

Does Tactical Voting Matter?
The Political Impact of Tactical Voting in Canadian Elections

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ABSTRACT

Tactical voting primarily takes place under single-member district plurality electoral institutions and takes the form of third-party supporters voting for one of the major parties. Although much has been written about tactical voting, few studies have attempted to show the impact of tactical voting on the seat distribution within the parliament, and the subsequent government makeup, in countries with single-member plurality systems. In this paper, we attempt to assess the magnitude and impact of tactical voting in the Canadian general elections in the 80's. We build a model of tactical voting by identifying factors that are known to affect the level of tactical voting that we can measure using available data. Based on this model, we generate predicted levels of tactical voting for all parties within each district. Using these predicted values, we adjust the actual election data to produce a new set of data containing a would-be election outcome in the absence of tactical voting. By comparing actual election data, adjusted election data, and the seat share of political parties in the parliament after these elections, we discuss the political impact of tactical voting in Canada.

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Introduction

Sincere voting assumes that voters always choose their most preferred candidates/parties. It has been argued in both the formal and empirical literature, however, that voters may not always vote for their most preferred candidates. This is known as tactical (or strategic, sophisticated) voting, and refers to voting contrary to one's nominal preferences. Tactical voting, as usually described in the literature, primarily takes place under single-member district plurality electoral systems and takes the form of third-party supporters voting for one of the major parties. The logic of tactical voting, of course, is that of Duverger's law, which states that the supporters of a small party would not "waste" their votes by voting for their most preferred party (candidate) since it does not have a chance to win under a plurality system with single-member districts. Instead, they vote for the major party that is most acceptable to them and that has a chance of winning (Duverger 1963). Since Duverger, ample theoretical literature has shown incentives to vote tactically under different electoral institutions (Riker 1976, 1982, Tsebelis 1986, Bowler and Farrell 1991, and Jesse 1995).¹

Until now, empirical studies of tactical voting have taken two different paths: the first evaluates whether indeed some voters vote tactically under single-member district plurality electoral institutions (primarily Britain and Canada), and if so, how many of them do? These

1. Although the notion of tactical voting has been primarily applied to plurality electoral systems, incentives to vote tactically may exist in countries with other electoral systems as well. Some recent studies indicate that such incentives exist in electoral systems with an ordinal ballot structure (voters order preferences among the candidates) where vote transfer is possible (e.g., Ireland and the Australian Senate; see Bowler and Farrell, 1991; Jesse, 1995). An incentive to act tactically on the part of small-party supporters arises in these countries as their party fails to meet the quota, and they subsequently transfer their votes to big parties (which may not be their second most preferred party). Also see Tsebelis (1986) for potential incentives for tactical voting in proportional representation (PR) systems.

studies investigate *the level* of tactical voting for a single election using existing survey data and have shown that tactical voting does occur, usually at a rate of somewhere between 5 and 10% of the electorate (Fisher 1973, Curtice and Steed 1988, Evans and Heath 1993, Blais and Nadeau 1996, Alvarez and Nagler 2000, and Blais, et al., n.d.). For different estimates of the level of tactical voting, see Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin 1992, 1993).

The second direction taken by empirical studies of tactical voting is the investigation of *the causes* of tactical voting for a given election. These studies have shown that several individual factors as well as contextual factors within districts affect the level of tactical voting in a given election (Black 1978, Cain 1978, Gailbraith and Rae 1989, Johnston and Pattie 1991, Bowler and Lanoue 1992, Lanoue and Bowler 1992, Blais and Nadeau 1996, and Blais, et al., n.d.).

In their recent work, Kim and Fording (2001) take yet another approach. Using data from four recent general elections in Britain, they investigate the *political impact* of tactical voting over a period of time. That is, they assess whether tactical voting has had an impact on the actual distribution of seats within the Parliament and eventually the partisan composition (and thus subsequent policies) of the government in Britain. If indeed the magnitude of tactical voting in single-member plurality systems is large enough to affect the power distribution within the Parliament and subsequent policy outcomes, they argue, this will provide additional empirical evidence that theoretical arguments based on voter rationality are valid in the real world and that voters are quite successful in not wasting their votes and preventing their least preferred parties from coming to power.

In this paper, we take the same approach as Kim and Fording and study two recent general elections in Canada, whose electoral system is characterized by single-member district

plurality rule. We estimate levels of tactical voting for all major parties within each constituency for these elections. Based on these estimates, we adjust the actual election data to produce a revised set of results that represents would-be election outcomes in the absence of tactical voting (i.e., had everybody voted sincerely). In the last sections of this paper, we discuss the impact of tactical voting in Canada by comparing these new results to the actual election data.

Estimating the Political Impact of Tactical Voting: An Operationalization

Ideally, to accurately gauge the political impact of tactical voting we would like to compare observed election results (which reflect tactical voting) to the election results that would have been observed if all voters had voted sincerely. This would be easy to do if district-level public opinion polls measuring voters' sincere preferences were available prior to each election. Unfortunately they are not. In the absence of such data we are left with two (albeit rather crude) choices.

