

Does Tactical Voting Matter?

The Political Impact of Tactical Voting in Recent British 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 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 recent British general elections. 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. Based on 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 parliaments after these elections, we discuss the political impact of tactical voting in the United Kingdom.

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 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; and Alvarez and Nagler, in press). 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).

We take yet another approach. In this paper, we investigate the political impact of tactical voting over a period of time. That is, we 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. 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, 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.²

In this paper, we study four recent general elections in the United Kingdom, 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 section of this paper, we discuss the impact of tactical voting in the United Kingdom 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 British Election Study (BES) for the elections of 1983, 1987, 1992, and 1997.³ To identify tactical voters we use the operationalization advocated by Evans and Heath (1993). This indicator of tactical voting is based on a single item that asks respondents why they voted as they did, and identifies tactical voters as those who responded by saying that their preferred party had no chance of winning (for a controversy over what survey items represent “tactical voting,” see Evans and Heath, 1993, and Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin, 1992, 1993). In estimating our individual-level 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.⁴

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 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.⁵ 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 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, the results of which are presented below in Table 1.

(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 in three of the four models, but does not quite reach conventional levels of statistical significance. However, given our theoretical preference for the interactive specification, as well as the multicollinearity inherent in such models, we chose to keep the interactive terms in the models for our final results.

The coefficients for the dummy variables indicating party support indicate that even after controlling for CLOSENESS and COMPETITIVENESS, supporters of the Labour Party and especially the Alliance/LDP were more likely to vote tactically than were Conservatives. The one exception here is the 1992 election, where controlling for the electoral environment, Conservatives were more likely to vote tactically. Overall, the results support the literature that suggests tactical voting is sensitive to electoral context. As a result, although national rates of tactical voting have consistently averaged 5-7% in these elections, there is reason to believe that rates of tactical voting may actually be significantly higher in certain constituencies due to variation in 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 now 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:

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

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.⁶ 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 in 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:

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

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 that prefer party i but voted for party j , minus (ii) the percentage of voters that preferred party j but voted for party i .

Results

The Impact of Tactical Voting in British Elections, 1983-1997

Using this logic, along with the coefficient estimates from the logit model above and observed electoral data from the elections of 1983, 1987, 1992, and 1997, we estimated the percentage of sincere voters for the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, and the Liberal/SDP Alliance (or Liberal Democrats) 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 Figures 1-3, which display frequency distributions of estimated constituency level tactical voting rates for the parties in these elections. In Figure 1, we can see that very little tactical voting has occurred among Conservative Party supporters. This is expected, as Conservative Party supporters have had little reason to expect their party to lose in recent elections. Alternatively, as Figures 2 and 3 indicate, tactical voting has been considerably higher among supporters of the other major parties. This is especially the case among Alliance/LDP supporters, where rates of tactical voting in the range of 40-50% are estimated in a sizable number of districts in the 1990's.

(Figures 1-3 about here)

Given this variation, and thus 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 has 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)

An examination of the results yields two important findings. First, generally speaking, the predicted effect of tactical voting on actual election outcomes has been modest at best. This is easily seen by an examination of the off-diagonal entries of the table, where nonzero entries represent election outcomes that would have differed if tactical voting had not occurred. Of the 2,342 constituency outcomes examined across the four elections, in only 39 cases did the actual winner differ from the winner predicted assuming sincere voting.

Assessing the Sensitivity of Our Projections

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 Figures 1-3) 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 Conservatives gave 100% of their tactical votes to the LDP/Alliance, that Labour supporters gave 100% of their tactical votes to Conservatives, and that the LDP/Alliance gave 100% of their tactical votes to Labour. 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 1983 and 1987, our estimates indicate that for approximately 84% of the constituencies, the result could not possibly have been affected. This figure decreases somewhat for 1992 and 1997, however, where it is estimated that for each of these years approximately 67% of constituency outcomes could not possibly have been affected by tactical voting. Put

somewhat differently, by the 1990's, it was mathematically possible that about 33% of the constituency outcomes could have been affected. 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. For example, national surveys repeatedly show that Labour Party supporters rarely gave their tactical votes to Conservative candidates, yet our experiment allows for such a possibility (at a rate of 100%). Consequently, the true impact of tactical voting must be significantly less than these estimates and is most likely (we feel) 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. As a result, we conclude that the true impact of tactical voting has likely been politically significant in recent years, though relatively modest in magnitude.

