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Strategic Defection Across Elections, Parties, and Voters*

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This chapter examines how the propensity to strategically defect from one's preferred party depends on characteristics of voters, parties, and elections. Looking at the amount and sources of strategic defection is important for at least two reasons. First, electoral outcomes are often interpreted as mandates (see Fowler and Smirnov 2007), which implies that voters are expressing their sincere preferences when they decide which party or candidate to support. That interpretation has to be revisited if vote choice is substantially strategic. This is implied in studies of policy voting or Left–Right voting, for example, see Chapters 4, 5, and 7. Second, looking at strategic defection allows us to better understand how electoral rules do or do not affect voter's behavior. Arguably, one of the best established laws in political science is Duverger's law, according to which the plurality rule leads to a two-party system because supporters of weak parties desert them for more viable parties (Duverger 1954; Riker 1982). Hopefully, our study will contribute to the debate about the merits and limits of Duverger's law (see Grofman, Blais, and Bowler 2009).

We define a strategic voter as someone who decides how to vote on the basis of preferences *and* expectations about the outcome of the election (Blais et al. 2001). The strategic voter can be contrasted with the sincere voter, who votes solely on the basis of her preferences, and the momentum voter, who considers solely the outcome of the election (the bandwagon voter goes with the momentum while the underdog voter goes against it).[1] We define a defector as someone who votes for a party other than the preferred one.

We adopt a two-step approach. We first identify the set of voters who desert their preferred party. We then screen out among those deserters those who did so for nonstrategic reasons – that is, they voted for a different party because they preferred the leader of another party. The remaining deserters are assumed to be strategically motivated.

The approach is relatively straightforward with regards to the measurement of defection. We are looking at people who vote for a party that is not their preferred one. The only issue concerns the measurement of preferences, which is discussed below. Note that the point of reference is the voter's preference in a specific election, not one's traditional party loyalty. A number of studies, in the United States in particular, have looked at the sources of partisan defection, that is, voting for a party other than one identifies with (see Kernell 1977; Beck 2002). In this study, we are interested in desertion from one's short-term (sincere) preference.

The approach is more indirect when it comes to ascertaining the strategic component of defection voting. Strictly speaking, we would need to tap voters' perceptions about the likely outcome of the election in the district, in the legislature, or with respect to the composition of the government (see Blais, Dostie-Goulet, and Bodet 2009). Such data are not available in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). We thus proceed indirectly. People may decide to desert their preferred party for all kinds of reasons, some strategic and some nonstrategic. We extract the most important nonstrategic consideration, and then we assume that what is left is mostly strategic.

The most important nonstrategic reason for deserting one's preferred party is simply that one prefers the leader of another party and puts greater weight on leaders than on parties. As Tverdova mentions in Chapter 6, election campaigns can be highly candidate-oriented, and there is growing evidence that a substantial number of voters vote on the basis of their views about party leaders (see Poguntke and Webb 2005; Aarts et al. forthcoming). When the best-liked leader does not belong to the best-liked party, there is an incentive to desert the preferred party, and this may have nothing to do with strategic motivations. As indicated below, we can identify those deserters who support the party of the preferred leader, and we construe them *not* to be strategic deserters.

We consider all deserters whose desertion is not leader-induced to be strategic. There are other nonstrategic reasons for deserting one's preferred party, the most obvious being the willingness to cast a personal vote (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987). There is some evidence that a number of voters focus on local candidates when deciding how to vote (see Blais et al. 2003; Marsh et al. 2008, chapter 8) and some of them may end up defecting from the preferred party because they just like a local candidate from another party. Unfortunately, the CSES data do not allow us to screen out such a local candidate vote. There are good reasons to assume, however, that the local candidate vote is much smaller than the party leader vote (Blais et al. 2002) while at the same time more likely to be idiosyncratic rather than systematic, and thus that non-leader-induced desertion is mostly strategic.

While we focus on strategic defection, we do not assume that non-defection – that is, voting for one's preferred party – is necessarily nonstrategic. It is indeed possible for a strategic voter to vote for her preferred party, if she does so in part

because she believes that this party is a viable option (Abramson et al. forthcoming).

We wish to relate the propensity to strategically desert one's preferred party to characteristics of elections, parties, and voters. There is strong evidence for each in the existing literature.

