

RESEARCH NOTE/NOTE DE RECHERCHE

## Why Bother? Supporters of Locally Weaker Parties Are Less Likely to Vote or to Vote Sincerely

Fred Cutler<sup>1\*</sup> , Alexandre Rivard<sup>1</sup> and Antony Hodgson<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1, Canada and <sup>2</sup>Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of British Columbia, 2054-6250 Applied Science Lane, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4, Canada

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [fred.cutler@ubc.ca](mailto:fred.cutler@ubc.ca).

### Abstract

Voters are deterred from casting a vote and more likely to vote strategically if their preferred choice is less competitive in their electoral district. We use 2019 Canadian Election Study data to show that respondents' answers to a "how likely are you to vote" question depend on their estimate of their preferred party's local chances of winning, relative to other parties. This deterrent effect on turnout from the competitiveness of a voter's preferred party is concentrated among certain parties (NDP, Green, People's Party of Canada). Under first-past-the-post (FPTP), voters with particular policy perspectives are systematically deterred from voting, relative to other voters. Furthermore, we find that despite supporters of all parties having an incentive to vote strategically if their party is outside the top two in the district, strategic voting is heavily concentrated among voters who prefer parties other than the nationally most competitive two parties.

### Résumé

Les électeurs sont dissuadés de voter et sont plus susceptibles de voter stratégiquement si leur choix préféré est moins compétitif dans leur circonscription électorale. Nous utilisons les données de l'Étude sur l'élection canadienne 2019 pour montrer que les réponses à la question « Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous susceptible de voter » dépendent de leur estimation des chances locales de victoire de leur parti préféré, par rapport aux autres partis. Cet effet dissuasif de la compétitivité du parti préféré de l'électeur sur le taux de participation est concentré dans certains partis (NPD, Verts, Parti populaire du Canada). Dans le cadre du système majoritaire uninominal à un tour (SMUT), les électeurs ayant des points de vue politiques particuliers sont systématiquement dissuadés de voter, par rapport aux autres électeurs. De plus, nous constatons que, même si les partisans de tous les partis sont incités à voter stratégiquement si leur parti n'est pas parmi les deux premiers dans la circonscription, le vote stratégique est fortement concentré parmi les électeurs qui préfèrent des partis autres que les deux partis les plus compétitifs au niveau national.

**Keywords:** electoral systems; elections; voting behaviour; turnout

**Mots-clés :** systèmes électoraux; élections; comportement de vote; taux de participation

Democratic equality is embodied in formal eligibility to vote, and eligible citizens can choose whether or not to exercise this right. But theorists and courts have rightly been concerned with the equality of the effect of each vote, which is a function of institutions, preferences and political geography (see Bickerton and Graham, 2020; Spitzer, 2018). The concern should be strongest in the case of the most ineffective votes: those that are not cast. And while insincere voting can be technically effective, it may not feel effective: it is surely less satisfying than voting one's true preference. Thus, the effective equality of democratic representation and citizens' satisfaction with it are likely threatened if a polity contains any systematic influences on behaviour that result in differential abstention or strategic voting by non-random sets of citizens. Voters who abstain or vote strategically have not had their preferences rendered through the electoral system in the same way as have voters who vote sincerely. This research note evaluates how abstention and strategic voting vary by party preference in Canada, using data from the federal election of 2019. Are non-voting and strategic voting more likely among citizens with certain political preferences?

There is a well-established link between electoral systems and turnout that works through the range and distinctiveness of the potential choices, along with the likelihood that a given vote will visibly translate into representation (see Wilford, 2017, and references therein). Voters prefer to make choices that correspond with their preferences (Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011) and to cast votes with a good prospect that representatives sharing those preferences will be elected (Bernauer and Vatter, 2011; Blais and Gélinau, 2007; Gallego et al., 2012: 159). As either of these two factors diminishes, voters see less and less point in taking the time and making the emotional and cognitive investment to cast a ballot. "Why bother?" they likely say. The other option to avoid a "wasted vote" is to vote strategically, so this research note considers both behaviours as suboptimal from the perspective of the voter. Our principal objective is to assess whether these behaviours are concentrated among identifiable political groups.

