

Strategic and semi-strategic voting under different electoral systems

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Abstract Strategic voting is often associated with plurality systems. This paper argues that strategic considerations also play a role in elections held under other electoral systems. Strategic considerations take various forms, such as which party (or candidate) receives a majority or plurality, which coalition is formed, and who becomes prime minister. The impact of the latter two factors is examined in the context of four Dutch parliamentary elections (characterised by PR, a single district, 150 seats, and a threshold of 0.67 per cent). The findings show that both factors played a double role. First, about 10 per cent of the voters appear to have voted strategically on the basis of these considerations. Second, among the even more sizeable group of voters who liked two or more parties equally well, strategic considerations were apparently used as tie-breaker; this phenomenon is referred to as ‘semi-strategic voting’.

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Workshop 13: Electoral system reform

1. Introduction

Models of voting differ from one another in many ways. But they have one feature in common: the assumption, explicitly or implicitly made, that people vote for the party or candidate they like best. In some cases, however, voters do not. In that case we usually speak about strategic or tactical voting. Strategic voting is associated with the notion of a wasted vote. Anthony Downs (1957: 48), for example, argued that rational voters do not want to 'waste their vote' and choose between parties that have 'a reasonable chance'. Strategic voting and wasting votes are in turn associated with a particular electoral system, namely that of plurality rule (also known as first-past-the-post), of which Britain provides the typical example. However, strategic voting may also occur in other electoral systems. In fact, strategic voting may occur in *any* electoral system. This has been proven in the context of social choice theory by Allan Gibbard (1973) and Mark Allen Satterthwaite (1975). They showed that any voting procedure that is strategy-proof, is dictatorial. In other words, any electoral system that is not dictatorial, is subject to the possibility of strategic voting. This fact has become known as the Gibbard-Satterthwaite theorem.

In electoral research, however, strategic voting has mostly been studied in the context of the plurality system and has mostly been conceived of in terms of not wasting one's vote by voting for a candidate that has no chance of winning the constituency. In this paper I argue that to understand strategic voting we should also focus on other electoral systems. After all, only about one in five democracies make use of the plurality rule (Farrell 2001: 7). In a plurality of countries, proportional representation is the rule; even mixed systems, which combine plurality rule and proportional representation, are more popular than the plurality system (Farrell 2001: 7-10). Furthermore, to understand how strategic considerations influence voters' choices at the polls, we need to go beyond the idea that strategic voting concerns the desire not to waste one's vote. In this paper a number of considerations will be identified that voters may base their choice on and which may lead to strategic voting. These considerations may also play a role in electoral systems that are usually not associated with strategic voting, including that of proportional representation. Furthermore, such considerations may also play a decisive role in a particular situation that has been overlooked in the literature, and which may result to what may be referred to as semi-strategic voting.

2. Sincere voting and strategic voting

The notion of strategic voting implies that voters would not have voted that way, had it not been for particular strategic considerations. This means that if voters cast a strategic vote, their actual vote deviates from some kind of baseline. This baseline is commonly referred to as a sincere vote (cf. Catt 1989; Blais and Nadeau 1996). The introduction of the concept of a sincere vote is generally credited to Robin Farquharson. In *Theory of Voting* (1969) he sought to fill a gap in social choice literature, namely its neglect of strategies that voters may employ in order to obtain a desired outcome. In order to be able to analyse such strategies, he used the notion of ‘sincere voting’ as a point of departure.

In the mathematical models Farquharson presented, three concepts are central: voters, outcomes, and preferences (pp. 5-6). Voters are defined as individuals (or other units, such as nations), which constitute an electorate (or an assembly or committee) and whose choices have consequences. Outcomes are defined as the possible results of the decision process in which voters participate. Preferences are defined as voters’ evaluations of the outcomes in terms of a rank order. Hence, voters are assumed to be able to list all possible outcomes of a voting procedure in order of their preference. Farquharson argued that in his study the results “have been set out only for the case of three voters and three outcomes, but can readily be extended to cover any desired number of either” (pp. xi-xii). Furthermore, he argued that outcomes may involve single candidates as well as combinations of candidates (p. 6). This means that the models can also be applied to parliamentary elections in which political parties compete for a large number of seats.

