

# Strategic voting and elite mobilization\*

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## **Abstract**

Strategic voting has been attributed to the mobilization activities of the benefited party. In this paper we use data from the Spanish general elections of 2000, 2004 and 2008 and find that, after controlling for the mobilization efforts of political elites, strategic voting persists as a relevant phenomenon. We use the number of party campaign events at constituency level to incorporate mobilization activities in a multinomial probit model of vote choice. According to our estimation, about 3 per cent of Spanish voters behaved strategically across the elections studied. This result is interesting because it suggests that a part of strategic voting behavior is not induced by elite activity, but it is more plausibly an autonomous response of voters to the situation that confront in their constituencies.

**Key words:** Strategic Voting, Proportional Representation Systems, Elite Mobilization, Spanish Elections

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## 1. Introduction

A potential effect of election campaigns is that they may increase the number of strategic voters. Voters act strategically when the party they like the most has little chance of attaining legislative representation due to the circumstances in their constituencies. A well designed campaign could convince some voters to support their second preferred party by informing them how competitive a contest is, how detrimental the effects of a disliked party victory are, or by making them more aware of how far is their favorite party from achieving a parliamentary seat in their constituency. Following this reasoning, some scholars have attributed strategic voting to the mobilization activities of the benefited party (Cox, 1997: 98; 1999; Lago, 2005: chapter 6; 2008). Previous empirical research however did not control for mobilization efforts which would allow testing whether strategic voting behavior still exists in the absence of campaign effects.

In this paper we use the number of elite campaign appearances in the constituencies to control for the influence of party mobilization on voter's choice. We compute the number of strategic voters in the three Spanish elections held from 2000 to 2008 using a counterfactual procedure similar to that proposed by Alvarez and Nagler (2000). In particular we first estimate a multinomial probit specification of voter behavior which incorporates elite mobilization activities. We then use the coefficients from this model to predict the number of voters and abstainers and to simulate how many of them would have chosen differently if there were no strategic incentives in the constituencies. After controlling for the effect of elite mobilization during the election campaigns, we find that between 1.5 and 5.3% of the voters behaved strategically, depending on the election. This result implies that a part of strategic voting is not explained by the efforts of party elites but it is more likely a response of voters to the current conditions in the constituencies where they cast their vote.

In addition to incorporating the effects of elite's mobilization to analyze strategic voting, this paper makes two contributions to previous literature. First, in our specification voters can choose either to vote or to abstain. Including abstention among

voters' options is rare in the strategic voting literature<sup>1</sup>. We believe that abstention should be incorporated in empirical estimations of strategic voting in order to identify individuals whose first preference would be to abstain if constituency characteristics offered no incentives to act strategically. Our study finds that a relevant part of the Spanish electorate whose most preferred alternative would have been to abstain voted strategically in the three general elections examined. Moreover, not allowing for the possibility to abstain would bias the estimates of strategic voters. This is due to the fact that when abstention is not an option, many voters would be predicted by the counterfactual procedure to be sincere voters when in fact their most preferred choice would be not to vote.

Another aspect in which this paper complements previous research comes from our decision to study Spanish general elections. Except for the copious literature on voting behavior in the United Kingdom, few papers have studied strategic voting in other European countries. This is somewhat surprising because the incentives to vote strategically should be greater in multiparty systems where several long established ideological parties compete for the same pool of voters. Spain is an interesting case study as there are two main parties on the left, the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the United Left (IU), and only one major party on the right, the conservative Popular Party (PP). While the PSOE alternates in government with the PP, the IU is a much smaller party with a declining support at the polls in recent elections. The fact that the IU has no chance to attain representation in most constituencies together with the fierce nationwide competition between the PP and the PSOE to gain office make Spanish general elections an ideal setting to study strategic voting in multiparty systems.

The remaining of the paper is organized as follows. The next section relates our work to the previous literature on strategic voting and discusses the approaches to measure it. Section 3 describes briefly the institutional features of the Spanish political system which enhance the strategic behavior of voters. Sections 4 and 5 present the statistical methods and information sources. In the sixth section we report the results and summarize the findings. Section 7 concludes.

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<sup>1</sup> An exception is Cain (1978).

## 2. Literature on strategic voting

The work of McKelvey and Ordeshook (1972) on the rationality of voter behavior in multiparty elections provides the theoretical basis to study strategic voting. The idea is simple: if voters care about government policies, they may choose to vote for a party that is not their favorite to avoid the victory of another one which will implement policies they reject. Furthermore, even without policy-seeking considerations, voters may support a party which is not their top preferred if the latter has no chances to gain representation in their constituency to avoid their vote being “wasted”<sup>2</sup>.

Many papers have measured the overall amount of strategic voting in multiparty elections. According to the literature summarized in Table 1, the proportion of voters that behave strategically ranges from 1% to 17%, depending on the type of election, the complexities of the electoral system of the country and the researcher’s measurement method. Three estimation approaches have been employed: the first uses aggregate data, the second survey information with respondents’ motives to vote for a party, and the third regression analysis and simulation.

