Coalition in a Plurality System: Explaining Party System Fragmentation in Britain

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Minor party vote and seat shares

![Graph showing the relationship between minor party vote and seat shares from 1945 to 2010. The graph displays two lines: one for Other Vote Share (blue) and another for Other Seat Share (green). The blue line shows a steady increase, while the green line shows a more erratic pattern with a sharp increase towards the end of the period.]
A Theory of Coalition Effects: Increasing Support for Minor Parties

• Strategic Voting (existing literature: PR systems, any party)
  – 'Threshold insurance policy' : a minor party supported to ensure a preferred coalition
  – 'Coalition-targeted duvergerian voting' : a vote for a second preference if the second preference has better chance of being in coalition
  – ‘Balancing strategy' : shifting own party’s policies in case of coalition moderation/compromise

• Sincere Voting (new contributions to coalition literature)
  – Greater influence in coalition with larger electoral mandate
  – Influence in coalition means minor party vote less wasted
  – Major party compromise means major party vote more wasted
  – Expressive sincere voting when major party differences blurred
Hypotheses

Coalition hypothesis:

– Expectations of a coalition government increases support for minor parties and decreases support for major parties

Strategic voting hypothesis:

– Expectations of a coalition government increases votes for minor parties among existing major party supporters

Sincere voting hypothesis:

– Expectations of coalition government increases votes for minor parties among existing minor party supporters

Plurality Duvergerian hypothesis:

– Expectations of coalition government increases support for major parties and decreases support for minor parties when a least preferred party may win locally.
Variables

• Expectations of coalition govt before and during campaign
  How likely do you think it is that the Conservative | Labour party will form a government on its own? (0-10 scale)

• Policy-maximizing: chance of influence in government
  Which of these parties do you think has no real chance of being part of the next UK government (either forming a government by itself or as part of a coalition)?

• Policy-maximizing: Likelihood of party winning in constituency
  How likely is it that each of these parties will win the General Election in your local constituency? (0-100 scale)

• Controls
  – Like-dislike for each party (combined with ‘propensity to vote’)
  – Age, election interest
Data and Methods

• Post-election vote choice for Lib Dems, UKIP, Greens, Plaid Cymru, SNP versus voting for Con | Lab

• Alternative specific logit: pooled model, all English respondents

• Strategic voting (logit) models: major party supporters who vote for minor parties.

• Sincere voting (logit) models: minor party supporters who vote for minor parties.

• And testing whether potential minor party voters more likely to desert if perceive close local race between Conservatives and Labour and think hung parliament likely.

• Exclude respondent if no minor party candidate running
Strategic Voting for Minor Parties

The graph illustrates the predicted probability of voting for different minor parties (LD, UKIP, Green, SNP, PC) as a function of the hung parliament expectation. The x-axis represents the hung parliament expectation, while the y-axis shows the predicted probability of voting for a party. The lines indicate the trend for each party, with different colors for LD, UKIP, Green, SNP, and PC.
Sincere Voting for Minor Parties
Little support for plurality strategic voting
Implications

• Coalition expectations increased chances of voting for minor parties in a plurality system

• This implies
  – Strategic voting incentives increased under coalition
  – Sincere voting incentives increased under coalition
  – Coalition effects do not require proportional system conditions

• Little evidence that local competitiveness between major parties drove voters back to those major parties

• We need to understand the 2015 general election in this light
  – Not a return to two-party Duverger election
  – Polling miss didn’t contribute to Conservative victory (at least not in ways that might be assumed)
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