

Tactical voting

A study of voters' tactical considerations in the 2010 Swedish general election

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Abstract

Most studies on tactical voting in proportional representation system focus on voting to help a party pass the threshold to the parliament. This study extends and develops the definition of tactical voting. The theoretical starting point is the rational choice theory of Anthony Downs (1957), who discusses voters' strategic considerations in elections. From Downs's perspective the rational voter considers the governmental consequences of voting. Downs distinguishes general rational voting, oriented towards the next-coming formation of government, from future oriented rational voting. This distinction is developed in the study, and tested on a contemporary electoral context. The specific case investigated is the 2010 Swedish general election. Tactical voting is defined as voting where party tactical considerations have decided vote choice. Among Swedish voters seven variants of tactical voting are identified. Five of these are short term: impact-voting, government-voting, relationship-voting, big party-voting and pass-the-threshold-voting, whereas two types are future oriented: signaling-voting and diversity-voting. In an explanatory analysis tactical voting is found to be related to hesitation about what party to choose and to young age.

Keywords: tactical, strategic, voting, rational choice, elections, Downs

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1. Intro: The electoral arena

Some voters vote for another party than the one they like most. One reason could be the specific party context. What are the relationships between parties? Does the favorite party have a chance to become influential? Which other parties are entering the election? Such tactical considerations may make the voter switch vote intentions. This thesis will investigate tactical aspects of voting.

The theoretical starting point is the rational choice theory of Anthony Downs (1957). From this perspective, voting is seen as a rational decision process. The voter is furthermore assumed to take the governmental consequences into account when voting. From this view it is the outcome of voting that is important, rather than expressing one's first political preference. Therefore some voters may choose another party than the favorite one. Downs also discusses why some voters vote rational, whereas others stay loyal with first party preference. Downs's theory will be tested on a contemporary electoral context.

First of all, the thesis will theoretically define what voting motives should be considered as tactical. The motives will be related to the specific party-system and expected governmental outcome. Furthermore, short-term tactical considerations will be distinguished from future oriented tactical motives. Moreover a distinction between tactical considerations and strict tactical voting will be developed. Tactical considerations may influence even those who stay with first party preference, whereas for others tactical factors lead to switching parties. The latter will be defined as strict tactical voting.

The specific case that will be examined is the 2010 Swedish general election. This election provided many alternatives; there were larger parties, smaller parties and a couple of outsiders. Furthermore, the parliamentary parties entered the election as two main government coalitions. This made the election resemble plurality rule system, and enhanced the possibility to use different sorts of tactical reasoning. Most research on tactical voting in proportional representation system focuses on voting to help a party pass the threshold to the parliament. This thesis will extend and develop the definition of tactical voting.

In an explanatory part of the study, the relationship between in previous research found different individual characteristics and tactical voting will also be tested.

In sum this will generate knowledge on voters' motives and behavior in a contemporary electoral context. This is a relevant subject to study not at least because voters are becoming

more volatile (van der Eijk & Franklin 2009). For some of these tactical aspects may play an important role.

2. Theoretical perspective

2.1 Rational voting

Most research on tactical voting starts from a rational choice perspective (Ordeshook & Zeng 1997; Alvarez & Nagler 2000; Kselman & Niou 2010:2). From this view, it is the outcome of the election that is voters' focus, rather than expressing a first political preference. The pioneer Anthony Downs (1957) develops a theory of voting from this perspective. He sees strategic considerations as a logical part of a rational voter's decision process. To consider strategic aspects there has to be more than two alternatives: then it might be a reason to support the second party preference. The base for voting is ideological, according to Downs: the voter assesses the benefits each party will provide. Sometimes this score is combined with a judgment of the party's performance in recent term in office (Downs 1957:41). Then, strategic aspects will be taken into account (ibid. p 47). If the favorite party has no chances to get elected the rational voter will tend to choose the second preference, given it is more competitive. For some voters, the two most preferred parties are seen as almost as good. These voters will tend to switch parties to a larger extent than those whose party preferences are clearer, Downs argues (ibid. p 49). The tendency to switch will also depend on whether there is a party the voter dislikes very much. Then there is an extra incentive to choose a more competitive party, to hinder the disliked alternative from getting influence. The tendency to shift parties will according to Downs also depend on the temperament of the voter (ibid. p 48).

There has been considerably consensus on the basics of voters' strategic considerations Downs discusses (Heath & Evans 1994; Ordeshook & Zeng 1997; Alvarez & Nagler 2000). However, there are some aspects of rational voting that are less investigated. This thesis will develop these.

2.2 Future oriented rationality

Downs also discusses that the rational voter may be future oriented. For these voters, it could be a reason to vote for an overall less preferred party if the voter dislikes the development of the favorite party, and wants to send a warning to it (Downs 1957:49). There could also be a

reason to vote for a small, uncompetitive party if the voter wants a more diverse selection of government later on, Downs argues (*ibid.*).

Downs is very brief in the description of future oriented rational voting, and few have picked up the arguments on this kind of voting. When similar voting is discussed, it is often under the more general label *protest voting* (Heath & Evans 1994; Kang 2004; van der Eijk & Franklin 2009:131). Protest-voting is often argued to be related to general disaffection and indifference. Thus protest-voting should not be regarded as the same phenomenon as the future oriented rational voting Downs describes. The important distinction between future oriented rational voting and general protest voting should be that the former is targeted and takes the long term consequences of voting into account, whereas the latter is a more diffuse sign of disaffection.

Some scholars though discuss protest-voting resembling of Downs's view of future oriented rational voting (Kang 2004; Kselman & Niou 2010:1). Kselman and Niou (2010:1) defines protest-voting as

“choosing a party other than one's most preferred one to send that most preferred party a signal of dissatisfaction.”

In line with Downs, Kselman and Niou develop an analysis from a rational choice perspective. They analyze this sort of *signaling voting* in cost-benefit-terms, i.e. as voting related to a rational decision calculus. The value of signaling-voting depends, according to these authors, on the improvement the favorite party is supposed to make if the voter sends a signal to it. Another aspect taken into account is the weight the voter gives to influencing the long term development of the favorite party, versus affecting the next-coming formation of government. If the benefits of signaling-voting are considered higher than the benefits of voting for first party preference, targeted protest voting is rational according to these authors.

Another contemporary scholar, Kang (2004), develops a similar rational choice influenced reasoning. Kang compares targeted protest-voting with abstention. As Kselman and Niou, Kang argues that the value of a signal of disaffection could be calculated in a cost-benefit-analysis. Targeted protest voting requires an alternative attractive enough to signal vote for, according to Kang. There is thus supposed to be some kind of appeal in the more targeted variant of protest-voting.

However, it is questionable that the value of signaling-voting could be calculated the way Kselman and Niou and Kang suggest. First of all, it should be very difficult to assess what improvement the most preferred party will make if sending a message to it. Kselman and Niou briefly discuss the importance of the degree of information parties' have on voters' motives. Reasonably the parties lack information on voters' motives, why signals of disaffection should be difficult for parties to interpret. It is also doubtful that voters consider parties' coming improvement when thinking about whether to signaling-vote or not. Rather, future oriented rational voting should be the result of a *mental* rationality. The voter *wishes* that the favorite party will improve if sending a message to it – therefore the action becomes rational for the specific voter.

