

# Split ticket voting in Italy: Rightist voters in 2001 parliamentary election

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## Abstract

In 1993 a mixed electoral system was introduced in Italy. Since then, the Lower Chamber (*Camera dei Deputati*) has been elected using two different ballots. Voters are enabled to cast two votes, the first for a party using a PR corrected electoral system and the second for a candidate in a single-member district using a plurality (first past the post) system. Aggregate results show that in 2001 parliamentary election a substantial minority of voters split their votes. In fact, one can find large differences between plurality and PR findings. Using survey data, this paper shows first of all that split ticket voting may assume three different forms, defined divided, disperse, and strategic voting. Then is demonstrated that for rightist voters the decision to split the votes is strongly affected by the feeling towards the leader of the coalition and candidate premier.

*Keywords:* mixed electoral systems; split ticket voting; Italy.

## 1. Electoral reform, coalition politics and campaigning in Italy, 1994-2001

During last ten years campaigns for the Italian parliamentary elections underwent dramatic changes. In the First Republic period (1945-1992) the core of propaganda was about ideological fight between Communists and moderate pro-democracy parties. When the Second Republic started after the party system collapse in 1992-1993 years electoral communication altered abruptly. In the three elections held in 1994, 1996 and 2001 parties focused on issues such as unemployment, European integration or immigration policy. Moreover, in the same mood of the «americanization» spreading in many European democracies, personalization and candidate-centered politics became a permanent characteristic of campaigning.

These remarkable changes were of course sustained by cultural transformation. Nevertheless the most important factor of modernisation was the electoral reform introduced in 1993. In the eleven elections celebrated from 1948 to 1992 a typical PR electoral system was used. Not surprisingly, it produced an extremely fractionalised party system and short-lived governments. Rare reform attempts failed, until in 1993 the parliament adopted a new electoral law<sup>1</sup>. Blais and Massicotte (2002: 54; see also Massicotte and Blais, 1999) define it as a mixed corrective system. Plurality and proportional formulas are used simultaneously with a double ballot to fill the 630 seats of the lower house (*Camera dei Deputati*). Three-quarters (475 seats) are attributed in constituency of about 100,000 voters using the first-past-the-post rule. Remaining 155 seats are to be filled on the basis of a proportional system with a 4% threshold at a national level. The PR seats are distributed in a corrective way (the so-called *scorporo*) to guarantee an over-representation for the weaker parties performing poorly in the single-member competition<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Katz (2001) describes extensively the approval of the reform bill.

<sup>2</sup> The Upper House (*Senato della Repubblica*) is elected according to the same general principles, but using a single ballot. For a general description of the Italian electoral system see D'Alimonte (2002).

The 1993 electoral reform, together with other exogenously-induced changes, completely transformed the party system. Some parties running the PR election formed two coalitions, the only available strategy to win seats in the single-member competition. Both left- and right-wing major coalitions changed in the three so far celebrated elections, and important parties ever refused to join any electoral cartel. Anyway, as late as 2001, bipolarism seems to be a permanent characteristic of the Italian party politics.

Table 1  
Parties and coalitions in the 2001 parliamentary election

Single-member (plurality) election	% vote	Party list (proportional) election	% vote
Leftist coalition: Ulivo	43.8	Democratici di Sinistra	16.6
		Margherita	14.5
		Girasole	2.2
		Partito dei Comunisti Italiani	1.7
		<i>Total left parties</i>	<i>35.0</i>
Rightist coalition: Casa delle Libertà	45.4	Forza Italia	29.4
		Alleanza Nazionale	12.0
		Biancofiore	3.2
		Lega Nord	3.9
		<i>Total right parties</i>	<i>48.5</i>
Total non coalitioned parties	9.1	Rifondazione Comunista	5.0
		Italia dei Valori	3.9
		Lista Bonino	2.2
		Democrazia Europea	2.4
		Movimento Sociale - Fiamma Tricolore	0.4
		<i>Total non coalitioned parties</i>	<i>13.9</i>

Source: adaptation from Di Virgilio (2002: 85), Bartolini and D'Alimonte (2002: 200), Chiaramonte (2002: 174).

Note: percents do not total 100 because local minor parties are non considered here.

