

***Split-ticket voting at the combined General and Local Elections in 2015***

Colin Rallings, Michael Thrasher, Galina Borisjuk and Michael Turner

The Elections Centre,

University of Plymouth, UK

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## Introduction

The 2015 general election is the fifth successive occasion that the parliamentary vote coincided with local elections across England. It was only the second time, however, when the general election occurred at the peak of the local electoral cycle which saw voters in 279 local authorities re-electing their councils. The first such occasion, in May 1979, also brought success for the Conservative party in what is undeniably the party's traditional heartland. This is an important feature of both the 1979 and 2015 elections that arguably went largely unnoticed in the run-up to these joint elections. In a majority of local councils conducting elections in these years voters select councillors in multimember wards. This means that rather than placing a single cross against one candidate's name each elector can vote multiple times, dependent upon the number of vacant seats at stake. In 2015, the maximum number was three vacancies. In such cases, participants would have four choices to make – a single choice for the parliamentary election and up to three candidates standing in the local election. There were real opportunities, therefore, for some voters to divide these choices across different types of candidate and different parties. In short, the conditions were ripe for split-ticket voting, an important characteristic of the election which undoubtedly contributed to voters' behavior and hence the outcome.

The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine the scale and direction of split-ticket voting in 2015 employing two types of data. The first stage of the analysis uses aggregate election results from both the general and local elections to identify the relationship between each party's performance at the two types of election. This clearly identifies those parties that do better at one type of election than another. The second part addresses the survey data obtained from the British Election Study where respondents to the post-election wave were asked how they had voted in both the parliamentary and council elections. Where practical, the data for 2015 are compared to that obtained from previous synchronous elections in order to assess whether this type of behaviour appears to be increasing among voters, whether its apparent causes are similar or different than previously and the implications of this for future combined elections in the UK. Before addressing the data, however, it is worth re-capping some of the existing research findings on this subject.

## Identifying and Understanding Split-ticket voting

In Britain it has only been in relatively recent years that the practice of either holding different elections on the same day or offering voters more than one vote at the same election has become commonplace. Other types of election have also been combined. Following devolution to Scotland and Wales in 1998, there have been instances of coincident local *and* two-vote Parliament/Assembly elections; in London, mayoral and Assembly elections in 2000, 2004 and 2008 have given electors four simultaneous choices; across England, local and European Parliament elections were held on the same day in both 2004 and 2009.

As a consequence, whereas in 1998 we were able to claim that ‘in Britain, split-ticket voting has been largely ignored’ (Rallings and Thrasher 1998), there has been a burgeoning of literature focusing on how UK voters behave in such circumstances. This has been particularly the case for horizontal ticket splitting –that is, where electors are offered more than one vote for the same level of government (Moser and Scheiner 2009; Burden and Helmke 2009). For example, Carman and Johns (2010) estimate 27% of voters in the Scottish Parliament elections in 2007 divided their two votes between different parties, and Margetts and Dunleavy (2005) report that more than 40% of London voters split their ticket at the 2004 Assembly contests. Similarly Rallings, Thrasher and Borisyuk (2009) explore how voters used their ballots when voting in multi-member, simple plurality local elections. They conclude not simply that split ticket voting took place, but that a proportion of voters did not use all the votes at their disposal.

Vertical ticket splitting –that is, where elections are held to fill different levels of government – also appears to be quite common. Game (1981) showed how thousands of electors in four politically competitive towns split their parliamentary and local votes between different parties. Analysis of aggregate data in 1997 suggested that a minimum of 11% voted for different parties at the local and general elections, with survey data showing that some 21% of respondents who were validated as having voted claimed to have done so (Rallings and Thrasher 2001). At the coincident European and local elections in 2004 the level of ticket splitting was 25% according to aggregate figures, rising to 38% when ecological inference of vote transitions was applied (Rallings and Thrasher 2005). In both cases these findings supported the contention that using survey data or scrutinising actual ballot papers reveals the true level of ticket splitting to be higher than would be obtained simply from analysis of aggregate data (Park, Hanmer and Biggers 2014; Cho and Gaines 2004; Johnston and Pattie 2003; Gschwend, Johnston and Pattie 2003; Gitelson and Richard 1983). All this has taken place against the background of a continuing decline in party identification and support for the two established parties.

Theories to account for this behaviour have focused either on individual voters or on the activities of candidates and parties. Individuals, for example, are seen to be prone to ticket splitting as a result of factors such as weak partisanship, the desire to moderate policy outputs, and the use of different decision rules to determine their preferred party at different types of election (Davis 2015; Mulligan 2011; Ames, Baker and Renno 2009; Petrocik and Doherty 1996; Jacobson 1990; Fiorina 1988). In multi-party systems an additional motivation might be provided by a voter’s desire to ensure the defeat of their least preferred party at one of the sets of elections (Evans et al 1998). Conversely, other research into split ticket voting has claimed it to be a reaction to the activities of and messages received from candidates and parties, which have the effect of persuading targeted voters away from a straight party choice (Beck et al 1992, Petrocik 1991, Wattenberg 1991).

It would be surprising if the 'onward march of dealignment' (Crewe and Thomson 1999) was not reflected in how electors reacted to the opportunity to cast multiple votes at a single point in time. At the 1979, 1997 and 2010 elections nine in 10 of those who claimed to be 'very strong' partisans report giving both their available votes to their chosen party, and all supported that party on at least one occasion (Rallings and Thrasher 2011). The number of 'not very strong' partisans who split their vote was considerably higher -ranging from 35% of Conservative identifiers to 60% of Liberals in 1979, and from 25% of Labour identifiers to more than 4 in 10 of Liberal Democrats in 1997. Here too it was less in 2010, varying from 18% of Conservative and Lib Dem identifiers to 27% of Labour ones. It is, of course, possible that the direction of causation runs the other way in that the act of ticket splitting might itself have prompted the reporting of a weaker party identification. Partisanship is not the only measure of distance between an elector and their preferred political party. It may be hypothesised that party loyalists will be those closest to their party's policies and most impressed by its performance, and that splitters will be found among those less clear in their assessments (Burden and Kimball 1998).

