Strategic Voting Versus Sincere Voting

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Summary and Keywords

People do not always vote for the party that they like the most. Sometimes, they choose to vote for another one because they want to maximize their influence on the outcome of the election. This behavior driven by strategic considerations is often labeled as “strategic voting.” It is opposed to “sincere voting,” which refers to the act of voting for one’s favorite party.

Strategic voting can take different forms. It can consist in deserting a small party for a bigger one that has more chances of forming the government, or to the contrary, deserting a big party for a smaller one in order to send a signal to the political class. More importantly the strategies employed by voters differ across electoral systems. The presence of frequent government coalitions in proportional representation systems gives different opportunities, or ways, for people to influence the electoral outcome with their vote. In total, the literature identifies four main forms of strategic voting. Some of them are specific to some electoral systems; others apply to all.

Keywords: voting behavior, political behavior, elections, rational choice, instrumental motives, political decision making

People do not always vote for their favorite party. Sometimes, they choose to vote for another one that they like less. For example, in the United Kingdom, many supporters of the small Green Party end up voting for the Labour Party, although still preferring the Green Party (Heath et al., 1991). Far from being irrational, this decision is often the result of a strategic calculus. Voters seek to maximize their impact on the final electoral outcome. Hence political scientists use the expression “strategic voting” when they talk about this behavior.[1] They oppose it to “sincere voting,” which is the decision to vote for one’s favorite party.

There are at least two reasons why political scientists should care about strategic voting. First, from a theoretical perspective, it helps in understanding the decision-making process behind vote choice. Strategic voting reveals that voters are rational and instrumental, in the sense that they seek to maximize the chance that their vote matters for the final electoral outcome. Studying strategic voting thus teaches something about the way people make up their mind during an election. Second, from an applied perspective, it

gives important insights for understanding electoral results. In many instances, the portion of strategic voters is substantial. Not recognizing it could thus lead to an inaccurate interpretation of parties' scores. For example, in the United Kingdom, an observer would overestimate the popular support of the Labour Party if she does not take into consideration that some of its apparent electorate are supporters from the Green Party, casting a strategic vote.

The study of strategic voting is intimately related to the study of electoral systems. One of the first analyses of this behavior can be found in Duverger's seminal book *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (1954). Analyzing how electoral systems and rules shape party systems, Duverger makes the distinction between direct and indirect effects. The direct effect is mechanical, in the sense that it is brought about by the rule itself in its translation of votes into seats; the indirect effect is psychological, in the sense that it derives from people anticipating the mechanical effect of the rule.[2] Along this line, people sometimes decide not to vote for their favorite party because they understand the mechanics of the system and that it would be better to vote for someone else in order to maximize their influence on the final electoral outcome. Although Duverger concludes that strategic voting only exists in plurality elections, other authors show that it applies to all electoral systems. In a famous theorem, Gibbard (1973) and Satterthwaite (1975) demonstrate that there is no electoral system that is invulnerable to strategic calculus. Regardless of the rule, there is always someone who has an incentive to vote for another party than the one they like the most. It is thus of tremendous importance to understand this widespread behavior.

This article starts by giving a general definition of strategic voting, discussing the necessary assumptions this theory makes about voters' motivations and knowledge, and reviewing the methods used by political scientists to study this topic. It also briefly presents the key determinants of the behavior. Second, it describes the different forms that strategic voting can take in elections organized under plurality and proportional rules. Finally, it concludes in discussing the most promising research avenues for future research on the topic.

Definition, Assumptions, and Methods

This section develops a general definition of the concept of strategic voting and discusses the main terms of this definition. Second, it clarifies the necessary assumptions that this definition makes about voters, how they make decisions, and which information they base those decisions. Third, it presents the key determinants of the behavior. Finally, it reviews the methods used by political scientists to study this behavior.

