Irish Political Studies

ISSN: 0790-7184 (Print) 1743-9078 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fips20

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To cite this article: Michael Marsh & Carolina Plescia (2016) Split-Ticket Voting in an STV System: Choice in a Non-Strategic Context, Irish Political Studies, 31:2, 163-181, DOI: 10.1080/07907184.2015.1059323

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2015.1059323

Published online: 08 Jul 2015.

Irish Political Studies, 2016
Vol. 31, No. 2, 163–181, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2015.1059323

Split-Ticket Voting in an STV System: Choice in a Non-Strategic Context

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ABSTRACT *This article explores the sources of weak party-voting patterns in Irish elections, conceptualising this as split-ticket voting. Ireland provides a context where election results show split-ticket voting is common, but the strategic interpretations of such behaviour that have been very prominent elsewhere are not generally applicable. We employ data from the Irish national election studies to explore the behaviour of individuals embedded in a variety of contexts. The results demonstrate the prevalence of split-ticket voting, and they support the validity of non-strategic explanations. One source of explanation for the patterns we find lies in differences between individuals: partisanship and the extent to which voters are attracted to candidates rather than parties are important. A second source is contextual: the factors connected with the complexity of the choice facing voters have a powerful influence on split-ticket voting.*

Keywords: partisanship; split-ticket voting; strategic voting; candidates; Ireland

Introduction

Liberal democracy may still be unthinkable without the presence of parties, but in countries where they have the opportunity to do so many voters seem to vote across party lines. Conventional wisdom suggests that the bond between voters and parties has weakened in many advanced democracies. Arguably voters are increasingly less inclined to use a party label to structure their vote choice (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Mair *et al*., 2004). This applies when we are simply looking at voting for a single position at a single time. However, choices may be more complex and in such situations voters are seen to split their preferences between different parties. This happens for instance in the USA, where elections for different positions are held at the same time, and in Germany, where voters have a vote for a

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local candidate as well as one for a party. Historic explanations for split-ticket voting, as it is usually termed, favoured weak attachment to parties (and strong attachment to particular candidates) as the reason for such behaviour. In more recent years, however, explanations have focused more heavily on strategic choices made by voters, painting this multiple party choice less as a result of weak party affiliation and more as a result of relatively sophisticated calculation.

In Ireland, the evidence is also that party labels seem to have less power than formerly thought to structure voting preferences. Election counts have shown increasing rates of transfers across parties and decreasing rates of transfers within parties, indicating that fewer voters are giving their highest preferences to candidates from the same party (Gallagher, 1978, 2011; Sinnott & McBride, 2011). While this is not normally described as an example of split-ticket voting (an exception in Darcy & Marsh, 1994), this article argues that it can be seen as such, and that many of the explanations advanced for split-ticket voting are worth exploring in the Irish context. In part this is because we should, where possible, seek to understand Irish behaviour in terms of more general theories, but also because sometimes the Irish context is of particular value in testing the universal applicability of such theories. We argue here that the assumptions underlying strategic explanations have little validity in the Irish case, and that Ireland thus provides a good test for the value of non-strategic explanations. This is not to argue that strategic reasons do not hold elsewhere, but simply to show that split-ticket voting can, and does, take place even in the absence of strategic calculation. Our results demonstrate that there is a lot of split-ticket voting, and that the non-strategic explanations offered elsewhere do carry real weight in explaining where such behaviour is more typical and what sort of people vote in this way. In essence weaker party attachments and stronger candidate attachments provide a strong basis for split-ticket voting; moreover, where the ballot is more complex, voters are even more likely to cross party lines.

Definitions of Split-Ticket Voting and the Irish Case

Burden and Helmke (2009: 2) outline a conceptual framework and definition intended to further the comparative study of split-ticket voting, which is as follows:

> 'a ticket is split if voter i votes for party j in contest r and votes for party $\sim j$ in some other contest'.

This is inclusive enough to cover both US elections, including the filling of multiple offices at different levels, and mixed systems, which we can see as cases of multiple offices at the same level. This definition could exclude some other cases in which, it is argued here, the concept of split-ticket voting is appropriate. One is the class of ordinal voting systems, and most notable is the system of the single transferable vote (STV). Under STV voters have a single vote to select a candidate in a multimember constituency, but are given the opportunity to designate preferences across a number of candidates by ranking them 1, 2, 3 and so on. When the votes are

counted lower preferences are considered either when a more preferred candidate has more votes than are necessary for election or else has fewer votes than all other candidates. A voter's ranking may be structured by party, with a voter giving first and lower preferences to the full set of candidates run by one party before moving on to indicate a preference between candidates of other parties. But it may be that a voter gives a second preference to a candidate nominated by a second party rather than one nominated by the same party, thus 'splitting their vote'.