The hypothesis that ticket splitting is likely to be more common among particular social groups has been a staple feature of the literature (Campbell and Miller 1957; DeVries and Tarrance 1972). Our data on the socio-demographic character of the various 'splitter' groups for the 1979, 1997 and 2010 elections prove much more difficult to interpret than those for partisanship and political attitudes (Rallings and Thrasher 2011). Labour and Conservative loyalists are, as expected, towards the opposite poles of the housing, occupation, and self-assigned class spectrums -with the Liberal Democrats in between, but there appears no status pattern to the splitters. Work on ticket splitting in the United States supports the contention that socio-demographic characteristics play only a minor role in explaining the behaviour pattern of individuals (McAllister and Darcy 1992).

It is also relevant to consider split-ticket voters are more likely to be found among who use their vote instrumentally rather than as a simple expression of party loyalty (Brunel and Grofman 2009; Gschwend 2007; Moser and Scheiner 2005; Soss and Canon 1995). It is difficult precisely to capture 'tactical' voters, but questions asked in all BES surveys do help identify them. In 1979 discussions of tactical voting tended to focus on the potential for the Liberals to receive more votes if only it looked as if the party might win more seats. A vote for the Liberals in a constituency in which the party had no chance of winning was characterised by opponents as 'wasted'. Unsurprisingly, whereas only one in four of both Conservative and Labour loyalists said they would have been 'very likely' to vote Liberal if they thought the party 'would win more seats in Britain as a whole', well over half of those who confined their support of the Liberals to the local election expressed such a sentiment (Rallings and Thrasher 2011). In 1997 respondents were asked more directly whether they considered that they had voted tactically, and only a small minority were prepared to admit that they had. Nevertheless, more than a quarter of Conservative/Liberal Democrat voters and more than a third of those who supported the Liberal Democrats at the general election and Labour at the locals did indeed make such a claim. This suggests that strategic considerations might have played a part in these electors' decision to split their votes. In 2010 voters were asked why they had chosen their general election party. Fewer than 10% overall, but more than a quarter of splitters said either they

preferred another party which they believed stood no chance of winning or explicitly admitted that they had voted 'tactically'.

Scholars such as Alvarez and Nagler (2000), Johnston and Pattie (1991, 1999), and Karp *et al* (2002) have focused on the importance of the closeness of the race and/or the intensity of campaigning in individual constituencies in providing cues to electors about how to avoid 'wasting' their vote in single member or mixed electoral systems. Here, however, we are dealing with the rather different case of ticket splitting between two elections held on the same day, with votes being cast for two sets of candidates standing in different electoral units for different tiers of government. As a result, some of those who did split their vote will have done so simply because their preferred party did not appear on both the general and local election ballot papers. Others will have voted for a non-party candidate at the local election, perhaps someone known to them personally. It is also likely that some voters use different criteria for choosing their preferred party/candidate at local and general elections (Miller 1988).

### **Aggregate data: Comparing parliamentary and local election results**

The general pattern at synchronous elections is that the Conservative and Labour parties record a higher level of support at the general election while the vote for smaller parties, and especially that for the Liberal Democrats rises when the local votes are considered. However, at the 2010 general election, support for the Liberal Democrats at both types of election grew closer together. In 1997 their local election share was six percentage points higher in all constituencies for which we have data and almost 10% higher in those seats where all three parties fielded a full local election slate. In 2001 the Liberal Democrats polled seven points better at the local elections in those constituencies with three-party competition in all wards lying within the parliamentary seat. In stark contrast to this earlier picture the gap in Liberal Democrat support in 2010 in seats with full party contestation at local level varied from 3.1 percentage points in the metropolitan boroughs to 1.3 in London.

Aggregate ward-level data from the local elections in both 2010 and 2015 are re-calculated to the constituency level. Because the local electoral cycle is four-yearly there is only partial congruence with the parliamentary cycle. For example, London borough elections coincided with the 2010 general election but did not do so five years later. The metropolitan boroughs have council elections for a third of their seats for any given election and for these areas 2010 and 2015 are broadly similar in terms of the number of constituencies available for analysis because changes to ward boundaries were minimal. The data for the unitary and district council areas is more variable because there were boundary changes in some of these authorities but the comparisons between voting at the two types of election are fairly robust. Constituencies are only included when a particular party contests at least one ward vacancy within the parliamentary area and its stands a candidate at the general election. Because there are some constituencies where a party does considerably better at one type

of election than in another (for example, in some local authorities there is a very strong Independent presence that attracts support from normally partisan voters) we show median values for each party's general election vote as a percentage of its local vote.

Table 1 reveals that the trend identified from the 1997 election onwards for the two main parties continues, each receiving more general election than local votes, but there is now a reversal in the pattern of support for the Liberal Democrats. Across 73 parliamentary constituencies located in the unitary/district council areas the Conservative general election vote is 114 per cent of its local vote and 111% in the urban areas covered by the metropolitan borough councils. This is about a six percentage point rise on the 2010 result, suggesting that a greater slice of the Conservative local vote is now being dispersed among other candidates. The position for Labour is almost unchanged since 2010 but it remains true that it receives greater support for the parliamentary than at the local election.