Definition

This piece relies on the definition of Blais and Nadeau (1996) (see also Fisher, 2004). There are two necessary conditions for a vote to be considered strategic: the voter needs to (a) cast a vote for a party that is not her favorite one, and (b) do so to maximize her

chances to affect the final electoral outcome. There are other definitions of strategic voting in the literature. In some studies, the authors consider that the willingness to affect the final electoral outcome is a sufficient condition to talk about strategic voting (e.g., Aldrich, Blais, & Stephenson, 2018; Blais et al., 2011). According to this second definition, voters do not need to be non-sincere to be considered as strategic. This approach is not adopted in the present article because it aims at clarifying the distinction between strategic and sincere voters. This is impossible with this second definition, according to which a voter can be strategic and sincere at the same time. Note also that there are different ways in which the voter can affect the final electoral outcome; hence there are different forms of strategic voting. The scenario that is the most commonly discussed in the literature is the one in which a voter who supports a small party, like the Green Party in the United Kingdom, votes for a larger party, like the Labour Party. She does so because she fears that a vote for the Green Party would be "wasted," as the party has little or no chance of forming the government. At the same time, she believes that her vote can help the Labour Party win at the national level against the Conservative Party that she does not like at all.[3]

Before outlining the main assumptions behind strategic voting, this section discusses the two necessary conditions. The first one makes a distinction between sincere and non-sincere voting. A sincere vote is a vote for one's favorite party. It is important to note that some people can decide to vote for a party that is not their favorite one because they like a candidate from that party (e.g., a local candidate or a party leader). This is also a sincere vote, as it is preference that drives their choice (Plescia, 2016). In elections for which there are two ballots, for example, under mixed-member electoral rule or when there are two chambers to elect, someone can sincerely vote for two different parties because she prefers a candidate of one party in one of the ballots, and a candidate of another party in the other one (Harfst, Blais, & Bol, 2018).

Non-sincere voting is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. To label a vote as "strategic," there has to be an attempt to affect the final electoral outcome. This is the second condition. Two notes must be made here. First, in reality, elections are never so close that a single vote can make a difference in the electoral outcome. However, if everybody adopts this line of reasoning and thus abstains from voting, a single person could in fact change the result by actually turning out to vote (Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974). Studies show that even when many people are voting, people act as if their vote were capable of influencing the result. They overestimate the probability that their vote can do so (Blais, 2000). Second, to be considered a strategic voter, one only needs to seek to influence the electoral outcome. People make mistakes sometimes. They cast a vote thinking that it will affect the final electoral outcome, but then regret their choice because they realize, after the election, that it did not make any difference. This typically occurs when they wrongly anticipate the electoral support of the competing parties (Bol, Blais, & Laslier, 2018).

Assumptions

Strategic voting can only exist with four main underlying assumptions: voters (a) are rational, (b) care about the outcome of the election, (c) have information about the strength of each party in their district, and (d) understand the way the electoral system works in their country. The first assumption is that they are rational in the sense that they seek to maximize their interest or "utility." This is a classic assumption in the literature on voting behavior. For example, the spatial model of voting, according to which voters cast a vote for the party that is the closest to them in terms of ideology and political preferences, is also based on this assumption (Downs, 1957).

Some might argue that the rationality assumption is implausible because not everybody votes for parties that serve their best interest. For example, it is a well-known fact that some disadvantaged people vote for right-wing parties despite these parties openly defending cuts in social benefits that would hurt their economic situation. This is not necessarily irrational. Many people care more about other things than their economic situation. For example, some in the disadvantaged group vote for right-wing parties because they seek to defend religious and conservative societal values (De La O & Rodden, 2008). In this context, rationality does not necessarily mean that people are able to identify exactly what is best for them and vote accordingly. It means that people have goals that they care about and vote in a reasonable way in the pursuit of these goals (Downs, 1957, p. 6). Defined like this, the rationality assumption is plausible. Even without spending much time on reading electoral manifestoes, most people can identify what is the best party for defending the issues that they care about (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997).

The second assumption is that voters care about the final electoral outcome and in consequence vote in a way that maximizes their chances to affect this outcome in changing either the composition of the parliament or the composition of the government. It is said that they have "instrumental motivations" in that they use their vote as an instrument to influence which party is elected. This contrasts with "expressive motivations," per which voters simply want to express their support for the party they like, regardless of whether this can influence the electoral outcome. An analogy to explain this concept is that expressive voters are like football supporters who enjoy cheering for their favorite team, even when it has no chance of winning the championship (Hamlin & Jennings, 2011). If people are purely expressive, there cannot be any strategic voting.

