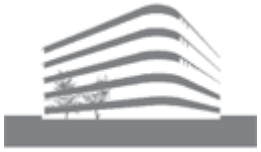

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A NON-STRATEGIC EXPLANATION OF SECOND PREFERENCE VOTING. THE CASE OF SPAIN

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that the strategic explanation of voting for the second preference is untenable. Voters cannot vote for the second preference to avoid wasting their votes because a single vote cannot affect the final outcome. After reviewing the theoretical inconsistencies and empirical shortcomings of the literature of strategic voting, I develop a non-instrumental explanation based on a suggestion by Brennan and Lomasky (1993). Second-preference voting is modeled in terms of loyalty to parties and responsibility (voters may consider it irresponsible to vote for a marginal party). This alternative explanation, unlike the strategic theory, accounts for the fact that some potential second-preference voters vote for their first preference. I test the validity of both theories for the case of Spanish general and European elections in the period 1986-2000.

1. Introduction[1]

Some people do not vote according to their first preference. They vote for less preferred parties or candidates. I will use the expression "second preference voting" to refer to this behavior. When it comes to the explanation of such behavior, the dominant theory is that of strategic voting. This theory assumes that voters who vote for the second preference do so in order to avoid wasting their votes. If voters expect that their most preferred party or candidate is going to lose, the vote for the first preference is thrown away. Thus, they may vote for a second preference with the aim of preventing the victory of the third preference. What is crucial in the strategic explanation of second preference voting is that voters act instrumentally, choosing the party or candidate that really has a chance of winning.

I do not deny the existence of second preference voting. Actually, different ways of analyzing it in multi-member districts are proposed in this article. However, I argue that the strategic explanation of second preference voting is untenable, both for theoretical and for empirical reasons.

With regard to the theoretical discussion, I agree with those who hold that the idea of strategic voting is internally inconsistent. If voters are sophisticated enough to vote for a second political preference to avoid wasting their votes, then they should understand that their votes have a negligible influence on the final outcome, but if voters understand this argument, the only rational action is abstention. There cannot be such a thing as rational strategic voting. If some voters do not vote for their first preference, two things may occur: either that these voters are irrational or that their behavior has to be explained in different terms to those of the 'thrown away vote'. On the other hand, the theory is unable to explain why some potential strategic voters vote nevertheless for the first preference.

The empirical analysis of strategic voting is largely disconnected from the theoretical literature. Most articles in this area try to calculate the amount of strategic voting from a

[1] I am grateful for comments and help to Belén Barreiro, Henar Criado and Esther Ruiz.

purely inductive point of view, without attempting to determine whether this amount of strategic voting counts as a confirmation or a refutation of the theory. Although it may be interesting to know the exact number of strategic voters in an election, what we really need is a procedure to test the theory.

A new explanation of second preference voting is developed and tested in this paper. Following a suggestion of Brennan and Lomasky (1993), I present a broad argument that explains why, among potential second preference voters, some vote for the first preference and some for the second. Basically, I model the voting choice as a function of loyalty and responsibility. Responsibility has to do with the idea of voters facing the real choices of their society. If some voters are loyal to a small third party with no chance of winning or of obtaining representatives in the district, they may consider that a vote for this marginal party entails some sort of self-indulgence or irresponsible behavior. When responsibility concerns are stronger than loyalty to the party, the individual votes for the second preference. On the other hand, when loyalty overrides the irresponsibility of supporting a hopeless party, the voter still votes for the first preference.

After the theoretical discussion on strategic voting and the presentation of the alternative explanation of second preference voting, I turn to empirical issues. The case of Spain, a relatively unexplored instance of a multi-member electoral system, is chosen (the only existing study is Gunther 1989). The statistical analysis has two parts. In the first one I demonstrate that, contrary to what Gunther claims, there is no concluding evidence of strategic voting in Spain. In the Spanish party system there are two dominant parties, the socialdemocratic party (PSOE) and the conservative one (PP), and a small leftist coalition, *Izquierda Unida* (IU), formed by the Communist Party together with some tiny, irrelevant parties. IU has an average vote share of around 5% of the electorate. There are also some other small parties in Spain, but they have nationalist claims and their presence is restricted to certain districts only. I focus on the third party, IU. It only obtains seats in districts of magnitude over five. In the smaller districts, then, there are incentives for strategic voting.

Spain, as a member of the European Union, also has elections to the European Parliament. The interesting feature of these elections is that the whole country becomes a

single national district with magnitude over 60. Thus, it is possible to compare the behavior of those supporting IU in the general and the European elections. If the hypothesis of strategic voting is true, some variation in the pattern of voting for IU should be observed depending on the type of election. But both an aggregate analysis with the results of IU in nine elections and a survey analysis show that second preference voting does not work differently in the general and the European elections.

Once the strategic explanation is rejected, I turn to the second part of the empirical analysis. The non-instrumental explanation of second preference voting is tested. Through a logit analysis of four post-election surveys it is shown how the dilemma of voting for the first or the second preference can be accounted for in terms of both loyalty or closeness to the third party, and an index of marginality of this party in each electoral district. The main advantage of this analysis, apart from its simplicity, is that it makes understandable both possible decisions, voting for the first or for the second preference.

2. The inconsistency of the strategic interpretation of second preference voting.

Strategic voting has been defined in several ways, but all of them depend on the assumption of the 'thrown away vote'. Suppose there are three parties, X, Y and Z, and some voters rank them X > Y > Z. If X has a very small chance of winning, voters may vote for Y in order to avoid the victory of Z. Thus, these voters vote for their second-most preferred party since, knowing that X is likely to lose, they prefer a victory of Y over Z. The voters behave 'strategically' because they do not want to throw away their vote.

I basically agree with the point made long ago by Meehl (1977) that a vote cannot be thrown away if it has a negligible influence on the final outcome. There is something really odd with the idea of strategic voting: it imposes an instrumental interpretation to the act of voting, but it is well known that if voting is an instrumental action, then turnout should be zero. In a large electorate, it does not pay to vote if we just consider instrumental reasons.