First, we might simply calculate the national rate of tactical voting, along with the direction of tactical vote flows, based on national level surveys. We might then apply these national-level estimates to elections at the district level, using this information to estimate the distribution of sincere preferences within each district. The most obvious weakness of this strategy, however, is that it assumes that the rate of tactical voting, which would be estimated from national-level data, is the same across all districts. This is not likely to be the case, as a large literature suggests that the rate of tactical voting in a given election is in part a function of various aspects of the electoral context *within each district*, and as we would suspect, the electoral context across districts is likely to vary to a significant degree.

A second approach to measuring the impact of tactical voting does not make such an implausible assumption, and therefore is adopted for this research. Our approach proceeds in three general stages. First, we estimate an individual-level model of tactical voting in which it is assumed that the probability that an individual votes strategically is a function of key characteristics of the electoral environment in his or her district. Having obtained the coefficients from this model, we then shift the level of analysis to the district level and, based on equivalent contextual variables, predict the rate of tactical voting for each party within each district. Along with estimates of vote flows obtained using national-level data, we then proceed to calculate the percentage of “sincere” supporters of each party within each district. This information is then compared to actual election results to determine how frequently tactical voting affects the outcome of an election.

A Contextual Model of Tactical Voting

To estimate the impact of contextual variables on tactical voting at the individual level, we rely on the Canadian Election Study (CES) for the elections of 1984 and 1988.² Unlike the British Elections Studies (BES’s), the recent CES’s do not contain a single survey item that asks

2. We chose to study these elections for several reasons. First, they were the last elections before the radical party system change in the 1993 general election in Canada. In that election, the two regional parties, the Bloc Quebecois and the Reform Party of Canada, which previously had not held any parliamentary seats, emerged as the second and the third largest parties respectively. We believe that it would take time for voter political learning process to take place fully after a change of this magnitude (For a discussion of political change in the 90’s, see Bickerton, et al. 1999 and Nevitte et. al, 2000). Second, the party system prior to 1993 fits a situation in which we most commonly envision tactical voting to occur, that is, two major parties (the Progressive Conservative Party and the Liberal Party) and a minor party (the New Democratic Party). Third, there is evidence that the level of tactical voting has decreased in Canada in the 90’s (see for example, Blais et al, n.d.). Since we are primarily interested in finding out whether tactical voting has any political impact, we want to look at the elections where the level of tactical voting is believed to be higher. Based on our findings in this paper, we can always extend our analysis to the elections in the 90’s.

respondents why they voted as they did.³ To identify tactical voters, therefore, we use the alternative operationalization advocated by Blais and Nadeau (1996) for Canadian elections.

The Blais-Nadeau method requires a comparison of voters' individual preference ordering of parties/candidates and their expectations about the election outcome in their districts. To establish the individual preference ordering, we recoded and standardized the thermometer scores given by respondents to major political parties.⁴ Then we regressed their votes against party scores and calculated for each respondent the "propensity" to vote for each party using the logistic regression coefficients. Ranking these propensities yields six different preference orderings for three parties, the Progressive Conservative (PC), the Liberal (LP), and the New Democratic Party (NDP): 1. PC>LP>NDP, 2. PC>NDP>LP, 3. LP>PC>NDP, 4. LP>NDP>PC, 5. NDP>PC>LP, and 6. NDP>LP>PC.

To establish individual voters' expectations about the election outcome for the 1988 election, we ranked each respondent's score on questions about each party's chance of winning in the district race. These ranks were organized in 13 groups. This time we considered ties, for there could be survey respondents who perceive two of the three or all three parties as having

3. If this survey question existed consistently across surveys, those who responded by saying that their preferred party had no chance of winning would be identified as tactical voters. For a controversy over which survey items represent "tactical voting," see Evans and Heath 1993, and Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin 1992, 1993.

4. Blais and Nadeau (1996), which analyzes the 1988 Canadian election, utilizes thermometer scores for the parties, leaders, and local candidates. We use only the party scores for the following reasons: first, the leader rating is very highly correlated with the party rating (for the Progressive Conservative Party and Brian Mulroney, Pearson coeff.=.782, p=.000). Second, only a small number of respondents rated local candidates, and even fewer, 23.5% of the entire sample, rated all three of them. This causes a loss of too many cases, leaving us with an n of around 600 (16.6%). Third, the 1984 survey contains only the rating of parties from most to least preferred. Thus, we can base individual preference ordering on the party rating only, which will be consistent across the two elections.

equal chances of winning the race in their district. For example, $PC > LP = NDP$ describes the situations where respondents expect the PC candidate to have the best chance of winning the seat, and the LP and the NDP candidates to have equal chances between the two but smaller chances than the Conservative candidate. Or, $PC = LP = NDP$ depicts the cases where respondents do not distinguish any of the three parties as a possible winner. Then we selected those who, according to their preferences (based on party ratings), do not expect their first-choice party to win. We found 648 such cases (19.95%) from the 1988 survey. Of them, 196 (30.2%) did not vote for their first choice. This means that about 6% of those in the survey can be identified as tactical voters.⁵