For a long time, models of voting behavior, like the spatial model, considered that voters only have instrumental motivations (Schuessler, 2001). In the end, it is logic that voters mostly care about in the result of elections. However, recent literature shows that at least some of them behave as if they were only driven by expressive motivations. For example, a substantial portion keeps voting for parties that they know have very little (or even no) chances of forming the government or even being represented in parliament (Arenas, 2016; Pons & Tricaud, 2018). However, even when they vote expressively, they might still have instrumental motivations. The coexistence of both types of motivations explains why some people regret their vote choice right after Election Day. They hesitate between vot-

ing instrumentally or expressively and sometimes make the wrong decision (Bol et al., 2018). Hence the instrumental motivation assumption is also plausible. Voters care, at least partially, about the final electoral outcome and vote accordingly.

The next assumption is about the amount of information that people have at the time of making their decision. To be able to vote strategically, they need to be able to anticipate how many votes each party will receive. The most-discussed form of strategic voting is the one in which people desert a small party that they really like (e.g., the Green Party in the United Kingdom) for a party that they like a bit less but has more chances of being elected (e.g., the Labour Party). It is then clear that strategic voting assumes that voters know the strengths of the parties that they (at least somewhat) like before casting their vote. What is more, they need to have this information at the constituency level. In U.K. constituencies where the Green Party is very popular (like Brighton), it is less pressing for its supporters to cast a strategic vote in favor of the Labour Party. These supporters can choose their favorite party without necessarily wasting their vote. However, in other parts of the country, the same Green Party supporters have more incentives to cast a strategic vote for the Labour Party that they like less, in order to affect the electoral outcome in their constituency (for instance, preventing the Conservative party winning the seat). Note that other forms of strategic voting, typically those for which the voter considers potential government coalitions before casting her vote, require also knowing the distribution of parties' vote shares at the national level and sometimes also the coalition agreements between parties. However, this knowledge is not necessary for all forms of strategic voting. By contrast, all forms of strategic voting require at a minimum that the voter be able to anticipate what will be the vote shares of the parties in her constituency. Even if the voter wants to influence the composition of the government, she casts her vote in a constituency, not at the national level. Hence this is where her vote can make a difference.

Several studies show that people are (maybe even surprisingly) good at anticipating the distribution of parties' vote shares nationally and in their constituency (Blais & Turgeon, 2004; Guinjoan, Simon, Bermuudez, & Lago, 2014). Although they are biased in their evaluation, in the sense that they often overestimate the chances of their favorite party ("wishful thinking"), a good majority of them can update their beliefs from election to election and sort out the weakest ones. This task is not as complicated as it seems. In the end, it is only about identifying what are the large and small parties, not necessarily precisely estimating the chances of each of them. This usually appears quite clearly during electoral campaigns, as large competitors tend to be more present at the national (TV, polls) and constituency (posters, canvassing, leaflets) levels. The information assumption is thus also plausible.

The final assumption is about the comprehension of the electoral system. As explained in "ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIC VOTING," strategic voting takes on different forms depending on the rules governing elections. Hence people need to be able to understand the mechanics of the electoral system in order to cast a strategic vote. Again, this assumption is rather realistic. People do not need to fully memorize all the intricacies

of the electoral system. They simply need to get the big picture. For example, in the United Kingdom, there is a special (and complicated) rule for electing representatives from Northern Ireland. Yet those living in other constituencies do not need to know this particular rule to vote strategically. They simply need to know that they vote to elect the representative of their constituency, that the candidate with most votes is elected, and that the party with a majority of seats forms the government.

Some electoral systems are simpler than others. For example, mixed-member electoral systems like the one used in Germany, in which people have two votes in two overlapping constituencies, are known for their complexity. Some might think that in countries using this system, people's understanding of the way it works is limited. However, it must be remembered that most people spend their entire life interacting with a single electoral system. Hence they have time to develop a good understanding of it through direct experience. A study shows that even a small difference in mixed-member electoral systems leads to substantial differences in voting behavior across countries (Riera & Bol, 2017). This shows that voters do understand the electoral system used in their country, even when this system is complex.