Explaining the Modest Effect of Tactical Voting

Although our projections indicate that tactical voting has had only a modest impact on election outcomes, it is not immediately obvious why this might be the case. One possible reason might be that there are relatively few constituencies where the election is close. This appears not to be the case. Across the four election years, approximately 12% of all elections were decided by 5 or fewer percentage points. Rather, the reasons for such a small impact may lie elsewhere. Three possibilities seem likely.

The first reason is inherent in the nature of the relationship between electoral context and tactical voting. The individual-level analysis suggests that the level of support of one's party is the most important factor in determining the probability of tactical voting. As a result, even though there are many instances of predicted tactical voting rates of 30% or more, this would necessarily mean that these high rates of tactical voting are coming from parties that enjoy relatively little support and thus have relatively few tactical votes to give.

A second reason lies in the fact 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 modest by our estimates (-.42, $p < .05$), this does suggest that these important influences on tactical voting tend to cancel each other out to some degree in the empirical world.

Finally, a third reason lies in the fact that tactical voters from a given party often do not seem to agree on their second-choice parties. Based on the national-level (survey) data, it is clear that tactical voters from the same party are far from unanimous in their selection of the party to receive their vote. This is clear by examining Table 3, which displays the distribution of vote flows from party to party, based on pooled samples of tactical voters over the four elections. As can be seen, only for the Labour Party do tactical voters seem to be in strong agreement as to who should receive their vote, as approximately 80% gave their vote to the Alliance/Liberal Democrats across the four elections. For both the Alliance/Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, tactical voters were significantly less unanimous in their choice, with the distribution of vote flows ranging between 40% and 60% in the four-election sample. Even granting the likelihood that these vote flows vary across districts, it is still likely that we would find considerable disagreement among party supporters could we observe district-level data,

suggesting that even if there were significant numbers of tactical votes to be had, these votes tend to flow in opposing directions, attenuating the cumulative impact of tactical voting.⁷

(Table 3 about here)

The Increasing Impact of Tactical Voting Over Time

Although we estimate that the impact of tactical voting has been relatively modest in the past, it has been growing. Of the 39 constituencies in which tactical voting was estimated to have made a difference, 20 occurred in the 1997 election alone. This finding confirms the conventional wisdom that tactical voting played a more important role in the 1997 election (Curtice and Steed, 1997; Budge et al., 1998). Further, our results show that in 18 of these 20 cases, Conservative Party candidates lost the election due to tactical voting by Labour Party or Liberal Democratic Party supporters. This is in sharp contrast to previous elections (1983 and 1987) in which Conservatives were predicted to be the primary beneficiaries of tactical voting.

Why might the tide have turned in 1997? The answer may lie in the recent ideological movement of the Labour Party. Based on recent evidence, it is clear that the Labour Party moved to the right in 1997, sending a clear message to both Labour and LDP supporters about what their second-choice party should be in case they voted tactically. The parties' ideological movement over time (based on a content analysis of party manifestos) is presented in Figure 4.

(Figure 4 about here)

As can be seen, by 1997 the Labour Party had moved considerably to the right, thus strengthening the relationship between Labour and the LDP. This fact is also supported by the pattern of vote flows over the four elections. In the three elections prior to 1997, Alliance tactical voters had given a majority of their votes (55%) to Conservatives. By 1997, however,

the data suggest that the Labour Party had replaced the Conservatives as the second choice of LDP supporters as 58% of the 1997 sample of LDP tactical voters gave their votes to Labour Party candidates. While Labour Party tactical voters have overwhelmingly favored the Alliance/LDP as their second choice throughout the four elections, the 1997 level of support significantly exceeded levels seen in earlier elections as 95% of the 1997 sample of Labour tactical voters gave their vote to LDP candidates.

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, in press). 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 period of time 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.