How can the idea of strategic voting be reconciled with the turnout paradox? It is difficult to find an answer to this question in the literature on strategic voting. Most authors who analyze strategic voting simply do not care about the fact that turnout cannot be explained in instrumental terms. Two illustrations will serve to make the point. Cox explicitly recognizes that an essential assumption to derive results on strategic voting is that "all voters are short-term instrumentally rational." (1997: 77) But if voters are instrumental, why do they vote? Cox never takes the issue seriously. In fact, his hypothesis on Duvergerian and non-Duvergerian equilibria in single-member districts seems to rest on a denial of the problem. In a Duvergerian equilibrium, only two parties obtain votes. Those who prefer the third party, knowing that it is going to lose, vote strategically. This is only possible when there is some big enough difference between the second and the third parties, making clear that the third party has no chance of winning. Given this huge difference, a vote for the third party is a thrown away vote. In a non-Duvergerian equilibrium, more than two parties obtain votes. Now, there are no clear differences in the chances the different candidates have and therefore the voter cannot cast a strategic vote. From here it follows that the larger the electorate, the more likely that differences in support among candidates will be great. When the electorate becomes bigger, it is more likely that the distance between candidates corresponds to a great number of votes. Thus, the larger the electorate, the more likely that voters will be able to vote strategically, since the distances between candidates will be greater on average. But it should be remembered that the larger the electorate, the less importance a single vote has for the final outcome, and therefore the less incentive to vote strategically. Cox overlooks this side of the argument, which contradicts his own argument about the likelihood of Duvergerian and non-Duvergerian equilibria. It is not very sensible to conclude that the larger the size of the electorate, the greater the incentives to behave instrumentally.

This kind of ignorance of the paradox of turnout is also present in other theories of strategic voting. Ordeshook and Zeng entirely dissociate the decision of voting from the decision of which party to vote for. They explicitly state that "a *rational voter* evaluates the decision to vote as a consumption act and the decision for whom to vote as an investment act." (1997: 178) As is well known, the main alternative to the instrumental understanding of voting is the expressive one. People vote not in order to make more likely the victory of their favorite party or candidate, but to express their political preferences and to fulfill what they

consider their political obligations. From this point of view, voting would be no different from cheering your favorite team in the stadium (Aldrich 1997). Ferejohn and Fiorina (1974) made an analogy between the opposition instrumental/expressive and the opposition investment/consumption. A natural solution to the turnout paradox is to understand voting in terms of a consumption act, which is done for its own sake (see, e.g., Schuessler 2000).

What is not acceptable in the previous quote of Ordeshook and Zeng is the overlapping of instrumentality (investment) and expressiveness (consumption). We are forced to take voting as a case of consumption because otherwise the prediction is zero turnout. But then instrumentality cannot be rescued for the decision of choosing a party or candidate. How can party selection be instrumental if the decision to vote cannot be answered in instrumental terms? Here, again, the possibility of strategic voting rests on silencing the turnout paradox. If an instrumental reasoning leads to absurd conclusions with regard to electoral participation, so it does with regard to strategic voting.

Beyond this general inconsistency within the theory, two other fundamental criticisms can be raised. First, the null hypothesis is never clearly specified. It is impossible to know how much strategic voting has to be observed to confirm the theory. Second, the theory has nothing to say about those who are potential strategic voters but vote for the first preference. Are they irrational? Do we have to conclude that there are two kinds of voters, those who follow strategic considerations and those who do not?

The problem with the null hypothesis is common to many other rational choice explanations, as Green and Shapiro (1994) have shown extensively. In the case of the theory of strategic voting, this problem is compounded by another ambiguity pointed out by these authors, the confusion between equilibrium levels and comparative statics. The explanation of the equilibrium outcome of some social phenomenon does not have to coincide with the explanation of marginal variations in this equilibrium level. It is possible to explain variations in the turnout rate in terms of variation in weather conditions, but this cannot explain the turnout rate (i.e. the equilibrium level). Thus, changes in the weather might explain why some year turnout is three points lower than it was four years before, but it cannot explain why in any case more than, say, half of the electorate voted.

This confusion is responsible for the lack of specificity about what would count as a confirmation of the hypothesis on strategic voting. This is most evident in the empirical studies on strategic voting, where scholars rarely try to go beyond the calculus of the proportion of the electorate that vote strategically (Alvarez and Nagler 2000; Kriesi 1998; Hsei, Niou and Paolino 1997; Evans and Heath 1993; Niemi, Whitten and Franklin 1992; Abramson et al. 1992; Johnston and Pattie 1991; Galbraith and Rae 1989; Gunther 1989; for an overview of empirical evidence, see Cox 1997). To know that 5% of the electorate voted strategically is of little interest if this finding cannot be used as evidence for or against the theory[2]. One partial exception is the article by Blais and Nadeu (1996): in their analysis of the 1988 Canadian election, they calculate the amount of strategic voting taking into consideration the number of potential strategic voters. This is an important first step to compare the actual rate of strategic voting with the rate that the theory would predict. Nonetheless, even if this objection were overcome, there would be still a second concern about the theory. Blais and Nadeu find that of those who were potential strategic voters (20% of the sample), 68% voted for the first preference, 28% for the second, and 6 % for the third. Assuming, for the sake of he argument, that these data confirm the theory, the problem is that the behavior of the 68% who voted for the first preference remains entirely outside the theory. Would someone hold that 68% of the Canadian potential strategic electorate is irrational? Why did they not vote on strategic grounds? The theory offers little guidance for understanding first preference voting among those who are potential strategic voters.

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[2] Sometimes the testing methodology is really peculiar. Apart from all their statistical sophistication, Abramson et al. (1992) state that 80% of the people behave in ways consistent with rational choice theory (p.60 and again p.67). To reach this conclusion, they include among the confirming evidence straightforward voting, that is, voting for the first preference when the first preference is the most viable. Obviously enough, straightforward voting is irrelevant for testing the hypothesis of strategic voting. As for the hypothesis itself, they openly admit that taken literally, in terms of affecting the outcome with a single vote, the theory does not work. They add, however, that "like all theories, the calculus of voting is a simplification of reality that seeks to capture the most salient features of actual situations. Many voters may see some candidates as having real chances of winning and others as likely losers, and they may weigh these perceptions against the relative attractiveness of the candidates." (p.56) This is a really odd way of interpreting rational choice theory. Precise predictions based on instrumental calculations are transformed into commonsensical platitudes that are almost impossible to refute. In economics this kind of latitude in the interpretation and testing of formal models is unthinkable.

3. An alternative explanation of second preference voting.

The main alternative that is contemplated in the literature on strategic voting is that politicians and not voters are the actors who behave in a strategic way (Fieldhouse, Pattie and Johnston 1996; Blais and Carty 1991; Johnston and Pattie 1991). Second preference voting would be induced by politicians, the idea being that the party spends fewer resources in hopeless districts. Here, voters are "mobilized" (Rosenstone and Hanssen 1993) by the efforts parties make during the campaigns. If a third party does not try to mobilize voters in districts where it does not obtain representatives, we will observe a great amount of second preference voting.