**Table 1: Party general election vote as percentage of its local election support, 2010-2015**

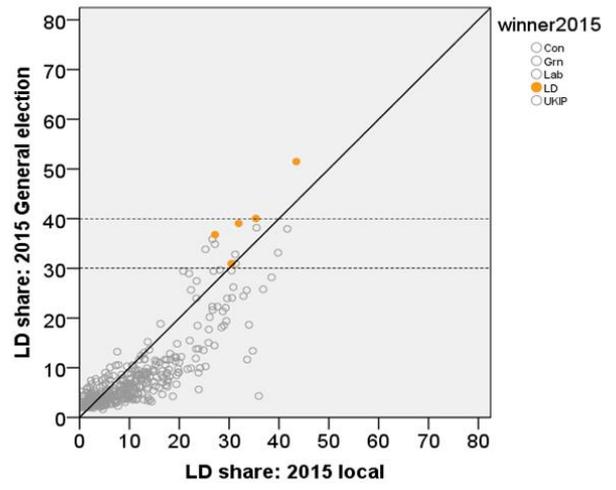
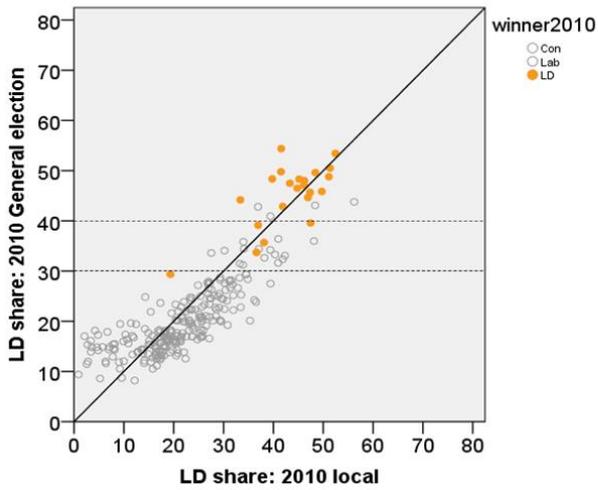
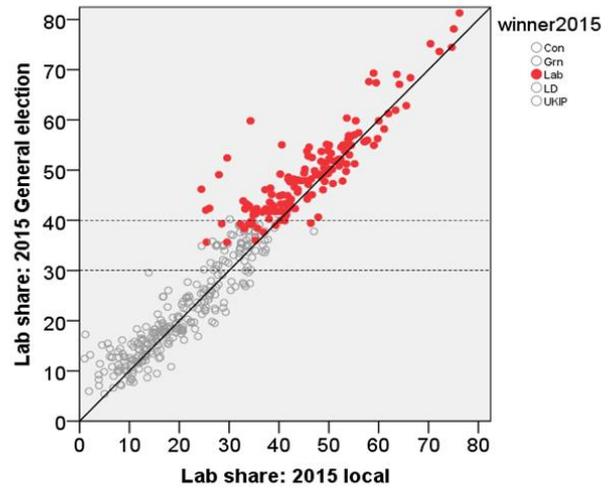
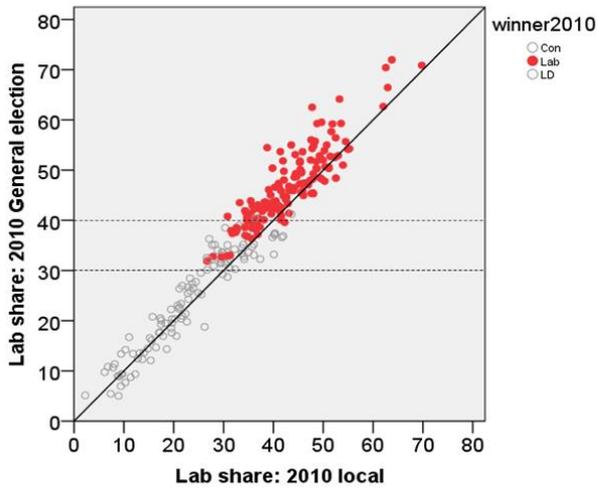
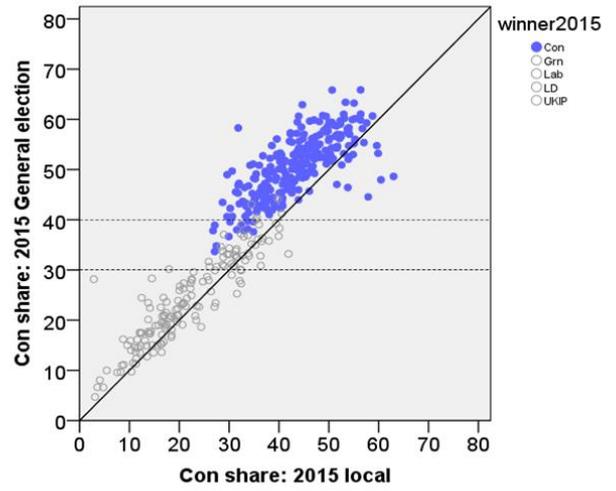
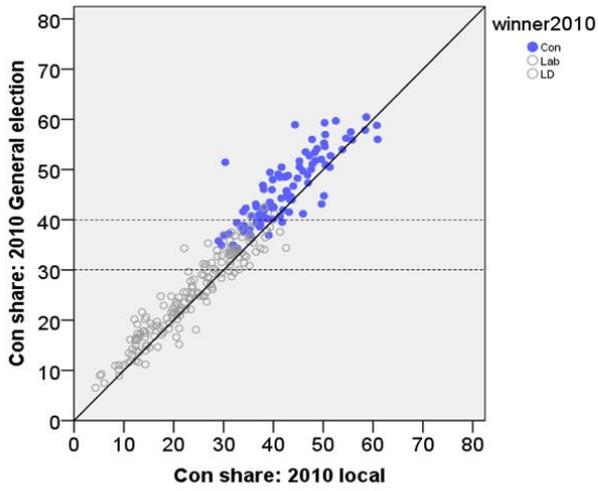
Type		Con	Lab	LD	Green	UKIP
Metropolitan boroughs	Constituencies 2015 (N=)	117	118	107	105	117
	Median %	111.2	104.5	79.6	60.4	101.4
	Constituencies 2010 (N=)	118	118	116	40	51
	Median %	106.4	106.0	91.3	43.3	195.8
District/Unitary	Constituencies 2015 (N=)	73	73	69	62	72
	Median %	113.8	104.0	75.3	61.6	101.2
	Constituencies 2010 (N=)	78	77	77	39	40
	Median %	106.7	102.9	87.6	47.6	129.5
London boroughs	Constituencies 2010 (N=)	72	72	72	69	37
	Median %	107.8	113.1	92.7	23.5	179.7