This is analogous to the cases above, but it is covered by the Burden and Helmke (2009) definition only if we treat each lower preference as indicating a choice in a separate contest; that is, if we accept that in some sense there is a contest for preferences 2, 3, . . . , n as well as for first preference votes. This has some basis in the way campaigns are run as candidates may well seek to get a 'No 2' from a voter when they accept the 'No 1' is promised elsewhere, and parties make efforts to get their supporters to give their first, second (and if appropriate third and fourth) preference to their candidates. Politically, there are contests for lower preferences votes even if voters have only one vote in the contest for a seat. Even if this definitional extension is not accepted, it is argued here that there is a form of voter behaviour under STV (and some other preferential systems) that is at least analogous to that in the USA and Germany, for instance, that can be substantively important for election outcomes and that is potentially explicable in similar ways.[1]

The obverse of split-ticket voting can be thought to be voting a straight ticket. This could be defined using the structure used by Burden and Helmke (2009) as amended above:

> a ticket is straight if voter i votes for party j in contest r and votes for party j in all other contests.

This, however, is perhaps too demanding, since it requires the same partisan choice in all n contests, even if n is quite large. It seems sensible to separate these three. As defined by Burden and Helmke (2009) a vote could be split and incomplete so it might be better to consider a straight vote in similar terms. An alternative would be:

> a ticket is straight if voter i votes for party j in contest r and does not vote for party $\sim j$ in any other contest.

However, under that definition a straight vote is simply one that is not split: hence a US voter who votes just for President and goes no further could be said to cast a straight vote.[2] We suggest that it makes sense to require a voter to express a choice in more than one of the real or theoretical contests at issue, although how many of these might be required may depend on the case being studied.

To cast a valid vote in an STV election in Ireland a voter is required to indicate a first preference for a candidate. This means placing a '1' next to a candidate's name. However, voters may express further, lower, preferences for as many candidates as they wish. In doing so, they are not constrained by the party labels of candidates.[3]

Consider a hypothetical example, a three-seat constituency contested by two parties (A and B), each of them nominating three candidates.

In Table 1, voter 1 casts a complete ballot, in which party appears as the primary determinant of the preference order, since all the candidates of A are supported before those of B. Voter 2 also appears to be motivated by party, even though the ballot is not filled in completely. Both should be designated as straight-ticket voters. Voter 3, although supporting only one party, is a very different case since he does not support all of party A's candidates. The inference could well be that he is indifferent between the other two candidates of A and all those of B. If A had run only a single candidate we could treat this case as a straight-ticket vote, but this designation could be misleading since the voter had no option to do anything else. Such cases are best left unclassified in the terms used here. Voter 4 casts a split-ticket, as does voter 5. The latter certainly fits the definition offered above, despite not completing the ballot, because votes are cast for different parties. Of course, voter 1 also casts votes for different parties. The difference is that he does so only once all of A's candidates have been ranked.

Following these illustrations it is appropriate to provide operational definitions of these three patterns of behaviour. In what follows we use the term 'vote' to mean express a preference.[4]

Split-ticket voting: voting for a candidate from party j and then voting for a candidate from party $\sim j$ before or instead of other candidates of party j.

Straight-ticket voting: voting for all of the candidates of party j before voting for any other candidate.

Incomplete: voting for a candidate from party j, but neither voting for all other candidates of party j nor voting for any candidates from party $\sim j$.

Table 1. Hypothetical voting patterns under STV where there are two parties (A and B), each running three candidates

Voter 1 Straight	Voter 2 Straight	Voter 3 Incomplete	Voter 4 Split	Voter 5 Split
A	A	A	A	A
A	A		B	B
A	A		A	
B			A	
B			B	
B			B	

Explanations for Split-ticket Voting[5]

Parties and Candidates

The seminal study of voting patterns focused on partisanship (Campbell & Miller, 1957). Straight-ticket voting was seen primarily as an expression of partisanship, but deviations from this behaviour could be expected where issues or candidate appeals might be in conflict with partisanship. This is more likely when party attachment is weak. It would be easy to see partisanship here in terms of party identification as popularised by Campbell *et al*. (1960), but this is not necessary. In theory, at least, a voter could choose to vote for the same party across many offices without having any long-term commitment to that party. The voter might simply feel that parties are more important than candidates and at a given time one party is more attractive than all others. In either case, variations in voting patterns come about because the importance of party weakens relative to issues or candidate appeals.