The mobilization hypothesis is quite reasonable, but it shifts the focus from voters to politicians. Even if there is some truth in it, it is still necessary to understand the mechanisms at the individual level that move some voters to vote for the first preference and others to vote for the second preference. Instead of trying to compare the mobilization and the strategic hypotheses, I want to pursue a non-instrumental explanation of second preference voting centered on the voters themselves[3]. In a book that has gone almost unnoticed in the literature on electoral behavior, Brennan and Lomasky (1993: 192-3) suggest an interpretation of second preference voting in expressive terms. Their point is that in a three-candidate contest, voting for the candidate with no chances may be taken as a sort of frivolous abdication of the real choice between the only two candidates with a serious chance of winning. The person who votes for the hopeless candidate is refusing to take sides in the real dilemma faced by society. The voter votes for the second preference because now first preference voting is seen as a form of self-indulgence or irresponsibility[4]. First preference voting is rejected insofar as

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[3] Some authors have referred to expressive tactical voting (Franklin, Niemi and Whitten 1994) to describe "all instances in which individuals might vote not so as to alter the winner in their constituency but instead to send some message or signal, to their own party or to some other." (p.550) The kind of explanation provided in this article, even if not instrumental, is unrelated to this signal interpretation of second preference voting. I agree with these authors, nonetheless, that quite often second preference voting cannot be accounted for in terms of the 'wasted voted' argument.

[4] Bernard Williams has analyzed the idea of self-indulgence in depth (1981: Ch.3). Although the accusation of self-indulgent behavior is almost always made from a utilitarian perspective, Williams admits that it is not necessarily so (1971: 102). Thus, the introduction of the idea of self-indulgence in the calculus of the voter does not require that the voter adopt a utilitarian standpoint.

it entails voting for a purely marginal candidate with no role to play in the political future of the country.

The problem with this explanation is that, as in the case of the strategic theory, it is difficult to understand why a vast majority of potential second preference voters vote for their first preference. What we usually observe is that in this group of potential second preference voters, some vote for the second preference and some for the first preference. A general explanation of this pattern is needed.

My proposal is rather simple: the utility function of voting for a given party has two arguments, the utility derived from being loyal to the party, and the utility of behaving responsibly. The degree of loyalty is the final product of the sum of all reasons, either instrumental or expressive, either materialistic or idealistic, that move the person to consider herself close to the party. Values, interests or identification may be behind loyalty. Responsibility, on the other hand, produces positive utility when the voter's first preference is one of the big parties with a chance of winning, or when the voter's first preference is a small party with no chance of winning and the voter votes for the second preference (if the voter votes for the small party, the utility of behaving irresponsibly is negative). In the case of voters with first preferences for big parties, both quantities, the value of loyalty and the value of responsibility, are positive. In the case of voters with first preferences for small parties, there is the positive value of being loyal and the negative value of behaving irresponsibly.

The voter has to assess whether the total utility of voting for the first preference is higher than the total utility of voting for the second preference. If the loss of not being loyal by voting for the second preference is smaller than the gain of behaving responsibly by voting for it, the voter will vote for the second preference. If the contrary is the case, the voter will vote for the first preference. This simple setting allows for the possibility of observing variation in the kind of voting (first or second preference) we observe. Unlike the theory of strategic voting, this hypothesis accounts for the existence of variation in the behavior of voters who are ideologically closer to a small party. Some will vote for the first preference and some for the second preference, depending on loyalty and responsibility.

Obviously, this general explanation is not incompatible with mobilization theory. Mobilization clearly affects both loyalty and responsibility. The more successful the mobilization, the greater the value attached to being loyal to the party that the voter considers closer to her political interests and values. Likewise, the more successful big parties are in showing the irresponsibility of voting for marginal options, the greater the cost of behaving irresponsibly.

There is a rather simple way of comparing the traditional theory of strategic voting with the explanation that I am offering here. Let us take the three main parties of the Spanish party system analyzed in the next section, IU, PSOE and PP. The preferences of our reference voter are IU > PSOE > PP. According to the theory of strategic voting, the expected utility of voting for the first preference is (Cain 1978):

$$EU(IU) = p_{IU}B_{IU} + p_{PSOE}B_{PSOE} + (1 - p_{IU} - p_{PSOE})B_{PP} - C$$

where the *p*s represent the probability that each party wins given that the voter votes for IU and the *B*s stand for the benefits the voter obtains in case one of the three parties wins the elections. *C*, as usual, is the cost of voting.

The expected utility of voting for the second preference is:

$$EU(PSOE) = p^*_{IU}B_{IU} + p^*_{PSOE}B_{PSOE} + (1 - p^*_{IU} - p^*_{PSOE})B_{PP} - C$$

where the *p**s represent the probability of each party winning given that the voter votes for the second preference.

The voter votes strategically when $EU(PSOE) > EU(IU)$, that is, when $EU(IU) - EU(PSOE) < 0$. Simple algebra shows that the condition for strategic voting is as follows:

$$(p_{IU} - p^*_{IU})(B_{IU} - B_{PP}) + (p_{PSOE} - p^*_{PSOE})(B_{PSOE} - B_{PP}) < 0$$

The problem with this formula is that a single vote only alters infinitesimally the probabilities of winning by the different parties, so that the quantities $p_{IU} - p^*_{IU}$ and $p_{PSOE} -$

p^*_{PSOE} are going to be nearly zero. This means that differences in the benefits provided by the victory of each party should not introduce any perceptible change in the probability of voting for the first or the second preference. As I have explained in the first section, the presence of probabilities makes the theory of strategic voting inconsistent.

According to the alternative explanation I am offering here, the conditional probabilities that a party wins given our voter's vote do not intervene in the calculus. Let I_i stand for the value of acting irresponsibly by voting for party *i*. To simplify as much as possible, let us consider that if the voter votes for a big party, the value of acting irresponsibly is zero (the voter is responsible). If L_i represents the degree of loyalty, then the utilities of voting for the first and second preferences for a voter closer to IU than to PSOE are:

$$U(IU) = L_{IU} - I_{IU}$$
$$U(PSOE) = L_{PSOE}$$

The voter votes for the first preference when $U(IU) > U(PSOE)$, that is, when

$$L_{IU} - L_{PSOE} > I_{IU}$$

In words: there is first preference voting for a small party when the difference in loyalty between the first and second preference is greater than the cost of behaving irresponsibly. Second preference voting will occur when

$$I_{IU} > L_{IU} - L_{PSOE}$$

Now, the cost of behaving irresponsibly is greater than the reduction in the utility of loyalty and therefore it pays to vote for the second preference.

