



DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

To: Future Now Fund

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Subject: Candidate Performance in 2018

What We Want to Know:

In the 2018 midterm elections, Future Now Fund (FNF) endorsed 62 candidates across six legislative chambers in five states. In addition, Data for Progress's Give Smart campaign endorsed 30 candidates of their own. Following the election, FNF provided Data for Progress with election results and district political dynamics for every state legislative race in 21 states, with an indicator for whether FNF and/or Give Smart made an endorsement in the race. As a preliminary analysis, we are interested in knowing whether endorsed candidates performed measurably better than raw district fundamentals would otherwise predict.

What We Did:

For contested races, we ran a hierarchical logistic regression modeling the probability that the Democratic candidate would win the seat based on whether the seat is currently held by a Republican and Hillary Clinton's vote share in the district with random intercepts for each state/chamber pair. This controls for the possibility that there are dynamics specific to a given legislative chamber that make it easier or more difficult for Democrats to win relative to national political dynamics. Next, we add binary indicators for whether candidates were endorsed by FNF or Give Smart, respectively.

What We Found:

As expected, this fundamentals-only model captures the vast majority of variation in Democratic performance, correctly classifying 87 percent of the districts. When we add the endorsement variables, classification accuracy improves very slightly, to 88 percent. This small change makes sense, as there were relatively few endorsements compared to the total number of candidates meaning that relatively little information was being added to the model.

However, exponentiating the coefficients from our model (in the table below) shows that -- after controlling for state, chamber, partisan control, and Hillary Clinton's vote share -- FNF and Give Smart candidates outperformed district fundamentals. FNF candidates were 28 percent more likely to win than non-FNF candidates with similar district fundamentals, while Give Smart candidates were 35 percent more likely to secure their seats.

In addition, we found that Obama 2012 vote share ($r^2=.61$) was a very similar predictor of vote share as Clinton 2016 vote share ($r^2=.64$)

Relative risk ratio for a Democratic win associated with...

Republican Control	sd(Clinton Share)	FNF Endorse	Give Smart Endorse
0.58	1.21	1.28	1.34

Qualifications and Next Steps

To be clear, these results cannot speak to whether FNF and/or Give Smart had a causal effect on the outcome of these races. It could be the case that the organizations selected above-replacement caliber candidates to endorse, which could produce the same associations we observe here. It could also be the case that these endorsements overlap with targeting patterns from other organizations. Further analysis is needed, and is planned, in order to provide leverage as to the extent to which these relationships may be causal. These additional analyses include matching endorsed candidates to similar districts in states in which FNF and Give Smart did not endorse, as well as using endorsing organizations' criteria to examine differences in performance between candidates who barely did and did not make the cut for receiving endorsements.