There are many ways in which candidate appeal can become salient. Perhaps the most widely recognised is incumbency. This moves us away from explaining voting patterns in terms of voter characteristics and allows room for contextual factors to influence behaviour (Vowles *et al*., 1998; Burden & Kimball, 2004). The more incentives and opportunities there are for candidates to personalise their links with voters, the more likely it is that party and candidate appeals might conflict in the mind of the voter, whose subsequent behaviour will reflect the cross pressures that result. In New Zealand, Karp *et al*. (2002) admit that split-ticket voting in several constituencies may be driven by misalignment between candidate and party preferences rather than strategic voting. Burden and Helmke's (2009) analysis of the 2000 election in Japan, where personal voting is rather common (Reed, 1994; Carey & Shugart, 1995), suggests that candidate features matter the most in explaining the levels of split-ticket voting in Japan. And this is confirmed by Moser and Scheiner (2005: 272–274) who claim that strategic voting is overestimated by the current literature because it fails to disentangle sincere voting from strategic split-ticket voting.

The Complexity of the Task

Another factor recognised by Campbell and Miller (1957: 310) was voter indifference: behaviour could be governed by 'a principle of least effort'. Contemporary electoral research tends rather to talk about 'short-cuts' taken by voters. Following a party line is a solution to the problem of choice when the voter has little information about the candidates and offices involved. If this is accepted, it is clear that voters' political sophistication as well as the requirements of the voting decision must also be taken into account: what are voters asked to do; how difficult is the task, and what other short-cuts might offer themselves. Campbell and Miller (1957: 299–300) show that the form of the ballot itself seems to have an influence on the proportion of straight and split-tickets cast. While factors such as these may be more important in explaining cross-system variation, there may still be constituency-level variations

in what voters are asked to do and how they are asked to do it (McAllister & Darcy, 1992; Bullock & Hood, 2002).

Strategic Considerations

While the previous line of explanation acknowledges that many voters may be poorly informed about, and relatively uninterested in, politics, a rather different body of literature treats voters as more informed and acting very strategically on that information. The 'policy balancing' literature argues that the choice of different parties for different offices is because voters see different policy priorities in different spheres, or because they simply want to limit the control exerted by a single party (Alesina & Rosenthal, 1995; Fiorina, 1996). Despite acceptance of this idea by many commentators, and particularly those with a conservative inclination, this is far from being accepted by most scholars (see Burden & Kimball, 2004: 26). It also seems inapplicable generally outside the US context, although variations in which people vote for a coalition are more applicable and are discussed below.

The classical formulation of strategic voting under mixed systems has been that voters usually vote sincerely for parties on the proportional ballot, but vote strategically for a candidate on the majoritarian ballot to avoid wasting their vote supporting a candidate with no chance of getting elected: this hypothesis is often known as 'wasted-vote' hypothesis (Bawn, 1999; Karp *et al*., 2002). More recently, however, researchers have pointed out that proportional rules may offer similar strategic incentives and the party vote could often be seen as indicating a preferred coalition. According to this line of reasoning, voters might split their vote to achieve a coalition outcome by supporting a less preferred party, but likely coalition partner, on the proportional ballot ('coalition-insurance' hypothesis) (Gschwend, 2007; Shikano *et al*., 2009).

It is worth pointing out that following each of these strategies results in observationally equivalent split-ticket patterns; that is, a candidate vote for a major party candidate and a list vote for the junior coalition partner's party list. In addition, these patterns are consistent with sincere voting as it is possible that voters may genuinely prefer a candidate that happens to run for a different party than the one chosen with the proportional vote (Gallagher, 1998: 209). Testing the individual-level mechanisms and disentangling sincere intentions from strategic intentions require information about preferences for both parties and candidates running for elections. However, while surveys usually ask respondents about preferences for parties, they do not ask similar questions for candidates.

With regard to strategic voting under STV, several scholars have concluded that the system presents such difficult calculations to voters that it seems to make little sense to do anything other than casting a sincere preference (Bowler & Grofman, 2000: 268). Specifically, classical wasted vote calculations concerning the vote for hopeless candidates make no sense in Ireland because STV ensures that votes are not wasted (Marsh, 2010). However, it may well be that some voters might use lower preferences strategically to favour a specific coalition outcome (Laver,

