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Abstract

Protest voting is a phenomenon of growing interest to both academic and other observers of elections throughout the world. In this paper we create a taxonomy of the wide range of behaviors that have been labeled as protest voting, and review the literature studying them. Our review shows that the analysis of protest voting faces significant challenges, first and foremost because researchers lack a clear conceptual definition of the term. Lack of conceptual clarity is particularly patent in the analysis of support for fringe or insurgent parties, as what is often labeled as protest voting is consistent with patterns of ideological attraction and retrospective voting that characterize support for mainstream parties. Protest voting can also take the form of voters casting blank, null, or spoiled (BNS) ballots, but a major problem for analyses here is that it is difficult to distinguish between BNS ballots that are cast intentionally from ballots that are voided due to unintentional mistakes. Protest votes can sometimes take the form of tactical voting, and in a few cases protest voting is organized and directed by political elites. In such cases, however, protest voting has been either ineffectual or counterproductive.

Introduction

In popular analysis of elections it is often reported that some voters have engaged in "protest voting." Votes cast for insurgent parties or candidates, e.g., Ross Perot or Ralph Nader in U.S. presidential elections, or for extremist parties such as the BNP in British elections, are seen as expressions of protest against the mainstream parties or the political status quo. Post-mortems of the Brexit vote attribute some of the success of the "Leave" campaign to voters who cared little one way or the other about remaining in the EU, but who used their vote as a vehicle of protest. For some, it was a way to register chagrin with David Cameron; for others it was a way "…to extend a middle finger to the establishment" (Cross 2016). Tony Blair, similarly, charges that Jeremy Corbyn has reduced the Labour Party to a "party of protest" (Ashmore 2016). The 2016 US Presidential campaign abounded in calls for voters to avoid casting protest votes for third party candidates. Others have interpreted Donald Trump's ascension to the presidency as riding a wave of discontent and protest against the establishment. And then there are other political movements, like the Pirate Parties in Europe, and the Tea Party in the United States, that coalesce around specific protest issues, sometimes on the political extremes, but which become lasting fixtures of the political landscape. Many different types of voting behavior, motivated by a variety of considerations, have fallen under the rubric of protest voting.

In this paper we seek to create a taxonomy for the wide range of phenomena that political scientists have described as protest voting, in the hope that this stimulates new and improved research in this area. In reviewing previous research, we find that there are five distinct patterns of voting behavior that have been characterized as protest voting:

1) Instead of voting for one of the major, conventional parties on the ballot, voters instead cast their ballots for parties that are anti-establishment, unorthodox, ideologically extreme, frivolous, or some convex combination of these characteristics—parties that we will refer to collectively as insurgent parties. This we describe as "insurgent party protest voting."

2) In order to convey their dissatisfaction with some aspect of their most preferred party's issue positions, voters cast their vote for a less-preferred party. This last choice is based upon tactical considerations, and for that reason we refer to it as "tactical protest voting."

3) Instead of voting for a party or candidate listed on the ballot, voters instead intentionally cast blank, null, or spoiled ballots; and so we refer to this as "BNS protest voting."

4) In response to disenfranchisement or due to other political considerations, political elites lead campaigns to encourage protest voting—a phenomenon we call "organized protest voting."

5) In recent years a number of countries and jurisdictions have begun offering voters the choice of "None of the Above" (NOTA) on the ballot. We characterize voters who choose this option as participating in "officially sanctioned protest voting."

In the course of developing this taxonomy, we find that that the diagnosis of protest voting in elections is fraught with a number of analytical quandaries. Observationally, it is difficult to distinguish between insurgent party protest voting and conventional issue or retrospective voting. Tactical protest voting can be observationally equivalent to other non-Duvergerian types of tactical voting. Similarly, in the case of BNS protest voting it is difficult to distinguish between ballots spoiled intentionally from those spoiled unintentionally, and much depends upon the way election administrators handle ballots. In the case of organized protest voting it is clear to see that protest voting has occurred, but we observe it only rarely, under unusual circumstances. Finally, it is hard to say whether officially sanctioned NOTA voting can be described as protest voting or not.

Insurgent Party Protest Voting

Several studies have investigated voting for insurgent, unorthodox, fringe parties out of the political mainstream, or for insurgent candidates, and have characterized support for such parties and candidates as protest votes. What criteria are used to assess whether or not a particular party is, or is not, the recipient of protest voting? These parties can be ideologically extreme, but in other cases they have little by way of programmatic policy agenda; positioning themselves as outsiders uninfluenced and uncorrupted by a decadent status quo, they simply promise to deliver results. The list of 68 such parties in Eastern Europe that Pop-Eleches (2010) compiles in his study of protest voting (parties that he describes as unorthodox) contains parties that are radical left, centrist populist, extreme nationalist, and neo-fascist. Critical assessments of such parties often detect elements of xenophobia and antisemitism. In many cases, however, whether or not an insurgent party is the potential recipient of protest votes is a judgment call (see Giugni and Koopmans 2007), and in making these judgments political scientists ultimately rely upon the criterion used by Justice Potter Stewart in the celebrated *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964) obscenity case: "I know it when I see it."

What defines insurgent party protest voting? Generally speaking, previous researchers posit that protest voters support insurgent parties not so much because of what they are, but because of what they are not. In many cases such parties are personalistic, and, as indicated above, can be lacking in terms of identifiable policy positions. What insurgent parties are not are the mainstream parties that protest voters associate with status quo politics, and it is a status

quo they find exasperating and uncongenial. As Pop-Eleches puts it, "A protest vote (or antivote) is an electoral option driven less by the positive appeal of the chosen party's ideological/policy platform than by the rejection of other possible political choices" (p. 236). Protest voting for insurgent parties is thus seen to reflect a dearth of "…acceptable mainstream parties to vent their frustration" (p. 238).