Employing aggregate electoral returns to test strategic behavior, as in Fisher (1973), Cain (1978), Galbraith and Rae (1989), Johnston and Pattie (1991) or Cox (1997), is logically flawed because individual preferences and behaviour cannot be inferred from aggregated data. Aggregate analysis however is helpful in order to study if the correlation detected at constituency level between variables such as the vote for small parties and district magnitude is consistent with the predictions of the strategic voting hypothesis.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

A second group of researchers measure strategic behavior directly from individual level data. Some post-election survey questionnaires include items about the respondents’ placement in the left-right scale and the motives of their vote. Researchers use this

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<sup>2</sup> Strategic behavior presupposes instrumental voters who use the polls with the purpose to affect the election outcome. Of course, the marginal impact of one vote is in most circumstances negligible, even at constituency level. Voters’ perceptions however are what matters for decision making. On the theoretical underpinnings of the strategic voting concept see Fisher (2004).

information to single out respondents that voted for a party that is not their favorite and count how many did it to avoid “wasting” their vote. This is the approach followed by Lanoue and Bowler (1992) for the British 1983 and 1987 general elections; Niemi, Whitten and Franklin (1992), and Evans and Heath (1993, 1994) for the British 1987 election; Felsenthal and Brichta (1985) for the general election in Israel in 1981; Blais and Nadeau (1996) for the Canadian general election in 1988; Kriesi (1998) for the elections to the Swiss Council of States in 1995; and Duch and Palmer (2002) for the 1997 general election in Hungary.

Self reported measures of strategic behavior however are also problematic, because respondents may misinform about their true motives for voting if they are afraid of being considered incoherent or disloyal. Moreover, the bandwagon effect (the propensity to state a vote to the winning party) tends to inflate the self reporting measure. As Alvarez and Nagler (2000: 74) point out, self reported votes for the winner are observationally equivalent to strategic votes for individuals whose first preference is for another party.

To temper some of the consequences of misreporting on estimating strategic behaviour, a third group of papers, such as Alvarez and Nagler (1998, 2000), Lago (2005, 2008), Merolla and Stephenson (2007), Herrman and Pappi (2008) or García Viñuela and Artés (2009), develop formal models of vote choice based on utility functions. These studies include individual data from election surveys and constituency characteristics as a first step to predict the probability of voting for a party. Then, in a second step they re-compute the predicted probabilities using the estimated regression coefficients, but simulating that the incentives in the constituencies to vote strategically disappear. Assuming utility maximizing behavior, researchers using this procedure can infer the respondents’ most preferred party and estimate the number of sincere and strategic voters in their samples.

This paper also proposes a model of voter behaviour to calculate the number of strategic voters. We depart from previous literature that uses this approach, such as Alvarez and Nagler (2000), in two ways. First, we include abstention as an alternative available to the voter. Previous papers have not taken into account that not allowing for the possibility of abstention some respondents may be predicted as sincere voters when in

fact their preferred option would be to abstain. We find indeed that this is the case. Our specification allows us to separate the strategic voters into those that would have voted for a different party and those that would have preferred not to vote. We find that a significant number of strategic voters would have abstained if the strategic incentives were removed from the constituencies.

A second contribution of this paper is that it incorporates the mobilization activities of party elites in a model of voter choice. Most of the theoretical and empirical literature discussed above sees strategic behavior as a result of voter's rational evaluation of constituency characteristics, but they do not account for the effect that party activities may have in shaping voter's decision. Some researchers acknowledge that strategic voting may be generated by the efforts of party elites, which would use the election campaign to inform voters on the situation in their constituencies and about how to avoid "wasting" their vote (Cox, 1997: 90-98; Lago, 2005: chapter 6; Lago 2008: 43). The implication of this view is that without such elite activity, strategic voting would be much smaller or inexistent. This idea however has not been tested empirically. It has been assumed instead that elite efforts are behind the findings that strategic voting is a significant phenomenon. In this paper we control explicitly for elite mobilization by including party campaign events as a covariate. The number of party appearances during the campaign has been used before to evaluate the effects of campaigning on voter's turnout (Jones, 1998; Shaw, 1999; Herr, 2002), but not in the strategic voting literature, as far as we know.

### **3. The Spanish political system**

In this section we describe briefly the main features of the Spanish political system and the incentives it offers for voters to act strategically, so that the results section of the paper can be interpreted taking into account the specific national context.

Spain has a proportional representation system with closed party lists for the elections to the lower house of parliament (the Congress of Deputies). The 350 seats of the Congress of Deputies are distributed among 52 constituencies, with district magnitude ranging from 1 in the small enclaves of the North African coast to 35 in the populous

province of Madrid. There is a legally mandated threshold of representation of 3% at constituency level, so party lists polling less than 3% of the constituency vote are excluded from the allocation of seats, which is done according to the d'Hondt formula. The large variance in the size of Spanish districts is a most convenient feature from the econometric point of view since it contributes to properly estimate the coefficients of the aggregate variable that captures the strategic incentives offered by the local constituencies. The fact that the d'Hondt formula favours bigger parties in the allocation of parliamentary seats at the expense of smaller ones provides an additional incentive to vote strategically compared to perfectly proportional systems.

Since the early nineties the Spanish party system is dominated de facto by two major parties: the center-left Socialist Party (PSOE) and the conservative Popular Party (PP)<sup>3</sup>. In the last three general elections both parties polled an average 81% of the votes and held 91% of the seats in the Congress of Deputies. PSOE and PP alternate in government. The PSOE held office from 1982 to 1996 and since 2004, and the Popular Party from 1996 to 2004. In many cases (e.g. 1993, 1996, 2004, 2008) neither of the parties obtained a majority of the seats in the Congress of Deputies. In such cases both parties have formed minority governments with the support of some of the nationalist parties.