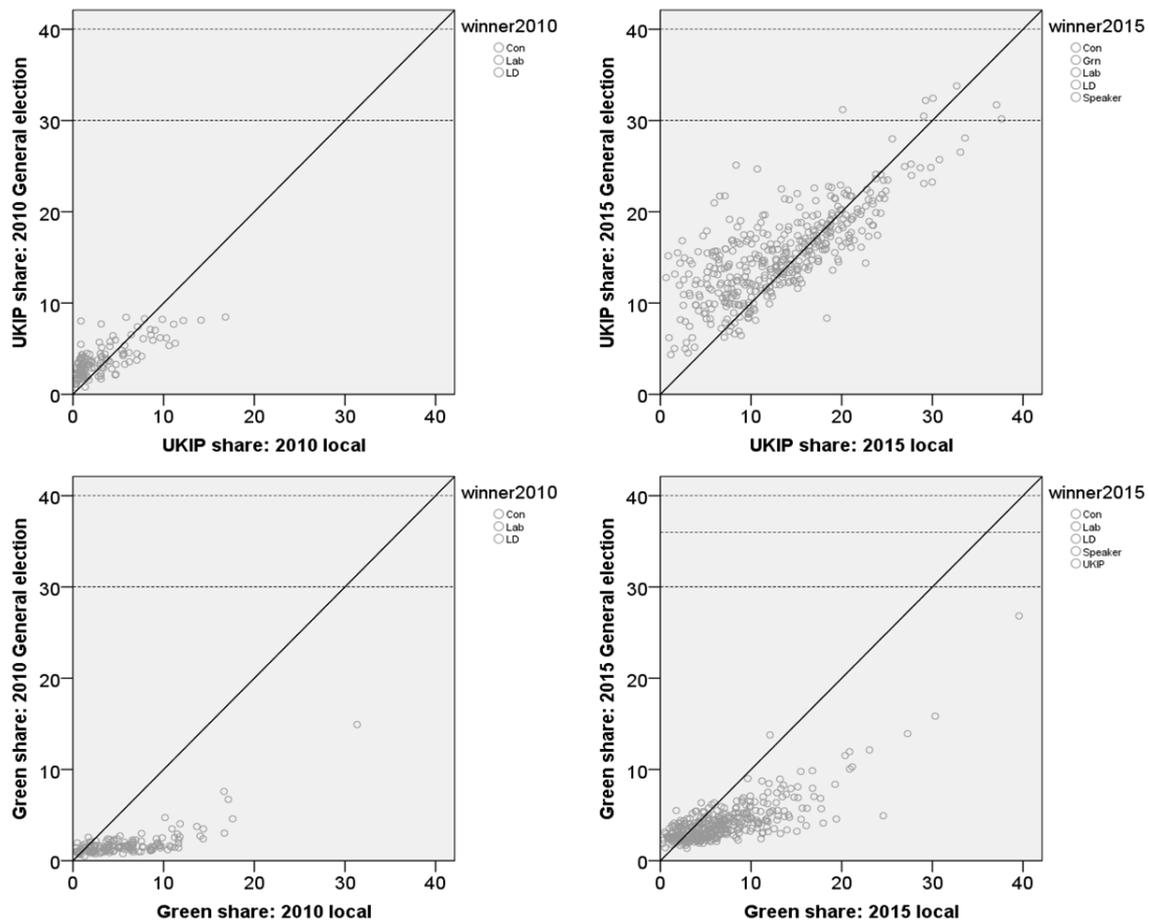
Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats revert to a position that is not quite what it was in 1997 when its general election vote was only about 65% of its considerable local election support (Rallings and Thrasher 2011). That said, the party received just 75% of its local vote in 69 constituencies outside of the main urban areas and only slightly better than that figure in the metropolitan areas. Of course, it goes without saying that this relative position should be set against the party's overall decline. In 2015 Liberal Democrat candidates contested just 46% of the vacant seats compared with the 59% of seats contested at the equivalent local elections in 2011. At the same time the party's share of the overall vote slipped from 16% to just 10%. This is not as dramatic as the collapse in its general election vote share and explains the figures in Table 1.