Table 1 shows the composition of the coalitions in the 2001 election and the strength of the bipolarism<sup>3</sup>. The leftist Ulivo includes two former communist parties (Democratici di Sinistra and Partito dei Comunisti Italiani), the moderate Margherita, and Girasole, a red and green umbrella including Socialists and Environmentalists. The rightist Casa delle Libertà includes Forza Italia, the populist party led by Silvio Berlusconi, the former fascist Alleanza Nazionale, the former Christian Democrat Biancofiore, and the regionalist Lega Nord. Third parties are the Communist Rifondazione Comunista, the Neo-Fascist Movimento Sociale, the civil rights party Lista Bonino, the moderate Democrazia Europea, and Italia dei Valori, the party created by the famous former judge Antonio Di Pietro. As one can easily see, in the plurality tier of the electoral system the major coalitions gained a substantial part of the valid votes, leaving to the other parties few votes and any parliamentary seat. In the proportional tier, inside the coalitions votes concentrated on the leading parties, generating a sort of *quadrille bipolaire*. Outside the coalitions, only Rifondazione Comunista was able to overtake the threshold at 4% and to achieve a small parliamentary presence.

Bipolarism of the party system is not the only important consequence produced by the electoral reform. First, the presence of third parties notwithstanding, only the two coalitions contend for the government. In this situation, both coalitions choose in advance their leaders as candidate for the role of Prime Minister. By so doing, they have personalised the electoral process by enabling voters to cast their ballots on a completely new basis. This feature became definitively clear just in the 2001 election, when both coalitions displayed the names of the candidate premier on their official symbols. Second, a highly sophisticated electoral system allows sophisticated behaviour by voters. Such behaviour is discussed in the next section.

<sup>3</sup> For a general description of the 2001 parliamentary election cfr. Parker and Natale (2002).

## 2. Split ticket voting in the 2001 parliamentary election: an overview

Figures reported in Table 1 show a characteristic of the 2001 election: large differences exist between list and plurality votes. This is a clear indication of the existence of splitters, i.e. voters supporting a particular party in the list competition but casting their ballot for an alternative party or coalition when the plurality vote is at stake. This phenomenon is not a mere curiosity and is not limited to the 2001 election. Table 2 sketches aggregate results of the major coalitions and of the related parties to detail the scope of split ticket voting in the three elections so far held with the mixed electoral system. In 1994, at least half a million voters supported leftist parties in the list vote, but deserted the leftist coalition in the single-member constituencies. Instead the rightist coalition was advantaged by split ticket voting in the plurality (and decisive) competition, gaining more than 300.000 supporters in comparison with the list vote. In 1996 and 2001 the pattern reversed, and the leftist coalition was able to attract more plurality than list votes. In both cases the rightist coalition was strongly damaged by the loss of nearly one and half a million of votes, and it is plausible that in 1996 this loss was sufficient to cause the electoral defeat of the right and the formation of a centre-left government.

Table 2  
Plurality and proportional vote for major coalitions, Lower House, 1994-2001

	left <sup>a</sup>			right <sup>b</sup>		
	Plurality vote	Proportional vote	difference	Plurality vote	Proportional vote	difference
1994	12.755.083	13.260.225	-505.142	18.246.240	17.917.396	+328.844
1996	16.744.708	16.270.935	+473.773	15.027.275	16.481.785	-1.454.510
2001	16.315.355	14.827.087	+1.488.268	16.918.020	18.390.893	-1.472.873

<sup>a</sup> 1994: Progressisti; 1996 and 2001: Ulivo and Rifondazione Comunista.

<sup>b</sup> 1994: Polo delle Libertà, Polo del Buongoverno, and other independent rightist candidates; 1996: Polo and Lista Pannella-Sgarbi.

Sources: 1994 D'Alimonte and Bartolini (2002, appendix); 1996 and 2001 Bartolini and D'Alimonte (2002: 231).

Analyses of split ticket voting based on aggregate results give us a description and some preliminary answers, but they leave many problems unresolved. Data in Table 2 for example brings evidence about three points. First, they fix the minimum level of split ticket voting, but they cannot measure the total amount. Second, assuming that the list vote is sincere and that the plurality vote is decisive for electoral victory, they allows us to single out the advantaged parties or coalitions as those obtaining more plurality than list votes. Third, aggregate results can sometimes show particular patterns occurring in the electoral arena. In the Italian case the most intriguing fact is the strong loss of votes suffered by the rightist coalition in 1996 and 2001 elections. Unfortunately many other aspects remains in shadow. Among unresolved problems there is the real amount of split ticket voting, and above all the explanation of the causes pushing voters to choose such a perhaps contradictory behaviour.