Electoral system

We first consider characteristics of elections. While the conventional wisdom is that strategic voting is most prevalent in single-member plurality systems, in a comparative study Gschwend (2009) shows that the frequency of strategic voting in an electoral district is negatively correlated with district magnitude. As a consequence, most studies focus on strategic voting in the United States (Abramson et al. 1992; Burden 2005), Britain (Cain 1978; Alvarez, Boehmke, and Nagler 2006), and Canada (Black 1978; Blais and Nadeau 1996; Merolla and Stephenson 2007). More recently, however, studies have documented the existence of strategic voting in countries such as France (Blais 2004; Gschwend and Leuffen 2005), Germany (Gschwend 2004, 2007a), Spain (Lago 2008), Portugal (Gschwend 2007b), New Zealand (Blais et al. 2004), and Israel (Aldrich et al. 2005). A comparative study of elections in the United States, Britain, the Netherlands, and Israel even comes to the provocative conclusion that there may be no difference in the overall magnitude of strategic voting between first-past-the-post, runoff, and PR elections (Abramson et al. forthcoming).

Three observations can be made about the contrast between first-past-the-post and PR elections. First, no voting system is immune from strategic considerations (Gibbard 1973; Satterthwaite 1975). Second, strategic voting seems to be easier in single-member district plurality elections. All that voters need to know is who the top two candidates are in their local constituency. In a large PR district, it becomes more difficult to determine which six or seven parties are viable among the twelve that are running (Cox and Shugart 1996). This has led Cox (1997, 122) to suggest that "strategic voting fades out in multimember districts when the district magnitude gets above five." Gschwend (2007b) and Lago (2008) show, however, that even in large districts voters can use a simple shortcut to ascertain party viability – that is, whether the party won at least one seat in the previous election. Third, there may be more options for strategic voting in a PR system. There are likely to be more parties, and so there is a greater likelihood for voters to find another party (besides the most preferred one) that is deemed to be "acceptable," a necessary condition for agreeing to desert one's first preference (Blais 2002). Furthermore, there are a greater variety of strategic considerations in a PR system because voters may be concerned not only with the outcome of the election in their local district but also with the formation of the (coalition) government after the election (Blais et al. 2006). On the one hand, voters might anticipate the impact of their vote on policy and

engage in some sort of policy balancing by voting for parties that take more extreme positions than their most preferred one (Kedar 2005; Bargsted and Kedar 2009). On the other hand, there is evidence of at least three different types of strategic behavior in Austria and Germany. First, is a "rental vote." Major party supporters might cast their vote strategically in favor of a preferred junior coalition partner if this party is perceived as uncertain to pass a minimum vote threshold. Second, small party supporters might avoid wasting their vote for the preferred party if it is not expected to pass the minimum vote threshold, and, thirdly, there is explicit strategic coalition voting to influence the composition of the next coalition government (Gschwend 2007a; Meffert and Gschwend 2009). The upshot is that the link between the electoral system and strategic voting is not obvious. Still, we test the standard hypothesis according to which there is less desertion of the preferred party in PR elections.

The above hypothesis posits a simple contrast between PR and non-PR elections. But that dichotomy may be too crude. On the one hand, there are some mixed systems (Massicotte and Blais 1999). On the other hand, some PR systems are less proportional than others, especially because of low district magnitude or high thresholds (Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Lijphart 1994). We therefore distinguish electoral systems on the basis of their degree of disproportionality.

Party characteristics

We consider not only the electoral system but also the potential impact of the electoral supply side. We first look at the number of parties contesting the election. The assumption is that the greater the number of available options the more likely voters ought to feel that there is at least one other party that is "good enough" to support. Secondly, we consider the degree to which the party system is polarized (Dalton 2008b). It is not clear, however, how polarization could affect strategic desertion. If more polarization means more choice we should observe more desertion; but if this means greater ideological differentiation among the parties, this could reduce the incentive to defect from one's first choice.

We assume that the temptation to desert one's preferred party also depends on the nature of that party. The most important characteristic is the party's relative strength – that is, the percentage of the vote obtained – at the constituency level. The most common incentive for casting a strategic vote is probably the desire not to waste one's vote on a party that has no chance of winning. The literature has referred to forms of « inverse » strategic voting, at the expense of strong parties (see Cox 1997; Blais 2004; Blais et al. 2004; Gschwend 2004, 2007a), but the most frequent pattern must be desertion of the weak. We test the hypothesis that, everything else being equal, weak parties are more likely to be deserted.

Voter characteristics

We finally examine voters' characteristics that may foster the propensity to vote strategically. We focus on two characteristics: level of information and strength of party attachment. We test the hypothesis that better-informed citizens are more inclined to vote strategically (Duch and Palmer 2002; Gschwend 2007a), presumably because it is easier for them to assemble information about the possible outcomes of the election. The second characteristic is party attachment. It is one of the most robust findings in the strategic voting literature that strong partisans are less likely to behave strategically than weak- or nonpartisans (e.g., Karp et al. 2002; Gschwend 2007a). We therefore expect strategic defection to be most frequent among nonpartisans and most rare among strong partisans.