At the same time, however, our results convincingly demonstrate that until recently, tactical voting has had a modest impact on election outcomes in the United Kingdom. Tactical voting had a modest impact on the actual distribution of seats within the Parliament and no impact on the partisan composition of the government.⁸ Even in 1997 when tactical voting had a

much greater impact, due to the ideological convergence of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, it did not affect the partisanship of the government given the margin of the Labour majority. At the micro-level, individual voters may try not to waste their votes by voting tactically. Our results suggest, however, that this individual act may not always lead to its intended outcome, which is to prevent voters' least preferred party from winning. This may be due to a variety of reasons, including the electoral contexts within districts, the small pool of tactical voters, a lack of information about party positions, and different preferences among tactical voters themselves about their second choice parties. There may exist individual-level incentives to vote tactically and thus rationally, in the Duvergerian sense, but the collective choice may not result in the intended effect. As social choice theorists would suggest, then, individual rationality does not necessarily lead to group rationality.

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 is an attempt to go beyond simply measuring the level of tactical voting after each election or evaluating the factors determining this level. Given our results, more studies about voter perception of party positions and the determinants of voters' ordinal preferences of political parties are warranted.

Notes

¹ Although the notion of tactical voting has been primarily applied to plurality electoral systems, incentives to vote tactically may exist in countries with different 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.

² There have been a few studies in the past that tried to estimate the number of constituencies in Britain whose election outcomes were altered by tactical voting. These estimates were based on somewhat crude assumptions and methodology. See Curtice and Steed (1988, 1992, 1997) and Evans (1994). See Catt (1990) for a critique of the approach taken by these studies.

³ We chose to begin with the 1983 general election since it was in the mid-1980s when tactical voting became a major subject of public and media interest (Butler and Kavanagh, 1988; Fieldhouse, Pattie, and Johnston, 1996). Further, surveys for prior elections do not allow one to reliably distinguish “pure” tactical voters from “insincere” voters who stray from their preferred party for other, nonstrategic reasons.

⁴ We only consider cases of tactical voting in which both the preferred party and the party actually supported were among the Labour, Conservative, and Alliance/Liberal Democratic Parties (LDP). This is due primarily to the fact that there are only a handful of tactical voters

in these samples who either truly supported or voted for another party, preventing us from estimating tactical vote flows to and from these other parties. Estimates of these vote flows are necessary to make the final election adjustments in the sections ahead.

⁵ For the contextual variables, we use actual election outcomes to determine preelection support. Ideally one should use individual preelection expectations or poll results. In the absence of such data for all constituencies in Britain for all four elections, we use actual election results, following the tradition of Black (1978), Cain (1978), and Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin (1992).

⁶ For vote flows between Labour and Alliance/LDP parties, these vote flows are calculated using national-level data for each of the four elections. For vote flows involving the Conservative Party, however, the sample sizes for each group of tactical voters are reduced to unacceptably low levels when using yearly figures (i.e., $N < 20$). We therefore use the average distribution of votes across the four elections for these cases.

⁷ Although the vote flow estimates presented in Table 3 are based on pooled data, yearly estimates of vote flows (which were used in the estimation of tactical voting rates) of Alliance/LDP supporters reveal similar levels of disagreement. Yearly estimates of vote flows originating from Conservative Party supporters were not calculated due to extremely small sample sizes (see Note 6).

⁸ 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 (thus the birth of

Alliance), 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 British Elections, 1983-1997

	<u>1983 Election</u>	<u>1987 Election</u>	<u>1992 Election</u>	<u>1997 Election</u>
Variables	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient
Competitiveness	-.075* (.016)	-.067* (.018)	-.112* (.017)	-.135* (.021)
Closeness	-.023 (.020)	.025 (.020)	-.032* (.012)	-.043* (.018)
Competitiveness*Closeness	.001 (.001)	-.001 (.001)	.001 (.001)	.001* (.001)
Conservative supporter	-1.050* (.312)	-.318 (.372)	.646* (.315)	-.511 (.433)
Labour supporter	-.128 (.196)	-.172 (.251)	.258 (.263)	.392 (.327)
Intercept	-.079 (.437)	-.571* (.514)	.841* (.309)	1.481* (.439)
Chi-square (df=5)	127.79	96.17	200.10	182.30
Pseudo R ²	.14	.18	.24	.31
N	3133	1544	2191	1549

* p < .05

Note: Cell entries are logit coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Estimates were generated by STATA 6.0.