The calculus becomes very simple. What has to be determined is whether the loyalty difference is more important than the responsibility factor. When it is, the voter votes for the first preference. When it is not, the voter votes for the second preference. Hence, two easy

results follow: the greater the difference $L_{IU} - L_{PSOE}$, the more likely that someone ideologically closer to IU than to PSOE will end up voting for IU. And the less irresponsibility the voter feels in voting for IU, the more likely that the voter will vote for it.

Next, I try to compare the performance of the two explanations of second preference voting, the strategic and the non strategic, using the data of the Spanish case. First I show that there is no evidence of strategic voting, and then the hypotheses on loyalty and responsibility are tested.

4. Strategic voting in Spain?

In his study of the Spanish electoral system, Gunther (1989) found ample evidence of voters' strategic behavior. He concluded that Spanish voters were able "to determine the threshold levels separating provinces in which their preferred party had a fair chance of receiving parliamentary representation from those in which their votes would have been 'wasted'" (1989: 842). This point was later incorporated by Cox (1997) and plays an important role in his chapter on strategic voting in multimember districts.

Before Cox (1997), strategic voting in multimember districts was not well understood, except for the notable exception of Reed (1990). Cox has extended previous research on strategic voting in single-member districts to multi-member districts (and to single-member dual-ballot systems). Without providing a formal analysis, he derives two interesting results. First, that there is an upper bound to the number of lists that are viable: concretely, in a district with magnitude M, only M + 1 electoral lists are viable. Second, and more interestingly for the present argument, that in districts with $M \leq 5$ there should be strategic voting, whereas in districts with $M > 5$ incentives for strategic behavior disappear, since the calculations that have to be carried out in order to anticipate the allocation of seats become extremely cumbersome. First preference voting, then, should be the rule in big districts. The evidence found by Gunther is presented as an important confirmation of these theoretical results.

The Spanish case provides a very appropriate setting for testing these conjectures. Firstly, there is wide variation in district magnitude in general elections (going from M=1 to M=34). And secondly, there is a small third party, IU, that usually has a vote share between 3% and 10% of the electorate at the national level (at the district level, IU has never obtained in general elections over 16% of the electorate in the period under study). Voters who have IU as their first preference in small districts are then the potential strategic voters.

Moreover, the Spanish case opens the possibility of implementing a new test of the strategic voting hypothesis that, as far as I know, has not been tried before[5]. Spain, as a member of the European Union since 1986, has European elections. In these elections, the whole country is a single district of M=60 in 1987 and 1989 and M=64 in 1994 and 1999. Thus, voters living in a district M≤5 have incentives for voting strategically in general elections, but in European elections these incentives disappear completely and therefore they should vote for their first preference. We have not only variation in the magnitude of districts within an election, but more importantly we can observe whether there are differences in behavior when the same people vote in districts with such a difference in magnitude. If no change is detected, the strategic interpretation of second preference voting is dubious, since strategic voting does not make sense in a district with magnitude over 60.

Some comments are necessary on the validity of this testing procedure. European elections are second-order elections (Franklin and Van der Eijk 1996). That means that what is at stake is not so important as in national elections. Therefore, apart from the issue of magnitude, there are fewer incentives for strategic voting. The stakes being lower, the voter may decide to vote for the first preference. Given this difference with general elections, why select European elections and not local elections or elections to the regional governments, where similar arguments could apply?

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[5] A similar research design (Kriesi 1998) has been employed to study the Swiss case, where elections to the National Council are run in a proportional system and elections to the Council of States (the high chamber) in a plurality one. However, the party system varies greatly across cantons. In the Spanish case everything is kept constant except magnitude and the importance of elections, but the effect of the importance of elections, as I argue next, may induce an overestimation of strategic voting, making the refutation of the strategic theory more difficult.

First, the party system is almost identical in general and European elections, whereas in local and regional government elections, nationalist or regionalist parties become more important. Actually, the existence of dual voting in Spain (voting for different parties in elections for the national and the regional governments) proves that voters perceive important differences between these two types of elections. Second, the influence of personal traits of candidates may be more important in local elections, altering somewhat the strategic reasons for the voting choice, whereas this influence is usually minor in general and European elections. And third, the change of magnitude produced by European elections is clear and affects all provinces in an identical way: the whole country becomes a single district. By contrast, elections to regional governments produce much more complex changes. Some regions are formed by a single province, others by several. The changes of magnitude are not uniform across provinces.

Yet someone could argue that European elections are not an adequate contrast because it may well happen that voters are unaware of the crucial fact that there is a single district in these elections. Thus, voters maybe do not change their behavior in these different elections simply because they do not know the change of magnitude. Given that citizens (particularly in Spain) are not very interested in European politics and have low levels of information on the European Union, it may be unwarranted to assume that they react to changes in the incentives for strategic behavior.

This objection can be partially met. First, the procedure for testing the presence of strategic voting does not require that all voters know the difference in magnitude between elections. It is enough if those who make this kind of vote understand the difference. This group should vote for the first preference in European elections. Thus, even if first preference voters do not notice the difference, the reaction of second preference voters should be observable. Second, the strategic voters of orthodox rational choice theory are rather sophisticated agents. If they know the magnitude of their province and understand the incentives for voting strategically in general elections, how is it that they do not get informed about magnitude in European elections? On what grounds can we sometimes attribute oversophistication to the electorate and sometimes deny it? If voters are as subtle as the theory supposes, there are not good reasons to assume that they are ignorant of district

magnitude in the European elections. Finally, it seems that IU, the small party, would have incentives to inform its potential voters about the electoral rules that are applied in the European elections, in order to avoid the loss of strategic votes that go to other parties.

Accepting the validity of the comparison between general and European elections as a test of the strategic voting hypothesis, I present an analysis in two steps. First I analyze aggregate data and then I turn to surveys. In both cases, the empirical results show that, contrary to Gunther, the strategic explanation of second preference voting is wrong.

An aggregate analysis

The electoral districts of general elections coincide with the 52 Spanish provinces. In general elections we should observe that the smaller the province in terms of magnitude, the greater the incentives for strategic voting for those who have IU as the first preference, and therefore the smaller the vote share of IU. In a regression with provinces as units of analysis, the magnitude of the province should have a positive coefficient on vote for IU. By contrast, in the European elections the magnitude of the provinces should have no influence at all on the vote for IU, since the whole country is a unique electoral district.