The data

Our analyses examine legislative (lower house) elections in module II of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). Table 8.1 lists the twenty-four countries and the twenty-five elections that are covered by the study.[2] The pooled data set includes 24,080 respondents who reported having voted in the election and with no missing data on any of the variables included in the analysis.

As indicated above, the dependent variable is whether the person strategically deserts her preferred party. For a person to be construed as a strategic defector, two conditions must be met. First, the person must vote for a party other than the preferred party. Second, the defection should not be due to the fact that the person votes for her preferred leader.

To determine a respondent's preferred party, we rely mostly on her ratings of the various parties on a 0 to 10 scale (see chapter appendix for information on this variable). The party that receives the highest rating is deemed to be the preferred party. This is relatively straightforward. There are two problems with this approach, however. First, respondents were typically invited to rate up to six of the more popular parties (in terms of vote share) in the country. The implication is that some of the smaller parties were not rated, and so those who prefer a small party were not allowed to rate that party. This is a particular concern for us since we expect supporters of small parties to be more prone to defect. To correct for this problem, we consider whether the respondent indicates that there is a (small, unrated) party that she feels closest to. For these individuals, the preferred party is defined as the party to which they feel closest.

The second problem concerns ties in party ratings. Seventeen percent of the respondents give their highest ratings to two parties or more. In those cases, again, we consider whether they indicate that they feel closest to any party. The party that the person feels closest to is then construed to be the preferred party.

Table 8.1 Defection levels across nations

	N	% Defection	% Strategic defection
Albania (2005) (PR)	725	40	36
Australia (2004)	1414	17	12
Brazil	711	71	68
Canada (2004)	1206	19	16
Chile (2005)	617	47	40
Finland (2003)	716	17	14
Germany (2002) (PR)	1554	25	21
Germany (2002)(SMD)	1522	27	24
Ireland (2002)	1312	27	24
Israel (2003)	648	23	19
Italy (2006)	356	38	37
Mexico (2003)	978	33	27
New Zealand (2002)(PR)	1123	21	14
New Zealand (2002)(SMD)	1101	36	28
Norway (2001)	1279	12	9
Peru (2006)	1216	43	36
Poland (2001)	536	37	35
Portugal (2002)	617	16	9
Portugal (2005)	1399	14	10
Romania (2004)	480	51	25
Slovenia (2004)	276	14	13
Spain (2004)	793	10	6
Sweden (2002)	762	11	10
Switzerland (2003)	650	20	16
Taiwan (2001)	981	40	37
United Kingdom (2005)	517	11	8
United States (2004)	591	15	14
Total N	24080		

See the Appendix for the construction of variables.

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, module II.

In short, for the great majority (82%) of respondents, the preferred party is the one that receives the highest rating. For a minority, that is, those with ties on highest party ratings and those who feel closer to a small party that is not rated, the preferred party is the party they feel closest to. According to the first condition, 26 percent of the respondents vote for a party that is not the preferred one.

The second condition for being construed as a strategic defector is that the defection ought not to be due to preferences among the party leaders. As a consequence, all defectors who vote for the party whose leader they evaluate the most positively are defined as not strategic. This leaves us with 22 percent strategic defectors.[3]

There are alternative ways of measuring strategic defection, and more specifically party preference. Our approach relies mainly on responses to questions where people are asked to tell how much they like or dislike the various parties. The party that is liked the best is construed to be the preferred party. We believe that this is the most direct and adequate indicator of voters' preference. There are problems with such ratings, the most important being that different people use the scales in different ways (see Brady 1985). The problem is not as serious in this case since we are not comparing party ratings across individuals.

Still, it is useful to determine if the findings are sensitive to the way the dependent variable is measured. We have explored one alternative, in which the preferred party is defined as the party that is perceived by the individual as closest to her position on the Left–Right scale.[4] The assumption here is that the preferred party is the party that is perceived to be most proximate on the overall Left–Right dimension. It seems to us more logical to infer preferences on the basis of questions about likes and dislikes than on the basis of questions about ideological orientations but we acknowledge that perceived ideological proximity to a party can be used as an indirect indicator of preference. When preference is measured in terms of ideological proximity, we get higher figures for "defection" (37% instead of 26%) and "strategic desertion" (25% instead of 22%). This suggests that preference is measured less adequately. Because the ideological measure of preference is noisier (see Chapter 4), there are more people whose vote choice does not appear to coincide with their sincere preference, thus yielding higher numbers of defectors. We determine how similar or different the patterns are with this alternative measure.

