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Strategic Voting under Coalition Governments

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Strategic Voting under Coalition Governments

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An Introduction to Strategic Voting

A tradeoff sometimes arises between choosing one's preference and choosing some other alternative in order to obtain as good an outcome as possible. If other people are involved in the decision-making, there is their behavior to take into account. Examples of this type of collective decision-making include voting in general elections, and electing leaders for a team. Sometimes parties or candidates cooperate, which is also likely to affect outcomes. This thesis is about how the consideration of others' behavior affects decision-making, which sometimes leads to choosing some other alternative than one's first preference.

Voting as social decision making has been given surprisingly little attention in previous studies. One exception to this is Anthony Downs (1957), who outlined a number of problems that arise when the government is a coalition of parties. If a voter cares about government policies, voting is not as straight-forward as choosing the party that one prefers most, but one must also look at the combination of parties and other voters' likely behaviors. If there were only two parties, then vote choice would be straight-forward: if many alternatives that form coalition governments exist, then the combination of parties and their positions will affect policy outcomes.

This study develops a new framework of strategic voting, related to how voter considers the behavior of others. Whereas previous work on strategic voting tends to focus on the impact of institutions on vote choice (see for example Cox, 1997; Blais et al., 2001), the emphasis here is on how information about others' behavior affects strategic voting. Downs suggested that the way parties signal other parties about cooperation in campaigns is one factor to take into account. If coalition formation is clear from the start, then the best option is to vote for one's first preference in order to increase that party's impact, according to Downs (1957:147). On the other hand, if there are no signals, voters have incentives to signal the direction they would like to see the government being formed move in.

However, one aspect that Downs does not develop is that there are sometimes reasons to cast strategic votes for smaller parties. If some potential coalition partner is at risk of falling below the threshold, its presence in, or absence from, parliament will affect the coalition's chances of winning. Moreover, the relative influence and distribution of portfolios between different coalition parties will affect overall outcomes. This is a potential reason to choose a smaller party than one might prefer, in order to increase that party's influence. Some recent studies

have started to examine the impact of election-specific information such as coalition signals and polling levels on strategic vote choice (see, for example, Meffert and Gschwend, 2011; Irwin and van Holsteyn, 2012). However, in these studies strategic voting as oriented toward government formation is only briefly touched upon. This study aims to paint a more comprehensive image of strategic voting under coalition governments.

The first contribution is to define strategic voting from a social decision-making perspective, which implies that the voter takes the behaviors of others into account. The starting point for choice is the voter's evaluation of the different parties in the system. The voter also takes into account other voters' likely behavior, and the parties' likelihood to form coalitions and affect government policies.

This is related to the government formation process. The perspective is that voters think like parties on the consequences of the vote in terms of government influence and the steps to get there: gaining seats, entering office and affecting overall policies. These goals are related to the four types of strategic voting that can potentially occur under PR: voting for a party that is more likely to obtain government representation ("the wasted vote"-reason); has a greater chance of becoming the leader of the government formation process ("strategic sequencing"); is at risk of falling below an electoral threshold ("insurance-voting") or to obtain as beneficial coalition policies as possible ("compensational voting").

The second contribution is to elaborate on how context impacts these types of strategic voting. The idea is that the election-specific context affects which type of strategic goals become salient. The focus is on the impact of two informational factors related to others' behavior: parties' pre-electoral signals on whom they intend to cooperate with in government (sometimes referred to as "pre-electoral coalitions"), which say something about how the parties will act, and polling information, which says something about how other voters will act.

One possible reason why informational aspects have been under-investigated in previous strategic voting research is that these factors are difficult to isolate in natural settings, since a number of factors may change at the same point in time (for example, party change of leaders and the saliency of issues). This study approaches the problem using different empirical strategies. Two of the studies are experiments, which is one way of limiting the impact of "confounding factors" since they make it possible to manipulate one or several factors of interest, whereas other factors are held constant. One of the studies is a large scale survey experiment with manipulated polls and coalition signals, and another study is a laboratory experiment with fictive parties in which the focus is voter coordination. In addition, two of the studies are multivariate analyses of survey data at different points in time. Combining these different methods is a way of strengthening overall conclusions.

This introductory essay proceeds as follows. First, the starting point for vote choice, party preference and reasons to defect from preference are developed, with a primary focus on the expected behavior of other voters and the parties' tendency to form coalition governments, leading to a definition of strategic voting. Then, different goals for strategic voting related to different stages of the government formation process are discussed, and the four different types of strategic voting that may occur under PR are elaborated upon. The impact of context on these types of strategic voting is discussed, with a focus placed on election specific information on others' behavior – pre-electoral coalition signals and polling information. A section on methods follows, which emphasizes the need for using different techniques and data. The findings from the four different studies are presented, and the concluding remarks summarize the discussion, give suggestions for future research, and discuss some normative implications.

Concepts

Party Preference

The most well-known way of positioning oneself in a political spectrum is to begin with the left-right scale, which is usually related to the degree of state involvement in the economy (redistribution and insurance systems). The more state involvement in the economy, the further to the left, whereas market economy ideas and solutions are associated with a position further to the right. A vote for the party that is closest to oneself on a left-right dimension it is often referred to as "spatial" or "proximity" voting, and is a common perception and operationalization of preference in voting studies in different contexts (see e.g. Granberg and Holmberg, 1988:10).

A complementary starting-point for preference is to evaluate party positions on a number of particularly salient issues (Green-Pedersen, 2007). Party position on a particular issue, such as education or environment, may thus outperform left-right orientation in choosing a party. Often, however, issue preference and spatial (left-right) preference coincide. Downs argues that voters tend to evaluate parties' stances only in topics with which the parties differ substantively in their policies (Downs 1957:46). In election campaigns, some issues get more attention than others, which may increase their salience in voter evaluations of the parties (Green-Pedersen, 2007).