Of course, magnitude could have an effect on IU vote share for reasons that have nothing to do with strategic considerations. For example, it could be that IU gets more votes in more industrial provinces, and these provinces tend to be the bigger ones. Hence, the prediction to be tested should not say that the coefficient of magnitude has to be zero in the European elections. Rather, a more reasonable prediction consistent with the strategic theory of voting would establish that the slope of magnitude has to be *different* in the European and the general elections. Whatever the slope of magnitude in general elections, in the European ones it should be less steep, and therefore closer to zero. The difference in the slope across elections would reveal that keeping everything else constant, it is the sharp variation produced by the magnitude change from general to European elections that produces this change in the slope.

Table 1. *Elections and electoral results of IU in the period 1986-2000* (percentage of the electorate).

Date	22 June 1986	10 June 1987	15 June 1989	29 October 1989	6 June 1993	12 June 1994	3 March 1996	13 June 1999	12 March 2000
Type	General	European	European	General	General	European	General	European	General
National	2.6%	3.5%	3.9%	6.3%	7.2%	7.9%	8.1%	3.7%	3.8%
M=1-5	1.95%	2.05%	2.07%	4.14%	5.04%	5.68%	5.95%	2.83%	2.81%
M=6-9	3.72%	4.31%	3.30%	6.18%	6.53%	7.14%	7.19%	3.84%	3.57%
M≥10	3.35%	4.03%	3.83%	7.16%	9.15%	10.14%	10.01%	4.54%	4.67%

All general and European elections for the period 1986-2000 have been selected. Spain entered the European Union in 1986 and the first European elections were held in 1987. As can be seen in Table 1, there are nine elections in the whole period, five general and four European. A clear cycle is detected in the aggregate results of the party. From 1986 to 1996 IU vote share increases (from 3.6% of the electorate to 7.2%), and later on there is a sharp decline: in the 2000 general elections, the vote for IU falls to the level of 1986. Table 1 also includes the results of IU by three different levels of magnitude[6]: at first sight it is already evident that IU gets more votes in the bigger districts than in the smaller ones, but this pattern is observed both in the general and in the European elections.

The dependent variable of the analysis is the percentage of the electorate that votes for IU in each election in each province. There are 465 observations in the sample[7]. As is well known, there are huge variations in turnout between general and European elections. Abstention is on average ten points higher in European than in general elections in the period of analysis. Thus, it is absolutely necessary to control for the level of abstention if we want to measure changes in the vote for IU produced by strategic behavior. The institutional incentives for strategic behavior are incorporated in the variable of magnitude of the districts in the general elections. Note that this variable should play an important role in general elections, but not in the European ones, where there is a single district. To test this idea, the variable of magnitude has artificially the same values in general and European elections. This is the only way to check that the magnitude of the districts in the general elections plays the same role in both types of elections. I have introduced a dummy variable for the type of election (0 if the election is general, 1 if the election is European) and the interaction between the type of the election and the magnitude variable. The function to be estimated is therefore

$$IUVOTE = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ABSTENTION + \beta_2 MAGNITUDE + \beta_3 ELECTIONTYPE + \beta_4 ELECTIONTYPE*MAGNITUDE + U$$

[6] Here I follow the grouping of districts proposed by Penadés (1999) in his exhaustive analysis of the Spanish electoral system.

[7] IU did not present lists in Ceuta and Melilla (the two uninominal constituencies of Spain) in the general elections of 1989, nor in Ceuta in the general elections of 1993.

If the theory of strategic voting is true, we should generally observe that vote for IU in European elections increases as compared with general elections and, more concretely, that the slope of the magnitude variable is smaller in the European elections than in the general elections. To be precise, given a positive coefficient β_2, coefficient β_3 should be positive and significant, while the coefficient of the interaction β_4 should be negative and significant. The basic idea is that in the bigger districts, vote for IU should not change because of the type of election, while in smaller districts vote for IU should be higher in the European than in the general elections.

Even if there are nine different periods, I present an OLS estimation with robust standard errors, without introducing the temporal structure of the data. Nevertheless, I have also tried with a pooled time-series analysis with random effects and no important changes were observed[8]. The basic conclusions of the analysis hold regardless of the estimation technique. As can be seen in Table 2, it is true in general elections that the greater the magnitude of the district, the higher the vote for IU. In the biggest district (M=34), IU should obtain an advantage of more than four points compared with the smallest district (M=1), a considerable change taking into account that the vote share of IU is on average around 5% of the electorate. Without comparison with the European elections, this result could be taken as a confirmation of the strategic voting hypothesis. Moreover, in the European elections the vote for IU tends to be somewhat higher (though the effect is extraordinarily weak, less than one point, and only significant at a 10% level). Again, this is consistent with the prediction[9]. Nonetheless, the crucial part of the prediction, namely, that the effect of magnitude is different in function of the type of elections, is not confirmed at all. Magnitude has a powerful positive coefficient, but the effect of magnitude is the same in general and European elections. The interaction term is not significant, which means that the slope of magnitude is the same across type of elections. If the effect of magnitude is the same even in European

[8] A fixed effects model does not make sense given that the magnitude variable is almost constant along time. The only important difference between the OLS model and the random effects model is that the coefficient of the dummy variable type of election is much lower in the random effects model. The coefficients of magnitude and the interaction of magnitude with the type of election are almost identical in the two models.

[9] Although it could be said more simply that European elections are of second order, so that voting for minority parties is more attractive.

elections (when the magnitude of the districts is not meaningful because there is a single national district), we are forced to conclude that voters do not react to radical changes in the magnitude of the districts. This amounts to saying that voters do not behave strategically.

Someone could raise the objection that the non-significant coefficient of the interaction term is due to the small presence of IU in small districts. There are so few voters close to IU that their strategic behavior cannot be detected. However, the analysis at the individual level reveals that this objection does not apply.

Table 2. *Vote for IU as a function of magnitude and type of elections. OLS Regression with robust standard errors.*

	Coefficients
Constant	7.465**
	(0.492)
Abstention	-0.136**
	(0.014)
Magnitude	0.142**
	(0.035)
Type of election	0.728*
	(0.420)
Type of election*Magnitude	-0.021
	(0.052)
R^2	0.21
N	465

Standard errors in parentheses
** Significant at 1%
* Significant at 5%

A survey analysis

Basically, what Gunther discovers at the individual level is what has been found at the aggregate one, namely that IU gets more votes in the bigger districts in general elections. But his analysis has the great advantage over the aggregate analysis that individuals' proximity to the party is controlled for. He calculates the proportion of voters of IU among those who are closer to IU than to other parties first in provinces with M≤5 and then in provinces with M>5[10]. His main finding is that, just focusing on those who were very close to IU, the proportion voting for IU is indeed higher in the bigger provinces than in the smaller ones.