The IU, a coalition of small leftish parties led by the Communist, is the third party by number of votes at the national level. It obtained its best results in the 1996 election, with a share of the vote about 11% and 21 seats in the Congress of Deputies. Since then the IU lost two thirds of the votes and its number of seats dropped from 21 to 2, weakening severely its standing as a meaningful force on the national political scene. The small magnitude of most Spanish constituencies<sup>4</sup>, the geographically dispersed vote

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<sup>3</sup> About 12 parties are normally represented in the Spanish legislature, most of them small nationalist and regional parties. The Laakso and Taagepera (1979) effective number of parliamentary parties was 3.13 for the 2004 election.

<sup>4</sup> Average district magnitude in Spain is small (7seats) and its distribution is highly skewed: almost 80% of the constituencies elect 7 or less deputies.

for the IU and the operation of the d'Hondt formula<sup>5</sup>, makes the IU a very likely victim of strategic desertion; and the PSOE, the largest party on the left, its main beneficiary<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4. Statistical procedure

##### 4.1 First step: Econometric estimation

We derive our model from a utility function of voter behavior. Voters obtain utility  $y_1$  when they choose the option (possibly abstaining) closest to their political preference:

$$y_1 = x_1 b_1 + \varepsilon_1, \quad [1]$$

where  $x_1$  is a vector of variables which contains individual characteristics and attitudes of eligible voters, such as social and demographic data, self reported placement on the ideological scale, evaluation of political leaders and assessment of both the general economic situation and family finances<sup>7</sup>. This vector is intended to capture each voter's underlying political preferences. The coefficients  $b_1$  translate individual's characteristics into utility. Finally,  $\varepsilon_1$  is a disturbance term which we assume to be random noise.

Voters also gain utility  $y_2$  (representation benefits) when they choose a party that attains a parliamentary seat in their district. We model  $y_2$  as dependent on constituency conditions  $x_2$  and  $\varepsilon_2$ , a random measurement error:

$$y_2 = x_2 b_2 + \varepsilon_2 \quad [2]$$

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<sup>5</sup> With the d'Hondt rule small and medium-sized parties can only win seats in large constituencies or where their voters are strongly concentrated, as are in Spain those of the nationalist or regional parties in Catalonia, the Basque Country and the Canary Islands.

<sup>6</sup> The mean ideological placement of the three national Spanish parties on the 10 points left- right scale was 2.4 for the IU, 4.3 for the PSOE and 7.8 for the PP, according to respondents to the 2004 CIS postelection survey. The respondents' self-placement mean was 4.6. The rate of non response in the survey was in the 20-30% range.

<sup>7</sup> These control variables should ideally account for all the factors that may lead an individual to abstain or vote for the IU over the PSOE. That is, we intent to incorporate all the variables included in the *ceteris paribus* clause.

We also assume that if voters support a candidate that is not the one they like the most, they incur in a cost or disutility  $c$ . This cost reflects voters' feelings of guiltiness when they abandon their true ideological preference to vote for a party which has more chance to achieve representation in their constituency. We model  $c$  as a linear function of the distance between the ideology of the voter and that of the closest viable party she considers voting for,  $x_3$ . Thus,

$$c = x_3 b_3 + \varepsilon_3, \quad [3]$$

where  $\varepsilon_3$  is a random error term. The farther away the viable party is in the ideological scale, the more costly is for a voter to depart from her first preference to take advantage of a strategic voting opportunity.

A voter whose preferred party is unlikely to gain a seat in the constituency will choose to vote for her second or third preference if representation benefits are greater than the utility she gets from voting for her favorite party plus the cost incurred by so doing. That is, a voter will vote strategically if the following expression is positive:

$$U = y_2 - y_1 - c = x_2 b_2 - x_1 b_1 - x_3 b_3 + \varepsilon_2 - \varepsilon_1 - \varepsilon_3 = X \beta + v \quad [4]$$

Taking the model to our data, each respondent in the sample will choose the option in  $V$  ( $V = \text{Abstain, IU, PSOE}$ ) that yields the highest utility (e.g.,  $V = \text{IU}$ , if  $U_{\text{IU}} > U_{\text{PSOE}}$  and  $U_{\text{IU}} > U_{\text{ABSTAIN}}$ ). As  $U$  is not observable, the coefficients in [4] cannot be estimated by ordinary least squares. They can however be estimated using a discrete choice model. If the error term  $v$  is normally distributed, a probit model would consistently estimate the coefficients in equation [4]. The probit model has also the property that the estimated parameters do not rely on assuming the independence from irrelevant alternatives, as the logit does.

To sum up, we will estimate the following multinomial probit:

$$P(V = i | X) = \Phi(X' \beta^i) \quad [5]$$

Where  $i$  denotes the number of categories of the dependent variable and  $\Phi$  is the cumulative multivariate normal probability distribution. We use the coefficients of the probability of voting for PSOE as the baseline and therefore in the results section of the paper we will report only two sets of coefficients,  $\beta^{IU}$  and  $\beta^{Abstain}$ , corresponding to the voting for the IU and abstention outcomes.

The vector of variables  $X$  includes measures of voter's personal characteristics ( $x_1$ ), constituency characteristics ( $x_2$ ), and the psychic costs which entail voting for a party that is not the most preferred ( $x_3$ ). All the variables in vector  $X$  are described in the Appendix<sup>8</sup>.

The variables in  $x_1$  include respondent's age, gender, educational level, earnings, type of job, subjective social class, church attendance, perception of the country's economy, situation of personal finances and evaluation of the leaders of the PSOE and the IU. The  $x_3$  variable measures the relative distance between the respondent's placement in the left-right scale and the position she assigns both to the PSOE and the IU.

