

Encouraging Loyalty and Defection: The Impact of Campaigns on Tactical Voting in Britain

Lucas Núñez *

Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University

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Abstract

In this article I study the impact of party campaigns on tactical voting, focusing exclusively on voters who face tactical incentives. Using data from three UK General Elections, I exploit panel data within each election to deal with strategic party outreach behavior, which would otherwise bias the estimates of campaign effects on tactical voting. My findings show that party campaigns can have a strong influence in encouraging loyalty to non-viable parties as well as defection to viable ones. These findings are important as little is known about what influences voters' decision to cast tactical votes, beyond their demographic characteristics and the electoral circumstances they may find themselves in.

Keywords: tactical voting; strategic voting; voting behavior; panel data

*Lucas Núñez is an Assistant Professor at the Schar School of Policy and Government, George Mason University, Aquia Hall MSN:3F4, 4400 University Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030 (lnunez6@gmu.edu)

1 Introduction

In winner-take-all electoral systems a voter's most preferred candidate is sometimes unlikely to carry the seat. In multicandidate elections, voters facing this situation can choose one of three alternative actions: (1) remain loyal to their most preferred candidate by voting sincerely, even though this candidate is unlikely to win; (2) defect to one of the parties that do have a chance of winning the seat, thus voting tactically, even if only to prevent a more disliked candidate from being elected (Duverger, 1954); or (3) abstain from voting altogether.¹

The second option, casting a tactical vote, has received widespread attention in the voting behavior literature (often under the name strategic voting). And this attention is certainly warranted by the centrality of tactical (or strategic) behavior in shaping the way in which election systems and rules create incentives that produce electoral outcomes (Cox, 1997). A substantial empirical literature has generally focused on measuring the extent to which tactical voting occurs. Evidence from a variety of countries and electoral systems shows that around 15 to 40 per cent of voters who are in a position to cast a tactical vote, that is, voters whose most preferred party or candidate is considered to be non-viable in their district, actually decide to do so (see Alvarez, Kiewiet and Núñez, 2018, for a review). These levels of tactical voting can have important consequences for overall election outcomes. For example, Kiewiet (2013) finds that as many as one in five Labour seats in Westminster are won thanks to tactical votes by Liberal Democrat supporters.

The literature has focused significantly less on why some voters behave tactically while others do not, perhaps perhaps because of the challenges in measuring the extent of tactical voting. While many important correlates of tactical voting have been found (see Section 2),

¹It is of course possible for a voter to cast a vote for a candidate that is not the most preferred and is also not likely to win. However, it is hard to imagine a voter doing this other than by mistake. Exceptions may exist in electoral systems that are more complex, like those with compensatory seats, which create different incentives. The case studied here, the United Kingdom, is a simple first-past-the-post electoral system which does not generate these more complex incentives (other than potential coalition incentives, which are not served by voting for a non-preferred non-viable candidate anyhow). Alternatively, voters may engage in a form of protest voting which is not aimed at influencing who is elected in the current election, but may have an impact in the longer run. The present article abstracts from this type of behavior. However, results are very similar when the first category includes sincere votes and other voting behaviors (other than standard tactical, which falls in category 2).

they typically relate to demographic characteristics of the voters or to electoral circumstances. Importantly, these correlates are generally non-actionable; that is, they are not variables or factors over which electoral participants have any agency (at least within the time frame of a campaign) so as to encourage voters to remain loyal to their more preferred party or to encourage supporters of non-viable parties to defect and vote tactically for another. This means that our understanding of tactical voting remains limited by a mostly passive view of how parties and voters relate to tactical voting behavior.²

Contrary to previous literature, but complementary to it, this article focuses on the impact that being contacted by political parties during election campaigns has on voters' propensity to cast a tactical vote. Direct outreach to voters during the campaign, party contacts, are a clear actionable (potential) correlate of tactical voting, as parties have agency over their campaigning strategies.

Estimating the effect of party contacts on voting behavior, however, is not straightforward. An important concern is that parties choose which voters they want to contact, possibly because they believe those voters will be more likely to respond to their message or appeals. This introduces a confounding factor that is difficult to measure. Ideally, disentangling the effects of party contacts from parties' strategic decision to contact some voters but not others could be done by relying on field experiments, in the spirit of Gerber, Green and Larimer (2008). However, while an experimental intervention in a real election aimed at increasing voter turnout may be relatively uncontroversial, one aimed at altering voters' choices can face significant ethical dilemmas (see, for example, Beerbohm, Davis and Kern, 2020). Additionally, experimental interventions do not allow the study of past elections.

Instead, I rely on observational data and address this estimation challenge by exploiting the panel structure of the British Election Study (BES) Online Panel (Fieldhouse et al., 2020), focusing on the data collected around the 2015, 2017, and 2019 United Kingdom General Elections. I focus on three survey waves for each election. With data from the first two waves, I estimate models in which the outcome is whether a voter is contacted by a party or not,

²There are some limited exceptions to this. See, for example, Fisher (2001); Fieldhouse et al. (2013).

separately for each party. Using these models, I then obtain the predicted probabilities that a voter would be contacted by each party in the third wave. Finally, I estimate the effect of actual party contacts on whether a voters casts a tactical vote or not, controlling for these predicted probabilities of contact. The entire analysis focuses exclusively on voters with an incentive (however small) to cast a tactical vote, for which I use the measure developed in Eggers and Vivyan (2020). The inclusion of the predicted probabilities of contact significantly reduce or eliminate the concerns of endogeneity of party contacts, since they provide a measure of the intent of parties to contact certain voters but not others that is separate from the actual contacts conducted in the estimation wave.³

My findings show that voter outreach in the form of party contacts conducted during the 2015, 2017, and 2019 General Elections have significant effects on the probability of voters casting a tactical vote, thus defecting their most preferred party or remaining loyal to it. Specifically, I find that the local campaign efforts by voters' most preferred party lead to a reduction in tactical voting of 3.82 percentage points, whereas the campaign efforts by voters' best insincere party⁴ increased tactical voting by 5.38 percentage points. Considering the impact of all local campaigns together, I find that party contacts are responsible for an increase in tactical voting of 2.75 percentage points. Some of this higher tactical voting is the result of a reduction in abstentions, but the dominant proportion comes from a switch of sincere votes to tactical ones.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. In Section 2, I discuss related literature on tactical voting as well as that on campaign effects in the United Kingdom, and derive a set of hypotheses; in Section 3, I describe the data and the methodology used to estimate the impact of party contacts on tactical voting; Section 4 presents the results together with partial counterfactual exercises; and Section 5, concludes.

³An important assumption here is that party contact behavior remains stable throughout each campaign; that is, that parties aim to contact the same types of voter in each wave. While parties certainly ramp up their campaign efforts towards the end of the campaign period, I provide evidence that suggests that they aim to contact the same types of voters, just more intensely.

⁴The best insincere party is defined as he party, other than the most preferred one, that would give the vote the highest expected utility.

2 Related Literature and Hypotheses

There is a relatively rich literature that aims to determine whether voters behave tactically, or rather, to determine the proportion that does.⁵ Despite the attention that the measurement of tactical voting has received by empirical researchers, there is less understanding on why and when some voters cast tactical votes when in a position to do so, while others do not. The variables that the literature has found to be associated with tactical voting can be broadly grouped in two categories: those that relate to the individual voter, and those that relate to the electoral environment.

Among the individual voter characteristics, the literature has found that voters that have strong partisan or ideological attachments are significantly less likely than other voters to cast a tactical vote (see Lanoue and Bowler, 1992; Niemi, Whitten and Franklin, 1992; Fisher, 2001; Blais, 2002; Karp et al., 2002).⁶ There is also evidence that voters' political sophistication and political knowledge (sometimes proxied by education levels) are positively associated with tactical voting (Niemi, Whitten and Franklin, 1992; Fisher, 2001; Karp et al., 2002; Alvarez, Boehmke and Nagler, 2006; Gschwend and van der Kolk, 2006; Merolla and Stephenson, 2007; Eggers, Rubenson and Loewen, 2022), as is also political interest (Fisher, 2001).⁷ Higher economic status is also positively related to tactical voting (e.g., Eggers and Vivyan, 2020; Eggers, Rubenson and Loewen, 2022). There is also evidence that when voters are experienced with the electoral system they are more likely to exploit it and vote tactically (Duch and Palmer, 2002; Spenkuch, 2018); and that voters who believe the media influences the voting decisions of others are more likely to behave tactically (Cohen and Tsfati, 2009).

Among the electoral environment variables, theoretical models put particular emphasis on the closeness of the election (see, for example Cox, 1997); that is, when the race between the

⁵See, for example, Heath and Evans (1994); Fieldhouse, Pattie and Johnston (1996); Alvarez and Nagler (2000); Duch and Palmer (2002); Karp et al. (2002); Alvarez, Boehmke and Nagler (2006); Gschwend and van der Kolk (2006); Fieldhouse, Shryne and Pickles (2007); Kiewiet (2013); Kawai and Watanabe (2013); Elff (2014); Spenkuch (2018)

⁶Similar effects have been found in the study of split-ticket voting in the U.S. (Beck et al., 1992; Burden and Kimball, 1998)

⁷An exception here is Eggers and Vivyan (2020), who find no differences in tactical voting by education level.

top-two contenders is considered to be close, it is expected for third party supporters to be more likely to vote tactically, as a defection from their most preferred party is more likely to be pivotal. Empirical results tend to support this theoretical expectation, albeit weakly (Lanoue and Bowler, 1992; Fisher, 2000; Kiewiet, 2013; Elff, 2014; Núñez, 2016).⁸ Related to this, the ‘distance from contention’ of the most preferred party (usually captured by the vote share gap between second and third placed parties in first past the post systems), has been shown to be positively associated with tactical behavior (e.g., Niemi, Whitten and Franklin, 1992). The empirical literature has also found that the presence of a viable close ideological substitute to a non-viable preferred party encourages tactical voting (e.g., Karp et al., 2002), and that the presence of an incumbent politician interferes with the decision to cast a tactical vote (Moser and Scheiner, 2005).

The determinants or correlates identified in the literature, usually as a secondary concern to measurement, do not provide with actionable recommendations. That is, electoral participants, be it parties, campaign volunteers, or voters, have no agency over these variables, at least not during the time-frame of a campaign.⁹ For this reason, this article focuses on a simple but central factor over which parties have agency during the campaign period: contacting voters directly (in a variety of ways) as part of their local campaign efforts.