Gunther's analysis is not reliable for two reasons. First, because the same results are observed in European elections, where the influence of the magnitude variable cannot be interpreted in instrumental terms. Second, because Gunther does not control for other variables. When other controls are introduced, the influence of magnitude simply vanishes.

I start comparing results for the general and European elections at the individual level. The logic is the same as that of the aggregate analysis. If the proportion of the vote for IU is a function of magnitude in European elections too, the strategic interpretation is wrong.

The procedure employed here to measure the impact of magnitude is slightly different from that of Gunther. His control variable is how close individuals consider themselves to IU[11]. The problem with this variable is that someone may feel close to IU but also to PSOE. If the individual feels very close to both parties, but we control only for closeness to IU, as Gunther does, we would classify this individual as a strategic voter in case she voted for PSOE. This classification would be wrong when the individual feels equally close to both parties. In the post-election survey of the general elections of 1986, for example, it turns out that of the 782 individuals who declare themselves to be close or very close to IU, 432 (55.4%) are also close or very close to PSOE.

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[10] Actually, Gunther is not fully consistent. In the 1979 elections, he divides provinces into those with M<5 and those with M≥5, while in the 1982 elections the division is between M≤5 and M>5.

[11] Actually, he analyzes the Spanish PC, the embryo of IU.

The control variable I use is constructed in terms of ideological distance. The individual is asked to place herself on a 1-10 scale, where 1 is extreme left and 10 is extreme right. Likewise, the individual is asked to place the position of the parties on this scale. Thus, someone is closer to IU than to PSOE when the distance between her ideological position and the ideological position attributed to IU is smaller than the distance between her ideological position and that attributed to PSOE. And the individual is indifferent if the two distances are the same. To avoid inconsistent answers, some precautions are necessary, as shown in a more rigorous definition of the variable. If *SELF* means the ideological position of the individual, and *IU*, *PSOE* and *PP* the ideological position attributed by the individual to the three parties, then:

> If $(|SELF - IU| < |SELF - PSOE|) \;\&\; (|SELF - IU| < |SELF - PP|)$, the person is ideologically closer to IU than to PSOE
>
> If $(|SELF - IU| = |SELF - PSOE|) \;\&\; (|SELF - PSOE| < |SELF - PP|)$, the person is ideologically indifferent between IU and PSOE

The analysis is restricted to those who are ideologically closer to IU than to PSOE and to those who are indifferent between the two parties. I want to determine how the vote for IU in this group is influenced by district magnitude. Results are reproduced in Table 3. Focusing first on general elections[12], the general pattern is that IU gets a greater proportion of votes in the bigger provinces among those who are closer to IU. There are, nevertheless, some important exceptions. Thus, in 1986 IU has the biggest share of votes in districts with M≤5, and in 1993 IU obtains worse results in districts with M between 6 and 9 than in districts with M≤5. These irregularities aside, the fact is that, as Gunther found, IU is stronger in the bigger districts.

[12] Unfortunately, I have not had access to the post-election survey of the 2000 general elections.

Table 3. *Percentage of people closer to IU who vote for IU according to levels of magnitude.*

	Magnitude		
	1-5	6-9	≥10
1986 (General elections)	31.7% (51)	25.2% (54)	28.9% (99)
1989 (General elections)	42.6% (20)	51.0% (50)	50.6% (83)
1993 (General elections)	31.8% (56)	28.3% (65)	42.9% (132)
1994* (European elections)	61.5% (16)	72.7% (24)	70.7% (57)
1996 (General elections)	28.8% (42)	40.3% (96)	50.8% (160)
1999 (European elections)	22.9% (16)	29.9% (26)	31.2% (44)

* The procedure to measure closeness to IU was different in this election. A detailed explanation of the method employed can be found in note 12.

With regard to the European elections, there are strictly comparable data only for the 1999 elections. In this year there is a difference of 8.3 percentage points between the vote share of IU in the districts with M≤5 and in the districts with M≥10. This difference, though smaller than that found in some of the general elections, is sufficiently large to question the strategic voting hypothesis. In the 1994 European post-election survey there were not data to create the variables of ideological distance. However, similar variables have been created in terms of closeness to the parties[13]. Although the percentage levels are very different from the

[13] Individuals are asked to declare their proximity to parties, value 1 meaning "very close", value 2 "close", value 3 "neither close nor distant", value 4 "distant", and value 5 "very distant." I have considered that a respondent is closer to IU than to PSOE when:

(closeness to IU < 3) & (closeness to IU < closeness to PSOE) & (closeness to IU < closeness to PP) .

Similarly, someone is indifferent between PSOE and IU when:

other elections, what really matters is the relative differences. And here, again, IU has the smallest vote share in districts with M≤5. Even if we are controlling for ideological distance to IU, differences produced by the magnitude of the district cannot be interpreted in instrumental terms, since the instrumental interpretation does not make sense in the case of the European elections.

I turn now to the second shortcoming of Gunther's analysis, the lack of relevant controls. The absence of a multivariate analysis makes his results dubious. It is easy to show that if the four general elections of the period 1986-1996 are selected, the effect of magnitude is negligible once we control for education and age.

Following Gunther's procedure, I have selected the sample of those who are ideologically closer to IU than to PSOE or to PP, and those who are ideologically indifferent between IU and PSOE. The dependent variable is the vote decision: it has value 1 if the person votes for IU and value 0 if the person votes for PSOE. The dependent variable measures whether the individual votes for the first or the second preference. This, however, is only partially true because in the case of those who are ideologically indifferent between the two parties it is not so clear what should be considered as the first preference. Nevertheless, when the person is in this particular situation, the theory of strategic voting would say that the greater the magnitude of the district, the easier it is to vote for IU if IU is the first preference.

There are three independent variables. The first is magnitude of the district, now recodified into two values: 1 if the magnitude is greater than five, 0 if it is five or less. This recodification is the most favorable to Gunther's hypothesis. If we take magnitude as such, or the three groups (≤5, 6-9, ≥10) used for Tables 1 and 3, the magnitude variable is never significant. The second variable is age. And the third is education, with four values (0 is without education, 1 primary education, 2 secondary education, 3 university studies).

(closeness to IU = closeness to PSOE) & (closeness to IU < closeness to PP).

I have made a logit analysis of the post-election surveys corresponding to the general elections of 1986, 1989, 1993 and 1996. Note that these are the elections where the effect of magnitude should be strongest, since in European elections there is a single district. Even so, the results of Table 4 show that there is little support for Gunther's conclusion on the relevance of magnitude. Only in 1996 is magnitude significant. In 1986 it has the wrong sign: the greater the magnitude, the smaller the vote share of IU. Education has a much stronger impact. Curiously, among those who are closer to IU, the more educated are more likely to vote for IU. Finally, age has a more erratic behavior, although in the four years it has a negative sign: the older the individual, the less likely that she will vote for IU. This variable is particularly important in the 1990s.