Following K. J. Arrow (1951), Farquharson noted that “the simplest assumption which can be made about the behaviour of voters is that their votes are directly in accordance with their preference scales” (p. 17). Such behaviour he referred to as ‘sincere voting’. In some cases this kind of behaviour is not advantageous to a voter, since voting another way would have resulted in a more preferable outcome (preferable from the perspective of the voter). Voters may then adopt a strategy other than voting sincerely. This is commonly known as ‘strategic voting’. Note that in order to be able to vote strategically, voters need to have an idea about the preferences of other voters. If few other voters share their preferences, it may be advantageous to adopt a strategy and vote ‘non-sincerely’.

As Farquharson rightly pointed out, the principles he set out can be applied to elections with any number of candidates (or parties) and any number of seats. If one wants to apply the ideas empirically, however, one runs into trouble. The reason lies in the fact that voters need

to rank order all possible outcomes, which are defined in terms of the distribution of seats. In the context of Dutch parliamentary elections, for example, usually around twenty parties compete for 150 seats. If one would exclude parties that fail to win any seat, this still leaves about ten parties and 150 seats. This means that in Farquharson's terms there are about 140 billion possible outcomes, which voters are presumed to rank order. This may be possible theoretically, but in practice voters cannot be expected to be capable of rank ordering such a large number of possible outcomes, nor can any such rank order be assessed in empirical research.

This paper therefore proposes to define a sincere vote not in terms of the outcome of an election (as alternative distributions of the seats), but in terms of those who compete in an election. As in most democracies political parties play a key role, and vote choice can thus be conceptualised in terms of the party for whom people vote, sincere voting is best defined in terms of voters' preferences regarding the competing parties. Furthermore, this paper proposes to determine these preferences not on the basis of a rank order of parties provided by voters, but on the basis of voters' evaluations of each individual party; evaluations indicate to what extent a voter likes or dislikes a particular party. By comparing at the individual level the evaluations of the competing parties, voters' party preferences can be determined. A vote is defined as sincere if it is cast in favour of the party that a voter prefers, that is, evaluates more positively than any other party. Hence, although the concept of a sincere vote as defined here differs from Farquharson's (1969) conception in some ways, the essence of the original definition remains intact: "voting directly in accordance with one's preference scales".

Determining preferences on the basis of evaluations of individual parties has two important implications. First, this procedure allows for ties in the rank order, as voters may evaluate different parties equally positively. Consequently, with respect to party preferences a distinction can be made between single and multiple party preferences. If voters evaluate one party more positively than all others, we speak of a single party preference; if voters evaluate more than one party most positively, we speak of a multiple party preference. Second, the procedure proposed enables one to assess the intensity of a preference, which cannot be deduced from a rank order. If voters like the party they prefer much more than all other parties, then the chance that they form a voting intention in favour of another party due to such considerations is presumably smaller than if they like the preferred party only slightly more than other parties. It may therefore be considered useful to focus on the strength of the preference, which may be defined as the degree to which a party is evaluated more or less positively than any other party.

In order to apply the notions of sincere and strategic voting in real-life studies of voting, it is useful to also deviate from Farquharson's theory in two other ways. First, in his theory outcomes are defined in terms of the distribution of seats. However, outcomes may also be defined in other ways. For example, Downs (1957) defined outcomes of an election in terms of policies adopted by the government that was selected. This implies that to understand why people vote as they do, we need to take into account their preferences concerning those policy outcomes. Second, in social choice theory votes that deviate from voters' preference scales are by definition considered strategic. Social choice theory allows voters to deviate from their sincere vote only on the basis of a strategy that may help establish a particular outcome at the aggregate level. In practice, however, voters may have other reasons not to vote for the party they evaluate most positively. For example, Richard Lau and David Redlawsk (2001) argued that one way in which voters may decide how to vote, is to follow the endorsement of a candidate by certain groups or persons. This choice mechanism fits neither the notion of sincere voting (following one's preference scales), nor that of strategic voting (voting for a non-preferred party on the basis of considerations regarding the election outcome). This means that individuals may also vote 'non-sincerely' for other reasons than strategic ones. In other words, a vote that is not sincere need not be strategic. To be classified as strategic, another requirement needs to be fulfilled. The vote must also be cast with the purpose to help establish a particular election outcome.

This implies that determining whether people voted strategically may be considered a two-step process. The first step consists of determining whether they voted 'sincerely' or 'non-sincerely'. The second step consists of determining whether non-sincere votes are cast with the purpose to help establish a particular election outcome. If the votes are, they are strategic.