The vector  $x_2$  includes two aggregate variables. The first variable, *sharedif*, captures the incentives arising from constituency characteristics. It is defined as the difference in each constituency between the previous vote shares of the PSOE and the IU, standardized by district magnitude (the number of representatives elected in each constituency in the upcoming election). Since voters tend to behave strategically when their preferred party is not locally viable, the larger the difference between the voting shares of the PSOE and the IU in their constituency the fewer the incentives for the IU sympathisers to vote for the IU party list. Therefore, if strategic voting occurs, we expect the coefficient of the *sharedif* variable to be negative for the IU voters and abstainers.

We considered other alternative measures to capture constituency conditions. In particular, although not reported here, we also estimated the model including a dummy that takes the value zero in constituencies where the IU obtained a seat in the previous election and the value one otherwise. This variable could also reflect the incentives to

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<sup>8</sup> A descriptive summary of the variables is not shown for space considerations, but it is available from the authors upon request.

behave strategically because it seems reasonable that voters anticipate that if the IU obtained no parliamentary representation before, the same will occur in the coming election. This dummy however is a crude proxy of what will happen in the upcoming election, because in some districts the IU may have been very close to attaining representation while in others it may have been far from winning a seat. Similarly in districts where the IU won representation just by a small margin, voters may expect that it will lose the seat. The *shredif* measure is thus more precise because it takes into account the exact difference in vote shares between the two parties in the previous election<sup>9</sup>.

The second variable in the  $x_2$  vector is the number of campaign events organized in the constituencies by the PSOE apparatus, which tries to measure its mobilization activities. As the socialist elite based part of its campaign efforts in convincing left-leaning voters and abstainers to vote for the PSOE, we would anticipate more party events in those constituencies with more potential to yield additional votes and seats to the party (Cox, 1999)<sup>10</sup>.

If voting is a socially approved behaviour, voters will respond to the mobilization activities of party elites to avoid disapproval. Increasing social pressure however will have an impact on instrumentally motivated voters only to the extent that it alters the perceived benefits and costs of voting. While campaign events energize party core supporters (see for instance Holbrook and McClurg, 2005), may also serve to send messages to non core supporters, which will receive them through local news and media coverage of party events. In this regard, the main message that the Socialist Party machine attempts to convey to the left leaning electorate is the wasted vote argument: since abstaining or voting for the IU in constituencies where the IU is not eligible cannot be translated into political representation, it makes the conservative Popular Party more likely to win the election. If individuals in the targeted group buy this

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<sup>9</sup> The lagged strategic incentives variable is an imperfect indicator of the situation in the constituencies at the time when voting decisions are taken. A better measure would be the difference in the vote shares of the PSOE and the IU as predicted by opinion polls. This information however is not available at constituency level for the Spanish parliamentary elections.

<sup>10</sup> We expect party machines to allocate its most valuable resources to competitive constituencies, where they can win a new seat or safeguard a threatened one. On the contrary foregone constituencies, where the distribution of seats is anticipated to be stable, will be ignored. According to our mobilization measure the PSOE's campaign activities are usually concentrated in about 20 constituencies (out of a total of 52).

argument, the number of votes for the PSOE due to elite mobilization activities will increase. Therefore we expect the *mobilization* variable, which reflects the campaign efforts of Socialist Party elites, to have a negative influence on the number of the IU voters and abstainers.

#### 4.2. Second step: Computing the number of sincere and strategic voters and abstainers.

We compute the number of strategic voters following the Alvarez and Nagler (2000) counterfactual simulation procedure. First we use the coefficients in the multinomial probit model to predict the choice of each respondent in the sample among the options to abstain, vote for the IU and vote for the PSOE, with the proposed full specification of vote choice. Respondents who are predicted to choose any of the options in the full model are labelled effective voters and abstainers.

Let  $p_1$ ,  $p_2$  and  $p_3$  be the probabilities predicted by the full model, corresponding to abstaining, voting for the IU and voting for the PSOE, respectively. Then, the precise definition of effective voters for each option is as follows:

Effective abstainers if  $p_1 > p_2$  and  $p_1 > p_3$ ,

Effective IU voters if  $p_2 > p_1$  and  $p_2 > p_3$ ,

Effective PSOE voters if  $p_3 > p_1$  and  $p_3 > p_2$ .

Effective voters include those who vote sincerely (first preference voters) and those who vote strategically to attain representation benefits. In order to identify sincere voters we predict once again the three outcomes setting the *sharedif* variable at zero in the estimated multinomial probit equation (the full model). The sincere voting model is the full model so constrained, which simulates that all party lists are locally viable and therefore there are no strategic incentives at constituency level to switch votes.

The difference between the effective values of the three outcomes predicted by the full model and the sincere values predicted by the constrained model yields the total number of strategic voters and abstainers. Strategic abstainers are those individuals in the electorate who derived similar utility from the IU and the PSOE and do not vote in the

counterfactual scenario when both parties are on an equal foot to gain legislative seats. When constituency conditions are such that clearly favor one of the parties, those first preference abstainers will cast a vote for the party more likely to achieve parliamentary representation.

## 5. Data

Data to test our models for the Spanish general elections come from three sources. For individual level data we use three post-election surveys conducted by the Spanish Centre for Social Research (CIS: *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*) after the 2000, 2004 and 2008 elections. The general elections of the period 2000-2008 permit us to test the model under the varying economic and political contexts in which the three elections took place. The CIS surveys provide information on respondents' vote choice, socio-demographic characteristics, ideology and attitudes about issues and party leaders. The CIS samples are designed to be representative of the Spanish population of eligible voters and are large enough to operationalize the many personal characteristics included in our models<sup>11</sup>.

