Government Formation and Strategic Voting in Multi-Party Systems

Voting for Coalitions in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Voters may have different strategic reasons to vote for a party that is not their favourite. The best known form of strategic voting takes place in majoritarian electoral systems, where citizens may decide to not waste their vote by supporting a candidate that has no chance of winning the seat. This incentive to vote strategically is absent in proportional systems with large district magnitude. We argue that in multi-party systems another form of strategic voting takes place, as considerations about future coalitions may also stimulate citizens to vote strategically. We analyse this for Netherlands on the basis of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2006, which contained a novel series of survey items aimed at identifying such considerations. The results suggest that Dutch voters did indeed vote strategically on the basis of their preferences for the future coalition. Voters' estimates of the probability that particular coalitions would form, on the other hand, had virtually no impact.

Introduction

Conventional wisdom has long held that tactical or strategic voting only takes place in majoritarian democracies. In parliamentary systems that employ plurality rule, like Britain, candidates of minor parties have no chance of winning the seat, and hence casting a vote for such a candidate would be ineffective. Motivated by the desire to not waste their vote by supporting a candidate that has *no chance of winning the constituency*, voters who prefer such a candidate cast their vote for their second option (Cain, 1978; Alvarez, Boehmke, & Nagler, 2006). The same logic applies to elections in the United States for the Presidency, where voters often neglect third party candidates because they have no chance of winning (Burden, 2005). In elections held under proportional systems, such incentives to vote strategically are absent. After all, in these systems minor parties also have a chance of winning a seat. Consequently, in proportional systems all citizens are expected to vote sincerely, i.e. support their favourite party (Cox, 1997).

Recent studies suggest that in proportional systems voters do not always meet these expectations, as substantial numbers do *not* support their favourite party. The wasted vote argument again applies, although in an adapted version. Strategic considerations of another nature, namely those concerning the formation of government coalitions, also motivate voters in those systems to cast their vote for another party than their favourite (see e.g. Blais, Aldrich, Indridason, & Levine, 2006; Rosema, 2006; Gschwend, 2007). Motivated by the desire to not waste their vote by supporting a party that has *no chance of getting into government*, voters who prefer such a party cast their vote for their second option.

This type of behaviour was already suggested by Downs (1957, pp. 148-149) who argued that a rational voter in multi-party systems must know what coalitions each party is likely to enter, "what policy compromises each party is likely to make in each possible coalition", and what the outcome of the election will be. Thus, voters may choose a party other than their most proximate in order to affect the future policy output of the government. This may involve voting strategically to alter the strength of the parties who are likely to enter a coalition, in order to pull the future government policy closer to the voter's ideal policy position (see also Cox, 1997). However, Downs also noted that such considerations may make the decision making process so complicated, that voters just support their favourite party: "the complexity of trying to figure out how to bring about the most favourable possible government may drive each voter into merely supporting his favourite party and leaving government selection to the legislature" (p. 154). The aforementioned studies suggest that voters are more sophisticated than Downs assumed when writing down those words. Citizens do take the process of coalition formation into account.

In this paper we seek to increase our understanding of this type of strategic voting in multi-party systems. Below we first elaborate upon different sorts of strategic voting and identify the sorts of strategic considerations that may play a role in

multi-party systems. To test out hypotheses we focus on national elections in the Netherlands. This country has a multi-party system in which coalition governments are the rule, and hence provides a suitable case for this study. We utilise the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2006, which included a novel series of survey items aimed at identifying considerations related to the coalition formation process. More specific, the survey asked respondents which parties they preferred to take part in the next government coalition. Furthermore, respondents were asked to rate four alternative coalitions in terms of desirability and probability. These measures enable a more fine-tuned analysis of strategic voting in multi-party systems than has hitherto been possible.

Duvergerian and Non-Duvergerian Strategic Voting

Duvergerian strategic voting

The notion of strategic voting is strongly associated with the psychological mechanism underlying Duverger's (1954) law, which states that "the simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system" (p. 217).

> In cases where there are three parties operating under simple-majority single-ballot system the electors soon realise that their votes are wasted if they continue to give them to the third party: whence their natural tendency to transfer their vote to the less evil of its two adversaries in order to prevent the success of the greater evil. (Duverger, 1954, p. 226)

This is not to say that strategic voting only takes place under plurality rule. Although strategic voting is usually associated with majoritarian electoral systems, it may also occur under other systems. Leys (1959, p. 139), for example, argued that Duverger's principles also apply to proportional representation if district magnitude is small. In fact, strategic voting may occur in any electoral system (Gibbard, 1973; Satterthwaite, 1975). This claim has been supported by a range of studies, which show that strategic voting has taken place under electoral systems of approval voting (Niemi, 1984), single non-transferable vote (Cox, 1994; Reed, 1991), parallel systems (Reed, 1999), mixed systems (Karp, Vowles, Banducci, & Donovan, 2002), and proportional representation combined with small district magnitude (Cox & Shugart, 1996).

The key characteristic of the electoral system is not the electoral formula, but another factor: district size (Cox, 1997). If district size is small, under proportional electoral formulas similar considerations apply as under plurality rule in single member districts (first-past-the-post). Citizens do not want to waste their vote and will not vote for any of the minor candidates; that is, they will avoid candidates that have virtually no chance of winning a seat. In practice this means that the number of viable candidates is limited to the number of seats contested in

the district plus one (Cox, 1997). This reasoning implies that as district size becomes larger, virtually all candidates become viable and the incentive to vote strategically vaporises. Cox (1997, p. 122) summarised this conventional wisdom, when he concluded that "strategic voting fades out in multimember districts when the district magnitude gets above five".