3. Five faces of strategic voting

Strategic voting implies that voters base their choice not on evaluations of competing parties, but on considerations concerning possible outcomes of the election. These considerations may be conceptualised in terms of voters' feelings about possible scenarios associated with the election (cf. Rosema 2004). These possible scenarios may be referred to by the notion of prospects, and the corresponding evaluations may thus be referred to as prospect evaluations. Furthermore, it may be hypothesised that voters decide on the basis of simple decision rules, or heuristics, in which prospect evaluations may play a role (cf. Rosema 2004). The use of

such heuristics may lead to strategic voting, namely if the resulting party choice does not correspond with the party voters evaluate most positively. Five types of strategic voting may thus be identified on the basis of different heuristics voters may employ.

Type I: Strategic voting based on candidate preferences

The first type concerns the ‘classic form’ of strategic voting, namely that in which voters base their choice on their preferences concerning the selection of a candidate, and only focus on candidates they consider viable for election. This may involve candidates at the national level (in presidential elections) as well as at the local level (in parliamentary elections based on the single member plurality system). For example, in the 2000 U.S. presidential election voters who considered Ralph Nader the best candidate might have voted for Al Gore, because they expected Nader to have no chance to win the election and preferred Gore to George W. Bush. Similarly, in British parliamentary elections voters who preferred Labour might have voted for the candidate of the Liberal Democrats if they expected the Labour candidate to have no chance to win the constituency seat and preferred the Liberal Democrats to the Conservatives.

Type II: Strategic voting based on government preferences

Downs (1957) and V. O. Key (1966) both emphasised that the sole function of elections is the selection of government: some parties or candidates get governmental power, whereas others do not. This implies that the consequence of an election can be conceived of in terms of the government that is selected, and voters can be expected to vote in a way associated with establishing the government they prefer.

In parliamentary elections the corresponding heuristic can be applied most easily in two-party systems. In Britain, for example, voters may base their choice on their evaluation of the prospect that the Conservative Party forms the government and the prospect that the Labour Party forms the government (for simplicity’s sake, we ignore the role of other parties). If voters like the prospect of a Conservative government better than the prospect of a Labour government, they simply vote Conservatives; if they prefer the prospect of a Labour government, they vote Labour. We may refer to this decision rule as the government preference heuristic. If the party thus voted for differs from the party evaluated most positively (perhaps because it is a small party that is considered to have no chance of forming the government), strategic voting results.

If governments constitute of coalitions of parties, as in the Netherlands, the use of this heuristic is less easy. Elections determine how many seats each party gets in parliament, but what kind of government is formed depends on the negotiations following the election. This, however, does not mean that voters cannot use the government preference heuristic. Voters may prefer a particular government coalition and they may be of the opinion that to bring about that coalition they best vote for one particular party. Another possibility is that they prefer a particular party to take part in the government, irrespective of which coalition this would concern, and therefore vote for that party. Yet another possibility is that voters hope that a particular coalition will not be formed and vote for a particular party for that reason. So in multi-party systems with coalition governments voters may base their choice on considerations about the future government and use the government preference heuristic. This may lead them to vote strategically.

Type III: Strategic voting based on government leader preferences

In presidential elections it seems straightforward to define the outcome of the election in terms of the candidate who becomes president. In parliamentary elections, however, voters may also take into account who will become government leader. Voters may cast their vote as if who becomes prime minister is the central question in the election (Bartle and Crewe 2002). The corresponding decision rule may be referred to as the government leader preference heuristic. We could then speak about ‘quasi-presidential voting’ (cf. Crewe and King 1994: 191). An example of an election in which this appears to have played an important role is the 2001 Italian parliamentary election. The question who would become prime minister was so central, in particular whether or not it would be Silvio Berlusconi, that the election was perceived by many as “a referendum for or against Berlusconi” (Allum 2001: 27). Note that this means that voters presumably used the government leader preference heuristic in a positive as well as a negative sense.

In Dutch parliamentary elections government leader preferences may also have played a role. In 1986, for example, the Christian Democrats used the campaign slogan “Let Lubbers finish his job” (at that time Ruud Lubbers was prime minister of his first cabinet with the Liberals). Selection of the prime minister was also central in 1977, when the main slogan of Labour was “choose the prime minister” (Brants et al. 1982: 31). Labour’s ten seats gain nevertheless did not bring Joop den Uyl the desired position, which illustrates that who becomes prime minister may depend more on the cabinet formation process after the election,

than on the result of the election itself. Nevertheless, voters may base their choice on their government leader preference and this may lead them to vote strategically.