The Determinants of Strategic Voting

Not everybody votes strategically. Under identical circumstances, some people vote strategically while others vote sincerely. There are good reasons to think that this decision is not random, or at least not always. Empirical studies find that there are patterns of strategic voting. In other words, strategic voters are systematically different from sincere voters on some individual characteristics. Hence these characteristics can be considered as determinants of the behavior.

Most of the individual determinants are related to the four assumptions underlying strategic voting. For example, people who feel strongly attached to a party ("partisan identity") are more likely to vote sincerely (Lanoue & Bowler, 1992; Niemi, Whitten, & Franklin, 1992). The reason for this is that the expressive benefit of supporting their favorite party is high, and they would feel bad to behave instrumentally in deserting it (Bol et al., 2018). Also, people that know a lot about and are very interested in politics are more likely to be strategic voters, as they usually have more information about the score of the parties in their constituency (Alvarez, Boehmke, & Nagler, 2006; Merolla & Stephenson, 2007). Finally, voters with higher abstract-thinking capabilities are also more likely to behave strategically, as they better understand the incentives brought about by the electoral system (Loewen, Hinton, & Scheffer, 2015).

However, some other determinants are not directly linked to the four assumptions. For example, strategic voters share psychological traits like agreeableness that others do not (Erisen & Blais, 2016). Finally, note that some determinants of strategic voting are systemic. There are more strategic votes when the election is close (Niemi et al., 1992) or polarized (Daoust & Bol, 2018), or when there is a single party that constitutes an unambiguous focal point for voters who are willing to cast a strategic vote (Blais, Erisen, &

Rheault, 2014; Fredèn, 2016). Also, in countries where media are not authorized to publish the results of polls in the days preceding Election Day, like in Spain, there is less strategic voting. The reason is that in these countries it is harder for voters to anticipate what the vote share of each party will be (Lago, Guinjoan, & Bermúdez, 2015).

Methods and Techniques

Political scientists use a variety of methods and techniques to study strategic voting. A classic way to approach this topic is via formal modeling and game theory. These researchers rely on mathematical formalization to precisely describe the choices that people face during an election, and identify the exact conditions under which they should vote sincerely or strategically (e.g., Fey, 1997; Kselman & Niou, 2010; Myatt, 2007). Others test the predictions of these models and of other theories by organizing mock elections in lab experiments, either of the economics (e.g., Blais et al., 2011; Blais et al., 2014) or psychology (Meffert & Gschwend, 2011) type. The main advantage of this approach is that the researcher can control the information given to voters regarding the vote share of each party. However, the main tool that political scientists use to study strategic voting is post-election surveys or exit polls.[4]

Scholars and polling companies often conduct general surveys right after Election Day, asking people various political questions, some of them directly related to the election, like “Which party did you vote for?” In many instances, they can use answers to these questions to reconstruct a posteriori who among the respondents voted strategically. To do so, the first step is to distinguish between sincere and non-sincere voters. Some researchers rely on questions like “How much do you like each of the competing parties?” or a derivate (e.g., Blais & Nadeau, 1996). Per this question, a sincere voter is someone who votes for the party that she likes the most, and a non-sincere voter is someone who chooses another party.[5] Others rely on ideological proximity and use answers to the question “How do you place yourself on a scale going from left to right?” (e.g., Alvarez & Nagler, 2000). Per this question, sincere voters are people who vote for the party that is the closest to them on the left–right scale, and non-sincere voters are people who choose another party. The problem with this measure is twofold. First, it requires a common left–right scale on which to locate these various competing parties. Although there are multiple datasets that estimate the left–right position of the main parties in most countries of the world (e.g., the “Comparative Manifesto Project”), it is not clear whether the scale is similar to what respondents have in mind when they answer the left–right placement question. Second, this measure assumes that the left–right dimension is the only one that matters in vote choice. In many countries, political competition is inherently multidimensional, with voters caring about multiple issues (De Sio & Webber, 2014). The measure of party preference, by contrast, is both simpler and more accurate.