2000). An analysis conducted by Marsh (2010: 336) suggests that at least some voters do appear to act strategically in line with a coalition preference, since when they vote for candidates of a second party this tends to coincide with their expressed preference for the nature of a coalition. Even so, while coalition preferences might influence the choice of a second party, it makes little sense to indicate a preference for the candidates of that second party before giving preferences to all candidates of the first one. Overall, this would suggest that strategic incentives for split-ticket voting in Ireland are very low when compared to other electoral settings such as mixed systems. Hence, the STV case offers an opportunity to examine ticket splitting in a context where the conventional range of strategic explanations is – at best – much less relevant. To the extent than we can explain split-ticket voting in Ireland without resorting to strategic explanations, this will attest to the validity of alternatives (although of course it would not rule out the importance of strategic voting elsewhere).[6]

We have argued that the literature on split-ticket voting is a useful foundation for explanations of Irish voter behaviour. A further source of explanations could be the literature on the use of opportunities for preferential voting, where these exist (for some general reviews see Marsh, 1985; Karvonen, 2004; for useful country studies see Katz, 1985; Lutz, 2011; André *et al*., 2012). However, we have opted to focus just on the split-ticket literature. The primary reason for this is that most of the preferential voting literature deals just with the use of options to express within-party preferences and we do not think it is useful to equate the use of preferential voting per se with the patterns of cross party or string within party voting which we identify here.

The Data

Split-ticket voting is not easy to measure directly. Aggregate data represent the only available source of data in many countries and this allows historical and cross-national comparisons. However, this obscures individual-level variation and does not allow us to investigate voters' motivations. Of course individual-level explanations can only be assessed directly and systematically only with survey data. Here we will use data from the three Irish National Election Studies, each of which consisted of a post-election face-to-face, in-home survey carried out after the elections of 2002, 2007 and 2011. Interviews were conducted in all constituencies, with between 10 and 99 respondents per constituency. We supplement that with information about the choice with which the voter is faced, so as to explore the behaviour of individuals embedded in a variety of contexts.

During the interview respondents were asked to fill in a mock ballot, essentially a replica of the one they would have filled on election data. Respondents were asked to mark this mock ballot as they did the real version on the day of the election. As with all survey data there is of course the possibility that this method measures voting with error. It is very unlikely that everyone would remember accurately exactly how he cast each preference vote, but the main concern is that the errors made might be systematic. There has been extensive exploration of Irish data from mock ballots (see

Bowler and Farrell, 1991a, 1991b and Marsh *et al*., 2008). Marsh *et al*. argue for the validity of the method, in terms of accurate first preference counts and comparability of voting patterns with aggregate data and data from experiments with electronic voting in 2002 (see also Laver, 2004). We will further address this below.

Several further points should be made here. The first is that we will restrict ourselves to higher preferences when operationalising split- and straight-ticket voting. A voter may cease to use party as an organising principle after, for example, voting for both of the candidates of the first choice party. They therefore display a mixture of straight- and split-ticket patterns. We do not treat such cases as split-ticket voters because it is the higher preferences that are most important, and because most voters do not express support for more than three candidates, or more than two parties (Marsh *et al*., 2008: 19–24; Bowler & Farrell, 1991a, 1991b). Our operationalisation also seems more analogous to the usual application of the concept. A second point is that our operationalisation excludes those who vote for an independent candidate with their first preference vote, a choice made by an increasing, but still tiny, number of voters (9 per cent in 2002, 6 per cent in 2007 and 9 per cent in 2011). We do so because we think it makes no sense to treat a vote for one of the independent candidates as akin to a party vote, because independents are such a very disparate group (Weeks, 2009). This means our analysis is restricted to a subgroup of voters: those who vote for a party, and a party running more than one candidate in a constituency. This however is a very large subgroup, amounting to 90 per cent of voters in 2002, 81 per cent in 2007 and 87 per cent in 2011.

Operationalisation and Hypotheses

We now move to operationalise measures of the key explanatory concepts identified earlier, so that we can look for the effects of partisanship, candidate appeal, the sophistication of the voter and the varying complexity of the task. We will focus only on split-ticket voting in these hypotheses and the subsequent analysis for the sake of simplicity. Essentially, in the way operationalised here, straight and split-ticket voting are two sides of the same coin.

Partisanship

Weak partisanship is a classic explanation for split-ticket voting. Strong partisanship serves to reduce the appeal of individual candidates from other parties and the appeal of parties with different issue positions or salience. In the Irish context it is worth thinking about what is meant by partisanship. Following the party identification literature, it represents a standing commitment to one party that can be expected to persist over time, and serves to insulate a voter from potential cross pressures. Such attachment as measured by the Eurobarometer question on closeness to a party is remarkably low, and in fact is below the levels of straight-ticket voting. An alternative is to see partisanship as simply a decision to vote for a party at a

particular time; a perception that the election is party centred and a party choice has been made.