Type IV: Strategic voting based on party size preferences

A distinction can be made between direct and indirect consequences of an election. Direct consequences are those that depend solely on how the electorate cast their votes, like who gets elected as president and the number of parliamentary seats a party gets. Such consequences of an election may in turn lead to indirect consequences. Examples are what coalition government is formed, and who becomes prime minister, in a multi-party system. This depends not only on the electorate cast their votes, but also on negotiations between parties after the election.

In multi-party systems voters may base their choice on indirect consequences of the election, like discussed above, but they may also focus on the direct consequences. More specifically, voters may focus on the outcome of the election in terms of the number of seats a party gets, as whether a party becomes largest in parliament or not, or as whether a party passes the electoral threshold. If voters hope that a particular party becomes largest, or if they fear that a particular party might not pass the electoral threshold, this may lead them to vote for that party. For example, in the 1988 Swedish election about a fourth of the Green Party voters supported this party (although they did not prefer them), in order to prevent the party from disappearing from parliament by not passing the four per cent threshold (Holmberg 1994: 316). With respect to parties that are large enough not to be in danger of not passing the threshold, but not large enough to make a chance of becoming largest, other prospects related to party size may play a role. For example, in the 1998 Dutch parliamentary election many voters of D66 said they voted for the party in order to help establish the second so-called purple coalition. Because these considerations are related to the size of parties, we may refer to the corresponding choice mechanism(s) as the party size preference heuristic.

Type V: Strategic voting based on policy preferences

According to Downs (1957), voters base their choice on one particular indirect outcome of the election: the policies of the future government. Various models regard voters' policy preferences the key to their choice. They assume that voters base their choice on their own stands on various issues in relation to the perceived stands of the parties. Policy voting as an

example of the use of the election outcome preference heuristic only applies if voters view policies as election outcomes and take these as such into consideration when they make their choice. In that case we could regard it as a choice mechanism and speak about the policy preference heuristic.

If only one issue plays a role, the election is much like a referendum and we could speak about ‘quasi-referendum voting’. Voters may also take into account a whole range of issues and base their choice on the degree to which they agree with parties more in general (in their perception). So-called ‘vote selectors’ on the world wide web (like the American ‘Vote Smart’ or the Dutch ‘StemWijzer’) facilitate voters to make use of this heuristic. Typically, such programs contain a wide variety of statements about policies. By comparing the opinions of voters with those of the participating parties, scores are computed that indicate which party voters agree with most. If voters base their choice on such ‘advice’, and they use it in order to get the desired policies in the future, then they may be conceived of as having used the policy preference heuristic.¹ If the party that favours the policy voters want is not the same as the party they generally like best, the use of the policy preference heuristic will lead to strategic voting.

4. The impact of electoral systems

Strategic voting is influenced by the electoral system under which elections take place. According to Gary Cox (1997: 11), it is standard in the literature to conceive of electoral systems in terms of a continuum from strong to weak regarding the incentive for strategic voting, and thereby reduction of the effective number of parties. In this view electoral systems have an impact on strategic voting because they determine the *degree* of strategic voting. The previous discussion has shown that strategic voting is not just a matter of degree, but also a matter of kind. Consequently, electoral systems may have an impact on strategic voting because they determine the *kind* of strategic voting.

A first dimension of electoral systems that influences what kind of strategic considerations may play a role is the electoral formula (Lijphart 1994; Cox 1997). Arend Lijphart (1994: 10-14), for example, distinguished between majoritarian formulas, proportional representation, and semi-proportional systems. If a majoritarian formula is used, voters may decide not to ‘waste their vote’. Hence, if voters prefer (a candidate of) a party that has no chance of winning a seat, they may decide to support another party or candidate instead. This is

presumably the best-known example of strategic voting. In this case the strategic considerations concern who gets elected at the constituency level. Voters may also focus on government formation at the national level. If a majoritarian formula is used, the link between votes cast and governments formed is clear (Powell 2000). Consequently, voters may be expected to take this into account and base their choice on their government preference. Furthermore, government preferences may be expected to be of the kind ‘a government by party x’. In systems of proportional representation, on the other hand, the links between votes cast and governments formed is less clear (Powell 2000). Consequently, voters may be expected to take this into account less often. Nevertheless, considerations related to government formation may still play a role. But these will be of another kind and may take various forms (see above). For the same reason, government leader preferences, as well as policy preferences, may be expected to play a larger role in systems that use a majoritarian formula than in other systems. Nevertheless, such considerations may also play a role under PR.