The second step is about identifying whether respondents who deserted their favorite party did so to influence the electoral outcome. The first possibility is simply to ask non-sincere voters about the reasons for this non-sincerity (Fisher, 2004). The answer categories then include various motivations, including one that describes a form of strategic

voting. For example, it can be “I really like another party, but it has no chance of winning in my constituency,” which is the rationale for the most common form. This measure has the advantage of being simple and straightforward. However, there are good reasons to think that people might not always be faithful in their response because they often rationalize their voting (and other behavior) a posteriori (Blais & Nadeau, 1996).

Another possibility to measure the willingness of voters to affect the electoral outcome is to reconstruct the motivations of non-sincere voters from objective indicators (Alvarez et al., 2006). For this method, the researcher checks the actual vote share (at the current or preceding election) of the favorite party and vote choice of the respondent in her constituency. If these vote shares correspond to a form of strategic calculus, she concludes that this is a strategic vote. For example, if the favorite party is so unpopular that it had no chance of being elected in the constituency (e.g., it has less than 5% of the votes), and if the voter voted for a more popular party (e.g., more than 30% of the votes), she concludes that this is a form of strategic desertion to avoid vote wasting. This method has the advantage of avoiding rationalization a posteriori, but assumes that everybody is perfectly aware of the vote share of each of the parties. Although this assumption is plausible (see “ASSUMPTIONS”), there are certainly some people who do not have any information about the constituency electoral results. Hence this method is likely to lead to an overestimation of strategic voting. A way to address this problem is to directly ask respondents to evaluate the chance of winning for each party in the constituency, for example, “on a scale from 0 (very unlikely to win) to 10 (very likely to win).”[6] Based on the answers to this question, the researcher can safely reconstruct the motivation of the non-sincere voters without making any assumption about the amount of information that they have. This method, often called the “direct measure,” is still the best way to measure strategic voting in post-election surveys to date (Blais, Nadeau, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2001).

Finally, another line of division among strategic voting research concerns the empirical strategy. The simplest strategy consists in identifying the strategic voters as those who meet the two conditions: voting non-sincerely and doing it in a way that corresponds to a form of strategic calculus (as per objective or perceived indicators, Blais & Nadeau, 1996). Another strategy is for the researcher to model a regression predicting the vote choice of the survey respondent (using logistic or conditional logistic models) by variables measuring the chances of winning of each party in the constituency, objective or perceived (Alvarez & Nagler, 2000). If the variable capturing the party’s chances has a substantive and significant effect on vote choice, in one way or another depending on the form of strategic voting (see “ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIC VOTING”), she can conclude that voters are strategic. The advantage of this strategy is that it directly corresponds to the utility function of the strategic voters without making any assumption about their strategic calculus. However, the disadvantage is that it does not directly identify who are the strategic voters. It simply establishes that there is strategic voting. There is, therefore, no ideal empirical strategy.

Electoral Systems and Strategic Voting

The study of strategic voting is intimately related to the study of electoral systems.[7] This article covers the various forms that strategic voting can take in the two most common electoral systems: plurality rule and proportional representation. Most of these forms apply to other electoral systems as well. For example, strategic voting under plurality functions similarly, with a few adaptations, to strategic voting under majority runoff, which is the common system for electing presidents (Blais & Loewen, 2008; Van der Straeten, Laslier, & Blais, 2016).

Plurality Rule

Plurality elections are elections for which people can vote for the candidate of one party, and the one with most votes is elected. Usually, countries using a plurality system are divided into multiple constituencies, each of them sending one representative to the national parliament. There are two main forms of strategic voting under plurality rule. In the first one, the voter's favorite party is small; in the second one, it is large.

The first form of strategic voting in this system is when a person decides not to vote for her favorite party because it has no chance of winning in her constituency (e.g., the Green Party). Instead, she votes for a party that she likes less but that has some chance of winning the seat (e.g., the Labour Party). In doing so, she hopes to influence the electoral outcome, as her vote can contribute to the victory of the candidate for whom she votes, and hence give one more representative to that party. Although this is not her favorite party, she still prefers it to others (e.g., the Conservative Party).

In other words, this form of strategic voting is a desertion of a small party out of fear of wasting one's vote. But what does it mean to be small? To answer this question, Cox (1997) introduced the concept of "viability." A party is viable in a constituency when it has a good chance of winning a seat. Under plurality rule, there are, at most, two viable competitors. In constituencies in which one is clearly ahead, there is only one (the one that is ahead). However, in constituencies in which the competition is tighter, the two first parties are both viable. The third or fourth ones are not because they are always further away from a victory than the second one.