To face these limits of the research aggregate data are clearly insufficient, and individual-level information gathered by survey collection is necessary. To do so, I use the 2001 Itanes (ITALian National Electoral Study) data. This face-to-face post-election survey has been conducted by the Istituto Cattaneo at Bologna University. It is composed of 3209 voters, and the sample is representative on national basis of the over 18 eligible citizens.

Using these data, Table 3 makes clear where split voters come from. In the plurality vote major coalitions are able to maintain a large amount of the voters of the related parties, achieving respectively 96% and 97% of the list votes. Third parties instead suffer a strong loss of support, averaging about 60% of their list votes. It depends of course on strategic considerations by these voters. In the plurality vote they desert their preferred parties – sincerely voted in the list vote – so avoiding to sustain a tiny non competitive party. But another aspect of the plurality competition is relevant here. Lacking a strong organisation, third parties are unable to present their own plurality

candidates in all the 475 single-member constituencies. As a consequence, many third parties voters in the proportional (regional) constituencies cannot repeat their vote in the plurality competition and are forced to change their options. Rifondazione Comunista is an exception from this point of view. As a successor of a typical mass party, Rc is based again on a strong territorial network, and it would be able in principle to fill all single member constituencies with a communist candidate. Nevertheless, the top leadership preferred to run only the list competition, rightly considering the party candidates unable to win any plurality seat. Therefore throughout the whole country for the communist voters split ticket voting is not a mere opportunity, but rather a necessary behaviour constrained by the party's electoral strategy.

Table 3  
Straight and split ticket voting according to the list vote

List vote	straight ticket voting		split ticket voting		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Lega Nord	48	91	5	9	53	100
Alleanza Nazionale	290	93	21	7	311	100
Biancofiore	37	95	2	5	39	100
Forza Italia	776	98	19	2	795	100
<i>Right total</i>	<i>1151</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>1198</i>	<i>100</i>
Comunisti Italiani	32	89	4	11	36	100
Girasole	25	89	3	11	28	100
Margherita	245	94	16	6	261	100
Democratici di Sinistra	432	99	3	1	435	100
<i>Left total</i>	<i>734</i>	<i>97</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>760</i>	<i>100</i>
Rifondazione Comunista	–	–	133	100	133	100
Other parties	4	29	10	71	14	100
Italia dei Valori	32	59	22	41	54	100
Msi	6	60	4	40	10	100
Lista Bonino	23	62	14	38	37	100
Democrazia Europea	21	81	5	19	26	100
Invalid ballot	43	81	10	19	53	100
<i>Total third parties</i>	<i>129</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>327</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>total</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>271</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>2285</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Itanes, 2001.

Table 3 above shows where split voters are concentrated. Table 4 adds some information detailing the flows from the list vote to the constituency vote. Bordered cells put emphasis on the straight (unified) voting, while other cells make clear which parties are advantaged by split ticket voting. Splitters deserting one of the major coalitions vote mainly for the other coalition, and they vote for a third party or cast an invalid ballot to a lesser extent. When choosing a third party, they apparently take in consideration ideological positions. Rightist splitters for example vote primarily for extreme right Msi, while when splitting their vote leftists mostly support progressive Lista Bonino. Third parties' voters and those casting an invalid ballot split their votes generally to the advantage of the major coalitions, according to the logic of the strategic voting. They sometimes choose not to vote in the plurality competition, or vote – in non strategic way – for another minor party. As already noted above, supporters of Rifondazione Comunista constitute a case apart. They are compelled to split their votes because of the absence of their preferred party in the single member constituencies, and they do so supporting the leftist Ulivo on the basis of their ideological proximity.

Table 4  
Flow of the vote matrix between the list and plurality vote

List vote	Plurality vote								total
	CdL	Ulivo	other parties	Idv	Msi	Lista Bonino	Democr. Europea	Invalid ballot	
right	1151 96%	23 2%		1 *	10 1%	1 *	3 *	9 1%	1198 100%
left	13 2%	734 97%		3 *		6 1%	3 *	1 *	760 100%
Rc	3 2%	119 89%		1 1%		2 2%	1 1%	6 5%	132 100%
other parties	3 21%	5 36%	4 29%			1 7%		1 7%	14 100%
IdV	3 6%	18 33%		32 59%				1 2%	54 100%
Msi	2 20%	2 20%			6 60%				10 100%
Lista Bonino	4 11%	10 26%				23 60%		1 3%	38 100%
Dem. Europea	1 4%	4 15%					21 81%		26 100%
Invalid ballot	5 9%	4 8%				1 2%		43 81%	53 100%
<i>total</i>	1185 51%	918 40%	4 *	37 2%	16 1%	34 2%	28 1%	62 3%	2284 100%

\* Less than .5%. Bordered cells emphasise straight ticket voting.

Source: Itanes, 2001.

Table 4 enables us to single out three main flows between the list and the plurality votes. First, there are voters supporting a party participating in a major coalition in the list vote, but supporting the opposite coalition in the plurality vote. Second, the same voters supporting a coalition party may use the plurality ballot to vote for a minor non-coalition party. Third, voters for the minor parties in the list vote may change their votes to the advantage of one of the major coalitions. According to the practice begun by Itanes (2001: 102-104) I consider the general area of the *split ticket voting* as broken in three sub-areas. Referring to the three cases just defined, I speak of *divided voting*, *disperse voting*, and *strategic voting*. The latter is of course the most known case in electoral theory. With a plurality (first-past-the-post) electoral system, voters act strategically when their preferred party – in our case, the party voted in the list vote – is not competitive, they are fully aware of this situation, and they change their vote to advantage a second best and to avoid the victory of the most unpleasant political alternative (Cox, 1997; Reed, 2001). The two other forms of split ticket voting spreading in Italy are less known and less obvious to explain. When a rightist (list) voter may vote for a competitive rightist alternative, why does she cast her (plurality) ballot to a leftist coalition? Or why does she waste her vote supporting another rightist non competitive party?

Aggregate data reported in the previous Tables 1 and 2 have shown that in spite of the very short trend based on only three elections the most noticeable and persistent occurrence of split ticket voting in Italy is the loss of plurality votes damaging the rightist coalition. In the next section therefore I address the problem of the explanation of the divided and disperse voting affecting the rightist voters in the 2001 parliamentary election<sup>4</sup>.

### 3. The rightist voters: a causal explanation of divided and disperse voting

Mixed electoral systems are not a complete novelty for democratic regimes. Germany for example adopted such a system as ready as 1953, even if it has been usually considered as a

<sup>4</sup> The theoretical framework necessary to examine the strategic voting is also quite different from the framework used here to analyse the two other forms of split ticket voting.

standard proportional system. This path-breaking experience notwithstanding, the great diffusion of mixed systems dates back to the 1990s, when they were adopted both in some consolidated democracies and in many new democracies in Eastern Europe (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001; Kostadinova, 2002). Attention for the sophisticated forms of electoral behaviour spread together with the extension of the mixed electoral systems. If during early phases of the development of the electoral studies the focus was only on the strategic voting associated with the plurality system (Duverger, 1951), in the last ten years other sophisticated behaviours related to mixed systems – such as split ticket voting – are taken in account.

The main topic faced by the first wave of these recent researches was the mere detection of a pattern framing the choice of the splitters. Some studies reached the conclusion that split ticket voting is not associated with any characteristic of the voters. Any discernible explanation for their actions being absent, splitters have been considered as voters confused by the details of a new and complicated electoral system, casting their ballots on a completely random base (Schoen, 1999). A more diffuse point of view is that splitters are not citizens lacking basic knowledge about politics and party systems. Rather they are evaluated as the most informed and alerted voters, fully aware of the niceties of the electoral process. Split ticket voting in such cases is not a casual action, but it is rather a choice made possible by voters' competence (Karp et al., 2002; Pappi and Thurner, 2002).

When split ticket voting is regarded as a mindful choice by knowledgeable citizens the problem arises of the clarification of the motivation for choosing such an option. Several factors have been studied both at constituency and individual level. Discussing variables at constituency level for example it has been argued that if a party spends much money for campaigning then it will be able to avoid defection by its supporters. Generally speaking, greater mobilisation efforts by parties produce lesser levels of split ticket voting. Another important variable is the extent of constituency competitiveness. In the study of strategic voting it has been discovered that when there is a little distance between the most voted and the second candidate then the third parties' voters are pushed to defect from their preferred parties. In such a situation they split because they have an opportunity to influence the final result in their constituency, at least avoiding the victory of the most unpleasant party. In general, when there is greater uncertainty about the victory of the seat – i.e. when there is a strong competition at constituency level – strategic voting should also be greater. Applying the same line of reasoning to the supporters of the major parties, if there is an uncertain competition and their preferred candidate risks to be defeated then they should be induced to behave faithfully and to avoid split ticket voting (Tsebelis, 1990). Again a generalisation is possible. Using the above defined terms, a fierce competition at constituency level will produce a large amount of strategic voting but it will limit the level of disperse and divided voting.

As noted, other explanations of the split ticket voting have focused on voters' personal characteristics. For example, those considering the split ticket voting as a manifestation of political sophistication argue that voters are more easily available to split when they are more competent. When party identification has been examined, researchers have discovered that strongly identified voters are less available to defect because of their strong attachment to the party, while splitters are more diffused among independents.

In this paper I focus on an individual-level independent variable so far overlooked in the research about sophisticated forms of voting, namely the voter feeling towards candidate premiers. To start, it is first necessary to recall an important consequence produced by the 1993 electoral reform. As said above, two major coalitions were immediately created to run the plurality competition. It is well known that they contend for government and, to this aim, the leaders of both coalitions are candidates as Prime Minister in case of electoral victory. This personalisation took place progressively. In 1994, when the first election was held after the electoral reform, only the rightist coalition openly presented Mr Berlusconi as future chief-of-government, while leftists only choose a speaker – Mr Occhetto, the former Communist leader of the greatest party of the coalition – to manage the campaign. In the 1996 second election after the reform both coalitions chose in advance their candidates. Rightist Polo delle Libertà replicated the choice in favour of Mr Berlusconi, while

after a long debate leftist Ulivo proposed Mr Romano Prodi. As a consequence, contrary to the Italian tradition in the field of political communication, the campaign was surrounded by a strong «americanization», including a televised debate with the two contenders as protagonists. Finally, in 2001 parliamentary election the growing personalisation of the electoral process moved a further step ahead when the names of the two candidates – Mr Berlusconi and Mr Rutelli – were ostensibly written on the electoral symbols of both coalitions, introducing in practice the direct election of the Prime Minister.

The fading away of some traditional motivations for voting – such as party identification, religion and social status – and the development of political communication have brought about a huge amount of literature on electoral personalisation (see f.i. King, 2002; Mughan, 2000; Swanson and Mancini, 1996). These studies are largely differentiated. They alternatively adopt an enthusiastic or sceptical view on the power of the leader to become a factor able to motivate voters' behaviour. They also alternate a methodologically sophisticated approach and a simply anecdotal evidence. Nevertheless, they share a common point of view according to which the problem to be researched is if the leader is able to attract voters, and how he actually does. In this paper I adopt an opposite point of view. We have previously seen that in 2001 parliamentary election the rightist coalition lost in the plurality competition a large amount of likely voters who supported rightist parties in the list competition. Can the feelings towards Mr Berlusconi, as controversial leader of the rightist coalition, explain split ticket voting by rightist voters?

To face this problem, I need a measure of the voters' feelings towards the coalition leaders. It is made available by a typical thermometer scale anchored to 1 and 10, where low scores indicate a low appreciation of the leader and vice versa high scores stand for a good evaluation. Summary informations about these variables are displayed for the two leaders in Table 5. Both coalition leaders are recognised and evaluated by a large number of voters. Out of 3209 interviews, 92% and 90% of the total utter a score to Berlusconi and Rutelli respectively. Berlusconi benefits of a slightly advantage, with an evaluation averaging 5.9 in comparison with the 5.3 attributed to Rutelli. Voters accredit the lowest score more often to Berlusconi than Rutelli, but for both candidates the most frequent assessment is 6.

Table 5  
Knowledge and evaluation of candidates premier, 2001

	Berlusconi	Rutelli
percent expressing an evaluation	92	90
mean evaluation	5.9	5.3
percent attributing the lowest score (=1)	15	12
mode	6	6
Number of cases	2960	2871

Source: Itanes, 2001.

Table 6 shows how the evaluations of the two candidates are related to the list (proportional) vote and to the decision to split the plurality vote. Upper left bordered cells emphasise the evaluations of the rightist list voters for Berlusconi. In general, rightist split voters assess the rightist leader in a less favourable way than faithful voters do. While 1126 voters for a rightist party and the rightist coalition reach a mean evaluation of 7.5, 47 splitters attributes to Berlusconi a lower mean evaluation averaging only 5.8. This distribution is replicated with no exception for the voters supporting all four rightist parties. In all considered cases, the mean evaluation by the splitters is lower than the straight voters' appraisal. Though less relevant here, the same pattern is reproduced in the case of the leftist voters', as shown in the lower right bordered cells. *A contrario*, non-bordered cells show that splitters have an approval of the opposite leader greater than the appreciation of their own candidate. Leftist straight voters for example attribute to Berlusconi a very low 3.6, while leftist splitters assign to him a mean of 5.0. Once more, this pattern is replicated either for leftist or rightist voters.

Table 6

Sympathy for candidates premier and split ticket voting by rightist and leftist voters (list vote)

list vote	Berlusconi				Rutelli			
	straight ticket voting		split ticket voting		straight ticket voting		split ticket voting	
	mean	n	mean	n	mean	n	mean	n
Forza Italia	8.4	759	6.9	19	3.9	712	5.2	19
Alleanza Nazionale	7.5	287	7.0	21	3.6	288	4.5	21
Biancofiore	6.5	33	5.0	2	4.1	34	4.5	2
Lega Nord	7.4	47	4.1	5	4.2	47	5.0	5
<i>Rightist voters</i>	7.5	1126	5.8	47	4.0	1081	4.8	47
Democratici di Sinistra	3.2	417	3.7	3	7.5	425	4.7	3
Girasole	4.7	24	6.2	3	6.6	24	5.5	3
Margherita	3.7	237	5.1	15	7.2	241	5.9	13
Comunisti Italiani	2.7	29	4.9	4	6.7	29	3.4	4
<i>Leftist voters</i>	3.6	707	5.0	25	7.0	719	4.9	23

Source: Itanes, 2001.

Though largely approximate, results reported in Table 6 allow us to reject the thesis according to which split ticket voting is simply a casual behaviour lacking any discernible cause. Instead, either for rightist or leftist voters, straight ticket voting is linked to a good appreciation of the coalition leader, while split ticket voting is associated with a low esteem for him. This encouraging point of view needs of course more evidence to be definitively established. To this aim, I run a multivariate regression analysis limited to the rightist list voters. The dependent variable may assume two values to model the vote choice. It assumes value 0 when the voter casts a straight vote and value 1 in case of split ticket voting. The main independent variable is the sympathy for Berlusconi, measured with the same thermometer scale extending from 1 to 10 used in the Tables 5 and 6.

To select the control variables I draw from the literature on sophisticated voting briefly summarised above. As previously said, this literature has identified some environmental factors operating at constituency level, as distinct from other individual-level characteristics. Among environmental factors the closeness of the competition at constituency level deserves special attention. In several studies about strategic voting it has been identified as the most important motivation pushing the potential supporters of tiny parties to desert their preferred options to advantage more competitive parties and candidates (f.i. Blais et al., 2001). In the same perspective, rightist voters are expected to desert the local candidate of the rightist coalition when the competition is not severe, namely when during the campaign the rightist candidate is perceived to be surely winning or losing the seat. To tap such an expectation, I use as a proxy the actual distance in absolute value between the winner in the constituency and the best loser.

Previous researches based on aggregate data have shown another characteristic of the 2001 Italian parliamentary election. As noted by Bartolini and D'Alimonte (2002: 238) rightist local candidates are damaged by greater losses of rightist voters – i.e., there is a great difference between rightist list and plurality votes – when there are several competitors in the constituency. To be fully aware of this point one should bear in mind that the format of the competition is not the same in all the 475 constituencies. In effect, only the two major coalitions have the organisational strength needed to present a candidate throughout the whole country. Other minor parties reported in Table 1 are unable to do so, therefore their candidates are present in certain constituencies but absent in others<sup>5</sup>. To tap this situation, I use the sheer number of candidates at constituency level as second environmental control variable after the closeness of the competition.

Let me now consider briefly the control variables at individual level. Cursory evidence shown in Table 6 induces me to disregard the point of view according to which split ticket voting is a random behaviour. Rather, the alternative stance seems to be valid that splitters are interested and well-

<sup>5</sup> Rifondazione Comunista is a deep-rooted party, able in principle to present a candidate in every constituency. As said above, neo-communist leaders decided to avoid resource wasting abstaining from the plurality competition and concentrating their efforts on list voting.

informed voters. If so, I use education as a proxy to tap voters' political competence. Lastly, I use voters' left-right self location to control for the ideological distance between rightist coalition and voters. It is reasonable to assume that split voting is more diffused among voters spatially far from the coalition. Question wording and descriptive statistics of the variables are reported in the Appendix.

Table 7

Model of the split ticket voting by rightist voters: binomial logistic regression, unstandardised coefficients

independent variables	b	s.e.	Sig.
Berlusconi rating	-.463	.085	.000
Closeness of the contest in the constituency	.030	.016	.059
number of local (constituency) candidates	.058	.149	.700
education	-.047	.114	.685
voter's left-right self location	.131	.100	.187
Constant	-1.121	1.191	.346
Number of cases		1069	
-2 log likelihood		333.52	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>		.107	

Source: Itanes, 2001.

Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, the statistical technique to be used is the binomial logistic regression. Results are reported in Table 7. Given the adopted measures, the expected sign is negative for the Berlusconi rating and left-right self-location, while it is positive for the contest closeness, the number of local candidates, and education. The main independent variable, the voters' feeling towards Berlusconi, is confirmed as the strongest predictor of the choice to split. As already shown in Table 6 above, rightist splitters defect Casa delle Libertà in the plurality competition first of all because they do not like Berlusconi as the leader of the coalition and they do not want Berlusconi as chief of the government. A fierce competition in the constituency instead induces the rightist voters to «rally around the flag» of the coalition. When at local level the seat is perceived to be effectively contested by the two main candidates, then rightist voters tend to avoid split ticket voting and they concentrate both their votes on the rightist parties and on the rightist coalition. By contrast, when the gap between the first two candidates is abysmal, then rightist voters consider their defection less relevant and they split more easily their votes so damaging the rightist coalition.

The other independent variables have not noteworthy relationships with the decision to practice split ticket voting. The number of candidates contesting the seat in the constituency exhibits the expected positive sign, so indicating that rightist voters defect more often when several different alternatives are available. Obviously this choice is less feasible when there are only few candidates. For instance, in the constituencies where the competition is entirely bipolar, a rightist (potential) splitter may only vote for the leftist candidate, or abstain. Anyway, the standard error is very large, and therefore this variable does not reach statistical significance according to generally accepted criteria. Finally, either voters' education or self-location have the «wrong» signs, and both variables lack significance. In contrast with my expectations, no relationship actually exists between political competence and split ticket voting<sup>6</sup>. And left-right self-location, one of the most important predictor for voting behaviour and party choice, does not reach the same weight for the account of split ticket voting.

#### 4. Conclusion

Voters may choose different kind of electoral behaviour according to the particularities of the electoral system they are enabled to use. When plurality (first past the post) systems have been

<sup>6</sup> The problem remains unsolved here whether the level of education is a good proxy for political competence.

studied the most diffuse form of sophisticated behaviour which has been found is strategic voting. In case of majority French-style electoral system the most investigated topic has been the problems of co-ordination involving candidates and voters between first and second ballot. Sophisticated voters' behaviour when a PR system is in charge is usually considered a less relevant problem. In these cases, the only significant topic is the role of the threshold which have to be overcome to obtain a parliamentary representation. When adopted, such devices push some voters to defect their preferred parties to guarantee to a minor partner at least a parliamentary seat.

Blending plurality and proportional principles, mixed electoral systems are particularly complex and allow the voters to behave according to many different criteria. In Italy for example both chambers are directly elected by people on nation-wide bases. Thus a voter may decide to split its two votes for the Upper and the Lower House supporting two different candidates/parties/coalitions. Great differences notwithstanding, something like that can happen in local elections. In these cases electoral rules adopted during the '90s enabled the voter to cast at the same time a vote for the mayor or the governor and a vote for the local assembly. Once more, a particular sort of split ticket voting is explicitly included in the electoral laws and it is largely adopted by Italian voters.

In this article, I have examined a distinct form of split ticket voting concerning the election of the Lower House. As two different ballots are used in this case for the plurality and the list competition, a voter may decide to vote for a given party in the latter and for a different candidate/party/coalition in the former. Aggregate data have shown that this behaviour is particularly diffused among rightist voters. As a consequence, I have looked for plausible causes – if any – pushing rightist voters to desert the rightist coalition Casa delle Libertà during the 2001 parliamentary election. A simple bivariate tabular analysis demonstrated that a good reason for defecting was a low esteem for the coalition leader (and potential premier). This result denies any importance to those positions considering split ticket voting as a random behaviour due to voters' inability. The following multivariate analysis has shown that low approval for Mr Berlusconi remains a cause pushing rightist voters to split their votes and to defect the Casa delle Libertà even when other control variables are introduced into the model. In the last analysis the splitters' behaviour should be explained with the contemporaneous use of individual and environmental variables. Besides a negative assessment of the coalition leader at individual level, splitters are motivated to defect at level of constituency by a largely anticipated recognition of the seat winner.