A second dimension of electoral systems that has an impact is district magnitude. In electoral systems with a large district magnitude the impact of strategic considerations may be expected to be more limited (Cox 1997: 106, 112, 122).

A third relevant dimension concerns the electoral threshold. In systems with relatively high electoral thresholds, voters may be expected to take related considerations into account. If parties are in danger of not passing the threshold, voters may decide not to ‘waste their vote’ and support another party. However, small parties may also benefit from strategic voting. The case of the Swedish Green Party has already been mentioned. Another example concerns Germany, where the FDP appears to have benefited from strategic voting aimed at letting them pass the five per cent threshold (Cox 1997: 81-83, 197-198).

A fourth dimension that may play a role is ballot structure (Farrell 2001). According to David Farrell (2001), two features of the ballot are particularly important: whether voting is candidate-based or party-based, and whether votes are cast categorically (an either/or choice) or ordinally (a rank order). Self-evidently, candidate-centred ballots facilitate the use of the candidate preference heuristic and the corresponding strategic voting, whereas the other forms of strategic voting are more closely related to party-centred ballots. Furthermore, the wasted vote argument does not apply to ordinal ballots (single transferable vote, alternative vote), because votes for candidates that receive little support are transferred to other candidates. Consequently, in those systems strategic voting based on the candidate preference heuristic presumably plays no role.

5. A case study: the Netherlands

Conventional wisdom has it that strategic voting is most unlikely at elections held under a system of proportional representation, in particular if the district magnitude is large (Cox 1997: 10-11, 99-122). A typical example of a country in which strategic voting is thus expected to be virtually absent is the Netherlands: its electoral system is characterised by proportional representation, a single district, 150 seats, and a threshold of only 0.67 per cent. It may therefore be considered interesting to test the ideas presented above in that context. This will be done below on the basis of data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies of 1986, 1994, 1998, and 2002.² These studies are based on two face-to-face interviews with a large sample of voters, one held in the weeks preceding the election and another in the weeks following. In the pre-election interview respondents were asked to indicate their evaluations of the individual parties in terms of a 101-point scale (more or less analogue to the NES feeling thermometer).³ Additionally, they were asked about their preferences concerning the new government coalition and their voting intention. In the post-election interview the same respondents were asked about their actual voting behaviour and their faith in various party leaders as a future prime minister in terms of a 7-point scale.

Voters' party preferences can be determined on the basis of the evaluation scores awarded to the parties. If voters evaluated one party more positively than any other, they are said to prefer that party (these voters have a single party preference). If voters evaluated two or more parties equally positively, and more so than other parties, they are said to prefer those parties (these voters have a multiple party preference).

TABLE 1 Number of voters who voted sincerely and non-sincerely (%)

	1986	1994	1998	2002
voted sincerely (single party preference)	68	58	48	46
voted sincerely (multiple party preference)	17	24	29	28
voted non-sincerely	15	19	23	26
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total	100	100	100	100
(N)	(1192)	(1282)	(1596)	(1505)

Whether voters voted sincerely or non-sincerely can be determined by comparing, at the individual level, party preferences and voting behaviour. As shown in Table 1, in each

election a substantial minority voted non-sincerely, that is, voted for a party they did not evaluate most positively. The number of voters to whom this applied increased from 15 per cent in 1986 to 26 per cent in 2002. The table furthermore shows that another substantial minority cast a sincere vote, but must have based their choice additionally on other considerations than their party preference: they evaluated at least two parties equally positively and thus had a multiple party preference. The number of voters to whom this applied increased from 17 per cent in 1986 to about 28 per cent in 1998 and 2002. Consequently, the number of voters with a single party preference who voted sincerely – these are the voters whose choice can be explained without taking into account strategic considerations – decreased from 68 per cent in 1986 to 46 per cent in 2002.

These findings suggest that strategic considerations may have been decisive for up to about a quarter of the electorate (as they voted non-sincerely), while up to another quarter may have used strategic considerations to choose between two or more preferred parties (as they had a multiple party preference). However, strategic considerations are not the only explanation possible for non-sincere voting as observed here. Another possibility is that the discrepancies between party preferences and voting behaviour are a methodological artefact resulting from the time difference between the moment voters expressed their party evaluations (in the pre-election interview) and the moment they cast their vote. After all, voters who changed their party evaluations between the pre-election interview and the election, and consequently changed their party preferences, and who voted for the party then preferred, are falsely classified as having voted non-sincerely.

Whether this scenario accounts for the non-sincere voting observed, can be examined by shifting our focus from actual voting behaviour (as reported in the post-election interview) to voting intentions (as expressed in the pre-election interview that also included party evaluation measures). Table 2 shows that in each election the number of voters who intended to vote non-sincerely is lower than the previous findings suggested. However, substantial minorities of voters preferred to vote for a party they did not evaluate most positively. The size of the group increased from 7 per cent in 1986 to 14 per cent in 2002. Hence, although about half of the non-sincere voting observed appears to be a methodological artefact, the other half is presumably not. Furthermore, the size of the group of voters who may have used strategic considerations to choose between two or more preferred parties remains of the same magnitude (between 15 and 28 per cent).

TABLE 2 Number of voters who intended to vote sincerely and non-sincerely (%)

	1986	1994	1998	2002
intended to vote sincerely (single party pref.)	78	71	59	58
intended to vote sincerely (multiple party pref.)	15	21	27	28
intended to vote non-sincerely	7	8	13	14
	-----	-----	-----	-----
total	100	100	100	100
(N)	(1127)	(1091)	(1396)	(1426)

The findings suggest that across the years voters became less likely to base their voting intentions solely on their evaluations of the competing parties. One possible explanation for this development is that the strength of voters' party preferences changed. If party preferences become weaker, the chance that the influence of other factors leads to an intention to vote for another party may be expected to increase. In line with this argument, we may hypothesise that voters with strong party preferences are less inclined to form non-sincere voting intentions than voters with weak party preferences. If this is indeed the case, we may further hypothesise that once the strength of party preferences is taken into account, the number of voters with non-sincere voting intentions was stable across the years.

TABLE 3 Party preference strength and non-sincere voting intentions (%)

	1986	1994	1998	2002
strong party preference	2	4	3	5
moderate party preference	5	4	11	7
weak party preference	14	12	19	20
multiple party preference	9	7	10	12
unweighted mean across categories	8	7	11	11
all voters (weighted mean across categories)	7	8	13	14

Reading example: In 1986 of all voters with a strong party preference 2 per cent had a non-sincere voting intention. The mean across the four categories, unweighted for the number of voters fitting each category, was 8. The weighted mean, which indicates the number of all voters who had a non-sincere voting intention, equalled 7 per cent.

Additional analyses support the first hypothesis. Voters with strong party preferences were less likely to form non-sincere voting intentions than voters with moderate party preferences,

who in turn were less likely to form non-sincere voting intentions than voters with weak party preferences (Table 3).⁴ Voters with multiple party preferences took an intermediate position. The second hypothesis, however, is only partly supported. Across all four categories non-sincere voting intentions became somewhat more likely across the years. The fact that within the various categories the increase is not as large as among the electorate as a whole, indicates that the development resulted in part from changes in the strength of party preferences. But the fact that within each category the figures increase, indicates that the development was also due to a weaker relationship between party preferences and voting intentions as such.

The findings presented so far provide circumstantial evidence for the existence of strategic voting. What remains to be seen, is whether the reason why voters preferred to vote non-sincerely, or why voters with a multiple party preference preferred to vote for one of those parties in particular, is to be found in strategic considerations. This can be examined by focusing on particular strategic considerations voters may have taken into account. The DPES surveys included questions on the basis of which the impact of two such considerations can be examined: voters' preferences regarding the composition of the future government and their preferences regarding the future prime minister.

Coalition preferences were assessed by asking voters, which parties should, according to them, be part of the next cabinet. Most voters mentioned the party (or parties) they evaluated most positively. Some other voters had a multiple party preference and included one of these parties, but excluded another. For these two groups of voters strategic considerations related to coalition preferences provided no incentive to vote non-sincerely. A third group consists of voters whose coalition preference did not include the party (or parties) they preferred. These voters often preferred relatively small parties, which they did presumably not regard as potential government parties. For these voters strategic considerations related to coalition preferences could be a reason to vote non-sincerely.

