The Many Faces of Strategic Voting

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In 1999, Israel held an early election. For only the second (and last) time, citizens cast two votes. One was the usual vote for party representation in the Knesset, which allocated seats to the parties in near proportion to the percentage of votes they received. The other was a separate vote for candidates, with the candidate receiving the most votes directly elected as prime minister. Several early candidates for prime minister dropped out, leaving three who ran throughout the campaign. The leaders of the two dominant parties, Ehud Barak and incumbent Benjamin Netanyahu, received the most votes, with Barak winning. A third candidate, Yitzhak Mordechai, ran as the head of the newly formed Center Party, which had broken away from Likud and PM Netanyahu. Mordechai was running reasonably strongly in third place, but with Barak rising in the polls and his fortunes declining, Mordechai withdrew his candidacy the day before the election. Subsequent studies showed that one important factor in citizens’ decisions was their perception that Mordechai was increasingly likely to lose and that their votes were better spent in support of Barak, whom they preferred to Netanyahu and who, unlike Mordechai, could win (Abramson et al. 2004).

Such decisions by voters are referred to as “strategic” voting, because the choices they make reflect the strategic setting of the campaign. Typically, the idea is to avoid “wasting” a vote on a candidate or party whom the voter likes but who cannot win by giving it instead to a candidate or party whom the voter finds less attractive but who may well win, thereby defeat-
ing an option the voter likes even less. Thus, some voters who disliked Netanyahu considered voting for Mordechai, their most preferred choice, or Barak, their second choice. In this instance, Mordechai lost support right at the end of the campaign as the strategic setting evolved such that those who especially disliked Netanyahu settled on Barak. As it became clear that Mordechai could not win but that Barak might, even more voters changed from Mordechai to Barak to avoid wasting votes. Those who reasoned in this fashion are said to have voted strategically. Had Mordechai stayed in the running, many others would undoubtedly have continued to vote for him in spite of the strategic setting. Such voters are referred to as sincere voters, voting for whom they prefer regardless of the strategic context. Sincere and strategic voting have similarities (they are both based on preferences, or utilities) but they also differ (since only strategic voters form expectations about likely outcomes and act upon those expectations). Those expectations combine with their preferences regarding the various outcomes to form expected utilities—to determine for which party these voters cast their ballots. Sincere voters, by contrast, act on their preferences but do not consider expectations in determining their actions.

The chapters in this book study the question of the existence, extent, and conditions under which voters reason strategically and thus engage in strategic voting in a wide variety of institutional settings and in elections in different strategic contexts. This variation provides the opportunity to test several theoretical propositions about voters and their inclination to engage in strategic reasoning. By examining voters in these different institutional and electoral contexts, we not only learn about how voters reason and thus about their role in democratic politics but also explain more fully voting decisions and outcomes in many different elections.

Each of the chapters involves original data, often survey-based but including laboratory and survey-embedded experiments. While sources vary, more than half the chapters draw their data from the Making Electoral Democracy Work (MEDW) project led by André Blais (2010). This project includes detailed analyses of party strategies, voting behavior, and laboratory experiments. According to the project’s website (www.chaireelectoral.com/medw.html),

The goal of the MEDW project is to examine how the rules of the game (especially the electoral system) and the electoral context (especially the competitiveness and salience of the election) influence the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between voters and parties.
The nations studied (Canada, France, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland) were chosen to obtain a rich variety of electoral institutions. The data, now publicly available (https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/MEDW), contain key questions that enable researchers to identify the preferences, expectations, voting choices, and evaluations of voters across a range of elections in different electoral contexts.

This chapter provides a conceptual framework for thinking about voting and its strategic and sincere forms. It provides a theoretical basis for understanding how voters reason through to their choices that applies across the various institutional structures that shape elections. This theoretical basis, in turn, enables a better understanding of the role the public plays in a democracy. Voters are often conceived as the target of campaigns but only sometimes imagined as active participants in democratic choices, alongside parties and candidates. This chapter examines those conditions under which voters are central, active strategists in shaping outcomes.

The chapter begins by developing the logic of strategic voting in a single-member district system, thus won by whichever party or candidate gets the most votes (first past the post, or FPTP). This represents the simplest and easiest case for the logic of strategic voting, and similarities (and sometimes theoretical isomorphism) exist between strategic voting—sometimes called instrumental voting (or voting as an investment)—and expected-utility maximization. This problem was developed originally in the context of studying turnout by Downs (1957) and Riker and Ordeshook (1968), leading to what the latter referred to as the calculus of voting. We prefer to call it the calculus of voting as investment to distinguish it clearly from the different but parallel calculus for sincere voting. We then develop the logic for sincere voting through the theory of expressive voting, which is (in its pure form) simply utility maximization—what might be referred to as the calculus of voting as consumption. The final part of this section unites the two pure cases of strategic voting and sincere voting into a general formulation (originally the work of Fiorina [1976]) that includes each pure type as a special case. In doing so, we further generalize by examining the concatenation of preferences and expectations, illustrating how these types of voting decisions are related and pointing out two further categories of voting decisions.

Part II examines institutional variation as a means of expanding the study of strategic voting from its common focus on FPTP systems. While part I develops the logic for a single district (or for a presidential election, where the nation as a single district selects a single winner via some [usually modified] form of FPTP), in part II we note not only that voters
choose their own representatives in the legislature but also that selection contributes to the collective outcome of what party or parties are chosen to lead the legislature (organize the government in a parliamentary setting or select chamber leadership in a legislature like the US House of Representatives). We thus consider the problem of nationwide as well as districtwide strategic voting.

We then turn to proportional representation systems in which there are several outcomes about which voters might have preferences, thus potentially leading them to think further about strategic actions for achieving those outcomes. One is voting in an attempt to ensure that a party crosses the threshold of representation and ends up with at least minimal representation in parliament. In proportional representation systems, increasing the percentage of votes received by a party also increases the percentage of seats won, often in a closer-to-matching proportion than under FPTP. Thus, a voter might consider how to maximize a party’s representation in a parliament. Finally, those who won seats in parliament then must decide which party or parties are in government and, if more than one, how cabinet portfolios are allocated across the parties in the governing coalition. Voters might reason strategically about government formation and perhaps about other aspects of the governing coalition, such as who will serve as prime minister. The final section considers the now-common mixed systems and how voters might cast their votes strategically in such systems.