We follow the same basic approach in establishing the group of tactical voters in the 1984 Canadian election. Again, we recognize six patterns of party preference ordering. Unlike the 1988 survey, however, the 1984 survey instrument does not contain questions asking respondents about parties' chances of winning in their district. In the absence of such questions, we rely on actual election data as a proxy for voter expectations about the election outcome (see footnote 6 below). Since there were no ties in the election data, only six groups of voters with specific expectations for the outcome are distinguished. Comparing individual preferences with perceptions of who the winner would be, we found 783 (23.2%) cases of voters facing a strategic choice situation in 1984. Of them, 155 (19.8%) chose not to vote for their most preferred party, that is, about 5% of all survey respondents.

A large literature in political science has addressed the impact of electoral context on tactical voting. This literature has identified two important aspects of an election as being critical to determining the rate of tactical voting. The first one is the probability that one's party

5. This number corresponds with that of Blais and Nadeau. For details about this method of identifying tactical voters, see Blais and Nadeau 1996.

can win the election. That is, voters are expected to be more likely to abandon their preferred party when their party is not competitive in the election (Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin 1992, Blais and Nadeau 1996). This contextual dimension is captured by including the variable COMPETITIVENESS, measured as the percentage of the vote obtained by one's preferred party in the election. A second dimension of electoral context suggested by the literature is the closeness of the election (Black 1978, Cain 1978, Tsebelis 1986, Gailbraith and Rae 1989, Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin 1992, and Blais and Nadeau 1996). Consequently, we include the variable CLOSENESS, defined as the distance (in votes) between an individual's second and third most preferred parties in the election.⁶ All else equal, it is assumed that voters are more likely to abandon their most preferred party and vote strategically when their party is not competitive and when the distance between the other parties is small. In other words, we expect COMPETITIVENESS as well as CLOSENESS to be negatively related to tactical voting.

Additionally, we expect COMPETITIVENESS and CLOSENESS to interact in their effect on tactical voting. For example, when a voter's preferred party is the frontrunner in a particular district (and thus COMPETITIVENESS is high), the value of CLOSENESS should not matter in that voter's decision to vote tactically. More generally, we should thus expect the effect of CLOSENESS to diminish in magnitude as COMPETITIVENESS increases. To allow for

6. Since the voters do not have complete knowledge about the election outcome at the time they make their vote choice, ideally one should use individual pre-election expectations or poll results for the contextual variables. Unfortunately, such data do not exist for the 1984 election as we stated above. For consistency, we use actual election outcomes to determine pre-election support for both elections, following the tradition of Black (1978), Cain (1978), Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin (1992), and Kim and Fording (2001). We then make separate calculations using pre-election perception data available for the 1988 election and compare the estimates with those previously obtained with actual election returns. As the two last columns in Table 1 show, the resulting coefficients are consistent in sign and statistical significance across the two measures used for the contextual variables.

this possibility, we include a multiplicative term (COMPETITIVENESS * CLOSENESS) to the model, where the coefficient for this interactive term is expected to be positive.

Finally, we add dummy variables for the party of the respondent to capture election-specific forces that might be expected to affect the propensity for tactical voting among members of each of the major parties. As the dependent variable is dichotomous, we use logit analysis to estimate the model. We estimate a separate model for each election, thus allowing the propensity for tactical voting among different parties, as well as the effects of the variables in the model, to vary over time. The results of our estimation are presented in Table 1 below.

(Table 1 about here)

As expected, both contextual variables are negatively related to tactical voting and are generally statistically significant ($< .05$). The interaction term is positive as expected and is statistically significant. The coefficients for the dummy variables indicating party support indicate that even after controlling for CLOSENESS and COMPETITIVENESS, supporters of the NDP and especially the Liberal Party were more likely to vote tactically than were the Conservatives. Overall, the results support the literature that suggests that tactical voting is sensitive to the electoral context. As a result, although national rates of tactical voting have consistently averaged 5-6% in these elections, there is a reason to believe that rates of tactical voting may actually be significantly higher in certain constituencies due to variation in the electoral context at the constituency level.

Estimating Tactical Voting at the Constituency Level

Having estimated our individual-level model of tactical voting for each election, we now shift the analysis to the constituency level, where our units of analysis, this time, become

political parties rather than individuals. Our ultimate goal at this stage is to estimate the extent and source of tactical voting within each district. We accomplish this task in a series of steps. First, we estimate the rate of tactical voting for each party within each district, defined as $TACTPARTY_i$, by using observed contextual data for the constituency and the coefficient estimates from the appropriate equation in Table 1. In other words, for each election we calculate:

$$[1] TACTPARTY_i = 1 / (1 + e^{-(\alpha + \beta_{CLOSENESS} + \beta_{COMPETITIVENESS} + \beta_{COMPETITIVENESS} * CLOSENESS + \beta_{PCSUPPORTER} + \beta_{LIBERALSUPPORTER})}),$$

for each party within each district, where the form of the equation is dictated by the fact that the coefficient estimates were generated using the logit model.