There is a rich literature that studies campaign effectiveness. Experimental evidence from multiple countries has shown that citizens are responsive to get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts (see, for example, Gerber, Green and Larimer, 2008; John and Brannan, 2008; Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009; Fieldhouse et al., 2013; Townsley, 2018). Other studies have instead focused on observational data and also found this positive impact of campaigns (see, for example Geys, 2006; Karp, Banducci and Bowler, 2008). There is a substantial literature on British elections that studies the effects of local campaigning that generally finds that parties benefit electorally from more organized and intense local campaigns, both in terms of mobilization and in terms

⁸In fact, some authors find no impact of election closeness (see, e.g., Niemi, Whitten and Franklin, 1992).

⁹Of course one can imagine on a longer time-frame, parties making certain choices to attract specific types of voters. We can also imagine a voter deciding to obtain more education or gaining experience with the electoral system, etc. But all these are factors that are unlikely to change within the time-frame of a campaign, or at least not do so sufficiently enough to matter in the short run.

of their vote share (e.g., Whiteley and Seyd, 1994; Pattie and Johnston, 2003; Clarke et al., 2004, 2009; Fisher et al., 2016; Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse, 2011; Fisher et al., 2019; Johnston et al., 2013; Cutts, 2014; Fieldhouse, Fisher and Cutts, 2020; Núñez, 2021).

With very few exceptions, however, the literature has not focused on the impact of local campaigning on voters' decisions to cast a tactical vote. Fisher (2001) notes that constituency campaigns are relevant factors to study in order to understand tactical voting. He finds some correlational evidence at the aggregate level that constituency campaign spending by the favourite party and by the second favorite party influence tactical voting; however, when his analysis includes a measure of tactical incentives, these associations disappear. Fieldhouse et al. (2013) argue that not only voters behave tactically, but political parties may also act strategically by focusing their election campaigns on 'marginal seats.' They find some evidence that parties' strategic campaign spending is associated with more tactical voting behavior on the part of voters, inferred from flow-of-the-vote (aggregate) analyses. They also find some evidence consistent with party campaigns affecting tactical voting behavior at the individual level, by examining how constituency campaign spending influences desertion from a preferred party.

Notwithstanding these exceptions, our understanding of how campaigns affect tactical voting is very limited. Thus this article contributes to both these strands literature (tactical voting and campaign effects), by focusing on measuring the effect of local campaigns on the set of voters who have an incentive to cast a tactical vote for a party that is not their most preferred one. Studying this specific population is important because their behavior has the potential to be, if not qualitatively, at least quantitatively different: in addition to the usual impacts of campaigns on voters, namely turnout and persuasion, campaigns may also trigger tactical (or expressive) considerations on voters who are in a position to cast a tactical vote. Additionally, voters with incentives to cast tactical votes are key for our understanding of incentives in electoral systems, all of which are, to some extent, susceptible to tactical behavior (see, Gibbard, 1978; Cox, 1997). Finally, this has normative implications: if campaigns are effective at encouraging

tactical voting behavior, then the electoral efficacy of these voters increases.

But what is the expected impact of campaigns on tactical voting? Overall, the literature on local campaigns generally agrees that party campaigns have mobilization effects, thus encouraging otherwise abstainers to turn out and vote:

H1. Voters who are contacted by parties during the campaign are less likely to abstain from voting.

A voter may be contacted by a variety of parties and each may affect the voter's calculus differently. Broadly speaking, a voter may be contacted by their most preferred party (not viable), by their best insincere party, or by other parties. The best insincere party is defined as the party, other than the most preferred one, that gives the voter the highest expected utility should the voter vote for it. Best insincere parties are, typically, viable parties (see more details in section 3). Contact by other parties should have the smallest impact on a voter's decision to turnout to vote because these parties would likely struggle to connect with a voter's expressive as well as tactical motivations. We should expect that contact by a viable party to have a higher impact on turnout than contact by the preferred (but not viable) party: motivating a voter to cast a potentially pivotal vote should be easier than motivating a voter to cast a wasted vote. Additionally, it is also important to remark here that, in practice, the best insincere party is typically evaluated rather positively by the voters that have an incentive to cast a tactical vote.¹⁰ Thus, there is also some element of expressive motivation in contacts by a viable party:

H1a. The impact on abstentions of contact by a best insincere party is larger than that of a preferred non-viable party, which is in turn larger than that of other parties.

In addition to deciding whether to abstain or not, voters also decide whether to cast a tactical vote for their best insincere party or a sincere vote for their most preferred one. Each

¹⁰This is partly *why* they have that incentive. A voter who evaluates the viable alternatives very negatively will not care to vote for them, as there is little expected benefit from that (even when the vote is pivotal).

party is expected to have a different impact on the probability that a voter will cast a tactical vote. Contact by a voter's preferred party is likely to increase the chances that the voter will cast a sincere vote. There are at least two reasons why this is the case. First, the party may remind the voter of the reason why they preferred them, creating a desire to cast an expressive vote, to signal their preferences (see, e.g., Hamlin and Jennings, 2011). Second, the voter may (incorrectly) interpret being contact by their preferred party as a signal that the party is in fact viable, thus becoming more likely to cast a sincere vote.¹¹

H2. Contact by a voter's most preferred party increases the probability that a voter casts a sincere vote, and reduces the probability of a tactical vote.

Contact by the best insincere party should have the opposite impact, that is, increase the chances that a voter will cast a tactical vote and reduce the chances of a sincere vote. This is because this party would be both encouraging the voter to cast a vote for an acceptable alternative (so that there is some expressive alignment) and can easily incite instrumental motivations in the voters.

H3. Contact by a voter's best insincere party reduces the probability that a voter casts a sincere vote, and increases the probability of a tactical vote.

Contact by parties other than the most preferred and the best insincere parties should have no impact on whether a voter casts a tactical or a sincere vote, as these contacts are unlikely to speak (directly or implicitly) to the value of casting a vote for a most preferred party or for a viable one.¹²

¹¹Notice that this does not require the party to indicate that it is viable in the contact message. Rather, if the voter assumes the party is instrumental in trying to increase their seat share in Parliament, the contact will be interpreted by the voter as a sign the party itself believes in its viability in that constituency, irrespective of the message content, simply because the contact requires at least some degree of effort.

¹²It is important to note here that contact by these other parties may in fact change the voters' preferences so that this party now becomes the most preferred one or the best insincere one. In that case, these voters would no longer be part of the sample being analyzed here. That is not to say that the issue of changing voters preferences is not an important one. The focus here is not on preference change, but on the behavior conditional on those preferences.

H4. Contact by parties other than the most preferred and preferred viable parties has no impact on the odds of a tactical versus a sincere vote.

It is important to highlight here that H4 does not say that contact by other parties will not increase tactical nor sincere voting; in fact, based on H1, it will increase both. What it does imply, when combined with H1, is that contact by other parties will only affect tactical and sincere voting in the proportion with which they happen; that is, both these behaviors are expected to increase in proportion to their prevalence when abstentions are reduced (assuming H1 holds), but the relative shares of tactical and sincere voters will not change as a consequence of contact by these other parties.

It is important to discuss the relative impact on tactical and sincere voting of contact by the most preferred and best insincere parties. As argued in the context of H1, convincing a voter to turnout to vote should be easier for a viable party, since it can leverage some amount of expressive motivations together the instrumental ones. The same should be true for the decision between a tactical and a sincere vote: contact by a (viable) best insincere party should have a stronger impact on the decision to cast a tactical/sincere vote than contact by a preferred but not viable party:

H5. The effects on tactical versus sincere voting is larger for a preferred viable party than for a preferred non-viable party.

Finally, the value of casting a tactical vote as opposed to a sincere one depends on the degree to which the voter has an incentive to cast a tactical vote in the first place.¹³ For voters with high incentives to cast a tactical vote, the impact of party contacts should be more muted. On the one hand, the preferred non-viable party should have a difficult time in convincing the voter to vote for them, since for voters with high incentives to cast a tactical vote, this has a high cost: a likely wasted vote that might lead a disliked party to win. On the other hand, voters with

¹³This article uses the definition of tactical incentive from Eggers and Vivyan (2020), which is discussed in the next section. However, the present discussion applies for whatever measure of a tactical incentive one chooses to use.

high incentives to cast a tactical vote should be the ones that, without any campaigning, are already likely to behave tactically. Thus, contact by best insincere parties should have a more muted effect, since these types of voters are already likely to behave tactically. Put together, this leads to the final hypothesis:

H6. The effect of party contacts on tactical voting depends on the incentives a voter has to cast a tactical vote. The higher the tactical incentives, the smaller the impact of party campaigns.

3 Data & Methods

3.1 Data and Variable Definitions

To study the effect of party contacts on the probability of casting a tactical vote, I use data from nine waves of the British Election Study (BES) Online Panel (Fieldhouse et al., 2020). The first three waves cover the 2015 General Election; the following three cover the 2017 General Election; and the final three cover the 2019 General Election. The data includes respondents in English, Scottish, and Welsh Westminster Constituencies.¹⁴

3.1.1 Tactical Incentives

I follow Eggers and Vivyan (2020) and measure a voter’s tactical voting incentive as the difference in expected utility between casting their best insincere vote and their sincere vote:

$$\tau \equiv \max_{j>1} p(j) \cdot u - p(1) \cdot u$$

where $p(j)$ is a vector that contains the probability of each party winning when a voter casts a vote for party j ; and u is a vector that contains the utility for the voter from each candidate being elected. The vector $p(1)$ measures the probability that each party will win if the voter

¹⁴The BES Online Panel does not include respondents from Northern Ireland. Therefore, this constituent country of the United Kingdom is not included in the analysis.

casts a sincere vote, that is a vote for the party they prefer the most (irrespective of the party’s chance of winning). Thus $p(1) \cdot u$ measures the expected utility of casting the sincere vote. The term $\max_{j>1} p(j) \cdot u$ measures instead the expected utility of casting the best insincere vote, which is defined as the vote for a party other than the most preferred one that gives the voter the highest expected utility.

