

Review of Steven J. Rosenstone, *Forecasting Presidential Elections*
(published by Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1983))

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Rosenstone develops a causal model to forecast political voting. The model seems reasonable; for example, it includes information about party, key issues, the economy, war, incumbency, region, and trends over time. Standard econometric methods are then used to determine how much weight should be given to each factor. The conditions are then forecasted for each of the 50 states, and the weights are applied to give state-by-state forecasts. Aggregation across states provides forecasts of both the popular and electoral votes for presidential elections.

Drawing upon the prior literature, the author provides over 230 references. His methodology appears to be sound, and the resulting model is impressive. The model is more complete than the econometric models that were used in the 1970's to forecast voting. I suspect that econometric models will, in time, become the standard forecasting method for elections. Rosenstone's work does much to aid the movement to such models. He may do for politics what Lawrence Klein did for economics.

If this econometric model can forecast well, it is advantageous compared with judgment because it can examine alternative political strategies in a consistent way. In fact, the model did an adequate forecasting job.

Rosenstone's approach to forecast validation was impressive. Ex ante and ex post forecasts were made of the 1976 and 1980 U.S. Presidential elections for each state as well as for the national total. Rosenstone's model did about as well as the early polls and experts' forecasts (journalists' opinions). It was reassuring that the ex post forecasts (known values for causal variables) were more accurate than the ex ante forecasts.

The two elections used in this book do not provide a sufficiently larger sample. It did help that he looked at results from the 50 states, but these were not independent observations. For rapid development of econometric models, it will be useful to expand the validation by backcasting U.S. elections, examining U.S. elections other than that for the president, and examining elections in other countries.

Rosenstone continues to evaluate his model. It was used for the 1984 Reagan-Mondale election [Rosenstone (1985)]. For example, on July 19, 1984, his model forecasted that Mondale would get 41.1% of the popular vote and win only four states. (The actual results were 40.8% and 2 states.)

Although the numerous footnotes detracted somewhat, the book is well organized and well written, with the details relegated to appendices. It is a satisfying combination: the book has something to say, and it says it clearly.

References

Rosenstone, Steven J., (1985), "Explaining the 1984 Presidential election," *The Brookings Review*, 3, 25-32.

¹ This review was written while the author was a Visiting Erksine Fellow at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.