Next, using our estimate of $TACTPARTY_i$ along with the observed vote share for each party ($\%VOTE_i$), we calculate the percentage of voters (across the entire district) who consider party i their most preferred party but instead voted tactically. More formally, we define $TACTDIST_i$ as:

$$[2] TACTDIST_i = (\#Tactical\ Voters\ Preferring\ Party\ i / \#All\ Voters\ in\ the\ District) * 100,$$

which can be calculated as follows:

$$[3] TACTDIST_i = [\%VOTE_i / (1 - TACTPARTY_i)] - \%VOTE_i$$

Note that the first component of this equation $[\%VOTE_i / (1 - TACTPARTY_i)]$ is equal to the *sum* of two groups of voters: those who prefer party *i*, and those who prefer another party but voted strategically for party *i*. By subtracting the proportion of the district voting for party *i* ($\%VOTE_i$), we are thus left with the percentage of voters who prefer, but do not vote for, party *i* ($TACTDIST_i$).

Calculating Sincere Supporters at the Constituency Level

The final step in the analysis is to estimate election results that would have been observed if tactical voting had not occurred. First, we estimate vote flows (i.e., how tactical voters distributed their tactical votes across parties) using national-level data. Let $FLOWRATE_{ji}$ be the proportion of tactical voters from party *j* that give their votes to party *i*. Then the percentage of voters who prefer party *j* but vote tactically for party *i*, to be denoted $VOTEFLOW_{ji}$, can be estimated as follows:

$$[4] \ VOTEFLOW_{ji} = TACTDIST_j * FLOWRATE_{ji}, \ j = 1, 2,$$

where $FLOWRATE_{ji}$ is the proportion of tactical voters from party *j* that give their votes to party *i*.

Our ultimate goal at this stage of the analysis is to estimate the distribution of sincere preferences within each constituency. This requires that we estimate for each party in each constituency the proportion of voters who regard that party as their most preferred. To accomplish this task, we rely on the following formula that decomposes sincere vote shares for

each party into several constituent parts. The percentage of voters who consider party i their most preferred party, to be denoted $SINCERE_i$, can then be estimated as:

$$[5] \quad SINCERE_i = \%VOTE_i + \sum_{j=1}^2 VOTEFLOW_{ij} - \sum_{j=1}^2 VOTEFLOW_{ji} ,$$

where $VOTEFLOW_{ij}$ is the proportion of voters who consider party i their most preferred party but vote for some other party j . In words, this final equation thus states that the percentage of the district electorate that (sincerely) prefers party i ($SINCERE_i$) is equal to the percentage of voters that voted for party i ($\%VOTE_i$), plus (i) the percentage of voters who prefer party i but voted for party j , minus (ii) the percentage of voters who preferred party j but voted for party i .

Results

The Impact of Tactical Voting in Canadian Elections, 1984-1988

Using this logic, along with the coefficient estimates from the logit model above and observed electoral data from the elections of 1984 and 1988, we estimated the percentage of sincere voters for the Progressive Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, and the New Democratic Party within each constituency. Based on our estimates of tactical voting for each of the parties in these elections, it appears that there is considerable variation in the rate of tactical voting across constituencies. This is evident from examining Figure 1, which displays frequency distributions of estimated constituency level tactical voting rates for the parties in these elections. In the Figure, we can see that very little tactical voting occurred among Progressive Conservative Party supporters. This is expected, as they had little reason to expect their party to lose in the

two elections in the 80's. Alternatively, as Figure 1 indicates, tactical voting was considerably higher among supporters of the other major parties. Our estimates show the rate of tactical voting among Liberal Party supporters of 30-50% in many districts in 1984 and up to 30% in 1988. The Liberal Party candidates in quite a few ridings were perceived as losers in the 80's and a sizable number of followers had a reason to shift their vote to another party. Among NDP supporters, predicted levels of tactical voting in the range of 20-40% are estimated for many districts in both 1984 and 1988.

(Figure 1 about here)

Given this variation and the many constituencies where rates of tactical voting are predicted to have been extremely high, the next question to be answered is whether or not tactical voting had a significant effect on election outcomes. We address this question by comparing observed election outcomes to estimated election outcomes assuming sincere voting. For each of the elections, this comparison is presented in the form of a cross-tabulation in Table 2.