The main analysis in this article focuses on those voters who are in a position to cast a tactical vote, which is defined here as those voters for whom there is a positive tactical voting incentive: $\tau > 0$. Other parts of the analysis will, however, use all voters, regardless of their tactical incentive.¹⁵

Calculating the tactical voting incentive (τ) requires specifying a measure of both the utility derived from each party being the winner as well as the probabilities of winning for each party. For utilities, I follow a similar approach to Eggers and Vivyan (2020) in using feeling thermometers for the different parties in the BES data as the main measure of utility. Whenever ties occur between parties, these are first broken by the feeling thermometer for the corresponding party leaders (if available) and then by party identification. The feeling thermometers used to calculate τ come in all cases from the last survey wave for each election (which is the post-election wave).

To measure the probabilities $p(j)$, $j = 1, \dots, K$, I follow the procedure in Eggers and Vivyan (2020), relying on the assumption that the vote share for each candidate in a constituency follows a Dirichlet distribution with parameter vector sv , where v is equal to the vector of vote shares actually observed in each constituency. The scalar s is a measure of precision, which I set to 85. Eggers and Vivyan (2020) choose the precision measure s that minimizes the “surprise” of election results compared to pre-election predictions. Their optimal s using data from the 2005, 2010, and 2015 elections is 85, which is why I choose it here. Their analysis shows that results do not vary very noticeably with the choice of s (within some range).

Once the measure of tactical incentive τ is obtained, I identify three parties for each voter.

¹⁵Note in Figure 2 that very few that extremely few voters cast a sincere vote when $\tau_i < 0$, which provides some validation for the measure.

The voter’s Most Preferred party is the party from which the voter derives the highest utility (feeling thermometer), regardless of the chances of winning. From among the rest of the parties, a voter’s Best Insincere party is defined as the party, other than the Most Preferred, that would bring the voter the highest expected utility, were the voter choose it. Finally, a voter’s Worst Insincere party is similarly defined as the party that would bring the voter the lowest expected utility should the voter casts a vote for it.¹⁶

It is important to note here that the tactical incentives are obtained using an ‘objective’ measure of the probability of winning. Alternatively, one could define these incentives based on voters’ perceptions of the chances of winning, that is, subjective probabilities. There is evidence, in fact, that the two do not always align.¹⁷ The focus here on ‘objective’ probabilities stems from the interest in measuring actual tactical behavior, rather than what voters may interpret to be their own tactical behavior. That is not to say that studying voters’ perceptions of the parties’ viability is not important.¹⁸

3.1.2 Outcome: Tactical Voting

I define the outcome of interest as a categorical variable with three possible values: (1) the voter chooses to abstain; (2) the voter casts a vote for their most preferred party (a sincere vote); (3) the voter casts a vote for their best insincere party (the non-sincere vote that gives the voter the highest expected utility).¹⁹ When focusing exclusively on voters with a positive incentive to vote tactically ($\tau > 0$), this outcome variable captures: (1) abstention, (2) sincere/expressive

¹⁶Notice that the Worst Insincere party will not necessarily be the party that the voter dislikes the most. This is because the voters’ most disliked party may be very unlikely to win, but a moderately disliked one may be a viable contender.

¹⁷In fact, Heath and Ziegfeld (2022) show that in the case of India, voters’ very severely overestimate the viability of their most preferred party, to the point where a tactical vote almost never makes sense. However, voters’ assessments in UK elections are likely substantially better, but of course not perfect. Raymond (2018) shows that in the case of Canada, voter assessments of the viability of third or lower ranked parties are in fact, to a large degree, reasonable.

¹⁸Studying subjective probabilities is complicated for a variety of reasons, not least that voter’s probability assessments rarely follow the rules of probability (like adding up to one). From a more practical perspective, the BES questions about winning probabilities have a large number of missing values, which dramatically reduces the sample size.

¹⁹There is a small percentage of voters who cast a vote for a party that is neither their most preferred party nor the best insincere party. These voters are excluded from the main analysis in this article. However, their inclusion in the second group (combining them with sincere voters) does not substantially alter the results.

vote, and (3) tactical vote.

3.1.3 Main Independent Variables & Controls

The main independent variables of interest are three indices that measure voters' being contacted by one of three specific parties: their Most Preferred, their Best Insincere, and their Worst Insincere parties. These indices are constructed by counting the number of modes in which a party contacted a voter in each wave. The modes of contact considered here are: telephone, letter or leaflet through the mail, home canvassing visits, meeting in the street, email, SMS (text messaging), and social media. The use of contact indices as opposed to binary indicators is preferred for two interconnected reasons. First, the use of indices provides a more nuanced measure that better approximates the intensity of contact. Second, and relatedly, a very large portion of voters receive (or at least are sent) the candidates address delivered free of charge by the Royal Mail, which diminishes the usefulness of the binary measure.²⁰ Núñez (2021) shows that these contact indices correlated closely with campaign expenditures at the constituency level, providing some validity to the measure.

As control variables, I include the feeling thermometer for the most preferred party, the difference in feeling thermometers between the most preferred and the best insincere parties, and that between the best insincere and the worse insincere parties. Additionally, I include a number of demographic characteristics: respondents' age, gender, indicators for household income terciles, two indicators for education level (A levels or similar, and University degree or higher); two indicators for home ownership/renter status, as well as the number of children in the household. Additional controls include a measure of political attention, constituency-level election results, and decile indicators for the tactical voting incentive, τ , that control for the intensity of the tactical voting incentive in a non-linear way.

²⁰While delivery is free, candidates must still ford the cost of producing the address for delivery.

3.2 Estimating the Effect of Party Contacts

As mentioned in the introduction, an important empirical challenge in measuring the impact that party campaigns have on the likelihood that a voter casts a tactical vote is that parties' behavior is strategic, at least in principle. In fact, there is evidence that parties increasingly target specific voters or groups of voters (defined both sociodemographically and geographically) they deem likely to affect the outcome (Hillygus and Shields, 2008; Hassell and Monson, 2014, 2015). Moreover, Townsley and Cutts (2022) provide evidence that suggests that parties may even attempt to contact some kinds of voters (undecided or weak partisans) using modes of contact that those voters tend to prefer over others. All of this means that parties will attempt to reach certain types of voters whom they believe are more likely to be convinced or swayed in the way they desire. In the case of tactical voting, for example, viable parties in a constituency have a clear incentive to contact those voters who might defect their most preferred party in a given constituency; that is, those with a positive tactical incentive. Regardless of the specific motivation, insofar as parties are somewhat strategic in their campaign contacting decisions, the estimates of the probability of a tactical vote as a function of party contacts will be upwardly biased: it will appear that parties are more effective at changing voters' behavior than they actually are, by simply reflecting the fact that parties are contacting voters who are more likely to behave in the desired way in the first place, regardless of the parties' actions. Notice that the existence of this bias does not rely on parties being effective at targeting the 'right' voters; any tendency to target the most easily swayed voters, which all parties have an incentive to do, will generate some amount of bias if these incentives are ignored.²¹

This challenge is not straightforward to resolve. A natural first approach is to estimate a

²¹One could also imagine a situation in which a party is run by so an incompetent group of people that they only go after the most difficult to convince voters. This would also create bias in the estimates, although in the form of underestimation bias. The only circumstance in which party's behavior would no create any form bias in the estimates is if the party contacted voters completely at random or at random conditional on observed covariates in the researchers data. Completely at random contacts are extremely unlikely. Random conditional on observed covariates are plausible, but unlikely due to the fact that parties and candidates have information that is not always available to researchers and, even when it is, it is used in ways that researchers cannot easily determine. Regardless, the method advanced in this article is agnostic about the effectiveness with which parties target voters, and accounts for this strategic behavior on the part of the parties all the same.

model that includes a variety of individual and constituency-level characteristics that hopefully capture the characteristics that make parties contact some voters (in some constituencies) but not others. However, this approach has limitations, as researchers do not directly observe the process behind parties' campaigning decisions, thus limiting its utility to some extent.

The BES data, however, has a significant advantage that lies in its panel structure, containing information for each voter multiple times during each election campaign. The panel structure allows controlling for parties' strategic behavior in their contacting decisions without being privy to the parties' and candidates' decision-making processes. The key methodological insight is to use the earlier waves in an election to estimate parties' contact behavior; and from this generate predicted contact probabilities for the final wave of the election. The impact of contacts on tactical voting are estimated using only the third wave, and include the predicted probabilities of contact as control variables. Importantly, these predicted probabilities of contact do not use party contact data from the final wave, thus providing a measure of parties' behavior that is separate from actual contacts.²²

Following Núñez (2021), who focuses on campaign effects at large, I first estimate the probability of a voter being contacted by each party based on a series of individual- and constituency-variables that include the feeling thermometers for each party and a measure of the tactical voting incentive.²³ This estimation only relies on the first two waves for each election (out of three) and focuses on all voters (regardless of whether their tactical voting incentive is positive or not). That is, I estimate:

$$P(\text{Contact}_{it}^p = 1) = \Lambda(\alpha^p + \beta^p x_{it}), \quad t \in \{1, 2\}, \quad p = \text{Con}, \text{Lab}, \text{LD}, \text{SNP}, \text{PC}, \text{UKIP}, \text{Grn}, \text{Bxt} \quad (1)$$

²²The predicted probabilities are of course correlated with actual contacts. In fact, this is how they can actually control for parties' strategic behavior.

²³To avoid losing observations due to a voter not providing a feeling thermometer for a specific party, all missing values in the feeling thermometers are imputed with a zero. At the same time, a set of dummy variables indicating whether the feeling thermometer for each party is missing or not is included (so that the specific value of zero imputed does not influence the result itself). Please note that this imputation to zero is only used in the first stage estimation. It is not used to define the tactical voting incentives, nor in the main estimates obtained from the model in equation 3.

where $Contact_{it}^p$ is an indicator that equals 1 if voter i reports being contacted by party p in the four weeks prior to wave t ; x_{it} are the covariates described in the previous section, which include the feeling thermometer for the most preferred party, the difference in thermometers between the most preferred and best insincere (the three combined are equivalent to including the feeling thermometer for the three parties), respondent’s age, gender, household income terciles, education, home ownership status, number of children, a measure of political attention, indicators for deciles of the tactical voting incentive, and election results at the constituency level; α^p and β^p are parameters for the equation for party p ; and $\Lambda(\cdot)$ is a logistic link.