What is striking about at least part – if not most – of this literature, is that it focuses strongly on candidate selection and often ignores the government formation process. However, as was emphasised by Downs (1957), if the function of elections is conceived of as selection of government, the process of the formation of government coalitions also involve considerations of a strategic nature that may affect the vote. It seems that, at least until fairly recently, academics have been preoccupied with the Duvergerian type of strategic voting, and thus neglected other types of strategic voting. Below we therefore elaborate upon another type of strategic voting, that we label non-Duvergerian (cf. Rosema, under review).[1] We contrast this to Duvergerian strategic voting, which may be defined as voting for a non-preferred candidate, because (the party of) the favourite candidate has no chance of winning the seat.

Non-Duvergerian strategic voting

Whereas Duvergerian strategic voting has a clear definition, non-Duvergerian strategic voting is less easily defined because it may occur in different ways. One type would be a vote cast for (a candidate of) a non-preferred party, because the preferred party has no chance of getting into government. This definition is rather similar to the traditional conceptualisation of strategic voting, except that the focus shifts from the selection of legislators to the selection of governments. However, the considerations that play a role above the constituency level are more varied. According to Cox (1997, p. 194) if the focus shifts from affecting the allocation of seats to affecting who controls the government, three species of strategic voting can be distinguished: strategic sequencing, threshold insurance, and strategic balancing. This list is not exhaustive, however, as additional types may be identified. Below we thus discuss five types of non-Duvergerian strategic voting.

In the first type, which Cox (1997) referred to as *strategic sequencing*, the key argument is that the largest party will take the lead in the government formation process and hence voters will focus on the question which party will become largest. Voters who opt for their 'second choice' because their favourite party has no chance of getting into government also fit this type. Cox cites two studies that suggest that some Israeli voters behaved this way and voted for Likud in order to give it the lead over the Labour Party, even though Likud was not their first

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[1] The terminology of Duvergerian and non-Duvergerian strategic voting was suggested by an anonymous reviewer of another paper of one of the present authors (Rosema, under review).

preference. In the Netherlands similar mechanisms seem to have been at work (Rosema, 2004). The typical pattern is that voters who like one of the small left-wing parties best, often vote for the Labour Party; and citizens who like one of the small orthodox protestant parties best, often vote for the Christian Democrats. This idea is supported by answers to open-ended survey questions, as some voters motivate their vote choice by saying they intended to help that party become largest or help it get into government (Van Holsteyn, 1994). Our first hypothesis addresses this mechanism.

> *H1: Voters whose favourite party has no chance of becoming largest, will relatively often deflect from their first preference and vote for a larger party.*

Which party becomes largest not only (co-)determines who takes the lead in coalition formation process, but also influences the question which party leader becomes prime minister. In this respect there is not much difference with parliamentary elections in majoritarian systems, where voters may be motivated by their preferences concerning the leadership. Following Crewe and King (1994, p. 191) one may refer to this phenomenon as 'quasi-presidential voting'. A good example of an election in which this played a crucial role seems the 2001 Italian parliamentary election, which focused on the question if Silvio Berlusconi would become prime minister (Allum, 2001, p. 27). Similar considerations play a role in the Netherlands, as the leader of the largest party typically gets the most strongly desired position in the new cabinet.[2] This shows that becoming the largest party has an effect that is perhaps related to taking the lead in the government formation process, but is distinct. Voters may accordingly base their choices on their preferences concerning the prime minister, rather than the coalition that will be formed. What matters, then, is if voters strongly prefer one candidate for prime minister over the other candidate(s). This leads us to formulate the next hypothesis.

> *H2: Voters who strongly prefer a prime minister who is not affiliated with their favourite party, will relatively often deflect from their first preference and vote for preferred prime minister's party.*

The third type of strategic voting concerns the position of the smallest coalition partner. Which party becomes largest is not the only relevant question when it comes to government formation. The fate of the small potential coalition parties may also be considered relevant. More specifically, if there is an electoral threshold it is pivotal that desired coalition parties exceed this threshold. Cox (1997) refers to strategic voting that stems from such considerations as *threshold*

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[2] The major exception concerns coalitions that exclude the largest party. For example, the coalition formed after the 1986 elections excluded the victorious Labour Party led by Joop den Uyl.

insurance. The position of the Liberal Party (FDP) in Germany provides an excellent example. Although its vote share has been small, this party has played a crucial role as second party in government coalitions. Whether or not it exceeds the five per cent electoral threshold determines whether certain coalitions are viable and hence also whether particular large parties, such as the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) are in the position to form a government. Another example is the Greens in Sweden. In 1988, for example, one in four Green Party voters did not prefer this party, but voted for them in order to let it pass the four per cent electoral threshold (Holmberg, 1994, p. 316). This leads to the following hypothesis.

> *H3: Voters who prefer their favourite party to form a coalition with a small party that appears in danger of not passing the electoral threshold, will relatively often deflect from their first preference and vote for that small party.*

A fourth possibility is that voters have a preference for a coalition that comprises a specific set of parties, and are of the opinion that the prospect of that coalition depends most strongly on the fate of one of the constituting parties. If this is another party than their favourite, voters may strategically vote for that particular party. Blais et al. (2006) found that this happened in the 2003 Israeli election. The preference for a coalition of Likud–Right–Religious induced voters to strategically shift away from Likud to NRP and Shas, whereas the preference for a coalition of Likud–Labor–Shinui increased the likelihood of strategically voting for Shinui. The 1998 Dutch parliamentary election provide another example (Rosema, 2004). The key question in this contest appeared whether the incumbent 'purple coalition' of Labour Party (PvdA), Liberal Party (VVD), and Democrats 66 (D66) would continue to govern. This largely depended on the electoral fate of the smallest coalition partner (D66). Opinion polls indicated it might loose about half of its 24 seats, which would mean it could no longer credibly stay in the government – Labour and Liberals would still have a majority, though. A substantial number of voters voted strategically for Democrats 66 in order to ensure continuation of the incumbent coalition. This illustrates that the mechanisms of strategic voting may be much more fine-tuned than the simple questions 'which party becomes largest' or 'which parties get represented in parliament by surpassing the electoral threshold'. The key question may also be which combination of parties voters would like to see in the future coalition and which kind of vote they think contributes most to establishing that particular coalition.[3] This is reflected in the next hypothesis.

