

Japan's Multimember SNTV System and Strategic Voting: A Rejoinder

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Five major claims are made in our paper on strategic voting within the context of Japan's multimember single non-transferable vote (SNTV) electoral system (Fournier and Kohno, 2000). Two claims deal with the reconciliation of Steven Reed's (1990) and Gary Cox's (1997) important work on extending Duverger's law to the Japanese case, and three claims deal with the informational effects of partisan labels on strategic voting.

Reed and Cox argue that strategic behavior led Japan's M -member districts to exhibit competition among $M + 1$ candidates, thus generalizing Duverger's law beyond the Anglo-American plurality electoral system. The first portion of our paper consolidates Reed's and Cox's divergent theoretical standpoints and methodologies by demonstrating that: (1) a gradual, but not smooth nor linear, Duvergerian optimization process took place over some time, and (2) there is a link between district size and race competitiveness, which in turn affects voters' ability to vote strategically. In his comment, Cox does not challenge this part of our paper, but acknowledges that we 'succeed in showing these differences [between the two authors' views] to be small in most instances' (Cox, 2001: 237).

The second portion of our paper examines how partisan labels facilitate and hinder strategic voting, a subject not explored fully in either of the earlier studies. Voters tend to abandon their preferred candidate if that candidate is perceived to have no reasonable chance of winning and if a second well-liked candidate risks closely losing to a disliked candidate. Party labels provide two types of information in this regard: information about the competitiveness of candidates, and information about the ideological location of candidates. The paper demonstrates that: (3) voters have no difficulty abandoning candidates without established parties' official endorsements, (4) strategic coordination rarely occurs with regard to losing candidates from large parties, such as the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and (5) Communist voters are more likely to abandon Communist candidates to help Socialist candidates

than to help candidates from the LDP or the centrist parties. Thus, partisan labels appear to cue the marginality of minor candidates (claim 3), lead to overestimations of the electoral chances of candidates from large parties (claim 4), and highlight the existence or lack of plausible second preferences for supporters of a particular candidate (claim 5). Again, Cox's comment does not challenge our claims. In fact, it provides further evidence for our fifth claim. Cox uses margins of victory/defeat in aggregate vote results to confirm that Communists tend to lose votes as the competitiveness of marginal Socialist candidates increases.

We welcome Cox taking interest in our 'corrective' on his earlier work. His additional test of our fifth claim is sound, allowing us to stray from the use of the S–F ratio (the second loser's vote totals divided by the first loser's totals) statistics. In line with Gaines (1997), our paper does mention the problems associated with interpreting the S–F ratio, problems which Cox also emphasizes in his comment. In our view, Cox's evidence simply bolsters our findings about the informational effects of partisan labels.

Cox's technique, of course, cannot be used to link the large parties' vote totals to a specific party's margin of victory/defeat, since the second preference of a Socialist or LDP supporter is not as evident as that of a Communist supporter whose only (likely) alternative is a Socialist candidate. More generally, we must add, whatever technique is used, the analysis of strategic voting based on aggregate election results is bound to face difficulties. The notion of strategic voting suggests that voters would have otherwise voted differently, i.e. sincerely, if there had not been any constraints that led them to behave strategically, but the sincere preference of voters is difficult to observe from the (*post hoc*) aggregate election data. We encourage future research on strategic voting in Japan to use individual survey data to supplement analyses based on aggregate election results.

Bibliography

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