The Irish election study offers opportunities to measure both of these concepts. The first can be assessed using the traditional Eurobarometer question about party attachment: 'Do you usually think of yourself as close to any political party?' Positive responses to this item have been declining in Ireland over the last 30 or so years and in 2011 no more than one in five voters felt close. The second is to use the feeling thermometer battery, asked for each party. This also allows us to identify people who 'like' one party over all others as against those who most 'like' at least two parties equally. The expectation is that identifiers and those with a clear liking for a single party (and, in each case, those who vote for that party) will be less likely to split their vote.

Parties and Candidates

A second approach is to explore the respective importance to the voter of parties and candidates. We have done this in two ways. For the first we have employed an index based on two questions, one asking directly whether the party or the candidate is the larger influence on the respondent's vote, and the second – more indirectly – asking if the voter would still support the same candidate under a different party label. The index collates consistent candidate responses, inconsistent responses and consistent party responses. These are scaled as 1, 0 and −1, indicating degrees of candidate centeredness. Past research has shown how this measure is associated with other measures of partisanship (Marsh, 2007). A second approach parallels that used for partisanship. Voters were provided with feeling thermometers for candidates. We can identify those who like best candidates from different parties as against those whose most liked a candidate or candidates who carried the same party label. Our expectations for these two variables are that those who are more candidate-centred will be more likely to split their votes.[7]

Information and Interest

Besides motivation concerning preferences for parties and candidates, if they are to avoid the need for simple 'short-cuts' voters need a certain level of sophistication and political knowledge (Zaller, 1992). Thus an alternative explanation for split-ticket voting is that many voters are poorly informed, find the decision they are being asked to make a complex one and in structuring their choice rely on a variety of short-cuts, which are often not those of party. We examine possible relationships using measures of knowledge about political affairs. The index of information is based on five knowledge items for the 2002 and 2007 elections and four items for the 2011 election where responses are coded true or false.[8] Arguably lack of knowledge may increase, or decrease, the chances of split-ticket voting. The literature does not provide a definitive answer on this. US studies have shown a negative association (Roscoe, 2003), a positive association (Maddox & Nimmo,

1981) and none at all (Beck *et al*., 1992). In mixed systems it appears that educated and/or politically sophisticated voters are more likely to cast a split-ticket vote than those featuring lower levels of education or political sophistication, a result that has often been interpreted as evidence that splitters cast an informed vote decision (Karp *et al*., 2002; Karp, 2006).

The Constituency Context

In addition to examining the characteristics of individuals, researchers have explored the context: in effect, the nature of the decision that the voter is being asked to make. This may involve the appearance of the ballot, the extent to which the candidates are well known, the importance of the offices being filled and so on. In the Irish context several features are worth examining. The first is the number of candidates from the first preference party. This varies between 0 and 4, but for our purposes in this analysis it varies between 2 and 4, with 2 being the modal category. Larger sets require more preferences to complete a straight ticket, and perhaps there is more scope for distraction.[9]

A second is the extent to which a party's candidates are well known. We have measured this with two variables. One is the number of incumbents running for the respondent's chosen party, and the second is whether the first preference is for an incumbent. Using incumbency as a measure in this way is commonplace (among others Burden & Kimball, 2004; Moser & Scheiner, 2005). Of course incumbents do not always win, but this is a measure of visibility, not necessarily popularity. The argument here is that an incumbent will be more likely to attract a personal, candidate vote, which may then leak away, perhaps to more preferred parties, so those who support an incumbent will be more likely to split; but, where party fields more incumbents, other things being equal, we would expect more voters to support the whole ticket, because there are well-known candidates down the line. Hence we expect more split-ticket voters among those who vote for an incumbent, but fewer such voters where a party runs at least one incumbent.

In the Irish context another factor is related to the likelihood of cross-pressure. There is a strong norm among Irish voters for their representative to work closely for a local area, and candidates typically come from the (often small) areas they represent (Gallagher & Komito, 2010). This is less strong in urban areas, but also in those areas – all very small in scale – the possibility of a candidate being seen to come from a very different part of the constituency is reduced. In contrast, in rural areas candidates do divide up the constituency between them, each canvassing separate areas; crossing dividing lines, laid down by party HQ, commonly leads to conflict. Hence we might expect the pressures to split would be strong for a rural voter, asked to choose between a local candidate and a party candidate from further away. Some constituencies also contain more than one county, a salient feature of identity for most Irish people, and there is evidence in many of these that vote transfers are less likely to cross county boundaries.