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[3] One may conceive of this example as another case of *threshold insurance*. In this case the threshold would then not be one of getting enough votes to go into parliament, but one of getting sufficient seats to go into government. In the latter case it would, however, merely be a psychological threshold, not an institutional characteristic of the political system. For that reason we prefer to distinguish between both cases.

H4: Voters who prefer their favourite party to take part in a particular coalition and who believe that the probability of that coalition most strongly depends on the result of another party, will relatively often deflect from their first preference and vote for that party.

The fifth and final type of non-Duvergerian strategic voting is of a rather different nature. It is closely related to the notion of divided government and split-ticket voting (Fiorina, 1992). In the United States this concerns the partisan dominance of the Presidency and Congress. By not consistently voting for (the candidates of) their preferred party, voters can moderate the influence of the party in power – or to put it more accurately: have more parties share power. In Germany similar mechanisms may be at work to establish differences between which parties control the Lower House (Bundestag) and the Upper House (Bundesrat). Cox (1997) refers to this as *strategic balancing*. It appears most likely that such balancing will not occur in the most salient electoral context (e.g., U.S. presidency or German Lower House), but in the less salient context. As this kind of consideration seems to apply in particular to moderate voters, the following hypothesis may be formulated.

H5: Voters who are more moderate than both major parties, will relatively often deflect from their first preference in an electoral context that they consider less salient (than the most salient electoral context) and vote for the other major party.

In this paper we focus on the impact of coalition formation. Hence, our below analysis will only focus on hypotheses H1 and H4.

Data and method

Data and measurement

This paper analyses strategic voting related to coalition formation in multi-party systems by focusing on the Netherlands. Apart from practical considerations (i.e., availability of appropriate data), the Dutch case is also suitable for theoretical reasons. Its electoral system is characterised by a very low level of electoral disproportionality. The effective electoral threshold of 0.67 per cent of the vote provides even the smallest parties a reasonable chance of winning one of the 150 seats in parliament.[4] This has led to a stable multi-party system. Typically about ten different political parties have been represented in parliament. No single party has ever been close to winning a majority of the seats and hence coalition governments have been the rule – minority cabinets only occurred when one or

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[4] Formally, the Netherlands are divided into nineteen electoral districts ('kieskringen'). However, seats are allocated such that the whole country can effectively be considered one district.

more parties left a majority coalition, while even these minority cabinets were still coalitions. In brief, the Netherlands are a typical example of a multi-party system with coalition governments.

To examine the impact of strategic voting in the Netherlands, we utilise data from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (DPES) held around the Lower House elections on 22 November 2006. The DPES is a two-wave survey that has been held around each parliamentary election since 1970. In the first wave of interviews, which were conducted in the weeks preceding the election, more than two-thousand randomly selected citizens eligible to vote were interviewed face-to-face. In the second wave of interviews, which was conducted in the weeks immediately after the election, the same persons were again interviewed.[5] For practical reasons, we focus on six 'major' parties that jointly received 87,5 per cent of the vote. Table 1 lists these parties and shows their vote share in the 2003 and 2006 elections, as well as their number of seats. Individuals who voted for one of the other parties are excluded from the analysis.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The dependent variable used in our analyses, vote choice, is based on a survey question from the post-election interview that asks respondents which party they voted for, as a follow-up to the question of whether they went to the polls on the 22nd of November. One of the main aims of our analysis is to gauge which individuals have cast a strategic vote, as opposed to a sincere vote. One way of measuring sincere voting is to analyse whether individuals have voted for the party they evaluate most positively. The pre-election interview and the post-election interview both contained a series of questions asking respondents to rate parties on an eleven-point scale (with values ranging between 0 and 10). In the analysis we use the post-election measures. We include both a dummy variable specifying if a party was rated more positively than any other party (including ties), and a continuous variable measuring the score awarded to each party as such (cf. Blais et al., 2006; Drummond, 2006).

The main explanatory features of interest in this paper have to do with individuals' preferences for government coalitions and their expectations about which coalitions will form. The DPES 2006 includes a novel series of survey items asking the respondents about their preferences and expectations about future government coalitions, as well as one item that had also been included in earlier surveys. The latter asks individuals which parties should, in their opinion, take part in the government to be formed after the election. This question is used to create a dummy variable, describing whether or not each party is preferred to be in the government coalition. Second, the respondents were asked about the

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[5] Principal investigators were Kees Aarts, Henk van der Kolk, and Martin Rosema from the University of Twente. Data are available from the DANS data archive in Amsterdam.

desirability of four specific coalitions using a seven point scale with values ranging from 1 ('very undesirable') to 7 ('very desirable').

The four coalitions, which were selected by the principal investigators to be distinct and credible, were a coalition consisting of CDA and VVD (centre-right coalition comprising the two major parties of the incumbent government, which had been in government with a third party since 2002 – initially with Fortuyn's party, later with D66), a coalition of CDA and PvdA (centre-left coalition of the two major parties in Dutch politics), a coalition of PvdA, SP and Greens (left-wing coalition), and a coalition between PvdA and VVD ('purple coalition' of traditional antagonists that formed a coalition between 1994 and 2002 with D66 as third party). These ratings are included in our analysis as variables indicating each individual's evaluation of that particular coalition. In addition, respondents were asked about the probability of each of the aforementioned coalitions being formed after the election, using a ten-point scale with values ranging between 1 (very small) to 10 (very large).