It is commonplace finishing an article invoking more research about the investigated topic. This is of course the case for all sorts of sophisticated voting. But a methodological caveat should also be borne in mind. Both usual approaches used to study electoral behaviour suffer here apparent limits. The use of aggregate data tune up the right problems and help a lot to face the essential questions, but it is impossible to answer them. The use of survey data obviates these drawbacks, but being the split voting a niche behaviour held by a tiny minority of voters these studies are challenged by a typical problem of «small numbers». The only available solution consists probably of a mixed strategy based on the simultaneous use of both data.

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### **Appendix A**

The following variable description is referred only to voters for the rightist parties in the list competition, as they constitute the base for the data analysis shown in Table 7. Where indicated, the initial number are reported from the original questionnaire.

*Question E12: assessment of Silvio Berlusconi.* I'm going to read the names of some politicians. First of all, I wish to know if you have never heard his name. If you have, please attribute him a vote from 1 to 10, where 1 indicates a completely negative appraisal, 10 indicates a completely positive one, and finally 6 indicates sufficient judgement. Please evaluate this leader from a political point of view, and not for his personal characteristics. Do you know Silvio Berlusconi? (*if yes*) Which vote do you attribute to him?

Table A1  
Rating of Silvio Berlusconi: frequencies

score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	9	.8	.8
2	4	.3	1.1
3	5	.4	1.5
4	12	1.0	2.5
5	46	3.8	6.3
6	131	10.8	17.1
7	220	18.1	35.2
8	295	24.3	59.5
9	167	13.8	73.3
10	298	24.6	97.8
I don't know him	25	2.1	99.9
Missing	1	.1	100
Total	1214	100	

Source: Itanes, 2001.

Table A2  
Rating of Silvio Berlusconi: descriptive statistics (only valid cases)

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
1188	7.9	1.7	2.8

Source: Itanes, 2001.

*Closeness of the contest.* This environmental variable is built using official data published by the Ministry of the Interior.

Table A3  
Closeness of the contest (difference between the winner and the best loser in the constituency of the voter): descriptive statistics

N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
1214	46.1	.1	46.2	12.4	8.9	78.9

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

Table A4  
Closeness of the contest (difference between the winner and the best loser in the constituency of the voter): frequencies

	Diff 1_2	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very competitive	Da 0 a 10	605	49.8	49.8
Medium competitive	Da 10 a 20	377	31.0	80.8
Not competitive	Oltre 20	233	19.2	100
Total	–	1214	100	

Source: Ministry of the Interior.

*Question F3: levels of education.* Which is your education level?

Table A5

## Levels of education

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
none	5	.4	.4
primary school with no title	75	6.2	6.5
Primary school	216	17.8	24.3
Secondary school	378	31.1	55.4
professional school	90	7.4	62.8
High school	354	29.1	92.0
degree	98	8.0	100
Total	1214	100	

Source: Itanes, 2001.

*Question C34: left-right self-location.* When talking about politics, most people make use of the words «left» and «right». In this picture there are several cells going from left to right (*show picture*). In reference with your own political opinions, where do you locate yourself?

Table A6

## Left-right self-location: frequencies

location	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A left	2	.2	.2	.2
B	3	.2	.2	.4
C	17	1.4	1.5	1.9
D	25	2.1	2.3	4.2
E	119	9.8	10.8	15.0
F	184	15.1	16.7	31.7
G	255	21.0	23.2	54.9
H	255	21.0	23.1	78.0
I	104	8.6	9.5	87.5
L right	137	11.3	12.5	100
Total valid cases	1100	90.5	100	
I don't know	57	4.7		
Refusal	53	4.3		
Don't answer	5	.4		
Total missing cases	115	9.5		
Grand total	1214	100		

Source: Itanes, 2001.

Table A7

## Left-right self-location: descriptive statistics (only valid cases)

N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
1100	7.3	1.7	2.8

Source: Itanes, 2001.

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