From the models in equation 1, I produce predicted probabilities of contact for the third wave in each election. That is, I calculate:

$$PrContact_{i3}^p = \Lambda(\widehat{\alpha}^p + \widehat{\beta}^p x_{i3}), \quad p = Con, Lab, LD, SNP, PC, UKIP, Grn, Bxt \quad (2)$$

where $PrContact_{i3}^p$ is the predicted probability that individual i is contacted by party p in wave $t = 3$, based on the model estimated using waves $t = 1, 2$ from equation 1.

For these predicted probabilities estimated using data from the first two waves to be valid indicators of the probability of contact for the third wave in each election, one must assume that parties’ contact strategies remain constant throughout the campaign. That is, that the types of voters that parties contact do not differ systematically over time. In Appendix A, I show that this is likely to be the case. First, I show that the predicted probabilities estimated from the first two waves have a very high power to predict contact during the third wave. Additionally, I show that predicted probabilities estimated using data from the first two waves have a very high correlation with predicted probabilities estimated using data from the third wave. All this shows that the parties contact strategies’ do not seem to vary with observed characteristics. While in principle they could vary with respect to unobserved ones, this is unlikely: to the extent that unobserved characteristics are correlated in some way with the observed ones, these differences would manifest in some way.²⁴ Note that the stability of strategies across waves does not mean

²⁴Núñez (2021) presents two other alternative ways to show that parties’ contact strategies likely remain

that parties do not ramp up their campaign efforts closer to election day; in fact they do. What the stability means is that they are contacting more of the same types of voters, as well as more intensely the same voters.

To estimate the effect of party contacts on the probability of casting a tactical vote, I use a multinomial model that focuses exclusively on those voters who have a positive incentive to cast a tactical vote; that is, voters for whom $\tau_i > 0$. Specifically, I estimate a model of the following form:

$$P(y_{i3} = j) = \Lambda(\alpha_j + \beta_{j1}ContMP_{i3} + \beta_{j2}ContBI_{i3} + \beta_{j3}ContWI_{i3} + \gamma_jControls_{i3}) \quad (3)$$

where y_{i3} is a categorical variable for individual i in wave $t = 3$ that indicates whether i abstained from voting ($j = 0$), cast a non-tactical vote ($j = 1$), or cast a tactical vote ($j = 2$); $ContMP_{i3}$ is an index of contact by i 's most preferred party during the four weeks prior to wave $t = 3$; $ContBI_{i3}$ is an index of contact by i 's best insincere party; $ContWI_{i3}$ is an index of contact by i 's least preferred party out of the viable ones. $Controls_{i3}$ are a set of control variables from wave $t = 3$ for each election, which include the predicted probabilities calculated in equation 2 (re-arranged into those for the most preferred, best insincere, and worst insincere parties). This model controls for the feeling thermometer of the most preferred party, the difference between the feeling thermometers between the most preferred and best insincere, as well as best insincere and worst insincere²⁵; a variety of demographic characteristics described in the data section, dummies for each election year, election results at the constituency level, a measure of political attention, and the deciles of the tactical voting incentive measure.²⁶

I also estimate additional models that are variations of model 3, to obtain heterogeneous effects by most preferred party, by the intensity of the tactical voting incentive (τ); and a model

constant throughout each campaign, using the same data.

²⁵This means using preferences (utilities) from the same wave. Contacts might influence preferences. By controlling for same-wave feeling thermometers, the analysis here measures the impact of party contacts on tactical behavior, free from any changes in preferences that those contacts might produce.

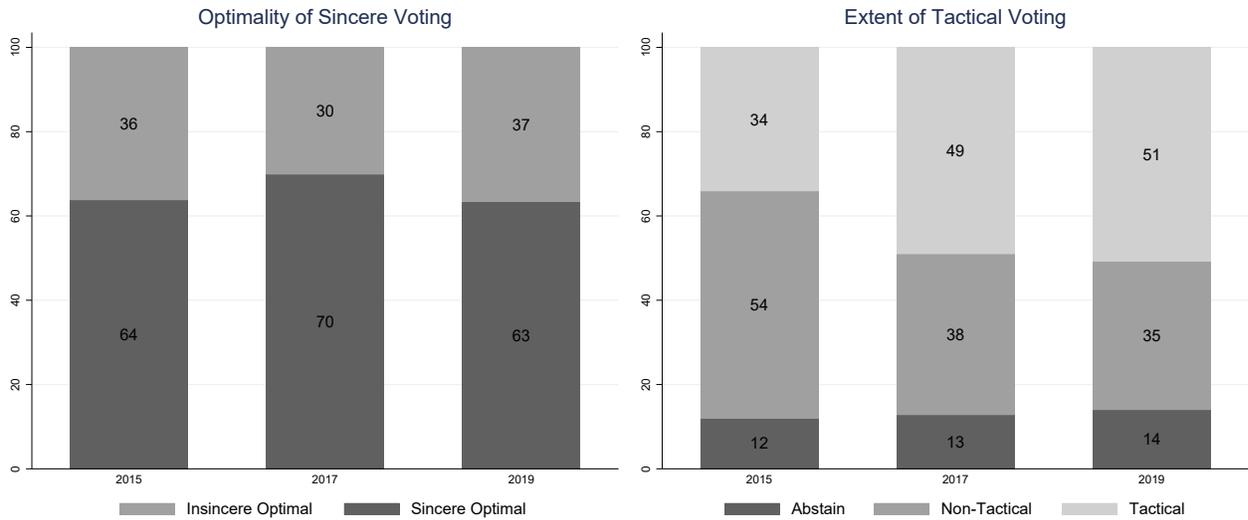
²⁶Since the model is estimated only for voters with a positive incentive, only five of these deciles are included.

that ignores the predicted contact probabilities to assess the overestimation that would result from ignoring the parties' strategic contact behavior.

4 Results

4.1 Extent of Tactical Voting

Figure 1: Extent of Tactical Voting Optimality



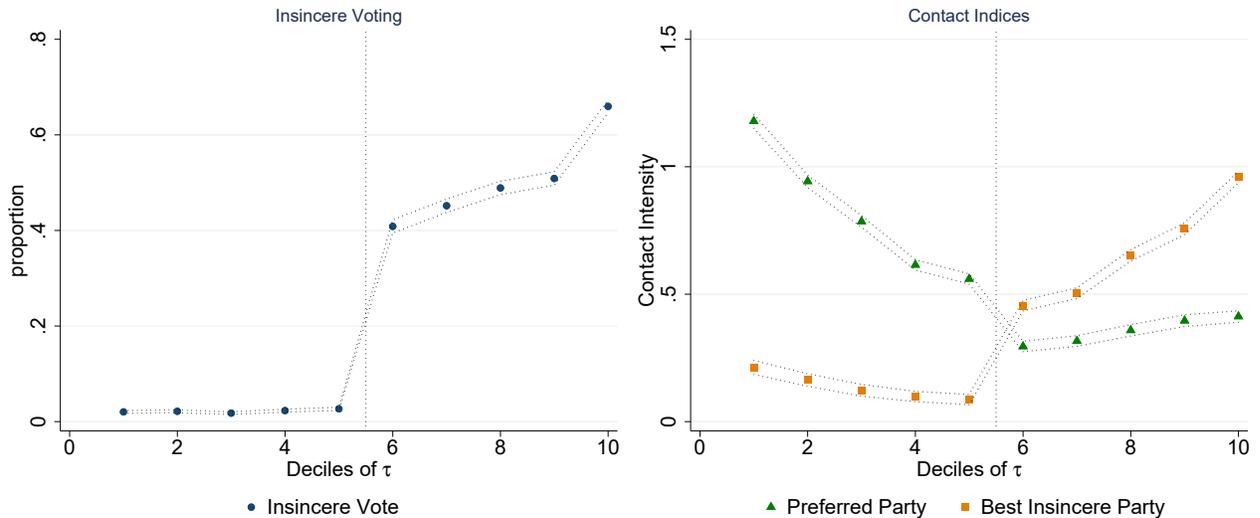
The left panel shows the proportion of the third wave sample for each election year that have a positive tactical voting incentive. The right panel shows voting behavior on the subset of voters with a positive tactical voting incentive.

Before analysing the effect of party contacts on tactical voting, it is useful to establish the extent and potential for tactical voting in the elections under study. The left panel of Figure 1 shows, for each election, the percentage of voters in the sample for whom casting a tactical vote is the optimal decision (that is, voters for whom τ is positive). About a third or more of the electorate would benefit from casting a vote for a party other than their most preferred one. This is a substantial proportion of the electorate. The right panel in Figure 1 shows the percentage of voters who chose to cast a tactical vote (or abstain, or vote sincerely), among voters for whom it is optimal to do so. For 2015, about 34% of voters in a position to cast a

tactical vote did so, a figure that is in-line with most previous research (see Alvarez, Kiewiet and Núñez, 2018). The percentage of voters casting a tactical vote, however, increases substantially for 2017 and 2019, to about 50% of voters in a position to cast a tactical vote.²⁷

The left panel of Figure 2 partially reproduces Figure 4 from Eggers and Vivyan (2020). It shows how the proportion of voters casting a vote for their best insincere party changes with the tactical incentives (τ). The figure is produced by averaging by deciles of τ for ease of exposition.²⁸ This panel shows two things: first, an insincere vote for the best insincere party is extremely unlikely among voters with a negative τ ; put another way, voters who would be hurt by voting insincerely, do not vote insincerely. Second, it is also clear that as the incentive to cast a tactical vote increases, the proportion of voters who do so increases as well.

Figure 2: Tactical Behavior & Incentive



The left panel shows the proportion of voters that cast their vote for their best insincere party. The right panel shows that average contact intensity for the most preferred and best insincere party. The horizontal axis are the deciles of the tactical voting incentive. Deciles from the 6th upwards have positive tactical voting incentives.

The right panel of Figure 2 shows the average contact index intensity depending on the value

²⁷The reason for this is partly a change in voters' preferred parties. Whereas in 2015 a substantial proportion of voters with positive τ preferred the Liberal Democrats, for 2017 and 2019 the proportion of voters ranking the Greens, UKIP, or Brexit party as their top party increased.