Part I: The Microfoundations of Strategic and Sincere Voting in FPTP

Theoretical Foundations

There are several places to look when seeking the theoretical foundations of vote decisions in FPTP systems. Rational choice theorists, such as Downs (1957), Riker and Ordeshook (1968), and McKelvey and Ordeshook (1972) thought about the act of voting in a way similar to how they thought about the actions taken by candidates and parties. That is to say, they thought of voters as rational actors. There is thus a firm foundation in decision theory for studying the conditions under which expected-utility-maximizing voters will vote for their most preferred candidate or will instead turn to their second-most-preferred candidate instead of the first-ranked candidate as the “rational” choice because of the higher probability terms involved.6

There is also a long history of studying considerations about voting
choices in game theory as well as in decision theory. Farquaharson (1969; written in the 1950s) developed the logic of strategic voting in game theoretic terms. Gibbard (1973) and Satterthwaite (1975) independently proved a very important result that showed that all voting systems are vulnerable to strategic action. Their theorem provides the foundation for studying strategic voting in all kinds of voting institutions because it is an ever-present option for voters, no matter how elections are structured. In many respects, however, this history goes back even further.

Blais and Degan (forthcoming) assert that “the study of strategic voting in political science started with Duverger (1951) and was given its full credential with the publication of Cox’s (1997) seminal Making Votes Count.” Duverger argued that plurality voting systems, which exist in many Anglo-American democracies, should logically lead to a two-party system for two reasons. The first is the mechanical effect, or the fact that the party that wins a plurality of votes overall almost always wins a higher proportion of seats than of votes. The second is the psychological effect, which is that voters, knowing the rules, do not want to waste their votes on parties or candidates that have no chance of winning. Voters consequently focus on the two leading candidates, reasoning that one of them will win and no one else will.

Riker (1982) made the fullest argument that it was important to understand Duverger’s results in rational choice theoretic terms (even though Duverger resisted the use of rational choice theory). Cox (1997), however, should justly be credited with being the first to fully derive Duverger’s Law from game theoretic foundations with purely strategic voters; indeed, the voters, not parties or candidates, are the driving force in this result. Even more generally his “m + 1” rule holds that in equilibrium, rational voters support a number of parties equal to the number of seats being chosen (m, or district magnitude) plus one, so that in single-member districts, the voting equilibrium m + 1 is 2. He further showed that the law applies only to a single district at a time, thus requiring a second provision—an aggregation rule to go from a single district to a full legislature (see also Palfrey 1984, 1989 [using a one-dimensional spatial structure]; Aldrich and Lee 2016 [expanding that perspective]).

**The Vote Decision in FPTP Systems**

Downs (1957) and then Riker and Ordeshook (1968) developed the calculus of voting, which is a statement of voting as an act of expected-utility maximization applied to the two-party FPTP case. McKelvey and Orde-
shook (1972) expanded the model to the more general, or n-candidate, case. It posits a single goal for voters: trying to make a candidate into a winner. This is sometimes referred to as thinking of one’s vote as an “investment” decision, investing the currency of a single vote in the election to try to produce a favorable result. It is, however, also a simple case of decision making under risk, and voters are assumed to be expected-utility maximizers. That is, voters must consider the likelihood that their vote will affect the outcome. If they prefer a party with no chance of winning, voting for that party does little to maximize expected utility.

Applying this to the two-candidate FPTP case, citizens vote for the more preferred candidate, since there are only two candidates in the race and one must win; the only interesting question is whether the citizen votes or abstains. In a contest with three or more candidates, however, a citizen may vote for the most preferred candidate or, under certain conditions, for the second-most-preferred candidate. A voter will never vote for the least preferred candidate. (For the full decision-making problem for this case, including abstention, see the appendix.)

In sum, the key here is that it is assumed that all voters value outcomes solely in terms of who wins their district. If there are three parties—X, Y, and Z—voters think of outcomes solely as whether X, Y, or Z wins. Hence, it follows that the only thing that matters in terms of voting is whether one’s vote affects which candidate wins in the district. This exclusive focus is why voters turn from preferred candidates to less valued ones if they are more likely to win and why this exclusive focus leads to two viable parties (that is, Duverger’s Law), but only in a given district. This is the pure theory of instrumental voting, based on the assumption that who wins and who loses is the single attribute of elections that matters to voters.

The Calculus of Voting as Investment

Under what conditions would someone vote for a second-most-preferred candidate? For example, there are three candidates, and a voter prefers them in alphabetical order—that is, receives the greatest utility if candidate X is in office, next most if Y wins, and least if Z wins. We can assign a utility of 1 to the victory of X, 0 to Z, and s to Y such that 0 < s < 1 (putting the candidate values in the correct order and simplifying the arithmetic). But, of course, one’s vote does not determine the outcome unless that vote makes or breaks a tie. So, for outcome-oriented voters, we need to calculate a set of expectations about the closeness of the contest among the three
candidates. In Downs (1957) and in Riker and Ordeshook (1968), attention is also given to the costs of voting, C. Furthermore, both consider the benefits that may come from the act of voting per se—what Riker and Ordeshook call the “citizen duty” term. Such benefits include the satisfaction of having done one’s duty as a citizen (or avoiding the costs of guilt from failing to do one’s duty by abstaining), D.