To our knowledge, there is no existing study that explicitly assesses the interaction of party preference and likelihood of voting for a winning local candidate on turnout at the level of individual voters. Most of the evidence for the claims mentioned above comes from the aggregate level, comparing levels of turnout across different electoral systems (Blais and Carty, 1990; Karp and Banducci, 1999; Banducci and Karp, 2009; Karp and Banducci, 2008; Söderlund, 2017; Blais and Aarts, 2006; Norris, 1997; Brockington, 2004; Vowles et al., 2017; Endersby et al., 2002; Arnold, 2018; Curini and Jou, 2016; Blais and Carty, 1991). Studies of Canadian and British elections show that riding competitiveness affects propensity to vote, but they use only the total competitiveness of the riding rather than voters' judgments about the relative competitiveness of their own preferred party (Johnston et al., 2007; Vowles et al., 2017; Maeda, 2016; but see Blais et al., 2018, which finds no effect in an experiment). That evidence does not indicate whether voters are deterred from voting because their own preferred party is less competitive. The contrast with studies of strategic voting is striking: many show that strategic voting is conditional on party preference and voters' judgments of their preferred party's competitive position.

Our results show that Canadians express a weaker intention to vote as their preferred party is less and less likely to win the local seat. This effect is, perhaps not surprisingly, distributed unequally in the aggregate across parties. We also show that strategic voting is more common among supporters of some parties than others, meaning that voters with preferences for more competitive parties are more likely to feel able to sincerely express their preferences than other voters.

We draw on the online 2019 Canadian Election Study (CES), with data from over 30,000 interviews (Stephenson *et al.*, 2020, 2021), using both pre- and post-election interviews.<sup>1</sup>

## Measurement of Turnout, Strategic Voting and Competitiveness

For our dependent variables, we need a measure of turnout and another of strategic voting. Our key independent variable is the competitiveness of the voter's chosen or preferred party.

### *Measuring turnout*

Measurement of turnout with surveys is fraught, and there is no validated measure available in Canada (Achen, 2019). Turnout measured by post-election survey responses exceeds government-reported turnout figures by such a huge margin that survey measures of turnout are basically useless. In 2019, while Elections Canada reported 67 per cent turnout, 92.5 per cent of CES post-election respondents said they had voted. This poses a problem for estimating the proportion of voters who fail to vote as a result of their preferred party's competitiveness.

The source of the bias is that political interest and engagement drive both voting and participation in the survey, as well as reluctance to report that one has not voted (for example, due to the sense that one ought to have voted). The statistical problem is that among voters whose preferred party has little hope of winning, the ones who get through to the post-election interview will have unmeasured characteristics that make them more likely to appear in the post-election sample and to report having voted (whether truthfully or not). This is apparent from the paucity of those who say they are certain not to vote in the sample—less than 2 per cent—and the fact that among those respondents who claimed in the initial survey to be certain not to vote and nevertheless participated in the post-election interview, 20 per cent report having voted.

We therefore rely on a pre-election question, which asks voters to say how likely they are to vote (hereafter, LV): "On election day, how likely are you to vote: Certain, Likely, Unlikely, or Certain not to vote?" It is similarly biased, but likely less so. The effect of political interest on recruitment to this first survey is weaker than its effect on attrition from pre- to post-election. And the question itself, posed prior to the election and worded to diminish a social-desirability effect, gives us more variation in degree of commitment to voting than the post-election vote report. Unweighted response percentages for the CES's online respondents are shown in [Table 1](#).

While these are only verbal representations of voters' likely behaviour, the distribution of this variable seems far closer to the official 67 per cent turnout. Given what is known about survey recruitment biases, we surmise that this distribution is still biased in a more politically engaged, duty-bound direction as compared with the

**Table 1.** 2019 Canadian Election Study (CES) Pre-election Reported Likelihood of Voting on Election Day

2019 CES likelihood of voting	%	N
Certain to vote	78	26,090
Likely to vote	16	5,474
Unlikely to vote	4	1,303
Certain not to vote	2	589
N		33,456

Source: 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-campaign wave.

true population distribution of this LV variable. The bias is important because it is among those who are less than certain to vote that we should expect stronger effects of preferred-party competitiveness. If we estimate effects with these categories under-represented, we will effectively underestimate the true effect in the population. There are almost certainly more of the less-than-certain voters in the population than among CES survey respondents, so we still expect our findings to be conservative estimates of the competitiveness effect on turnout. By contrast, we might overestimate the effect of strategic voting because it is more common among the most politically engaged (Merolla and Stephenson, 2007).