Still, in the aggregate such signals of disaffection may have an impact on the electoral outcome; the effect of a warning-message to a party should be more forceful if many voters articulate it. Therefore future oriented signaling voting could still be rational from a more pure rational choice perspective, if the voter co-ordinate the signaling-behavior with other voters.¹

2.3 Voting under coalition governments

The base for Downs's analysis on rational voting is plurality systems, where only one party takes the seat (winner takes all). These electoral systems often results in one-party government. In systems with coalition governments, rational voting becomes more complicated. Here rational voters should take the favorite party's coalition partners into account when voting, Downs argues (1957:146). If the favorite party co-operates with a disliked party, it may be rational to choose another one. Since governmental alternatives are often blurred it is though difficult to take strategic aspects into account, Downs puts forward. Therefore voters in coalition government systems tend to behave irrationally from Downs's point of view, i.e. not consider strategic aspects at all (Downs 1957:154). Downs though admits that for a specific voter this behavior could still be rational (ibid.).

There is thus a reservation with the view of rationality used in the rational voting theory. Downs's view of rational voting is first of all related to systemic aspects, not to the individual voter. For many voters in unclear systems it should, as Downs also admits, be rational and cost-saving *not to* take strategic aspects into account. If it is too complicated and impossible to assess the outcome, such considerations could be seen as pointless and confusing.

¹ The view of aggregate rationality holds true for short term rational voting as well. The chances that a single vote will affect the outcome are exceptionally small. Though, in the aggregate tactical votes could have a real impact.

However, if governmental alternatives are clear, it is easier for voters to consider strategic aspects, Downs argues (1957:147). If the rules of the game are clear, it becomes less costly to consider governmental outcome, and might be rational to do so for even from the individual's point of view.

2.4 Summary: rational voting in theory

From Downs's perspective, rational voting is to take the governmental consequences into account when voting. The voter therefore has to consider the specific party context. Strategic considerations could be short-term, focusing on the next-coming formation of government, or long term, related to a wished development of a favorite party or diversity in the party system.

The prerequisites for rational voting are clearer in plurality systems, where only one party gets the seat. Under coalition governments strategic thinking could also be related to close inter-relationships between parties. If the governmental alternatives are clear, it is easier to vote rationally in these systems, according to Downs.

3. Previous research

3.1 Definitions of tactical voting

Most research on tactical voting is influenced by Downs's view of rational voting. Most scholars furthermore start from the view that tactical voting is to vote for another party than the first party preference (Holmberg 1984, Gilljam & Holmberg 1990; 1993; Ordeshook & Zeng 1997; Alvarez & Nagler 2000; Alvarez et al. 2006). Holmberg (1984:41) defines tactical voting as

“consciously voting for another party than one's most preferred one to attain a specific political goal.”²

The most well-known example of tactical voting in proportional representation system is voting to help a party pass the threshold to the parliament (see sect. 3.2). Within Holmberg's definition, several political motives could however be included. Some voters might for example vote for another party than the most preferred one due to disliked candidates in the favorite party. From Downs's point of view, it is the party context and the governmental consequences that is central in rational voting. A specific candidate could hardly influence the

² “Medvetet rösta på ett annat parti än sitt bästa för att därmed nå ett visst politiskt syfte.” (Holmberg 1984:41)

“consciously voting for another party than the most preferred one (or an equally preferred one), to attain a specific governmental outcome.”

This definition will be the theoretical starting-point for the forthcoming empirical investigation. Central features are the specific party system and the expected governmental consequences of voting.

3.2 Tactical considerations

Many scholars have applied Downs’s reasoning on strategic considerations in voting on contemporary electoral contexts. Most studies investigate voters’ tendency to abandon the most preferred party for a more competitive one (Niemi et al. 1992; Ordeshook & Zeng 1997; Alvarez & Nagler 2000; Kselman & Niou 2010:2). Fewer discuss future oriented rational voting and voting under coalition governments. Some studies have discovered future oriented tactical motives inductively. In a study of the British plurality system, Franklin et al. (1994) find out that some voters who refer to tactical motives have voted for small uncompetitive parties. They interpret this as voters’ wish to signal a direction, and label the voting expressive tactical. In a proportional representation context, Gilljam and Holmberg (1990; 1993) find similar tendencies. They discover that a part of the supporters of some minor parties, for example the Green Party, in Swedish elections in the late 1980s and early 1990s were not sincere supporters of these parties, but declared another party as their favorite (ibid.). Gilljam and Holmberg interpret this as voters wish to see another direction in a certain issue, and label the voting *issue oriented tactical* (saktaktisk) (Gilljam & Holmberg 1990:291).

There has also been some research on tactical voting specific for proportional representation system and coalition governments. A characteristic of PR-systems is the threshold to the parliament, which generates motives to vote for small parties near the threshold. For example small parties may function as coalition partners to larger parties, why it could be a reason for supporters of the larger one to vote for the minor party. In line with this reasoning, Gilljam and Holmberg label voting to help a party pass the threshold to the parliament *party tactical* (partitaktisk) (ibid.). They mean that pass-the-threshold voting could be a tool to strengthen (the politics of) the larger party. On the other hand, voting for a small party within a governmental coalition could also be a sign of a wished direction to the larger party. It could furthermore be a reason to support a party near the threshold to get a more diverse selection of

government later on. In these cases the tactical pass-the threshold voting is thus more future oriented. It is pass the threshold voting most research on tactical voting in PR-systems refers to (Holmberg 1984; Tselis 1986; Holmberg 2000; Oscarsson & Holmberg 2008). In Sweden it is sometimes labeled “comrade four per cent” (kamrat fyra procent), referring to the threshold to the parliament (and historically to Social Democratic supporters voting for the considerably smaller Left party (see Holmberg 1984:45)).

Many studies have also looked at how widespread tactical voting is. In plurality systems, the percentage varies considerably. If all voters are included around 6–8 per are estimated to vote tactically (Heath et al. 1994; Alvarez & Nagler 2000). If future oriented tactical voting in a broad sense is included in the analysis the percentage is about twice as high, according to Franklin et al. (1994). In the Swedish proportional representation system, the percentage tactical pass-the-threshold voters is about 1 per cent, according to self-reported answers (Holmberg 2000:112). Pass-the-threshold-voting is however a very narrow definition of tactical voting.

3.3 Explaining tactical voting

Some studies also try to explain the presence of tactical voting. Most studies confirm Downs’s arguments on the importance of the composition of party preferences. In plurality system, tactical voting is related to small chances for the favorite party to be elected, indifference between the two most preferred parties and low party identification (Niemi et al. 1992; Franklin et al. 1994; Heath & Evans 1994; Alvarez & Nagler 2000). Some studies from the Swedish proportional system show that tactical voting is more common among voters who have switched parties from one election to the other, i.e. volatile voters (Holmberg 2000:112). In Sweden tactical voting is also found to be slightly related to education, political interest and knowledge (Gilljam & Holmberg 1990:292).

3.4 Contribution of the study

Previous research on tactical voting in the Swedish system in general focuses on pass-the-threshold voting. On the other hand, there is no systematic investigation of what different kinds of tactical considerations voters use. This thesis will fill this gap. The study will test Downs’s (1957) theory of rational voting on a contemporary PR-context. It will see if the tactical considerations Downs discuss are present among voters. Furthermore, the study will test individual characteristics related to tactical voting.

3.5 Research questions

What kinds of party tactical considerations are present among voters in a contemporary PR-system?

Are there both short term and future oriented tactical considerations?

Which individual characteristics are related to tactical voting?