We also include a number of control variables in our models, which represent the most important forces shaping electoral choice in the Netherlands. The first two concern religion and social class. For decades Dutch voters' choices at the polls were primarily determined by the cleavage structure of Dutch society (Lijphart, 1974; Andeweg, 1982). The key elements of societal segmentation – or pillarisation ('verzuiling') – were voters' religiosity and social class position. The conventional measure for religiosity in Dutch electoral research, which we also use in our analysis, is a question that asks respondents how often they attend church or other religious services (at least once a week, 2-3 times a month, once a month, less than once a month, seldom or never). Social class position is measured on the basis of a self-image question that asks respondents which of five alternative classes they belong to (upper class, upper middle class, middle class, upper working class, or working class).

Due to processes of deconfessionalisation and depillarisation, the impact of these factors has strongly decreased since the 1950s (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 1989a). Hence, electoral researchers have shifted their focus to other factors, in particular ideological positions. Like in many other Western democracies, in the Netherlands, too, ideological divisions in terms of left/right have been widely viewed as highly important (Van der Eijk & Niemöller, 1983; Oppenhuis, 1995; Van Wijnen, 2001). Positions in terms of left/right ideology are tapped by questions where respondents are asked to state on an eleven-point scale where they would place themselves and the political parties (where 0 means 'left' and 10 means 'right'). The variable we include measures the (absolute) distance between the respondent and each party.

As several scholars have argued that Dutch politics are characterised not by one economic left/right dimension but also by conflict over moral values (Irwin and Van Holsteyn, 1989b) and over cultural issues (Middendorp, 1991; Pellikaan, De

Lange, and Van der Meer, 2007), we additionally include measures that tap voters' positions on each of these three dimensions. These measures derive from questions asking voters to indicate on a seven-point scale their view about economic issues (whether income inequality should be decreased or increased), moral values (whether euthanasia should be possible or always forbidden), and cultural issues (whether more asylum seekers should be allowed or existing asylum seekers should be send back).

Although coalition governments are not the best facilitators of retrospective voting based on evaluations of the incumbent government, voters' feelings about the current government do have electoral consequences, in particular for the prime minister's party (Rosema, 2004). We therefore also include a measure concerning satisfaction with the incumbent government (a five-point scale with the following categories: very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied). Yet another factor that may affect the vote, albeit the size of its impact has been debated, is voters' feelings about party leaders (Anker, 1992; Van Wijnen, 2000; Aarts, 2001). These are controlled for by including a variable based on questions asking respondents to rate their feelings about each party leader on an eleven-point scale (similar to the scale used to evaluate political parties). Finally, we also include demographic controls for age (in years) and gender.[6]

Methodological considerations

Vote choice can be modelled as a discrete choice problem, "based on the principle that an individual chooses the outcome that maximises the utility gained from that choice" (Long, 1997, p. 155). To evaluate this discrete choice problem, we here apply a conditional logit model. Conditional logit has been recommended by Alvarez and Nagler (1998) for the analysis of discrete choice problems such as a voter's choice between different parties. The rationale for this statistical model is two-fold. First, the dependent variable is an unordered multiple choice, including more than two alternatives that cannot be ordered, which suggests that a logit or probit model allowing for multiple choices should be applied, e.g. a multinomial logit or conditional logit model. Second, since we deal with some variables that vary within actors, or across choices, i.e. that are choice-specific (e.g. evaluation of the party's leader), a conditional logit model is appropriate since it is

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[6] Note that we do not include any measures of party identification. Thomassen (1976) showed that party identification is not a meaningful concept in the Netherlands. Party identifcation apears to not be prior to vote choice and can hardly be disentangled from it. Voters identify with the parties they vote for and vice versa. Hence, in an explanatory model measures of partisanship are meaningless and would only mask effects of any other underlying factor. Some scholars argued that those findings could be the result of the nature of the times of the analysis. This, however, appears not to be the case: the initial findings have been replicated with more recent data (Thomassen & Rosema, in press). Moreover, partisanship has already been included in our models on the basis of party evaluation scores. This is justified in the light of the finding that the problems of the party identification concept can be overcome when partisanship is conceptualised, and hence also measured, in terms of the psychological concept of attitudes (Rosema, 2006).

"conditional on the characteristics of the choices" (Alvarez & Nagler, 1998, p. 56). The multinomial logit model only allows for characteristics that vary across actors, i.e. individual-specific variables (e.g. social class). The conditional logit model also allows for the inclusion of individual-specific characteristics if they are interacted with the choice alternatives or some choice-specific feature. Here we include some individual-specific features by interacting them with each vote choice alternative (i.e. each party).[7] This method has already been successfully applied to identify strategic voting in Israeli elections (Blais et al., 2006).

Ideally, when analysing the effect of attitudinal variables on voting behaviour, we should use panel data, which allows us to measure predictors at a time prior to the measurement of the dependent variables. This enables us to be more certain about the direction of causality, which is a potential problem when predictors are psychological characteristics that might be effects as well as causes of voting (see e.g. Finkel, 1995). This is the reason why most election studies are structured as two-wave panels, where the first wave is based on a survey conducted prior to election day, whereas the second panel wave is conducted after the election has taken place. This was also the design of the Dutch 2006 Election Study, and we thus have access to two panel waves. Unfortunately, both waves do not include measurements of all relevant variables, which means that we cannot fully take advantage of the panel structure of the data. However, the measures of the variables that are crucial for our analysis, those concerning coalition preferences and probabilities, are taken from the first wave.