Table 2. Predicted Winners Based on Sincere Voting by Actual Winners, 1983-1997

Predicted Winner Based on Sincere Voting	Actual Winner (Reflecting Tactical Voting)			
1983 Election:	Conservative	Labour	Alliance	Total
Conservative	391	0	0	391
Labour	6	209	0	214
Alliance	0	0	24	24
Total	396	209	24	629
1987 Election:	Conservative	Labour	Alliance	Total
Conservative	367	0	1	368
Labour	4	210	0	216
Alliance	0	0	20	20
Total	373	210	21	604
1992 Election:	Conservative	Labour	Alliance	Total
Conservative	323	3	4	317
Labour	0	213	1	222
Alliance	0	0	09	12
Total	325	214	12	551
1997 Election:	Conservative	Labour	LDP	Total
Conservative	164	4	14	182
Labour	0	352	2	354
LDP	0	0	22	22
Total	164	356	38	558

Table 3. Distribution of Tactical Votes across Parties, 1983-1997

		Sincere Preference of Respondent			Total
		Conservative	Labour	Alliance / LDP	
Vote of respondent	Conservative		2 4.9%	23 41.8%	25 24.0%
	Labour	2 25.0%		32 58.2%	34 32.7%
	Alliance / LDP	6 75.0%	39 95.1%		45 43.3%
Total		8 100.0%	41 100.0%	55 100.0%	104 100.0%

Source: British National Election Studies (BES), 1983, 1987, 1992, 1997

Figure 1. Predicted Levels of Tactical Voting among Conservative Party Supporters, 1983-1997

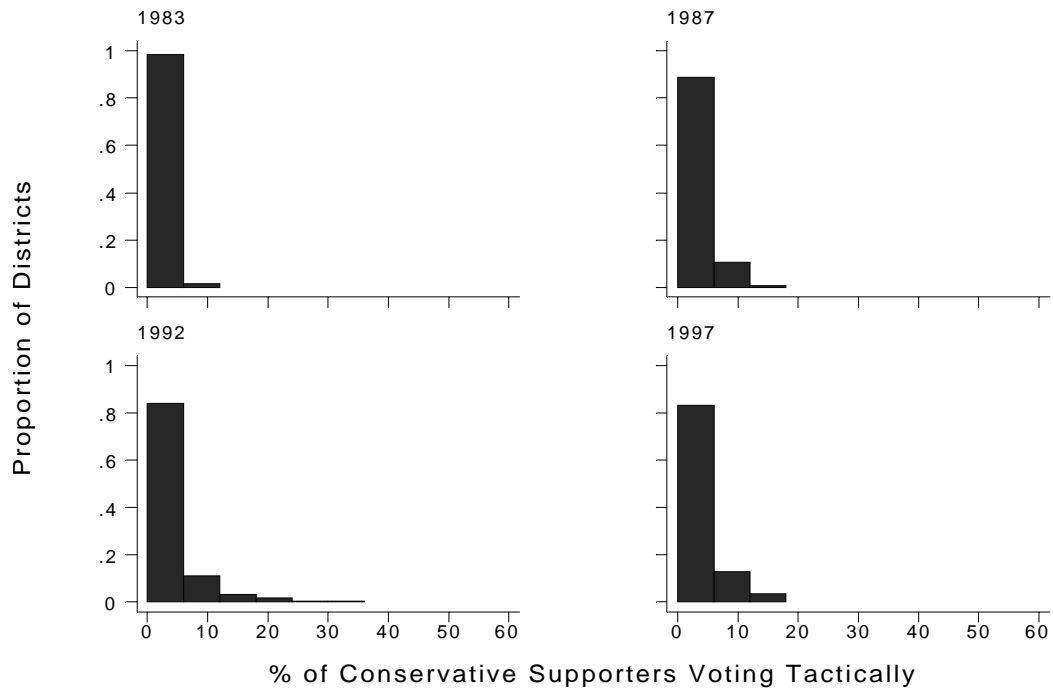


Figure 2. Predicted Levels of Tactical Voting among Labour Party Supporters, 1983-1997