4 Empirical investigation

4.1 Case: Sweden

A clear example of a complicated and changing party strategic situation in proportional representation electoral systems is Sweden. Here the Social Democratic party was for long the dominant government party, but the last decade the bourgeois parties have challenged this position. At the prospect of the 2006 election, the four bourgeois parties for the first time outspokenly and closely co-operated in “the Alliance”, aiming at getting into office. This was successful: the Alliance succeeded in winning the election. Approaching the 2010 election the bourgeoisie parties stayed with the Alliance, whereas the Social Democrats for the first time co-operated with the Green party and the Left party in another government alternative, “the Red-Greens”. In a Swedish perspective, this was an extraordinary clear government alternative situation. From Downs’s perspective, this could be argued to encourage strategic considerations. It could lead to

- 1) voting for any of the parties within the main government alternatives, to make the vote count (short-term tactical voting)³
- 2) signal oriented voting , if the voter disliked the favorite party’s recent development (future oriented tactical voting)

Therefore the Swedish general election 2010 is an interesting case to investigate in regard to tactical voting. There are three main reasons to choose this election as the specific case. The main reason is that it provided many different opportunities to vote tactically: there were larger and smaller parliamentary parties, as well as a couple of outsiders, and proposed

³ This was in fact encouraged by Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt and minister of finance Anders Borg, who late in the election campaign encouraged the Swedes to vote for a stable Alliance government, to keep the xenophobic party Sweden Democrats out of influence (DN 101124). This is not a unique Swedish phenomenon: parties tend to emphasize strategic factors in election campaigns (van der Eijk & Franklin 2009:106).

government coalitions. It should therefore be possible to study different sorts of tactical considerations. The second reason is that this election is a recent example. This could reveal trends. The third reason is pragmatic: there was available, relevant individual level data from the 2010 election.

4.2 Data

The data for the study comes from the 2010 Internet Campaign panel (E-panelen) in the 2010 Swedish general election, conducted within the Multidisciplinary research on Opinion and Democracy institute (MOD), University of Gothenburg. This election study is an Internet based citizen-panel with five sequential questionnaires, four pre-election and one post-election. They were conducted the four weeks before and the week directly after the general election in 19 September 2010 (weeks 34–38). About 14 000 respondents were recruited, of which 4300 participated in all surveys (Dahlberg et al. 2011). The questionnaires for each week of the panel contained several questions on political attitudes and thoughts about the general election. At each stage, the respondent got a part of the questions. That means that some respondents got one question one week, while others got the same question the week before or after.⁴ The panel is self-recruited⁵ and males, relatively young people with high education and high political interest in urban areas are over-represented (Nilsson et al. 2007; Dahlberg et al. 2011). In the 2010 panel, supporters for the largest parties, the Social Democrats and the Moderate Party, were underrepresented (Dahlberg et al. 2011). This is beneficiary for this study in the sense that supporters for smaller parties are represented. Future oriented tactical voting should therefore have a chance to be revealed. Furthermore, in a complicated PR-context, tactical voting is supposed to be somewhat more widespread among politically sophisticated voters. Therefore different kinds of tactical considerations should have a chance to be present in this sample. Moreover the sample is large: 1746 respondents answered the question relevant for the dependent variable. This increases the generalizability of the study. Of course there could be ways of reasoning tactically that have not been covered, but the size and character of the sample should strengthen the generalizability. The explanatory part of the study should be somewhat less representative, since individual characteristics are more influential. Still, important background factors such

⁴ Some questions were only given to a part of the respondents. Therefore the sample varies in the forthcoming explanatory analyses.

⁵ via for example Internet sites and local morning papers

as age and education vary in the panel. The explanatory part will make it possible to reveal tendencies, which could be tested in future research.

4.3 Dependent variable: tactical considerations

Many studies on tactical voting use voters' self-reported answers on reasons to vote for a party as a measurement of tactical voting (see e.g. Niemi et al. 1992). This thesis will start from this perspective, as it aims at discovering different kinds of tactical reasoning. As a second step, this method will be complemented with elements from another tradition in tactical voting research, which compares voters' party preference with vote or vote intention (Gilljam and Holmberg 1990; 1993; Alvarez & Nagler 2000). If the voter votes (or intend to vote) for another party than the first party preference, the vote is considered as tactical. A critique against using this method uniquely is that there are other reasons than party tactical ones to vote for another party than the first preference, for example certain candidates, random or trends. In this thesis the comparison between party preference and vote is on the other hand combined with self-reported voting motivations, which strengthens the coding of a vote as tactical.

The open-ended question that was analyzed to reveal tactical considerations in the first step is the following question in the post-election stage of the panel:

*Why did you vote the way you did in the 2010 Swedish general election?*⁶

This question makes it possible to mention different kinds of reasons, such as tactical aspects. The participants answered the question the week immediately after the general election, which is very beneficiary for the study: responses on open-ended questions related to voting decision tend to be more valid the closer to the election they are given (Alvarez & Nagler 2000). The initial coding of an answer as tactical is rather inclusive: if tactical considerations are mentioned to have influenced the final vote to some extent, the answer is coded as tactical. A reason for this inclusive categorization is that tactical voting according to previous studies is very rare in PR-systems (Holmberg 2000:112). This implies that some kinds of tactical reasoning among voters may have been uncovered.

The second step was to reveal strict tactical voting, i.e. voting for another party than one's first party preference. In line with the reasoning on when to define a vote as tactical or not (sect. 3.1), voting for one of equally preferred parties was also included. Since tactical voting

⁶ "Varför röstade du som du gjorde i riksdagsvalet?" Q2W38

is supposed to be something conscious, a subjective measurement of party preference was considered relevant.⁷ Most previous studies on the Swedish system compare the voter's response on a question on what is his or her "best party" with the actual vote.⁸ Unfortunately, there was no "best party"-question in the 2010 Internet campaign panel. Instead there was a question on how much the voter likes a party on an 11 point feeling thermometer scale from (-5) to +5. The rating on the feeling thermometer was therefore used to reveal strict tactical voting.⁹ For all responses that were coded as tactical in the first step, party scores on the feeling thermometer were compared with the final vote.¹⁰ If the respondent voted for another party than the first party preference, or if preferences for the most preferred parties were tied (had been given the same score), the voting was coded as strict tactical.¹¹

To conclude, the first coding of an answer as tactical is rather inclusive, in line with the definition of tactical considerations. The coding of strict tactical voting is on the other hand more exclusive. Both codings are based on voters' own motivations. What is investigated is whether the respondent said they let tactical considerations guide voting decision, and, for strict tactical voting, whether these considerations made the voter chose another party than the most or an equally preferred one. A reservation with this measurement is that motivations are not the same thing as real motives. The answers might for example have been influenced by what was seen as appropriate to express for the moment. In this specific election, it could for example have been seen as politically correct to express tactical motives. At the same time, if tactical voting was seen as appropriate, this could also have influenced voters' actual behavior. It is also possible that some voters who did not mention tactical considerations in fact had tactical motives. If so, some tactical voters may have been included in the non-tactical category. It is however very difficult to reveal voters' "real" motives, since they may

⁷ An alternative would have been to measure the voter's "objective" party preference through for example his or her attitudes in certain ideological and/or performance-oriented issues.

⁸ See Gilljam and Holmberg (1993).

⁹ The feeling-thermometer could be argued to be more emotionally oriented than the "best party"-question. It is not certain that liking a party the most is the same thing as preferring it from an ideological or competence-oriented point of view. The feeling thermometer is therefore a somewhat imprecise measurement of party preference. Still it was the best indicator of (subjective) party preference in this investigation.

¹⁰ Here final vote was considered a better measurement than vote intention a couple of days before the election (although some research shows that voters tend to over-report having voting for the winning party (Alvarez & Nagler 2000). It is possible that the voter changes vote intention during the last couple of days, especially if tactically oriented. Furthermore the response on actual vote was given the week directly after the election, which strengthens validity.