Most studies in this area pursue the following analytical strategy: after having stipulated that a particular party or candidate attracts protest voters, they test hypotheses concerning differences between supporters of such parties and supporters of the conventional mainstream parties. Southwell and Everest (1998) characterize protest voters as those who hold a certain set of political beliefs and attitudes, and that it is these beliefs and attitudes that lead them to support insurgent candidates. In their analysis of ANES data, they find that Perot voters in the 1992 US presidential election had weaker attachments than other voters to either the mainstream Democratic or Republican parties. They were more likely to agree that the government could not be trusted and that it was run for the benefit of special interest groups. They were also "externally inefficacious," in that they were more likely to believe that existing parties did not offer meaningful choices, that elections do not allow citizens to influence government policy, and that elected officials were not representative of public opinion. Southwell and Everest conclude that the Perot candidacy had many of the earmarks of what they considered to be protest voting.

Bowler and Lanoue (1992) investigate support for the Canadian New Democratic Party (NDP) in the 1984 federal election. They posit that the NDP garnered votes from two groups: 1) NDP party loyalists who supported the party and its platform regardless of its electoral prospects, and 2) protest voters, who,"...disenchanted with the performance of the major parties or the incumbent government," (p. 489), voted NDP to signal their high level of dissatisfaction. Such voters were not necessarily attracted to the NDP's policy positions. Like Pop-Eleches, they hypothesize that protest voters supported the NDP not because of what it was but because of what it was not—one of the major conventional parties that had produced an objectionable and unacceptable status quo. Analyzing data from the Canadian National Election Study, Bowler and Lanoue posit that NDP support came mainly from voters who held the government responsible for their deteriorating standard of living, or who expressed strong dissatisfaction with the current government's performance. In the probit equation they estimate the coefficient of their protest voting measure was in the expected direction, but not statistically significant.

Other studies have investigated the nature of support for anti-immigration parties that have emerged throughout Europe during the past few decades. According to Van der Brug *et al.* (2000) such parties are viewed as protest parties, and votes for them are seen to be protest votes.

Van der Brug *et al*. are critical of this approach. As they put it, "…students of right-wing extremism so far have neither given serious thought to the theoretical elaboration nor to the operationalization of the concept of a 'protest vote'…We find the definition 'a protest voter is a voter who votes for a protest party unacceptable, because it begs the question" (p. 82). In any case, the key hypotheses that Van der Brug *et al*. derive with respect to protest voting are: 1) supporters of the insurgent anti-immigrant parties are less influenced by the spatial (ideological) location of parties; 2) they are less concerned about electoral viability; 3) they are more Euro-sceptic. Their analysis of voting behavior in seven countries in the 1994 elections to the European Parliament generates little support for these hypotheses. Supporters of anti-immigrant parties were no less influenced by ideological location, no less concerned about parties' electoral prospects, and no more hostile to the EU than supporters of conventional mainstream parties. What differentiated anti-immigrant party supporters from other voters was their strong opposition to immigration.

Ivarsflaten's (2008) findings are consistent with Van der Brug et al.'s. In seeking to determine what factors were responsible for the rise of right-wing populist parties in the early years of the new millennium, Ivarsflaten sees these parties as "mobilizing grievances," and so to become a vehicle of protest voting. Her main hypotheses concern the nature of these grievances, and she investigates three possible sources: 1) the deterioration of real income, living standards, and economic security caused by welfare retrenchment, and job losses due to technological advances, trade liberalization, and privatization; 2) political cynicism and disillusionment fanned by large scale corruption scandals in several European countries and antagonism toward the European Union; 3) a backlash against the "postmaterialist" green movement, and 4) unhappiness and uneasiness due to continued high rates of immigration, particularly by immigrants from Islamic countries who lack the skills and education needed to integrate into their societies, and who, they suspect, hold values inimical to those of modern Western civilization. In an analysis of data from seven Western European countries collected by the European Social Survey in 2002-3, Ivarsflaten found nothing to distinguish supporters of the insurgent right-wing populist parties from those of conventional, mainstream parties along these first three dimensions. Views concerning immigration, in contrast, were powerful predictors of support for these parties: "As immigration policy preferences become more restrictive, the probability of voting for the populist right increases dramatically" (p. 17).

Pop-Eleches (2010) makes a comprehensive study of the many insurgent, unorthodox parties that gained prominence throughout Eastern Europe in the early years of the new millennium. His analysis of 76 elections held in post-communist countries between 1990 and 2006 shows that

support for insurgent parties became much more widespread in "third-generation" elections, as negative experiences with the first and second-generation of post-communist party governments accumulated. His analysis of a dozen panels of survey data collected in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems similarly indicates that insurgent party supporters tended not to feel close to any party, which is consistent with the idea that the support for protest parties is more a function of what they are not than of what they are. Contrary to expectations of protest voting, however, insurgent party voters, compared to supporters of other mainstream opposition parties, were no more likely to adopt the cynical view that it makes no difference who is in power, or to be dissatisfied with democratic government.

Rodon and Hierro (2016) report similar results in their study of the rise of insurgent parties (and poor performance of mainstream parties) in Spain in the 2014 European Parliament election and in the 2015 local and regional elections. Following a severe economic downturn, the imposition of austerity measures, and revelations of corruption involving the incumbent PSOE (Socialist) government, the conservative Partido Popular rode a wave of discontent to power in 2011. With little improvement in the economy, the PP's continuation of debt reduction as a major policy priority, and corruption scandals of their own, both major parties had lost considerable credibility. In the 2014 and 2015 elections electoral support for new insurgent parties, Podemos and Cuidadanos, parties that also offered a somewhat different mix of policies regarding taxation, welfare benefits, and immigration, rose significantly.

In their study of the British National Party, Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin (2011) observe that research on parties of the extreme right is informed by the conventional view of insurgent party protest voting. Support for parties like the BNP is "…a by-product of citizens' dissatisfaction with mainstream parties and discontent with the political system more generally…Implicit in the protest model is the assumption that 'voters have reasons to vote for them [ERPs] that have more to do with deficiencies of mainstream parties than with the attraction of anti-immigrant parties per se'" (p. 420). Cutts et al. find that BNP voters in the 2009 European Parliament Election did indeed hold negative views of the political mainstream. Overwhelming majorities of them agreed that most politicians were corrupt and that there were no differences between the major parties. Contrary to expectations concerning protest voting, however, they also find that BNP votes were in strong agreement with (and thus attracted by) the BNP's issue stances: they were opposed to immigration, favored withdrawal from the EU, and held hostile views toward racial minorities and Islam. BNP voters, in short, were not simply casting a protest vote to express dissatisfaction with conventional parties and the political mainstream. They were also quite supportive of the BNP's program, as unsavory as that might be.