Another factor for developing preferences for parties is evaluations of competence, for example how the party has been handling the economy (see e.g. van der Brug et al., 2007). Downs (1957:50) argues that voters use retrospective evaluations of party performance to choose between two alternatives that are supposed to produce equally attractive policies, and van der Brug et al. (2007:13) also proposes economic evaluations as potential tie-breakers when voters choose between two alternatives.

The starting point for this study is that the voter has preferences for policies and evaluates parties' prospects to implement these policies. This leads to preferences for parties. The conditions are summarized as follows:

The voter

- cares about policy outcomes
- has preferences for parties

If a voter votes directly for party preference it is often referred to as a "sincere vote" (Farquharson, 1969:17; Rosema, 2004). However, reasons to defect from preference sometimes arise. These reasons are developed below.

Strategic Voting

A "sincere vote" would be the choice the voter would always make if he or she made the decision all alone. However, voting is decision-making among a large number of others (compare Schelling, 1978). General elections could thus be seen as collective decision making from two views: with regard to other voters' behavior, and with regard to parties' behavior. First, a party that is very small will not be elected, and has little chance of impacting policies. Therefore, there are reasons to vote for a party that has a higher chance of getting elected. Second, in many electoral systems, parties form coalition governments and policy outcomes are combinations of different party policies. This makes it relevant to consider parties' prospects to enter coalitions and influence policies. For a voter who cares about policy outcomes, it is therefore relevant to consider the parties' chance of being elected (which depends on other voters' expected behavior), and parties' post-electoral bargaining (which depends on parties' expected behavior). If such considerations lead to a non-sincere vote for some other party than the one which one prefers, then it is a "strategic" vote. The conditions for strategic voting are summarized below.

The voter

- considers other voters' behavior
- considers parties' post-election behavior
- casts a non-sincere vote

This definition of strategic voting is more explicitly related to others' behavior than many previous studies, which often define strategic voting as a non-sincere vote. Voters' strategic goals related to the government formation process are further developed below.

Theoretical Framework

Goals for a Strategic Vote

One previous contribution to the government-oriented strategic voting perspective is Gary Cox (1997), who concentrates on the impact of institutions. Cox places much focus on the institutional aspect of voting: individuals are seen as respondents to the present rules. Cox separates incentives to defect from preference at the constituency level, which are related to the parties' chances to get elected (seats), from incentives at the national level, which concern the formation of government and distribution of portfolios (1997:181–202). Cox's perspective is that voters who consider the national level are oriented toward portfolios. Blais et al. (2001) share Cox's view of institutions as an important explanatory factor for strategic vote choice, placing focus on institutional mechanisms and voters' incentives to vote for a winning party. Blais et al. (2001) briefly discuss that voters may have other motives in mind than electing a winning party when casting a strategic vote, but do not develop alternative explanations further.

Other scholars focus more on the policy consequences of electing a particular parliament or government (Downs, 1957; Kedar, 2005; Indridason, 2011). Based on this view, voters are less concerned with electing some party or candidates into government, and more concerned with the policies that government will pursue. Downs refers to policy outcomes as "benefits" or "utility" (1957:36), and mentions that the voters aim to elect a government that produces as many benefits as possible. Kedar (2005) develops the policy-oriented perspective, discussing incentives to choose a more extreme party than one's preference under PR whereas smaller parties are more likely to influence policy. Indridason (2011) takes a more explicit government-oriented view, closer to Cox's (1997) perspective that it is the distribution of portfolios that matters, relating such considerations to the strategic voting literature and a consideration of other voters' behavior. Indridason's point of reference is a PR system with majoritarian legislatures. In such a system it takes a majority of votes to get policies through parliament which usually leads to majority coalitions. Therefore voters are likely to vote for parties that are "coalitionable" since the party then is more likely to impact policy-making. Thus the size of the party and other voters' likelihood to choose it matters. Indridason focuses on parties' chances to be included in a

coalition in the first place and the likely outcome of a coalition: closer to, or further from, the voter's position.

Previous work thus places focus on different aspects of the government formation process: is it more important to win seats and take office (Cox, 1997; Blais et al., 2001), or to affect (government) policies (Downs, 1957; Kedar, 2005; Indridason, 2011)?

This work acknowledges that voters may focus more or less on these aspects when making a strategic choice under proportional representation. It is possible to look at the distribution of seats in parliament, electing a winning coalition, or further on the division of influence between different coalition parties.

From this perspective, voters' goals can be related to parties' goals when entering an election: toward maximizing their votes, becoming office-holders and pursuing their policies (Sjöblom, 1968:81–82; Müller and Strøm, 1999:11–13). Votes are a prerequisite for gaining seats. However, one vote is not enough to elect a party into parliament, and thresholds for representation affect which parties obtain seats and influence outcomes. Then, voters, like parties, may think even further about the consequences of vote shares: which parties are likely to enter office, and which policies a coalition will pursue. Under PR, this implies considering which parties to be "coalitionable", and determining how negotiations between coalition parties are likely to play out. An illustration of the different stages voters may have in mind in terms of government formation is found below:

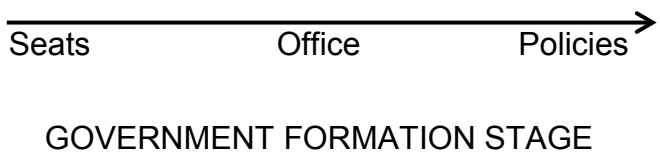

Figure 1. Goals for Strategic Voting

Four Types of Strategic Voting

The previous section discussed how voters may think about the consequences of the vote in terms of a party's chance of gaining seats, entering office and affecting policies. The likelihood of making an influence will also depend on the party's support in the electorate as a whole. There are strategic reasons to defect to a larger party, in order to increase the vote share for a party that has a chance of becoming the leading party in government. There are also incentives to defect to a smaller party, with the aim of increasing that party's chance of gaining representation in parliament and taking part in government in conjunction with other parties.