¹¹ The feeling-thermometer question was only asked in the pre-elections stages of the Internet campaign panel. That means that the score on the sympathy-scale and vote were not measured simultaneously. The attitudes vis-à-vis parties (and the score on the feeling thermometer) might, for some voters, continue changing until the Election Day. However the voter's general attitude towards the main parties during the election period should have been covered.

even be unconscious. At least the self-reported answers reveal what the voters themselves consider being important factors for vote choice.

The answers on the reason to vote for a party-question were coded into four broad categories: short-term tactical, future oriented tactical, general tactical and non-tactical. The two broad tactical categories have been composed with Downs (1957) as the theoretical reference.

4.4 Presence of tactical considerations

Previous studies on the Swedish system have identified a couple of different sorts of tactical reasoning. Holmberg (1984:41) identifies three sorts of tactical voting: pass-the-threshold-voting, voting for a party represented in the parliament (not to waste one's vote) and voting for a large and strong party. In a precedent study Gilljam and Holmberg also discuss some future oriented tactical motives, related to sending an ideological direction. They label this kind of voting issue oriented tactical (*saktaktisk*) (Gilljam & Holmberg 1990:291). All these tactical considerations are present in the Internet campaign panel material as well. Furthermore, there are tactical considerations related to outspoken party co-operation: some voters argue to have voted for another party than the most preferred one, due to proposed government coalitions. There are also tactical motives related to increasing diversity of the party system. Both short-term and future oriented tactical thinking are thus present. The tactical answers are presented in these two broad categories, in line with Downs's view of voters' different time perspectives.

4.4.1 Short-term tactical considerations

The answers in this category have in common that they relate to the short term outcome of the election and the expected impact of certain parties. Within this category, five main types of answers were identified: voting for a party that is represented in the parliament (not to "waste one's vote"), voting to support a strong governmental alternative, voting adjusted to present or probable government coalitions, voting for a large and strong party and voting to help a party pass the threshold to the parliament. This category tactical voting could be seen as an extended version of Holmberg (1984); Holmberg does not discuss motives related to government coalitions.

The first type of short term tactical considerations is related to voting for a party within the parliament, to make the vote count. This kind of voting is similar to tactical voting for big parties in plurality systems, "not to waste one's vote", and could be labeled *impact-voting*. If

there is a party that is very much disliked, there might be an extra incentive to do this. The following statement is an example:

“I intended to vote for the Feminist Party¹², but since the Sweden Democrats were so successful I wanted to give my vote to a party that is represented in the parliament.”

The second type of short term tactical considerations is also related to the impact of the vote, but more outspokenly to government alternatives, and could therefore be called *government-voting*. These kinds of considerations are related to supporting a governmental alternative that is considered to be strong, to hinder a disliked alternative from getting influence. The following answer expresses this:

“I planned to vote for the Green Party, but I wanted the Bourgeois alliance to get the majority of seats, so that the Sweden Democrats would not come to hold the balance of parliamentary power¹³.”

In the cases mentioned above, the voters thus adjusted their votes according to a disliked alternative.

The third variant of short term tactical considerations is also related to adjusting the vote according to present or expected political coalitions, and even more directly. If the voter does not like the favorite party's coalition partners, he or she might choose another alternative. Since it has to do with ties between parties, it is labeled *relationship-voting*. The following statement exemplifies this:

“[...] I would rather have voted for the Green Party, but not when a vote there is a vote for the Social Democrats and the Left Party.”

The fourth type of short term tactical considerations is related to voting for a large party with good chances to become influential – *big party-voting*. In these motivations the party's main opponent is sometimes mentioned: there are several voters who express they would like the Moderate Party to become larger than the Social Democrats, and vice versa. This voting thus

¹² Feministiskt Initiativ (FI)

¹³ vågmästarroll

has a strategic aspect related to main competitors. The following statements are examples of big-party voting:

“I wanted the Moderate Party to outperform the Social Democrats. Otherwise I would have voted for the Liberal Party¹⁴,”

“First of all: I concluded I wanted to vote for the big left party”

In the latter case, it is not evident that the tactical considerations made the voter switch vote intentions, but the answer indicates they may have functioned as a tie-breaker.¹⁵

The fifth type of short term tactical considerations is voting to help a party pass the threshold, *pass-the-threshold-voting*. This kind of voting could both be related to supporting a governmental alternative, and a wish to see a certain ideological direction or greater diversity. In the latter cases, this kind of voting has future oriented elements (see below). The following answer is an example of general pass-the-threshold-voting.

“I support-voted. To make them pass the 4 per cent threshold.”

4.4.2 Future oriented tactical considerations

This category includes answers related to sending a signal to a favorite party. Answers related to wanting a more diverse selection of parties are also included, in line with Downs’s theory on future oriented rational voting.

The first variant of future oriented tactical motives is related to expressing a wished direction to a favorite party, a type of *signaling-voting*. The signaling-voting was sometimes difficult to distinguish from more general “protest” motives (with the society as a whole as the target, for example). This refined a criterion for signaling-voting to be related to the recent development of a favorite party, as well as a wished direction. The following answer was coded as tactical:

¹⁵ It is not obvious to include big-party voting within the definition of tactical considerations. Big party-voting could for example be related to prestige-thinking, rather than governmental outcome. The example above indicates that. Still it is clearly related to the party context and the relationships between parties, which constitute the prerequisites of government formation. Therefore big-party voting was seen as a tactical consideration.

“I wanted to punish the Liberal Party. I am dissatisfied with their proposals on burqua restrictions as well as language tests for immigrants. The Center Party is fair enough, with decent immigration politics.”

The voter cited above is apparently dissatisfied with a favorite party’s handling of some integration related issues, and therefore chooses another party with fair enough politics. This could be seen as a tactical, targeted signal of disaffection and an expression of wished direction. On the other hand, answers which express dissatisfaction more generally, without references to any party voted for previously, were coded as non-tactical. The following statement exemplifies this:

“Because of failed integration.”

The distinction between future oriented tactical considerations and general protest motives does thus depend on how specific the voter has been in his or her motivations and whether there are references to parties, both backwards (past development) and forward (wished direction). It is possible that some voters with unspecified protest motives in fact had tactical arguments. However, if the voter gives a more nuanced motivation, he or she should reasonably have more tactically oriented motives for party choice.

The second variant of future oriented tactical considerations is voting to increase diversity in the party system, and could therefore be labeled *diversity-voting*. This type of answers includes those who explicitly say they want to vote for a smaller party, to have more alternatives in coming elections or to balance the party system. The following statement is an example:

“I wanted to support a bourgeois government, but I think several parties enrich politics. So that the Moderate Party does not become too strong.”

This is related to a more diverse selection of parties, and a more balanced governmental outcome. Therefore these kinds of considerations are seen as tactical. The categorization of future oriented tactical considerations could be seen as a refined version of the issue oriented tactical voting (*saktaktik*) discussed by Gilljam and Holmberg (1990; 1993). Gilljam and

Holmberg define issue oriented tactical voters as voters who want to see another political direction in a certain issue. In this thesis, to be coded as tactical it furthermore takes a negative reference to the development of a specific party or to diversity-oriented motives.

If both short-term and future-oriented motives were mentioned, the answer was coded according to the most emphasized factor.

4.4.3 General tactical considerations

This category includes answers that mention “tactical” or “strategic” with no further explanation, for example:

“strategy”¹⁶

4.4.4 Summary: tactical considerations

The main kinds of tactical considerations related to tactical voting are summarized in the table below.