We expect that pre-election statements about the likelihood of actually voting are correlated with voters' sense of duty to vote and that this is relevant for our analysis given the powerful effect of duty not just on voting but as a moderator of the influence of other determinants of turnout. As Blais and Achen (2018) argue, any influences on the costs and benefits of voting are likely to have a much stronger impact on those who do not consider voting a duty. Clearly, participation in a survey is more common among those who are politically engaged and feel that voting is a duty. This will produce an underestimate of the effect of party competitiveness on turnout because the sample has fewer people who are willing to say "why bother to vote?" than there are in the population. We cannot correct for this bias; we can only note it. We therefore conduct some analyses differentiated by respondents who consider voting a duty versus a choice. We always find much stronger effects of competitiveness on turnout among those who consider voting a choice. Table 2 shows the distribution of the duty-versus-choice question for each of the likelihood-of-voting categories.

### Measurement of Voters' Preferred Party

Because we are concerned with the preferred party of people who were less likely to vote, it is unfortunate that the 2019 CES did not ask a vote intention question to voters who said they were certain not to vote. So we generally use the straightforward vote intention questions, but we also construct a measure of voters' preferred party (PP) so we can include the "certain not to vote" respondents in some analyses. The PP measure is also key to our determination of who has voted strategically, as in other studies of strategic voting (Daoust and Bol, 2020). We infer voters' PP based on their responses to the party and leader feeling thermometers; 78 per cent of respondents gave consistent responses in that their preferred leader was from the

**Table 2.** Voting as Duty versus Choice, by Pre-election Likelihood of Voting

Likelihood of Voting	% saying voting is a duty not a choice	<i>N</i>
Certain to vote	81	25,747
Likely to vote	41	5,191
Unlikely to vote	13	1,184
Certain not to vote	18	513
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>32,635</b>

Source: 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-campaign wave.

same party as their preferred party. When we use our calculated PP measure, we omit the 22 per cent of voters whose preferred party and leader were not consistent.

### **Measurement of strategic voting**

In the single-member plurality electoral context, strategic voting (SV) refers to a voter not casting a vote for their sincerely most-preferred party or candidate, typically because they feel that their preferred option has no chance of winning. Instead, the voter chooses another option that they feel has a better chance of defeating a lesser-liked alternative, avoiding a so-called wasted vote. We categorize a voter as intending to vote or having voted strategically if their vote intent or their reported vote

1. does not match their preferred party, *and*
2. the voter's preferred party is outside the top two in the chances of winning the district, *and*
3. the party they intend to vote for or did vote for was placed in their estimate of the top two parties' chances locally.

Using this definition, we find strategic voting by 7.1 per cent of post-election respondents (who voted and who ranked the parties' chances of winning the local seat). This is above the level detected in many studies of plurality elections, particularly in Canada, where estimates have ranged from 2 per cent to 5 per cent (Blais, 2002; Blais et al., 2009; Blais and Gschwend, 2010; Blais, 2004; Blais et al., 2001; Daoust and Bol, 2020; Merolla and Stephenson, 2007). However, those estimates mostly pre-date the emergence of a competitive Green Party. Below, we show that voters who preferred the Greens and the People's Party of Canada (PPC) made up 60 per cent of strategic voters in 2019, such that the rate of strategic voting by those who prefer one of the other four parties (Liberal, Conservative, New Democratic Party [NDP], Bloc Québécois [BQ]) closely matches previous estimates.

### **Measuring the Competitiveness of the Voter's Party**

For our key independent variable, the CES asked voters to estimate the chances that each party would win the local seat—a subjective measure of party competitiveness. The CES also identifies respondents' electoral district, so we are also able to assign an objective measure of the parties' competitiveness based on previous election

results. We use the subjective measure more heavily, but the two are closely linked despite wishful thinking in voters' forecasts. Blais and Bodet (2006) showed a strong link between the results from the previous election and voters' perceptions of their party's local chances in the present one.