These two dimensions, related to the direction of the vote (voting for a larger or a smaller party) and the goals for the vote (seats, office and policies) are outlined below:

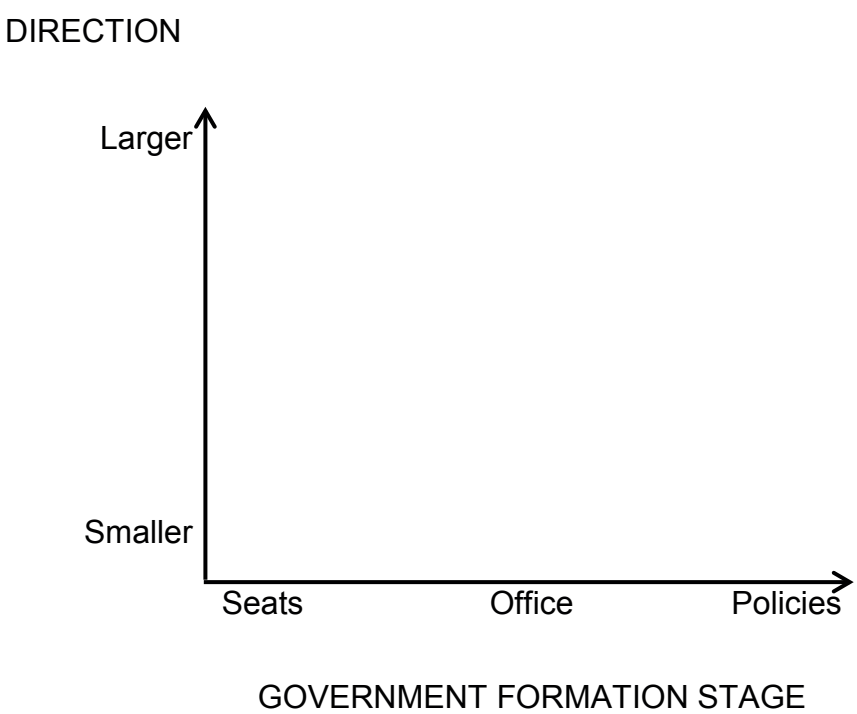

Figure 2. Dimensions of Strategic Voting

By far the most discussed type of strategic voting in previous literature relates to the tendency among voters to vote for a winner (Downs, 1957:49; Alvarez and Nagler, 2000; Blais et al., 2001). In the context of elections this includes parties that are popular enough to reach the threshold for representation. Under plurality rules, voting for a viable party in a single constituency is also very likely a vote for a potential office holder. On the other hand, a party that has very low support is likely to be abandoned. Recent studies indicate that this type of "wasted vote"-reasoning is also the most common type of strategic voting under PR: after controlling for party preference, voters choose larger parties to a greater extent than smaller ones (Abrahamson et al., 2010; Blais and Gschwend, 2011, Fredén and Oscarsson, 2015). The tendency to vote for a party that has higher chance of getting elected can be seen as the first variant of strategic voting:

- One's preferred party has no or very little chance to reach parliamentary representation (the "wasted vote"-mechanism) (1)

When considering the chances of being included in a government, additional factors could be taken into account in the vote decision. Larger parties, in general, are more likely to become influential and lead government formation, becoming so called "formateurs" (Bäck and Dumont, 2008). Even under plurality rules, it is possible for a party to be popular at the local level and to gain a constituency seat, but not to have the overall national support to form a government. A voter may therefore defect to a party that is more likely to lead the government formation process. Under proportional rules, larger parties are also more likely to lead government formation. A voter may therefore switch from a smaller party to one of the larger ones in order to influence who leads the government formation process, which has been referred to as "strategic sequencing" in previous studies (Cox, 1997). This leads to the second type of strategic voting:

- Another party has a greater chance of leading the government formation process ("strategic sequencing") (2)

The tendencies to defect to a stronger alternative (not to waste one's vote, and to "sequence" one's vote on a party that is more likely to become the leading former of government) are potentially present in all types of electoral systems where more than two parties compete for power: larger parties have a greater chance of gaining representation in parliament, and becoming leaders of government.

The electoral system also affects voter strategies. The main difference is that the likelihood that the parties will form coalition governments is higher under PR (Blais et al., 2006; Gschwend, 2007; Duch et al., 2010) (although minority single party government occurs under PR systems as well, and some plurality systems also produce coalitions).

The third type of strategic voting is related to electing a winning coalition in which a small party is expected to take part. An institutional factor that is central under PR is the electoral threshold, which is a focal point for voters and sets limits regarding which parties are large enough to obtain seats. Parties that have support levels close to the threshold are often potential government partners to larger parties. Sometimes these smaller parties are needed to form a majority or plurality government, i.e. entering office. If a small party at risk of not reaching the threshold is included in a potential government coalition, supporters of larger members of the coalition have incentives to cast a strategic vote for the smaller party in order to elect the coalition as a whole, referred to as "insurance voting" (Cox, 1997), which is the third type of strategic voting:

- Another party in one's most preferred coalition is at risk of falling below an electoral threshold (3) ("insurance"-voting)

Another focal point for evaluating the size of a party is other parties. One previous contribution to this view is Kedar (2005) who argues that voters under PR are more likely to vote for a party that is smaller and more extreme than their first preference, in order to push policies in that direction (referred to as "compensational voting"). Kedar's perspective is that voters under PR vote for a parliamentary party. It is also relevant to place more focus on the chances of taking part in government, since the chance of impacting policies are greatest there. Indridason (2011) argues that voters even under proportional rules are more likely to choose parties that are "coalitionable", i.e. likely to take part in government. This holds in particular for PR systems with majoritarian legislatures where it takes a majority of votes to get proposals through parliament. In these systems small parties are often attractive partners to bigger parties to form majority coalitions.