It is the changing pattern of local party competition that probably lies behind the figures for both Ukip and the Green party. Both parties contested far more seats, at both types of election, in 2015 than in 2010. Although we must be careful about over-interpreting the numbers (Ukip stood only 609 candidates and the Greens 1,620 candidates for 4,223 seats in 2010; the equivalent figures in 2015 are Ukip 4,094 and Greens 3,536 in 9,340 seats) there are distinct differences between them in

terms of their general/local electoral support. In Ukip's case its general election vote in 2010 is considerably larger than its local vote but there is more equality between the two in 2015, although the overall support for its candidates increased considerably in the meantime. A different picture emerges for the Green where the aggregate data at least suggest that the party receives support for its local election candidates that it does not carry forward into the parliamentary elections.

Because of various changes taking place between the 2010 and 2015 general elections, in the number of candidates standing for each party as well as the support they received, only some fragment of the general picture is captured from an examination of the relationship between general and local election votes. A more dynamic representation of the scale and direction of support may be captured by plotting each party's general election share against its local electoral vote share in both 2010 and 2015 (Figure 1).





**Figure 1: Comparison of party vote share at general and local elections, 2010-2015**

## Survey data

Initial examination of BES data supports the evidence of the aggregate data that ticket splitting is more prevalent in 2015 than at preceding simultaneous elections. When voters who responded as supporters of 'other party' at the general election and also 'other party' for the local election are counted as split-ticket voters then it appears that 26% split their votes in 2015 compared with 20.4% who did so in 2010. If a more rigorous count is made and supporters of 'others' are removed from the calculation then it appears that 25.2% of 2015 voters should be classified as split-ticket, seven percentage points higher than at the preceding election.

The survey data suggest that 21.2% of Conservative general election voters switched to another party with their local election choice. The equivalent figure for Labour is 18.4% but it rises sharply to 37.1% for Liberal Democrats. This figure is close to that among Ukip supporters (41.9% of general

election voters switched their local allegiance) and Greens (42.2%). By any account, this is a very large proportion of English voters who appeared to act in this way and it is difficult to see how this did not impact upon the electoral outcome (and possibly upon the accuracy of pre-election polling).

Table 2 shows the proportion of each party's local and/or general election supporters who reported voting for the same party at both contests. The most striking change again concerns Liberal Democrat voters. In 1979 only 43% of them stayed loyal to the then Liberal party; in 2010, two-thirds stuck with that choice but the 2015 figure is down to just 40%. The long-term trend also suggests a greater degree of split-ticket voting among both Conservative and Labour voters, consistent with findings regarding the decline in partisanship generally.

**Table 2: Proportion of party 'loyalists'**

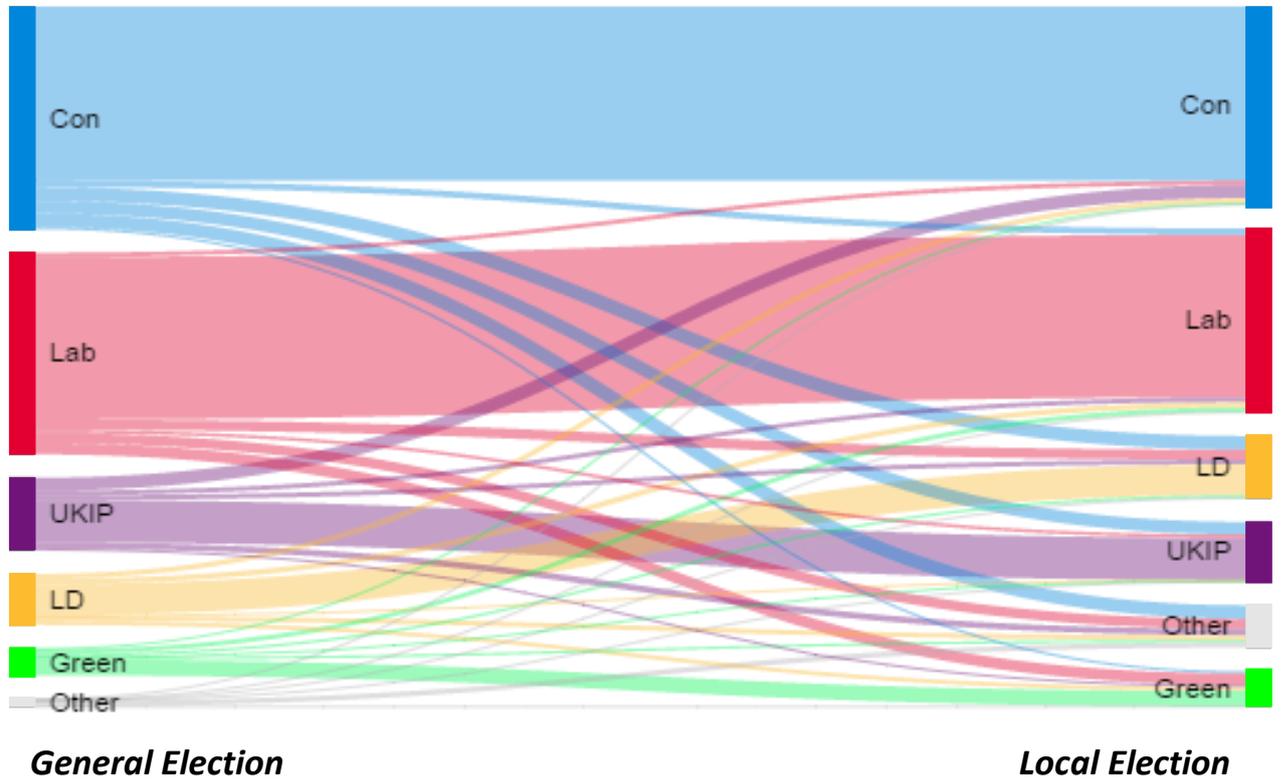
	2015	2010	1997	1979
Conservative	72	78	76	83
Labour	74	78	75	82
Lib (Dem)	40	65	53	43