Denemark and Bowler (2002) find something similar with respect to Australia's One Nation Party (ONP) and New Zealand's New Zealand First (ZNF). Studying the electoral support of all small parties, they find that the more "traditional," centrist small parties drew support mainly from voters dissatisfied with the status quo and economic performance. On the other hand, and similar to the findings in Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin (2011) for the BNP, supporters of the ONP and ZNF came not only from the politically or economically dissatisfied, but also from voters who endorsed (some) of these parties' policies with respect to immigration and aboriginal aid.

Based upon their analysis of data from a massive YouGov sample (n> 30k), Whitaker and Lynch (2011) report that United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) voters in the same 2009 European Parliament election were similarly distrustful of the political mainstream, Eurosceptic, and anti-immigration. Lacking the overt racism and xenophobia of the BNP, by 2009 UKIP was of course not as small and insurgent as it had been a decade earlier. In their analysis of these same YouGov data Ford, Goodwin, and Cutts (2012) find that UKIP supporters came in two distinct varieties. The first group, which they characterize as "core" UKIP supporters, reported voting for UKIP in both EP and Westminster elections. These voters were relatively young, more working class in background, more likely to report growing up in a Labour household, and were doing relatively poorly economically. They did not view the Conservative party and its policies as conducive to their interests, were disaffected from the mainstream political establishment, Eurosceptic, and anti-immigration. They might otherwise have been BNP supporters had not that fringe party been discredited by its violent and racist elements. A larger group, that of "strategic" supporters, on the other hand, voted UKIP primarily to express disapproval of Britain's membership in the European Union—a behavior that one could label protest voting. In all other respects they were much like Conservative voters in general—older, more male, more affluent, and more middle class.

Dozens of political commentators and bloggers have characterized support for UKIP as protest voting. So did former PM David Cameron. Urging voters not to support UKIP in the 2014 European Parliament election, Cameron warned that "Just sending a message or making a protest doesn't actually, I think, achieve what people want" (BT 2014). But can UKIP still be regarded as an insurgent party benefitting from the support of protest voters, now that it's overriding policy goal—Britain's withdrawal from the European Union—has been approved by a majority of voters in a national referendum?

Ford, Goodwin, and Cutts (2012) do not describe UKIP support as protest voting, and their study raises important questions about the analytical usefulness of characterizing support for insurgent parties as protest voting. Confining our attention to the 2009 EP election, just who

among UKIP supporters was casting a protest vote? Was it the politically disaffected, anti-EU and anti-immigration core supporters? As Ford, Goodwin and Cutts show, their voting choices were motivated by the same factors—issue congruence and retrospective assessments of government performance—that inform the choices of mainstream party supporters. Strategic supporters of UKIP may not have been engaging in protest voting, either. They may have simply been strategic. It could well be that UKIP was their most preferred party, which they voted for sincerely in EP proportional representation elections. In Westminster plurality elections, however, they adopted Duverger's logic and voted for the Conservatives because UKIP had no chance of carrying their constituency.

Our doubts about the value of characterizing support for insurgent parties as protest voting are reinforced when we take another, broader view the many other studies discussed above. According to Pop-Eleches (2010), who fittingly titles his paper, "Throwing Out the Bums," what one might call protest voting looks remarkably like conventional retrospective voting, and in the decades following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe there were plenty of things generating negative retrospective evaluations—standard-of-living killing austerity policies, job losses due to globalization, rising inequality, rank governmental incompetence, and rampant corruption. As he explains, voters in these countries who were disappointed with the status quo initially turned to untried but nevertheless mainstream alternatives to the incumbents they wished to reject. When these parties too were found wanting, insurgent parties became a more compelling option. Rodon and Hierro (2016)'s account of recent Spanish elections follows the same story line. Insurgent party supporters, then, are engaging in the same sort of choice behavior as conventional retrospective voters. They find the status quo unacceptable and blame the incumbent party. What is different is that the party they end up supporting is a new and unorthodox fringe party and not a perennial opposition party.

Similarly, the studies of anti-immigrant and extreme right-wing parties that we have reviewed indicate that insurgent party supporters are much like mainstream party supporters in the weights they attach to party issue positions policy priorities. Their votes reflect their attraction to insurgent party policies—as objectionable as these policies might be those in the political mainstream—and not merely their rejection of (and protest against) established mainstream parties. Calling them protest voters actually adds no additional insight into their behavior as voters. For these reasons, we strongly argue it is incorrect to interpret support of fringe or insurgent parties per se as an indicator of protest behavior. Instead, researchers should weigh protest motivations relative to other voting incentives, especially ideological alignment.

Tactical Protest Voting

Several studies of tactical voting in Britain have come across an anomalous pattern of voting behavior. Respondents in the BES surveys sometimes report that they cast a tactical vote, but not of the standard Duvergerian form, i.e., abandonment of a preferred minor party with no chance of winning in order to support a major party that they found acceptable and was in contention. In many cases the "tactical" choices they made suggest that when they reported being tactical they simply meant that they had thought a bit about what they were doing. Some of them persisted in voting for their preferred party, while others voted instead for the other major party. In the days of the Alliance, some said that they voted tactically for a Social Democrat candidate instead of the Liberal. As Kiewiet (2013) puts it, "…political scientists do not have a monopoly on the definition of 'tactical'. British voters sometimes describe their vote as being tactical because it is based upon some sort of calculation, but a calculation different from what Duverger had in mind" (p. 91).

Some of the non-Duvergerian voters, however, did something interesting, and in the view of some political scientists, something that was sensible. These voters reported one of the major competing parties to be the highest party in their preference ordering, but voted instead for a minor party, e.g., the Greens instead of Labour. Franklin *et al*. (1994) speculate that that voters might do so "…in order to show support for the policies espoused by that party in the hopes that the voter's preferred party might be induced to adopt them." (p. 552). They also suggest that such voters might not want their preferred party to have an overwhelming majority, which can be an important consideration when major constitutional changes are in the offing.