Important though C and D might be for understanding abstention, they do not affect the choice of voting among the candidates, because these terms are the same whether one votes for candidate X, Y, or Z and thus cancel out. As the appendix shows, the expected-utility-maximizing choice comes down to the question of how much one likes the second choice compared to the first (Is s close to 1, close to 0, or in between?) and the relative chances of making or breaking ties involving candidates X and Y. In particular, a voter chooses candidate Y—that is, casts (what appears to be) a strategic vote—if and only if s is larger than the ratio of tie-making and -breaking chances for candidate X to the tie-making and -breaking chances for candidate Y. Thus, if X has a better chance of beating Z than does Y, one never votes for Y. To put it algebraically, if $P_{ij}$ indicates the probability of making or breaking a tie between candidates i and j, then one votes for one’s second choice candidate if and only if $s > (P_{XZ} + P_{XYZ})/P_{YZ}$—that is, when s is greater than the ratio of the chances of making or breaking a tie between X and Z or among all three candidates compared to the chances of making or breaking a tie between Y and Z. This follows from the classic form of the calculus (where R is the reward or expected utility of voting):

$$R = PB + D - C.$$ 

What we call strategic voting is simply selecting the best choice in expected utility when there are more than two candidates. Rational expected-utility-maximizing voters sometimes find it in their best interests to vote for their most preferred candidate; sometimes their best interests dictate that they vote for their second-most-preferred candidate, depending on how much they like the candidates and how close the contest is. The key is that voters are deciding how best to utilize their vote to be instrumental in affecting the outcome.

The concern often expressed about the calculus of voting applied to abstention—that the probability of making or breaking a tie in a large electorate is extremely small—does not apply to strategic voting. Because whether one votes for the first- or second-choice candidate depends upon a ratio of probabilities, it does not matter whether the numerator and denominator are both large or both small numbers; what matters is how
much larger one is than the other. The absolute size of probability terms matters a great deal in asking whether one votes or abstains, but once one is in the voting booth, only the relative size of probabilities matters.

The Calculus of Voting as Consumption

This theory posits that a rational, expected-utility-maximizing voter simultaneously chooses whether or not to vote and for whom to vote. Thus, the concern that voters do not (and maybe cannot) determine their choice on what are likely to be very small probability terms is worth considering. Indeed, citizens might find close elections exciting, but it is hard to imagine anyone saying they are voting because they think it plausible that doing so will make or break a tie. Why, then, do voters vote? From the view of voting as consumption, voters have a different goal. They are not voting to determine who wins or loses—or at least, that is simply one (likely small) component of their choice. Rather, their goal is to express their support for their preferred candidate. Consumers in economic theory do this all the time; they pay for tickets to go support their preferred athletic team, for example, or give money to the local classical station during fund-raising periods simply to express their support for such a valued commodity. Even more commonly, consumers buy groceries to consume them directly and not as an investment in the future of farming. That is, rather than valuing actions by their strategic effect on who wins or loses, the “expressive” voter values outcomes differently. This voter cares primarily (and in the “pure” theory, exclusively) about asserting support for the most preferred candidate or party—sincere voting.

In the purest case of expressive voting, the voter gets a benefit (a utility value), B, for voting for a preferred option (in the investment voting example, above, we set B = 1) and only for voting for that candidate. This differs from the expected-utility case, where a value is realized if and only if a candidate wins the election; with expressive voting, if you abstain, even if your candidate wins (or if you vote for another candidate), you get zero expressive benefit. Put alternatively, the outcomes of value in the pure strategic voting case are who wins and who loses the election. The outcomes of value in the pure sincere voting case are who one actually supports and who one does not support.

The pure case of expressive voting is simple. Vote for the preferred candidate, X, and get B (and possibly the benefit for doing your duty, D, and pay cost, C); vote for candidate Y or Z and get 0 (plus, possibly, D–C); and abstain and get 0 (and receive no D and pay no cost, C). Thus, it is
always better to vote for one’s most preferred candidate, no matter the circumstances. The only interesting question under this conceptualization of expressive voting is whether the person votes rather than abstains, which happens when B + D > C.

This expressive voting account may sound simple, perhaps simplistic. Vote only for your favorite candidate. And vote if you like your candidate a lot and if you feel you should do your duty. Abstain only if the cost of voting is (relatively) high. As simple as that may sound, Brennan and Hamlin (1998) and Brennan and Lomasky (1997) develop complex theories of choice and elections from expressive voting accounts, paralleling the spatial and related models that depend on expected-utility-maximizing voters, including Cox (1997).14

### Distinguishing Voting Types

The difference between strategic and sincere voters comes down to the considerations that factor into the vote decision—more precisely, whether the choice is based solely on preferences regarding candidates or parties or on preferences and expectations regarding outcomes. It can be visualized as follows in table 1.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferences Regarding Candidates/Parties</th>
<th>Expectations Regarding Outcomes</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1. Strategic, also Instrumental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2. Sincere, also Expressive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bandwagon, also Underdog</td>
<td>4. ?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Square 1 applies to the case when individuals take into consideration both their preferences regarding the candidates and their expectations about the outcome of the election. This case corresponds to voters who care only about the result of the election in their constituency and evaluate outcomes accordingly. It is thus the case where strategic voting comes into play via expected-utility maximization. Voters are using their ballot to affect the outcome of the election and therefore are voting on the basis of their preferences regarding outcomes rather than just their preferences regarding candidates or parties, or expectations. In square 2, voters ignore expectations and act purely to express their preferences with regard to candidates or parties. While they may care who wins their district’s seat, they
evaluate turnout and vote considerations only in terms of their preferences regarding the options on the ballot and thus are expressive or sincere voters. Even someone who prefers a small, niche party’s candidate who has no chance of winning will support that candidate, knowing that the candidate will lose, because the voter likes this candidate best.

If a voter considers only the likely outcome of the election, without caring about personal preferences regarding the candidates/parties (or if she is indifferent between some or among all options), then her vote choice would correspond to square 3. One can imagine someone who likes to be on the winning side, regardless of who the candidate is, or someone who only supports an underdog candidate so he/she does not “feel bad” about having such low support (Simon 1954; Lanoue and Bowler 1998). At least some voters in US presidential nomination contests consider whether to back one candidate or another based on how strongly they are performing and how well they might do in the general election—the famous “momentum” factor. In such cases, some voters end up voting for what might be their least preferred alternative in the primary (say, Romney in 2012), because he appears the most likely to win that November. Square 4, on the other hand, is harder to define. For our purposes, the crucial feature of these individuals is that they consider neither of the two elements—preferences regarding candidates/parties and expectations regarding outcomes—that we have identified as pertinent to vote choice. One can imagine voters who simply copy others in their household or sell their vote, which would lead to a specific choice that cannot be discerned from knowing personal preferences and/or expectations regarding outcomes. It is also possible that someone might decide to vote (possibly out of a sense of duty) but does not know whom to vote for and thus makes a random choice. Most studies consider only the options that include preferences regarding defined quantities, and given the range of motivations that might explain a voter with this profile, we set aside such consideration here.

Sincere and Strategic Voting

So far we have considered different types of voting as if they are mutually exclusive. However, there are two important exceptions. First, how can we distinguish the motivations of voters who support a first preference if it is also one of the top two most viable options (in an FPTP election)? In some configurations of preferences and expectations, we can distinguish strategic from sincere voters (for example, we would take all those who voted for the second-most-preferred party as at least potentially strategic but certainly not as sincere voters). But we cannot tell whether those who
support a top-two party as their preferred option are strategic or sincere voters. Both kinds of voters would choose the same action; the different calculi predict observationally equivalent outcomes. Indeed no fewer than two-thirds of all voters in a three-candidate contest have identical choices derived from strategic as well as sincere preferences. All those who prefer the strongest-running candidate and those who prefer the second strongest candidate should vote for their most preferred option whether reasoning from sincere or from strategic premises. So, when estimating rates of strategic voting, the best we can say is that we are estimating “pure strategic voting,” and possibly compare that to the rate of “pure sincere voting.”

Second, there is nothing to say that voters cannot receive pleasure from voting for their favorite candidate and value the fact that their vote helps make that candidate into a winner (and, at the least, certainly does not make it any less likely that the candidate wins). There is no reason to believe that citizens are either purely strategic (that is, purely investment) or purely sincere (that is, purely consumption) voters. On the contrary it makes sense to suppose that voters value shaping outcomes and also supporting their favorite party/candidate. While Brennan and colleagues argue for this mixture, they do the hard work of theorizing about the pure case of expression to show its richness. Even earlier, however, Fiorina (1976) developed this hybrid account as a generalization of the calculus of voting.15

So, if the reward for voting for a Downsian, purely strategic, or expected-utility maximizer is

\[ R = PB + D - C, \]

and for a Brennan-esque, purely expressive, or utility-maximizing voter is

\[ R = B + D - C, \]

then for a voter who is both an instrumental consumer and an investment voter, the reward should be

\[ R = PB + B + D - C. \]

**Part II: Extensions across Outcomes and Institutions**

In the abstract, the emphasis on preferences and expected utility regarding outcomes is equally applicable across all electoral rules, and as the Gibbard-Satterthwaite theorem (Gibbard 1973; Satterthwaite 1975) shows, there
are always reasons in every electoral system for deviating from the purely sincere choice. Voters have preferences regarding candidates/parties and have expectations about the chances of each winning. But institutional rules shape a variety of different kinds of outcomes and thus ways in which “winning” is defined. In this section, we generally consider all voters to be instrumental, using the calculus of voting with regard to outcome. What differs, however, are the definitions of winning and thus the outcomes about which voters have preferences and expectations. The relevant institutional rules are primarily those defining the electoral system and the party system. We focus here mostly on different electoral systems. We also recognize that ingrained in all systems are several different types of outcomes that may concern voters—direct winners in a constituency, legislative control, and government formation. The existing work on strategic voting in FPTP systems tends to concentrate on the constituency level, which makes sense because that level is where the vote is directly invested. But just as decisions about investing in any specific stock may be shaped in part by expectations about the performance of the national economy, so might decisions about investing the vote in any specific district race be shaped in part by expectations about the performance of the national government. It thus becomes pertinent to consider different institutional configurations and how those shape the importance of outcomes at other levels.

**National Outcomes under FPTP**

The citizen is a potential voter not only in a district but also in a country. Both Canada and the United Kingdom essentially have unicameral national governments. As a result, if one party wins a majority of the seats, it forms the government, selects the cabinet and prime minister, and so on. But even in a separated-power system such as the United States, the majority party in the House of Representatives selects the Speaker of the House, who may wield considerable partisan authority over the agenda and help determine outcomes that flow from the House. And, in both cases, if no one party holds a majority of the seats, a coalition of parties may form and determine the government, or a minority may try to govern (in a minority government). As a result, voters may care not only about who wins their constituency but also about who controls the chamber. (For the United Kingdom, see Abramson et al., this vol.)

In such a system, the citizen votes directly for a candidate in the district. The citizen is more likely to vote if that election is predicted to be close. The citizen votes only indirectly for the government. That is,
the party that carries that particular district has one more seat in the legislature and thus one more step toward forming a majority in the chamber. Abramson et al. (this vol.) basically investigate three UK parties. Since World War I, the “third party” (in this case, the Liberal Democratic Party) has not come close to winning a majority in the Commons and rarely has kept the Conservatives or the Labour Party from winning an outright majority of seats. But in the 2010 election, the Lib Dems appeared to have a real chance to move as high as second place in the Commons and their leader seemed to have a plausible chance at becoming prime minister—at least for a short while.

Taking this example for simplicity, then, the citizen was choosing among at least nine possible outcomes; party X wins in the district, X forms the government; X wins in the district, Y forms the government; X wins in the district, Z forms the government, and so on with Y or Z winning the constituency’s seat. Citizens are assumed to have candidate/party preferences and expectations regarding these nine outcomes and choose so as to maximize expected utility. (Of course, there are more possible outcomes, and the actual result in the 2010 UK election was a coalition government formed of the Conservatives and the Lib Dems.) We might well imagine a voter caring about who forms the government and runs the political system. However, that voter will be inclined to vote on the basis of the local constituency only if the contest is competitive; if it is, the voter might select the second-choice contender if the most preferred party has no chance of winning.

The voter’s actions also contribute to the national outcome, but again, only if the contest is close. Thus, the voter could decide to cast a constituency-level “tactical” vote (that is vote for the second-place party, following Abramson et al.’s terminology [this vol.]) if the constituency contest is close. But the voter could cast a national-level tactical vote if the parties are expected to be close in terms of numbers of seats won nationally and if the voter’s constituency is also competitive. In other words, casting a strategic vote in the constituency involves the straight P term—the closeness of the race in the district. Casting a strategic vote with respect to the nation involves both the expected closeness in the district and the expected closeness in the legislature. We thus expect that district closeness will matter more in determining the casting of a strategic vote than will national closeness, which involves a combination of two (likely small) probabilities, in interaction. Psychologically, we might also expect that the indirect nature of the national outcomes reduces their saliency to the determination of the vote, relative to the more immediate case of an expected close
contest in the constituency (though the media are likely to pay more attention to the national than to the local outcome).

Two-Round Systems

Two-round elections are particularly popular for the election of a president, and we thus start with this simplest situation. We also focus on the most frequent rule, which is that an absolute majority of votes is required for election in the first round and that if a second round is necessary, only the top two candidates can participate. In that case, the only outcome that matters is who will be elected president. Because the second round has only two choices, strategic and sincere voters alike vote for the more preferred option. Strategic voting in the binary case is sincere voting.

The most obvious type of strategic voting in the first round in such a context is strategic desertion of the weak candidates. Supporters of these candidates must decide whether to vote sincerely for their preferred option or to cast a strategic vote for the preferred candidate among those who have some chance of winning. The logic is exactly the same as in an FPTP election.

The existence of two rounds, however, opens up the possibility of at least two additional types of strategic moves. The first type is when there is certainty about who the top candidate in the first round will be (and certainty that this candidate will not obtain an absolute majority of the votes) but uncertainty about which other candidate will be allowed to participate in the second round. In such a context, some supporters of the strongest candidate may want to focus on the race for the second position and cast a strategic vote for a candidate who has some chance of making it to the second round and who is very unlikely to be able to defeat the strongest candidate in the second round. In this situation, the voter strategically deserts a strong candidate to support a weaker one. Those who oppose the strongest candidate, conversely, may support a candidate expected to have the best chance of defeating the certain candidate. In both cases, such voters are taking into account the possible outcomes of both the first and second rounds when making up their mind about how to vote.

A second possibility emerges when there is certainty about the two candidates who will make it to the second round. In this context, some of the supporters of these two candidates may wish to signal their preferences among the weaker candidates. This can be the case, for example, when a voter likes a policy stance of one of these weak candidates and wishes that the preferred strong candidate would pay more attention to that policy position. This seems to have been the case for some Jospin supporters in
the 2002 French presidential election: they voted for a more leftist candidate because they mistakenly believed that Jospin would reach the second round and hoped to prevent Jospin from moving too much toward the center (Blais 2004). This appears similar to sincere voting, and indeed it might be—but not always. That is, a voter wishes to vote strategically but calculates that expectations are so nearly certain that it is better to vote purely for a desired policy than to invest the vote strategically by supporting the more preferred of the top two contenders so that the candidate makes it to the second round. It can differ from the single-round FPTP case of strategic voting, however, if the voter prefers, for example, the moderately liberal strong contender who is certainly expected to make it to the second round but the voter wants to send a signal to that candidate. By voting for a more liberal candidate not expected to advance, the voter can signal to the preferred and strong candidate that if policies must be modified to gain support, the candidate should work with the Left and not the middle or Right.

The same possibilities apply to single-member district two-round legislative elections, since the presidential election is a single-member district election. In legislative elections, however, as in the case of FPTP elections, voters may care not only about who wins in their district but also about which party will gain a majority of the seats or even whether the government will be a majority or minority one. This creates additional incentives for strategic voting if and when voters take into account the possible outcomes of the national race.

**Divided Government**

In the specific case of France, with its semipresidential system, there is also the issue of divided government (called *cambitation* in France). There is divided government when the party that has a majority of seats in the National Assembly differs from the party of the president. But since the presidential and legislative elections are not simultaneous, voters already know who will be the president for the next five years when they vote in legislative elections, and expectations about the other election thus do not come into play. Therefore, the voters have only two choices if they care about the president-legislature combination: divided government or single-party government. The key is that the outcome of interest for the voter—in this case, whether there is *cambitation*—has only two options. With only two choices, there is no room for strategic voting as we have defined it. The United States extends this consideration of divided government by having three electoral units, each of which has a role in passing
any legislation, thus expanding the array of strategic choices for voters. We do not consider this case further, but see Alesina and Rosenthal (1995, 1996); Fiorina (1991, 1992).

In the case of a parliamentary system, the issue of divided government takes a slightly different form. Divided government then means that the largest party holds only a minority of the seats, as happened in the 2010 elections in the United Kingdom considered by Abramson et al. (this vol.). As a result, passing any legislation requires the formation of a multiparty coalition after the election, either on a case-by-case basis between a minority government and one or more parties not in government or via a lasting coalition of parties to forge a majority government, with the party of the prime minister needing the support of some other party to remain in power or to pass legislation. Some voters prefer minority or majority governments. Daoust (this vol.) considers how such preferences affect voting behavior in Canadian elections. Voters who prefer minority governments, like those who prefer divided government, may decide not to support a party that is perceived to have a good chance of gaining a majority of the seats. Voters who prefer majority governments may wish to support the only party seen as having a good chance to win a majority, even if that party is not their most preferred party. There is thus the possibility of strategic voting, since voters’ decisions hinge on both their preferences and their expectations about election outcomes. Unlike in the case of cohabitation or midterm divided government in a presidential system, there is no certainty about how one’s vote would contribute to the outcome. But outside of Canada and the United Kingdom, most parliaments are decided by either proportional representation or a mixture of FPTP and proportional representation voting. We now turn to strategic voting under proportional representation and under mixed systems.

**Proportional Representation (PR)**

The wide array of PR systems all share two features. First, they contain multimember districts. In some cases, districts are a whole country (for example, Israel, the Netherlands); in others, the country is divided into regions (for example, Spain, Norway). Second, seats are distributed based on the proportion of support shown for a party. As was the case under FPTP and two rounds, strategic voting may occur in PR because of expectations about the outcome in the district, in the legislature, and in the government.

While some observers claim that strategic voting is associated with
FPTP but not with PR voting procedures, the Gibbard-Satterthwaite theorem tells us that logically there are opportunities for strategic voting in every system, including PR. What makes FPTP special in this sense is that the logic of wasted voting is very easy to see and implement. Indeed, parties and candidates often pursue campaign strategies that remind voters about this logic and instruct them on what to do. The situation is more complex with PR voting. Empirically, the evidence seeming to support “wasted” voting may well be as clear and compelling under PR as under FPTP (see Abramson et al. 2010; Riera 2016, table 1.1). Table 1.2 offers a simple example, the 1999 Israeli election. In that election, Israelis cast two votes, one for prime minister under pure FPTP rules and one for representation in the Knesset under what are among the purest cases of PR rules in use. Nearly everyone who preferred Barak or Netanyahu most intended to vote for him. Many Mordechai supporters also intended to vote for him, but one in four reported an intention to cast a strategic vote for their second-choice candidate. That is the kind of evidence we would expect given the circumstances of the campaign at the time of the survey and assuming that voters are purely investment-oriented. But Israelis also cast a vote for the Knesset under highly proportional rules. Table 1.2B shows that, if anything, the results are even stronger in support of the “wasted voting” account in the Knesset election.

At least three kinds of outcomes under PR might motivate strategic

| TABLE 1.2. Preference and the Vote in Israel for Prime Minister and for Knesset Representation |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| **A) Voting for PM via FPTP, 1999** | **Vote intention for**              | **Highest Preference**            | **Barak**                         | **Netanyahu**                    | **Mordechai**                  |
|                                    |                                    | **Barak**                         | **95.6%**                         | **3.2%**                         | **1.3%**                       |
|                                    |                                    | **Netanyahu**                      | **5.3%**                          | **94.3%**                        | **0.4%**                       |
|                                    |                                    | **Mordechai**                      | **8.5%**                          | **15.9%**                        | **75.6%**                      |

*Source: Abramson et al. 2010, table 2E.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>B) Voting for the Knesset via PR, 1999</strong></th>
<th><strong>Vote intention for</strong></th>
<th><strong>Highest Preference</strong></th>
<th><strong>One Israel</strong></th>
<th><strong>Likud</strong></th>
<th><strong>Center</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>One Israel</strong></td>
<td><strong>96.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Likud</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>93.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.9%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Center</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>61.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Compiled by authors from Israel Election Study 1999; Jewish respondents only.*
voting. First, voters might support a party to ensure that it achieves representation in the parliament. Generally, that means that a party must pass a voting threshold—that is, receive at least a legally specified minimum proportion of the vote—to obtain any representation. Israel previously had a relatively low 2% threshold; 5%, as in Germany, is more typical; Sweden’s threshold is 4%, while Turkey’s is 10%. An extreme example of threshold politics is presented by the United States and its presidential primary system. In 2016, for example, thresholds were often as high as 15%; in other years, they have reached 20%. The higher the threshold, the harder it is for small and new parties to achieve representation (or in the US primary case, for presidential candidates to win delegates). Indeed, a threshold of 50% means that the PR system has become identical to a majority voting system. Theoretically, the set of outcomes over which a PR voter has preferences is rather like that of FPTP. There are two outcomes—the party does or does not achieve the threshold—and the citizen evaluates by preferences and expectations accordingly. While breaking the threshold is often a stated goal of a party and often claimed to motivate voters, if the party is anywhere close to the threshold in popular support, it is very difficult to measure reliably such a rare circumstance with very low percentages of support for a party just at the threshold in a survey. This consideration may be very important, but it also can only be investigated via a special research design (see Freden 2016).

A second outcome is the number of seats a party wins. For a supporter of a given party, the most obvious formulation is that supporters desire their party to win more rather than fewer seats. That is, at least over the empirically relevant range of likely outcomes, preferences regarding those outcomes are monotonically increasing in the number of seats the preferred party wins. In Israel, with one nationwide district and thus with all 120 seats allocated in close proportion to the percentage of votes received, the set of outcomes is finite but dense (that is, there are many different outcomes, each one differently valued, such as my party wins 2 seats, it wins 3, . . . , it wins 119, it wins 120) and preference is increasing with each new seat won. In that respect, utility is approximately continuous and for this reason is considered to have very little room for the logic of “wasting” a vote. Every vote contributes to increased representation, and thus we expect that voters will vote for their preferred party in the hope of helping it win just one more seat. In such cases, strategic and sincere voters vote exactly the same. Of course, all PR systems deviate from a pure one-to-one relationship between seats and voters, and this discrepancy provides room for strategic considerations.
More important, unlike Israel, most other PR systems have voters select more than one but less than every member of Parliament (often in the range of 5 to 10). It is in this case that the Cox \( m + 1 \) result really takes effect, so that if \( m \) is 5, there is strategic room for up to 6 parties to survive and win up to 5 seats. And here there is room for strategic voting in quite the same way as under FPTP. With so many parties able to win seats, however, fewer and fewer voters will back a party that is unlikely to win one seat and thus be a prime candidate for the “wasted vote” logic. Alternatively, a voter in a multimember district may have near-certain expectations for how many seats the preferred party will win and so may vote strategically to influence the outcome of a close race. For example, if there are four parties and four seats and party A is certain to win two seats and party B one, then the voter may choose between parties B and C if the race for the fourth seat is close.

But there is an FPTP-like situation in every parliament, and this FPTP-like argument is particularly compelling in unitary governments (that is, in cases where one chamber of the parliament is dominant in governing). After the election determines the allocation of seats, the parties in the parliament must select a government with a cabinet and prime minister, and this selection is clearly FPTP—that is, only one government forms at a time. It is quite reasonable to imagine that voters do care what government forms, who chooses policies for the nation, and who leads the nation as prime minister (and who occupies other important posts, such as finance or defense minister). Thus, the third outcome to consider is government composition. In PR systems, where coalition government is the norm, considerations of composition take the form of voting to affect the ruling coalition. There are two ways that this can be strategic. The first is that a voter may desert a sincere preference for a larger party to support a small party in the hope that the small party will become a member of a preferred coalition (known as rental voting; Meffert and Gschwend 2010). If expectations for a preferred major coalition party winning are high, this might be a consideration. This could result, inter alia, in moving the center of the governing coalition in a direction favored by the strategic voter (see, for example, Duch, May, and Armstrong 2010). The other form of strategic voting would be deserting a first-preference small party to support a major party that is likely to head a coalition in the case of a close race between two potential coalition heads (that is, between the two leading candidates for prime minister). Lagos (this vol.) examines this possibility using data from the 2016 election in Spain.

Overall, PR systems introduce many different outcomes regarding
which voters might have preferences. All of these preferences have the potential for strategic behavior, or using a vote in an instrumental way that takes into account both party preferences and expectations. To appreciate the range of ways that voters may use their vote instrumentally, we need to recognize the great range of outcomes that matter to voters.\(^\text{18}\)

**Mixed-Member Systems**

Having discussed outcomes and potential strategic behavior in FPTP, two-round, and PR systems, it is now necessary to consider the other major electoral system type, mixed-member systems. There are two main types of mixed systems: parallel, where the two systems work independently of each other (sometimes called Mixed-Member Majoritarian), and compensatory, where the number of seats allocated to each party is basically determined by the list vote (sometimes called Mixed-Member Proportional). In the majority of mixed systems, one vote determines the outcome of a single-member district election (usually the FPTP rule), and the other vote is cast to support a party, which in turn will affect the proportional allocation of second-tier seats. Thus, the outcomes that may affect vote choice in mixed systems combine the outcomes for FPTP and PR systems separately.

In parallel mixed systems, each vote may be sincere or strategic on its own terms. In compensatory systems, however, a voter knows that the constituency vote will count toward the allocation of seats determined by the party vote. This opens up the possibility of using one vote instrumentally based on expectations regarding the outcome of the other vote. The practice of allowing candidates to stand for election for both types of seats at the same time can also contribute to this phenomenon, bringing elements of personal voting into play (see Gschwend 2007).

The presence of ticket-splitting (for example, voting for a given party in the list PR vote and for a candidate of another party in the FPTP district vote) is sometimes interpreted as an indicator of strategic voting. Plescia (2016) compellingly demonstrates that this is a mistake. In many cases, people vote for the candidate of another party simply because they have distinct preferences about the parties and the local candidates. Plescia (this vol.) shows that this is particularly the case in Japan, where many voters have distinct preferences regarding the local candidates. In their analysis of Germans’ two votes, Harfst, Blais, and Bol (this vol.) make the same point. In addition, they show that it is possible to cast a straight ticket for the same party and for both votes to be strategic. In short, ticket-splitting
and strategic voting are two different phenomena that need to be clearly distinguished.

Strategic voting is likely to be more frequent in mixed systems. This is so almost by definition since the presence of two votes increases (by 100%) the opportunity to cast a strategic vote. But it is also quite possible that having two votes makes people think a bit more about how to make both votes count. Gschwend (2007) and Plescia (2016, 55) have argued that strategic voting in FPTP local district ballots (a common feature of mixed systems) is more frequent precisely because it is less consequential and thus less psychologically costly for voters with strong partisan preferences.

**Part III: Chapter Overview**

This chapter provides a general framework for assessing the strategic quality of vote decisions. Identifying a voter's goals within the context of a given electoral system and thinking through how preferences and expectations may affect actions taken to achieve those goals leads to a better understanding of what behavior is sincere and what is strategic. It also leads to different conceptualizations of what constitutes strategic voting.

In the chapters that follow, each study presents an analysis of strategic behavior in a specific institutional context. FPTP, PR, mixed, and approval voting systems are examined in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Spain, and Germany. Each chapter takes a unique approach to a specific case.

Three chapters consider the balance between local and national considerations. Abramson et al. examine the 2010 UK election, building on the classic calculus-of-voting model by relaxing two assumptions and thus allowing for uncertainty about outcomes and introducing national considerations into voters’ decision making. Using both micro and macro models, they find evidence that both local and national considerations are relevant for voters, although to different degrees. Local considerations are the main factor, but national considerations also produce strategic incentives, and such incentives are amplified when local and national considerations push behavior in the same direction.

Lago’s chapter also addresses national considerations. The 2015 Spanish election failed to produce a viable government—no party commanded the support of enough legislators to govern effectively. As a result, Spain held another election in May 2016. Going into that contest, it might have
seemed logical that voters would have had the national situation in mind and would want to elect legislators who would lead to a clear win for a party. To this end, Lago analyzes the effects of local and national considerations on voters’ strategic behavior. Surprisingly, however, he finds very little effect, although the outcome of a minority or majority government seemed to be a pressing concern.

Daoust’s chapter considers the influence on strategic voting of preferences regarding minority or majority government at the national level in a single-member district system, where strategic behavior should be a local calculation. He looks at the 2015 Canadian election, in which expectations of a minority government were common. The country had experienced minority governments in 2004, 2006, and 2008, and these experiences informed voter preferences. He finds that minority government preferences do matter, although the local calculus dominates voter considerations. His findings are commensurate with those of Abramson et al., although Daoust uses different analytical techniques and different measures of national considerations.

Blais et al. also consider the 2015 Canadian election but do so from a different part of the voting calculus. Instead of considering voters’ preferences, the authors focus on whether providing more information that could shape expectations affects strategic behavior. They present the results of an experiment that randomly showed voters the latest local or national poll results. Given the prominence of expectations in the theory of strategic voting, receiving information that a preferred party is unlikely to win should inspire strategic behavior. Somewhat surprisingly, they find no effect of the experimental treatment. This result raises questions about the origins of perceptions and the importance of wishful thinking.

Plescia’s chapter also looks at the role of information in the calculus of voting. She examines strategic behavior in the single-member district ballot of lower house elections in Japan. Her analysis demonstrates voters’ ability to use contextual information—in this case, the number of quality challengers—to understand the strategic incentives to coordinate. This kind of indirect information gathering should inspire researchers to look for the cues that voters are likely to use to figure out the nature of electoral competition in their district.

The remaining four chapters look at the incidence of strategic behavior in complex contexts. Focusing on Belgium, Verthé and Beyens analyze whether coalition viability affects voting behavior when coalitions are the norm but the party system is complicated. They seek to understand
whether voters would try to use their vote strategically even when there are two separate party systems, different language groups, and a constitutional requirement for language representation in government. They find that voters are still affected by viability and preferences. Indeed, for those who have an incentive to vote strategically, the distance between their first and second party preferences is a key factor. Voters therefore consider not only which parties might have a chance of being in government but also whether they like the alternatives well enough to support them and avoid wasting votes.

Harfst, Blais, and Bol take a close look at strategic voting in a mixed electoral system. They distinguish three separate types of strategic behavior—strategic local desertion (in the FPTP ballot), strategic list desertion (in the PR ballot), and strategic coalition insurance voting (in the PR ballot)—a common expectation in Germany, where coalition government is the norm. Assessing the FPTP and PR votes for the 2013 German election individually, the authors find that people can and do vote strategically, sometimes only on one ballot and sometimes on both.

Van der Straeten, Lachat, and Laslier look for evidence of strategic behavior in approval voting in Switzerland. They find that even when voters appear to have no strategic incentives, there is evidence of strategic behavior along the lines put forth by Laslier and Van der Straeten (2016). This lends support to the chapter’s overall conclusion that any time a voter considers the outcome of the election when making a choice, strategic thinking is involved.

Finally, Lebon et al. consider the choices of voters confronted with three voting rules that allow them to use their vote in different ways. The results demonstrate that voters do not always behave as one might predict. They consider alternative explanations for the observed behavior that recognize that some parties that are popular (evaluated positively) are also small and so do not receive the expected support. They also find that neither strategic voting nor sincere voting paradigms can entirely explain voters’ choices.

Understanding the incidence of strategic voting in elections, then, requires that we expand our thinking to consider voters’ many preferences regarding various electoral outcomes and the ways that voters imagine they can use their votes instrumentally. Strategic voting indeed has many faces, because the instrumentally oriented voter may have a diversified set of goals and the choice of the optimal decision is bound to depend on the prevailing political institutions.
24  The Many Faces of Strategic Voting

APPENDIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A1.1</th>
<th>1 ahead</th>
<th>2 ahead</th>
<th>3 ahead</th>
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<th>1–3 tie</th>
<th>2–3 tie</th>
<th>1–2–3 tie</th>
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</tr>
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<td>S/2–C+D+B</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>S/2–C+B</td>
<td>(1+S)/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES

1. The first such election was 1996. Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated as the time for the election campaign neared. While there were likely to have been several candidates, the assassination changed the dynamics, with the result that only two candidates, Shimon Perez (standing in for Rabin as head of Labor) and Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud) ran, and Netanyahu won.

2. Barak was the head of the Labor Party, running in a coalition with smaller parties and called on the ballot “One Israel.” Netanyahu was head of the Likud Party.

3. In the last two weeks of the campaign, his support fell from nearly 20% to about 5%.

4. Still others might have found that the strategic setting inclined them to remain supportive of Mordechai, such as those who really did not like Barak much better than Netanyahu. And, of course, all those who preferred Barak from the outset would stay with him because the strategic setting reinforced their preferences. Such voters are sometimes said to have “straightforward” strategies in that their strategic and their sincere choices are the same.

5. For a recent review of empirical findings that often parallels our theoretical review, see Riera 2016.

6. See McKelvey and Ordeshook 1972. For an early empirical application of this calculus to voting behavior in Britain, see Cain 1978; for Canada, see Black 1978.

7. They actually proved that all voting procedures are consistent with the conditions of Arrow’s theorem (2012), but that includes all systems under consideration here.

8. Imagine a nation with two single-member districts. Party A wins both districts with 51% of the vote in each. Party A thus wins 100% of the seats with 51% of the vote, while Party B wins 0% of the seats with 49% of the vote. Rarely is the result so extreme, but it is common for the plurality-winning party in the nation to win far more seats than votes. In the United Kingdom, for example, no party has won a majority of the votes nationwide since World War II, but only twice has the plurality-winning party failed to win a majority of the seats. In the United States, there is considerable public opposition to politicians’ construction of gerrymandered electoral districts that seek to capitalize on the mechanical effect to the benefit of the majority party.
9. That is so unless the third-strongest contender is nearly tied with the second-place party, as was more or less true for Mordechai early in the 1999 Israeli prime ministerial election. This psychological effect underlies all of the results in Cox's (1997) classic book.
10. Palfrey (1984, 1989) was the first to derive a two-party system from rational choice theoretic principles, but he did so with both “strategic” and “sincere” voters, so that the driving force was not the electorate’s decision making.
11. Harsanyi (1977) developed game theory with Bayesian expectations among citizens (more generally, all players), with the resulting advances in game theory yielding him a Nobel Prize.
12. This expressive term differs from the Downs–Riker/Ordeshook “citizen duty” or D term, which comes from voting, no matter for whom. This expressive or B term comes only from supporting the appropriate candidate.
13. Alternatively, the theory might be modified so that a voter who chooses Y might get s. With s < B, the purely expressive voter would not choose to vote for Y, since that action is dominated by voting for X.
14. Their accounts also differ substantially from the standard Downsian spatial model in terms of candidate strategies.
15. He developed a theory of party identification, which is where the expressive values were located. We simply take his model and apply the expressive term as something that any voter (not just partisans) might value.
16. This is much less likely to occur since legislative elections now take place immediately after the presidential election. In the wake of that institutional change, the party of the president has always won the next legislative election, partly because the presidential party benefits from a honeymoon and partly because most voters prefer unified government.
17. Strategic voting in the presidential election may still occur on the basis of expectations about the outcome of the following legislative election. For example, some voters who prefer unified government may decide not to support their preferred candidate in the presidential election because they believe that the party of that candidate is too weak to win a majority of the seats in the following legislative election. We are not aware of any study that has explored that possibility. However, it is similar to the theory applied to divided government in the United States developed and tested by Alesina and Rosenthal (1995, 1996) and Fiorina (1991).
18. The major difference with respect to strategic voting is that under PR, there are many ways—and many reasons—for casting a strategic vote, and these differences may lead to conflicting outcomes, so that some voters cast a strategic vote in one direction while some do so in the other direction. Formally, there are equilibrium solutions for strategic voting under FPTP but not (or not yet proven) under PR. This difference is especially acute because there are so many reasonable motivations for considering the strategic setting and for evaluating the diversity of possible outcomes.

REFERENCES
paring Strategic Voting under FPTP and PR.” *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (1): 61–90.