Source: British Election Studies

**Table 3: How voters divided choices in the 2015 and 2010 general elections**

2015		Local vote						
		Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Green	Other	
g.e.	Con	78.9	3.1	6.3	5.4	1.1	5.3	100
	Lab	2.0	81.5	5.1	1.6	4.8	4.9	100
	LD	9.0	10.1	62.8	2.0	7.4	8.6	100
	UKIP	18.0	6.1	6.7	57.7	2.8	8.3	100
	Green	4.3	15.5	11.6	1.7	57.8	9.1	100
	Other	9.4	8.2	8.8	4.4	8.2	61.0	100
Total		33.8	32.7	11.7	9.3	5.7	6.7	100
2010		Local vote						
		Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Green	Other	
g.e.	Con	83.8	1.7	7.9	1.4	2.4	2.8	100
	Lab	2.8	84.7	4.8		0.8	6.8	100
	LD	6.7	6.7	77.5		2.2	6.7	100
	UKIP	23.1	15.4		38.5		23.1	100
	Green		66.7			33.3		100
	Other		50.0				50.0	100
Total		35.4	31.0	23.0	1.3	1.9	7.5	100





*Figure 2: Scale and direction of general election vote flow to local vote*

This is further confirmed if we examine the distribution of the reported vote of those who cast a ballot for one of the major parties at both elections. According to BES data the proportion of voters casting a ballot for either Labour or the Conservatives at the general election and then the Liberal Democrats at the locals (by far the most common form of ticket splitting) halves from 9.6% in 1997 to 4.8% of the total in 2010 –see Table 4. Figures taken from a YouGov internet survey suggest a higher level of vote swapping, but its overall extent is still lower. Nor does behaviour appear to vary by type of local authority. The pattern remains similar when the data is examined separately for London, the metropolitan boroughs, and the less urban district councils.

**Table 4: Categories of split-ticket voting amongst three-party voters 1979-2015**

	1979	1997	2010	2015
Conservative general vote/Conservative local vote	42.5	32.3	36.7	40.9
Conservative general vote/Labour local vote	2.5	0.8	0.8	1.6
Conservative general vote/Liberal (Democrat) local vote	5.0	4.4	3.5	3.3
Labour general vote/Conservative local vote	1.6	2.7	1.1	1
Labour general vote/Labour local vote	30.8	34	31.8	39.8
Labour general vote/Liberal (Democrat) local vote	4.4	5.2	1.8	2.5
Liberal (Democrat) general vote/Conservative local vote	1.6	2.5	1.8	1.2
Liberal (Democrat) general vote/Labour local vote	1.6	2.0	1.8	1.3
Liberal (Democrat) general vote/Liberal (Democrat) local vote	10.1	16.1	20.8	8.4
Total 'splitters'	16.7	17.7	10.7	10.9

**Table 5: Categories of split-ticket voting amongst four-party voters 2010-2015**

Type of voter	2010	2015
	%	%
Conservative general vote/Conservative local vote	35.9	34.9
Conservative general vote/Labour local vote	0.7	1.4
Conservative general vote/Liberal (Democrat) local vote	3.4	2.8
Conservative general vote./UKIP local vote	0.6	2.4
Labour general vote/Conservative local vote	1.0	0.9
Labour general vote/Labour local vote	31.2	34.0
Labour general vote/Liberal (Democrat) local vote	1.8	2.1
Labour general vote/UKIP local vote	-	0.7
Liberal (Democrat) general vote/Conservative local vote	1.8	1.0
Liberal (Democrat) general vote/Labour local vote	1.8	1.1
Liberal (Democrat) general vote/Liberal (Democrat) local vote	20.4	7.1
Liberal (Democrat) general vote/UKIP local vote	-	0.2
UKIP general vote/ Conservative local vote	0.4	2.3
UKIP general vote. Labour local vote	0.3	0.8
UKIP general vote./Liberal (Democrat) local vote	-	0.9
UKIP general vote./UKIP local vote	0.7	7.4
<b>Total 'splitters'</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>16.6</b>

What about the demographic characteristics of voters – were some types of people more or less likely to divide their support across parties?

**Table 6: Characteristics of straight-ticket and party loyalists at 2015 general election**

		split-ticket voter	party loyalist	N=
Sex	female	24.2	75.8	6,168
	male	27.3	72.7	5,856
Age	under 35 years	22.7	77.3	3,547
	36-55 years	25.3	74.7	3,942
	56 years and over	28.4	71.6	4,536
Ethnic origin	white British	26.3	73.7	11,053
	other white	24.1	75.9	259
	minority ethnic	15.6	84.4	593
Education	no formal qualification	18.3	81.7	867
	lower level qualification	24.1	75.9	3,594
	A-level equivalent	25.8	74.2	2,126
	higher level qualification	28.2	71.8	5,097
Housing	own outright/mortgage/shared	27.2	72.8	7,776
	private rent	23.9	76.1	1,563
	social rent	17.0	83.0	659
	other	25.9	74.1	1,354
Marital status	married	26.4	73.6	7,684
	divorced	23.3	76.7	896
	widowed	26.1	73.9	391
	never married	24.6	75.4	2,963
	civil partners	24.4	75.6	91
Employment	work full time	24.7	75.3	5,050
	work part-time	28.0	72.0	1,733
	unemployed	25.4	74.6	335
	student	24.6	75.4	681
	retired	27.9	72.1	2,807
	other	22.6	77.4	1,419
Occupation	higher managerial/professional	24.9	75.1	657
	other	26.3	73.7	8,818
Personal income	personal <15 K	25.9	74.1	3,829
	15-25 K	23.9	76.1	2,552
	over 25 K	26.6	73.4	3,174
Family income	family <25 K	25.2	74.8	3,865
	25-50 K	25.4	74.6	3,615
	over 50 K	28.4	71.6	1,698