Analysis

Table 2 shows the extent of straight- and split-ticket voting by party. It is very clear here that split-ticket voting is widespread, and indeed the norm. As explained above, these calculations apply only to cases where a party fielded more than one candidate, but this accounts for the great majority of cases for Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, and for Labour in 2007 and 2011. Across the three elections most of those who supported one of these parties with their first preference did not do so with their second or third where they could have done so. Table 3 shows that straight-ticket voting is much more common where a party fields just two candidates, at least for Fianna Fail and Fine Gael voters. (The Labour cases are all two candidate slates.) The final row in Table 3 shows the estimates of straight-ticket voting on the basis of vote transfers at the counts. These are higher than those in row 1. One explanation for this is that the two are not directly comparable because the figures in row 1 are based on party solidarity across 2, 3 and 4 candidates, rather than just 2, as in row 2. They are more comparable with those in row 2, based on cases where a party ran only two candidates and serve to validate the estimates derived from mock ballots.

That split-ticket voting is common is shown by aggregate results as well as by survey data. The great advantage of the survey data here is that we can link the behaviour to the individual voter. In the multivariate analysis that follows we look only at split-ticket voting as defined above. Straight-ticket voting is typically the obverse (as we see in Table 2), and though in preferential systems the two are not quite opposites, the results here are effectively the same for both. Our dependent variable is dichotomous: whether or not the voter casts a split-ticket vote. Consequently, logistic regression is used to estimate our models. With regard to the independent variables, in general what we need to do here is combine individual level and constituency measures in the same models, so we have data with a multilevel structure. There are many ways of estimating such models. The simplest is to treat constituencies as a source of error in our model of individuals, meaning that error at the individual level may be correlated within a constituency. This involves running a

Table 2. Patterns of split- and straight-ticket voting in multi-candidate situation (%)

	2011			2007			2002		
	First preference vote								
	FF	FG	Lab	FF	FG	Lab	FF	FG	Lab
Voting for candidates of different parties without completing set of first party's candidate	51	49	54	48	56	64	51	61	70
Voting for all the candidates of first preference party in sequence	46	49	45	50	42	35	49	39	31

Note: The table includes only instances where a party fielded more than one candidate.

Table 3. Patterns of straight-ticket voting in multi-candidate situation (%)

	2011			2007			2002		
	First preference vote								
	FF	FG	Lab	FF	FG	Lab	FF	FG	Lab
Voting for all the candidates of first preference party in sequence	46	49	45	50	42	35	49	39	31
Voting for all the candidates of first preference party in sequence when just two candidates	57	64	47	63	62	35	55	46	35
Straight-ticket voting from analysis of official results	58	68	56	67	64	43	63	64	48

Note: The table includes only instances where a party fielded more than one candidate. Analysis of official results from Gallagher (2011: 163); Gallagher (2007:148) and Gallagher (2003: 106).

straightforward logit model, but adjusting the standard errors in that model to recognise that the behaviour of individuals in a constituency may vary in some way unconnected with their individual level characteristics, and unconnected with the variation in another constituency. We can do this by treating errors as clustered by constituency.

This would ignore, however, the fact that there may be some structure to cluster (constituency) variations, and it would be better to model that more precisely. Some, perhaps even much, of the variations between individuals may in effect be variation between constituencies in a manner suggested by our contextual variables. If so, a model is required that accounts for that. We estimate a multilevel logit model, examining variations in the behaviour of individuals within constituencies as well as across them. Table 4 contains two regression models, one using just the individual level measures on split-ticket behaviour and the second including the constituency-level, contextual measures. Each regression uses a random effects model, allowing constituency means to vary in a defined manner.[10] We show rho, a statistic that tells us how much of the variation we want to explain is effectively between rather than within constituencies. This is significant for both models, a result that clearly justifies the use of the multilevel logit model instead of a more straightforward logit model.

In the first model the measures of partisanship are much stronger than that measuring information. Split-ticket voting seems to be down to weak partisanship and/or a commitment to particular candidates more than it does to low levels of political information and interest. When it comes to a comparison between parties and candidates, having warmest feelings for more than one party is more important in explaining split-ticket voting than having rated candidates from different parties equally. This finding confirms just how important parties still are. In other words, to explain

Table 4. Multivariate analysis of split-ticket voting: logit coefficients and standard errors

	Model 1 Split	Model 2 Split
Individuals		
Party attachment for first pref (1/0)	−0.766***	−0.797***
	(0.103)	(0.104)
Party centred (1–3)	−0.572***	−0.595***
	(0.061)	(0.061)
Non-singular party rating (1/0)	1.011***	1.021***
	(0.114)	(0.114)
Non-singular candidate rating (1/0)	0.457***	0.493***
	(0.105)	(0.105)
Information level (0–4)	−0.032	−0.015
	(0.037)	(0.037)
Context		
Incumbent first preference		0.124
		(0.111)
Number of incumbents run by party (0, 1 or more)		−0.260**
		(0.080)
Candidates run by each party (2, 3 or 4)		0.882***
		(0.102)
Urban constituency (1/0)		−0.147
		(0.147)
N	2,754	2,754
LL	−1,642.06	−1,604.51
AIC	3,298.12	3,231.02
Rho	0.135	0.075
	(0.026)	(0.019)

Logit coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses:
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.

split-ticket voting it remains more important to look at whether or how much the voter likes one party more than all the others rather than how much he likes candidates from different parties.