Table 1

Variants of tactical voting

Short term	Future oriented
1. impact-voting	1. signaling-voting
2. government-voting	2. diversity-voting
3. relationship-voting	
4. big party-voting	
5. pass-the-threshold-voting	

¹⁶ If a respondent with general tactical considerations had also answered question 7 in the same post-election stage (Do you remember your way of reasoning when you finally decided what party to vote for?) (“Kommer du ihåg hur du resonerade i det ögonblick då du fattade det slutgiltiga beslutet om hur du skulle rösta i riksdagsvalet?)) and that answer clarified the tactical considerations, the answer was coded according to that motivation.

4.4.5 Non-tactical reasons

The remaining answers, which expressed no party tactical motives, were categorized as non-tactical. Two examples of non-tactical motives are the following answers:

“For ideological reasons.”

“The best choice for me.”

In sum, there are thus four main voting reason categories: short-term tactical considerations, future oriented tactical considerations, general tactical considerations and non-tactical reasons.¹⁷ For detailed coding of tactical answers, see Appendix.

5. Presence of tactical voting

5.1 Presence of tactical categories

1746 respondents answered the relevant open-ended question on reasons to vote for certain party.¹⁸ All answers were read repeatedly and coded into any of the broad voting reasons categories outlined above. 173 of the answers were identified as tactical, of which most were short-term tactical (Table 2).

Table 2
Presence of tactical categories

Category	N
Short-term tactical	134
Future oriented tactical	28
General tactical	11
Non-tactical	1556
Missing	17
Total	1746

Data: Q2W38, 2010 Internet campaign panel, MOD

The frequencies should be seen in relation to the material, and not as representative for the Swedish electorate. In the Internet campaign panel people with high education and high political interest are overrepresented, why tactical voting should be somewhat more

¹⁷ There is also a missing category, which includes respondents who answered they did not vote in the general election or whose answers did not relate to voting decision.

¹⁸ “Why did you vote the way you did in the general election?” (“Varför röstade du som du gjorde i riksdagsvalet?”) Q2 W38. The response rate was about 60 per cent if including all participants (14434) in the panel (2887 of these got the open-ended question Q2W38 on vote reason). The response rate would be higher if including only the active participants (Dahlberg et al. 2011).

widespread here (Gilljam & Holmberg 1990:292). Therefore the percentage tactical responses is probably higher here than in the electorate as a whole.

5.2 Presence of strict tactical voting

As a second step voters' scores on the party feeling thermometer were used to reveal strict tactical voting.¹⁹ 980 respondents had complete values on the feeling thermometer, of which 105 were tactical answers. Of the short-term tactical answers, 87 per cent were coded as strict tactical, whereas 76 per cent of the future oriented tactical answers were coded as strict.²⁰ All general tactical answers were coded as strict (Table 3).

Table 3
Tactical considerations or strict tactical voting

Tactical category	N
Short-term strict	66
Short-term considerations	11
Future oriented strict	16
Future oriented considerations	5
General strict	7
General considerations	0
Total	105

Data: Q2W38 and feeling thermometer ratings weeks 34–37, 2010 Internet campaign panel, MOD

This implies that some tactical reasoning, especially future oriented, is incorporated in voters' general attitudes towards parties, as van der Brug et al. (2007) suggest; some voters who have mentioned tactical oriented motives have voted for the party they like most. Still, most

¹⁹ The feeling thermometer is based on the question: "This question concerns how much one like or dislikes a party. Where would you personally place the different parties on the following scale?"(Q28W34, Q33W35, Q33W36; Q80W37) Scale from (-5)–(+5), where (-5) stands for "strongly dislike", (0) for "indifferent" and (+5) for "like very much". (Den här frågan gäller hur mycket man gillar respektive ogillar de politiska partierna. Var skulle du personligen vilja placera de olika partierna på nedanstående skala?) (-5) "ogillar starkt", (0) "varken ogillar eller gillar", (+5) "gillar starkt".) All major parliamentary parties were evaluated, as well as the Sweden Democrats, the Pirate Party and the Feminist Party. If the respondent answered the question at several stages, the rating closest to the election was used.

²⁰ To be coded as strict tactical, the voter must have mentioned tactical motives *and* have voted for another party than the one given the highest score on the feeling thermometer (se footnote 19), or have had tied first political preferences (two or more most preferred parties were given the same score).

answers (89) were coded as strict tactical, i.e. tactical aspects have been crucial for vote choice. In the strict coding of tactical voting the tactical considerations-answers were included in the non-tactical voting category (Table 4).

Table 4
Presence of strict tactical voting²¹

Category	N
Strict tactical	89
Non-tactical	891
Total	980

Data: Q2W38 and feeling thermometer ratings weeks 34–37, 2010 Internet campaign panel, MOD

6. Explaining the presence of tactical voting

This part of the study aims at explaining the presence of tactical voting. The starting point is the rational voting theory of Downs (1957).

6.1 Theoretical expectations

According to Downs, tactical voters are pragmatic and see elections as a selection of government. They are outcome-oriented, thinking about the consequences of voting. Furthermore, tactical considerations are supposed to be more short-term and election specific than ideological attitudes. Tactical voters should therefore decide late what party to vote for, and might switch vote intentions during the election campaign.²² In a proportional representation system context, which is complicated from a strategic point of view, tactical voters should also be relatively aware of political matters.

6.2 Logistic regression method

To test the theoretical expectations of tactical voting, logistic regression analysis was used. This is a useful method in this case since the dependent variable tactical voting can be constructed as a dichotomous variable, distinguishing tactical answers from non-tactical answers. Logistic regression has many similarities with linear regression: it reveals significant relationships between variables and the signs of the coefficients are interpreted in the same

²¹ The frequencies should not be seen as representative for the Swedish electorate, due to the composition of the Internet campaign panel.

²² If the tactical considerations are oriented towards the strength of the party the preferences might be more stable.

way as in linear regression (positive or negative relationship). However there is no measurement of explained variance such as the R^2 -value in the linear regression (Hamilton 1992:233; Agresti 2002:226). Moreover, the logistic equation is non-linear and the beta-values are associated with probabilities instead of linear effects. A useful way to compare the strength of effects in logistic regression is the Odds Ratio (OR). The odds ratio is an exponential function of the beta value, and reveals how much the odds change if the value of the variable increases or decreases one scale step (Hamilton 1992:231; Hosmer & Lemeshow 2000:49). Other things being equal, the odds that an individual gets value 1 on the dependent variable are multiplied by the odds ratio.²³

For the regression analyses two dependent variables were created. The first variable distinguishes non-tactical motives from tactical considerations. The second distinguishes strict tactical voting from non-tactical voting. The first variable explains the presence of tactical considerations among voters, whereas the second explains the presence of strict tactical voting. The effects are supposed to be the same, though more pronounced for strict tactical voting.

6.3 Independent variables

Two main groups of independent variables were constructed in line with the theoretical expectations. The first group is related to hesitation about what party to choose and tactical considerations as a short term factor. The second group is related to political interest and awareness. Furthermore some relevant background factors are included. All variables are chosen in regard to factors previous research argues to be related to tactical voting.

The indicators are based on voters' self-reported answers in the Internet campaign panel. A reservation with this measurement is that it is not certain that these answers are valid indicators of the factors they are supposed to reveal. However, it is hard to find a more objective way of measuring hesitation-related factors, for example difficulties to decide what party to vote for (see below). This is related to a decision process, and in an election context such a process is difficult to reveal without voters' own statements. This study furthermore benefits from the fact that most indicators are measured directly before or after the general election.