Findings presented in Table 4 support the hypothesis that coalition preferences stimulated non-sincere voting. Voters who belonged to the third group (voters who preferred a coalition that did not include their party preference) were about five times as likely to intend to vote for a non-preferred party than other voters. Furthermore, findings presented in Table 5 show that those who intended to vote non-sincerely mostly intended to vote for a party they preferred to participate in the new government (the figures in the third row outnumber those in the fourth row). The number of voters who fit the pattern expected if they voted strategically on the basis of their coalition preference increased from 6 per cent in 1986 tot 12 per cent in 2002.

TABLE 4 Coalition preferences and the party preference–voting intention relationship (proportion of non-sincere voting intentions, %) ⁵

coalition preference:	1986	1994	1998	2002
includes preferred party (or parties)	4	5	8	9
includes one preferred party, excludes another	4	5	12	11
excludes preferred party (or parties)	42	26	46	51
all voters	7	8	13	14

Reading example: In 1986 of all voters who preferred the party (or parties) of their party preference to participate in the new government coalition, 4 per cent had a non-sincere voting intention.

TABLE 5 Relationship between coalition preferences, party preferences, and voting intentions (%)

voting intention in line with:	1986	1994	1998	2002
party preference & coalition preference	86	76	76	77
party preference only	7	16	10	9
coalition preference only	6	6	11	12
neither	1	2	2	2
	-----	-----	-----	-----
total	100	100	100	100
(N)	(1127)	(1091)	(1396)	(1426)

In a similar way, the impact of voters' preferences concerning the future prime minister can be examined. Whom voters preferred to lead the next government can be determined by comparing at the individual level the faith ratings awarded to the leaders of the major parties. Two groups of voters can then be distinguished: those who preferred the leader of their party preference to become prime minister and those who preferred the leader of another party to become prime minister. Again, the latter group includes many voters who preferred the relatively small parties. Table 6 shows that voters who belonged to the latter group were about three to four times as likely to intend to vote non-sincerely than those of the former. This is not to say that these voters did so for that reason. Table 7 shows that only a minority of them intended to vote for the party of their favourite candidate for prime minister. Consequently, 'only' about 5 per cent of the voters fit the pattern expected if they voted strategically on the basis of their prime minister preference.⁶

TABLE 6 Prime minister preferences and the party preference–voting intention relationship (proportion of non-sincere voting intentions, %)

prime minister preference:	1986	1994	1998	2002
concerns leader of preferred party	3	4	7	5
concerns leader of non-preferred party	13	13	20	23
all voters	7	8	13	14

Reading example: In 1986 of all voters who preferred the leader of a preferred party to become prime minister, 3 per cent had a non-sincere voting intention.

TABLE 7 Relationship between coalition preferences, party preferences, and voting intentions (%)

voting intention in line with:	1986	1994	1998	2002
party preference & prime minister preference	68	63	58	64
party preference only	25	29	29	22
prime minister preference only	4	3	4	6
neither	4	5	9	8
	-----	-----	-----	-----
total	100	100	100	100
(N)	(1127)	(1091)	(1396)	(1426)

The second way in which strategic considerations may influence voting, is as a tie-breaker for voters with multiple party preferences. Self-evidently, coalition preferences can only be used to break a tie if these include only one of the preferred parties; similarly, prime minister preferences can only be used to break ties if these include the leader of only one of the preferred parties. Hence, the first matter to be examined is whether, in principle, voters with a multiple party preference could use their coalition preference and prime minister preference to break the tie. Table 8 shows that often they could not. Hence, many voters could not resolve the dilemma, which preferred party to vote for by taking into account strategic considerations. If these strategic considerations could provide a solution, however, voters often voted as expected on that basis (see Table 9).⁷ More specifically, among the voters for whom the use of the coalition preference heuristic would provide a solution, about four out of five voted for the party they preferred to participate in the new government. These findings provide strong

support for the hypothesis that voters with multiple party preferences use strategic considerations to break ties.