Post-election bargaining between parties is also likely to matter for policy outcomes (Baron and Ferejohn, 1989; Müller and Strøm, 1999). The chances to make an influence within a coalition of parties and negotiating for one's policies are likely to be affected by the response from voters, both in terms of total vote share (seats) and its support trend since the previous election, which says something about how the public evaluate the party at present. First of all, smaller parties usually get fewer portfolios (Gamson, 1961). In addition, vote loss since

the previous election decreases the chances for a party to take place in a government coalition (Mattila and Raunio, 2002). A negative response from the public as whole may thus decrease a party's chance of impacting coalition policies.

Whereas under plurality rules smaller parties and parties that have experienced great losses have small chances of entering office, under PR these parties still have a chance to become government partners to larger parties. If the voter observes that one of the parties that are potential government partners is getting smaller, this is an indicator that the position of this party is weakening. If the voter perceives that some party's position should be strengthened in order to increase its chances to obtain portfolios, this is thus a potential reason to cast a strategic vote for a smaller party or for a party with falling support. This is a variant of "compensation", close to Kedar's idea of compensational voting for a more extreme party than one's preference, with the difference that the perspective is more oriented toward the government formation process, and the parties' expected relative influence within coalitions. The voter votes for party that has low or falling support, with the aim of strengthening the party's chance of obtaining portfolios and influencing policies. This leads to the fourth type of strategic voting:

- A vote for as smaller potential coalition party is expected to produce better overall policies (4) ("compensational" voting)

The voter is thus expected to consider different stages of the government formation process in the vote decision. This may lead to a strategic vote for a larger party in order to affect who gains seats ("the wasted vote-mechanism") or becomes the leading party in government formation process ("strategic sequencing"). It may also lead to a strategic vote for a smaller party, if the main goal is to elect a government coalition in which a smaller party is needed to form a winning coalition ("insurance voting"), or to increase the chances that a party gains influential portfolios ("compensational voting").

The four different types of strategic voting, their goals and directions can be systemized as follows:

Table 1: Different Types of Strategic Voting

	GOVERNMENT FORMATION STAGE		
DIRECTION	**Seats**	**Office**	**Policies**
Larger	"Wasted vote"	"Sequencing"	
Smaller		"Insurance"	"Compensational"

The incentives to vote for smaller and larger parties may vary from election to election, depending on the parties in the system and the voter's preferences for these parties. For example, it would be possible to cast a "compensational" vote for a bigger coalition party if that party has lost support since the previous election.

The emphasis on different goals and types of strategic voting is also likely to depend on electoral system characteristics and the election campaign character. The prerequisites for elections under plurality rules and PR are different and there is also variance within the same type of system, such as levels of thresholds. Furthermore, the election campaign is sometimes more focused on parties' performance as single players, sometimes toward office and coalitions, which would place more or less emphasis on the different goals. The next part discusses how the electoral system and information in the election campaign affects the types of strategic voting which become prevalent.

Context

Electoral Systems and Thresholds

Under mixed and proportional rules, the likelihood of obtaining coalition governments is considerably higher than under plurality rules, since it is harder for a single party to gain a majority of votes. Thresholds for parliamentary representation are also likely to affect voters' tendency to defect to smaller or larger parties. If the threshold is very high, small parties are more likely to be abandoned. If the threshold is low, smaller parties have higher chances to get elected and even enter government positions. In proportional representation systems voting for a party close to the threshold can, at least theoretically, be more influential in the distribution of seats than voting for a larger party (Tsebelis, 1986). If the smaller party reaches the threshold, it gains a number of seats and may be included in government. Thresholds also functions as cues for voter coordination. Another point of reference is polls.

Polling information

Opinion polls say something about how the public is going to vote. Polling information is likely to put more emphasis on the viability and winning aspects of vote choice: who is likely to become a member of parliament, who will win and who will lose. Media place more focus on polling information today than they did previously (Strömbäck, 2008; Walther, 2015). A number of studies show that all else equal, large size positively impacts voting for a party (van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009:105; Fredén and Oscarsson, 2015). Furthermore, high popularity and a positive trend can result in a "bandwagon-effect", meaning that voters go with the flow and choose the party that is the most successful at the moment (Simon, 1954). High shares also indicate that a party is more likely to become a government formateur (Bäck and Dumont, 2008). This can lead to a strategic "sequencing" vote for a bigger party.

Smaller size, or a negative trend, also instigates some strategic incentives. There is an "inverse" tendency to the bandwagon-voting in which voters cast a vote for a party that is expected to lose in the election, referred to as "underdog"-voting (Simon, 1954). There are also motives more closely related to government formation. If polls show that a party is dangerously close to an electoral threshold, and that this party would be needed to form a government, large party supporters should be more likely to cast a vote for a smaller party than for their most preferred party ("insurance-voting"). Polling trends are also likely to affect consideration or division of influence within coalitions. The larger the party is, the higher the chance of obtaining influence, whereas if a party is very small or has falling support, then its chances to influence are likely to be smaller (Gamson, 1961; Mattila and Raunio, 2002). If the voter observes such a negative trend, this is a potential reason to cast a "compensational" vote for a coalition party in order to increase the party's chance of influencing government policies.