Aggregate data come from the Spanish Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Ministerio del Interior*), which is the government office in charge of collecting electoral returns. We obtained from this source data at constituency level on district magnitude and on the votes and seats obtained by the PSOE and the IU.

Finally, we compiled information on the number of campaign events organized by the PSOE elite from the archives of the two national Spanish leading newspapers: *El País* and *El Mundo*. We consider as campaign events those mobilization activities organized by the Socialist Party apparatus during the four weeks prior to Election Day, consisting in party rallies and other activities that include either the presence of the party candidate

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<sup>11</sup> Two problems of the CIS postelection surveys may bias the inferences drawn from the explanatory variables of our model. One is that reported turnout was one sixth to one fifth higher than actual turnout. The other is the understatement of the vote for the party that lost the election (the PSOE in 2000 and the PP in 2004 and 2008), which was about one third. These kind of misreporting problems are nevertheless common in political surveys (Bernstein et al., 2001; Duch and Palmer, 2002: note 46; Niemi et al., 1992: note 7; Wright, 1990, 1992).

for Prime Minister or other senior national party leaders. This variable is similar to the ones used by Herr (2002), Shaw (1999) or Jones (1998).

There is a potential measurement error in the variable that captures elites' efforts since not all campaign events are reported on the media. This is not a problem for our estimation as we are interested only in those campaign events that may have an impact on non-partisans. Mobilization activities not covered by the print and broadcast media are less likely to persuade non-core supporters because it is more difficult for potential voters to know about them.

## 6. Results

Tables 2 to 4 display the overall goodness of fit statistics and the coefficients of the multinomial probit models for the three general elections held in Spain from 2000 to 2008<sup>12</sup>. The estimated probit coefficients show if the explanatory variables increase (when they are positive) or decrease (when negative) the probability that a respondent in the sample chooses to vote for the IU or to abstain over voting for the PSOE (the reference outcome)<sup>13</sup>.

We expect the *idgap* variable, which reflects the strength of partisan commitment, to have a positive sign for abstainers and IU voters, since the greater the margin of preference (that is, the distance between the first and the second party choice), the costlier will be for an individual to abandon her most preferred option to vote strategically. Five of the six parameter estimates of the *idgap* variable have positive signs (that is, diminish the likelihood of strategic voting) and four of them are significant at the 1% level. On the contrary, the variable that reflects a favorable evaluation of the PSOE leader should attract strategic behavior by depressing IU voting and abstention. The results in Tables 2 to 4 strongly confirm this prediction: all the

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<sup>12</sup> Sample sizes (N) in Tables 2 to 4 are the number of cases left after cleaning the data and dropping all individuals with missing information on any variable from the original samples. The 2004 CIS post-election survey did not include questions about the performance of the national economy and household finances, so we could not operationalize the *countryeco* and *familyeco* variables in our model for the 2004 election.

<sup>13</sup> That is we report only the probit coefficients, not the marginal effects.

estimates of the *psleader* variable for IU voters and abstainers are negative and highly significant.

Lanoue and Bowler (1992) suggest that age and education presumably improve the knowledge of the political system and the opportunities it offers for strategic behavior. We find some evidence consistent with this view for the age variable: three negative and significant coefficients. Regarding the education variable however, our results, like those of other researchers (Niemi, Whitten and Franklin, 1992; Heath and Evans, 1994; Duch and Palmer), show no evidence that the propensity to vote strategically is related to the level of education. Other personal traits of respondents, such as occupation or gender, are not significant factors, by conventional statistical standards, in explaining voting behavior across elections.

Looking at the variables that capture strategic incentive at constituency level, the results show that voters do respond as predicted to the situation they confront in their electoral districts and to the campaigning efforts of party elites. The six coefficients of the strategic incentives variable have the anticipated negative sign for the abstention and vote for the IU outcomes and are significant (two of them at the 10% level) for the three elections. This result clearly supports the hypothesized independent influence of constituency conditions on the vote decision, the casual effect of interest. The mobilization measure of elite effort has also the right sign and is statistically significant, except for the atypical 2004 election. This is hardly surprising since the high voter turnout of the 2004 election cannot be attributed to conventional elite efforts. It seems to have been a consequence of the terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic militants on the commuters' trains in Madrid three days before the election (Bali, 2007; Michavila, 2005; Van Biezen, 2005). The bombings activated the participation of nearly two million eligible voters who would have otherwise abstained (Michavila, 2005:23)<sup>14</sup>, distorting the influence of party campaign activities.

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<sup>14</sup> The Madrid bombings resulted in near 200 casualties and 2000 injured. As can be seen in our Table 3, its influence on the probability of abstention was negative and significant in our model for the 2004 election. Before the attacks, most pre-election polls gave the incumbent government's party a margin of 4 to 6 percentile points over the PSOE. The incumbent government handling of information on the terrorist attacks could have also contributed to its electoral defeat. The PSOE won the election by a 5% margin over the PP.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