Results

The aim of this analysis is to determine whether Dutch citizens vote strategically for other parties than their favourite because of the coalition formation process that follows the election. A first step in such an analysis is to determine which voters are voting sincerely, i.e. who vote for a party that they like best. Table 2 shows the link between party evaluations and vote choice. Note that voters may award their highest rating to more than one party and consequently we should not expect figures to approach one-hundred per cent. We do see, however, that many individuals indeed vote for the party that is their preferred one. This can be seen by looking at the diagonal of the table, the cells marked in gray. For example, we see that among those who evaluate the Christian Democrats (CDA) most favourably, approximately 70 per cent voted for this same party. Similar figures are obtained for the other two major parties, Labour (PvdA) and Liberals (VVD). The share of individuals voting sincerely is clearly lower for the three smaller parties – only about half of those liking the Socialist Party best voted for them and the figures for voters who preferred the Greens (GL) or Orthodox Christians (CU) are even lower at 36 and 37 percent.

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[7] STATA's asclogit command enables us to perform this operation without creating each of these interaction terms.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

These findings seem to lend support to our hypothesis (H1) that states that voters who prefer small parties are more likely to deflect. However, merely observing that they deflect does not suffice. What is also relevant, is which parties they turn to when casting their vote. Let us therefore inspect for which parties insincere voters cast their vote. For those who evaluated one of the three smaller parties most positively, the common insincere vote indeed went to one a large party. SP and Greens sympathisers mainly voted PvdA, and CU sympathisers mainly voted CDA. This is exactly what we expect on the basis of hypothesis H1. Further inspection of the findings reveal that insincere voting among those who rated one of the larger parties most positively follows another pattern. A large group of the sympathisers of the Christian Democrats (16%) cast a vote for the Liberals (VVD). Looking at the VVD sympathisers, the largest vote share of insincere votes went to the CDA. This means that there is some exchange of votes between these two parties. Among Labour (PvdA) sympathisers, a relatively large group (10%) voted for the Socialist Party (SP). Although this findings is at odds with hypothesis H1, it might be consistent with hypothesis H4. Perhaps these voters wanted a left-wing coalition and were of the opinion that such a coalition could be helped by voting for the more pronounced left-wing party. We will analyse this hypothesis below when focusing on voters' desirability ratings of such a coalition.

A question that we address first, however, is whether insincere votes went to parties that voters preferred for reasons of coalition formation. We can analyse this by focusing on the question if the party voted for was mentioned by voters when they were asked about their preferred coalition. Table 3 distinguishes between sincere and insincere voters for each group of party sympathisers and indicates whether voters cast a vote for a party that they preferred to be in the government coalition. Those who voted sincerely usually also cast a vote for a party that they preferred to be in the coalition. For all parties, except SP and CU, about 90 percent of the supporters who voted sincerely also think that their favourite party should be in government. For supporters of the Socialist Party and the Christian Union, the figure is somewhat lower, around 70 percent. Thus, some individuals cast a vote for these parties even though they do not envision the party to participate in the government.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

What is more interesting to look at, is the votes cast by individuals who voted insincerely. Looking at the CDA supporters we see that a large share did in fact choose a non-favourite party which they preferred to be in the cabinet. Connecting this result with the information from Table 2, where we saw that most CDA supporters voting insincerely cast their vote for VVD. This suggests that these individuals might have been in favour of a CDA–VVD coalition, and by casting their vote for the Liberals, they may believe that this makes it more likely that

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such a coalition forms. For VVD supporters, who we saw (in Table 2) that they to a large extent voted for CDA, the rationale for voting for this larger party may be that they aim at influencing which party (CDA instead of PvdA) becomes the largest party. We also see in Table 3 that about 64 percent of the VVD insincere supporters voted for a party that they preferred in the coalition, which supports this interpretation.

For the Labour Party the pattern looks different. Labour supporters who chose to vote insincerely, did in fact chose a party that they did not prefer to take part in the government. As we saw in Table 2, a large share of the individuals whose most preferred party is PvdA, chose to vote for SP. This type of vote cannot be interpreted as a coalition vote, since the individuals did not vote for a party that they wanted to enter government. We can only speculate about the underlying motivation. One reason could be that these individuals voted for the more outspoken left-wing party (SP) with the aim of sending a signal to the large party of the left (PvdA) to move towards the left.

Looking at the individuals who prefer the two smaller parties on the left, the Socialist Party and the Greens, we can see that a large share of the insincere SP and Greens sympathisers (74 and 79%) did in fact vote for a party that they preferred to be in the coalition, which supports our first hypothesis. For the Christian Union supporters the pattern is similar.

The above findings are consistent with our hypothesis about the relevance of coalition preferences, but any conclusion would remain somewhat speculative. We therefore present a multivariate model aimed at predicting vote choice on the basis of coalition preferences, while controlling for other factors that influence the vote. Table 4 presents a conditional logit model which includes one type of coalition preference variable, namely a choice-specific variable that indicates if a party was preferred in the coalition. This model also includes choice-specific variables measuring party evaluations, party leader evaluations, and the impact of left/right ideology. Furthermore, the model includes individual-specific variables concerning the voter's religiosity and social class, ideological position in terms of three dimensions, retrospective evaluations (government satisfaction), and two demographics (age and gender). This type of analysis enables us to say whether coalition preferences had a systematic effect on vote choice, after controlling for the 'usual suspects' that may affect vote choice.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

The first column of Table 4 presents the effects of choice-specific variables on vote choice, whereas the other columns present the effects of the individual-specific variables on voting for a particular party, in comparison with voting for the base category, which in this analysis case is CDA. The first two choice-specific variables exert positive and significant effects on vote choice, suggesting that party evaluations are strong predictors of the vote – individuals who have

given a party their highest sympathy score are more likely to vote for it, and individuals who did not vote for their most preferred party, seem to be more likely to vote for parties that they have given a higher evaluation score. Looking further down this column, we come to the most crucial finding: the coalition preference variable also exerts a positive and significant effect on vote choice. Thus, individuals do seem to be more likely to vote for a party that they prefer to be in the coalition, even when taking into account party evaluations and all other aforementioned factors. This gives strong support for the hypothesis that preferences about coalitions mattered in this election. Citizens seem to vote for some parties with the rationale that they want to influence the outcome of coalition bargaining.

