker of the House
* Treasury Secretary
* Senate Majority Leader
* Justice of The Supreme Court
* Governor of New Mexico

Economic perceptions

- Thinking about the economy in the country as a whole, over the next year do you expect the nation's economy to get better, stay the same, or get worse?

  – Get much better
  – Get better
  – Stay about the same
  – Get worse
  – Get much worse

Demographics

- Citizenship

  – What is your country of citizenship?

    * United States

* Others (please specify in the box below)

- Turnout

  - Do you intend to vote in the November election?

    * No
    * Not sure
    * Yes
    * I already voted, absentee or early

- Gender

  - What is your gender?

    * Male
    * Female

- Age

  - What year were you born?

    * [respondent selects one from 1900-2000]

- Education

  - What is the highest level of education you have completed?

    * No formal education
    * 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th grade
    * 5th or 6th grade
    * 7th or 8th grade
    * 9th grade
    * 10th grade
    * 11th grade
    * 12th grade, but no diploma
    * High school diploma or the equivalent (GED)
    * Some college, no degree
    * Associate degree
    * Bachelors degree
    * Masters degree
    * Professional or Doctorate degree

- Income

  - What is your household's annual income?

* Less than $5,000
* $5,000 to $7,499
* $7,500 to $9,999
* $10,000 to $12,499
* $12,500 to $14,999
* $15,000 to $19,999
* $20,000 to $24,999
* $25,000 to $29,999
* $30,000 to $34,999
* $35,000 to $39,999
* $40,000 to $49,999
* $50,000 to $59,999
* $60,000 to $74,999
* $75,000 to $84,999
* $85,000 to $99,999
* $100,000 to $124,999
* $125,000 to $149,999
* $150,000 to $174,999
* $175,000 or more
* Prefer not to say

- State

  – In what state do you currently reside?

    * [respondent selects one of the 50 states]

2. REPLICATION OF TABLES 1 AND 2, INCLUDING EXTREME PREDICTIONS

Table A2: Voteshare predictions yield different inferences about partisan bias and information.

	Winner prediction		Voteshare prediction	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Democrat	52.26	49.66	18.36	16.55
	(3.67)	(3.78)	(1.27)	(1.27)
Political knowledge	-8.64	-8.26	1.02	3.08
	(4.09)	(4.24)	(1.12)	(1.17)
Dem X knowledge	17.98	19.84	-9.88	-8.99
	(5.45)	(5.45)	(1.65)	(1.61)
Some college		3.12		-1.13
		(2.21)		(0.77)
Bachelors		0.70		-1.61
		(2.62)		(0.77)
Post-graduate		1.16		-1.92
		(2.77)		(0.79)
Income		3.80		-1.76
		(4.07)		(1.37)
Turnout		-1.88		-0.12
		(3.03)		(0.91)
Age		-8.21		-5.11
		(4.02)		(1.20)
Female		-2.09		-0.22
		(1.82)		(0.55)
Black		10.61		7.13
		(2.91)		(1.12)
Other race		2.10		2.34
		(2.97)		(0.96)
Constant	24.36	26.68	45.60	48.69
	(2.80)	(4.62)	(0.91)	(1.50)
Observations	2,083	2,083	2,083	2,083

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.

Table A3: Voteshare predictions are better able to detect election effects.

	Baseline		X winner prediction		X voteshare prediction	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Republican	-0.71	-0.69	-0.82	-0.78	-1.60	-1.66
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.31)	(0.31)
Prediction			-0.01	0.02	0.00	-0.12
			(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.30)	(0.32)
Rep X prediction			0.54	0.52	1.93	2.08
			(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.61)	(0.60)
Political knowledge		-0.19		-0.18		-0.20
		(0.09)		(0.08)		(0.08)
Some college		0.06		0.05		0.07
		(0.07)		(0.07)		(0.07)
Bachelors		0.05		0.04		0.04
		(0.08)		(0.07)		(0.07)
Post-graduate		0.25		0.25		0.25
		(0.08)		(0.07)		(0.07)
Income		-0.02		-0.02		-0.02
		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Turnout		-0.02		-0.00		-0.01
		(0.08)		(0.08)		(0.08)
Age		-0.00		-0.00		-0.00
		(0.00)		(0.00)		(0.00)
Female		0.00		0.01		0.01
		(0.05)		(0.05)		(0.05)
Black		-0.07		-0.07		-0.06
		(0.08)		(0.08)		(0.09)
Other race		0.03		0.03		0.02
		(0.10)		(0.09)		(0.09)
Constant	0.00	0.39	0.01	0.36	0.00	0.46
	(0.03)	(0.14)	(0.08)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.23)
Observations	1,202	1,202	1,202	1,202	1,202	1,202

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses.