

The Blank and Null Vote:
An Alternative Form of Democratic Protest?

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ABSTRACT:

Blank and null voting has too often been misclassified as a regular vote, abstention or a mistake. On the contrary, it is often a form of popular political protest: relatively new, sometimes mobilized, growing everywhere, and increasingly attracting the attention of political elites. By changing the lens through which this behavior is observed, I uncover an important channel of political expression that, if and when institutionalized, represents a new source of information and accountability for governments, political parties, and politicians.

¹ This work has benefited from the advice and suggestions of a number of colleagues: Naor Ben-Yehoyada, Jorge I. Dominguez, Noam Gidron, Shelby Grossman, Steven Levitsky, Jennifer Pan, Amanda Pinkston, Margaret Roberts, James Reich, and Vanessa Williamson.

In 2011, more than 300,000 citizens in Spain walked to the polling stations and left the ballot completely blank, thus casting a blank vote. Around the same number of voters cast a null (spoiled) ballot, either by mistake or willingly. At the same time, around 100,000 Spaniards voted for *Escaños en blanco*, a "blank vote" party created in 2004.ⁱ These figures are significantly higher than the estimated number of people who participated in the *indignados* demonstrations that spread across Spain in 2011, one of the largest mass protests in Spanish history.

The Spanish case is not unique. It represents a wider trend. The aggregate levels of blank and null votes have shown an impressive upward trend across all countries and have doubled since the 1960s both in terms of vote share and absolute number of individuals protesting (see figure 1 and 2). Yet these citizens and their message have been largely ignored by scholars, with only a few pages dedicated to this act of protest.ⁱⁱ *Why?*

This is due to widespread (but misleading) assumptions about the nature of this behavior: that it is electorally marginal, politically insignificant, or simply a mistake.ⁱⁱⁱ On the contrary, this behavior should be treated as an instance of mass political protest: a strong message of deep discontent with the political offering. It should be compared to other types of protest (like street demonstrations and boycotts) rather than to abstention,^{iv} which is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, but often caused by ignorance^v and apathy.^{vi}

This change of perspective carries important implications. Classifying this behavior as a form of political protest, instead of a marginal electoral phenomenon, matters for the ongoing debate about the institutionalization of the blank vote on the ballot. Much of the debate, led by civic movements and courts, revolves around the idea of blank voting (or similar) as a voting right. I claim that it should be considered a form of non-violent democratic protest and actually used as an opportunity both for gauging popular discontent and increasing parties' accountability.

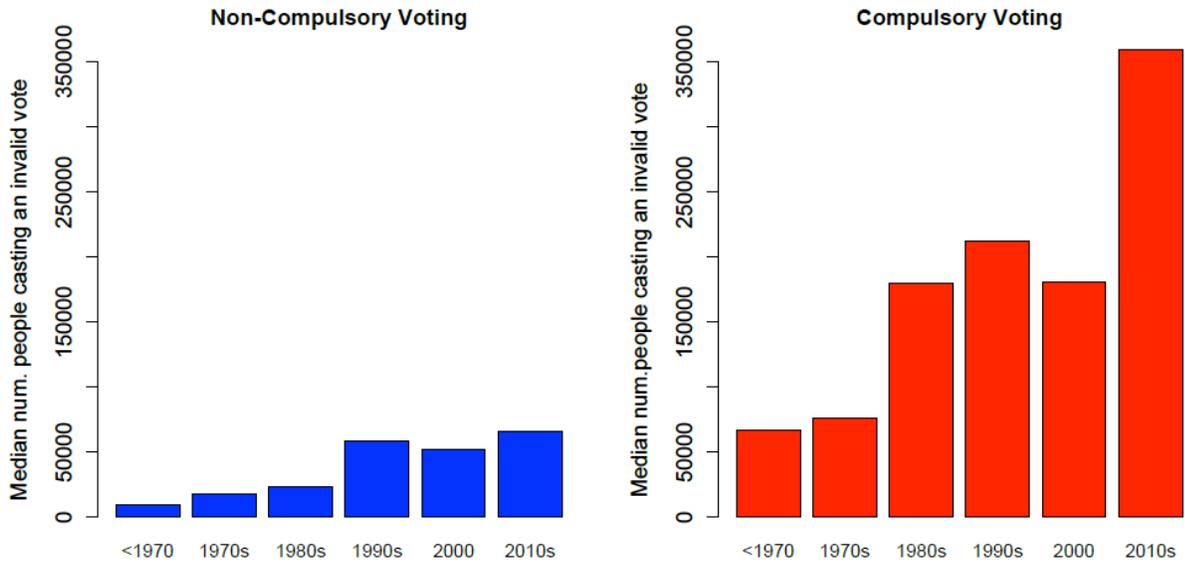


Figure 1: Median number of invalid voters (both blank and null) across time. In the sample there are 1439 elections in non-compulsory systems and 566 in compulsory systems. Null votes also include an error component that is assumed to be either constant or decreasing over time. The increase is also evident in invalid votes as a share of total votes. Data: “Data on Voter Turnout since 1945.” <http://www.idea.int/vt/viewdata.cfm>. Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2013.

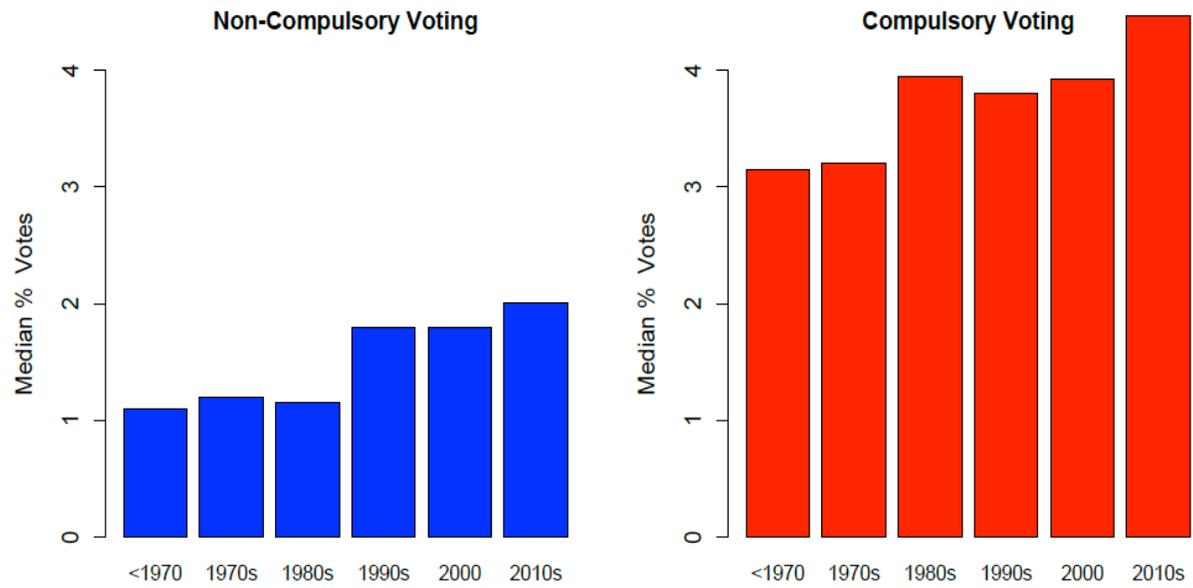


Figure 2: Same as figure1, but using the median percentage of votes. Data source: see figure 1.

A Protest: Historical Developments and Contemporary Trends

Political protest is often an active rejection of a political entity, policy, or political agenda. Protesters in the streets aim to send a signal of dissatisfaction with and to the political elites, as much as petitioners and boycotters. Especially in the last fifteen years, there has been an increase in protest movements that show an attitude directed against the current political system.^{vii} A blank or null vote fits into this trend and is much more akin to a rejection of the party system than to a preference for an individual candidate. However, even large cross-national surveys like the World Value Survey count as “protest” these actions: signing a petition, joining in boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, occupying buildings or factories;^{viii} and exclude blank voting.

What has prevented the inclusion of blank and null voting in the realm of political protest so far are three misconceptions regarding blank and null voting: 1. that it is not chosen by many and is a relatively unknown method of protest; 2. that people who choose to vote in this manner do not share a common cause and do it mistakenly or because of apathy, like abstention; 3. that this behavior has not and will not spur any major political changes or reform and that political elites do not care about this vote. Let me address these misconceptions.

First, the relatively low popularity of this form of protest compared to other types (like riots and demonstrations) is possibly a function of time. Indeed, because the necessary condition for protesting by voting blank – elections – is a relatively recent development, protest voting is recent too. Historical reports of riots date back at least to the Roman Empire, and these early forms of protest provoked as much surprise as blank votes do today. Thomas W. Africa writes:

"When civil war broke out between Septimius Severus and Clodius Albinus in A.D. 196, Dio witnessed an extraordinary display of crowd discipline during a demonstration for peace that took place at the Circus: [...] Dio adds that divine inspiration must have prompted the demonstration, for how else could so many men have cooperated?"^{ix}

The first recorded cases of blank and null voting that I could find, instead, is much more recent, dating back to the nineteenth century. In many European countries, nineteenth century restrictions on what was accepted as a “valid” vote led to the disenfranchisement of many people who had previously used

the voting to convey their opinions and discontent. Two French scholars, Ihl, O. and Deloye,^x studied the ballots of the 1881 legislative election in France, when around 3% of the national vote had to be voided because of null votes, and some areas experienced 20% rate of spoiled ballots. They found that many citizens express strong discontent through the ballot and reported some of the many messages written on the ballots:

“*Merde* to all the deputies, none of them are worth one good pig, however dirty it is. It would do a better job than those damn animals”^{xi}

“All the Candidates make great promises, Once they are elected they do what they want, Otherwise put, they are all the same.”^{xii}

“I erased the name (follows the name of the candidate printed, canceled) null ballot, Sir, I want to inform you that my ballot is null I vote for no one because they are not radical enough.”^{xiii}

These examples represent one of the earliest historical instance of the collective use of ballots to make political statements that go beyond the simple vote. Indeed, many of the examples reported by the authors show the use of sophisticated language and complex political concepts, which support the idea that this action was actually done by politically informed elites. Furthermore, these same voters were – most likely – aware that their ballots would be voided. They appear to have done it nonetheless, as a sign of protest, knowing that those ballots were most likely going to be read during the counting procedures.^{xiv}

Compared with street demonstrations, blank and null voting has a much shorter history and has yet to become a commonly known means of protest; it has not fully entered into what Charles Tilly called the "repertoire of contentions":^{xv} what individuals know how to do in the moment in which they want to send a political message; the set of options that the society in which the individual lives considers valid and culturally appropriate styles of protest.

However, repertoires change.^{xvi} According to many scholars, our time is witnessing a "normalization" of many forms of protest (like street demonstrations), which are now widely and commonly used.^{xvii} As Donatella Della Porta points out, forms of protest, such as marches or sit-ins, which are now well-accepted as part of the democratic process, were seen as dangerous and a threat to democracy as recently as 30-40 years ago.^{xviii} Despite the fact that the nature and consequences of

blank vote protesting are still relatively unknown, we observe a slow increase in the use of this tool with several cases of mobilized blank and null voting and even a few "spontaneous" outbreaks.

Examples of the latter, spikes of non-mobilized blank voting, have been found across the world. In the US, the 1975 Boston mayoral election witnessed over 10,000 spoiled ballots, which significantly overcame the margin of victory of the incumbent, Kevin White, over Senator Joseph Timilty. The mayor was accused of major corruption and the blank vote appeared to have been driven by the liberal community, tired of corrupt politics.^{xix} In 2001, 21% of the Argentinian legislative elections' votes were spoiled or left blank by disappointed voters. This *voto bronca*, the angry vote,^{xx} was interpreted as a strong message to the President Fernando de la Rúa after years of economic recession and social unrest.

In addition to spontaneous outbreaks there are multiple instances of mobilized blank (or null) voting. In these cases, this form of protest has been introduced by political elites using a top-down approach that promoted it in place of election boycotting and street demonstrations. The majority of cases of mobilized blank (or null) voting were either the protest of an "illegal" party after having been outlawed, or the protest of legal opposition parties against a perceived democratic backslide of the government or fraudulent elections. Important examples of outlawed and illegal political movements that set in motion waves of blank or null voting can be found in Latin America and Southern Europe. Blank or null votes were used by the supporters of the guerrilla movement *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru in the 1980s. The "Shining Path," a Marxist-leninist movement, created in the early 1960s by Abimael Guzmán Reynoso, was able to convince 56% of the voters in Ayacucho's municipal elections to cast a blank or null vote in 1983.^{xxi} In Brazil in the 1950 elections, Luis Carlos Prestes, leader of the outlawed communist party, urged all his followers to cast a blank ballot with a call for that he published in a communist newspaper.^{xxii}

However, the most famous case of a blank ballot surge among those lead by outlawed parties is Argentina in the 1960s^{xxiii}. In the election of 1957 for the Constitutional Convention, Perón, from his exile in Venezuela, asked his supporters to cast a blank ballot, which ended up being the first "party" in the race, with 2,115,861 votes, almost 10000 more votes than the real first party (UCRP).^{xxiv}

The correspondence between Perón and John William Cooke, Perón's representative in Argentina after the leader's exile, reveals the complex campaign put in place to promote the use of the blank vote, and shows the symbolism of this vote within the party. *Palabra Argentina*, the most important newspaper of the *Peronistas*, published from 1955 to 1958,^{xxv} was campaigning for the use of this vote; pamphlets were produced and sent from Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil; and clandestine publications spread the word across the country.^{xxvi}

The most recent case of an outlawed party that mobilized null votes is the banned *Batasuna*

party in 2004 in the Basque Country in Spain. In March, 2003, one of the Basque nationalist parties, *Herri Batasuna*, was officially interdicted from participating in any election, because of its connections to the terrorist movement ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*). In the aftermath of 9/11, Spain increased its efforts to fight local terrorism, and in 2002 its Parliament passed a revision of the Law of Political Parties “prohibiting that a political party could, in a repetitive and serious way [...] politically support the violence and the activity of a terrorist group.”^{xxvii} In August of the same year, Batasuna was suspended, and its official proscription arrived in March, 2003.^{xxviii}

Sometimes blank and null votes are mobilized by legal opposition parties, which aim to delegitimize the ruling party^{xxix} and possibly invalidate the election.^{xxx} A recent instance of this is the case of Thailand in 2006. The main opposition parties called for a boycott of the parliamentary elections in response to widespread discontent with the single-party government controlled by the Thai Rak Thai party (TRT), whose leader, owner of a telecommunications empire, had been accused of corruption. Thai electoral rules allow for the “no vote” option on the ballot. The large share of “no vote” (33%), together with the invalid vote (13%) made it impossible to fill all the seats in the Parliament, leaving 49 seats vacant. This was one of the reasons leading to the Supreme Court's decision to invalidate the elections.^{xxxi}

Another interesting case of opposition parties' organizing of blank voting comes from Bolivia. In the first Bolivian election for four national courts in 2011, the opposition mobilized an invalid vote of up to 60%. The direct election of judges was part of a constitutional reform lead by the *Movimiento Al Socialismo* (MAS) of Evo Morales.^{xxxii} The call for a null vote to protest against the MAS government, combined with the lack of electoral campaigning, which was not allowed by law, produced a high level of blank and null voting.^{xxxiii}

Finally, in some countries political movements have been formed in defense of the right to protest by blank voting (see examples in table 1). For example, the Spanish *Movimiento Ciudadano por el voto blanco computable* (Citizens' movement for the computable blank vote) was created at the beginning of the 2000s. On their website, these activists claim that the movement targets those who “do not feel represented by any other political option.”^{xxxiv} Connected to this movement is *Escaños en Blanco*, a registered political party that aims to leave seats empty. The two organizations collaborate in promoting the official recognition and counting of blank votes. In 2011, this party obtained 1.47% of the votes in Cataluña.^{xxxv} Similar parties also currently exist in France, UK, Colombia, Wales, and Serbia(see a examples reported in table 1).^{xxxvi}

These instances of blank voting provide a direct response to the second assumption about the

nature of this behavior: that there is no common cause behind it and that it is driven by apathy or ignorance.^{xxxvii} The examples of mobilization answer clearly that, as with many other tools of protest, blank voting can be used to promote an agenda. Moreover, as table 1 shows, statements of grass-roots movements and blank voting campaigns present important similarities: references to the desire to participate in the democratic process; a sense of duty toward society (“Vote for a candidate you really want, or vote blank in protest. Both will help to revitalize UK politics”), and a vivid disappointment with contemporary political offerings (“those who want democracy but have no one for whom to vote”). All these messages hint at a rejection of the current system as corrupt or broken, and they recall the platform of many anti-establishment parties, such as the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (Italy), *Podemos* (Spain), and *Ciudadanos* (Spain). Even if part of the null (spoiled) ballots are effectively mistakes, the blank and null voting phenomenon as whole appears to be predominantly a conscious protest.

Finally, the last commonly cited misconception regarding blank and null voting is that politicians do not pay attention to this behavior. Various elections have already shown that, when included officially on the ballot, this vote is taken into consideration by the political elites. For example, in the 2014 Colombian presidential elections, the blank vote was polled to be over 30% of the ballots.^{xxxviii} Many of the candidates campaigned against this vote and addressed the discontent that it was believed to represent. The actual national share of *voto en blanco* was of around 7% , but with a peak of 13.29% in Bogota and even higher shares in regions of the Altiplano Cundiboyacense.^{xxxix}

In India, in the 2014 local elections, politicians became weary of the fact that several constituencies, in some of the local assemblies districts, had a margin of victory smaller than the number of votes received by the “None of the Above” vote (NOTA)^{xl} As one political expert from Mumbai University observed: "The NOTA share in assembly elections may go up in Maharashtra just like we have seen in other states. This is exactly the reason for political parties to worry,"^{xli}

In the United States, the Republicans have recognized this vote as a serious political threat. In 2012, the Republican Party filed a lawsuit against the state of Nevada demanding to eliminate the option from the ballot. The legal argument presented was that the voters of NOTA were disenfranchised since their vote could never win the elections if it had achieved the plurality votes.^{xlii} The actual rationale behind the lawsuit was the fear that blank votes would represent a loss for Mitt Romney, who was the non-incumbent in that race.

To summarize, these three elements—the rise of a "young" form of protest , the shared political discontent of these voters, and the awakening of the elites—make this behavior more similar to street

demonstrations, boycotts, and petitioning, than to abstention.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Message</i>	<i>Website/source</i>
Escaño Blanco (Blank Ballot)	Spain	“For whoever does not feel represented by any other political option” ^{xliii}	http://www.votoenblancocomputable.org/
None-of-the-above	United Kingdom	“Vote for a candidate you really want, or vote blank in protest. Both will help to revitalise UK politics”	http://www.blankvote.org.uk/
Voto en Blanco (Blank Vote)	Colombia	“[...] those who want democracy but has no one for whom to vote” ^{xliv}	http://votoenblanco.org/
No-Candidate-Deserve-My-Vote	Wales (UK)	“This party gives a voice to those who feel disillusioned or disenfranchised by the choice of political parties or their candidates.”	http://www.nocandidate.org.uk/
Parti du Vote-Blanc (Party of Blank Vote)	France	“Blank vote identifies the will to participate to the democratic process but it marks a rejection of the proposed options.” ^{xlv}	http://www.parti-du-vote-blanc.fr/
None-of-the-above (NOTA)	United States	“All legitimate consent requires the ability to withhold consent; therefore, the legitimate consent of voters requires they be able to withhold their consent in an election to office.”	http://nota.org/
Parti-nul (Null Party)	Quebec (Canada)	“Why create <i>Parti Nul</i> ? Because voters have no clear way to express, without a doubt, their dissatisfaction with regard to political parties, the electoral process, or political institutions in general. [...]”	http://www.partinul.org/en/mission/

Table 1: Sample of Blank Vote Parties and Movements.

What Does Blank (or Null) Voting Say about the State of Representative Democracy?

Blank voting, a political protest within the ballot, represents a sign of discontent with the perceived low-quality of the entire range of political offerings. Often this is due to a general sense of the corruption of the political elites. The limits of the ballot—that is, the limited expressive possibilities offered by the electoral channel—become glaring in the eyes of disappointed voters. When none of the options on the ballot are seen as viable, the impossibility of officially rejecting all of them (*i.e.*, institutionalized "none-of these-candidates" or "blank vote") and proposing political alternatives (*i.e.*, write-in procedures) become striking. For this reason, the increase of the blank or null vote, mobilized or not, signifies something deeper than a simple unhappiness with the political parties running in a specific electoral race. It is evidence of the inadequacy of today's representative democratic system in meeting citizens changing political demands.

What do I mean by the expressive limitations of the ballot? The development of representative democracy has contributed to the containment of the role of the people in democracy. This represents a fundamental change from direct democracy, created by the Greeks as a combination of the active participation of the citizens, their deliberation in the assembly, and the high level of accountability of the participants. The archetype of liberal representative democracy, described in the Federalists Papers, is actually explicitly meant to be the opposite of ancient direct democracy. It was created with the aim of curbing the collective action of the masses.^{xlvi} Moreover, the introduction of the secret ballot and formal rules for elections also added a further filter on popular political expression. As Albert Hirschman put it, the vote is:

“the safeguard against an excessively expressive citizenry [...] 'one man one vote' rule gives everyone minimum share in public decision making, but it also sets something of a maximum or ceiling: for example, it does not permit the citizens to register the widely different intensities with which they hold their respective political convictions and opinions.”^{xlvii}

Although not all ballots are the same, in the majority of cases voting is a binary (or categorical) choice among preselected parties (and candidates). For this reason, it is fundamental for the functioning of representative democracies that citizens accept the ballot as their main tool of participation and that they trust the good faith of the selected individuals and parties. If the voters believe that all the candidates and parties are acting on personal interests and are corrupt, the existing conventional accountability mechanisms (like regular elections) are not sufficient, while, at the same time, no tools

of official rejection are available to the citizens. The representative democratic system is not well equipped to deal with a generalized increase in dissatisfaction with the party system and politicians and, unless blank vote is formalized on the ballot, does not offer any democratic channels to express this officially.

In the last 20 years, with voting being more and more the exclusive vehicle of mass democratic participation, as party membership becomes less appealing^{xlviii} and anti-party sentiments spread,^{xlix} the electoral process shoulders much of the burden of democratic expression. This makes evident the inadequate range of expressive options that the electoral process permits to.¹ Especially in the eyes of many politically engaged and well-educated citizens, who are not inclined to abstain, the ballots may easily become limiting, and the blank vote or null vote appealing as a signal of the rejection of the political options.

Opening up the Ballots: Institutionalizing the Blank (or Null) Vote.

An institutionalized “blank vote” option is already available to voters in a number of countries. A civic movement put the “none of these candidates” option officially on Nevada’s ballot (USA) in the 1970s. In this state, since 1975, the citizens have the option of choosing “None of these Candidates” for all the positions that are decided by a state-wide election. The option was brought to the ballot in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal to allow citizens to express their discontent. As Nate Silver said in a blog post: “In Nevada, No One Is Someone to Watch”.^{li} In 1976, this vote actually won the plurality of the Republican primary for a House seat; in 1996 it won more than the difference in votes between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, as it did in 1998, when, in the Senate race, the difference between Harry Reid and John Ensign was about 395 votes while the “none” option received over 8000.

A much older and more common tradition in the United States, which may as well be an alternative manifestation of blank and null vote in its protest nature, is the write-in procedure: the possibility of writing the name of a candidate who is not among those on the ballot. This option was the result of the introduction of the Australian ballot system at the end of 1800, which by design limited the possible choices to preselected candidates, already printed on the ballot. Hence, the need for the possibility of adding a name to the list of candidates at the polling station arose.^{lii} Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia allow the use of “write-in” candidates; six only at general elections (like Arkansas); four only in specific cases (like Nebraska). Four completely prohibit it.^{liii}

This type of vote has been used both to advance the actual candidacy of outsiders, with some

successes (like Lisa Murkowski in the 2010 senatorial elections), and as a form of protest (like the Donald Duck vote are we supposed to know what this is? If not, say something like, like the famous "Donald Duck" vote, and readers can go look it up). A recent example of a provocative protest vote has been the campaign of the popular director Michael Moore, who in the 2000 elections supported the candidacy (as a write-in) of a plant – a ficus for the Congressional race of New Jersey, in the 11th district. The protest, according to the director, was intended to challenge the lack of competition in many districts of the United States. In a television interview he declared:

“[...] hopefully the plant will do some good in bringing some people out, who you know, unfortunately we don’t have “none of the above” on our ballots in this country, so the plant is a good way to vote "none of the above" [...]"^{liv}

Another country where the blank vote option, in the form of "Against All," had been used until recently is Russia. This vote had been in place since 1991, when the official ballots changed from the Soviet ones. The option was eventually abolished in 2006. In its 15-year existence, “Against All” collected between 4.88 % of the vote in the second round of 1996 Presidential election, 4.7 % in the 2003 parliamentary election, and 3.45% in the presidential election of 2004.^{lv} The initial rationale behind the introduction of the law was to avoid dissent being dispersed to minor parties.^{lvi} However, the United Russian party (Putin’s ruling party) decided to eliminate it when it started becoming too popular (especially in the regional elections), despite the protests of opposition parties’ leaders, who claimed that this was a further sign of the country's democratic backslide.^{lvii} Ukraine, on the other hand, currently maintains the option of "against all” on its ballot.

More recently, Bangladesh has introduced “None of the Above” in the 2008 election. It collected only a small percentage of votes (.55%), but according to some monitoring organizations, like the European Union, this option should be classified as: “an additional means of democratic control from voters’ perspective: ”^{lviii} A similar step has been approved in India, where the option "None of the Above" was introduced in 2013.

Finally, Colombia's 1991 constitution established the inclusion of the option *voto blanco* on the ballot. Since then, the country has witnessed a number of surges in this vote. As the ex-president of the Constitutional Court in Colombia, Jaime Araújo, declared in an interview on *Semana*: “The blank vote is a peaceful revolution, a mechanism to channel much of the non conformist behavior that exists in the country, and a way to renovate politics, Colombian society [...].”^{lix}

The Debate: *Should this Protest Be Institutionalized on the Ballot?*

With its argument and qualitative evidence, this paper intervenes directly in the heated discussion regarding the value of the blank vote and the introduction of an official “rejection” option on the ballot (“blank vote,” or “none-of-these candidates”). The arguments in favor can be gathered into two main groups: intrinsic and instrumental justifications.

To start, many have interpreted the institutionalization of the blank vote as providing citizens with the opportunity to voice their dissent. Hence, they recognize in this vote a principle of freedom of expression that is intrinsically important for democracy. Along these lines, in 2011 the Colombian Constitutional Court declared the blank vote as: “a political expression of dissent, abstention or nonconformity, with political effects [...] through which the protection of the freedom of the voter is promoted.”^{lx} Similarly, California Proposition 23 declares that blank voting is a form of active dissent, as opposed to abstention, since “not voting does not get you heard, it just gets you labeled as apathetic”.^{lxi} A different approach claims that the blank vote is equal to a vote for a candidate and increases the representativeness of the democratic system. This second argument is well represented in the decision of the Indian Supreme Court, which introduced the “none-of-the-above” vote in September 2013. The decision was based on the principle that democracy should allow for the option of rejecting all the candidates, that the right to vote “negatively” should be protected by secrecy as much as the “positive” vote, and that only the addition of the “NOTA” option on the ballot (or electronic voting screen) can ensure it.^{lxii}

Moreover, an instrumental argument, defended in the United States, Colombia, and India, states that the existence of an institutionalized blank vote would increase parties' accountability, by forcing them to self-reform and improve their transparency. As one political expert from an Indian think tank, declared: "It will have some effect on the political parties. If people prefer for [*sic*] NOTA over others, it will send a message to them that their choice of candidates is not right and we are unhappy."^{lxiii} This argument is particularly compelling in regards to those elections, in the United States and elsewhere, where the incumbent party has uncontested power.^{lxiv}

Among all the cases mentioned, only in Colombia does the victory of this vote have actual consequences. If the blank vote wins the majority of the votes the election needs to be repeated, although only the first time. In this case, the candidates who were present in the invalidated election cannot participate in the new elections.^{lxv} Parties and government therefore interpret any increase of the

blank vote as a serious threat. This makes it an important and significant channel of accountability.

While embracing many of the points presented above, particularly the accountability argument, I would like to conclude this paper by offering a further instrumental justification for the institutionalization of the blank and null vote: the opportunity that it provides for the gathering of political information. As I have shown, blank and null voting is a conscious message of discontent sent to the political system by voters, a symptom of the gap between citizens' need for expression and the amount of expressiveness allowed on the ballot. By excluding this phenomenon from the set of choices that the ballot institutionally permits, governments and parties miss the opportunity to record a significant form of dissent, which might help them reach a better understanding of the political sentiments in their country. The existence of a formal option on the ballot could eliminate any ambiguity behind this message.

ⁱ Ministerio del Interior España (2013). *Resultados electorales*. Url: <http://goo.gl/oz1FG7>. Data downloaded: November, 2013.

ⁱⁱ For a good overview of determinants of this vote: Power, T. and Garand, J. (2007). Determinants of invalid voting in Latin America. *Electoral Studies*, 26(2):432–444. More examples of literature on blank voting in the body of the paper.

ⁱⁱⁱ Example of "ignorance" argument for blank voting: McAllister, I. and Makkai, T. (1993). Institutions, society or protest? explaining invalid votes in Australian elections. *Electoral Studies*, 12(1):23–40;

^{iv} Examples of the "protest" argument: Herron, M. C., & Sekhon, J. S. (2005). Black candidates and black voters: assessing the impact of candidate race on uncounted vote rates. *Journal of Politics*, 67(1), 154-177. Stiefbold, R. P. (1965). The Significance of Void Ballots in West German Elections. *American Political Science Review*, 59(02), 391-407. Rosenthal, H., & Sen, S. (1973). Electoral participation in the French fifth republic. *American Political Science Review*, 67(01), 29-54. Zulfikarpasic, A. (2001). Le vote blanc: abstention civique ou expression politique? *Revue française de science politique*, 51(1):247–268.

^v Lijphart, A. (1997). Unequal participation: Democracy's unresolved dilemma presidential address, American political science association, 1996. *American Political Science Review*, 91(01):1–14. Rosenstone, S. and Hansen, J. M. (1993). *Mobilization, participation and democracy in America*.

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^{vii} Bardi, L. (1996). Anti-party sentiment and party system change in Italy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 29(3):345–363. Bélanger, É. (2004). Antipartyism and Third-Party Vote Choice A Comparison of Canada, Britain, and Australia. *Comparative Political Studies*, 37(9), 1054-1078.

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- ^{xi} Reported in Schaffer, F. C. (2008). *The hidden costs of clean election reform*. Cornell University Press.
- ^{xii} Ihl, O. and Deloye, Y. (1991). Des voix pas comme les autres. votes blancs et votes nuls aux elections legislatives de 1881. *Revue française de science politique*, 41(2):141–170, page 165 and translated by the author of this paper.
- ^{xiii} Ibid: page 166, translated by the author.
- ^{xiv} Schaffer, F. C. (2008). *The hidden costs of clean election reform*. Cornell University Press.
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- ^{xvi} Tilly, C. (1993). Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834. *Social Science History*, 253-280
- ^{xvii} Norris, Pippa, Stefaan Walgrave, and Peter Van Aelst. (2005). "Who Demonstrates? Antistate Rebels, Conventional Participants or Everyone?" *Comparative Politics* 37, no. 2.
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