Pre-Electoral Coalitions

One way of evaluating the probability that the parties will form coalition governments is to look at the signals the parties themselves send out. Before elections the parties have to make the decision whether they should run their election campaigns independently, or if whether to cooperate with other parties. Sometimes the parties are not clear about whom they intend to include in government, or even if they want to take part themselves. This should impact how voters look at outcomes. In the chapter "*Problems of rationality under coalition governments*" (1957:142-163), Downs starts from the voter's position in policy space. If a voter prefers the government to be formed to the left or to the right, he or she should choose the party so that a government is more likely to be formed in that direction. However, if there are great uncertainties about government formation it so difficult to predict government outcomes that voters tend vote for their preferred party, without considering strategic aspects, at all (Downs, 1957:154).

On the other hand, if the parties decide to run campaigns together with another party or parties before the election, the prerequisites for government formation become clearer from the start. These types of alliances are sometimes referred to as "pre-electoral coalitions" (Golder, 2006; Allern and Aylott, 2009). Downs (1957:147) argues that by knowing which coalition one's most preferred party will enter, the choice will be most straight-forward in deciding to vote for one's preference, thus increasing its influence.

However, Downs does not discuss the presence of electoral thresholds and parties' relative chances to negotiate for their policies. First, thresholds may

instigate strategic voting for smaller parties, and if a larger party already includes a smaller party in coalition discussions already before elections, these parties are more likely to be seen as a team. Therefore the smaller party may receive strategic votes if it is at risk of falling below an electoral threshold. Another factor that should become more salient under the presence of pre-electoral coalition signals is the relative strength of coalition parties, since there are fewer incentives to signal a direction of government formation, and the voter should rather consider distribution of portfolios and influence between different coalition parties. Downs notes briefly that if one party dominates the other, then this is likely to affect outcomes (1957:149) but does not develop this thought further. Larger parties, in general, have a higher likelihood of obtaining portfolios (Gamson, 1961), and a party with a negative result from the previous election generally weakens its position to negotiate as a government party (Mattila and Raunio, 2002). These are potential factors to take into consideration for the policy-oriented voter.

Coalition signals thus create incentives to vote for a coalition party close to an electoral threshold, and potential "compensational" incentives to vote for a party to obtain as favorable policy mix as possible.

Individual Level Factors

In this thesis, focus is placed on how different contextual aspects affect voter tendency to cast a strategic vote, and individual level factors that are likely to affect the tendency to cast a strategic vote are included as control variables. Two factors that are likely to affect the tendency to cast a strategic vote at the individual level are party identification and political knowledge. When a voter does not identify with a particular party, election-specific factors should play a greater role than if a voter has strong ties to political party. One of the most robust finding from strategic voting studies is that voters who do not identify strongly with a specific party are more inclined to vote strategically than others (Niemi et al., 1992; Blais and Gschwend, 2011). These are the voters who decide between two or more different parties when casting their vote, i.e. voters who are split between parties (van der Brug et al., 2007). The general trend in established democracies since the 1980s is that fewer voters identify with a particular party than previously (Dalton, 2014:194–195). At the aggregate level, electorates today should therefore be more concerned with policy outcomes than voting for a particular party, and strategic voting is likely to be more prevalent.

Studies also indicate that there is a relationship between political sophistication (education and political knowledge), and strategic voting, even though the evidence is mixed. Some studies show that voters with higher political knowledge pay more attention to and make use of polls, and that voters with high political interest tend to be more likely to defect from larger to smaller parties, or vote for more extreme parties than their preference (Gilljam, 1990; Kedar, 2005; Meffert and Gschwend, 2011; Huber and Faas, 2014; Fredén and Oscarsson, 2015). Other studies show that voters with different levels of political knowledge vote strategically to the same extent (Blais and Gschwend, 2011). The impact of sophistication on strategic voting is likely to depend on the way strategic voting is defined and observed: if the definition is broad, it is less likely that a relationship exists between political knowledge and strategic vote choice; whereas if the definition is more specific, including others voters' actions as well as parties' actions in the government formation process, political knowledge is more likely to play a role.

Methods and Data Material

Mixing Different Methods

Previous strategic voting studies approach the problems of figuring out the reason for voters' tendency to defect from preference and the motives behind this in various ways. Some previous studies rely on individuals' responses to survey items concerning tactical considerations (see e.g. Niemi et al., 1994), whereas others model the presence of strategic voting with voters' preferences and vote choices (see e.g. Alvarez and Nagler, 2000). To further explore various types of strategic voting, it is necessary to examine both individual motivations and contextual variation. First, defection from party preference may be due to a number of other factors than strategic considerations, for example randomness. Therefore it is important to investigate systematic patterns in defections. In this work, focus is on how the presence of different contextual factors alters voters' choices.

It is possible to obtain variation in real life election contexts or via experiments where some factors are externally manipulated. This study mixes these approaches, using extensive "real life" election data, and testing strategic voting mechanisms in experiments. Focus is placed on mechanisms – exploring different potential "types" of strategic voting – rather than levels of strategic voting.