Table 4. *Logit regressions.*

	1986	1989	1993	1996
Constant	-0.842* (0.425)	-0.5763 (0.7340)	-0.9233* (0.4595)	-0.3252 (0.4786)
Education	0.4397** (0.0932)	0.6645** (0.1657)	0.5131** (0.1239)	0.3535** (0.1033)
Age	-0.0137* (0.0054)	-0.0142 (0.0088)	-0.0148** (0.0055)	-0.0327** (0.0055)
Magnitude	-0.0408 (0.1892)	0.2502 (0.3091)	0.2469 (0.1894)	0.5526** (0.2051)
Pseudo-R^2	0.045	0.08	0.05	0.09
% of positive predicted cases	10.9%	68.0%	40.1%	58.2%
% of negative predicted cases	96.0%	55.8%	80.73%	63.3%
N	750	361	663	783

Standard errors in parentheses
** significant at 1%
* significant at 5%
Note: the sample is composed only of those who are ideologically closer to IU than to PSOE and of those who are ideologically indifferent between IU and PSOE.
The dependent variable takes value 1 if the person voted for IU and value 0 for PSOE.
Education has four values, 0 being no education and 4 being university studies.
Magnitude is a dichotomous variable with value 1 if M>5 and 0 if M≤5.

Obviously, the fit of the model, as measured by the Pseudo-R^2, is rather poor in each of the regressions[14]. But the point of this analysis is not to provide a detailed explanation of the choice between IU and PSOE. All I want to show now is that once some features of the voters are controlled for, the importance of magnitude weakens or vanishes altogether.

Gunther's analysis is too simple. While it is true that focusing only on magnitude this variable has some impact on the vote for IU, this impact tends to disappear as soon as some basic controls are introduced. This result questions the strategic interpretation of second preference voting, but does not deny that some people vote for their second preference. Given that the reference group is formed by those who are ideologically closer to IU or indifferent between IU and PSOE, the presence of a majority of voters who vote PSOE in this group is a clear signal of the importance of second-preference voting. In the next section I analyze to what extent the decision of voting for the second preference can be explained with the theoretical hypotheses developed in section 3.

5. An empirical analysis of the non-instrumental explanation of second preference voting.

The basic insight of the non-instrumental explanation is that the decision of voting for a small third party depends on the weight that the voter attaches to loyalty and responsibility. These two forces operate in opposite directions in the case of small third parties. Loyalty to the party moves the voter to be faithful to her most preferred option. But the irresponsibility the voter may feel for voting for a marginal option pushes the voter to the second preference. The final decision will be the consequence of the domination of one of these factors over the other.

It is rather difficult to operationalize these two factors, loyalty and irresponsibility. In the case of loyalty, I will simply assume that the ideological distance between the individual

[14] The measure of the Pseudo-R^2 I have used is this: [initial(-2loglikelihood)-final(-2loglikelihood)]/[initial(-2loglikelihood)].

and the party is a proxy for loyalty. The closer the person is to the party in ideological terms, the more loyal she will be to the party. If this is so, the difference $L_{IU} - L_{PSOE}$ will be simply $|SELF - IU| - |SELF - PSOE|$.

With regard to irresponsibility, this is an issue that is not normally included in electoral surveys. There is no way of measuring it as a subjective trait, defined by the individual. This makes matters much more complicated, since the criteria for choosing a proxy of the concept are not clear. For instance, it might well happen that some voters approach the issue of responsibility valuing results only at the national level. But others could pay attention to the winner at the district level. And some could worry only about whether the party gets some representative in the district, regardless of the position of the party in the ranking of winners. These are three different criteria on which to judge the responsibility of voting for a party. Obviously, different criteria can produce contradictory judgements[15].

Due to the lack of proper questions on responsibility in surveys, the only available option is to resort to some objective indicator of the irrelevance of voting for IU. I have prepared an index of marginality of IU at the district level. This choice is clearly problematical, since it assumes arbitrarily that the relevant level of analysis for issues of responsibility is the district one. The basic idea is that the greater the difference between the vote share of PSOE and IU, the more marginal is IU. However, the distance by itself is not enough: even if the distance is big, it may be that IU gets an important vote share in the province. This can happen in provinces with a vast majority of people on the left. Therefore, the distance between the two parties has to be weighted by the vote share of IU. The greater this share, the less importance the difference between the shares of IU and PSOE, that is, the greater the vote of IU, the less marginal IU. More concretely,

$$\text{Index of IU marginality} = \frac{\%\text{vote of IU} - \%\text{vote of PSOE}}{\%\text{vote of IU}}$$

[15] This problem can also exist for the theory of strategic voting (see Cox 1997: Ch.10), though if voters are instrumental the natural assumption is that they act instrumentally at the district level, not at the national level.

This index always takes negative values, for in no district has IU ever obtained a greater vote share than PSOE. If the index were positive, there would be no marginality at all. Being negative in every case, the closer the index is to zero, the less marginal IU and therefore the more likely that the person who is ideologically closer to IU will vote for the first preference. To calculate the values of the index, I have used in each survey the results of the corresponding general election, not of the previous one[16].

To test this alternative explanation of second preference voting, I have selected the four available post-election surveys of the general elections for the period 1986-1996, just as I did in section 4[17]. In each case, I work only with the sample of those who are ideologically closer to IU or are indifferent between IU and PSOE. Again, the dependent variable is whether the person votes for IU (value 1) or votes for PSOE (value 0). The independent variables corresponding to the explanatory factors, loyalty and marginality, are the difference between the ideological distances of the individual with regard to IU and PSOE, and the index of marginality. Finally, I have also introduced education as a control.

Results of the logit analysis appear in Table 5. Controlling for education, the two hypotheses about loyalty and marginality are clearly confirmed. Note first that the sign of the coefficient of ideological distance is negative. Taking into account that only those who are closer to IU or indifferent between IU and PSOE enter into the analysis, this variable cannot adopt positive values. The maximum value is zero, when the person is indifferent between the two parties. A value of –1 means that the person is one point on the ideological scale closer to IU than to PSOE; a value of –2 that the distance is two points favorable to IU; and so on. Thus, it is only logical that the greater this variable, the less likely that the person votes for IU. On the other hand, the sign of the coefficient corresponding to the index of marginality is positive. As said before, the index only takes negative values. The closer to zero, that is, the

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[16] The results of previous elections seem a less reliable indicator. First, people may forget about the results of four years ago. Second, IU has gone through dramatic changes from election to election. Third, the pervasiveness of surveys during the electoral campaign makes it rather easy for citizens to get informed about the expected results of the parties.