The control for contextual factors in the second model has little or no impact on the individual level coefficients. The number of candidates run by each party has a strong effect, but the two candidate quality variables do not entirely fulfil expectations. Where there are more incumbents the likelihood of splitting is significantly reduced, but where a voter casts his first preference for an incumbent we do not see a significant reduction in the likelihood of a voter casting a split-ticket: the

sign of the effect is as expected, but the effect is weak and not significant. The dummy variable for urban constituencies is positive as expected with urban constituencies featuring lower levels of split-ticket voting, but it is insignificant across all models. Similarly, as expected, constituencies combining at least two counties to a substantial degree were also more likely to see split-ticket voting, but the impact is not significant.

Table 5. Multivariate analysis of split- and straight-ticket voting where a party runs two candidates: logit coefficients and standard errors

	Two candidates		More than two candidates	
	Model 3 Split	Model 4 Split	Model 5 Split	Model 6 Split
Individuals				
Party attachment for first pref (1/0)	−0.807***	−0.794***	−0.798***	−0.794***
	(0.155)	(0.155)	(0.140)	(0.141)
Party centred (1–3)	−0.644***	−0.645***	−0.530***	−0.537***
	(0.086)	(0.086)	(0.088)	(0.088)
Non-singular party rating (1/0)	0.906***	0.865***	1.357***	1.337***
	(0.145)	(0.145)	(0.199)	(0.200)
Non-singular candidate rating (1/0)	0.532***	0.541***	0.439**	0.424**
	(0.139)	(0.139)	(0.163)	(0.163)
Information level (0–4)	−0.044	−0.030	−0.009	−0.001
	(0.052)	(0.051)	(0.052)	(0.052)
Context				
Incumbent first preference		0.106		0.178
		(0.167)		(0.155)
Number of incumbents run by party (0, 1 or more)		−0.369**		−0.173
		(0.142)		(0.099)
Urban constituency (1/0)		−0.161		−0.216
		(0.189)		(0.209)
N	1,476	1,476	1,278	1,278
LL	−865.17	−861.21	−740.83	−738.61
AIC	1,744.35	1,742.43	1,495.65	1,497.22
Rho	0.117	0.096	0.063	0.054
	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.024)

Note: Logit coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < 0.001$.

We estimated a further set of models controlling more closely for candidate numbers by separating our sample according to whether a party ran two, or more than two, candidates. We thought this would provide a better indication of the importance of measures like incumbencies. The results, again estimated with a random effects model, are presented in Table 5. There are some differences between these and the estimates in Table 4, but in general the individual level effects are much the same, and are similar in both 2 and 2+ candidate situations. The individual-level exception is that the non-singular party rating has even more impact where there are more than two candidates. In two-candidate situations we see clear differences in the weight of the constituency-level factors. It is notable that the rho is smaller once this important contextual factor has been controlled for by selection. Candidate quality no longer has such significant effect, although the patterns are the same as in Table 4. It is evident that the missing variable here, numbers of candidates, did most of the constituency-level work. With that variable controlled for, the constituency items add little.

Substantive conclusions hold when models are run separately for each year of election. The only differences lie in the fact that the vote appears to be more party-centred in 2002 when compared to the other elections, while in 2007 the contextual variables perform less well than in 2002 and 2011. Significantly, the information scale results do not differ across the three elections. Results are also broadly similar for the three parties considered in the analysis. Finally we tried to relax the definition of our dependent variable. With reference to Table 1, first we used a less demanding test of a party vote considering any vote beginning A–A as a straight vote even if voters do not vote right 'down the ticket'. Another case considered is the one taking the form of A–B–B–B. In both cases the proportion of straight-ticket voters increases. While this increase lowers somewhat the effect of the contextual predictors it does not change substantive conclusions.