Experiments

Causal Relationships

A central aspect of the social sciences is, as in the natural sciences, the investigation of relationships between factors which are expected to be related. A relationship between intense election campaigning, and good election results, is not necessarily a causal one: there are other factors that could influence the success of a party, such as, for example, economic factors. The importance of finding and explaining relationships is proposed by various perspectives within the

social sciences, from the logic-oriented John Stuart Mill (1843), to the sociologists Max Weber (1922:19) and David Silverman (2013). Silverman (2013:84) argues that one important aspect of social science is to examine the process leading to an outcome and that various social science approaches, such as interviews and statistical analyses, often fail to do that. Silverman suggests that research should place more focus on when and where a phenomenon takes place (which is referred to as "naturally-occurring" data).

What is less explored in the social sciences methods literature is how a methods approach that is common in the natural sciences – experiments – could prove useful in examining relationships. If the aim is to detect individuals' reactions to different election campaign stimuli, and confronting a number of party options, then large scale data is unlikely to provide all the necessary information, and experiments should add more information. In experiments, it is possible to manipulate one or more specific contextual aspects, whilst holding other factors constant (Morton and Williams, 2010). The political scientist Rose Mc Dermott (2002) argues that experiments could be seen as a "middle ground between theory building and "naturally-occurring" data". This is useful in this type of study, with the aim of investigating the impact of context and information on strategic vote choice. Another advantage of the experimental approach is that voters are observed in "real time", which is not the case in analysis of pre- or post-election surveys. In most surveys, respondents declare their preferences some weeks before the election, and these are compared with vote choices made weeks after, or voters are assumed to have had the same preference before the election as they declare afterwards. In experiments, the time delay is shorter.

A critique against the experimental approach in general is that participants receive an incentive to behave in a certain manner, such as voting strategically, or that the impact of some temporary treatment is exaggerated. A related point is that it is very difficult to "imitate" complex social environments in experiments. However, the focus of this work is to look at the presence of strategic voting and potential mechanisms, not to measure absolute levels of strategic voting. If individuals behave in a certain way in an experiment it is likely that similar mechanisms are present, to some extent, in real life elections as well. Experiments make it possible to determine what they are since there are fewer participants that can be carefully observed. Experimental designs also disentangle the influence of particular (contextual) factors from one another.

The Psychological and Economic Approaches

There are different types of experiments; a main distinction is between the psychological tradition, which often uses "deception" as a stimulus to provoke reactions, and the economic tradition, which strives toward transparent rules and

motivates participants via incentives (often monetary) (Dickson, 2011). Furthermore, psychological experiments tend to be more information-rich and close-to-reality framed, whereas economic experiments refer to abstract units and settings. While there is an ongoing debate between economics and psychology as to which of the perspectives is most adequate, in political science it is most often the research question that guides the choice of the experimental approach (Druckman et al., 2011). If the aim is to investigate the impact of institutional rules and rational reasoning in decision-making, then the economic perspective with a higher degree of abstraction is likely to be more useful. If the aim is to discover "intrinsic" motivations and immediate reactions to some stimuli, the psychological approach is more useful.

Field, Survey or Lab

Experiments also vary in how the data is being gathered and in the use of "treatments": from "naturally occurring" variation, to manipulation. There are three main ways of approaching this problem: in a lab, in the field or via surveys (Druckman et al., 2011; Meffert and Gschwend, 2012). First, experiments can be conducted in a laboratory, where it is possible to control a larger number of factors and in which the experimenter has an overview of the participants, referred to as "laboratory experiments". Second, it is possible to use large scale surveys and vary the treatments – in the form of items, images or other type of stimuli – between respondents, referred to as "survey experiments". Third, it is possible to use the field and take advantage of natural variation (such as, for example, the implementation of a new electoral law), referred to as "field experiments".

Two Experiments

This study borrows from both the economic and the psychological traditions. One of the experiments (Article 2) leans toward the psychological tradition, starting from voters "genuine" preferences and referring to real parties and systems, whereas the second experiment (Article 3) leans toward the economic tradition, using fictive parties, party systems and monetary incentives. Nevertheless the "economic" experiment was introduced with references to real life elections, to make it easier to understand and to engage participants. This is important in itself in order to obtain "internal validity", meaning that the experiment actually measures the impact of the manipulated factor(s) (Mc Dermott, 2011).

Furthermore, the data has been gathered in two different ways. One of the experiments is a survey experiment with a large number of participants over the Internet (Article 2), and the other is a small scale lab experiment in which

participants vote in repeated (iterated) elections (Article 3). The survey experiment included a larger number of observations, whereas in the lab it was possible to control a greater number of factors, for example that the subjects participated individually. The combination of different types of experiments: one with a higher degree of control, and the other with references to real parties; one with smaller number of participants over a number elections and another with a large number of participants at different points in time, leads to a higher degree of external validity, meaning that the findings from the experiments should be generalizable to real life contexts to a greater extent. In combination with real life election survey data analyses, validity increases further.

Statistical Analyses of Survey Data

The central idea of the study – how information about parties' and other voters' actions affects strategic vote choice – is also tested using large scale real life election data. These build on different types of interview surveys of voters (face-to-face and postal questionnaires) that were conducted shortly before and after general elections. It is important to take into account voters' reasoning before elections, since this is when expectations about others' behaviors are at play. Afterwards the answer – the election result – may affect considerations to a larger extent. One of the survey data analyses is a study of a general election where voters declared their position, preferences and motivations before the election (Article 1). The inclusion of ideological positions and individual motivations makes it possible to extrapolate on how considerations in election campaigns affected vote choice. The second survey data analysis emphasizes the impact of variation in contextual factors – pre-electoral coalition signals and polling trends – on vote choice (Article 4). Voters' evaluations of all main parties are included, making it possible to more precisely model the relationship among party preference, contextual factors and vote choice using real life election data.