Kselman and Niou (2011) define this sort of protest voting, as "…choosing a party other than one's most-preferred to send that most preferred party a signal of dissatisfaction" (p. 400). This type of protest voting is a variant form of tactical voting, in that it involves voting for a lesser-preferred party or candidate instead of one's favorite. Instead of abandoning a party with no chance of winning, however, protest voters vote for another party to signal dissatisfaction with their most-preferred party, which they are confident is going to win. The dissatisfaction protest voters are seeking to convey is usually understood in terms of the spatial model. Supporters of the major socialist party, for example, might vote instead for a more extreme left-wing party to signal a desire that the party move somewhat to the left of its current ideological location. As suggested by the discussion in the previous section, this is also the type of protest vote that David Cameron feared many Conservative voters were contemplating casting for UKIP in the 2014 European Parliament election. To distinguish it from conventional Duvergerian tactical voting, we refer to this behavior as tactical protest voting.

Myatt (2015) develops a formal model of tactical protest voting. In his model, voting for a small, issue focused, party generates a successful protest if the vote share of the small party rises above a certain threshold. His model assumes that those considering casting a tactical protest vote nevertheless want the mainstream political party that is their most preferred choice to win the election. This creates a tension, of course, between staging a successful protest and making sure the preferred mainstream party still gets elected. In contrast to conventional strategic voting, where voters seek to coordinate on an alternative, tactical protest voters face an anti-coordination problem: those in favor of the protest want the protest to succeed, but they also need to ensure that not too many of them vote for the small party. Cox (1997) also observes that tactical protest voting is a plausible tactic, but that it entails the risk of excess coordination. If tactical protest voters withdraw too much support from their most preferred party, that party could lose.

There has not been a great deal of empirical work on tactical protest voting. Kselman and Niou's analysis of survey data from the 1988 national election in Canada finds scant evidence of this behavior, primarily because few voters were both ideologically disposed and tactically situated in a riding to even consider casting a protest vote for this small, leftist party. In an analysis of elections to the European Parliament, Weber (2011) also reports finding no clear evidence of voters casting tactical votes for a less preferred party to protest against their most preferred party. He concludes instead that protest voting is sincere, and, as indicated in many of the studies we have discussed previously, motivated by issue concerns and retrospective evaluations.

One study, however, that of Blais (2004), detects high levels of tactical protest voting in the 2002 French presidential election—as well as evidence that the tactic backfired. In the days leading up to the first round of the election, political elites, the press, and virtually all members of the mass public were convinced that incumbent center-right candidate Jacques Chirac and Socialist Prime Minister Jospin would advance to the second round. National Front candidate Le Pen was polling well, given the high level of disrepute associated with his party, but in any case he was in third place and given little chance of advancing to the second round (Blais 2004, p. 98).

The Socialist Jospin ended up garnering 16% of the votes in the first round, which turned out to be less than LePen. LePen and not Jospin thus advanced to the second round in which he lost to Chirac by an 82% to 18% margin. Falsely confident that Jospin were sure to advance to the second round, over 40% of Jospin's supporters instead cast a protest vote for a smaller party. As the entries in Figure 1 indicate, Chirac also suffered from tactical protest voting in the first round, but not to the extent Jospin did, and not enough to prevent him from advancing to the second round and to an overwhelming victory over LePen. Bolstered by defectors from Jospin, the seven

other small parties of the left amassed 26% in the first round. This is consistent with the idea that they did so in order to signal dissatisfaction with what they viewed to be the overly moderate positions of Jospin and the Socialist party.

As it turns out, Jospin could have withstood this level of defection to the other parties on the left. What was lethal to his prospects was that a third of his backers, as well as over 20% of the voters who most preferred Chirac, voted for LePen in the first round. Were these voters seeking to signal to Jospin that they wanted him and the Socialists to be more like LePen and the National Front? All things are possible, but this seems unlikely. Another scenario worth contemplating is that these voters supported LePen in the first round out of a desire to knock out Chirac. Running against LePen in the second round would be an ironclad guarantee of victory. Some of Chirac's supporters, of course, could have voted for LePen in the first round with the same idea in mind vis-à-vis Jospin.

Table 1 about here

In contrast to insurgent party protest voting, tactical protest voting can be clearly defined, formally modeled, and empirically tested. The problem here is that there is little evidence to indicate that this behavior is widespread (Weber 2011). In the one election in which there is strong evidence of tactical protest voting—the 2002 French presidential election—the tactic backfired for erstwhile supporters of a major party candidate. With this history in mind it may well be that voters in the future will be quite averse to engaging in tactical protest voting—at least in France, anyway.

BNS Protest Voting

Those who study election administration know that there are always anomalies in the tabulation of ballots. From the earliest days of political science, rates of unmarked and mismarked ballots have been taken to be measures of the reliability, usability, and accuracy of electoral systems and balloting technologies (Mott 1926). The Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project has documented that the "residual vote", i.e., the fraction of uncounted ballots among those cast, is associated with certain types of voting technologies (Sinclair and Alvarez 2004). This indicates that unmarked and mismarked ballots result from mistakes that voters make when they fill out their ballot, or from mistakes that the voting technologies themselves introduce in the ballot marking process (c.f., Caltech/MIT VTP 2001; Ansolabehere and Stewart 2005).

But anomalous ballots like these can be also be the product of intentional actions by voters. Voters who intentionally cast a blank, null, or spoiled (BNS) ballot can be regarded as engaging in a type of protest that we term BNS protest voting. According to Superti (2016), data from over 2000 elections held throughout the world over the past several decades indicate that the rate of BNS voting has been increasing. BNS votes can comprise a substantial proportion of votes cast. BNS votes have exceeded 15% of all votes cast in a third of the elections in Latin America held since 2000, and are cast at similarly high rates in emerging democracies throughout the world (IDEA 2002).

In his study of the 1957 and 1961 elections in West Germany, Steifbold (1965) distinguishes two types of BNS voters. "Apathetic voters," in his view, turned out to the polls because of strong social conformity pressures, but had no clear opinions one way or the other about the legitimacy of the political system and were indifferent among the party choices presented to them. They cast blank ballots, which can thus be considered a sort of weak or feeble protest vote. The second category "…is comprised of voters who are highly politicized, who know exactly whom they would vote for if they could find the party corresponding to their ideas; but failing to do so, they deliberately invalidate their ballots as a political act (p. 406). He bases this inference concerning this stronger form of protest voting on the fact that rates of BNS voting were higher in locations that formerly gave significant support to parties that were not on the ballot, e.g., the Communist KPD, which was banned in 1956.

