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DOI:

[10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101956](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101956)

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*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Rivas, J & Rockey, J 2021, 'Expressive voting with booing and cheering: evidence from Britain', *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 67, 101956. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101956>

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# Expressive voting with booing and cheering: Evidence from Britain.

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August 2020. s

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**Abstract:**

Previous work on Expressive Voting has focused on the desire of voters to express what they are *for* and thus who they *are*. But, often also as important, is the desire of voters to express what they are *against*, and who they *are not*. In this paper we extend the standard formulation of Expressive Voting to account for this possibility. Using data for the UK we find empirical evidence that the desire to *boo* has been increasingly important at recent elections. The implications of this for recent trends in political polarization are discussed.

**Keywords:** Expressive Voting, Polarization, British Politics

**JEL-Codes:** D72

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# 1 Introduction

The theory of *Expressive Voting* (Brennan and Lomasky, 1993, Hamlin and Jennings, 2011) suggests that voters care not only about the outcomes of elections but also about expressing their opinions, beliefs, or conscience. As discussed by Hamlin and Jennings (2019), the domain of expressive motivations is ‘large and nuanced’ in a similar manner to conventional instrumental concerns. Thus, voters may want to express what they are, and they may want to express what they are not. Thus, they may be motivated to vote by a desire to *cheer* a political party whose platform reflects their views and identity, and by a desire to *boo* parties whose platform does not.<sup>1</sup> This paper argues empirically that voters’ desire to express what they are not has been more important than the desire to express what they are at recent British elections, and increasingly so.

We suggest this finding may offer an additional perspective on the well-documented recent increases in political polarization and populism in many western democracies. Across countries and political systems, the last decade has witnessed the emergence of electorally-successful populist and anti-establishment politicians. While, the specifics naturally vary, many countries have experienced the following:

1. increased political polarization
2. populism and anti-establishmentism
3. involvement by movements of both the political right and left.

There are many competing explanations for each of these trends individually and for them as a set. Some appeal to pocketbook voting explanations and the effects of austerity (Fetzer, 2019) for the UK, Autor et al. (2016) for the US, and Dal Bó et al. (2018) for Sweden. Others emphasise the limited explanatory power of the internet and social networks (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017, Boxell et al., 2017). Similarly, in

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<sup>1</sup>The origins of the idea of Expressive Voting are commonly attributed to Buchanan (1954) and particularly Tullock (1971). Fiorina (1976) provides the first formal treatment. This paper’s point of departure is Hamlin and Jennings (2011) which provided a key treatment. See, Hamlin and Jennings (2019) for an updated exposition. The idea of voters wishing both to *boo* and *cheer* parties is first found in Brennan and Lomasky (1993).

the UK at least, there was a limited role of migration (Becker et al., 2017) although xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment predict support for the far-right EDL.

This paper posits that the changing importance of booing and cheering is one explanation, perhaps reflecting increasing antipathy towards politics and politicians. This explanation requires neither changes in voter preferences nor pocketbook concerns, but instead changes over time whether voters are more likely to vote to express their preference or to express what they are not. Put another way, differences in whether voters' political behaviour is driven by *cheering* what they are *for* or *booing* what they are *against*. We provide empirical evidence that *booing* is an important motivation, and at recent elections more important than *cheering*.

Brennan and Lomasky (1993), Schuessler (2000), Brennan (2008), Hamlin and Jennings (2011) argue for an expressive theory of political behaviour. In this view voters decide whether and how to vote depending both on the outcome that will occur if their vote were decisive and also based on their return from expressing their opinion, conscience, or beliefs. This departure from the standard view in rational choice where voters have preferences only over outcomes is reminiscent of the large literature on the, by now, well documented preferences for fairness identified by Fehr and Schmidt (1999), Dawes et al. (2007), Tricomi et al. (2010). Similarly, agents are now presumed to have preferences beyond their economic self-interest. Notably, while in a market setting there are reasons to believe that these other preferences may be normally a comparatively small aspect of behaviour as the opportunity cost may be expected to be high. In the case of elections where voting is private and unlikely to affect outcomes, opportunity costs will be smaller.<sup>2</sup>

The analysis of Brennan and Lomasky (1993) distinguishes between *cheering* the party or group you support and *booing* the one you do not. But, focuses on the case of two parties and thus this distinction has limited empirical content. Brennan (2008) argues that strategic voting may be understood in expressive terms, and there the distinction between *cheering* and *booing* has more bite.<sup>3</sup> in the context of strategic

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<sup>2</sup>Wiese and Jong-A-Pin (2017) provide laboratory evidence for Expressive Voting. Schnellenbach and Schubert (2015) provide a survey of behavioural political economy.

<sup>3</sup>The idea of a voter expressing who they do and do not support has some parallels with approval voting, as reviewed by Weber (1995). There a voter has multiple votes with which to convey this information. Whereas, in a conventional single-vote election, and with expressive motivations, they must

voting and In reality, however, three or more parties contesting elections is the norm outside of the US and in this case the comparative desire of voters to *cheer* versus *boo* may imply different outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

This paper analyses British data for general elections over the period 1922–2017 to establish some stylised facts about the relative importance of cheering and booing. We find that:

1. *booing* is comparatively important
2. that the relative importance of *cheering* and *booing* have changed over time
3. the importance of *booing* seems to be higher after the 2008 Financial Crisis.

Note, viewed from the perspective of expressive behaviour it is the decision to vote that is key and one feature of the data is that turnout varies considerably over time. Individuals are not strategic in this view, and so the outcome of an election hinges on which groups can be motivated to vote.<sup>5</sup> Figure 1 reports aggregate UK turnout rates for the last 95 years and we note firstly that turnout has varied considerably over time from a high of nearly 84% in 1950 to historic lows of just under 60% in 2001. Secondly, we note that turnout is relatively volatile with differences in turnout rates between elections of around 10% in several cases. Long-run changes in turnout rates will represent a combination of different non-consequentialist (Shayo and Harel, 2012) factors encompassing warm glow and civic duty explanations as well as changes in information acquisition Feddersen (2004), Feddersen and Sandroni (2006) and social preferences and information Myatt (2015) or the strategic protest voting Myatt (2017). To the extent that these explanations rest on fundamentals of voters preferences it is harder for them to explain short-run changes in turnout rates as normally we regard such fundamentals as, at most, slowly changing if not fixed. In general, there is every reason to believe that voters' behaviour will reflect both expressive and instrumental motivations. But, in this paper we will assume for clarity, and given that the elections choose *how* they wish to express themselves.

<sup>4</sup>This expanded set of motivations has clear parallels with the models of context dependent voting introduced by Callander and Wilson (2008, 2006) in which the appeal of each choice at an election depends on the other available option.

<sup>5</sup>Individuals may be strategic but in large elections it is assumed that this motivation is small relative to their expressive motivations, which thus dominate.

we study are large, that there is little instrumental benefit from voting and thus that voters' behaviour reflects expressive motivations.



Figure 1: Turnout at British general elections 1922–2017

Source: House of Commons Library ([Audickas and Cracknell, 2018](#)). Data are for Great Britain only.

At this point it useful to briefly rehearse the key features of UK political history over the last century. Figures 2 and 3 plot the vote shares and number of seats in the UK Parliament over the same 95 year period as Figure 1. The blue and red lines depict the two largest parties, the Conservative and Labour parties. Our interest is in the fluctuating importance of the gold line which plots the varying success of what was initially the Liberal Party and is now the Liberal Democrat party, and the purple line which plots the fortunes of 'other' parties, most importantly United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) (in terms of votes but not seats) in recent years, as well as the green line plotting the importance of the Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties. The detail has been extensively documented and analysed by historians and political scientists, for example [Sked and Cook \(1979\)](#), but our interest is in the macroscopic story that following the *'Strange Death of Liberal England'* [Dangerfield \(\[1935\] 2017\)](#) prior to 1918, the period 1922–1945 saw the Labour party usurp the Liberals as

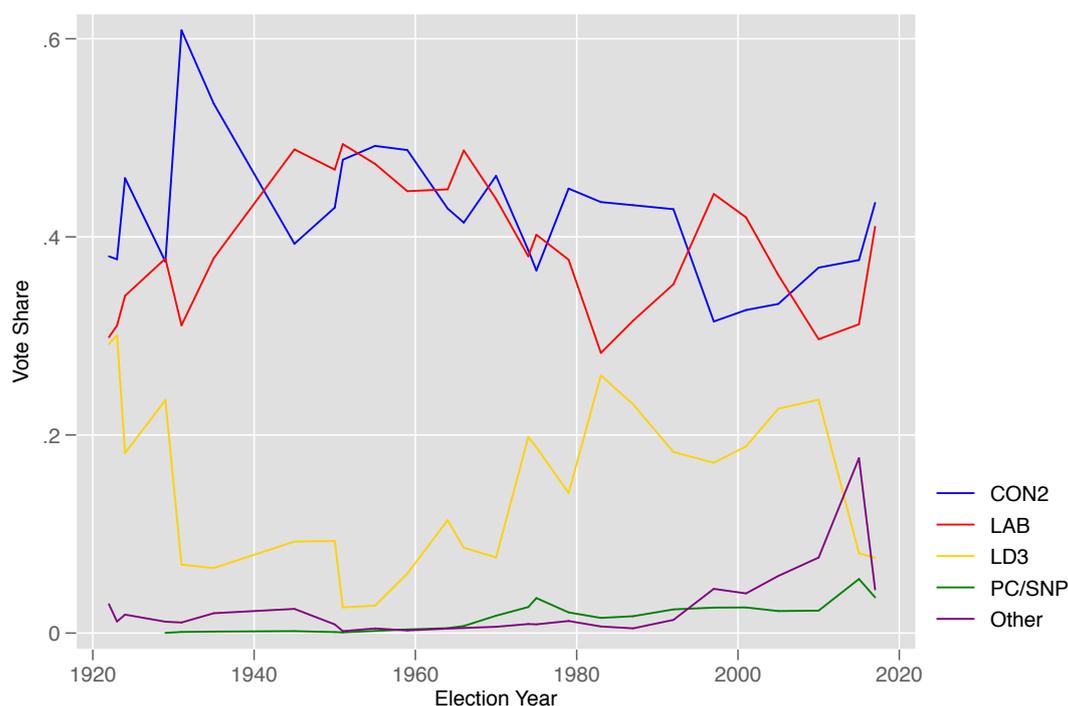


Figure 2: Party vote shares at British general elections 1922–2017

Source: House of Commons Library (Audickas and Cracknell, 2018). Data are for Great Britain only.

the main opposition. The Cold War period then saw a stable, Duvergian, two party duopoly with almost all seats until the beginning of the 1980s when key members of the Labour party split to form a separate, more centrist party, and in time joined with the remainders of the Liberal party to form the Liberal Democrats. Also relevant is the growth in the Nationalist parties, and crucially from the late 1990s onwards, the populist anti-EU UKIP. Thus, the UK has become, contra Duverger, a multiparty democracy with coalition government in 2010 and minority government in 2017.

Coincident with these changes in the party landscape has been a precipitous decline in the perception of politicians and political parties. The British Social Attitudes Survey Lee and Young (2013) documents that

In 1986, for instance, 71 per cent agreed that "people like me have no say in what the government does"; now that figure is down to 59 per cent.

This, and declines in trust in, and respect for, politicians may explain why voters are increasingly less motivated by expressing who they like, and more by expressing

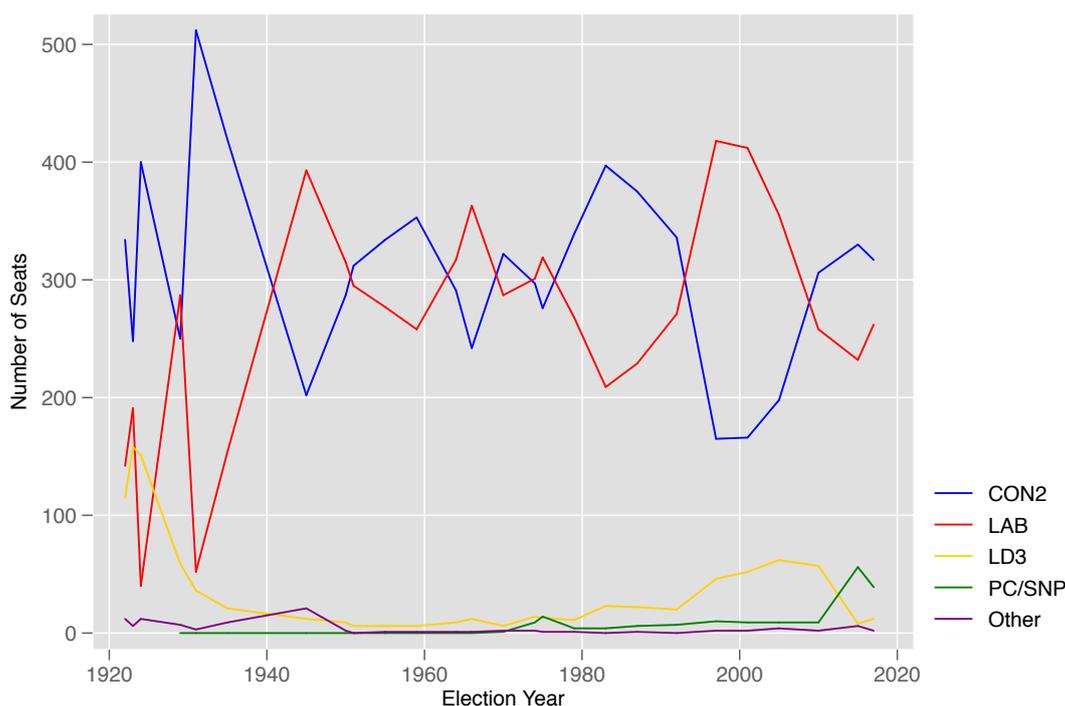


Figure 3: Party seats at British general elections 1922–2017

Source: House of Commons Library (Audickas and Cracknell, 2018). Data are for Great Britain only.

who they like least. This is consistent with our finding that booing has become more important in recent years, and this change may explain in part the proliferation of parties – booing one’s political opponents reduces the viability of large centrist ‘big tent’ parties.

This paper is organised as follows. The next section introduces the British Election Survey data we use, how we measure expressive voting and our empirical strategy. Section 3 presents the results of this analysis. We discuss possible interpretations of our research in section 4. Finally, section 5 briefly concludes.

## 2 Data and empirical strategy

This section begins by introducing the data we work with and some further details of the British political context before introducing our key variables, and our empirical strategy.

## Data and context

We study the relative roles of cheering and booing in politics in the United Kingdom. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the UK has seen dramatic political change since 2008, most notably with the “Brexit” referendum. But, more generally, with the rise of first UKIP and subsequently the Brexit party, as well as the dramatic shift leftwards of the Labour party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. Secondly, there are few comparable datasets to the British Election Study (BES) ([Fieldhouse, E. and J. Green. and G. Evans. and H. Schmitt and C. van der Eijk and J. Mellon and C. Prosser, 2017](#), [Fieldhouse et al., 2016](#)) which has conducted detailed individual level surveys of voters’ views, beliefs, and voting behaviour since the early 1980s. Moreover, the UK has strong party discipline, one elected chamber and no separation of powers, which combine to eliminate many of the complications inherent in the analysis of other nations’ democracies. <sup>6</sup>

The dependent variable we focus on is *Turnout*, which as the name suggests records whether or not a citizen voted. A key feature of the BES data is that for recent elections it records individuals’ actual voting behaviour rather than their stated intention or behaviour. This eliminates an important source of potential measurement error, which complicates inference with other datasets.

Each voter  $i$  has a preference over the political spectrum  $i \in R$  where we use  $i$  to denote both identity of a given voter and their location in the political spectrum. As is standard in a Hotelling-Downs model such as ours a voter, if they vote, votes for their closest party. We assume that the policy space is one dimensional, which is a reasonable approximation of the UK political landscape (see [Hakhverdian \(2009\)](#) among others), but not necessarily for the US or other countries. Our key independent variables are each individual’s perception of the distance between their ideal point,  $i$ , and that of each political party. The BES contains survey questions that ask each individual where they place themselves on a left–right scale, and where they locate each party. Thus, we can compute the distance between each individual and each party as perceived by that individual and without having to use estimated national

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<sup>6</sup>Although the UK has a strong party discipline, there have been instances of so-called intra party rebellions, see e.g., [Kirkland and Slapin \(2018\)](#).

party platforms either estimated from data (Volkens et al., 2018) or based on expert’s views (e.g. the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2015, Polk et al., 2017)). This is an important advantage not only because it obviates the need for assumptions about how each individual (or at least the average individual) perceives ideological space in comparison to those implicit in the measurement of party positions. But, also because it means that we can abstract from concerns about political sophistication or knowledge. It doesn’t matter in our analysis if individual  $i$  believes (counterfactually) that the Conservative party are a hard-left party and the Liberal Democrats extremely right-wing. Similarly, we do not need individual  $j$  to perceive the difference between 3 and 5 on a 10-point scale in the same way. All we require is that respondents are on average truthful about their perceptions, something that the long-running nature and careful design of the survey reassures of.

Thus, given the set of all parties contesting an election,  $\mathcal{P}$ , we define NP1 as the position of party  $p \in \mathcal{P}$  that individual  $i$  perceives as closest:

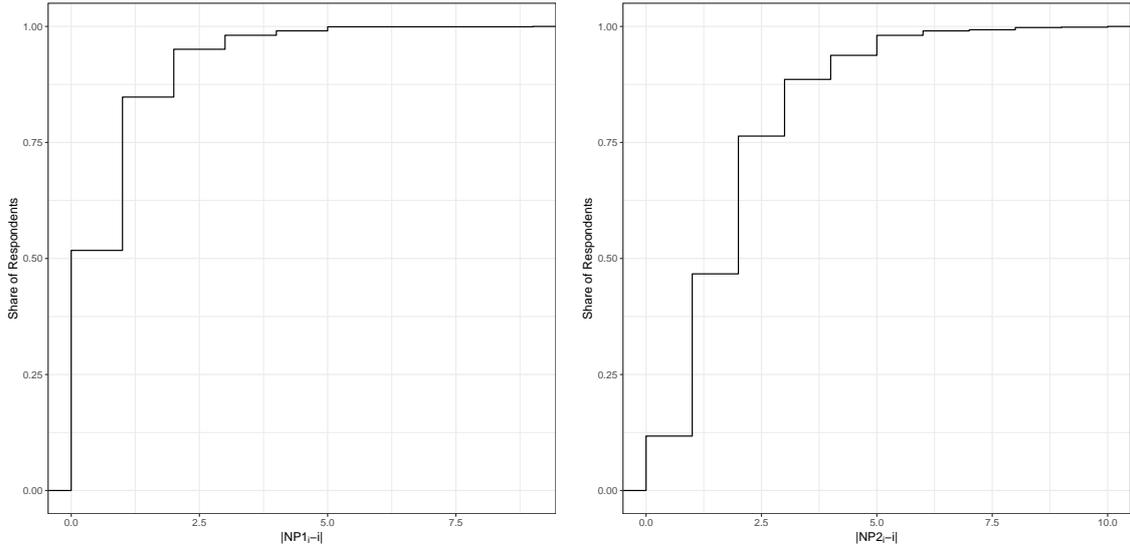
$$\text{NP1}_i = \arg \min_{p \in \mathcal{P}} \{|i - p_i|\}. \quad (1)$$

Similarly, the position of its second nearest party, NP2 is defined as:

$$\text{NP2}_i = \arg \min_{p \in \mathcal{P} - \text{NP1}_i} \{|i - p_i|\}. \quad (2)$$

And so on for the third and fourth nearest parties, etc.

We report the empirical cumulative distribution function (ECDF) of  $\text{NP2}_i$  and  $\text{NP2}_2$  in Figures 5a and 5b respectively. As we can see, just over half of the population believe that the party they perceive as closest as a platform the same as their ideal point. With few voters believing their nearest party is far from their ideal point. This is as expected, since we should not expect in a competitive democracy for a large share of the electorate not to have a party with a platform close to their ideal points. Also as expected, the ECDF of  $\text{NP2}_2$  shows more variation with some votes perceiving multiple parties as close to them, and others not. The BES also contains demographic information and given well-known income, education, and age differences in turnout



(a) Distance to Closest Party:  $NP1_i$

(b) Distance to Second Closest Party:  $NP2_i$

Figure 4: Empirical Cumulative Density Plots

rates we include these in our vector of controls  $X_i$ . Specifically, we include dummy variables coding whether or not the respondent is a graduate and whether they are a woman. We also include a quadratic in the respondent's age and potentially allow this to be different for men and women. Finally, we control for income.

## Empirical strategy

Our benchmark specification is the following linear probability model:

$$Turnout_i = \beta|NP1_i - i| + \gamma|NP2_i - i| + \psi X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (3)$$

where the parameters of interest are  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$ .  $\beta$  will capture *cheering*, voting expressively for a party that is perceived to represent my views and beliefs. *Booing* is measured by  $\gamma$  – voting to express dislike or distaste for a party that we perceive as less well aligned with our beliefs. We thus expect that  $\beta$  should be negative, and  $\gamma$  positive. The more important *cheering* is, the greater in magnitude  $\beta$  will be, and similarly  $\gamma$  will be larger if *booing* is more important. Given they are measured on the same scale the relative magnitudes of the two will allow us to understand the relative importance of the two motivations.

While, using the distance to the nearest party to capture *cheering* is a straightfor-

ward choice, capturing *booing* is more subtle. Voters may be motivated to vote by the distances to all or several of the more distant parties. For example, a right of centre voter, who is closest to the Conservative Party, may be motivated not only by their desire to *boo* the Labour Party but also the Liberal Democrats. Alternatively, a left of centre voter may be primarily motivated by their desire to *boo* the most distant party, say UKIP. For this reason it is appealing to include the distances to the third and fourth most distant parties in Equation 3 as well as  $|NP2_i - i|$ . However, this is difficult in practice for two reasons. Firstly, transitivity means that if the nearest party to the one that you support is not liked, then those further away are certainly disliked, thus the distances  $|NP2_i - i|$ ,  $|NP3_i - i|$ ,  $|NP4_i - i|$ , etc., are highly correlated with each other and including them all will lead to a multicollinearity problem. Secondly, the number of parties standing varied from constituency to constituency and not every respondent provided an answer about the location of every party, meaning that including  $|NP3_i - i|$  and  $|NP4_i - i|$  will limit the sample, in a non-random way. Below, we show that our results are robust to alternative choices to additionally including distances to more distant parties.

We use the supplied BES survey weights to ensure that our results are representative of the those eligible to vote as a whole and allow for arbitrary heteroskedasticity in  $\varepsilon_i$ .

### 3 Empirical results

Table 1 reports estimates of Equation 3 using the 2015 face-to-face cross-section BES (Fieldhouse et al., 2016). Looking across all of the specifications, the first thing we note is that both  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  are of the expected sign.  $\beta$  is negative, reflecting that the expressive benefit of voting for a preferred party declines the more different its policies are to those you prefer. Secondly,  $\gamma$  is positive reflecting the fact that as the next nearest party is further away the utility from *booing* it increases. Secondly, we can see that  $\beta$  is slightly smaller in magnitude than  $\gamma$  and not imprecisely estimated. This is consistent with an interpretation that *booing* is a more important motivation than *cheering*. We will see that this is a consistent finding. Interestingly, the estimate

$\gamma$  (and to a lesser extent  $\beta$ ) is consistent in magnitude suggesting that the second nearest party being 1 point further away on a 10 point scale is associated with a 2.5% increase in the probability of turnout. This is a substantial effect given the average turnout rates plotted in Figure 1. While, the estimate of  $\beta$  is smaller it is of a similar magnitude to  $\gamma$  suggesting that the nearest party being one point further away is associated with a 1–2% decrease in turnout. While the estimates are not significant here, they are consistent. One possible reason for this could be that just over half of respondents locate their preferred party at the same point on the scale as themselves, as was shown in Figure 5a.

The first column reports results excluding the demographic controls and, for the whole sample, comparing with Column 2 we see that while including demographics improves the explanatory power of the regression it only reduces  $\gamma$  slightly. Columns 3 and 4 report results for survey respondents whose reported turnout was successfully validated against the electoral record. We see that now, perhaps due to the elimination of measurement error,  $\gamma$  is a little larger in magnitude in both columns, as is  $\beta$  although it remains imprecise.

Columns 5 and 6 report the same specification as Column 4, but now additionally including  $|\text{NP3}_i - i|$ ,  $|\text{NP4}_i - i|$ . We see that the point estimates of  $|\text{NP2}_i - i|$  are similar to before, albeit slightly smaller, and less precisely estimated. The estimated coefficient of  $|\text{NP3}_i - i|$  in Column 5 is similarly sized, but more precisely estimated. Looking at Column 6 the estimate of  $|\text{NP4}_i - i|$  is of a similar magnitude but not significant, as now are the coefficients of  $|\text{NP2}_i - i|$  and  $|\text{NP3}_i - i|$  which are both a little smaller and less precise. Thus, while the signs are as expected this specification seems to ask too much of the data. Notably, the sum of the ‘*booing*’ coefficients is again larger than that on  $|\text{NP1}_i - i|$  Column 7 seeks to address the issues of multicollinearity and sample-size by replacing  $|\text{NP2}_i - i|$ ,  $|\text{NP3}_i - i|$ , and  $|\text{NP4}_i - i|$  with their sum. While, the coefficient is smaller as expected, it is precisely estimated, significant at the 1% level. The extent to which this reflects the improved sample size, or the reduction in multicollinearity is unclear, but we interpret it as further evidence of the importance of *booing* as a motivation. The overall conclusion seems consistent however: in every specification *booing* seems more important than *cheering*.

Table 2 report analogous specifications to the first four columns of Table 1, except additionally including  $|NP1 - NP2|$ , the distance between the two nearest parties. We find no evidence that this matters: the estimated coefficient is consistently very close to zero and we can rule out large effects. This is important because it suggests that our results are not being driven by a range of other potential mechanisms. For example, it suggests that it is not the intensity of political competition that matters, if the parties being close together were associated with higher turnout this might be a reasonable inference. Similarly, it also suggests that our results are not being driven by there being some asymmetry between the two nearest parties both being to the left or to the right of a voter as opposed to either side as this would be associated with the parties being further apart, other things being equal, and hence a positive coefficient.

The advantage of the face-to-face survey is that using professional interviewers should minimize measurement error. One disadvantage is that in the BES the available sample size is comparatively small, and each respondent is only interviewed once. Thus, we now turn to the BES Internet Panel Study which includes the results of over 100,000 online surveys ([Fieldhouse, E. and J. Green. and G. Evans. and H. Schmitt and C. van der Eijk and J. Mellon and C. Prosser, 2017](#)). The dependent variable is the self-reported likelihood of voting on a five point scale: 'Very unlikely that I would vote', 'fairly unlikely', 'neither likely nor unlikely', 'fairly likely', 'Very likely that I would vote', and as such we employ an ordered logit estimator.

The results are reported in Table 3. Here, the results are a little different. Now  $\beta$  is consistently negative and precisely estimated.  $\gamma$  is consistently positive and statistically significant, but the estimated coefficient is smaller than that for  $\beta$ . This is true, both unconditionally and including controls. Column 4 reports results including only a subset of controls that maximize sample size: household and personal income, past voting behaviour, marital status, survey date fixed effects, and education. Column 5 reports results including our full set of controls additionally including housing status, newspaper readership, religion, class, job type, and hours worked. It is unclear why the results from the internet survey are different. One possibility is that the larger sample means that  $\beta$  is now better estimated since many respondents locate their preferred party at the same point on the ideological spectrum as themselves,

potentially limiting the variation with which it is identified. Our preferred explanation is that it reflects the difference between reported intention of voting, and actual voting. That is, it might be that while *cheering* is more important for predicting intended voting, *booing* is more important for actual voting.

Columns 3 and 6–10 report results including constituency fixed-effect estimates. This is an extremely demanding specification as it now holds constant the particular set of politicians a voter can choose between, as well as the local strength of a particular party, etc. The results are nevertheless similar. Splitting the sample we find that  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  are larger in magnitude for women than for men. Indeed,  $\gamma$  is now insignificant. We find a similar pattern when we split by age.  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  are an order of magnitude larger for voters under the age of 49 than those aged 49 and over and  $\gamma$  is imprecise for older voters. It would be interesting in future research to follow the same individuals over a longer time-period so that we could potentially separate age and cohort effects in voting motivations and behaviour.

We now test how the relative importance of cheering and booing have varied over time, by re-estimating Equation 3 for previous waves of the BES so that we can assess the stability of  $\beta$  (*cheering*) and  $\gamma$  (*booing*) over time. Results are reported for 1983–2015 in Table 4. Some caution is necessary in interpreting these results given the substantial time-span and changes in survey techniques over the period. In particular, the results for 2015 are validated against the electoral-register whereas earlier surveys are not. Notwithstanding this caveat the results are clear. There has been a consistent increase in  $\gamma$  over the period while  $\beta$ , albeit normally inconsistent, has steadily increased. Both of these trends suggest increased role for booing. Looking more carefully at the coefficients we can see that as well as being small in magnitude the estimates of  $\gamma$  for 1983–1992 are of the wrong sign, while  $\beta$  is still negative consistent with more traditional party politics explanation in which one is more likely to vote, given idiosyncratic factors, if there are two parties close to one's ideal point rather than one. Again, the estimates are very small and relatively imprecise, and so we need to be careful not to over-interpret the results, but are nevertheless suggestive.

[Fetzer \(2019\)](#) argues that those areas most affected by austerity following the

Financial Crisis are those most likely to support Brexit. We might expect the desire to *boo*, will be most strong amongst those least fortunate. To address this we ask a related question, does the desire to *boo* vary by with deprivation quintile? The BES data contains a variable categorising the precise area the respondent lives in by multiple-deprivation index quintile.<sup>7</sup> The results are reported in Table 5. Deprivation is ordered from 1, most deprived, to 5, least deprived. We see that indeed, as might be expected, *booing* is most important for the most deprived, less important for those in quintiles 2 and 3, and unimportant for the least deprived 40%. *Cheering*, seems to be concentrated on those in quintiles 2 and 3. Indeed, for these quintiles *cheering* seems to be more important than *booing* suggesting that their relative importance varies amongst different social groups. It's unclear why  $\beta$  is insignificant in quintile 1, but this would be consistent with defining oneself in terms of what one is *against* almost to the complete exclusion of what one is *for*. The lack of any measured effect for the more affluent may reflect a number of non-exclusive possibilities. Firstly, it could be that the more affluent are more likely to engage in other forms of expressive political behaviour such as protest or campaigning. Secondly, it could be that the more affluent are less motivated by the desire to boo, perhaps precisely because of their wealth, but this is not obviously true. Third, it could be that their perceived cost of voting against their economic interest is higher.

In sum, we have found evidence consistent with the hypothesis that voters are motivated to vote by their desire to *boo* parties they dislike and to a lesser extent *cheer* parties they like.

## 4 Discussion

Our finding that *booing* matters more than *cheering*, and that their relative importance seem to have varied over time are in line with the arguments of [Hamlin and Jennings \(2019\)](#) that the domain of expressive motivations is 'large and nuanced'. In particular, it suggests that there may be expressive parallels to tactical voting – voters turning out expressively in response to the prospect of a party they dislike being elected has

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<sup>7</sup>This is done on the basis of Census data at the Lower Super Output Area Level which are a fine grained geographic construct, each containing around 1,500 people.

in common an evaluation of the relative positions of all parties, in the same way that is assumed for voters supporting a less-preferred party for instrumental reasons. In the instrumental case, the motivation is clear as voters normally are assumed to have preferences over policies not parties.

Expressive voters do not expect to alter policy, and thus it is worthwhile interrogating why the platforms of non-preferred parties are more important than that of the preferred choice. One explanation is identity politics. As argued by [Hillman \(2010\)](#), a voter's identity as a liberal or a conservative has a substantive importance beyond their allegiance to any one party. Beyond traditional liberal–conservative differences, identity politics may also be thought of as voting on the basis of differences, such as race, gender, or class, rather than party allegiance.

A substantial literature in Economics and Political Science has focused on polarization in US politics [Boxell et al. \(2017\)](#), and a more recent one on the UK [Peterson and Spirling \(2018\)](#), but, while clearly related, identity politics is distinct from extremism. We take identity politics to describe the set of disagreements based on individual identity not outcomes. So, in this sense, a voter might be regarded as having extremist views about policy because they want to live in a society very different to the majority. Whereas, they would be regarded as being driven by identity politics if they were concerned about outcomes of their group rather than themselves. Thus, affluent members of a minority may support policies that in fact disadvantage them in direct terms, but which in general benefit members of their group. This is in contrast to conventional party politics in which, mostly, supporters of a political party are presumed to have a common interest.<sup>8</sup> Identity politics means that I need not be personally affected by an issue to be motivated by it. Hence, for example, the popularity of campaigns to alter laws in other jurisdictions that disadvantage coreligionists or LGBTQ+ people. Identity politics can also often transcend and coexist with party politics.

Thus, if identity politics is important, then voters may be more motivated to vote the more different the policies of their less-preferred party, and the greater their

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<sup>8</sup>Note, that, for example, this definition of party politics need not rule out champagne socialists, etc., but does suggest that they will not comprise the mass of a socialist party's support.

antipathy towards them. This might reflect a perceived threat or just a basic dislike of what other parties represent and a desire to reject it. In the context of British politics one can contrast the 1980s, with the subsequent two decades, and then the post financial-crisis period. In the 80s political identity was often inherited and dominated by class and geography, with Labour dominating the working-class, industrial, urban vote, and the Conservative party the middle-class and rural vote. Thus, there is relatively little variation once we control for these factors, with the more conventional party politics of the period 1992–2008 during which triangulation, and the pursuit of swing-voters, reflected the reduced importance of these previous identities.<sup>9</sup>

This decline in class-based political identity is mirrored by the long-term decline in the share of voters identifying with a particular political party. [Sanders \(2017\)](#) documents that the share of voters not identifying with any party was less than 5% in 1964, and only around 10% in 1992, but was over 20% by 2015. Likewise, the share identifying fairly strongly or very strongly with a party was around 85% in 1964, and about 57% in 2015. This decline in party identification may have contributed to changing motivations for voting, as the decline in party identification reduced the incentive to *cheer*.

Since 2008, identities seem to be in flux and increasingly to predominate. Labour has in recent years suffered the collapse of its traditional heartlands, and the Conservative party similarly no longer attracts the votes of the young educated, and affluent in the same way. [Fetzer \(2019\)](#), [Becker et al. \(2017\)](#). Instead, as in the US and elsewhere, the divide is increasingly between those those (who perceive themselves to be) affected either by austerity [Fetzer \(2019\)](#) or by deindustrialisation and globalisation [Autor et al. \(2016\)](#) and those who have continued to prosper. The success of Donald Trump in Rust Belt communities that previously voted Democrat is mirrored by the support in the equivalent British communities for Brexit, and UKIP. Moreover, the the seeming switch from Labour being the party representing working class voters and the Conservatives the young and prosperous in the '80s to the opposite today shows that both political identity and its effects on party politics are far from

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<sup>9</sup>See [Shayo \(2009\)](#) for a discussion of the role of national identity in the political economy of western democracies.

fixed. The animus Brexit has generated between its supporters and detractors has been manifested not only in electoral politics, but also in protests, marches, and social media.<sup>10</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has sought to explain the occasional emergence of successful extremists and populists. Much of journalistic and academic commentary of these events talks of voters *rejecting* the establishment / status-quo / mainstream politicians. Often extremists' success is predicated on an extremely loyal and enthusiastic base who turnout in high numbers and who reject moves by parties or candidates towards the political mainstream. The support for such candidates, often in the face of economic self-interest, is often described as being a consequence of a rejection of the status-quo. Here we operationalise this politics of rejection as being closely related to an expressive motivation to *boo* candidates one does not support. That is to express one's difference.

Taking this argument to the data, we find evidence that the distance between a voter's ideal point and the platform of the second closest party is a key driver of turnout decisions in British elections, and more important than the distance to the nearest party. Moreover, it argues that this phenomenon can be well understood in the context of Expressive Voting motivations. That is, voters want to make clear who they 'like' or identify with *and* who they do not, with the latter increasingly important in recent years.

While this paper has provided empirical evidence for the importance of *booing* it has had relatively little to say about how the utility from *booing* will depend on the the distances to the second nearest party versus more distant parties. Similarly, it would be worthwhile to understand why the relative utility of *booing* and *cheering* has changed over time.

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<sup>10</sup>[Rivas and Rokey \(2019\)](#) study formally how such changes in the relative importance of cheering and booing in turn translate into political polarization, *ceteris paribus*.

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|  |   | Turnout             |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |
|--|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|  |   | (1)                 | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 | (5)                 | (6)                 | (7)                 |
|  | $ \text{NP1}_i - i $  | -0.013<br>(0.014)   | -0.013<br>(0.013)   | -0.022<br>(0.017)   | -0.021<br>(0.016)   | -0.025<br>(0.018)   | -0.020<br>(0.017)   | -0.013<br>(0.014)   |
|  | $ \text{NP2}_i - i $  | 0.024**<br>(0.010)  | 0.018*<br>(0.009)   | 0.029***<br>(0.011) | 0.026**<br>(0.011)  | 0.016<br>(0.013)    | 0.009<br>(0.014)    |                     |
|  | $ \text{NP3}_i - i $  |                     |                     |                     |                     | 0.018**<br>(0.008)  | 0.013<br>(0.010)    |                     |
|  | $ \text{NP4}_i - i $  |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | 0.013<br>(0.010)    |                     |
|  | $\sum_{q \in \{\text{NP2}_i, \text{NP3}_i, \text{NP4}_i\}}  q - i $ |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |                     | 0.010***<br>(0.003) |
|  | Age   |                     | 0.000<br>(0.004)    |                     | -0.003<br>(0.004)   | -0.003<br>(0.005)   | -0.001<br>(0.005)   | -0.003<br>(0.004)   |
|  | Age <sup>2</sup>  |                     | 0.004<br>(0.004)    |                     | 0.005<br>(0.004)    | 0.004<br>(0.004)    | 0.002<br>(0.005)    | 0.005<br>(0.004)    |
|  | Income  |                     | 0.010***<br>(0.002) |                     | 0.005**<br>(0.003)  | 0.006**<br>(0.003)  | 0.005*<br>(0.003)   | 0.005**<br>(0.003)  |
|  | Woman   |                     | 0.028<br>(0.022)    |                     | 0.043*<br>(0.024)   | 0.050**<br>(0.025)  | 0.040<br>(0.025)    | 0.046*<br>(0.024)   |
|  | Graduate  |                     | 0.065**<br>(0.026)  |                     | 0.079***<br>(0.026) | 0.087***<br>(0.027) | 0.083***<br>(0.029) | 0.071***<br>(0.026) |
|  | Constant  | 0.818***<br>(0.021) | 0.576***<br>(0.114) | 0.849***<br>(0.024) | 0.734***<br>(0.120) | 0.692***<br>(0.125) | 0.653***<br>(0.134) | 0.698***<br>(0.119) |
|  | Validated Turnout   | No                  | No                  | Yes                 | Yes                 | Yes                 | Yes                 | Yes                 |
|  | Observations  | 1,237               | 1,237               | 827                 | 827                 | 786                 | 699                 | 839                 |
|  | R <sup>2</sup>  | 0.006               | 0.063               | 0.012               | 0.042               | 0.054               | 0.057               | 0.048               |

Notes: The dependent variable is the decision to vote.  $|\text{NP}_i - i|$  is the ideological distance to political party nearest a given voter.  $|\text{NP2}_i - i|$  is the distance to the second nearest party. Columns 3–7 report the decision to vote validated against the electoral roll.

Table 1: The 2015 Election: In Person Survey

|                            | Turnout             |                     |                     |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                            | (1)                 | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)                 |
| $ \text{NP1}_i - i $       | -0.009<br>(0.017)   | -0.005<br>(0.016)   | -0.015<br>(0.016)   | -0.011<br>(0.016)   |
| $ \text{NP2}_i - i $       | 0.042***<br>(0.012) | 0.029**<br>(0.012)  | 0.042***<br>(0.013) | 0.035***<br>(0.013) |
| $ \text{NP} - \text{NP2} $ | -0.006<br>(0.009)   | 0.001<br>(0.009)    | -0.002<br>(0.010)   | 0.001<br>(0.009)    |
| Age                        |                     | -0.001<br>(0.004)   |                     | -0.002<br>(0.005)   |
| Age <sup>2</sup>           |                     | 0.004<br>(0.004)    |                     | 0.004<br>(0.005)    |
| Income                     |                     | 0.011***<br>(0.003) |                     | 0.006**<br>(0.003)  |
| Woman                      |                     | 0.036<br>(0.024)    |                     | 0.035<br>(0.027)    |
| Graduate                   |                     | 0.081***<br>(0.028) |                     | 0.087***<br>(0.029) |
| Constant                   | 0.803***<br>(0.027) | 0.582***<br>(0.123) | 0.831***<br>(0.031) | 0.716***<br>(0.128) |
| Validated turnout          | No                  | No                  | Yes                 | Yes                 |
| Observations               | 922                 | 922                 | 621                 | 621                 |
| $R^2$                      | 0.017               | 0.073               | 0.020               | 0.051               |

*Notes:* The dependent variable is the decision to vote.  $|\text{NP}_i - i|$  is the ideological distance to political party nearest a given voter.  $|\text{NP2}_i - i|$  is the distance to the second nearest party.  $|\text{NP} - \text{NP2}|$  is the distance between these two nearest parties. Columns 3,4,7, and 8 report the decision to vote validated against the electoral roll.

Table 2: The 2015 Election: In person survey

|                      | (1)                  | (2)                  | (3)                  | (4)                  | (5)                  | (6)                  | (7)                  | (8)                  | (9)                  | (10)                 |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| $ \text{NP1}_i - i $ | -0.043***<br>(0.004) | -0.049***<br>(0.005) | -0.055***<br>(0.005) | -0.055***<br>(0.005) | -0.049***<br>(0.008) | -0.049***<br>(0.009) | -0.040***<br>(0.011) | -0.061***<br>(0.012) | -0.103***<br>(0.014) | -0.019*<br>(0.010)   |
| $ \text{NP2}_i - i $ |                      | 0.013***<br>(0.004)  | 0.020***<br>(0.004)  | 0.015***<br>(0.004)  | 0.012*<br>(0.006)    | 0.014**<br>(0.006)   | 0.006<br>(0.009)     | 0.020**<br>(0.009)   | 0.028**<br>(0.011)   | 0.004<br>(0.008)     |
| Female               |                      |                      |                      | -0.046**<br>(0.020)  | -0.154***<br>(0.033) | -0.173***<br>(0.035) |                      |                      | -0.190***<br>(0.054) | -0.133***<br>(0.043) |
| Age                  |                      |                      |                      | 0.004<br>(0.004)     | 0.002<br>(0.010)     | 0.009<br>(0.010)     | -0.013<br>(0.014)    | 0.026*<br>(0.015)    | 0.101*<br>(0.053)    | 0.022<br>(0.039)     |
| Age <sup>2</sup>     |                      |                      |                      | 0.033***<br>(0.005)  | 0.014<br>(0.010)     | 0.010<br>(0.010)     | 0.027**<br>(0.014)   | -0.008<br>(0.015)    | -0.113<br>(0.070)    | -0.003<br>(0.031)    |
| Controls             | No                   | No                   | No                   | Some                 | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes                  |
| Fixed Effects        | No                   | No                   | Yes                  | No                   | No                   | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes                  | Yes                  |
| Sample               | All                  | All                  | All                  | All                  | All                  | All                  | Men                  | Women                | Young                | Old                  |
| Observations         | 111807               | 110829               | 106388               | 100423               | 62062                | 62062                | 35455                | 26607                | 16598                | 45464                |

"The dependent variable is the self-reported likelihood of voting on a five point scale: 'Very unlikely that I would vote', 'fairly unlikely', 'neither likely nor unlikely', 'fairly likely', 'Very likely that I would vote'. Estimates are from an ordered logit model.  $|\text{NP1}_i - i|$  is the ideological distance to political party nearest a given voter.  $|\text{NP2}_i - i|$  is the distance to the second nearest party. Columns 3,4, and 6–11 additionally include constituency fixed effects. Controls include survey date fixed effects, marital status, housing type, income, past voting behaviour, household size, job type, hours worked and social class. All data are from the British Electoral Survey (2015). \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 3: Perceived party proximity and the decision to turn out: 2015 election (Internet Survey)

|                      | (1)               | (2)                 | (3)                | (4)                 | (5)               | (6)                | (7)                 | (8)               |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| $ \text{NP1}_i - i $ | 0.004<br>(0.003)  | -0.000<br>(0.001)   | -0.001<br>(0.001)  | -0.011**<br>(0.005) | -0.001<br>(0.007) | -0.015*<br>(0.008) | -0.007<br>(0.004)   | -0.027<br>(0.018) |
| $ \text{NP2}_i - i $ | -0.002<br>(0.002) | -0.001**<br>(0.000) | -0.001*<br>(0.001) | 0.005*<br>(0.003)   | 0.000<br>(0.004)  | 0.005<br>(0.005)   | 0.008***<br>(0.003) | 0.022*<br>(0.013) |
| Election             | 1983              | 1987                | 1992               | 1997                | 2001              | 2005               | 2010                | 2015              |
| When                 | After             | After               | After A            | After               | After             | After              | After               | After (Validated) |
| Controls             | Yes               | Yes                 | Yes                | Yes                 | Yes               | Yes                | Yes                 | Yes               |
| Observations         | 3284              | 3337                | 1528               | 2108                | 2370              | 2718               | 1022                | 834               |

The dependent variable is the decision to vote.  $|\text{NP1}_i - i|$  is the ideological distance to political party nearest a given voter.  $|\text{NP2}_i - i|$  is the distance to the second nearest party. Controls include gender specific stochastic age trends, a university graduate dummy and income. (The 1983 survey has occupation fixed effects instead of income and gender specific quadratic age trends.) \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Robust standard errors in parentheses. All data are from the British Electoral Survey (various waves).

Table 4: Perceived party proximity and the decision to turn out: Multiple elections

|                      | (1)                 | (2)                 | (3)                 | (4)               | (5)               |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| $ \text{NP1}_i - i $ | -0.009<br>(0.565)   | -0.043**<br>(0.043) | -0.034*<br>(0.086)  | -0.004<br>(0.862) | 0.009<br>(0.585)  |
| $ \text{NP2}_i - i $ | 0.032***<br>(0.005) | 0.020*<br>(0.095)   | 0.023***<br>(0.008) | -0.008<br>(0.577) | -0.006<br>(0.653) |
| Election             | 2015                | 2015                | 2015                | 2015              | 2015              |
| When                 | After (Validated)   | After (Validated)   | After (Validated)   | After (Validated) | After (Validated) |
| Controls             | Yes                 | Yes                 | Yes                 | Yes               | Yes               |
| Quintile             | 1                   | 2                   | 3                   | 4                 | 5                 |
| Observations         | 91                  | 177                 | 173                 | 206               | 187               |

The dependent variable is the (validated) decision to vote.  $|\text{NP1}_i - i|$  is the ideological distance to political party nearest a given voter.  $|\text{NP2}_i - i|$  is the distance to the second nearest party. Quintiles are defined based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. All specifications also control for age, age squared, whether the respondent was a university graduate and income. All data are from the British Electoral Survey (2015). \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5: Social economic status, perceived party proximity and the decision to turn out