(Table 2 about here)

To see the impact of tactical voting on the seat distribution within the parliament, we simply need to examine the off-diagonal entries of the table, where nonzero entries (in bold) represent election outcomes that would have differed if tactical voting had not occurred. An examination of the results yields two interesting findings. First, the predicted effect of tactical voting on actual election outcomes was fairly large in the 1984 election, producing different electoral outcomes in 34 districts. Second, the impact of tactical voting decreased significantly

in the 1988 election. In either of the two elections, tactical voting did not alter who would get into government.⁷

Explaining the Varying Effect of Tactical Voting over Time

Of the 41 constituencies in which tactical voting was estimated to have made a difference, 34 occurred in the 1984 election alone. Although this 34-seat swing would not have

7. For many reasons, it is possible that our results underestimate the impact of tactical voting. First, the omission of relevant explanatory variables and the possibility of measurement error in our individual-level model may serve to attenuate coefficient estimates used to predict rates of tactical voting. The ability of the model to predict such high rates of tactical voting in many constituencies (as evidenced in Figure 1) leads us to believe that this may not be a serious problem. A more likely source of bias, however, may exist due to the use of national level tactical vote flows to generate our predicted set of sincere election results. To the extent that these vote flows vary across districts (as we expect they do), it is quite likely that we underestimate the true impact of tactical voting. While survey limitations do not allow us to assess the variability in vote flows across constituencies, we assessed the sensitivity of our estimates to variation in vote flows by generating a series of alternative (sincere) election results using hypothetical (assumed) sets of vote flows between parties. In this experiment, we generated election outcomes assuming that tactical vote flows were either 100% or 0% for each combination of parties. For example, for one set of election outcomes, we assume that the Progressive Conservative supporters gave 100% of their tactical votes to the NDP, that Liberal supporters gave 100% of their tactical votes to Progressive Conservatives, and that the NDP supporters gave 100% of their tactical votes to Liberals. Exhausting all possible combinations, this results in eight unique sets of vote flows generated from the assumption that party supporters gave 100% of their tactical votes to a single party. Based on these hypothetical sets of vote flows, we generated eight sets of sincere election outcomes. For each election (year), we then calculated the percentage of district outcomes that were the same under every one of the eight combinations of vote flows. Assuming the adequacy of the individual-level model presented in Table 1, these percentages thus reflect the number of districts where it is *mathematically impossible* for tactical voting to have affected the outcome. Thus, to the extent that these estimates are reasonably large, we can conclude that the true impact of tactical voting has been modest at best. For 1984, our estimates indicate that for 80% of the constituencies, the result could not possibly have been affected. For 1988, the percentage becomes 76. Put somewhat differently, it was mathematically possible that about 20 to 24% of the constituency outcomes could have been affected. First of all, this maximum possible number is not much higher than our estimate for 1984. Second, while this figure is not insignificant, we must stress that this value was generated based on a change in the outcome observed under *any* of eight possible vote flows within each district, and thus represents the universe of districts where it is only mathematically possible that tactical voting could have mattered. Obviously, many of these vote flows are *highly implausible*. Consequently, the true impact of tactical voting must be significantly less than these estimates and is most likely closer to our point estimates presented in Table 2. Nevertheless, this exercise does lead us to believe that variability in vote flows, which we believe may exist to some extent, probably leads us to underestimate the true impact of tactical voting to some degree.

altered the Conservative control of government given its size of majority in the parliament, this is a lot more than what Kim and Fording (2001) found in any of the four British elections they analyzed.⁸

Further our results show that the Progressive Conservatives were the sole beneficiaries of tactical voting in 1984. That is, in all of 34 cases, the Progressive Conservative Party candidates won the elections due to tactical voting by Liberal Party or NDP supporters. This fact is also supported by the pattern of vote flows in 1984. Table 3 displays the distribution of vote flows from party to party, based on samples of tactical voters from the two elections. In 1984, the tactical voters from the Liberal Party and the NDP gave an overwhelming majority of their votes (87.4% and 82.8% respectively) to Progressive Conservatives, while few Progressive Conservative supporters voted tactically.

(Table 3 about here)

The 1984 election result represented a dramatic change from the past. The Progressive Conservatives' seat share in the parliament doubled from 103 to 211, while that of the Liberals' shrank from 147 to 40. The PC's total vote share jumped from 32.5% in 1980 to 50%, while that of the Liberals dropped from 44.3% to 28%. We can see the anomalous nature of the 1984 election in Figure 2, which show the popular vote share of the two major parties. Prior to the 1984 election, the Liberals had governed on a narrow geographic base encompassing eastern Canada and Quebec. In 1984, however, the Liberal Party's stronghold in the Catholic areas of eastern Canada collapsed. More importantly, the Party lost 56 seats and half of its vote share in Quebec. The Progressive Conservatives, on the other hand, gained 57 seats and nearly

8. They found 5 to 20-seat swing in the British elections they studied. The difference in the impact of tactical voting between the Canadian case (our study) and the British case (Kim and Fording) is in fact even greater, considering the size of British parliament, which is roughly twice

quadrupled their vote there.