²³ For dichotomous variables $OR=e^b$, where the constant $e \approx 2,718$. To make the effects of multi-step variables comparable with dummies, the b-value could be multiplied with the number of scale steps; $OR=e^{(b \times \text{number of scale steps})}$ (Hamilton 1992:231).

6.3.1 Hesitation

In line with the ideas on tactical considerations as short term factor, three indicators of hesitation and late voting decision were included in the analysis. The first hesitation-indicator to test is number of parties in *party consideration set* the weeks before the election (discussion on party sets see e.g. Oscarsson & Holmberg 2008:160 and Steenbergen & Hangartner 2008). If choosing between two or more different parties at a late stage, the voter should be more sensitive to tactical considerations.²⁴ To create this variable the following question was used:

*Which party or parties do you consider voting for in the general election?*²⁵

If the respondent considered voting for two parties or more during the three-week period directly before the election, preferences were considered as tied. If the respondent ticked only one party only during the same period, preferences were considered as clear.²⁶ As a second step, voters who considered three or more parties the weeks before the election were distinguished from others. This is thus an even more pronounced indicator of hesitation between parties.²⁷

The second measurement of hesitation focuses on difficulties to arrive at a voting decision. This “hard to vote” -variable was operationalized with the following question

*How difficult or easy did you find it to decide what party to vote for in this year’s election?*²⁸

The answers distinguished those who found it very easy to vote from those who found it hard to choose a party to vote for.

²⁴ Or alternatively: tactical voters may wait longer before they decide what party to vote for.

²⁵ “Vilket eller vilka partier överväger du att rösta på i riksdagsvalet 2010?” Q35W35, Q35W36, Q82W37

²⁶ The respondent could tick for any of the main parties or other parties. The ones who ticked for two alternatives or more were coded as 1 (tied preferences), whereas the ones who ticked for only one party was coded as 0 (clear preferences). The responses on the consideration-question in weeks 35, 36 and 37 were combined into a single variable. It thus distinguishes those who have a clear party choice 1–3 weeks before the election from those who hesitate between two or more parties during the same period. If the respondent answered the question on party consideration more than once, it is the answer closest to the election that is included. (This variable was technically constructed in SPSS 18.0 with some advice from Henrik Lindholm, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg and Anders Sundell, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg.)

²⁷ Questions and response alternatives see footnotes 26 and 27. Here, respondents who ticked three parties or more was coded as 1, others as 0.

²⁸ “Hur lätt eller svårt tycker du att det var att bestämma dig för hur du skulle rösta i årets riksdagsval?” Q11W38. Those who answered “very easy” were coded as 0, “quite easy” 1, “quite difficult” 2, “very difficult” 3 (“mycket lätt” 0; “ganska lätt” 1; “ganska svårt” 2; “mycket svårt” 3.) .

The third measurement of hesitation is late voting decision. In line with Downs's theory, a wait-and-see-approach should be widespread among tactical voters. To reveal if tactical voters decide late what party to vote for, the following question in the post-election stage was used:

*When did you finally decide what party to vote for in this year's general election?*²⁹

Here voters who said they decided the party choice on the Election Day or the last week before the election were distinguished from those who decided earlier.^{30 31}

6.3.2 Center-position

A fourth indicator of an in-between position between parties is center-position on the political left-right scale.³² At the one hand, a position near the center of the scale should make more room for tactical considerations: there are more alternatives for a voter in the center and tactical considerations may be a tiebreaker. At the other hand, the purpose of tactical voting in PR-system may also be to help a party pass the threshold to the parliament. Such considerations might be to the left as well as to the right. Therefore impact of center-position is uncertain.

6.3.3 Political sophistication

Political sophistication means that the voter is interested in and well aware about political matters (see e.g. van der Brug et al. 2007:127). Tactical voting in PR-systems is supposed to be related to such knowledge, since the party system is complicated from a strategic point of view. To reveal political sophistication three measurements were used: level of education³³;

²⁹ "När bestämde du dig för vilket parti du skulle rösta på i årets riksdagsval?" Q6W38. Those who answered they decided what party to vote for at the polling station, on the Election day or the last week before the election were coded as 1, those who said they made the decision earlier in the autumn or had decided since long were coded as 0.

³⁰ Some research suggests that voters tend to say they decided what party to vote for later than they in fact did (Oscarsson & Dahlberg 2009). This self-reporting bias should though be evenly spread among voters, why the general effect should be valid.

³¹ It would also have been relevant to include a measurement of party-identification. However, a question on party-identifications was only given to a small number of respondents in the panel.

³² To create this variable, answers from the recruitment questionnaire to the 2010 Internet campaign panel were used (Q28). There all respondents were asked to place themselves on a political left-right-scale from 0 – 10. Those who placed themselves at position 4, 5 or 6 were coded as center-position (1), others as 0.

³³ This variable was created using Q26 on highest education level in the e-panel recruitment questionnaire. Those who answered primary school (grundskola; categories 1+2) were coded as 0, secondary school/high school (gymnasium; categories 3+4) were coded as 1, some kind of higher education (eftergymnasial; categories 5+6) were coded as 3, and higher education degree or doctoral degree (categories 7+8) were coded

political interest³⁴ and factual political knowledge.³⁵³⁶ A high level of education should make the voter more cognitively skilled in general. Political interest should encourage the voter to discuss and calculate about the election. Sophisticated voters should also have a high degree of factual political knowledge: this kind of knowledge reveals that the voter is informed and well aware of politics in the specific context.

6.3.4 Age and gender

The background factors age³⁷ and gender³⁸ are also included in the analysis. Age is supposed to be slightly negatively related to tactical voting in general. During the last decades the party political identities have become less clear (Dalton 2008; van der Eijk & Franklin 2009). Younger cohorts may therefore use tactical considerations more than older people. Gender is included as a control variable.

as 4. Some veterans in the panels did not answer this question in the 2010-panel, but in the 2006 general election e-panel. These answers were also included.

³⁴ Political interest was measured using the question: “How interested are you in politics in general?” (“Hur intresserad är du i allmänhet av politik?”) (Q24W38). The answers “not at all interested” and “not very interested” were coded as 0, “quite interested” as 1 and “very interested” as 2. (“inte alls intresserad” och “inte särskilt intresserad” 0; ganska intresserad 1; mycket intresserad 2.)

³⁵ To reveal political knowledge question 36:1-9 in week 36 was used “What parties do the following politicians belong to?”. (“Vilka partier tillhör följande personer?”)The respondent had to name the party affiliation for some more or less well known politicians: Anders Borg (m), Fredrik Federley (c), Birgitta Olsson (fp), Gunilla Carlsson (m), Leif Pagrotsky (s), Mikaela Valtersson (mp), Alice Åström (vp), Mats Odell (kd) and Tomas Östros (s). Those who got all candidates right were coded as 2, those who got 1–2 mistakes as 1, others as 0.

³⁶ In the multivariate analyses the political knowledge and political interest variables were collapsed into the variable political awareness. Questions and codings, see footnotes 34 and 35. The collapsed variable political awareness gives equal weight to the interest and knowledge measurements, giving a variable ranging from 0–4.

³⁷ Age was measured using the birth year values in the recruitment questionnaire (Q3). Those who were born 1988–1992 were coded 0, 1983–1987 1; 1978–1982 2; 1973–1977 3; 1968–1972 4; 1963–1967 5; 1958–1962 6; 1953–1957 7; 1948–1952 8; 1943–1947 9; 1938–1942 10; 1933–1937 11; 1926–1932 12. Some veterans who participated in the 2006 panel did not answer the birth year question 2010. For these respondents the values from the 2006 panel were included.