²⁸Please note that these deciles are in reality constructed as the set of quintiles among positive τ s and the quintiles among the non-positive τ s. This is done to ensure that there is no decile containing both positive and negative values of τ .

of τ for two parties: a voter’s most preferred party, and a voter’s best insincere party. Two things are worth noting here, which highlight parties’ strategic behavior. First, the intensity of contact by a voters’ most preferred party is the highest when the voter has no incentive to cast a tactical vote (when τ is negative), but it drops noticeably when tactical voting is optimal for voters. Second, the intensity of contact by a voters’ best insincere party follows a mirror pattern: it is lowest when the voter has no incentive to cast a tactical vote, and it increases noticeably when tactical voting is optimal.²⁹ This figure illustrates that parties’ contact behavior is not immune to the tactical voting considerations on the part of voters. While the patterns presented here could simply be a result of constituency level characteristics, I show in Appendix B, that this pattern holds even after accounting for constituency-level characteristics (although it is less stark). This means that it is not sufficient to control for whether a constituency is a ‘target seat’ for a party: contact intensity varies strategically within constituencies as well as across them.

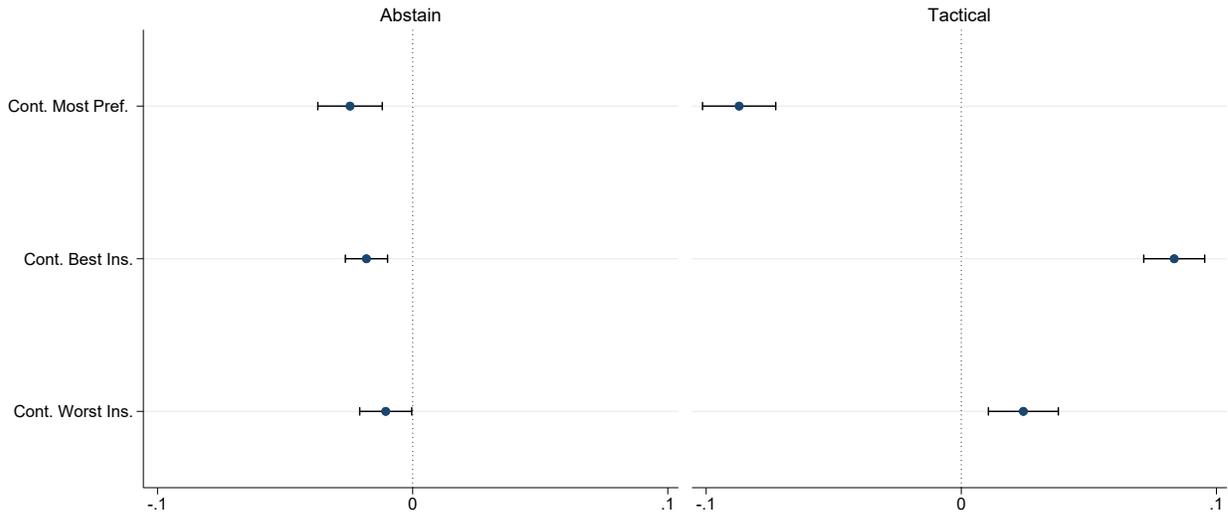
4.2 The Effect of Party Contacts on Tactical Voting

Figure 3 and Appendix Table C1 in the Appendix show the average partial effect of contact by the most preferred, best insincere, and worst insincere parties on the probability that a voter either abstains or cast a tactical vote (the remainder is the probability that the voter cast a non-tactical vote) estimated using the model in equation 3.

The first thing to notice from the average partial effects is that contact by all three parties (the most preferred, the best insincere, and the worse insincere) lead to a reduction in the probability that a voter will abstain from voting, thus providing evidence in favor of hypothesis H1. Contact by the worst insincere party reduces the probability of abstention by 1.1 percentage points, that of the best insincere party reduces it by 1.8 percentage point, and that of the most preferred party reduces it by 2.5 percentage points. Thus, the evidence presented here is not entirely consistent with hypothesis H1a: while the worst insincere party has the weakest turnout

²⁹Contacts tend to be the least intense overall for voters with $\tau \approx 0$ (5th and 6th deciles). These tend to be voters in safe constituencies, where there is little to no incentives to vote one way or another.

Figure 3: Average Partial Effect of Party Contacts



The effects presented here are all average partial effects calculated from the model in equation 3. The average partial effects on the probability of casting a sincere vote are excluded from this figure, since they can be inferred directly from the other two categories. All confidence intervals are at the 95% level. Standard errors are clustered at the constituency level.

effect (as expected), the strongest effect comes from the most preferred party, rather than the best insincere party.

In terms of the impact of party contacts on the probability of casting a tactical vote, contact by a voter's most preferred party leads to reduction of 8.7 percentage points in the probability of a tactical vote. Combined with the 2.5 percentage points reduction in the probability of abstention, this means that contact by the most preferred party also leads to an increase of 11.2 percentage points in the probability of a sincere vote. On the other hand, the impact of contact by the best insincere party leads to an increase of 8.3 percentage points in the probability of a tactical vote and a 6.5 percentage point reduction in the probability of a sincere vote. These results are thus consistent with hypotheses H2 and H3.

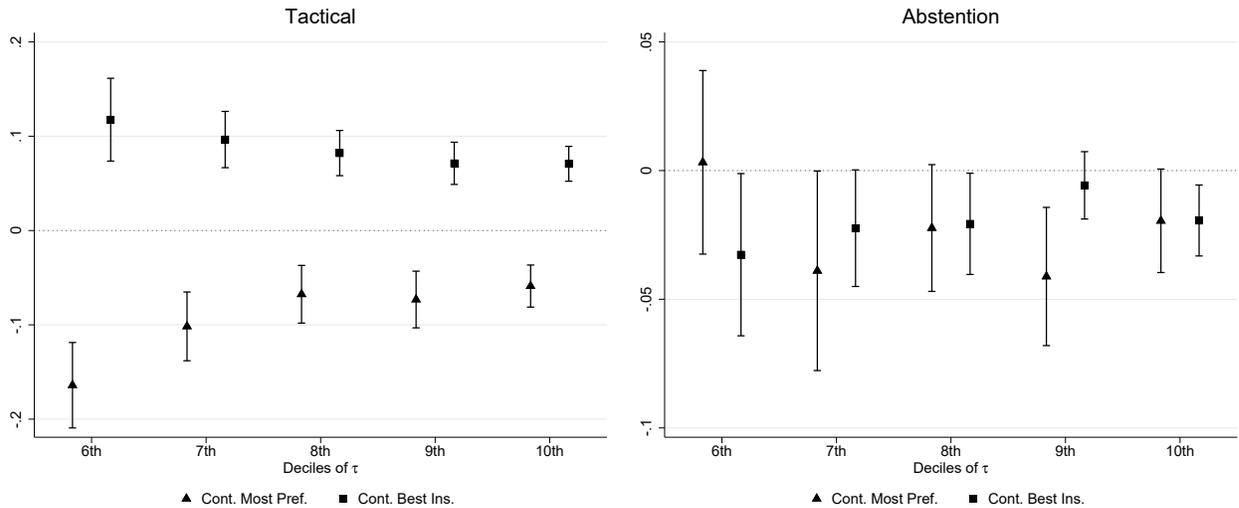
The impact of contact by the worst insincere party, which was defined as the party that would give the voter the worst expected utility, leads to a small increase of 2.4 percentage points in the probability of casting a tactical vote, and a 1.4 percentage point reduction in the probability of a sincere vote. These effects are thus not consistent with hypothesis H4: in

addition to the turnout effect, contact by the worst insincere party leads to some switch of sincere to tactical votes. It is possible that contact by the worst insincere party ignites fears in the voter that this party might actually win the seat, thus pushing them towards a higher likelihood of casting a tactical vote in favor of their best insincere party.

Figure 3 also speaks to hypothesis H5, that the impact of the best insincere party on voter behavior should be larger than that of the most preferred party. The results presented here are not consistent with this hypothesis; in fact the most preferred and best insincere parties have very similar impact (of opposite signs) on the probability that a voter will cast a tactical vote. Moreover, the effect of the most preferred party is actually larger than that of the best insincere party. However, the difference between the two effects is not statistically significant at standard significance levels.

4.3 Effect of Party Contacts by Tactical Incentive

Figure 4: Average Partial Effects by Tactical Incentives



All estimates presented here are calculated from a model similar to that in equation 3, which includes interaction terms between the contact indicators by each of the parties and dummy variables indicating the decile of the tactical incentive variable. All confidence intervals are at the 95% level. Standard errors are clustered at the constituency level. Only the 6th to 10th deciles are included since the other deciles have negative tactical voting incentives (and are thus not included in the sample).

As noted in Section 2, the impact of party contacts voter behavior should depend on the extent to which a voter has an incentive to behave tactically, which was summarized in hypothesis H6. Figure 4 shows the impact of contact by the most preferred and best insincere parties for voters in the different deciles of the tactical voting incentive. These estimates were obtained using a modified version of the model in equation 3 in which the contact variables for each of the parties is interacted with dummy variables for the tactical voting incentive deciles. In terms of the impact of party contacts on the probability that a voter cast as a tactical vote, the results are consistent with hypothesis H6. That is, the higher the tactical voting incentive, the more muted the effect of party contacts. This is true for both the effect of the most preferred and the best insincere parties (although weaker).³⁰

The right panel of Figure 4 shows how the impact of contact by the most preferred and best insincere parties on abstentions differ by the deciles of the tactical voting incentive. Contrary to tactical voting, there is no clear pattern emerging from here. This suggests that abstention does not seem to be reactive to tactical incentives, and instead any tactical reaction tends to be the result of a choice between casting a tactical vote and a sincere vote.