This form of strategic voting is the most commonly discussed in the literature (e.g., Duverger, 1954) and probably the most widespread in countries using plurality rule. Studies show that it is substantial in elections in the United Kingdom (Cain, 1978; Lanoue & Bowler 1992; Niemi et al., 1992), Canada (Blais, Young, & Turcotte, 2005; Merolla & Stephenson, 2007), and even the United States (especially in primary elections for which there are multiple candidates, as some of them are nonviable [Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, & Rohde, 1992]). Compared to the entire electorate, the portion of strategic voters of this form might seem small (around 5%–10% generally). However, it is important to note that not everybody is in a position to cast a strategic vote like this one (Alvarez et al., 2006). Many people support a party that is large enough to be viable in almost all con-

stituencies. Hence, as per our definition, they cannot cast a strategic vote. Looking at supporters of nonviable parties, those who are potential strategic voters, this portion becomes quite substantial (around 40%).

The second form of strategic voting under plurality rule is less often discussed in the literature (e.g., Piketty, 2000; Tsebelis, 1989). It concerns supporters of large viable parties who are not entirely satisfied with all of the positions of this party. When they are certain to win in their constituency, they can decide to vote for a smaller party that they like less overall but that is more radical on an issue that they care about. In doing so, they want to send a signal to their favorite party. They hope that it will change its position when it sees the increased score of this small radical party. For example, a supporter of the Conservative Party who lives in a constituency in which the party always wins by a fair margin, but who is not happy with the position of the party on immigration, can vote for the extreme-right British National Party in the hope that her favorite party adopts a more radical view on this issue when it sees the results. This strategy is efficient as large parties tend to be responsive to the score of smaller parties, modifying their platforms to mimic them when they are successful (Adams, 2012). This form of strategic voting is notably common in France, especially because of the existence of two electoral rounds (Blais & Loewen, 2008).

Proportional Representation

In elections held under proportional representation, people vote for a party list, and each party receives seats proportionally to their vote share in the constituency. For some time, scholars thought that proportional representation was invulnerable to strategic voting. Given that seats are distributed proportionally, many parties are represented in parliament, and hence people can support the one that they like the most without fearing to waste their vote.[8] Duverger (1954) uses this argument to explain why there are more parties in proportional representation countries than in plurality countries. However, recent studies find that there is at least as much strategic voting in proportional as in plurality elections, although it takes different forms (Abramson et al., 2010).

The first form of strategic voting under proportional representation is similar to the one under plurality.[9] Even if there are multiple parties elected in this system, there are always a few (very) small parties that have no chance (e.g., the Pirate Party in most European countries). Hence their supporters can also fear wasting their vote, and sometimes choose to support a larger party that they like less, to maximize their influence on the final electoral outcome. This form of strategic voting is common in proportional representation countries with relatively small constituencies, like Belgium (Verthé, Beyens, Bol, & Blais, 2017; Verthé & Beyens, 2018), Portugal (Gschwend, 2007A), and Spain (Lago, 2008). When there are only a few seats to be filled, not all competing parties can have one. Hence the smaller ones become nonviable, and their supporters have an incentive to desert them.[10]

The second and third most common forms of strategic voting under proportional representation relate to coalition politics. This is the most important difference between proportional and plurality systems. Because multiple parties are represented in parliament under proportional representation, often none of them obtain a majority of seats. Hence some of them need to form a coalition to govern together. This creates additional incentives for voters to behave strategically.[11] These forms of strategic voting rely on one extra assumption: people need to be able to anticipate the chances of each party to be part of the governing coalition. Depending on the country and election, this can be hard to predict, as the formation of coalitions is only partly a function of electoral results. Bargaining between parties plays a crucial role in government formation (Indridason, 2011). However, this assumption is not implausible either, as parties often signal which are their likely coalition partners during the campaign (Duch, May, & Armstrong, 2010; Golder, 2006). Sometimes party leaders make official statements explaining to their supporters what could be an efficient strategic vote given these pre-election coalition agreements (Gschwend, Stoetzer, & Zittlau, 2016).

