Strategic Voting in Plurality Rule Elections

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Abstract:

Some have suggested that strategic voting should be most likely when a preferred candidate trails behind two narrowly separated competitors. Others have proposed a bi-modality hypothesis: either desertion of all but two candidates, or an exact tie for second place. Our formal analysis of the incentive to vote strategically in three-candidate elections allows for imperfect information about the candidates’ popularities. We predict multi-candidate support and that, after controlling for the distance from contention of a preferred candidate, strategic voting should be more muted in close-race districts. We examine voters in England from recent General Elections. Our predictions find support in the data, while the informal argument and the bi-modality hypothesis do not. A calibration exercise suggests that the precision of information available to voters is relatively low.