The subjective measures use a question asking for the voter's raw estimate of the chances of each party winning the riding, on a 0 to 100 scale.<sup>2</sup> For a given respondent, we calculate the ranked chance for each party. Our  $C_{\text{subj}}$  score is the "chances rank" a voter gave their intended vote party (IVP) or their preferred party. In most of what follows, we use the rank measure because it is a within-respondent measure that is not subject to inter-respondent differences in interpretation of the scale. Ranks are also the key factor in strategic voting.

Objective measures of competitiveness for an individual voter are based on the margin of loss or victory of the party in the riding in the previous (2015) election. While the previous election is an imperfect guide to the current situation in the riding, we believe it is a good proxy for the information most voters have about the relative chances of each party, and it is certainly a standard variable included in studies of strategic voting in first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems.

## Results

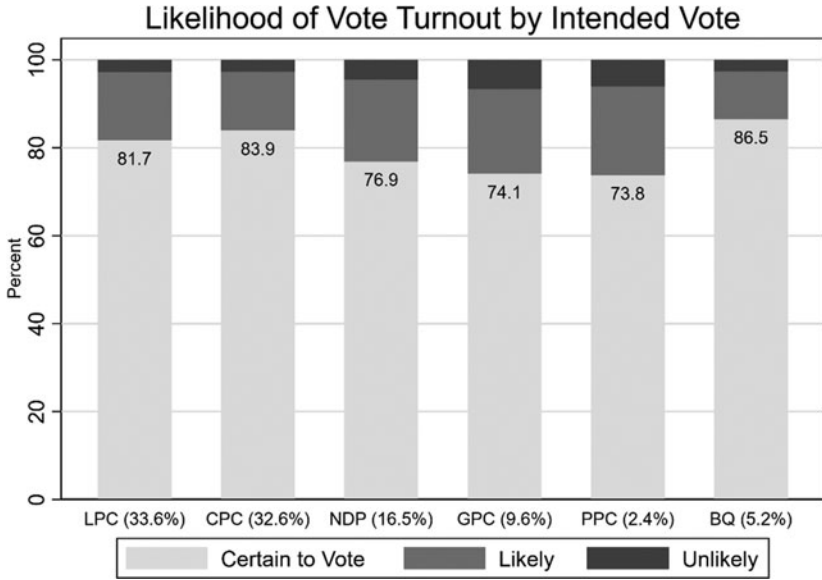
We begin with simple stacked bar graphs to show voters' responses to the LV question as a function of the subjective and objective measures of the competitiveness of the parties. We then use ordered logistic models to evaluate the effect of competitiveness on LV and evaluate the null hypothesis that the distribution of LV is independent of competitiveness.

### *Effects of competitiveness on intention to vote*

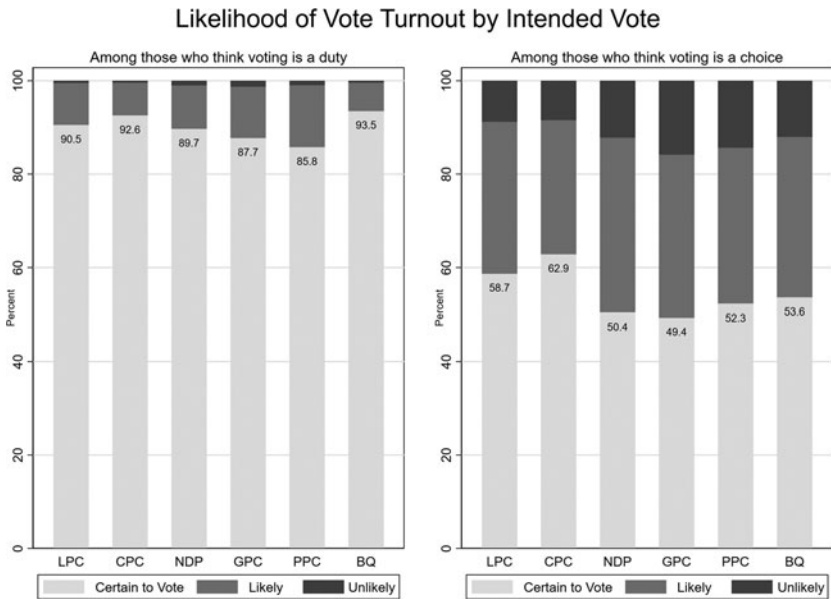
Figure 1 shows voters' LV by the party the voter intended to vote for. In this and the following two figures, all contrasts are statistically significant except for ones involving the PPC.<sup>3</sup> Recall that the vote intention question was not asked to those who said they were certain not to vote. The figure shows that supporters of the traditionally "third" or "minor" parties are significantly less likely to be certain to vote. (The BQ result is an exception that is, in fact, consistent with the patterns we see below, because where it contests seats, it finishes in the top two in a majority of ridings.)