(Figure 2 about here)

This dramatic reversal in election outcome can be attributed to several factors. First, from 1963 to the PC victory in 1984, the Liberals had held power for over 20 years, with a brief interruption in 1979, creating Liberal government fatigue. Second, the Progressive Conservatives chose a popular Quebecois, Brian Mulroney, as their party leader. Third, the Party now adopted less centrist and interventionist orientation compared to that of the Liberals. This laid the basis for a Conservative alliance with Quebec on economic and constitutional issues. Liberal policies and governing style had created an electoral opening for the right type of Conservative leader, who cemented his advantage through a shift in ideological positioning so as to better appeal to an electorate alienated from the governing party (Bickerton, Gagnon, and Smith 1999, pp.11, 13-14, and 213-214). Sensing their party's weakness in their constituency, many Liberal supporters voted tactically, primarily for the Progressive Conservative candidates, which magnified the PC victory.

The situation again changed drastically in 1988 when tactical voting is predicted to have produced only a seven-seat swing.⁹ The Progressive Conservatives continued to be the primary beneficiaries of tactical voting by Liberal Party and NDP supporters, but at a much lesser degree than in 1984. The Liberal Party also gained one seat due to tactical voting by the NDP supporters.

that of the Canadian parliament.

9. Our estimation of the model with survey data from 1988 shows nearly identical results with the number of possible seat swings at six. Once again, the predicted seat swings would not have changed the final overall outcome in the 1988 Canadian parliamentary elections. Since we do not have data on individuals' perceptions of party strength for 1984, we cannot make comparisons across elections.

From the observation of Table 3 and Figure 1, it appears that one of the reasons why the impact of tactical voting on election outcomes declined in 1988 was that the Liberal supporters came back home to their own party.¹⁰ We can also imagine that the impact of tactical voting declined because the overall number of tactical voters declined. This can happen if there were fewer constituencies where the election was close in 1988. This appears not to be the case. In 1984, approximately 15% of all elections were decided by 5 or fewer percentage points, while in 1988, close races of the same magnitude were reported in approximately 24% of all districts. We can also suspect that the two most important electoral variables influencing tactical voting – COMPETITIVENESS and CLOSENESS – tend to be negatively correlated across districts. Though the magnitude of the correlation is not extremely high by our estimates (-.465, $p < .001$ in 1984 and -.227, $p < .001$ in 1988), this does suggest that these important influences on tactical voting tend to cancel each other out to some degree in the empirical world.

Another reason why the impact of tactical voting declined in 1988 might be that the second-choice parties of tactical voters from a given party changed. This is clear by examining Table 3, based on the national-level (survey) data. By 1988, the data suggest that the Liberal Party had replaced the Progressive Conservatives as the second choice of NDP supporters as 63.3% of the 1988 sample of NDP tactical voters gave their votes to Liberal Party candidates. While Liberal Party tactical voters overwhelmingly favored the Progressive Conservatives as their second choice in 1984, there is disagreement among them in 1988 as they almost equally split their votes between the PC and the NDP. One reason why tactical voters from the NDP and the Liberal Party found each other's party more acceptable might be the position the Liberal Party took on an important issue of the time. Liberals entered the 1988 campaign stressing their

10. Our statistics show that it was especially the case in eastern Canada and Ontario.

opposition to Canadian approval of the proposed free trade agreement with the United States. The same view was supported by the NDP on the left, with only the Progressive Conservatives favoring the agreement. This might have made the positions of the Liberal Party and the NDP closer than before, and as a result, the supporters of one party found the other as acceptable second choice.¹¹

Conclusion

Previous empirical studies using existing survey data have shown that some voters do vote tactically under single member district plurality electoral institutions (Fisher 1973, Curtice and Steed 1988, Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin 1992, 1993, Evans and Heath 1993, Blais and Nadeau 1996, Alvarez and Nagler 2000, Blais et al., n.d.). These studies provide empirical evidence that some voters try to avoid “wasting” their vote by not voting for their most preferred party (candidate) under the Duvergerian reasoning. Our study over a two-election cycle in Canada further affirms the fact that, in some cases, tactical voting does indeed lead to election outcomes that are different from those in the absence of tactical behavior. This means that voters can be successful in not wasting their votes and preventing their least preferred party candidates from being elected, thus providing additional evidence that theoretical arguments based on voter rationality are to some degree valid in the real world.

11. As we stated above, Table 3 presents aggregate figures based on the national-level (survey) data. We can observe an interesting phenomenon by looking at different regions in Canada. Namely, even under those propitious circumstances for generating a truly national debate along the free trade issue and common national choice for Canadians, anti-free trade voters in the West tactically chose the strongest opposition party in the region, the NDP, while in the East they did the same and moved to the Liberals. The end result was to deny both parties the claim to speak with a strong national voice (Bickerton, Gagnon, and Smith 1999, pp.13-14).