Table 8.1 indicates the proportion of strategic desertion in each election. It is extremely high in Brazil and particularly low in Spain. The finding regarding Brazil is consistent with Ames, Baker, and Renno results (2009), which show an exceptionally high level (70%) of ticket-splitting in that country. Ames, Baker, and Renno (2009, 18) conclude that this is so because "Brazil's elections for the national legislature are localized affairs, with voters choosing native sons and daughters attractive because of their presumed ability to deliver local-level public goods." There is clearly a lot of defection in Brazil but defection seems to be induced by local candidates rather than being strategically oriented.[5] Because we are unable to take into account such local candidate vote, the Brazilian estimate of strategic defection is problematic.

Among these twenty-five elections, sixteen were held under PR, four under plurality (Canada, United States, United Kingdom) or majority (Australia), and five were mixed systems. Among the latter, voters have two votes in Albania, Germany, and New Zealand, while they have only one vote in Taiwan and Mexico. Mexico is classified as PR because it has a corrective component while Taiwan is coded as non-PR because it is a parallel system (Massicotte and Blais 1999). As for the countries with two votes, we consider each vote separately.[6]

Note that we can examine only the (national) PR vote in Albania because of lack of information about respondents' single-member district.

Table 8.2 compares the proportion of strategic desertion in PR and non-PR systems. Contrary to conventional wisdom, there appears to be as much strategic defection in PR as in non-PR elections.[7] We also wish to distinguish elections on the basis of how proportional or disproportional their outcomes are. To that effect, we use the Gallagher disproportionality index (see the volume appendix). Table 8.2 suggests that there may be no relation between frequency of strategic desertion and level of disproportionality.[8]

Table 8.2 Bivariate relationships with strategic defection

Electoral system	Strategic defection	
	%	Freq
PR	22	16748
Non-PR	21	7332
Disproportionality		
Low	22	8297
Medium	20	8097
High	23	7686
Effective number of electoral parties		
Low	16	7437
Medium	23	7028
High	26	9615
Party system polarization		
Low	28	8691
Medium	20	7363
High	17	8026
Strength of preferred party		
Low	34	8240
Medium	20	8075
High	11	7765
Partisanship		
None	27	10039
Low	22	2778
Medium	19	7315
High	15	3948
Information		
Low	21	7926
Medium	23	8547
High	22	7607

See the Appendix for the construction of variables.

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, module II; N = 24,080.

In order to characterize the political supply side we consider two different dimensions: the number of parties contesting the election and the overall polarization of the party system. The number of parties is an indicator of the opportunity structure: the more parties are contesting the election, the easier it is to desert the most preferred party. We use the effective number of electoral parties (see the volume appendix). Table 8.2 indicates that the likelihood of strategically defecting from the preferred party is modestly correlated with the effective number of parties. The second factor characterizing the political supply side is party system polarization (see the volume appendix). Table 8.2 suggests that strategic defection is somewhat more frequent when there is less polarization.

We also take into account the preferred party's electoral strength. As indicated above, the temptation to desert one's preferred party should be stronger when that party is weak. Our measure of party strength is the proportion of the vote received by the preferred party in the respondent's constituency. Table 8.2 confirms that strategic defection is negatively correlated with popular support for the preferred party.

Finally, we consider two characteristics of voters: strength of partisanship and political information. Our indicator is whether the respondent feels closer to any party and how strongly she feels. There are four categories: very strong identification, somewhat strong identification, not very strong identification, and no identification. Table 8.2 shows that the propensity to cast a strategic vote declines with party attachment.

The final variable is the respondent's level of information. CSES collaborators were invited to include three factual questions (one relatively easy, one relatively difficult, and one "medium") to tap people's level of information about politics; the specific questions vary across countries. We have centered and standardized the variable, and so we are tapping people's level of information, relative to their country's mean and variance.[9] As can be seen in Table 8.2, the amount of strategic defection seems to be similar across information groups.

Multivariate analyses

We wish to determine whether and to what degree the propensity to strategically defect from one's preferred party depends on characteristics of voters, parties, and elections. Given that our dependent variable is dichotomous, we estimate a logit model predicting the propensity to strategically defect depending on the seven factors discussed above.

Table 8.3 presents the estimation results of a model incorporating our three individual-level and four contextual-level variables, and a dummy for Brazil, where the estimated amount of strategic desertion is exceptionally high and problematic, as explained above. To account for nonindependence in the structure of the CSES data we report standard errors that are clustered by election.