Looking at our control variables, we can see that several variables exert significant effects in this model. The variable measuring distance between the individual and the party along a left/right dimension exerts a negative and significant effect, suggesting that individuals choose to vote for parties that they perceive as close to them ideologically, which is in line with a proximity theory of voting (Downs 1957; Enelow & Hinich, 1984). We also see that the effect of the variable measuring evaluations of the party leaders is positive and significant, which implies that people vote for parties where they like the party leader. The effects of some of the individual-specific variables also exert significant effects on voting for some of the parties. Individuals who are satisfied with the incumbent government are less likely to vote for PvdA and GreenLeft than for CDA. People who are positive towards allowing more asylum seekers in the Netherlands are more likely to vote CDA or GreenLeft (and hence the analysis shows negative coefficients for the other parties). Looking at the cleavage related variables, only religiosity exerts a significant effect: individuals who attend church regularly are less likely to vote for PvdA and VVD than for CDA.

In the final part of our analysis we focus on the four coalitions that were discussed earlier in this paper: left-wing (PvdA–SP–GL), centre-left (CDA–PvdA), centre-right (CDA–VVD), and 'purple' (PvdA–VVD). We hypothesised that voters may be op the opinion that to increase the chances of their favourite coalition, they best vote for one particular party, even though this may not be their favourite. Voters may reason in, at least, two different ways. The first way of reasoning focuses on the question which party becomes largest. In this sense the 2006 election was, like most preceding elections, a competition between Christian Democrats and Labour Party. Hence, the stronger voters preferred a coalition that included only one of these, the stronger the incentive to vote for that party. We thus expect that our measure of desirability of a centre-right coalition (CDA–VVD) should increase the chances of a CDA vote (at the costs of VVD and CU), whereas desirability of a left-wing coalition (PvdA–SP–GL) should increase the chances of a PvdA vote (at the costs of SP and Greens).

The second way of reasoning focuses on the strength of the second (and possibly third) coalition partner, in line with the findings for Israeli elections by Blais et al.

(2006). The idea is that the larger the parties on the left, the larger the chance of a left-wing coalition; and the larger the parties on the right, the larger the chances of a centre-right coalition. This would lead one to expect desirability of a left-wing coalition to positively affect votes for SP and Greens and negatively affect PvdA. Similarly, desirability for the centre-right coalition would then positively affect voting VVD and negatively affect voting CDA.

In Table 5 we present some models including alternative measurements of coalition attitudes. In the first part of the table we present model 2, which includes the four variables measuring how desirable the respondent finds the four specific government options. This model also includes the variables measuring party evaluations and all control variables. First, we can see that individuals who strongly desire a coalition between CDA and VVD are less likely to vote for PvdA and SP. This may seem like a trivial result, but it should be recognised that this effect is significant even after controlling for party evaluations and ideological positions. Second, it is clear that individuals who place a high desirability of a left-wing coalition (PvdA–SP–GL) are more likely to vote for all of the parties included in this coalition than voting for the CDA, since the effect of this variable is significant for PvdA, SP and Greens. This suggests that neither of the alternative hypothesis just formulated are supported. Hence, neither the largest left-wing party (PvdA) nor the more pronounced smaller left-wing parties (SP and GL) have apparently convinced voters that to bring about such a coalition they best vote for their party – this may also be considered a success for the minor parties, which in past elections appear to have suffered from strategic voting (Rosema, 2006). With respect to the centre-right coalition comparable results are obtained. Voters' evaluations of such a coalition did not alter the chances of voting CDA versus VVD. Apparently, neither of these parties has succeeded in convincing voters that to get such a coalition they best vote for their party. Finally, for the two other coalitions no significant results are obtained either.

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

Lastly, Table 5 also presents model 3, which includes four variables measuring the expected probability of each of the four coalitions forming. The idea is that not only coalition preferences, but also the likelihood of certain coalitions forming should influence the individual's vote choice. We only find weak support for this idea. People who expect that a coalition between CDA and VVD will form seem to be somewhat less likely to vote for the SP. This could suggest that individuals with left-wing preferences are more likely to vote for PvdA when they gauge the "risk" of a right-wing coalition as high. Individuals who believe that a CDA–PvdA coalition is likely to form seem to be somewhat more likely to vote for the PvdA since the effect of this variable on voting for PvdA is positive and significant. This could suggest that people vote strategically in order to influence who becomes the Prime Minister of such a coalition. Lastly, the effect of the variable measuring the probability of a purple coalition (PvdA–VVD) is significant for voting for the Socialist Party, suggesting that some individuals are

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more likely to vote for SP when they believe that Labour might join forces with the Liberals.

All in all we find support for the hypothesis that some individuals vote strategically to influence the outcome of coalition bargaining. First, we have shown that a number of individuals do not cast a sincere vote, i.e. a vote for the party they prefer most. Second, we found that some of these insincere voters chose to vote for a party that they preferred to be in the government coalition. Third, we found that in a multivariate model, coalition preferences and coalition expectations systematically influence vote choice. This type of strategic behaviour could suggest that some individuals vote for one of the larger parties instead of their most favourite smaller party. This could be in order to influence who becomes the Prime Minister. It could also mean that some voters chose a party other than their favourite in order to influence the balance of power between the parties in the coalition, in order to move the policy outcome of the government closer to their own.