As explained above, we used the coefficients displayed in Tables 2 to 4 to compute the number of effective and sincere voters and abstainers in the three elections. The estimates are reported in Table 5. Effective voters and abstainers are those predicted by the proposed full model of vote choice, which incorporates the individuals' specific characteristics and the two constituency variables. The "effective PSOE voters" row of Table 5 shows the predicted support for the PSOE by the full model in each general election. For instance, in the 2000 election the predicted votes for the PSOE were 568. Sincere voters and abstainers are inferred from the constrained model, which simulates that incentives for strategic decision making in the constituencies disappear. Strategic voters and abstainers are those individuals for whom the predicted effective and sincere choices differ. In our sample of the 2000 election, the PSOE received 24 strategic votes from the IU supporters and 67 from the abstainers.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Table 6 shows our estimates of what could be called autonomous or pure strategic voting (i.e., strategic behavior not induced by elite efforts). Autonomous strategic voting amounted to 5.3%, 1.4% and 2.5%, respectively, for the three elections of 2000, 2004 and 2008. In a comparative perspective these numbers are in the lower half of the range of estimates reported in the second section of this paper. In order to evaluate this result it has to be taken into account that our measure does not compute as strategic voting the influence of elite mobilization on voters' turnout. However, the fact that we still find a relevant number of strategic voters after controlling for campaign effects shows that elite mobilization is not the only mechanism that activates strategic behavior. Moreover the estimates presented in Table 6 should be considered as a lower limit because we have restricted the analysis to the strategic choice between the two main Spanish parties on the left, ignoring the nationalists and regional parties. It seems plausible that a fraction of the electorate of such parties could have also abandoned them at the polls for strategic reasons. Unfortunately, there are not enough observations

in the CIS post-election surveys to reliably estimate the behavior of those small party's sympathizers.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Our results suggest that strategic behavior at the polls contributed to the consolidation of the Spanish democracy by limiting the fragmentation effects of its proportional representation system. As can be seen in Table 7, strategic voting seriously damaged the electoral fortunes of the United Left, which lost almost a quarter of its vote potential in the three elections held between 2000 and 2008.

Table 7 also provides evidence that the Socialist Party obtained more strategic votes from abstainers than from the defection of the IU followers. Except for the atypical 2004 election, 3 out of 4 strategic votes received by the Socialist Party came from the pool of abstainers. This result suggests that it is advisable to include abstention as a choice when modeling the voting decision. The empirical evidence shows that potential abstainers consider constituency incentives when they decide whether to participate or not in the election. This is an interesting result because it implies that strategic factors may influence decision making even in bipartisan systems where the activation of strategic voters could come from the mobilization of abstainers in districts where the race between the two major parties is close.

TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

A part of the literature considers strategic voting as a product of the mobilization efforts of the party machine benefited by it. The empirical evidence presented in this paper suggests that strategic voting not induced by campaign activities is still significant, although not a large scale phenomenon. After controlling for elite mobilization, the extent of voting behavior motivated by constituency conditions (that is, pure or autonomous strategic voting) was about 3% of the total vote in the last three Spanish general elections.

This analysis also contributes to the existing literature on strategic voting by incorporating the behavior of strategic abstainers. These are individuals who would not vote under counterfactual conditions because the difference between the utilities they get from the two most preferred parties is small. If strategic incentives are at work, they are predicted to cast a ballot for the party which is better placed to attain them representation benefits in their constituency. If abstention was not included as a choice in the model, strategic abstainers would be counted as sincere voters.

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## Appendix: Variable description

Individual variables<sup>15</sup>:

\**age*: respondent's age in years.

\**class*: subjective social class defined as follows: upper or middle-upper class=0, middle class=1, middle-lower or lower class=2.

\**countryeco*, *familyeco*: respondent's assessment of the performance of either the national economy (*countryeco*) or his/her household (*familyeco*). Both are coded 0 if the economic situation is perceived as bad or very bad, 1 if neither bad nor good, and 2 if good or very good.

\**education*: illiterate=0, primary education=1, high school=2, university education=3.

\**earnings*: monthly family earnings categorized as 0 if the respondent's family earnings are between 600 and 900 €, 1 if below and 2 if above.

\**gender*: female=0, male=1.

\**idgap*: distance between the respondent self-placement in the ideological scale ( $x_i$ ) relative to the place assigned to the PSOE ( $x_{PSOE}$ ) and the IU ( $x_{IU}$ ). It is computed as:

$$\frac{|x_i - x_{PSOE}|}{|x_i - x_{IU}|}$$

The ideological scale is a 1 to 10 left-right scale, where 1 means extreme left and 10 extreme right.

\**iuleader*: respondent's evaluation of the leader of the United Left (IU) on a scale ranging from 0 (very bad) to 10 (very good).

\**March11attacks*: effect on behavior at the pools of the terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic terrorists in Madrid's commuter trains. It is coded 0 for respondents that did not change course, 1 for abstainers who decided to vote because of the attacks, 2 for those who switched votes and 3 for respondents who were reaffirmed in their previous choice to vote for a given party.

\**psleader*: respondent's evaluation of the leader of the Socialist Party (PSOE) in a scale ranging from 0 (very bad) to 10 (very good).

\**occupation*: housewife=0, student=1, unemployed=2, retiree=3, employed=4.

\**religion*: atheist=0, not practicing believer=1, practicing believer=2.

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<sup>15</sup> The response code for the individual level variables in the three samples are available at the Center for Social Research (CIS) website: [www.cis.es/cis/open/cm/ES/1\\_encuestas](http://www.cis.es/cis/open/cm/ES/1_encuestas).

\**vote*: respondent's choice in the general election: 0 (did not vote), 1 (voted for the United Left), and 2 (voted for the Socialist Party).

Aggregate variables:

\**mobilization*: number of constituency visits by the Socialist candidate for Prime Minister and other senior party leaders to held rallies or similar events in the four weeks previous to the election.