Table 8.3 Robust cluster logit estimations of strategic defection

	No interaction		Interaction	
Individual level				
Information	.139	(.128)	−.151	(.266)
Partisanship	− .719**	(.108)	−.748**	(.104)
Strength of preferred party.	−3.698**	(.478)	−1.256	(.720)
Contextual level				
PR electoral system	−.160	(.280)	−.155	(.260)
Number of electoral parties	.705	(.702)	.611	(.650)
Disproportionality	.307	(.447)	.936	(.543)
Party sytem polarization	−1.441	(.851)	−1.398	(.856)
Brazil	1.580**	(.477)	1.733**	(.456)
Interaction				
Information*Disproportionality			.630	(.502)
Strength*Disproportionality			−5.099**	(1.529)
Constant	.106	(.563)	−.189	(.563)
N	24080		24080	
Clusters	25		25	

See the Appendix for the construction of variables.
*P (.05 **P (.001
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, module II.

The results are rather clear-cut. Two of the three individual-level variables, party identification and strength of the preferred party, are significant while the four contextual variables (the electoral system, the degree of disproportionality, party system polarization, and the effective number of parties) are not.[10] Not surprisingly, the Brazilian dummy variable is also highly significant. The hypotheses that nonpartisans and supporters of weak parties are more prone to cast a strategic vote are confirmed, but there is no support for the expectation that the better informed are more prone to strategically desert their preferred party.

The nil findings regarding the direct impact of contextual factors are consistent with the weak bivariate relationships observed in Table 8.2 and are not due to collinearity. The correlations between contextual factors are modest, and in no case does a significant effect emerge if one of them is omitted. This nil finding may be the most important result of this study. The conventional wisdom according to which there is less strategic voting in PR or less disproportional systems is not supported by the data. The verdict is similar to the one reached by Abramson et al. (forthcoming) on a smaller set of nations.

Even though contextual factors do not have a direct effect on strategic voting they may well interact with individual-level variables (see the introduction). We formulate two hypotheses in this regard.

The first hypothesis is that information has a smaller effect in more disproportional systems such as first-past-the-post. Presumably, all that is required in such a system is to determine whether a given party is one of the two strongest competitors in the constituency, something that may be easy to ascertain in most circumstances. In more proportional systems with large districts, it is more complicated to know which parties do or not have a chance to win a seat (but see Gschwend 2007*b*, 2009 and Lago 2008) and, perhaps more importantly, the focus of attention is likely to shift to potential government coalitions, about which information may not be easily available.

The second hypothesis is that the propensity to desert weak parties is stronger in more disproportional systems. The assumption is that in disproportional systems those who vote strategically abandon their weak first choice in order to support a more viable alternative while there are more varieties of strategic considerations in more proportional systems and as a consequence weak parties are not as systematically disadvantaged.

The second column of Table 8.3 tests these two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is not supported. There appears to be no relationship between information and strategic defection, in very disproportional as well as in very proportional systems. However, the second hypothesis is clearly confirmed. As expected, the propensity to desert weak parties is considerably stronger in more disproportional systems. This nicely squares with the reported negative correlation between frequency of strategic voting and district magnitude in Gschwend (2009).

We checked whether there were other interaction effects between our contextual-level and individual-level variables. Not surprisingly, there is a positive interaction effect between the strength of the preferred party and PR, which means that the desertion of weak parties is less widespread under a PR system, which is the flip side of the negative interaction effect with disproportionality reported in Table 8.3. We also find that the impact of partisanship is weaker as the number of parties increases. More importantly, given the findings displayed in the other chapters, there is no evidence of any interaction effect between polarization and the three individual-level variables.

We can also determine how different our results are depending on whether we measure defection on the basis of party ratings or party proximity and whether we take out leader-induced defection or not. Table 8.4 tests the sensitivity of our findings to the operationalization of the dependent variable. As can be seen, the patterns are similar across the various specifications. In all estimations, partisanship has a strong negative impact and there is a powerful interaction effect between strength of preferred party and disproportionality. The only difference is that disproportionality is positively correlated with the general measure of defection but not with the specific indicator of *strategic* desertion.

The implications of our findings are illustrated in Figure 8.1, which shows how the predicted probability of strategic defection declines with the preferred

Table 8.4 Robust cluster sensitivity analysis using logit estimations with various measures of defection

	Strategic defection (Ratings)		Defection (Ratings)		Strategic defection (LR proximity)		Defection (LR proximity)	
Individual level								
Information	.151	(.266)	−.271	(.228)	.200	(.358)	.566*	(.243)
Partisanship	−.748**	(.104)	−.623**	(.131)	.299**	(.105)	−.625**	(.087)
Strength of preferred party	−1.256	(.720)	−1.389	(.821)	−1.398*	(.559)	−1.003*	(.327)
Contextual level								
PR electoral system	−.155	(.260)	.046	(.264)	−.065	(.212)	.012	(.130)
Number of electoral parties	.611	(.650)	−.285	(.614)	.714	(.516)	.164	(.324)
Disproportionality	.936	(.543)	1.414*	(.449)	.636	(.571)	.923*	(.447)
Party system polarization	−1.398	(.856)	−1.399	(.796)	−.553	(.728)	.039	(.440)
Brazil	1.733**	(.456)	2.054**	(.401)	1.713**	(.348)	1.665**	(.214)
Interaction								
Information*Disproportionality	.630	(.502)	.714	(.453)	.299	(.574)	.003	(.488)
Strength*Disproportionality	−5.099**	(1.529)	−5.995**	(1.562)	−1.963*	(.914)	−1.719**	(.437)
Constant	−.189	(.563)	.261	(.480)	−.696	(.601)	−.715	(.392)
N	24080		22618		20339		22618	
Clusters	25		26		25		26	

See the Appendix for the construction of variables

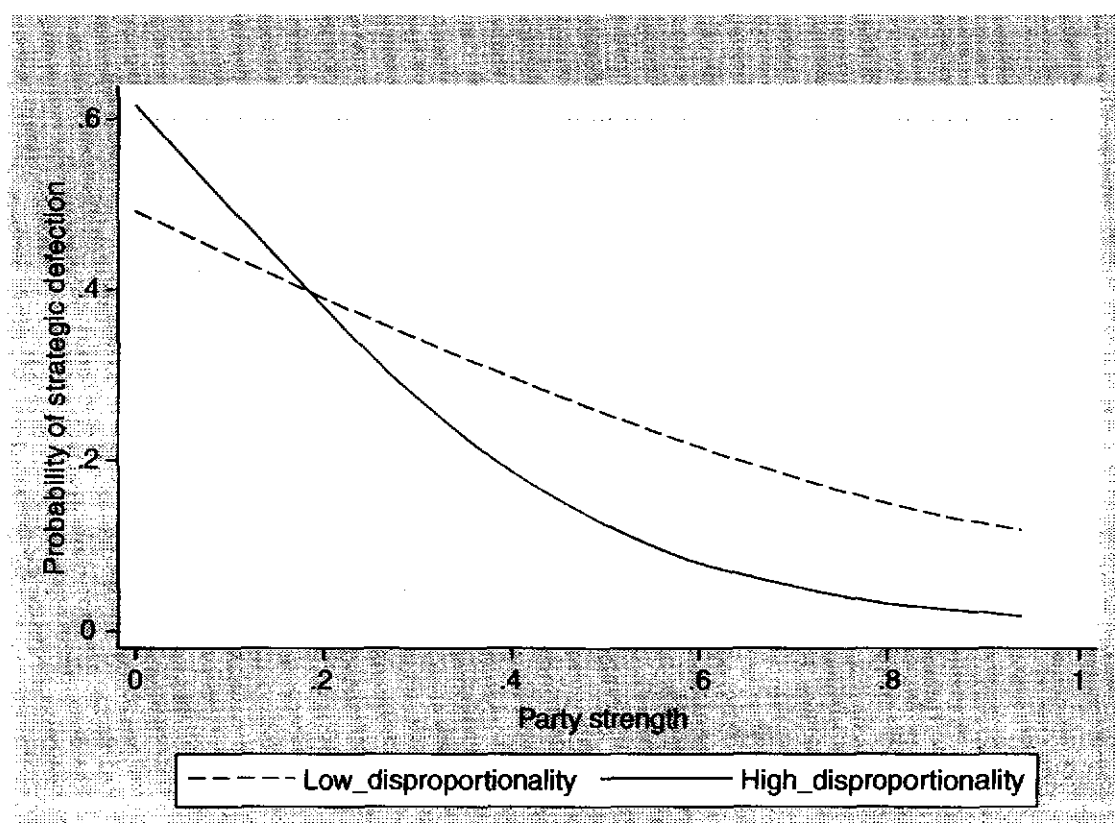*Source*: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, module II.

Figure 8.1 Impact of party strength by disproportionality

party's electoral strength in elections with relatively low or high degrees of disproportionality (one standard deviation below or above the mean). The propensity to defect is much more strongly dependent on party strength in more disproportional systems. Figure 8.1 indicates that, as we would expect, strategic desertion of weak parties is more frequent in more disproportional systems.[11] But the figure also shows that while there is hardly any strategic defection from strong parties in more disproportional elections, we observe some non-negligible desertion of these strong parties in more proportional elections. The pattern is reversed at the high end of party strength: desertion is more frequent in more proportional systems. This is why there is no difference overall, between PR and non-PR elections (Table 8.2 and Table 8.3, column 1).

The findings regarding the interaction between disproportionality and party strength are in line with our predictions. The downward sloping lines indicate that in all systems weak parties are more likely to be deserted than their stronger counterparts. The pattern, again, is much stronger in the most disproportional elections.

The preceding analysis is based on robust cluster logit estimations. One could argue that a hierarchical linear model (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002) would be more appropriate. But Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009) show that at least in

some conditions there is no meaningful difference in the findings produced by these two methods. As an additional check on the robustness of our results, we performed a multilevel analysis with random intercepts as well as random slopes.

The findings are presented in Table 8.5. The results of the multilevel model are quite similar to those of the robust cluster logit estimations presented in Table 8.3. None of the contextual variables has a direct effect on strategic defection. Among the individual-level variables, partisanship is the most powerful variable. And there is a strong interaction effect between strength of preferred party and disproportionality. The only difference is that according to the multilevel model information has a main negative effect and a positive interaction effect with disproportionality[12] while the robust cluster logit estimation indicates that neither effect is significant. We infer that the results concerning the impact of information are not robust, and we conclude that information has no clear impact on the propensity to strategically desert one's preferred party.

Table 8.5 Multilevel logit model of strategic defection

Individual level		
Information	−.479*	(.226)
Partisanship	−.847**	(.048)
Strength of preferred party	−.993	(.709)
Contextual level		
PR electoral system	−.016	(.396)
Number of electoral parties	−1.398	(1.168)
Disproportionality	1.249	(.687)
Party sytem polarization	−.579	(.979)
Brazil	3.413**	(.993)
Interaction		
Information*Disproportionality	1.161*	(.412)
Strength*Disproportionality	−5.369**	(.706)
Constant	.126	(.661)
Country-Level Variance		
Information	.150	(.330)
Strength of preferred party	3.102	(.490)
Constant	.764	(.153)
Micro N	24080	
Macro N	25	
Deviance	21404.74	

Notes: Hierarchical nonlinear model with random intercepts and random slopes. Estimation performed using Stata 10, xtmlogit function.
See the *Appendix* for the construction of variables.
*P ⟨.05 **P ⟨.001
Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, module II.

Conclusion

We have looked at the propensity to strategically defect from the preferred party across elections, parties, and voters. We have used the CSES module II data set to compare twenty-four countries, twenty-five elections, and 24,080 voters.

We find clear support for the effect of two individual-level characteristics. Strong partisans and supporters of strong parties are much less prone to desert their preferred party. Contrary to our expectations, however, the better informed are not more prone to strategically defect. There is no support for the view that only the most sophisticated citizens have the ability or the information required to think strategically. This indicates that voters might not need a PhD in political science to strategically defect their most preferred party. Rather the electoral environment is likely to provide voters with cues that facilitate strategic voting.

But perhaps the starkest results concern the nonimpact of contextual factors. Our findings are consistently negative. There is no support for the conventional wisdom that there is more strategic defection in more disproportional systems[13] or for the alternative hypothesis that it is easier to desert a preferred party when and where there are more alternative options. The only substantively important contextual effect is a conditional one. While strategic desertion is almost exclusively at the expense of the weakest parties in the most disproportional systems, the bias is more muted in the most proportional systems.

We hope to have shown that the CSES data set offers a great opportunity to study strategic defection in a comparative perspective. The most important advantage associated with the CSES is that it covers an a wide variety of elections with very different rules and party systems, which allows us to examine in a systematic fashion how contextual factors affect the propensity to desert one's preferred party.

CSES has some drawbacks. The most important disadvantage is that because it is a postelection study it is impossible to take into account voters' subjective expectations about the outcome of the election. Still, the survey questionnaire could be improved to allow us to better measure whether people do (or do not) vote for their preferred party. We would suggest two such improvements. First, it would help if there were a direct question asking respondents what party they like the most. The existing set of questions that tap how much people like or dislike the most important parties is extremely helpful but it has two short-comings. The first is that the weakest parties are excluded, and so it becomes impossible to identify supporters of the smaller parties, which are precisely the most likely to vote strategically. The second is that the rating questions produce a number of ties. The solution, it seems to us, is very simple. CSES could just add the following question: "All in all, which party did you like the most in this election?" Secondly, it would be possible to include questions tapping how much respondents care about the outcome of the election, at the district level

and with respect to government formation, and whether they thought that their vote might count, perceptions and attitudes that should be related to the propensity to vote strategically. We could also gauge expectations indirectly by better describing the electoral environment in that regard. For instance, it would be helpful to know how many seats a party actually won in each electoral district and whether parties issued positive or negative coalition signals before the election about which parties they are willing to form a governing coalition with (Meffert and Gschwend 2009).

The data presented here, as well as in the literature reviewed above, make it clear that it is incorrect to assume that vote choice merely reflects voters' preferences. They also indicate that strategic defection is *not* confined to the least permissive electoral systems or highly informed voters. Strategic voting is pervasive for all types of voters and it occurs in all kinds of contexts. If we want to understand what voters express in the ballot box, we need to determine how their sincere preferences interact with the rules of the game in affecting their final vote decision.

Appendix

CSES survey variables

Variable	Question wording	Coding
Desertion	Preferred party based on party ratings on a 0 to 10 scale (B3037) and Party Identification (B3033, B035, B3029_1). Vote: B3006_1, B3006_2. See text for full description.	1 if the person voted for a party other than the preferred party, 0 otherwise
Strategic Desertion	Preferred leader: B3026. See text for full description	1 if the person deserted her preferred party (see above) and did not vote for the preferred leader, 0 otherwise
Information	B3047. Three political knowledge questions in each country. Proportion of correct answers minus mean proportion in the country, divided by the standard deviation.	Scale from 0 to 1
Party ID	B3028 and B3036. "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?" (If yes): "Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?"	0 =No Party ID to 1 = Very strong Party ID

Notes

* We thank Pascal Doray-Demers for his excellent research assistance.

1. We leave aside a fourth possibility: the voter whose choice is unaffected by preferences or expectations.

2. We excluded election studies that do not provide information about respondents' district (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary) or that did not include questions about respondents' level of information (Iceland) or leader ratings (the Netherlands). Two other countries (South Korea and Philippines) could not be included because of lack of data on electoral outcomes at the district level.

3. This does not mean that only 4 percent of the electorate voted for a party leader. It rather means that 4 percent deserted their preferred party to support the party of their preferred leader. Many more voters may have decided to stick with their preferred party in good part because they liked the leader or may have deserted their preferred partly because they did not like the leader. See Chapter 6 for a more detailed examination of the role of leader evaluations.

4. Again, we use the party one feels closest to for those who identify with a party whose position of the Left–Right scale was not asked in the survey as well as for those with two or more parties equally proximate to their own positions.

5. Ames, Baker, and Renno (2009) show, for instance, that split ticket is not based on policy balancing.

6. We consequently assume that voters form independent decisions in every tier in mixed systems. If voters' decision in one tier depends on their decision in the other tier, there are contamination effects (Herron and Nishikawa 2001; Gschwend et al. 2003; Ferrara and Herron 2005; Gschwend 2007a). If contamination effects are present we expect more straight-tickets than otherwise. Thus we would underestimate the degree of strategic voting that has occurred if both tiers were independent. We did test whether strategic defection is more frequent in elections with mixed systems or with two votes, and we found no significant difference.

7. We use a simple PR/non-PR dichotomy instead of the three-category PR/mixed/majoritarian because we look separately at the two votes in mixed systems with two votes.

8. For the purpose of displaying bivariate relationships in Table 8.2, all the independent variables except the electoral system and party identification were divided into three categories of about equal size.

9. More precisely, the information variable was constructed in the following way. The respondent's number of correct answers to the factual questions was subtracted from the mean number of correct answers in the country. That relative score was divided by the country's standard deviation (to control for the fact that the variance varies across countries) and the normalized relative score was finally transformed into a 0 to 1 variable.

10. Note that strength of preferred party is not, strictly speaking, an individual-level variable; it is rather the combination of an individual characteristic, that is, the person's preferred party, and a contextual factor, that is, how much support that preferred party enjoys in that election.

11. The difference is relatively modest, however. The predicted probability of strategically deserting a party with 1 percent of the vote in the district is .6 in a more disproportional system, compared to .49 in a more proportional system. The difference would be twice as large if we were to contrast the most and least disproportional elections.
12. Note that these results more or less contradict our initial hypothesis that information has a smaller effect in more disproportional systems. This hypothesis would entail a positive main effect for information and a negative interaction effect; we observe exactly the opposite in Table 8.5.
13. There is more strategic desertion of weaker parties in more disproportional systems but this is counterbalanced by less desertion of stronger parties.