Discussion

Scholars have long assumed that an electoral system that combines three characteristics – proportional electoral formula, large district magnitude, and no electoral threshold – provides no incentive for strategic voting. Indeed, the traditional 'wasted vote argument', which entails that voters will not vote for their favourite candidate or party if it has no chance of winning a seat, does not apply in such a system. Consequently, one might expect that in such systems strategic voting is virtually absent.

However, recent studies suggest that in multi-party systems that adopt proportional representation strategic considerations of another nature, namely those related to coalition formation, also provide incentives for voters to deflect from their favourite party and thus vote strategically (Blais et al., 2006; Rosema, 2006; Gschwend, 2007). This paper has further explored this matter by focusing on a context where the electoral threshold is so low, that even strategic voting for reasons of 'threshold insurance' is not likely – this is the example usually referred to by scholars when focusing on the possibility of strategic voting in proportional systems (e.g. Cox, 1997).

The novel series of survey items included in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2006 enabled us to study strategic voting in the Netherlands. Arguably, its political system is exactly the kind of system where one would least expect strategic voting to occur. The 150 seats of the Lower House are allocated on the basis of proportionality in – effectively – a single district. Hence, even parties that receive barely 0.7 per cent of the vote can win representation. However, such parties are seldom considered potential partners for a government coalition. So if voters would consider elections as an instrument to affect the composition of the

government, the system may still provide incentives for strategic voting. We identified two ways in which voters could then reason. First, they could focus on which party becomes largest and if they prefer a small party they may vote strategically for one of the large parties (cf. Drummond, 2006; Rosema, 2006). Second, they could focus on the electoral fate of the smaller potential coalition partners, assuming that if one of them does well in the election this will increase the chances of a government including that party (cf. Blais et al., 2006). This leads to two alternative and conflicting hypothesis as to which parties would benefit from strategic voting.

The results of our analysis suggest that coalition preferences indeed played a role. The key finding is that if voters did not conceive of their favourite party as a party that would participate in the coalition they would like to see formed after the election, they deflected and mostly voted for one of the major parties, as these were seen as taking part in their favourite coalition. We already knew from previous studies that in the Netherlands this is strongly related to party size (Rosema, 2004, 2006). We consider the evidence strong, as the models controlled for the impact of party evaluations, religiosity, social class, left/right, three broad dimensions of conflict (economic issues, moral values, and cultural issues), incumbent approval, party leader evaluations, and demographic factors age and gender.

We also found that preferences for any of four specific coalitions that we examined (left-wing, centre-left, centre-right, and 'purple') affected the chances of voting for the constituting parties in similar ways. This suggests that the effects of the two ways of reasoning that voters may employ cancelled each other out. If voters wished a particular coalition, the large partner benefited as much as the smaller partner. So the key question for political parties appears to have been if voters saw them as potential government parties. Apparently, none of those parties succeeded in convincing voters that if they wanted a particular coalition, they best vote for one of these parties. These findings are at odds with results obtained from an analysis of Israeli elections, which did show such effects (Blais et al., 2006). Furthermore, the direction was not affected either by voters' perceptions of the chances that each of those four coalitions would form.

These findings have important implications for political parties' strategies in electoral campaigns. Furthermore, the findings also have important implications for the strategies to be employed by electoral researchers. Downs' (1957) argument that it may be too difficult for voters in multi-party systems to take into account the government formation process appears to have guided electoral researchers when formulating their models and designing their questionnaires. However, voters appear to have not followed Downs' argument. So it is time that electoral researchers no longer do so either.

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TABLES

Table 1. Political parties' vote share and number of seats in the 2003 and 2006 elections

		% votes 2003	*% votes 2006*	*seats 2003*	*seats 2006*
Christian Democrats	(CDA)	28.6	26.5	44	41
Labour Party	(PvdA)	27.3	21.2	42	33
Liberal Party	(VVD)	17.9	14.7	28	22
Socialist Party	(SP)	6.3	16.6	9	25
GreenLeft	(GL)	5.1	4.6	8	7
ChristianUnion	(CU)	2.1	4.0	3	6
		-----	-----	-----	-----
subtotal		87.4	87.5	134	134
other parties		12.6	12.5	16	16
		-----	-----	-----	-----
total		100	100	150	150

Note: The full party names are as follows: Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA), Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA), Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD), Socialistische Partij (SP), GroenLinks (GL), and ChristenUnie (CU). The first four parties are commonly referred to by these abbreviations; the latter two abbreviations are used in this paper only for practical reasons.
Source: www.parlement.com

Table 2. Party evaluations and vote choices for six parties in the 2006 Dutch election

		Party with highest evaluation score					
		CDA	PvdA	VVD	GL	SP	CU
Vote choice	CDA	70.4% (532)	7.2% (38)	18.4% (65)	10.0% (26)	11.6% (65)	31.2% (78)
	PvdA	4.8% (36)	72.4% (382)	4.0% (14)	25.5% (66)	23.8% (174)	12.4% (31)
	VVD	15.7% (119)	3.6% (19)	72.0% (254)	4.6% (12)	4.1% (30)	7.6% (19)
	GL	0.5% (4)	2.5% (13)	0.6% (2)	37.1% (96)	5.3% (39)	3.2% (8)
	SP	4.4% (33)	10.2% (54)	3.1% (11)	18.9% (49)	49.0% (358)	8.4% (21)
	CU	2.7% (20)	0.6% (3)	0.3% (1)	1.9% (5)	2.5% (18)	36.4% (91)
	Total	100% (756)	100% (528)	100% (353)	100% (259)	100% (731)	100% (250)

Note: Entries are percentages with actual frequencies in parentheses. Observe that some individuals may have given several parties the same highest evaluation score. For party abbreviations: see Table 1.

