

Strategic Split-Ticket Voting in Mixed Electoral Systems: The Cases of Germany, Hungary, and Lithuania

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine strategic split-voting in mixed systems by analyzing the results of elections in three countries using mixed electoral systems—Germany, Hungary, and Lithuania—to further improve researchers’ understanding of the relationship between strategic voting and ticket splitting. This is achieved by exploring new quantitative measures. The three selected countries do not use identical electoral systems, but their common characteristic is that they provide an opportunity for voters to split their ballot between an individual candidate running in a single-member constituency and a party list. This makes it possible to compare the two different types of votes and to search for patterns indicating strategic behavior. In this article, the authors introduce two analytic tools: one for determining the approximate quantity of split ballots and another for measuring strategic voting patterns based on the concentration of split tickets.

KEYWORDS

Electoral Behavior, Electoral Systems, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Mixed-Member Systems, Parallel Voting, Split-Ticket Voting, Strategic Voting, Tactical Voting

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INTRODUCTION

Although researchers have extensively studied patterns of both strategic voting and split-ticket voting have in the past, they remain difficult to observe or measure and can still be considered somewhat elusive subjects in political science. At the same time, with the growing number of mixed member electoral system used around the world, the intersection of tactical and split-ticket voting provides new data for research every election year. This paper aims to examine this subject by analyzing the results of 23 legislative elections in three countries using mixed electoral systems: Germany, Hungary, and Lithuania. The main goal of this research is to further improve researchers' understanding of the relationship between strategic voting and ticket splitting by exploring new, common quantitative measures. The three selected countries do not use identical electoral systems. Rather, their common characteristic is that they provide an opportunity for the voters to split their ballot between an individual candidate running in a single-member constituency and a party list competing on either a national or a regional level. This makes it possible to compare the two different types of votes and to search for patterns indicating strategic behavior. In this paper, the authors introduce two analytic tools: one for determining the approximate quantity of split ballots and another one for measuring strategic voting patterns based on the concentration of split tickets. The two measures rely on each other in an indirect manner, and although they analyze two separate, sometimes independent phenomena, they are both calculated based on the difference between party list and candidate vote counts. The rate of split-ticket votes provides the context for the concentration of such ballots and indicates an overlap between split voting and strategic voting.

Theoretical Framework for Strategic Voting

The term "strategic voting", also called "tactical voting," refers to a situation when a voter supports a second-preferred party or candidate due to the perception that they have a better chance at winning the election than the first-preferred one (Blais & Nadeau, 1996). This definition, however, may be further expanded by replacing "second-preferred" with "another", as it is possible that the *n*th preference of the voter has an even higher chance to win. Researchers often note that such situations are specific to multiparty systems (Downs, 1957, p. 48), in which choosing between second- and third-preferred alternatives makes most sense. Downs explains such voter decisions with rational voter behavior: the voter considers their vote to be a tool in the selection process, not just an expression of preference (Downs, 1957, p. 48). Consequently, these voters attempt to make an optimal decision in the polling booth that promises a successful political outcome - that is, at least some of their political preferences gain representation or as a bare minimum, they may prohibit their least-preferred alternative from winning. As Downs explicitly discusses, this approach to understanding voter behavior is predicated on the theory of rational, strategic voters as opposed to expressive ones. While this study follows the same theoretical framework, it must be noted that the scientific debate on which model describes voter behavior

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