4.4 Heterogeneous Effects By Party

Figure 5 shows the impact of contact by the most preferred and best insincere parties on the probability of casting a tactical vote for voters with different most preferred parties. These estimates are obtained from a model like that in equation 3, but where the contact indices are interacted with dummy variables indicating each voter’s most preferred party.³¹ The results show that the impact of party contacts is not driven exclusively by supporters of any one party;

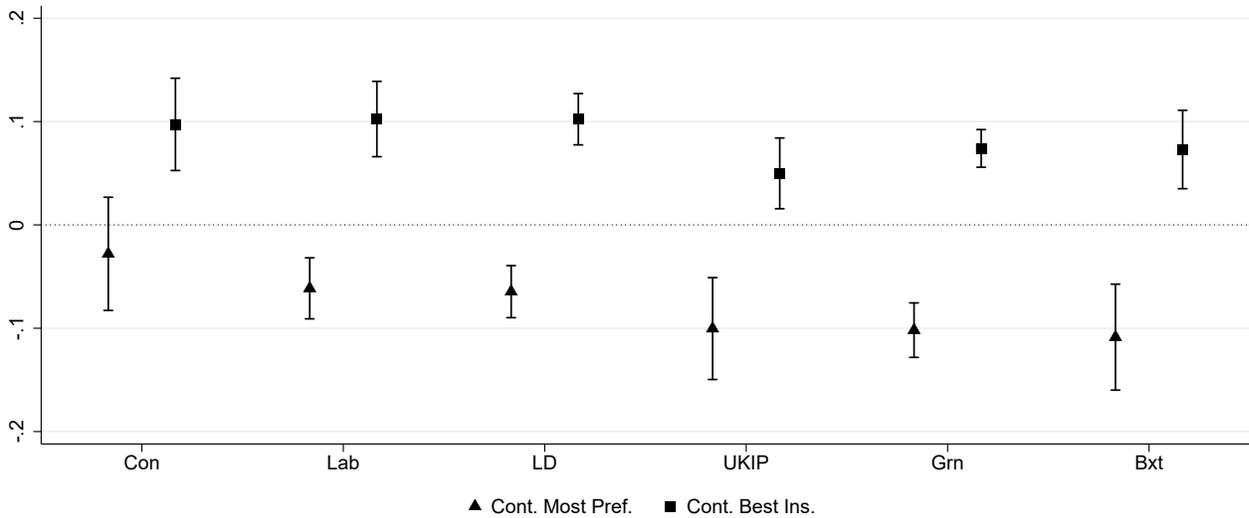
³⁰These effects are also statistically significant. The difference between the 6th and the 7th deciles for contact by the most preferred party is statistically significant with a χ^2 test-statistic of 4.22 and a p-value of 0.0399. In the case of contact by the best insincere party the difference between the 6th and the 7th decile is not significant at the usual significance levels, but the difference between the 6th and the 8th is, with a χ^2 test-statistic of 3.40 and a p-value of 0.0653

³¹Please note that the results do not include the Scottish National Party, as there are almost no voters who preferred this party and had a positive incentive to cast a tactical vote. Results for Plaid Cymru are not included here as the number of voters who preferred this party and have a positive incentive to cast a tactical vote is relatively small in the sample and the standard errors are thus very large. Results for PC are nonetheless included in Table C3 in the Appendix for reference.

instead, supporters of all parties respond to party contacts: they become less likely to cast a tactical vote when contacted by their most preferred party and more likely to cast a tactical vote when contacted by their best insincere party. There are some differences in the size of effects, however.

The impact of contact by the most preferred party on the probability of casting a tactical vote is typically smaller among supporters of the three long-established parties, Conservatives (2.8%, not significant), Labour (6.1%), and Liberal-Democrats (6.5%) than for the less-established parties, UKIP (10%), Greens (10.2%), and Brexit (10.9%). Simultaneously, the impact of contact by the best insincere party follows the opposite pattern, being stronger among supporters of the more established parties (9.7% for Conservatives, 10.2% for Labour, and 10.2% for Liberal-Democrats) and weaker among supporters of the less-established parties (5.0% for UKIP, 7.4% for Greens, and 7.3% for Brexit).

Figure 5: Main Effects By Party



All estimates presented here are obtained from a model similar to that in equation 3, but that includes interaction terms between the contact indicators and dummy variables indicating a voter's most preferred party. All confidence intervals are at the 95% level. Standard errors are clustered at the constituency level. Results for SNP and PC are not included due to data limitations.

It is not clear why these differences between the more established and less established parties exist. One possibility, however, is that voters who are supporters of the less established parties

are less responsive to contact by their best insincere party simply because they are already more likely to cast a tactical vote. Part of this may have to do with the fact that these parties rarely if even win seats in Parliament. However, it is not possible to test this with the currently available data (as it involves more long term trends and reasons behind belief formation that are outside of the scope of this article).

4.5 Partial Counterfactuals

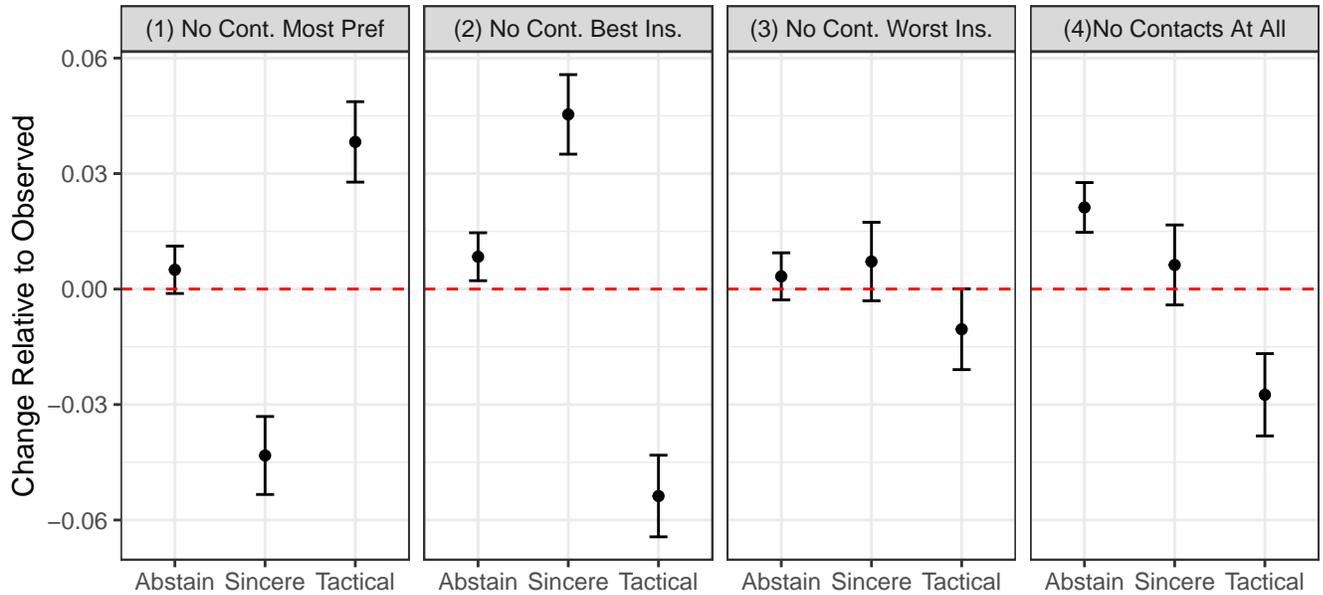
The average partial effects presented in Figure 3 can only show an incomplete picture of the impact of party contacts on tactical voting, as they only measure the impact of contact at the individual-voter level. These effects, however, do not consider that parties contact vastly different number of voters, as indeed Figure 2 shows: among voters with a positive incentive to cast a tactical vote, the most preferred party is less intense in their contact efforts than the best insincere party.

To obtain a measure of the overall impact of party contacts, I conduct a series of four simple partial counterfactual exercises. The first counterfactual assumes that every voter's most preferred party does not contact them at all. The second one assumes that every voter's best insincere party does not contact them. The third one assumes that every voter's worst insincere party does not contact them. And finally, the fourth partial counterfactual assumes that neither of these three parties contact the voter. All these counterfactuals are then compared to the in-sample proportion of abstentions, tactical, and sincere votes among those voters who have a positive incentive to cast a tactical vote ($\tau > 0$).

It is important to note here that these counterfactuals are only *partial* counterfactuals, in the sense that the change in the behavior of a party is assumed not to generate any kind of strategic response in the behavior of other parties. For example, when calculating the counterfactual that the most preferred party does not contact any voters, it is assumed that the best insincere party continues to behave as observed in sample. This is of course unlikely to occur in reality, as parties are, to some extent, expected to respond to each other's actions and reach a new game-theoretical

equilibrium. However, these partial counterfactuals do allow for a better understanding of the magnitudes of the impact of party behavior on tactical voting, even if out of equilibrium, as well as the overall forces involved in strategic considerations from the part of parties out of the equilibrium path.

Figure 6: No Contact Partial Counterfactuals



The counterfactuals are calculated from the model estimated in equation 3, by obtaining the probability of each outcome assuming the specific party behavior of each counterfactual. The figures presented here are the difference between the counterfactuals and the in-sample observed behavior. Confidence intervals at the 95% level.

Figure 6 presents the four counterfactuals (see also Appendix Table C4). In each panel, it shows the difference between the counterfactual proportion of abstentions, sincere, and tactical votes, relative to that observed in-sample. For the first counterfactual, where it is assumed that each voter's most preferred party conducts no direct voter outreach, we see that sincere voting would be 4.3 percentage points less likely, whereas tactical voting would be 3.8 percentage points higher (the impact on abstentions is positive but not distinguishable from zero). The second counterfactual, in which the best insincere party conducts no contacts shows that sincere voting would be 4.5 percentage points higher, while tactical voting would be 5.4 percentage points lower. Additionally, there would be slightly more abstentions (0.8 percentage points). The third counterfactual shows that contact by the worst insincere party would have little impact

on voter behavior, except perhaps for a small increase in tactical voting.³² Finally, the fourth counterfactual shows the combined impact of the previous three. Overall, had parties not contacted voters with an incentive to cast a tactical vote, there would have been higher levels of abstentions (2.1 percentage points) and tactical voting would have been 2.8 percentage points lower than observed in-sample. The impact on sincere voting is a small increase that is not statistically different from zero.