Table 3. Coalition votes for sympathisers for six parties in the 2006 Dutch election

		Party with highest evaluation score						
		CDA	PvdA	VVD	GL	SP	CU	Total
Sincere vote	Coalition vote	91.8% (376)	92.9% (208)	90.5% (142)	91.1% (51)	72.0% (190)	73.0% (46)	86.1% (982)
	Not coalition	8.2% (31)	7.1% (16)	9.6% (15)	8.9% (5)	28.0% (74)	27.0% (17)	13.9% (158)
	Total	100% (376)	100% (224)	100% (157)	100% (56)	100% (264)	100% (63)	100% (1 140)
Non-sincere vote	Coalition vote	72.7% (40)	30% (6)	63.6% (7)	79.0% (15)	73.9% (65)	87.0% (20)	70.8% (153)
	Not coalition	27.3% (15)	70% (14)	36.3% (4)	21.1% (4)	26.1% (23)	13.0% (3)	29.2% (63)
	Total	100% (55)	100% (20)	100% (11)	100% (19)	100% (88)	100% (23)	100% (216)

Note: Entries are percentages with actual frequencies in parentheses. Observe here that only individuals with a strict preference for one party are included. For party abbreviations, see Table 1.

Table 4. Conditional logit model of vote choice and coalition preference

	Choice specific	**Model 1 (coalition preference)**				
		PvdA	VVD	GL	SP	CU
Party evaluations						
Party with highest score	0.86***					
	(0.27)					
Evaluation score	1.32***					
	(0.20)					
Coalition attitudes						
Party preferred in coalition	1.06***					
	(0.17)					
Attitudinal controls						
Left/right distance	-0.54***					
	(0.06)					
Evaluation score party leader	0.23***					
	(0.08)					
Government satisfaction		-0.67***	0.20	-0.62**	-0.27	-0.31
		(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.32)	(0.26)	(0.30)
Issue – euthanasia		0.18	0.12	0.16	0.09	-0.29***
		(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.21)	(0.16)	(0.11)
Issue – income differences		0.05	-0.11	-0.12	0.13	0.07
		(0.16)	(0.10)	(0.19)	(0.16)	(0.19)
Issue – asylum		0.32**	0.25**	0.11	0.44***	0.45***
		(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.19)	(0.15)	(0.17)
Socio-demographic controls						
Age		0.02	0.01	0.02	-0.00	0.01
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender		0.30	-0.24	-0.26	0.03	-0.67
		(0.40)	(0.32)	(0.50)	(0.41)	(0.47)
Social class		-0.03	0.13	0.30	0.10	0.02
		(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.27)
Religiosity		-1.07**	-1.04***	-0.81	-0.67	0.01
		(0.43)	(0.33)	(0.52)	(0.43)	(0.76)
Constant		3.08	2.52	1.90	-0.12	-1.74
		(2.57)	(2.20)	(3.42)	(2.67)	(4.25)
Number of individuals	1 192					
Log likelihood	-546.92					

Note: Significant at * the 0.10 level, ** the 0.05 level, *** the 0.01 level. Entries are parameter estimates from a conditional logit analysis including both choice-specific and individual-specific variables (CDA is base category), using STATA's asclogit command, with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5. Conditional logit model of vote choice, coalition desirability and probabilities

	Model 2 (coalition desirability)						Model 3 (coalition probability)					
	Choice specific	PvdA	VVD	GL	SP	CU	Choice specific	PvdA	VVD	GL	SP	CU
Party evaluations												
Party with highest score	0.99*** (0.27)						1.09*** (0.35)					
Evaluation score	1.23*** (0.20)						1.27*** (0.25)					
Coalition attitudes												
Desirability CDA–VVD		-0.30** (0.15)	0.01 (0.13)	-0.29 (0.20)	-0.31** (0.14)	-0.06 (0.16)						
Desirability CDA–PvdA		-0.01 (0.14)	-0.19 (0.12)	-0.18 (0.17)	-0.11 (0.14)	0.09 (0.15)						
Desirability PvdA–SP–GL		0.47*** (0.14)	0.13 (0.12)	0.55*** (0.17)	0.38*** (0.13)	-0.03 (0.18)						
Desirability PvdA–VVD		0.20 (0.15)	0.17 (0.12)	-0.02 (0.18)	0.14 (0.15)	-0.10 (0.18)						
Coalition probabilities												
Probability CDA–VVD								-0.10 (0.12)	-0.14 (0.09)	-0.23 (0.15)	-0.22* (0.12)	-0.05 (0.14)
Probability CDA–PvdA								0.24* (0.14)	-0.10 (0.10)	0.18 (0.16)	0.09 (0.14)	-0.12 (0.16)
Probability PvdA–SP–GL								0.14 (0.14)	-0.09 (0.11)	0.17 (0.18)	0.24* (0.14)	0.04 (0.21)
Probability PvdA–VVD								0.02 (0.18)	0.08 (0.14)	-0.06 (0.21)	0.07 (0.17)	0.11 (0.24)
Number of individuals	1 206						745					
Log likelihood	-560.68						-341.70					

Note: Significant at * the 0.10 level, ** the 0.05 level, *** the 0.01 level. Entries are parameter estimates from a conditional logit analysis including both choice-specific and individual-specific variables (CDA is base category), using STATA's asclogit command, with standard errors in parentheses. The model also includes attitudinal and socio-demographic control variables (coefficients not shown).