³⁸ The gender variable was created using question 2 in the recruitment stage: “Are you a woman or a man?” (Är du kvinna eller man?) Woman was coded as 0, man as 1. For some veterans, answers from the 2006 panel were included (see footnote 33).

6.4 Results

6.4.1 Bivariate analyses

All independent variables were first tested in bivariate logistic regression analyses (Tables 5 and 6). The effect of the first hesitation indicator, tied preferences, is significantly related to tactical voting, as expected. Also the more pronounced measurement of hesitation, three or more parties in consideration set, is related to tactical voting. This confirms the expectation that tactical voting is related to considering several parties at a late stage. The second hesitation variable, difficult to decide what party to vote for, is also significantly related to tactical voting. In line with previous results, the third hesitation indicator, late voting decision, also has a significant effect on tactical voting.

The hesitation variable having the strongest impact is tied preferences, with the odds ratio 5.³⁹ That means that the odds to be a tactical voter are five times higher for a person with tied preferences than for a person with stable party preferences, other things being equal.

Of the sophistication-related variables, education has a significant relationship to tactical voting. Age is also related to tactical voting: young people tend to vote tactically to a higher degree than older ones.⁴⁰

³⁹ For dichotomous variables the odds ratio (OR) = e^b ($e \approx 2,718$). Here OR = $e^{(1,574)} = 4,8$ (b-value from tied preferences Table 4).

⁴⁰ The relationships between age and tactical considerations and strict tactical voting are significant and similar when using a strict coding of age (one year=one scale step) instead of age groups. In this investigation there are however very few very old respondents, why the division in somewhat broader age groups was considered relevant.

Table 5

Bivariate logistic regression analyses of the relationship between hesitation, political sophistication and tactical considerations

	tactical considerations	OR ⁴¹	N
tied preferences (0-1)	+1,574*** (0,284)	4,8	860
several preferences (0-1)	+1,089*** (0,224)	3,0	860
difficult decide (0-3)	+0,450*** (0,125)	3,9	842
late decision (0-1)	+1,292*** (0,165)	3,6	1719
center-position (0-1)	+0,120 (0,204)		1417
education (0-4)	+0,231* (0,101)	2,5	1653
political interest (0-2)	+0,074 (0,125)		1707
political knowledge (0-2)	+0,040 (0,108)		1367
age (0-12)	-0,120*** (0,033)	4,2	1413
gender (0-1)	-0,014 (0,168)		1650

Note: The dependent variable tactical considerations is coded 1 for respondents who mentioned tactical reasons as motive for vote choice, 0 for non-tactical answers. Standard-errors are in parentheses. Estimations performed using SPSS version 18.0. * p< .05 **p<0.01 ***p< .001

Data: The 2006 & 2010 Internet campaign panels (E-panels), MOD, University of Gothenburg 2010

As expected, the effects of hesitation, education and age are somewhat stronger on strict tactical voting (Table 6). Especially the effect of education is more pronounced. This indicates that political sophistication is somewhat more related to strict tactical voting than to tactical considerations in general. Also the effect of age is stronger. The odds ratio for the extreme values is 6, which means that the odds to vote strict tactically are six times higher for a 20-year-old than for an 80-year-old person, other things being equal.⁴²

⁴¹ OR = odds ratio. For dichotomous variables $OR=e^b$ ($e \approx 2,718$). For multi-step variables the b-values are multiplied with the number of scale steps: $OR= e^{(b \times \text{number of scale steps})}$ (Hamilton 1992:231). All odds ratios are calculated with positive beta-values, to make the effects more intuitively comparable.

⁴² $OR= e^{(b \times \text{number of scale steps})} = e^{(0,145 \times 12)} = 5,7$ (beta-value for age from Table 6.). The sign of the beta-value is here given positive sign since this makes the OR more intuitively interpretable. The negative sign means that the chances to be a strict tactical voter decrease with age. The chances that an 80-year old is a tactical voter are six times lower than for a 20-year-old. Division in age groups (0-12), see footnote 37.

Table 6

Bivariate logistic regression analyses of the relationship between hesitation, political sophistication and strict tactical voting

	strict tactical voting	OR⁴³	N
tied preferences (0-1)	+1,643*** (0,423)	5,2	453
several preferences (0-1)	+1,121*** (0,320)	3,1	453
difficult decide (0-3)	+0,490** (0,171)	4,3	474
late decision (0-1)	+1,355*** (0,227)	3,9	977
center-position (0-1)	+0,093 (0,292)		798
education (0-4)	+0,455** (0,153)	6,2	939
political interest (0-2)	+0,154 (0,177)		968
political knowledge (0-2)	+0,125 (0,143)		863
age (0-12)	-0,145** (0,046)	5,7	793
gender (0-1)	-0,323 (0,226)		942

Note: The dependent variable strict tactical voting is coded 1 for respondents who mentioned tactical reasons as motive for vote choice and voted for another party than the most preferred or an equally preferred party, 0 for all other voters. Standard-errors are in parentheses. Estimations performed using SPSS version 18.0. * p< .05
 p<0.01 *p< .001

Data: The 2006 & 2010 Internet campaign panels (E-panelen), MOD, University of Gothenburg 2010

The results above show that all hesitation-related variables have a considerable impact on tactical voting. This confirms the expectation that tactical considerations are short term and election specific.

⁴³ Formula see footnote 41.

Linear regression analyses show that these variables are strongly inter-related.⁴⁴ Several parties in consideration set, as well as difficulties to decide what party to vote for, could be supposed to be precedent variables to late voting decision:

several parties in consideration set → late voting decision



difficulties to decide → late voting decision

Age is also significantly related to all hesitation-variables. The relationship between age and tied preferences is the strongest.⁴⁵ This implies that age is a precedent variable to hesitation about what party to choose, which in turn is related to tactical voting:

young age → hesitation → tactical voting

6.4.2 Multivariate analyses

To reveal possible interaction-effects, the relationships were also tested in multivariate analyses. Here late voting decision was chosen as the indicator of tactical considerations as short term factor, to avoid problems with multicollinearity and get a decent number of valid responses.⁴⁶ Furthermore political interest and political knowledge were collapsed into the single variable *political awareness*, since these factors are also inter-related.⁴⁷

In the multivariate analyses the general patterns remain, but some new tendencies appear (Table 7). First of all, political awareness is here significantly related to strict tactical voting. This implies that if a voter who hesitates between different parties is also politically sophisticated, tactical aspects tend to be relatively influential for the voter to arrive at a final

⁴⁴ Difficulties to decide and late voting decision have the strongest interrelationship ($R^2 = 0,37$).

⁴⁵ $R^2 = 0.02$; $p < 0.001$. In this linear regression analysis age was seen as the dependent variable since tied preferences is a dichotomous variable and cannot be used as the dependent variable in a linear regression (unless the independent variable also is a dichotomous variable).

⁴⁶ This resulted in 105 tactical respondents in the multivariate tactical considerations-analysis, and 59 strict tactical respondents in the multivariate strict tactical analysis. If any of the other hesitation variables had been chosen the sample would have been half as large, and have given less statistically reliable results.

⁴⁷ Political interest and knowledge are given the same weight in the collapsed variable. The collapsed variable has therefore 4 scale steps (instead of 2 for each of the separate variables).

voting decision.⁴⁸ This result confirms that political sophistication is somewhat related to tactical voting. On the other hand, the significant relationship between education and strict tactical voting disappears in the multivariate analyses. This could be due to the fact that education is significantly related to all other independent variables except center-position and to the reduced sample.⁴⁹ The significant effect of young age remains and is stronger for strict tactical voting.