In their classic study of the first set of run-off elections held in the French Fifth Republic, Rosenthal and Sen (1973) identify a pattern of BNS protest voting that they attribute to "alienation," i.e., disapproval of all the choices on the ballot. BNS ballots were cast at much higher rates by second-round voters whose most preferred party had dropped out after the first round. Rather than vote for any of the remaining options on the ballot, they prefer to indicate their dissatisfaction with these remaining options—either by leaving the ballot blank, or by indicating so explicitly in colorful and/or vulgar terms. Rosenthal and Sen also surmise that BNS protest voting could be targeted at incumbent officeholders or at the regime in general.

A review of previous research in this area since these classic studies reveals that political scientists have seen BNS protest voting as a function of electoral laws and institutions. In mandatory voting regimes, for example, voters who would not otherwise vote are compelled to do so, and some respond by casting a BNS ballot. Superti (2016), among others, finds that BNS ballots are cast at higher rates in mandatory electoral regimes than in nonmandatory ones—presumably by voters who would otherwise not turn out to vote. Other institutional factors that may

reduce the perceived efficacy of voting, e.g., bicameralism, electoral disproportionality, or multipartyism, are also seen to encourage more BNS protest voting. A second major approach connects the casting of BNS ballots to voter discontent, either with poor economic conditions, rejection of incumbent politicians, or disillusionment with the existing political system. Other research attributes higher rates of BNS ballots not to protest voting but to a lack of voter information, political skills, and experience. These studies focus on socioeconomic factors such as urbanization, education, and literacy as predictors of BNS votes.

McAllister and Makkai (1993) analyze aggregate data from the 1990 and 1997 federal elections in Australia together with census data to assess the relative contribution of these various factors to rates of BNS balloting. The institutional factors they consider are the number of parties competing in the elections and the closeness of the elections. Their major predictor of BNS protest voting proclivity is SES, the hypothesis being that protesters are politically efficacious and should thus come disproportionately from the high SES echelon. They also hypothesize that a number of socioeconomic factors are associated with voters making more mistakes in casting their ballots, such as the percentage of immigrants who are likely to have poor English language skills and the percentage of aboriginal population. McAllister and Makkai find no support for their institutional hypotheses; the closeness of the election was not related to the percentage of invalid votes, and the number of parties contesting the election had no effect whatsoever. SES and BNS voting rates were negatively correlated, which is the opposite of what was predicted by their hypothesis regarding BNS protest voting. The strongest predictor of invalid ballots cast was the number of voters who were recently arrived immigrants who presumably were lacking in English language skills. BNS protest voting thus appeared to be of negligible importance in these elections.

Power and Roberts (1995) also find that background factors associated with the political skills and information levels of voters, i.e., literacy rates and urbanization, explain much of the variance in the rate of BNS votes. But they also find evidence of BNS protest voting. In Brazilian elections held between 1945 and 1990, BNS votes were cast at markedly higher rates in elections held under authoritarian regimes, or when there was overt electoral manipulation by the government, often resulting in the proscription of some parties. Measures of objective economic conditions, economic growth and inflation, were not associated with the casting of invalid ballots.

Power and Garand (2007) analyze BNS voting rates in 80 legislative elections held in 18 Latin America countries between 1980 and 2000. The institutional variables they investigate include the degree to which the electoral system favors “personal” votes (closed vs. open party list), average district magnitude, disproportionality of the electoral system, unicameralism,

whether voting was voluntary or compulsory, and, if compulsory, how strictly it was enforced. Adopting socioeconomic measures as indicators of voter skill and knowledge (hypothesized to lower the rate of invalid ballots cast unintentionally) they investigate the degree of urbanization, literacy rates, income inequality, and GDP per capita. Their predictors of BNS protest voting include economic growth rates, an index of revolutionary violence, and both levels and changes in the Freedom House Index of Civil and Political rights. Their findings indicate that all three sets of factors were significant in predicting the percentage of BNS ballots that were cast. With respect to the protest behavior, they find that higher levels of revolutionary violence were associated with higher levels of BNS voting, while both the level and change in Freedom House's Index are negatively correlated with it. Countries with good and/or improving civil and political rights thus experienced less BNS voting.

Uggla (2008) takes a similar approach to these two previous papers. He analyses BNS voting, as well as turnout and voting for extra-parliamentary parties (parties with no representation in the legislature), using data from 200 elections in Western Europe, Latin America, Australia, and New Zealand held between 1980 and 2000. Uggla entertains four hypotheses: (1) the incompetence hypothesis, according to which voters make mistakes that void their ballots. This he tests using measures of literacy and years since the last democratization; (2) the social marginality hypothesis, whereby discontent bred by social marginality leads to BNS and extra-parliamentary votes, operationalized by the degree of urbanization and unemployment; (3) the polity hypothesis, that views BNS and extra-parliamentary votes as generated by feelings of alienation. These he posits are reflected in Freedom House's Index of Political Rights and the degree of election saliency (from legislative midterms to executive elections); and (4), the political hypothesis, whereby BNS and extra-parliamentary votes are the results of a party system dominated by a single party. This is captured by the vote share of the first party and the margin of victory. The author includes as extra covariates, dummies for majoritarian elections, proportional elections, compulsory voting, and for Latin American countries. He finds that lower levels of political rights are associated with higher levels of BNS ballots and abstention, lending some support for the polity hypothesis. The author also finds some support for the political hypothesis, as the margin of victory of the largest party is positively associated with both BNS and extra-parliamentary voting.[1] Both these findings can be seen as indicative of protest voting.

[1] There is a problem with the specification used in this paper. The author includes the vote share of the largest party, and the margin of victory of the largest party. He obtains negative coefficients for the vote share of the largest party, which goes against his hypothesis (4). Here is where the specification is problematic. Let W be the vote share of the winner, and R be the vote share of the runner up. Thus, the model includes both W and W-R as covariates, with coefficients *a* and *b*. This means that the marginal effect of the larger party vote share is not *a,* but *a+b.*

Moral (2016) studies invalid voting, abstention, and support for niche (fringe) parties, using data from 23 postelection surveys in 18 European party systems between 2001 and 2011. He finds that invalid votes might be an expression of discontent with the variety of policy offers in the party system, measured as the effective number of distinct party families. He also reports that dissatisfaction with democracy is associated with higher levels of invalid votes, as well as higher abstention and support for niche parties.