There are two main forms of strategic coalition voting. The first form is the one for which the voter knows that her favorite party is non-viable at the coalition level, meaning that it is very unlikely to enter any coalition. This is, for example, the case of parties with extreme views that are considered as undesirable partners by others (e.g., the extreme-right party Vlaams Belang in Belgium). Hence a supporter of such an extreme party has an incentive to vote for another party, even if this party is big enough to have seats in parliament, in order not to waste her vote and to have influence in the electoral outcome. This form of strategic voting is common in countries where some parties make clear statements that they will not govern with some of the other parties, like in Austria (Meffert & Gschwend, 2010), Belgium (Verthé et al., 2017; Verthé & Beyens, 2018), Israel (Bargsted & Kedar, 2009), and New Zealand (Bowler, Karp, & Donovan, 2010).

The logic of this second form of strategic voting in proportional representation systems is similar to the first form except that viability is defined at the level of the coalition rather than the constituency. This is an important difference because it relies on a distinct definition of the concept of “influencing the electoral outcome.” In the first form, it is about influencing the composition of the parliament; in the second form, it is about influencing the composition of the government. Both are important for the policy orientation of the country as a whole, but sometimes strategic voters must decide which one is the most important. A party can be viable in the constituency, but not viable in the coalition. Hence their supporters can vote for it, supposing that its simple presence in the parliament is exerting an influence on the government; or desert it, supposing that if it is not in government, it does not have any impact.[12] In reality, it seems that some people in this situation are split, that is, they are equally affected by parliament and government viability in their vote (Verthé et al., 2017).

A third common form of strategic voting can occur in proportional representation countries, especially when pre-election coalition signals are clear for everybody. For example, in Germany or Sweden, there are right-wing and left-wing coalition blocs, and voters

know that, if possible, these parties would like to govern together. In these countries, supporters of large parties (e.g., the Christian Democratic Party in Germany) sometimes have an incentive to vote for a small coalition partner of their favorite party (e.g., the Liberal Democratic Party in Germany). This happens when there is a risk that this small coalition partner would not receive enough votes to secure parliamentary representation. This indeed threatens the coalition as a whole, as it is very unlikely that the large party obtains a majority of seats on its own. Hence its supporters can strategically vote for the small partner party in order to ensure its seat in the constituency, and maximize the chances of their favorite party entering government. Just like the second form of strategic voting under proportional representation, the underlying rationale for the voter is to influence the composition of government. This form of strategic voting, sometimes labeled “threshold insurance voting” is common in countries like Germany (Gschwend, 2007B; Shikano, Herrmann, & Thurner, 2009) and Sweden (Fredèn, 2014).

Conclusions

This article reviews the literature on strategic and sincere voting. In the first section, “Definition, Assumptions, and Methods,” it defines strategic voting with two necessary conditions: non-sincere voting and the desire to influence the final electoral outcome. It also describes the assumptions one needs to make for this behavior to be able to occur: rationality, instrumental motivations, information about parties’ scores in the constituency as well as nationally, and understanding the electoral system. Although plausible, it is possible that these assumptions are not met for every single voter, and this, at least partly, explains why in the same situation some vote strategically while others vote sincerely. This also teaches something about how people make political decisions. When it comes to voting, strategic voters are rational and motivated by an end: influencing the composition of the parliament and the government. They are also able to acquire information about the strength of each party, and they understand the way electoral systems work in their country. Then, it discusses briefly the individual as well as macro determinants of strategic voting before describing the methods used by political scientists to study the behavior. Although there seems to be a consensus for one set of measures, the “direct” ones, there are two popular empirical strategies that both have their own advantages and drawbacks.

The second section outlines four different forms of strategic voting. Under “PLURALITY RULE,” the first form consists in deserting a small party for a large one, to avoid wasting a vote; and the second one consists in deserting a large party for a small one to send a signal. Under “Proportional Representation,” the first form is similar to the first one in plurality elections and concerns itself solely with district viability. However, the other forms are different as they consider coalition politics: the third form consists in deserting a party that has no chance of entering the government for a party that has some, to prevent a wasted vote, and the fourth one consists in deserting a large party for its small coalition partner to ensure it conquers a seat and hence improve the chances of the preferred bloc of parties forming the next coalition. It is not argued that these forms of

strategic voting are exhaustive. One can potentially think of infinite forms of voting that can affect the final electoral outcome, including some that are specific to other electoral systems (e.g., Cox [1994] on strategic voting in the very rare single nontransferable vote system). However, the forms presented in this paper are the main ones in the literature and have been empirically established in reality.