Source: British Election Study 2015

**Table 7: Differences among split-ticket and party loyalists in strength of party identification and interest in general election**

**Strength of party identification**

	<b>split-ticket voter</b>	<b>party loyalist</b>
Does not identify with party	37.4	62.6
Not very strongly identifies with party	36.9	63.1
Very/fairly strongly identifies with party	21.3	78.7
<b>Total</b>	25.7	74.3

**Interest in General Election**

	<b>split-ticket voter</b>	<b>party loyalist</b>
Not at all interested	22.5	77.5
Not very interested	23.2	76.8
Somewhat interested	25.4	74.6
Very interested	26.5	73.5
<b>Total</b>	25.9	74.1

**Attention to Politics**

	<b>split-ticket voter</b>	<b>party loyalist</b>
Pay no attention	21.0	79.0
1	19.8	80.2
2	19.4	80.6
3	26.2	73.8
4	27.1	72.9
5	23.8	76.2
6	24.0	76.0
7	27.8	72.2
8	25.7	74.3
9	27.3	72.7
Pay a great deal of attention	25.7	74.3
<b>Total</b>	25.8	74.2

**Multivariate analysis**

Our descriptive review of some of the possible correlates of ticket splitting has raised a number of interesting points. Splitters are more likely to be drawn from the ranks of the partisan detached and also from those who are less supportive of the policies and performance of any one party. However, it is also the case that most divide their votes between parties that they consider to be ideologically close. There were also indications that a proportion of ticket splitting was in response to the context

in which votes were being cast. Respondents who split their vote were more likely to say that they had voted tactically, and it appears that the behaviour of some splitters might have been influenced by the electoral dynamics in their local ward or constituency. There was very little sign of any significant socio-demographic distinction between splitters and loyalists. We now turn to see how these various factors interact with each other and whether they form the basis for modelling the differences between electors who stay loyal to one party and those who decide to split their vote.

We begin by conducting a logistic regression that uses a selection of the indicators included in our earlier bi-variate descriptions to predict the probability of ticket splitting among all electors in our samples—see Table 5. The results demonstrate the presence of theoretically expected relationships between the strength of party identification (negative) and seriously considering voting for another party (positive) and ticket splitting. Voters' attributes appear less important than their attitudes. The 2010 YouGov survey shows the same variables to be the most powerful and with the same signs.

**Table 8: Logistic Regressions for split ticket vs. 'loyalist' voters**

	1979 B (SE)	1997 B (SE)	2010 B (SE)	2015 B (SE)
STRENGTH	-1.12 (0.365)**	-0.86 (0.235)**	-0.86 (0.346)**	-1.08 (0.08)**
CONFEEL	-0.06 (0.099)	-0.26 (0.509)	0.16 (0.064)**	-0.04 (0.01)**
LABFEEL	0.14 (0.089)	0.71 (0.578)	0.17 (0.066)**	-0.04 (0.01)**
LIBFEEL	-0.12 (0.083)	1.00 (0.612)	0.13 (0.081)	0.10 (0.01)**
OTHERP	0.67 (0.383)*	1.05 (0.239)**	n/a	0.07 (0.01)**†
DEGREE	0.32 (0.767)	0.39 (0.316)	0.14 (0.306)	0.20 (0.06)**
AGE	0.00 (0.012)	0.01 (0.008)	0.01 (0.008)	0.01 (0.002)**
INCOME	0.08 (0.064)	0.28 (0.095)**	0.03 (0.035)	0.02 (0.01)*
TACTICAL	0.23 (0.408)	0.58 (0.325)	1.79 (0.521)**	0.96 (0.09)**
Constant	-1.72 (1.29)	-3.82 (.911)**	-5.1 (.963)**	-1.12 (0.16)**
% correct	56.0	82.9	91.1	74.5
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.153	0.178	0.092	0.10
N=	266	643	757	8,602

\*\* - significant at 0.01; \* - significant at 0.05

† the variable used in this regression is UKIPfeel.

Source: British Election Studies

However, while these findings are interesting, we would argue that the mere activity of splitting the ballot is not the defining key in the context of the British electoral and party system. Of far greater moment in trying to determine the reasons for such behaviour is an explicit comparison of the characteristics of those who were loyal to a particular political party with those who only voted for it once.

**Table 9: Regressions for straight ticket Conservative and Labour voters vs. voters who split their ticket to either Liberal Democrat or UKIP at the 2015 synchronous elections**