Conclusions

This article explores the sources of weak party-voting patterns in Irish election. This is of interest in an Irish context where common patterns of weak party-voting have not generally been interpreted using theories of split-ticket voting. It is important to understand Irish voter behaviour as part of our wider understanding of Irish politics. Parties seem to be getting weaker as a constraint on voting patterns over many years and non-party candidates have grown in popularity in recent years. We have also argued here that our results have a wider significance. This is first because this pattern can be seen as analogous to those seen elsewhere and conceptualised as split- and straight-ticket voting; so the Irish case provides another test of an approach developed elsewhere. The second is that these voting patterns within an STV system – and perhaps similar patterns within preferential list systems like the Swiss – provide a way of looking at split-ticket voting in a context where the strategic interpretations that have been very prominent as an interpretation of this pattern in recent years, can be placed to one side. Hence the question is do we get split-ticket

voting where there are no strategic considerations; and if so, how much do we get, and how can it be explained?

Our results demonstrate that there is a lot of split-ticket voting, and that the non-strategic explanations offered elsewhere do carry real weight in explaining where such behaviour is more typical and what sort of people vote in this way. This provides very strong evidence for the validity of non-strategic explanations. Despite not ruling out strategic voting elsewhere, the findings in this article indicate that many ticket splitters do not act strategically. One source of explanation lies in differences between individuals. Partisanship and the extent to which voters are attracted by candidates rather than parties are important determinants of split-ticket behaviour; there is much less evidence that either behaviour is a consequence of the amount of interest, or information about politics. A second source, and this appears to be more powerful, lies in what people are asked to do in the ballot box, and in factors connected with the choices they have to make. A voter given just two candidates from his party, perhaps in a small constituency, and with both being incumbents, is much more likely to vote a straight ticket than the voter faced with three non-incumbents spread out across a long ballot. The importance of such factors does validate the choice of a multilevel estimation procedure such as the one employed here.

Further exploration, controlling by selection for the number of candidates nominated by a party, suggests that there are important interactions between many of the constituency-level variables, but the significance here is less with whether constituency size or positional range is most important but more with whether a set of factors which can be seen as contributing to a more or less 'easy' decision by the voter matter, and it would seem that they do. This perhaps conflicts somewhat with the evidence at individual level, and this surely deserves further exploration. Generally speaking we find a lot of split-ticket voting that can be accounted for by non-strategic explanations. This deserves attention in future works, and points to the need to systematically distinguish sincere voting from strategic split-ticket voting.

Funding

Carolina Plescia gratefully acknowledges the financial support offered by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Studies (IRCHSS) through its Ph.D. scholarship programme.

Notes

1. For instance, in Switzerland electors vote for a list which can be a party's list, or one amended by a voter to combine candidates from different lists.
2. Some states in the USA have an option (sometimes known as a *master lever*) to choose all the candidates of one political party with a single motion. By our definitions, a master lever vote would represent an instance of straight voting.
3. In some STV systems, such as Malta, the ballot paper is organised by party, but in Ireland there is a single list of candidates, arranged in alphabetic order. Party labels are indicated on the ballot. Arguably the Maltese structure increases the incidence of straight-ticket voting while the Irish one reduces it (Darcy and Marsh, 1994).

4. Most of the previous work on these patterns of voting in the Irish case has used a different terminology. Gallagher (1978) uses the term 'solidarity' to describe transfers within the same party, while Sinnott (1995) uses the term 'party loyalty'. We prefer to use the terms split- and straight-ticket voting so as to fit the Irish case into more general patterns.
5. Explanations for straight- and split-ticket voting are generally the same ones, with only differences in the direction of the effects.
6. Given that we reject the idea of strategic voting on grounds of plausibility, our regression models do not include strategic voting variables. However, we looked at the effect of some common strategic voting variables such as previous year candidate's share of vote and spending by parties and candidates which turned out to be statistically insignificant across all models. Additional results are available from the authors upon request.
7. We also looked at non-singular leader rating of the sort presented for parties and candidates. However, we decided not to include this variable in subsequent models because it was highly correlated with party rating and statistically non-significant in any model.
8. The items are not the same in all three surveys although they are similar in substance. Mokken scaling analysis demonstrates that each provides scales with strong unidimensional properties, but of course they may not measure the same thing or do so with equal effectiveness. However, as we see in the analysis, the relationships we find are very similar in each of the three election studies.
9. To some degree this will be linked with the *length of the ballot*. We consider also the simple count of the number of candidates running in each constituency (*ballot length*) and a measure of the difficulty of finding a party's candidate on the ballot paper (*position range*). These two variables, however, were much less powerful than the simple count of the number of candidates run by each party.
10. At the suggestion of one reviewer we also ran a further random effects model allowing random effects at the candidate level. Results did not differ significantly from those in Table 4.

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