Case

In a study seeking to explore various types of strategic voting, it is relevant to look at systems in which these types can potentially occur. The bulk of data comes from Sweden, which has a proportional representation electoral system. The electoral threshold is relatively high (four percent), which restricts the possibilities for smaller parties to gain influence. At the same time, the threshold is a focal point and smaller parties are sometimes included in government coalitions.

Governments in Sweden have varied over time: from single party minority governments (historically Social Democrat), center-right government coalitions, left-wing pre-electoral alliances, and center-socialist cooperation. Since the late 1990s, parties have oriented themselves more toward (pre-electoral) coalitions (Bergman, 2000:227).

There is also variation between different types of proportional systems, take, for example, how proposals proceed through Parliament. In Sweden there is a "negative" investiture rule, which means that it takes a majority to outvote a government proposal, and minority governments can hold office if they have sufficient support in Parliament. Parties may, therefore, be influential as support parties to governments even if they are not included in the formal government (Bale and Bergman, 2006). This would be an argument as to why government-oriented strategic voting is less likely to occur. In systems with so-called "positive" investiture rules, where a majority is required to get proposals through government, voters are more likely to choose parties that are potential members of government.

Turning to voter characteristics, Sweden is a system with a high degree of policy-oriented voting: most voters vote for the party that they are closest to on a spatial left-right dimension (Oscarsson and Holmberg, 2013:221–222). The level of voters who are attached to a party is about 30–40 percent, which is similar to, for example, Germany, higher than in the Netherlands, but lower than in, for example, Australia and the United States (Bengtsson et al., 2014:69). Party-identification has decreased over the past few decades, just like in many other established democracies (Dalton 2014:194–195), whereas the level of non-sincere voting – the share of voters who cast a vote for some other party than their preference – has increased over the years: from 6 percent in the 1960s, to 15–20 percent in the 2000s elections (Fredén and Oscarsson, 2015). Nevertheless, Sweden does not stand out as a country where there are extraordinarily high levels of non-sincere voting. In Israel and Germany, for example, the levels are similar or higher (Blais and Gschwend, 2011:181).

This profile makes Sweden ideal for identifying different types of strategic voting mechanisms and the impact of the election-specific context on such voting. There is a threshold for electing parties into Parliament which may instigate strategic voting for larger, as well as smaller parties. There is a necessary variation for one of the central contextual aspects of the study – coalition signals: the parties sometimes cooperate explicitly prior to elections, and sometimes they do not; sometimes there have been single-party governments, and sometimes coalitions. It is possible to vote for coalition governments, as well as for single parties. Voters have clear perceptions of parties and the presence of insincere voting is an indicator that some strategic voting occurs. In more candidate-oriented or newly established democratic systems such for example Brazil or the US, policy-oriented strategic voting is less likely to take place, since voters have a less clear view of

the party system in ideological terms (Ames et al., 2009; Granberg and Holmberg, 1988). In these systems voting, in general, and defection from one's first preference, in particular, is more likely to be affected by other factors, such as economic evaluations or leader characteristics.

Some data also comes from another electoral system: Canada, which has plurality electoral rules for general elections. The participants in the Canadian part of the experiment were less likely to be familiar with coalition governments. Nevertheless, findings from the different waves of experiment in Canada and Sweden show that when provided with identical rules, voters with experience from different political systems behave similarly at the group level (Article 3). This indicates that (temporary) information environments have a large impact on election outcomes.

Summary of Methodological Approach

The four different empirical strategies: survey analysis of an election at a single point in time, one survey experiment, one lab experiment and one panel data study over time, all contribute to strengthen the conclusions. The experiments made it possible to conduct tests of hypotheses related to information on others' behaviors, and the findings from the experiments are validated in the real life election data analyses. In sum, the different approaches and their focus on various aspects of strategic voting under PR strengthens overall conclusions. An intention has been to be transparent in the use of data and methods, so that the studies would be possible to replicate, using different samples in other contexts.

Findings from the Four Studies

The ideas behind strategic voting are developed in four papers covering voter strategies in different contexts. Overall the articles support the claim that government-oriented strategic voting occurs, and that contextual factors affect the strategic goals (seats, office or overall policies) which then become salient, and the kinds of strategic voting which take place in practice. Therefore election campaign signals are one key to understanding differences in vote shares for parties over time and space. When the margins are small, the presence of strategic voting can have a substantive impact on the overall results. The electoral system sets the stage, and the election-specific information creates different strategic environments, which then affect voters' choices.

Article 1 looks at a real-life election where there were two explicit pre-electoral coalitions – the case of the 2010 Swedish general election. In this case, there were potential incentives to cast insurance votes. The analyses of voters' motivations and preferences show that insurance voting for a smaller center-right party in this election had a substantive impact on their vote choices, and on the election results, in contrast to Downs' (1957) claim that voters under PR would be likely to choose their most preferred party when government alternatives were clear.

Article 2 further investigates the coalition-oriented strategic voting perspective further, elaborating on the impact of pre-electoral signals and polling levels on voting for parties at risk of falling below an electoral threshold. The findings show that the tendency to cast an insurance vote is highest when coalition signals are clear and a small coalition party has polling levels slightly below the electoral threshold level, whereas parties that are not included in coalitions and have low support in the polls are more likely to be abandoned. Thus differences in coalition status and polling information have a substantial impact in the incentives to vote strategically.

Article 3 delves even deeper into voter coordination under the presence of two very clear government alternatives. The main focus here is determining when voters employ insurance strategies, as opposed to when they "sequence" their vote for larger parties. The findings show that when two parties are at risk of not being elected, voters cast insurance votes to a higher extent than in situations where only one party is at risk of not reaching representation, which is when strategic voting

for larger parties is more common. The experiment also shows that voters are able to coordinate strategically in more complex decision-making environments.