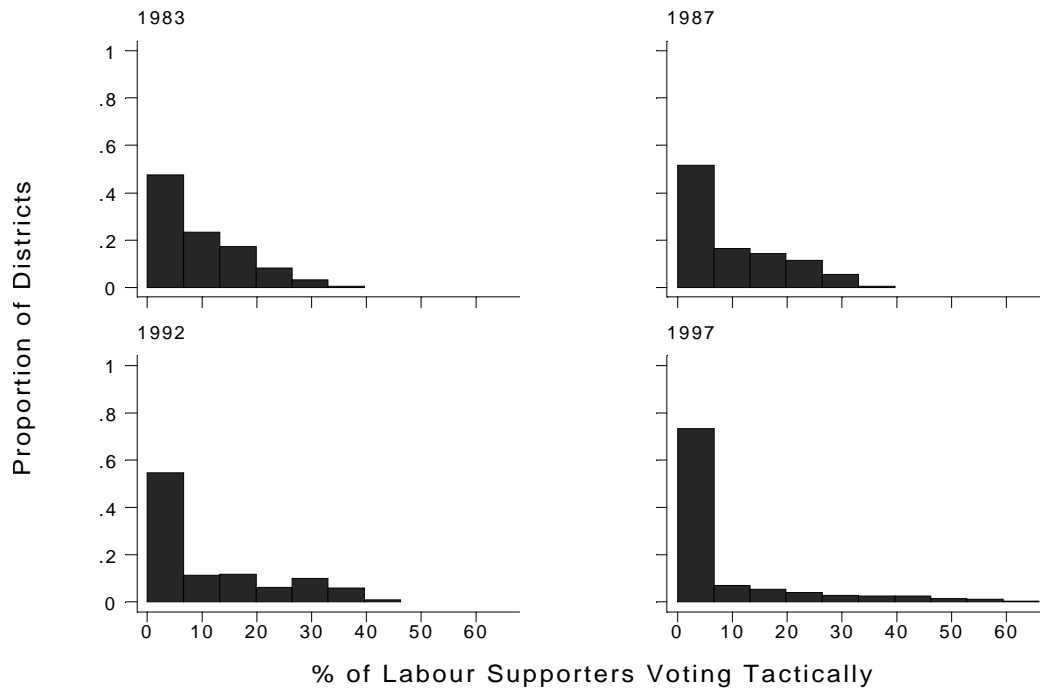


Figure 3. Predicted Levels of Tactical Voting among Alliance/Liberal Democratic Party Supporters, 1983-1997