Using a very different approach, more related to election administration, Hill and Young (2007) categorize and analyze the different types of BNS ballots cast in the 2004 federal elections in Australia. Around 60% of those ballots were incorrectly marked in a way that suggests that the voters intended to cast a valid vote, but for one reason or another were unable to. But 15% of those BNS ballots were written on, which suggests that these voters were seeking to make some type of political statement rather than failing to cast a valid vote. The other 25% of BNS ballots were mostly blank, a category that can signal protest, but apathy or indifference as well.

Escolar et al. (2002) rely on ecological estimates of voter transition matrices, obtained with data at the municipality level, to analyze the sources of BNS votes, as well as the support of parties in general, between the 1999 and 2001 Argentine General Elections. They find some indirect evidence of protest behavior, as around 25% of voters who supported the Allianza government in the 1999 elections instead decided to cast a spoiled ballot in 2001. Moreover, the other major party lost 0.1% of its support to spoiled votes, which suggests that it was Allianza voters that become disappointed with the government that cast spoiled votes as a way to signal dissatisfaction.

In general, the empirical literature on BNS protest voting has not provided a common definition of what constitutes a protest vote. Much of the empirical work has been inferential, and based largely upon ecological data. These studies have often looked at elections data at some level of aggregation (precincts or higher levels of aggregation) and tried to model the variation in the rate of BNS voting as a function of a variety of institutional, political, or social covariates. This has made it difficult to determine whether the spoiled and unmarked ballots are indeed the result of intentional voting behavior, or whether they are the result of voter or administrative error. Furthermore, many of the covariates used to predict protest behavior may also induce unintentional BNS voting as well. The lack of political rights or electoral manipulation may also induce BNS voting because it leads to lower quality candidates or reduced information about the election. Moreover, voter discontent or lack of excitement might lead them to be more careless when

Taking this into consideration, the marginal effect of the vote share of the largest party seems to be nonsignificant for BNS, extra-parliamentary votes, and abstention.

casting a vote, accidentally causing higher levels of BNS voting that are not protest behavior per se. Finally, in compulsory voting systems it is hard to distinguish between voter apathy and protest behavior as drivers of BNS votes, and researchers should be especially careful in viewing BNS voting in these systems as stemming from protest behavior.

Organized Protest Voting

Incontrovertible evidence that voters engage in protest voting by casting BNS ballots comes from elections in which such ballots are a major, even predominant phenomenon. This occurs in response to the directives of political leaders and elites to their followers to do so. In this section we discuss a number of the more celebrated episodes in which organized protest voting has reached an impressive percentage of total votes cast. Our review of these cases indicate that while it is indeed possible to orchestrate high levels of protest voting, large sections of the electorate remain resistant to such appeals. As a consequence protest vote organizers have failed to achieve their objectives.

Argentina's 1957 Constitutional Assembly Election

Following the coup that toppled then Argentine President Juan Perón, in 1957 President (and General) Aramburu called for a constitutional assembly to supplant the 1949 Peronist constitution. This marked the culmination of an intense campaign of de-Peronization. Perón was in exile, Peronist leaders were imprisoned, Peronist elements had been purged from the government and the CGT, and the Justicialist (Peronist) party had been banned from participating in politics. A 1956 decree made it illegal to speak Perón's name out loud, and Eva Perón's body had been disinterred and hidden to prevent it from being a rally point for diehard Peronistas. Prior to the Constitutional Assembly elections, the largest legal party, the Radical Civic Union, split into two factions: the anti-Peronist People's Radical Civic Union (UCR-P), supported by the military regime, and the Intransigent Radical Civic Union (UCR-I), headed by Arturo Frondizi. Frondizi signaled a willingness to recognize and eventually rehabilitate the Peronists.

Choosing not to accept these overtures from the Intransigents, Perón instructed his supporters to cast blank votes in the Constitutional Assembly election, and as the entries in Table 2 indicate, large numbers of them did so. In an election that featured turnout in excess of 90%, the largest number of votes cast went to neither the UCR-P (24.2%) nor the UCR-I (21.2%), but were instead left blank (24.7%).

Table 2 about here

The plurality won by blank votes represents an impressive ability on the Peronists' part to organize protest voting, especially given that their leaders were in exile or in jail, had no voice in the press, were not allowed to meet, and that the world was still sixty years away from Twitter and Facebook. Upon reflection, however, this strategy appears to have been politically ineffective, as it divided the electoral support of the military regime's strongest opponents. Large number of Peronists cast blank votes, but many of them voted instead for the Intransigents—a sort of tactical vote, as it were. The UCR-I's strategy of appealing to Peronists also fell short of its intended objective. As Torre and De Riz (1993) put it, "In spite of having achieved considerable electoral support, the UCR-I had to resign itself to having failed to co-opt the *peronista* electorate" (p. 270). In 1958, in contrast, the Peronists and UCR Intransigents did join forces after Peron endorsed Frondizi four days before the presidential election. Frondizi won nearly half the popular vote and over two-thirds of the electoral college votes. In the end, Frondizi's quasi-Faustian bargain with the Peronists led to his undoing. In 1962 he lifted the ban on the Peronists and allowed them to compete in provincial elections. They did very well, winning the governorship of Buenos Aires and 9 out of the 13 other governorships. Too well, it turns out. Frondizi was deposed by the military and exiled a few weeks later.

The 2000 Peruvian presidential election

As in France, presidential elections in Peru call for a runoff election if no candidate wins an absolute majority of the vote in the first round. Incumbent president Alberto Fujimori had consolidated political power in the presidency in the "auto-coup" of 1992, and the shock treatment economic reforms he instituted appeared to go well at first. By 2000, however, Peru had experienced years of rampant inflation and political turmoil. According to the official results, Fujimori, running as the Peru 2000 candidate, nevertheless obtained 49.9% of the vote in the first round, just short of the majority required to avoid a runoff with Alejandro Toledo of the Peru Posible party. Toledo and international election observers protested the government's use of state resources for campaign purposes, control of the news media, absence of an independent election authority, irregularities in the vote count, and inexplicable delays in announcing election results (Carter Center 2002; Schmidt 2002).