Table 7

Multivariate logistic regression analyses of the relationship between hesitation, political sophistication and tactical voting

	tactical considerations	OR ⁵⁰	strict tactical voting	OR
late decision (0-1)	+1,029*** (0,217)	2,8	+1,104*** (0,291)	3,0
center-position (0-1)	+0,097 (0,239)		+0,090 (0,328)	
education (0-4)	+0,117 (0,133)		+0,198 (0,186)	
political awareness (0-4)	+0,107 (0,089)		+0,280* (0,124)	3,1
age (0-12)	-0,113** (0,040)	3,9	-0,137* (0,054)	5,2
gender (0-1)	0,237 (0,224)		-0,361 (0,290)	
constant	-2,728*** (0,437)		-3,002*** (0,591)	
N	1080		677	

Note: The dependent variable tactical considerations is coded 1 for respondents who mentioned tactical reasons as motive for vote choice, 0 for non-tactical answers. The dependent variable strict tactical voting is coded 1 for respondents who mentioned tactical reasons as motive for vote choice and voted for another party than the most preferred or an equally preferred party, 0 for all other voters. Standard-errors are in parentheses. Estimations performed using SPSS version 18.0. * p< .05 **p<0.01 ***p< .001

Data: The 2006 & 2010 Internet campaign panels (E-panelen), MOD, University of Gothenburg 2010

⁴⁸ For less sophisticated voters with tied preferences, factors as specific candidates, trends or random could be supposed to be more influential.

⁴⁹ Regression analysis shows for example that there is a positive significant relationship between education and late voting decision. The reduced sample may have weakened the effect of education since some tactical voters with high education may not have been given or answered all variable related questions, and have therefore been excluded from the multivariate analyses.

⁵⁰ Formula see footnote 41.

6.4.3 Summary of results

The results confirm the expectation that tactical voters consider voting for different parties and wait long before they make their final choice. Young age is also related to tactical voting. This indicates that younger people use tactical considerations to a higher extent than older ones. Furthermore there is a relationship between political sophistication and tactical voting. If a young voter who hesitates between different parties is also very aware of political matters, the chances increase that he or she votes tactically.

7. Conclusions

Tactical voters have in common that they take the governmental outcome into account when deciding what party to vote for. This thesis shows that Downs's (1957) theory on rational voting can be applied on a contemporary PR-context. Thinking and calculating about the governmental outcome are present also here. There are many different ways of reasoning tactically. There are considerations related to political coalitions, the size of the party, the party's ideological development or diversity of the party system. The two latter incentives could be seen as future oriented and are not obviously tactical. The definition of future oriented tactical considerations has been much elaborated in this study. One conclusion is that protest-voting against the society as a whole should not be regarded as tactical. To be considered as tactical, it takes more party-specified motives and an expressed wished direction.

The theoretical expectation that tactical voting is related to considering different parties at a late stage was greatly confirmed. In line with expectations, tactical considerations thus seem to function as a short term tie-breaker:

hesitation → tactical considerations (tactics as tie-breaker) (1)

On the other hand, it could also be argued that tactically oriented voters in general have a wait and see-approach; they await the development of the political arena before they decide what party to vote for. From this perspective it is a tactical mentality rather than uncertainty that explains the relationship between hesitation and tactical voting. According to this interpretation, the causal direction is reversed:

tactical considerations → hesitation (wait-and-see-approach) (2)

It is though reasonable to see tactical voting as the result of both these dynamics. The tactical voter may both be tied between different parties and play a waiting game:

3) hesitation ↔ tactical considerations (tactical dynamics) (3)

To see if tactical voting is above all the result of a conscious wait and see approach, or genuine uncertainty about party choice, would require further research. It would for example be possible to use more specified surveys or in-depth interviews to reveal tactical voters reasoning.

Tactical voting also seems to be related to young age. This confirms the expectation that younger cohorts use tactical considerations to a stronger degree than older ones. There are a couple of possible explanations. First of all, young people are in general less tied to parties. Therefore they hesitate more between alternatives, and become more sensitive to tactical considerations – as the perspective “tactics as tie-breaker” (1) suggests. On the other hand, young voters may in general have a more instrumentally oriented mentality than older people. This could be argued to be associated with the other tactical dynamic outlined above: playing a waiting game (2). These tendencies could also be combined, as the third perspective tactical dynamics suggests.

Moreover, voting trends could influence young people more than older ones. In this particular election, there was a quite lively public discussion on voting tactically. This could have influenced young voters’ final vote decision more than older people’s vote choice. To see if the relationship between young age and tactical voting holds for other elections, it should be tested in future research.

8. Discussion

Tactical voting is rational in the sense that the voter thinks one step further: about the governmental consequences of voting. As governments are central actors in society, Downs’s view of rational voting as selections of governments is relevant. Therefore clear government alternatives could be seen as beneficial, since it makes it easier for voters to consider the outcome of elections. On the other hand, if having a broader view of political society than formation of governments, Downs’s theory of rational voting is too restrictive. A voter might in fact find it more important to express a belonging or strengthen non-governmental channels, than to affect the selection of government. Then such voting could be rational for

the specific voter. Downs's voting theory, with exclusive focus on voting as selection of government, is therefore a somewhat limited notion of voting rationality.

Downs also has difficulties to integrate future oriented rational voting in the analysis. In the chapter on voting under coalition governments, the future oriented rational voter is regarded as an exception, and is not included in the general analysis (Downs 1957:145). There is thus ambiguity in the handling of future oriented rationality. Short-term rationality is obviously easier to grasp.

Downs's notion of voting rationality clearly has limitations. Still it is relevant, and apparently present among voters. This study shows that tactical reasoning is especially common among young people with loose ties to the parties. Therefore tactical considerations may become more pronounced in the future. What would be the systemic consequences of a higher degree of tactical voting are not evident. It could lead to political stability, if the voter adjusts the vote according to proposed parliamentary alternatives. If voters on the other hand are more guided by future oriented tactical considerations, the party system might become less stable. This could make it harder for governments to implement and legitimize political reforms. At the same time, future oriented tactical voting could be seen as a (positive) democratic control mechanism.

This study applied Downs's view of rational voting (1957) on a contemporary PR-electoral context. Downs's reasoning was found to be relevant. The study defined tactical voting as voting taking governmental consequences into account and let this decide vote choice. Tactical considerations could be both short term, focusing on the next-coming formation of government, and future oriented. The inclusion of future oriented tactical motives should be further elaborated in future research.

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Data

The Swedish general election Internet Campaign Panels 2006 & 2010 (E-panelen 2006 & 2010). Multidisciplinary research on Opinion and Democracy institute (MOD), University of Gothenburg

Appendix

Coding of tactical considerations

Short term tactical

vote

- for a party represented in the parliament to make the vote count, e.g. to hinder a disliked party/government alternative from getting influence (impact-voting)
- for a governmental alternative that is considered to be strong ,e.g. to hinder a disliked alternative (government-voting)
- adjusted to present or probable governmental coalitions (relationship-voting)
- for a large party considered to be influential (big party-voting)
- to help a party pass the threshold to the parliament (pass-the-threshold-voting)

Future oriented tactical

vote to

- signal an ideological direction to a favorite party, to protest against its recent development (signaling-voting)
- support a small party with chances to improve, to increase diversity (diversity-voting)

To be included in the expressive tactical category the answer *also* has to either include the word

1) “tactical” or “strategic”

or

2) have a reference to

- a negative development of a party that has been voted for in recent elections
- the importance of diversity in the party system

General tactical

“tactical” or “strategic” is mentioned without further explanation,

such as

“strategy”