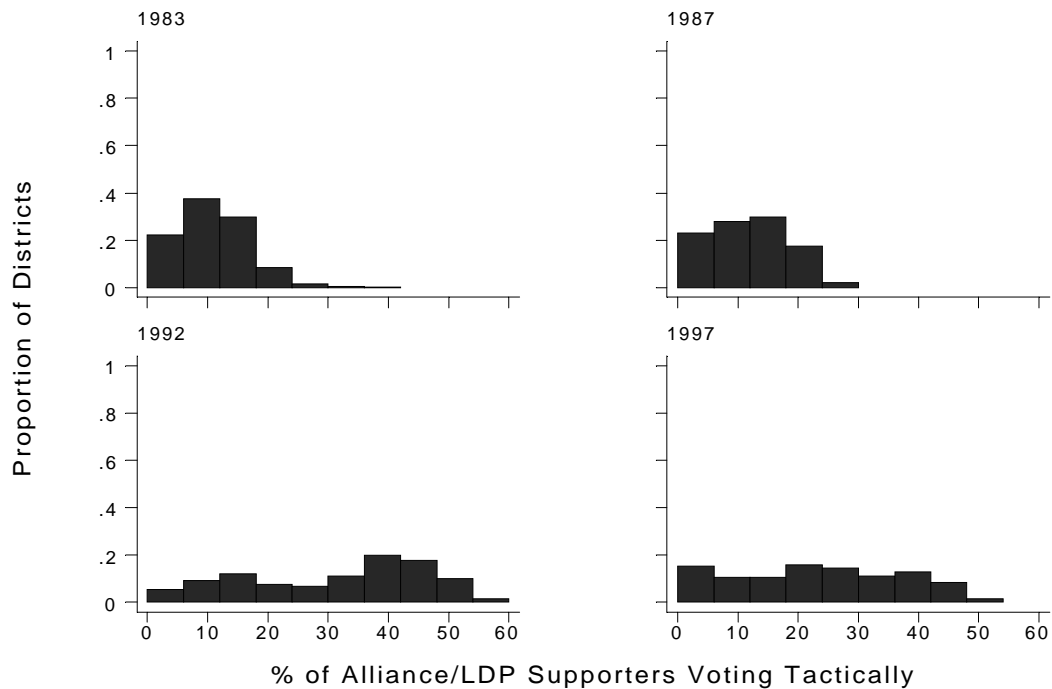
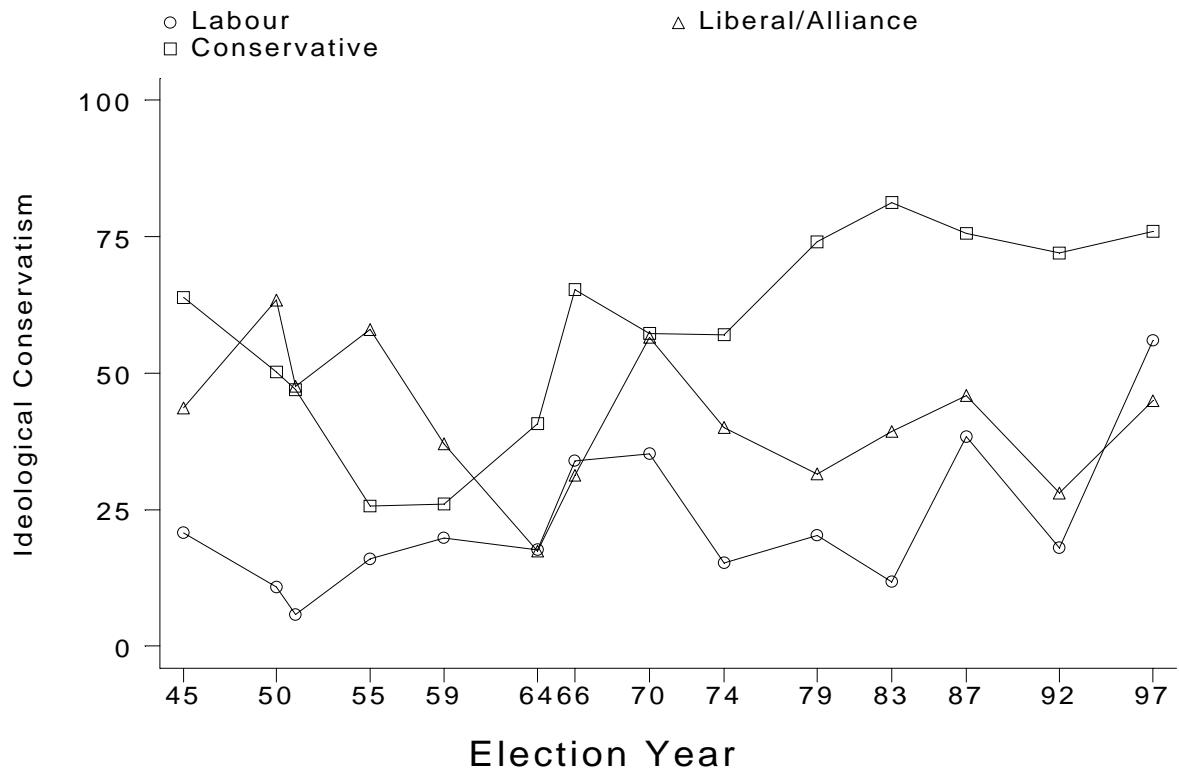


Figure 4. British Parties' Left-Right Movement, 1945-1997



Source: Comparative Manifestos Project (ECPR) and Ian Budge