	Con/Con vs. Con GE/LD local	Con/Con vs. Con/UKIP	Lab/Lab vs. Lab/LD	Lab/Lab vs. Lab/UKIP
Strength	0.93 (0.26)**	1.08 (0.33)**	-0.40 (0.36)	1.16 (0.54)*
CONfeel	0.25 (0.05)**	0.21 (0.07)**	0.06 (0.04)	0.13 (0.08)
LABfeel	0.10 (0.04)**	0.04 (0.04)	0.34 (0.05)**	0.26 (0.09)**
LDfeel	-0.33 (0.04)**	0.04 (0.04)	-0.42 (0.04)**	0.09 (0.07)
UKIPfeel	0.06 (0.03)*	-0.57 (0.05)**	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.49 (0.06)**
Degree	-0.18 (0.17)	0.25 (0.20)	-0.20 (0.19)	-0.34 (0.37)
Age	-0.02 (0.01)**	-0.02 (0.01)*	-0.02 (0.01)**	-0.03 (0.01)*
Income	0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.03)*	-0.12 (0.05)*
Tactical	-0.79 (0.28)**	-0.88 (0.29)**	0.01 (0.31)	0.36 (0.51)
LDwinner2010ge(1)	-1.72 (0.24)**	0.88 (0.48)	-2.28 (0.27)**	0.50 (0.80)
LDsecond2010ge	-0.68 (0.17)**	0.45 (0.19)*	-1.01 (0.20)**	0.55 (0.35)
Constant	2.50 (0.59)**	3.92 (0.76)**	4.25 (0.63)**	4.32 (0.97)**
** - significant at 0.01; * - significant at 0.05				
% correct	92.7 (8.2 / 99.6)	93.6 (10.7 / 99.2)	94.0 (8.1 / 99.5)	97.9 (1.5 / 99.9)
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.21	0.34	0.27	0.30
N	2,744	2,706	2,696	2,585

## Summary and Conclusions

The prime aim of this paper has been to shed some new light on split ticket voting in England. The first point to note is that the incidence of ticket splitting in 2010 appears to be rather less than that established in previous combined general/local elections. In good part this is because there is a much closer overall correlation between Liberal Democrat support at the two types of election than hitherto. This is in line with the trend of an increase in the party's national vote across England (up from 18% in 1997 to 24% in 2010) compared with a much flatter trajectory for its local vote (from an average national equivalent of 23% at the 1995/1996 local elections to one of 24.5% for the 2008 and 2009 contests). It is the increase in support for the smaller parties of both right and left – themselves often the repository of the so-called 'protest' vote – that now seems to have the greatest overall influence on the degree of ticket splitting. Allied to this is the contrast in the relative stability of the Liberal Democrat vote even in seats fought as two-party, Conservative and Labour, marginal constituencies. In 1997 the Lib Dems lost more than a third of their local support in these cases; in 2010 they retained nearly 90% of it – and that from a higher base too.

The individual level analyses tend to suggest that both individual voter attitudes and the activities of parties and politicians are important in helping to stimulate ticket splitting. They showed that ticket splitters were less strongly partisan and likely to feel less positively about either of their chosen parties than party 'loyalists'. Nonetheless, it did not appear that their votes were cast randomly.

Most splitting took place between what can be seen as ideologically adjacent parties, and there were considerable differences in attitude and character between Conservative/Liberal (Democrat) and Labour/Liberal (Democrat) splitters. Perhaps most interesting of all was the significant role that contextual variables seemed to play in prompting ticket splitting, even having controlled for other influences. Living in a Liberal (Democrat) local ward did seem an important impetus in encouraging Conservative and Labour general election supporters to 'desert' their party. The Liberal (Democrats) have a reputation for campaigning hard in selected local areas (Denver and Hands 1997), and party incumbency or subsequent success may be seen as a surrogate for those more traditional measures of campaign spending and visibility associated with congressional and state office ticket splitting in the United States (Jacobson 1997, Beck et al 1992). Whether voters respond either to local issues and/or to local level campaigning, such behaviour is indicative of different decision processes being at work when partisan choice for the two types of election is assessed. These findings help to challenge some of the wider orthodoxies about British voters and parties. Sub-national elections, for example, may become less occasions for a referendum on the record of the government as an opportunity for electors to choose and judge parties according to their promises and performance at that tier.

For their part, it seems that political parties need increasingly to realise that targeted, localised campaigning is important at all levels. The national campaign sets the scene, but only activity on the ground can maximise effective votes in the ballot box. This can work to a party's advantage or disadvantage at both general and local elections. For example, it is widely accepted that Labour managed to limit its seat losses in 2010 through effective campaigning and policy emphases in certain types of constituency (see Curtice et al, 2010). The detailed figures for constituencies such as Brent Central, Rochdale, Tooting and others are evidence of electors responding to the way the general election campaign was waged locally and wanting to have a direct say in who is elected as their MP even where this contradicts their local election choice. Indications of that can be found here in the significance of 'tactical' voting in prompting local Liberal Democrats to support Labour at the general election. On the other hand, in places like Newcastle and Watford many appear to have drawn a distinction between supporting the Liberal Democrat-controlled council and its local representative in their ward and voting for that party's general election candidate.

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## Appendix. Independent variables in the regression equations

STRENGTH 1 = Very or fairly strongly identifies with a party; 0.5 = not very strongly identifies with a party; 0 = does not identify with a party

CONFEEL **1979** - mark out of 10 for party; **1997** - 1 = strongly in favour of named party;

LABFEEL 0.75 = in favour; 0.5 neither in favour nor against; 0.25 = against; 0 = strongly against;

LIBFEEL **2010** - feelings about party from 0 strongly dislike to 10 strongly like.

OTHERP 1 = respondent seriously considered voting for other party in general election; 0 = not

DEGREE 1 = respondent has university degree; 0 = not

AGE respondent's age in years

INCOME family income on 15 point scale (**1979 and 2010**)

household income in quintiles on 1 (low) to 5 (high) scale (**1997**)

TACTICAL 1 = respondent would 'very likely' have voted Liberal if thought party would win a lot more seats throughout Britain;

0 = not (**1979**)

1 = respondent's preferred party had no chance/respondent claimed to vote tactically at general election; 0 = not (**1997**)

1 = respondent said favourite party had 'no chance of winning' or claimed to have voted tactically (**2010; 2015**)