To summarize, these counterfactuals show that contact by the most preferred and best insincere parties have a significant impact on the levels of tactical voting. The impact of the most preferred party is somewhat weaker than that of the best insincere party. This may sound as a confirmation of hypothesis H5. However, H5 is about the impact of contact on individual voters, which is best tested using average partial effects as in Figure 3 (from which H5 was rejected). Instead, the weaker overall impact of the most preferred party comes from the behavior of the parties rather than the voters: the most preferred parties tend to conduct less voter outreach in less intense ways than the best insincere party. And this is perfectly rational on the part of the parties: the most preferred parties are unlikely to win the seat which reduces the incentives to campaign in a particular constituency.³³

5 Conclusion

While there is a relatively rich literature on tactical voting, a very significant portion of this literature is devoted to measuring its extent. This is of course vital, as understanding the extent of tactical voting establishes its relevance as an observed political behavior rather than an interesting theoretical possibility. Somewhat less attention has been paid, however, to the factors that may drive voters to behave tactically or not. Most known correlates of tactical voting behavior are limited to demographic characteristics and electoral circumstances;

³²This is the result of relatively small average partial effects combined with relatively few contacts being conducted by each voter's worst insincere party.

³³This does not mean that the most preferred parties (or volunteers on their behalf) will not conduct any campaigning at all. After all, winning a seat is not the only motivation that will drive party behavior, although arguably it may be the strongest one.

factors over which electoral participants do not have any agency during short-term course of a campaign.

This article fills a gap in the literature by studying the impact of local campaigns conducted by the parties on the probability that voters remain loyal to their most preferred party (thus casting a sincere vote) or defect in favor of a viable one (thus casting a tactical vote). While campaign effects have been studied extensively in the United Kingdom, there is little focus tactical voting behavior explicitly.

I find that party contact efforts have an important impact on the electoral behavior of voters with a positive incentive to behave tactically. First, there is clear evidence that contact by the most preferred, best insincere and worst insincere parties encourages turnout among these voters. Second, contact by a voters most preferred party encourages loyalty and consequently a sincere vote; whereas contact by a voters best insincere party encourages defection in the form of a tactical vote. Interestingly, and contrary to expectations, the extent to which most preferred parties encourage loyalty is about the same as the extent to which best insincere parties manage to encourage defection. Third, the impact of party contacts on tactical behavior is strongest among voters with the weakest incentives to cast a tactical vote. Fourth, there is some heterogeneity depending on voters' most preferred parties: the impact of contact by the most preferred party tends to be larger among supporters of the more established parties; while the impact of contact by the best insincere party tends to be larger among supporters of the newer parties.

While the impact of contacts by the most preferred and best insincere parties are similar at the individual voter level, these parties conduct campaigns of different intensities. Counterfactuals that compare the observed in-sample voter behavior relative to the case in which parties do not conduct local campaigns, show that the impact of the best insincere parties is larger than the most preferred ones: thus the defection effects of campaigns outweigh the loyalty effects, leading to overall higher levels of tactical voting.

The results presented here have important normative implications. Tactical behavior is not

an inherent characteristic that voters may or may not possess. Instead, it is the result of voters' beliefs, preferences, information, values, and as shown here, parties' campaigns. Campaigns play a role in voters' tactical considerations that can lead to higher or lower instrumental efficacy, by encouraging defection from or loyalty to their most preferred party.

There are several avenues for future research on the connection between campaigns and tactical voting. This article has focused on an objective measure of the probability of winning, so as to obtain a measure of actual tactical behavior. However, voters' may have subjective probabilities that differ from the objective ones. Importantly, these subjective probabilities may be important channels through which party campaigns can encourage tactical or non-tactical behavior. If party campaigns lead to overall better probability assessments on the part of voters, then voters can become more instrumentally effective.³⁴ Distinguishing the impact of campaigns on voters' probability assessments is also an important element for a different research task: understanding the determinants of tactical versus expressive behavior which occurs even among voters with the same beliefs and preferences. Do voters differ in some fundamental way in how they understand the goals of voting? Do voters have short-term reactions to party outreach that, everything else equal, leads them towards more expressive or instrumental behavior?

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³⁴Campaigns can also lead to worst probability assessments on the part of voters. However, to the extent that viable parties campaign more intensely than non-viable ones, it is likely that, all in all, campaigns will lead to better assessments if voters' take contact as indirect evidence that the party believes itself to be viable.

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Appendix A Contact Probabilities and Observed Contacts

The methodological insight used to control for parties’ strategic contact behavior relies on the assumption that party contacts remain the same throughout the each campaign, such that the predicted probabilities of contact estimated using data from the first two waves provides a reasonable approximation to parties intention to contact particular voters during the final survey wave. That is, it requires that the party contact strategies remain constant within each campaign.

Here, I provide two pieces of evidence suggesting that party contact strategies remain constant within each campaign. Table A1 shows the correlation between the predicted probabilities estimated from equation 1 using data for the first two waves in each election and those obtained using data from the third wave in each election. The very high correlation in the vast majority of cases indicates that parties are likely using the same contact strategies in the first two waves than in the third wave.³⁵ There are some party-years that the correlation is lower: UKIP in 2017, and Brexit for 2019. However, while lower, these correlations are still substantially high.

Table A1: Correlation of Predicted Probabilities: Pre & Post Election

| | 2015 | 2017 | 2019 |
|------|------|------|------|
| Con | 0.87 | 0.90 | 0.85 |
| Lab | 0.95 | 0.97 | 0.96 |
| LD | 0.95 | 0.97 | 0.94 |
| SNP | 0.95 | 0.97 | 0.96 |
| PC | 0.89 | 0.95 | 0.96 |
| Grn | 0.90 | . | 0.87 |
| UKIP | 0.77 | 0.67 | . |
| Bxt | . | . | 0.72 |

Table A2 shows the ratio between the R^2 of two regressions. The numerator is a model where the outcome is the contact index for a particular party during the third wave of the election

³⁵Note that high correlations do not mean that the probabilities are about the same levels in the third wave relative to the others. In fact, contact probabilities are higher across the board for the third wave because campaigns efforts are more intense closer to election day.

and the independent variables are the predicted probabilities obtained from the first two waves plus all control variables used in equation 1. The denominator is linear model with the same outcome that includes only the predicted probabilities as independent variables (and no other variables). The ratios presented in Table A2 are all substantially high, which indicates that all the variables included in the model used on the numerator add relatively little predicted power on top of the predicted probabilities. Put another way, the predicted probabilities estimated from the first two waves are, by far, the dominant factor in predicting the contact index during the third wave. If party contact strategies were not attempting to contact the same types of voters, then these ratios would be substantially smaller, as specific characteristics (different from the predicted probabilities) would likely have independent predicted power.

Table A2: Predicted Power of Predicted Probabilities

| | 2015 | 2017 | 2019 |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Con | 84.93 | 79.16 | 84.37 |
| Lab | 91.52 | 94.03 | 91.46 |
| LD | 91.39 | 93.50 | 89.31 |
| SNP | 93.54 | 96.82 | 97.35 |
| PC | 96.31 | 96.23 | 95.31 |
| Grn | 86.59 | . | 65.77 |
| UKIP | 65.97 | 61.85 | . |
| Bxt | . | . | 70.88 |

Using the same data, but for a different purpose, Núñez (2021) shows (1) the average characteristics of voters' contacted by each party do not differ between survey waves in the same election; and (2) that random forests models trained on different waves result in predictions for the other waves that have high levels of agreement. This provides additional evidence that the contact strategies of parties' remain relatively constant throughout each election campaign.

Appendix B Contact by Tactical Incentives

The left panel of Figure 2 suggest that parties' contact behavior changes with voters' tactical incentives. However, it is not clear from that figure whether this is due to parties treating constituencies differently, or whether there is also an individual-voter component.

In this appendix, I show that parties' contact strategies vary with individual tactical incentives, and not just with incentives at the constituency level. To do so, I estimate a model in which the outcome variable is the contact index for a given party and the independent variables include deciles of the tactical voting incentives, a variety of demographic characteristics described in the data section and, importantly, fixed effects by most preferred party, fixed effects by constituency, and the average tactical incentive for individuals who preferred the same party in the same constituency.³⁶ The inclusion of these fixed effects together with the average tactical incentive mean that the estimates of the coefficient for the deciles of the tactical voting incentives are within most-preferred party, within constituency, and controlling for that average incentive for voters in the same constituency and who prefer the same party. Should parties only vary their behavior at the constituency level without any individual-level component, then the coefficients for the deciles should be zero. However, Figure B1 shows this is not the case. In fact, there is clearly a difference between the coefficients of the tactical voting incentives when the incentive is positive relative to when it is negative. That is, within most preferred party and constituency, individual tactical voting incentives are still predictive of party contacts.

Figure B2 shows the same exercise but using contact indicators instead of contact indices, with qualitatively comparable results.

³⁶Ideally, one would include constituency-most-preferred-party fixed effects. However, this presents a severe estimation problem since the sample sizes are not sufficiently large to estimate such a model (it would require some 4,000 dummies). Therefore, the use of the average tactical incentive by constituency-most-preferred-party is intended to approach these.

Figure B1: Contact Index by Tau (after controls)