TABLE 8 Number of voters with multiple party preferences for whom strategic considerations could break ties (%)

	1986	1994	1998	2002
coalition preference	40	38	28	38
prime minister preference	61	58	60	55

Reading example: In 1986 of all voters with a multiple party preference, the coalition preference could additionally be used to break the tie by 40 per cent.

TABLE 9 Number of voters who broke ties as expected on the basis of strategic considerations (%)

	1986	1994	1998	2002
coalition preference	84	78	81	84
prime minister preference	56	56	55	69

Reading example: In 1986 of all voters with a multiple party preference who could use the coalition preference to break the tie, 84 per cent intended to vote for the corresponding party and thus broke the tie as expected on that basis.

6. Conclusions

On the basis of the preceding analyses a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, strategic voting is not just a matter of degree. To understand why people vote as they do, insight in whether or not they voted strategically is not sufficient. At least equally important is insight in the kind of strategic considerations that voters base their choice on. The traditional focus on strategic voting in terms of ‘wasting a vote’ has arguably resulted in neglect of the various forms that strategic voting may take. With respect to electoral systems this means that the study of their impact on strategic voting should not be limited to the degree of strategic voting; it needs to be extended to the impact on the kind of strategic voting.

Second, if the proposed perspective is adopted, it becomes clear that strategic voting need not be limited to electoral systems with a majoritarian electoral formula and a small district

magnitude. Cox (1997: 122) concluded that under proportional representation “strategic voting fades out in multi-member districts when the district magnitude gets above five”. The analyses presented above in relation to the four Dutch parliamentary elections, which are characterised by proportional representation and a district magnitude of 150, tell a different story. Up to more than 10 per cent of the voters appear to have voted strategically on the basis of their preferences concerning the partisan composition of the future government or their preferences regarding the future prime minister.⁸

Third and finally, strategic considerations also play a role among a particular group of voters, namely those who like two or more parties equally well. These voters with a so-called multiple party preference may break the tie on the basis of strategic considerations. The analyses presented suggest that substantial number of voters did so. We may refer to this phenomenon as semi-strategic voting. Strategic considerations thus play a much larger role than has hitherto been assumed.

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Notes

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¹ If statements of vote selectors do not concern future policies, their use does not fit the use of this heuristic. Moreover, even if they do, one may doubt whether voters that make use of vote selectors view them in terms of *future* policies and possible election outcomes. If they do not, their voting does not fit the heuristic discussed.

Note that voters who base their choice on perceived ideological agreement, and regard this as a key to future policies (as in Downs' theory), fit this mode of voting too. In all these cases it is essential, however, that voters conceive these policies in terms of possible consequences of the election, and thereby of their vote.

² Documentation on these studies can be found in Van der Eijk, Irwin and Niemöller (1986); Anker and Oppenhuis (1989); and Aarts, Van der Kolk and Kamp (1999). The documentation on the 2002 survey should become available soon too. The corresponding data files have been (or will be) deposited at the Steinmetz Archive in Amsterdam; they can also be obtained from several other social science data archives.

³ In the analyses the scales have been transformed into an 11-point format by rounding off scores to the nearest multiple of ten. Because in practice the scales already operated more as an 11-point scale than as a 101-point scale, this does not affect the outcomes much.

⁴ A party preference strength measure has been created by subtracting the evaluation score awarded to the second-best liked party from the score awarded to the best-liked party (the party preference). The resulting scores have been transformed into a four-point scale by collapsing values of 30 and above.

⁵ Because there were very few voters who did not express a coalition preference but did express a vote preference, these are not included as a separate category in the table.

The numbers of observations upon which the figures are based are as follows. In 1986: 924, 97, 104, and 1127; in 1994: 764, 131, 169, and 1091; in 1998: 978, 220, 163, and 1396; and in 2002: 983, 257, 171, and 1426.

⁶ The figures in the second row are inflated, because due to panel mortality typically about 15 per cent of the respondents did not participate in the post-election interview and thus did not express their faith in potential prime ministers.

⁷ The findings concerning prime minister preferences are based on ratings of the leaders of the competing parties in the pre-election interview in terms of a 101-point scale analogue to that used to assess party evaluations. These figures need to be replaced by those concerning the 7-point rating scores in terms of faith as a prime minister, which were discussed earlier in the paper.

⁸ The number of voters who consider voting strategically is presumably even larger. Irwin and Van Holsteyn (2003) found that at least one third of the Dutch electorate would consider voting strategically under particular circumstances.