At the same time, our results demonstrate that the impact of tactical voting on election outcomes fluctuated in Canada in the 80's. Tactical voting had a significant impact in 1984, but only a modest impact in 1988, on the actual distribution of seats within the Parliament. It had no impact on the partisan composition of the government in either of the two elections.¹² This fluctuation in the impact of tactical voting may be due to a variety of reasons, including changes in the electoral contexts within districts, in the pool of tactical voters, in the amount of information about party positions, and in the preferences among tactical voters themselves about their second choice parties.

As we suggested in the first section of this paper, the study of tactical voting in single member district plurality systems has been a growth industry in comparative politics. Our study, like Kim and Fording (2001), is an attempt to go beyond simply measuring the level of tactical voting after each election or evaluating the factors determining this level. To get a more complete picture of the impact of tactical voting in Canada, obviously, our next task is to look at the elections in the 90's. Furthermore, given our results in this paper, more studies about voter perception of party positions and the determinants of voters' ordinal preferences of political parties are warranted.

12. A caveat applies here: our study assesses the impact of the act of tactical voting on the day of election. However, the expectation of tactical voting can shape parties' pre-election electoral strategies, such as the choice of candidates for individual constituencies, the amount of party support in each constituency, the cooperation with other parties, and so on. Therefore this aspect of tactical voting, although unobservable and thus unmeasurable, can still have great impact on election outcomes.

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Table 1. Logit Results for Tactical Voting in Canadian Elections, 1984-1988

Variables	<u>1984 Election</u> Coefficients with Actual Election Data	<u>1988 Election</u> Coefficients with Actual Election Data	<u>1988 Election</u> Coefficients with Survey Data
Competitiveness	-.095**** (.019)	-.078**** (.010)	-.119**** (.009)
Closeness	-.013 (.012)	-.024** (.011)	-.025**** (.004)
Competitiveness*Closeness	.001** (.001)	.001*** (.001)	.001**** (.000)
PC supporter	-.727 (.485)	-.582** (.235)	-.425* (.244)
Liberal supporter	1.133**** (.239)	.080 (.179)	.304 (.186)
Intercept	-.641 (.439)	-.268 (.297)	1.053**** (.261)
Chi-square (df=5)	257.206	135.054	372.900
Pseudo R ²	.28	.31	.27
N	2223	2760	2927

* p < .1; ** p < .05; *** p < .01; **** p < .001

Note: Cell entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

**Table 2. Predicted Winners Based on Sincere Voting
by Actual Winners, 1984-1988**

Predicted Winner Based on Sincere Voting		Actual Winner (Reflecting Tactical Voting)			
1984 Election:		PC	Liberal	NDP	Total
PC		177	0	0	177
Liberal		27	40	0	67
NDP		7	0	30	37
Total		211	40	30	281*
1988 Election:		PC	Liberal	NDP	Total
PC		163	0	0	163
Liberal		2	82	0	84
NDP		4**	1	43	48
Total		169	83	43	295

* There were 282 seats in the parliament in 1984. The one remaining seat went to an independent.

** These are the districts where the Progressive Conservative candidates won by slim margins (by 1.8%, 1.1%, 0.9%, and 0.4% respectively). Our results show that the NDP candidates would have won, in the absence of tactical voting, in these districts by even slimmer margins (by 0.06%, 0.2%, 0.34%, and 0.8% respectively). This extreme closeness of the elections in these districts allowed tactical voters to alter the election results even though the amount of vote flow from the NDP to Progressive Conservatives was not high in 1988 (see Table 3 below).

Table 3. Distribution of Tactical Votes across Parties

The 1984 Election

		Sincere Preference of Respondent			Total
		PC	Liberal	NDP	
Vote of Respondent	PC		104 87.4%	24 82.8%	128 82.6%
	Liberal	2 28.6%		5 17.2%	7 4.5%
	NDP	5 71.4%	15 12.6%		20 12.9%
Total		7 100%	119 100%	29 100%	155 100%

The 1988 Election

		Sincere Preference of Respondent			Total
		PC	Liberal	NDP	
Vote of Respondent	PC		26 49.1%	18 36.7%	44 22.4%
	Liberal	66 70.2%		31 63.3%	97 49.5%
	NDP	28 29.8%	27 50.9%		55 28.1%
Total		94 100%	53 100%	49 100%	196 100%

Source: Canadian Election Studies (CES), 1984, 1988.