[17] I have declined to make comparisons between general and European elections at this point due to the highly imperfect measure of responsibility.

greater the value of the index, the less marginal IU and therefore the more likely that the person votes for IU[18].

Table 5. *Logit regressions.*

	1986	1989	1993	1996
Constant	-2.172**	-1.886**	-1.946**	-1.583**
	(0.2268)	(0.3789)	(0.3069)	(0.2604)
Ideological distance	-1.034**	-1.0924**	-0.8844**	-0.8432**
	(0.0884)	(0.1355)	(0.0802)	(0.0762)
Marginality	0.0431**	0.1383*	0.1617**	0.2076**
	(0.0132)	(0.0624)	(0.0510)	(0.0554)
Education	0.5101**	0.8359**	0.6019**	0.5756**
	(0.0999)	(0.1851)	(0.1326)	(0.1103)
Pseudo-R^2	0.24	0.37	0.25	0.25
% of positive predicted cases	45.0%	76.33%	62.5%	67.8%
% of negative predicted cases	91.7%	83.63%	84.9%	82.8%
N	751	361	664	783

Standard errors in parentheses
** significant at 1%
* significant at 5%
Note: the sample is composed only of those who are ideologically closer to IU than to PSOE and of those who are ideologically indifferent between IU and PSOE.
The dependent variable takes value 1 if the person voted for IU and value 0 for PSOE.
Ideological distance is the difference |SELF – IU| - |SELF – PSOE|
Marginality is the index (IU vote share – PSOE vote share) / (IU vote share) measured in the year of the survey in each province.
Education has four values, 0 being no education and 4 being university studies.

[18] The coefficient increases in the period 1986-1996 because, as shown in Table 1, the vote share in this period grows and the distance between IU and PSOE becomes smaller. The index of marginality has a smaller range in the 1990s than in the 1980s.

Unlike the logistic regressions of Table 4, where the point was to demonstrate that magnitude is an irrelevant variable, now the fit of the model is much better in every year. It seems that the hypotheses of loyalty and marginality are able to explain the political choices made by this group of voters. Whether to vote for the first or for the second preference depends on how close (i.e. how loyal) the individual is to the most-preferred party, and how marginal the most-preferred party is in comparison with the second most-preferred party.

Table 6. *Predicted probability of voting for IU according to the logit model of 1996 in Table 5 when education is kept at its mean (1.5) and ideological distance and marginality vary*

	Index of marginality				
Ideological distance	0	-5	-10	-15	-20
-3	0.86	0.68	0.43	0.21	0.09
-2	0.72	0.48	0.25	0.10	0.04
-1	0.53	0.29	0.12	0.05	0.02
0	0.33	0.15	0.06	0.02	0.01

An easy illustration of how the two hypotheses work together can be found in Table 6, where a simulation is presented using the results of the 1996 logistic regression of Table 5. Holding education at its mean (1.5), ideological distance between the two parties and the index of marginality are allowed to vary. Ideological distance varies between 0 (indifference) and –3 (the person is three points closer to IU than to PSOE). The index of marginality varies between 0 and –20 (the minimum value in the sample in 1996, meaning that the difference in vote share between the two parties is 20 times the vote share of IU). Were not IU marginal at all, the person would always have a probability of voting for IU greater than 0.5, except if she were indifferent between IU and PSOE. This is fully consistent with the theoretical argument I am defending. Likewise, even if the person is very close to IU as compared to PSOE (values –3 and –2 in ideological distance), the probability of voting for IU is very low if the party is really marginal in the district (values under –10 in the index of marginality).

The data show very clearly that both first and second preference voting make sense in terms of the proposed hypotheses. If the degree of loyalty is high and the party is not extremely marginal, the person will vote for the first preference. On the other hand, if loyalty is not strong enough, or if the party is really marginal, the voter will vote for the second preference.

It is worth noting that the two indicators I have used in the analysis, marginality and ideological distance, are not so different from the independent variables that are usually employed in the empirical analysis of strategic voting. The index of marginality corresponds more or less to the indexes of closeness between parties used in this literature. But whereas the literature takes closeness as a factor that affects the impact of an individual vote in the final result, I interpret it as something that affects the degree of irresponsibility associated to the vote for a hopeless party. Likewise, ideological proximity to a party is included as an independent variable in some analyses of strategic voting (e.g. Blais and Nadeu 1996), the hypothesis being that the greater the proximity to the most preferred party, the less likely that the voter casts a strategic vote. However, this hypothesis is incompatible with a literal understanding of the strategic theory, where variation in proximity to parties is irrelevant given the infinitesimal value of the probability of a vote breaking a tie. Ideological closeness or loyalty find their place only when incorporated into a non-instrumental explanation of second-preference voting.

6. Conclusions.

Previous studies of strategic voting have found ample evidence of second preference voting. Most of them have interpreted this evidence as a confirmation of the strategic theory. I do not deny this evidence, but I have argued that it is seldom used to test rigorously the theory: quite often, these studies just report the percentage of second preference voting in some elections, or claim that the data confirm some diluted version of the theory where the argument about a single vote affecting the final outcome is dropped.

There are good reasons to be suspicious about the strategic interpretation of second-preference voting. First, because this interpretation cannot overcome the turnout paradox. If the vote for the second preference is decided on instrumental grounds, then electoral participation is a mystery. If voters are instrumental, the prediction is not strategic voting, but zero turnout. Second, because the theory cannot explain the behavior of those potential second preference voters who nevertheless vote for their first preference.

Given all these shortcomings, some alternative interpretation is needed. I have proposed a non-instrumental explanation where loyalty (or closeness to the most preferred party) and irresponsibility determine the final decision. Voting for a hopeless party may be seen by some voters as a form of irresponsible choice, as ideological self-indulgence, so that if the cost of irresponsibility is greater than the benefit of being loyal to the party, the voter will end up voting for the second preference.

I have tested this alternative interpretation against the evidence of the Spanish case. First I have argued that Gunther's results on strategic voting in Spain are not too reliable, both because he does not control for some fundamental variables, and because he could not compare (since his article was published in 1989) the results of general elections with those of the European elections, where magnitude changes dramatically. Then, I have shown through an analysis of four post-election surveys that the hypotheses on loyalty and responsibility provide a reasonable and clear explanation of voting behavior. This explanation has the merit that frees the behavior of voters from the analytical inconsistencies of strategic theory.

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