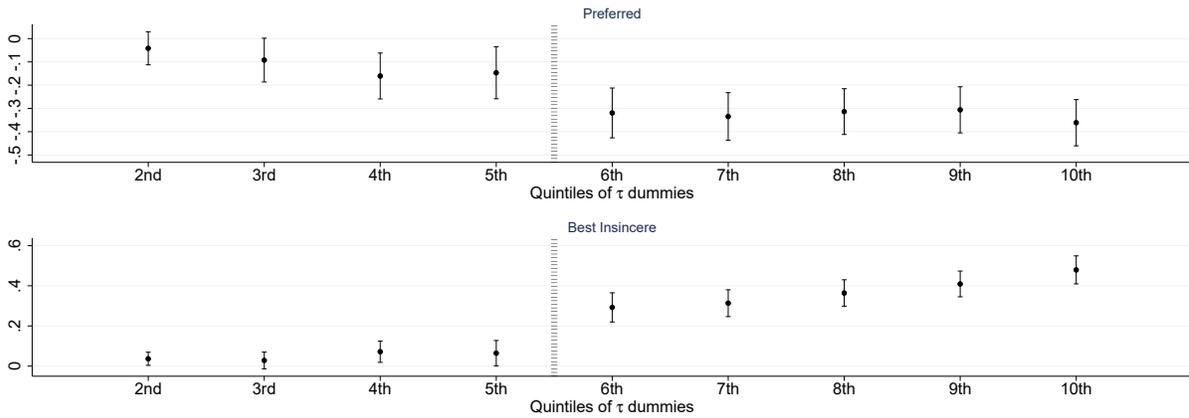
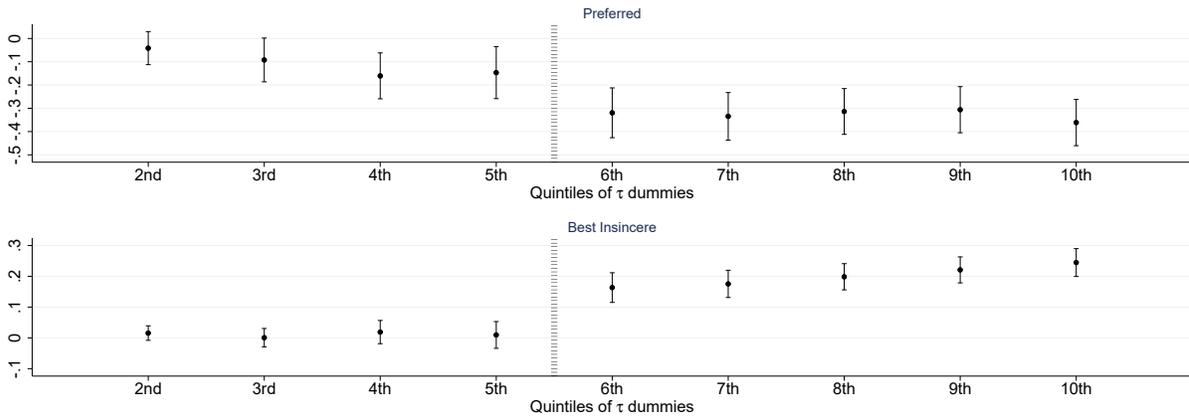


Figure B2: Contact Indicator by Tau (after controls)



Appendix C Additional Tables and Figures

Table C1 shows the main Average Partial Effects presented in Figure 3.

Table C2 shows the main Average Partial Effects presented in Figure 4.

Table C3 shows that Average Partial Effects presented in Figure 5.

Table C4 shows the partial counterfactuals presented in Figure 6.

Table C1: APEs of Contact Indices

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Abstain | Sincere | Tactical |
| Cont. Most Pref. | -0.025*** [-3.81] | 0.112*** [16.18] | -0.087*** [-11.89] |
| Cont. Best Ins. | -0.018*** [-4.29] | -0.065*** [-10.53] | 0.083*** [13.70] |
| Cont. Worst Ins. | -0.011* [-2.03] | -0.014* [-2.00] | 0.024*** [3.48] |

t statistics in brackets

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C2: APEs of Contact Indices, by Tactical Incentive

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| | Cont. Most Pref. | Cont. Best Ins. | Cont. Most Pref. | Cont. Best Ins. |
| | Abstain | | Tactical | |
| 6th | 0.003 [0.18] | -0.033* [-2.03] | -0.164*** [-7.10] | 0.118*** [5.25] |
| 7th | -0.039* [-1.97] | -0.022 [-1.94] | -0.102*** [-5.46] | 0.096*** [6.34] |
| 8th | -0.022 [-1.78] | -0.021* [-2.06] | -0.068*** [-4.33] | 0.082*** [6.71] |
| 9th | -0.041** [-3.00] | -0.006 [-0.86] | -0.073*** [-4.77] | 0.071*** [6.25] |
| 10th | -0.020 [-1.90] | -0.019** [-2.76] | -0.059*** [-5.18] | 0.071*** [7.51] |

t statistics in brackets

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table C3: APEs of Contact Indices by Most Preferred Party

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|------|------------------|----------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|----------|
| | Abstain | Sincere | Tactical | Abstain | Sincere | Tactical |
| | Cont. Most Pref. | | | Cont. Best Ins. | | |
| Con | -0.012 | 0.040 | -0.028 | -0.018 | -0.079** | 0.097*** |
| | [-0.67] | [1.34] | [-1.00] | [-0.94] | [-3.13] | [4.27] |
| Lab | -0.035* | 0.096*** | -0.061*** | -0.003 | -0.099*** | 0.102*** |
| | [-2.52] | [6.10] | [-4.08] | [-0.38] | [-4.63] | [5.51] |
| LD | -0.004 | 0.069*** | -0.065*** | -0.024* | -0.079*** | 0.102*** |
| | [-0.45] | [5.24] | [-5.03] | [-2.57] | [-5.54] | [8.08] |
| PC | -0.112* | 0.123** | -0.011 | 0.006 | -0.093 | 0.087 |
| | [-2.02] | [2.71] | [-0.23] | [0.36] | [-1.80] | [1.92] |
| UKIP | -0.056* | 0.156*** | -0.100*** | -0.006 | -0.043* | 0.050** |
| | [-2.10] | [6.39] | [-3.99] | [-0.51] | [-2.43] | [2.86] |
| Grn | -0.030* | 0.131*** | -0.102*** | -0.021** | -0.053*** | 0.074*** |
| | [-2.46] | [13.17] | [-7.57] | [-3.10] | [-5.73] | [7.96] |
| Bxt | -0.011 | 0.120*** | -0.109*** | -0.025 | -0.048** | 0.073*** |
| | [-0.37] | [6.98] | [-4.15] | [-1.37] | [-3.17] | [3.77] |

t statistics in brackets

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

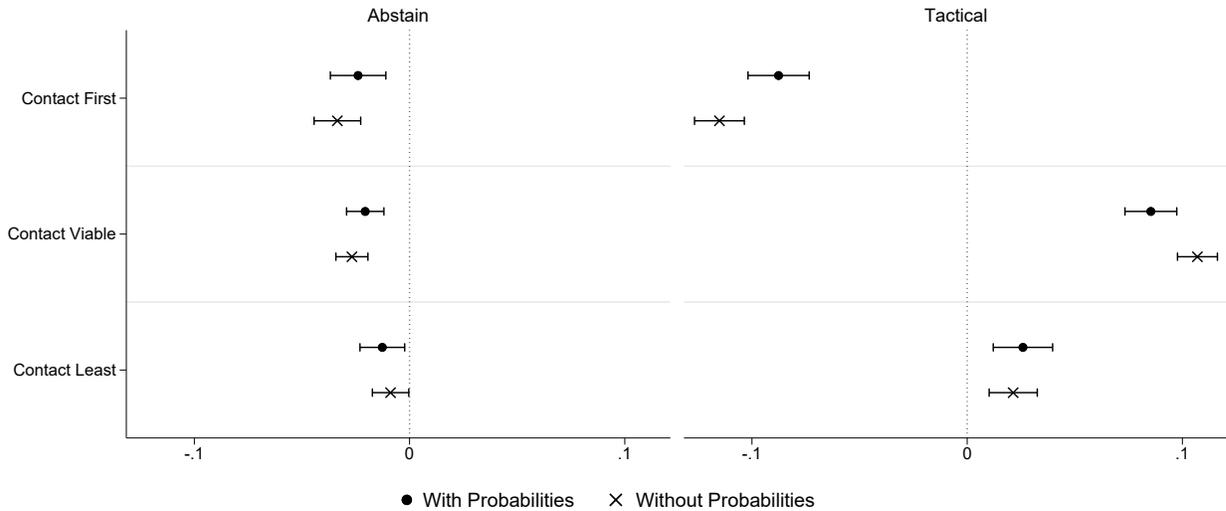
Table C4: No Contact Partial Counterfactuals

| | Difference | Std | Outcome | Counterfactual | 95% CI (low) | 95% CI (high) |
|----|------------|------|----------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1 | 0.50 | 0.31 | Abstain | (1) No Cont. Most Pref | 1.12 | -0.11 |
| 2 | -4.32 | 0.52 | Sincere | (1) No Cont. Most Pref | -3.31 | -5.34 |
| 3 | 3.82 | 0.53 | Tactical | (1) No Cont. Most Pref | 4.87 | 2.78 |
| 4 | 0.84 | 0.32 | Abstain | (2) No Cont. Best Ins. | 1.46 | 0.22 |
| 5 | 4.54 | 0.53 | Sincere | (2) No Cont. Best Ins. | 5.57 | 3.50 |
| 6 | -5.38 | 0.54 | Tactical | (2) No Cont. Best Ins. | -4.32 | -6.44 |
| 7 | 0.33 | 0.31 | Abstain | (3) No Cont. Worst Ins. | 0.94 | -0.28 |
| 8 | 0.71 | 0.52 | Sincere | (3) No Cont. Worst Ins. | 1.73 | -0.31 |
| 9 | -1.04 | 0.54 | Tactical | (3) No Cont. Worst Ins. | 0.01 | -2.09 |
| 10 | 2.12 | 0.33 | Abstain | (4)No Contacts At All | 2.77 | 1.47 |
| 11 | 0.63 | 0.53 | Sincere | (4)No Contacts At All | 1.67 | -0.41 |
| 12 | -2.75 | 0.55 | Tactical | (4)No Contacts At All | -1.68 | -3.82 |

Appendix D Overestimation

As argued in the introduction and the methods sections (and illustrated in Appendix B), parties do not contact voters at random. But, to what extent does ignoring this strategic behavior by parties lead to overestimation of the effect of party contacts?

Figure D1: Overestimation when not Controlling for Predicted Probabilities



Estimates presented here derive from two versions of the model in equation 3. The only difference is the inclusion or exclusion of the predicted probabilities; all other variables are the same and included in both models. All confidence intervals are at the 95% level. Standard errors are clustered at the constituency level.

Figure D1 shows estimates from two versions of the model in equation 3. The first is the main model that includes the predicted probabilities of contact and was already presented in Figure 3. The second uses the same model as in equation 3, but does not include the predicted probabilities of contact as control variables (all other control variables are the same). Comparison of the estimates of average partial effects from both models show that there is very little overestimation in terms the impact of party contacts on the probability of abstention. However, there is some substantial overestimation of the impact of contact by the most preferred and best insincere parties on the probability that voters cast tactical vote. For example, the impact of contact by the most preferred party on tactical voting is overestimated by 40% when contact probabilities are not controlled for; whereas the impact of contact by the best insincere party on tactical

voting is overestimated by 25%.³⁷

³⁷Interestingly, Núñez (2021) finds much larger overestimation when studying vote choice in general, rather than just focusing on voters who would benefit from a tactical vote.