\**sharedif*: difference in each constituency between the vote shares of the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the United Left (IU) in the previous election divided by the number of representatives elected in the constituency.

**Table 1. Summary of Literature on Strategic Voting**

<b>Paper</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Strategic voters</b>	<b>Approach</b>
Cain (1978)	Britain	1970	15%	Aggregate and survey data
Galbraith and Rae (1989)	Britain	1987	11%	Aggregate data
Johnston and Pattie (1991)	Britain	19,831,987	4%, 6%	Aggregate data
Lanoue and Bowler (1992)	Britain	19,831,987	5.8%, 6.6%	Survey answers to motivation to vote
Niemi, Whitten and Franklin (1992)	Britain	1987	17%	Survey answers to motivation to vote
Evans and Heath (1994)	Britain	1987	9%	Survey answers to motivation to vote
Blais and Nadeau (1996)	Canada	1988	6%	Survey answers to motivation to vote
Blais et al (2001)	Canada	1997	3%	Survey answers to motivation to vote
Felsenthal and Brichta (1985)	Israel	1981	12%	Survey answers to motivation to vote
Kriesi (1998)	Switzerland	1995	16%	Survey answers to motivation to vote
Abramson et al. (1992)	US	1988	13.50%	Survey answers and simulation
Duch and Palmer (2002)	Hungary	1997	13.60%	Survey answers and simulation
Alvarez and Nagler (2000)	Britain	1987	7.20%	Simulation
Alvarez and Nagler (2006)	Britain	1987, 1997	9%, 11%	Simulation
Merolla and Stephenson (2007)	Canada	1988-2000	2.30%	Simulation
Herrman and Pappi (2008)	Germany	1998, 2000	3%, 1%	Simulation
Alvarez and Nagler (1998)	US	1996	14%	Simulation
Lago (2005)	Spain	1979-2000	<1%	Simulation
Garcia Viñuela and Artés (2009)	Spain	2000-2008	2.5% - 10.3%	Simulation

**Table 2. Spanish 2000 Election Multinomial Probit Model**

	<b>P(V=IU)</b>	<b>P(V=Abstain)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	0.1434 [0.2142]	0.0552 [0.1983]
<b>Age</b>	-0.0169* [0.0094]	-0.0315*** [0.0091]
<b>iuleader</b>	0.3211*** [0.0574]	0.008 [0.0548]
<b>psleader</b>	-0.3032*** [0.0561]	-0.3225*** [0.0531]
<b>Occupation_1</b>	-0.6873 [0.4822]	-0.2144 [0.4617]
<b>Occupation_2</b>	-0.479 [0.4208]	0.1313 [0.4150]
<b>Occupation_3</b>	-0.4218 [0.4263]	0.5244 [0.4257]
<b>Occupation_4</b>	-0.6750* [0.3497]	0.0064 [0.3533]
<b>education_1</b>	0.2007 [0.5083]	0.1212 [0.5353]
<b>education_2</b>	0.4906 [0.5488]	0.4444 [0.5688]
<b>education_3</b>	0.6372 [0.5686]	0.3726 [0.5856]
<b>religion_1</b>	-0.0734 [0.2177]	-0.4172** [0.2111]
<b>religion_2</b>	0.0168 [0.3383]	-0.0625 [0.3061]
<b>earnings_1</b>	-0.1935 [0.2610]	-0.177 [0.2434]
<b>earnings_2</b>	-0.0395 [0.2509]	-0.0663 [0.2396]
<b>countryeco_1</b>	0.3208 [0.2972]	0.5820** [0.2918]
<b>countryeco_2</b>	0.6716** [0.3291]	0.8637*** [0.3206]
<b>familyeco_1</b>	-0.0369 [0.2947]	-0.1052 [0.2802]
<b>familyeco_2</b>	0.0601 [0.3391]	-0.3156 [0.3245]
<b>class_1</b>	0.3122 [0.4306]	0.0764 [0.3848]
<b>class_2</b>	0.6089 [0.4666]	0.2429 [0.4225]
<b>idgap</b>	0.5656*** [0.0551]	0.2461*** [0.0501]
<b>mobilization</b>	-0.1973* [0.1137]	-0.4370*** [0.1079]
<b>sharedif</b>	-0.1171** [0.0524]	-0.1804*** [0.0520]
<b>constant</b>	-0.6626 [1.0746]	2.5155** [1.0402]
<b>N</b>	751	
<b>LL</b>	-486.576	
<b>Wald(48) Chi-Sq</b>	256.8	

Note: Probability of voting for PSOE is the default outcome.

Standard errors in brackets. Statistical significance levels:

\*\*\* = 1 %, \*\* = 5 %, \* = 10 %

**Table 3. Spanish 2004 Election Multinomial Probit Model**

	P(V=IU)	P(V=Abstain)
Gender	-0.3283* [0.1731]	-0.2465 [0.1862]
Age	-0.0268*** [0.0076]	-0.0124 [0.0083]
iuleader	-0.0235 [0.0512]	0.2507*** [0.0558]
psleader	-0.2961*** [0.0503]	-0.4812*** [0.0568]
Occupation_1	-0.6422 [0.4813]	-0.5089 [0.5532]
Occupation_2	0.1467 [0.3426]	0.2876 [0.4079]
Occupation_3	0.4595 [0.3332]	0.0840 [0.4132]
Occupation_4	-0.0819 [0.2820]	0.2768 [0.3199]
education_1	0.0162 [0.3688]	0.5543 [0.5177]
education_2	0.0625 [0.4152]	0.1632 [0.5556]
education_3	-0.2086 [0.4343]	0.2619 [0.5621]
religion_1	-0.1177 [0.1923]	-0.3367* [0.1896]
religion_2	-0.0835 [0.2618]	-0.7534** [0.3090]
earnings_1	0.0164 [0.2219]	-0.3006 [0.2505]
earnings_2	0.3170 [0.2101]	0.2567 [0.2150]
class_1	-0.3758 [0.3420]	0.4719 [0.4984]
class_2	0.0899 [0.3572]	1.0316** [0.5096]
March11attacks_1	-0.6896** [0.3197]	-0.6944* [0.3731]
March11attacks_2	-0.8918** [0.4041]	-0.7592 [0.4840]
March11attacks_3	-1.206*** [0.2552]	-0.4803** [0.2286]
idgap	0.0421 [0.0459]	0.4035*** [0.0475]
mobilization	-0.0905 [0.0961]	0.0859 [0.1017]
sharedif	-0.0683* [0.0398]	-0.1200** [0.0472]
constant	2.5499*** [0.8367]	0.2564 [1.0182]
N		1247
LL		-571.873
Wald(48) Chi-Sq		272.32

Note: Probability of voting for PSOE is the default outcome.  
Standard errors in brackets. Statistical significance levels: \*\*\* = 1 %, \*\* = 5 %, \* = 10%

**Table 4. Spanish 2008 Election Multinomial Probit**

	Model	
	P(V=IU)	P(V=Abstain)
Gender	0.2617 [0.1907]	0.1786 [0.2085]
Age	-0.0014 [0.0084]	0.0053 [0.0092]
iuleader	0.0887** [0.0446]	0.3688*** [0.0499]
psleader	-0.7398*** [0.0555]	-0.6533*** [0.0614]
Occupation_1	0.0079 [0.5686]	1.1455* [0.6206]
Occupation_2	0.3162 [0.3585]	0.6466 [0.4534]
Occupation_3	-0.3529 [0.3852]	0.2759 [0.4705]
Occupation_4	-0.1621 [0.3175]	0.3407 [0.4158]
education_1	-0.4137 [0.4319]	0.3657 [0.6076]
education_2	-0.4465 [0.4618]	0.5023 [0.6273]
education_3	-0.3702 [0.4707]	0.3289 [0.6394]
religion_1	-0.4775** [0.2027]	-0.4978** [0.2079]
religion_2	-0.5821* [0.3316]	-1.2997*** [0.4952]
earnings_1	-0.3691 [0.2917]	-0.5171 [0.3258]
earnings_2	-0.2305 [0.2238]	-0.2387 [0.2494]
countryeco_1	-0.2947 [0.1940]	-0.1186 [0.2202]
countryeco_2	-0.3183 [0.3080]	-0.7377** [0.3370]
familyeco_1	-0.3457 [0.2305]	-0.3381 [0.2636]
familyeco_2	-0.3140 [0.2714]	0.2005 [0.3005]
class_1	-0.2747 [0.4924]	0.8305 [0.8007]
class_2	-0.1810 [0.5056]	1.4568* [0.8107]
idgap	-0.1519** [0.0756]	0.4928*** [0.0745]
mobilization	-0.5035*** [0.1282]	-0.3308** [0.1326]
sharedif	-0.1217*** [0.0358]	-0.0605* [0.0369]
constant	5.1315*** [0.9562]	0.0026 [1.2437]
N		1442
LL		-478.4
Wald(48) Chi-Sq		375.69

Note: Probability of voting for PSOE is the default outcome. Standard errors in brackets. Statistical significance levels: \*\*\* = 1 %, \*\* = 5 %, \* = 10%

**Table 5. Predicted strategic votes to the PSOE from IU supporters and abstainers, by election year.**

	Sincere abstainers	Sincere IU voters	Sincere PSOE voters	Effective totals
Effective abstainers				
2000	64	0	0	64
2004	6	0	0	6
2008	68	0	0	68
Effective IU voters				
2000	0	119	0	119
2004	0	76	0	76
2008	0	57	0	57
Effective PSOE voters				
2000	67	24	477	568
2004	6	31	1128	1165
2008	54	17	1246	1317
Sincere totals				
2000	131	143	477	751
2004	12	107	1128	1165
2008	122	74	1246	1442

Note: Cell entries are the estimated number of respondents in each post-election sample whose effective choice was the row party and whose sincere choice was the column party. Row values are those predicted by the full specification of vote choice. Column values are the numbers predicted by the constrained model, when we simulate that the IU party lists are eligible in all constituencies.

**Table 6. Extent of strategic voting to the PSOE, by election year.**

Election year	PSOE strategic totals	% of IU+PSOE vote in the survey	Estimated percent of total vote
2000	91	13.2% :91/(751-64)	13.2 x 0.40* = 5.3%
2004	37	3% : 37/(1247-6)	3 x 0.48* = 1.4%
2008	71	5.3%: 71/(1442-68)	5.3 x 0.48* = 2.5%

Source: Table 5.

(\*) Percent of the vote for the PSOE plus the IU in the national vote.

**Table 7. Source of strategic votes to the PSOE, by election year.**

Election year	From the IU	% of sincere IU vote	From the abstention
2000	24 (26%)	17% (24/143)	67 (74%)
2004	31 (84%)	29% (31/107)	6 (16%)
2008	17 (24%)	23% (17/74)	54 (76%)

Source: Table 5.