The first round vote totals, reported in Table 3, raise a number of questions. First, if Fujimori was cheating, and most everyone in Peru believed he was, then why did he stop at 49.9% when 50.0% would have obviated the need for a second round of balloting? His people would have needed to find only another 15,000 ballots, or to declare 30,000 others to be invalid, to put

him over the threshold. Some observers argue that Fujimori had indeed intended to achieve and declare a first-round victory, but backed off in the face of domestic pressure and international opprobrium (Schmidt 2000). We doubt it. It seems more likely that a confident Fujimori was confident of defeating Toledo in the second round and so was not concerned about achieving a first-round absolute majority. This question could well be one that is never answered.

Toledo demanded that the second round be postponed until the fairness and integrity of the electoral process could be guaranteed in the runoff. When it was not postponed, Toledo withdrew from the contest and urged his supporters to cast protest votes by either spoiling the ballot, i.e., by writing NO TO FRAUD or something along those lines, or by leaving it blank. Most of Toledo's supporters followed his directive, and in the second round 3.7 million voters, or about 31% of those who participated in the election, cast a blank or spoiled ballot.

As in the case of the 1957 Argentine election, however, the strategy of organized protest voting was not efficacious. As shown in Table 3, even though Toledo had withdrawn and urged his followers to cast BNS ballots, over two million Peruvians voted for him anyway in the second round. The sum of the Toledo and BNS votes still fell below Fujimori's total, but it is also the case that turnout was lower in the second round than in the first. This may have been due, at least in part, to discouragement and confusion among Toledo supporters after his withdrawal from the contest. Toledo might well have done better had he pursued a different strategy. Instead of pulling out and urging blank protest votes, he could have placed his supporters at as many voting sites as possible to deter fraud, or sought even more scrutiny from international observers.

As it turns out, Fujimori was subsequently pressured to call for new elections to be held in April 2001, but was removed from office before that after the "Vlad-videos" came to light and the Montesinos corruption scandal broke. Fujimori faxed in a letter of resignation from Tokyo in November 2000, but Congress, citing permanent moral disability as grounds for removal, fired him instead.

Table 3 about here

The 2011 Bolivian Judicial Election

Vowing to "refound" the country to better serve the interests of the working class, indigenous peoples, and cocaleros, leader of the Movement to Socialism party (MAS) Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia in 2005. In accordance with the new 2009 constitution, the Morales government called for elections to the national judiciary in 2011. These elections were to be

nonpartisan, and it was also illegal to campaign for or against any individual. All voting information was provided by a government office—the Organo Electoral Plurinational—and another constitutional provision required Bolivia's Congress, the Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional, to vet all candidates. Given the large super-majority that MAS enjoyed in the Congress, the candidates selected through this process were Morales and MAS loyalists (Driscoll and Nelson, 2014).

Anti-MAS opponents, forbidden by law to campaign against any of the judicial election candidates, called upon their backers to instead cast BNS votes. An unprecedented level of BNS voting occurred—nearly 60% of all ballots cast. Using both individual-level survey data and municipality-level election results, Driscoll and Nelson (2014) confirm that the overwhelming share of BNS votes were protest votes. Those who supported MAS and Morales were far less likely to have reported casting blank or spoiled votes. Evidence from their survey data is corroborated by election results. Municipalities in opposition strongholds (primarily in the east of Bolivia) reported much higher percentages of BNS ballots, while Government strongholds experienced much lower levels of BNS voting.

Driscoll and Nelson's findings also indicate that voters who spoiled their ballots intended to register a stronger degree of protest than those who cast blank ballots. This makes perfect sense, of course. Spoiling a ballot requires more effort than simply casting a blank one, and at least some blank ballots result from voter/voting technology error. Secondly, even though ballot spoilers are known to sometimes traffic in vulgar imperatives and coarse imaginery, Driscoll and Nelson report that anti-Morales Bolivian voters with some college education or more were more likely to cast a spoiled ballot than those with less education. In a study of Italian municipal elections and elections in the Basque country of Spain, Superti (2015) also finds that the more educated and political sophisticated voters are likely to spoil their ballots.

Sinn Fein and Abstention

Urging voters to cast a blank ballot as a protest vote, as Perón did in the 1957 Constitutional Assembly election and Alejandro Toledo in the 2000 Peruvian presidential election, appears to be a problematic strategy. Many of their supporters seem to have been unpersuaded that anything would be accomplished by casting a blank ballot, and so in 1957 cast votes for the relatively pro-Peronist UCR-I and in 2000 for Toledo anyway, even though he had told them not to. We suspect that they may have been reluctant to cast a ballot that they knew by definition would not count. They may have also seen this as defeatist strategy, or have not understood why a blank ballot would convey any information whatsoever. Others might have thought that it would make no sense to show up at the polls only to cast a blank ballot. But what better way is

there to signal support for a candidate who has been banned from competing, or that one perceives the electoral process to be fraud-ridden or otherwise illegitimate?

There is a method of protest voting that does not discourage or confuse some of one's supporters. This is the policy of abstention that Sinn Fein has adopted in Northern Ireland with respect to elections to the UK Parliament. Sinn Fein places their candidates on the ballot, and they participate in the election like all other candidates. If elected, however, they promise not to serve. Their supporters thus do not have to do anything out of the ordinary when they vote in the election—they can cast a protest vote against British rule in Northern Ireland by simply voting for Sinn Fein. The costs of this strategy, both financial and political are minimal. The abstentionist MP's cannot collect their salary but they can claim living expenses. Politically, of course, it is hard to imagine a bloc of four or five Sinn Fein MP's casting a pivotal vote in Parliament.

In sum, whereas a blank or spoiled ballot cast during a regular election leaves observers with multiple alternatives as to its cause, a BNS ballot cast in the context of organized protest voting becomes immediately associated with protest behavior. This in turn, may significantly increase the psychic benefits from casting a BNS ballot; while forgoing the opportunity to influence the election, voters can nevertheless be confident that their BNS ballots will be perceived as protest votes. However, organized BNS protest voting is very infrequent, occurs only under special circumstances, and generally fails to achieve the objectives of the organizers.