Figure 1. Predicted Levels of Tactical Voting among Progressive Conservative, Liberal, and NDP Supporters, 1984-1988

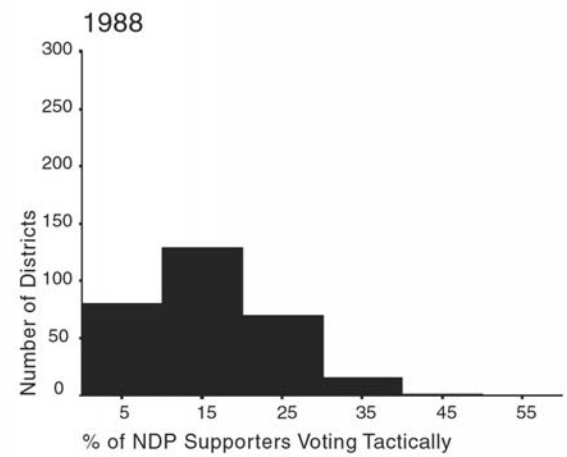
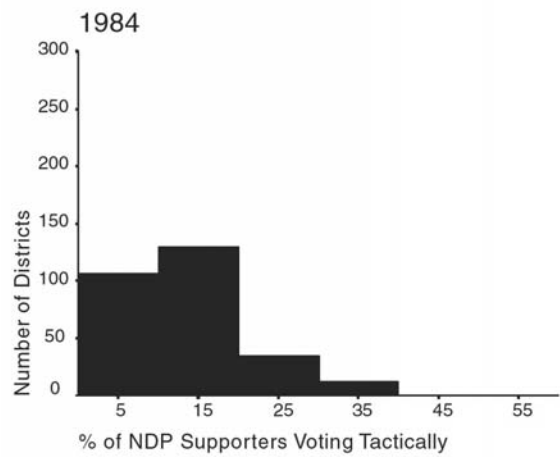
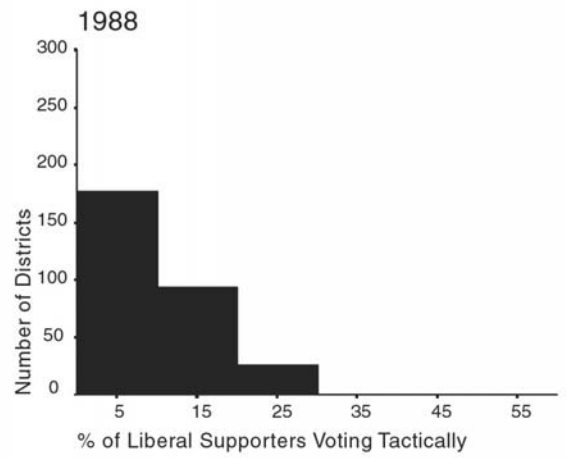
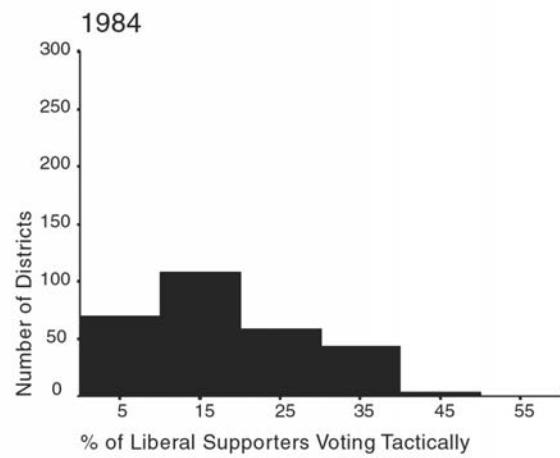
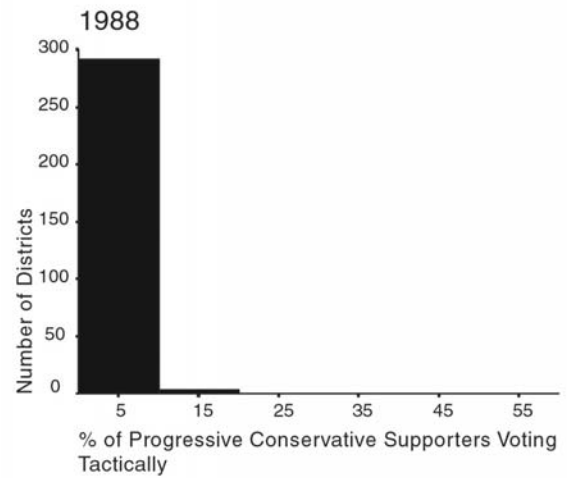
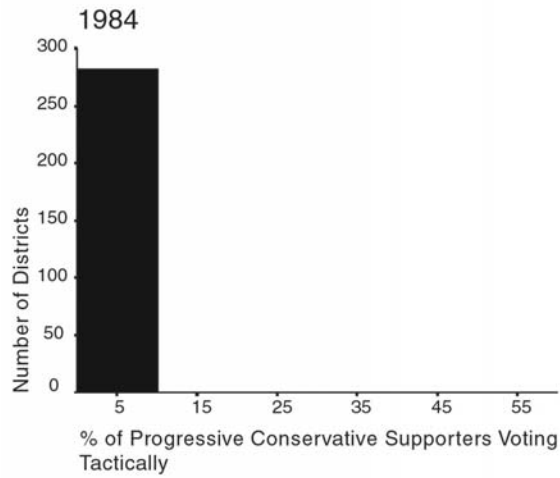


Figure 2. Two Major Parties, 1962-1997, by Popular Vote