What is the future of the study of strategic voting? Political scientists have long worked on establishing the presence of this behavior among voters and have identified the different forms it can take in various electoral systems. Also, they have identified the factors that prevent or favor it, such as partisan identity or political information. In our opinion, the main challenge is now to establish the consequences of this behavior for voters and democracy as a whole. The choice between strategic or sincere voting can affect the result of elections. This happens frequently in the United Kingdom (Heemin & Fording, 2001) or France, for example (Pons & Tricaud, 2018). Another problem is that it creates inequalities between people. As not everybody votes strategically, some groups in the population are more represented in the final outcome than others because they maximize their influence on the final outcome, such as older and richer voters (Eggers & Vivyan, 2018).

Finally, voting strategically can also influence voters' overall happiness and satisfaction. Using survey data, Singh (2014) shows that voting non-sincerely decreases the level of satisfaction with democracy of people, especially when they vote for a party that does not end up in the government. However, it is unknown whether this is related to strategic calculus or not. Similarly, Bol et al. (2018) find that those who "miss" their strategic vote, in the sense that they desert their favorite party but fail to influence the final electoral outcome, tend to regret their choice in the week that follows Election Day. However, further research is needed to verify whether this has deep and long-term impact on people. Research on strategic voting is thus not bowing out yet.

Further Reading

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Notes:

(1.) In some studies, in particular those analyzing U.K. elections strategic voting is called "tactical voting." (e.g., Niemi, Whitten, & Franklin, 1992). This piece sticks to the expression "strategic voting."

(2.) The direct effect of the rule is anticipated by both voters (voting strategically or sincerely) and parties (deciding to participate in the election or forming pre-election alliances [Golder, 2006]). These effects in turn explain why there are only a few parties/candidates in plurality elections (Bol, Blais, & Labbé St-Vincent, 2018).

(3.) This is simply an illustration of strategic voting under plurality rule. However, the two conditions described above are general, and apply to all forms.

(4.) Sometimes, scholars use pre- and post-election panel surveys to measure the different attributes needed to measure strategic voting (Verthé et al., 2017). However, this approach necessitates that the pre-election survey takes place only a few days before Election Day as attitudes and vote intention can change over the course of the campaign.

(5.) Sometimes, a vote for the party of the local candidate or party leader that the respondent likes the most is also considered as a sincere vote, even if this party is different from her favorite one (Harfst, Blais, & Bol, 2018).

(6.) Depending on the form of strategic voting, this approach necessitates extra questions about the chances of entering the government of each party (see below).

(7.) There are also a few pieces of work on how strategic voting is shaped by other institutional features, such as how much "power-sharing" the overall democratic setup is (Kedar, 2005).

(8.) Some proponents of the proportional representation system argue that there is no strategic voting in this system and use this (incorrect) argument to make a case in favor of it.

(9.) In principle, the second form of strategic voting, that is, deserting a large party to send a signal, can also exist in proportional representation systems.

(10.) As per Cox's (1997) definition, the number of viable parties is a direct function of the number of seats in the constituency ("M+1" rule). However, in some countries, there

is also a minimal vote share threshold below which a party gets no seats in the constituency. This threshold is 5% in Belgium and Germany.

(11.) This form of strategic voting also exists in the few plurality elections in which there is a real possibility that no party obtains a majority of seats (Abramson, Aldrich, Diskin, & Houck, 2018; Daoust, 2018). However, these situations are rare, as plurality rule often gives a parliamentary majority to a single party, which automatically forms the government.

(12.) It is important to note that even if they want to maximize their impact on the composition of the government, strategic voters need to take into consideration the chances of being elected for each party in their constituency. If a party is too small to have a seat in the constituency, voting for it will not increase its chances to enter the government coalition.

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