Article 4 elaborates upon the idea of "compensational voting" for a smaller coalition party under the presence of pre-electoral coalitions. The idea is that voters adjust their choices with regard to parties' chances to obtain government influence. The argument being made is that some voters cast a strategic vote for a coalition party with a negative polling trend, with the aim of strengthening its position in the forthcoming government negotiations. Using multivariate models, the findings give support to the idea that some voters cast compensational votes for coalition parties with falling public support. Ideological distances matter more for compensational voting than for insurance voting.

For a summary of the four articles and their contributions, see Table 2.

Table 2: Contributions of the Four Articles

	ARTICLE 1	ARTICLE 2	ARTICLE 3	ARTICLE 4
Type(s)	*Insurance*	*Insurance Wasted vote*	*Insurance Sequencing*	*Compen-sational*
Preferences	"Real"	"Real"	Induced	"Real"
Coalition signals	Clear	Clear and ambiguous	Clear	Clear and ambiguous
Polls	Real life	Manipulated	Iterated	Real life
Method	Survey data analysis	Survey experiment	Lab experiment	Panel data analysis
Case	Sweden 2010	Sweden 2013, 2014	Sweden and Canada	Sweden 1988–2014
Findings	Insurance voting exists	Election-specific factors affect vote choice	Relative party strength affects coordination	Compensational voting exists

The next section discusses the implications.

Concluding Remarks

Discussion

In this essay, the definition of strategic voting was developed, relating it more explicitly to others' behavior than has been previously done. The starting point was that the voter has preferences for policies and parties, and considers a party's chances of being elected and being influential within government. Such considerations may lead to a "strategic" vote for some other party than one's preference. Relating strategic considerations explicitly to the government formation process implies that voters sometimes think like parties do regarding the consequences of their vote in terms of seats, office and overall policies. When the government outcome is expected to be a coalition, strategic voting for smaller parties is more likely to take place since even smaller parties have the chance to become influential players in government. This can lead to "insurance voting" for a party that is at risk of not making it to Parliament, or "compensational voting" for a smaller party in order to increase its chances of obtaining portfolios in a coalition.

One example in which strategic voting for smaller parties had a crucial impact in outcomes is the 2010 Swedish general election. In this election the Prime Minister declared that a vote for a center-right government was needed to form a strong majority coalition (Article 1). Under such circumstances, a strategic vote for a party at risk of falling below a threshold may become an attractive option for voters who prefer a coalition. Sometimes voters are also likely to consider the relative strength of parties that are potential members of a coalition. This creates the incentive to vote for a smaller party to strengthen its position to negotiate and obtain portfolios (Article 4). Whereas Downs expected very few voters to cast strategic votes under PR, this work shows that such voting actually occurs: contrary to Downs' expectations, the presence of pre-electoral coalitions instigates strategic voting for smaller parties that are included in a coalition.

This work also shows that the election-specific context affects voter tendency to cast a strategic vote. The presence of polling information is crucial to evaluate parties' chances to make an impact; voters are greatly influenced by this kind of information (Article 2). If the media focuses on polls, consideration about parties' chances of being elected and the likelihood that a coalition will win are more

likely to become emphasized. Thresholds and previous election results are still focal points for evaluating parties' chances and the electoral system matters for how the electorate's choices are translated into seats. Both system and informational factors are thus important for explaining how voters make their choices.

Strategic voting, as developed in this study – oriented towards coalition governments – is more likely to take place in party-oriented systems such as those found in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, and less likely in candidate-oriented systems, such as Brazil or Finland, where voters have weaker perceptions of ideologies (Ames et al., 2009; Bengtsson et al., 2014:101). If the voter perceives there to be party positions, then he or she is more likely to think about election outcomes and a combination of different party policies.

The findings from this study indicate that election-specific signals about party strength and how parties plan to cooperate with each other matter in terms of election outcomes. To what extent party signals about cooperation impact voters would be relevant to investigate further. For example it is possible that voters use parties' "negative" signals about other parties when making (strategic) party choices.

Another gap to fill in future research is the way that individual level factors such as political knowledge is related to strategic voting. Previous evidence is mixed and points at differences in tendencies to cast strategic votes for smaller and larger parties. Forthcoming studies should elaborate upon the particular individual characteristics which are related to different types of strategic voting.

Normative Implications

If it is politically ideal for democracies to reflect and be responsive to public opinion (Weale, 2007) then strategic voting may be seen as something undesirable. For example, if voters vote strategically for a small coalition member that would have fallen below the threshold without those extra votes, then this implies that some party with public support lower than the threshold has a chance to gain an influential position in government. However, in systems with coalition governments in which policies are the result of cooperation between different parties, a strategic vote choice may very well represent an individual's view on policy. Policy positions from different coalition parties and their post-election negotiations will affect overall policy outcomes, and a "strategic" vote potentially takes these factors into account.

However, if the media places emphasis on factors such as polls and speaks less about parties' policy positions, then it becomes difficult to develop preferences for parties in the first place. Another challenge for voters living in a

contemporary media environment is to sort through all the information surrounding campaigns. Polls are sometimes difficult to evaluate, and their content depends on their samples and timing; they are not "true" in themselves. So-called "polls of polls" that averages the results from different polling institutes are one source voters can turn to for a more nuanced picture.

Polls should be based on representative samples, so that voters have a fair chance to evaluate the parties' chances of being elected. The media could make it easier for voters to navigate the different parties' issue positions and could also interpret polls in relation to their timing and source. If parties were clearer about their policy views and their intentions to cooperate, then voters would have a clearer view of what is likely to come after the election.

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