Officially Sanctioned Protest Voting

Some political scientists advocate placing the choice of NOTA (None of the Above) on the ballot to regularize protest voting. India, Ukraine, Thailand, Columbia, and the U.S. state of Nevada currently provide voters this option. At times, the NOTA option has important political consequences. In the 2014 Democratic gubernatorial primary, the NOTA option took a plurality of the votes case (30%), with Democratic candidate Robert "Bob" Goodman coming in second behind NOTA with 25% of the primary ballots. Despite trailing behind NOTA, Goodman was, under Nevada election law, declared the winner of the election. Another example was the 1998 U.S. Senate race between the Democratic candidate Harry Reid and Republican John Ensign. Reid received 208,621 of the votes cast to Ensign's 208,220. But 8,113 "none of these candidates" ballots were also cast, which is more than sufficient to have altered the outcome of this election.

Superti (2015) argues that the NOTA choice eliminates the observational equivalence between BNS protest voting and voter error. Should selecting NOTA still be considered an expression of protest voting? We think it should, but it obviously takes on a different tone when it is officially sanctioned. And while NOTA may remove much of the ambiguity regarding protest votes

compared to votes cast in error, it necessarily introduces another source of ambiguity, as shown in studies of NOTA voting in Nevada (otherwise known as "none of these candidates" in Nevada). For example, Damore et al. (2012) found that around 11% of all ballots cast in all statewide elections between 1976 and 2008 were marked NOTA, and the results of their analyses indicate that some of these should be regarded as protest votes. NOTA voting rates were also higher in nonpartisan contests and those for lesser offices, which implies NOTA voting also reflects a lack of interest and lack of information. Brown (2011) reached similar conclusions, arguing that NOTA votes in Nevada statewide elections "are motivated by a mixture of ignorance and protest" (364).

At this point only a small amount of research has been done on NOTA, and the few primary studies that that we have found in the literature have concentrated on recent data from Nevada. More research using data from other countries, as well as other sources of data from Nevada (particularly survey data), might help shed better light on the situations in which voters cast NOTA ballots, and how many of those NOTA votes are being cast in protest.

Conclusion: Moving Forward in the Study of Protest Voting

Reports of protest voting currently abound in news coverage of contemporary politics, and protest voting has been subject to some amount of social scientific analysis. We have offered some thoughts about a basic taxonomy for protest voting, but much more work needs to be done. As we have seen, there are significant problems and shortcomings in the study of protest voting, which we believe need to be addressed before researchers can begin to better understand this phenomenon. First, on the theoretical side, we lack a clear conceptual definition of what constitutes protest voting. As this review has shown, interpreting votes for insurgent parties as protest votes is not analytically useful, as support for insurgent parties typically follows ideological alignments rather than rejection of the mainstream parties. Secondly, a great deal of research has sought to distinguish between sincere and strategic votes, but where do protest votes fall in this dichotomy? Are protest votes a sincere expression of a voter's preferences? Are they strategically motivated? Till's (2011) study of voting in European Parliamentary Elections favors the view that these voters are voting sincerely, but much more research needs to be done here.

Are protest votes more akin to other forms of unconventional political participation than to the conventional act of voting? We also need to learn much more about the political, social, economic, and behavioral determinants of protest voting. What specifically characterizes the situation in which a particular voter will cast a protest vote? Are protest votes an emotional reaction,

what we might call “angry voting”? Or are protest votes motivated by economic or social distress, and are thus signals from voters who are extremely disaffected by the current socioeconomic situation that they are in? How much do politics play a role in motivating protest votes? How much does the competitiveness of an election matter for protest voters? We need a stronger set of theories to help researchers understand what motivates individual voters to cast protest votes.

Finally, researchers need to develop the analytical tools needed to study protest voting, both qualitative and quantitative. How do we measure protest voting? In a national political behavior poll or survey (like the ANES or CCES), what survey questions should be included to measure protest voting? Once we can effectively identify and measure protest voting, researchers will then need to focus on appropriate methods for collecting the data needed to study protest voting. In most places most of the time it is relatively low-incidence behavior; in situations where only small fractions of the electorate cast protest votes we would necessarily need large-sample surveys (like the CCES), or other innovative sampling methods, to yield a sufficiently large sample of protest voters in order to understand what drives their protest behavior.

It is clear that protest voting is an important aspect of electoral politics throughout the world, and it may sway elections one way or the other. Academic research on protest voting, however, has lagged behind the political trends that seem to be producing more and more protest voting, as well as other forms of unconventional political behavior. This represents an important opportunity for social scientists, as we need new conceptual, theoretical, and empirical approaches for understanding this important and growing political phenomenon.

Table 1: Tactical Protest Voting in the 2002 French Presidential Election (from Blais 2004)

	Chirac	Jospin	LePen
First Choice	27.0%	24.8%	7.4%
Actual Vote Share	19.4%	16.0%	16.7%
Loyalty Rate of Supporters	66.7%	59.5%	94.4%
Loss due to Protest Voting	-9.0%	-10.0%	-0.3%
Gain from Other Candidates	1.3%	1.2%	9.7%
Pct. Defectors to LePen	21.2%	33.3%	----
n = 2897			

Table 2: Constitutional Assembly Election and Presidential Election, Argentina 1957-58

Party	1957	1958
UCR-P	24.2	30.7
UCR–I	21.2	47.6
Center Federation	6.1	---
Popular Conservative	---	2.0
Socialist	6.0	3.1
Christian Democratic	4.8	3.4
Democratic Progressive	3.0	1.5
Communist	2.6	---
Others	7.2	2.0
Blanks	24.3	---
Other Invalid	.4	---

Table 3: Presidential Election, Peru 2000

	First Round	Second Round
Perú 2000	49.9	74.3
Perú Posible	40.2	25.7
Somos Perú	3.0	---
Avancemos	2.2	---
Sol. Nacional	1.8	---
APRA	1.4	---
FREPAP	0.7	---
Acción Popular	0.4	---
UPP	0.3	---
Valid Votes	91.9	68.9
Blanks	5.9	1.2
Spoiled	2.3	29.9

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