Figure 2 separates respondents based on their response to the voting is a duty or a choice question. The differences in LV by party are markedly greater among voting-is-a-choice people (29 per cent of the sample), and the overall likelihood of voting is also markedly lower among choice voters (Blais and Achen, 2018). Voting-is-a-choice voters who support the NDP, Greens or PPC are about 10 per cent less likely to be certain to vote and about 6 per cent more likely to be unlikely to vote than comparable supporters of the Liberals and Conservatives.<sup>4</sup>

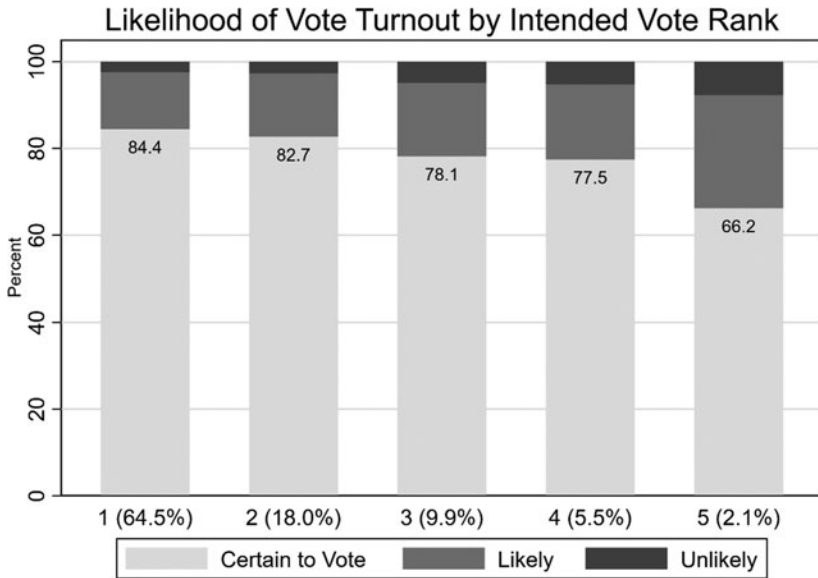
In the next figure (Figure 3), we show the same LV proportions but this time by the respondent's own ranking of the local chances of the party they intended to vote for (for example, an NDP voter who gave the Conservative Party of Canada [CPC] a local chance of winning of 60, Liberals 50 and NDP 30, would be classified into the rank 3 group). In Figure 3 we see a decline in "certain to



**Figure 1.** Likelihood of Vote Turnout by Intended Vote. *Source:* 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-campaign wave,  $N = 27,406$ . *Note:* Values in parentheses indicate the fraction of voters who expressed an intention to vote for the party.



**Figure 2.** Likelihood of Vote Turnout by Intended Vote among Those Who Think Voting Is a Duty and Those Who Think Voting Is a Choice *Source:* 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-campaign wave,  $N = 7,455$  and  $19,454$ .



**Figure 3.** Likelihood of Vote Turnout by Intended Vote Rank *Source:* 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-campaign wave,  $N = 23,031$ . *Note:* The numbers in parentheses indicate the percentage of voters who placed their intended vote choice at the corresponding rank of local chances of winning.

vote” from 84.4 per cent and 82.7 per cent for the top two parties down through 78.1 per cent, 77.5 per cent and 66.2 per cent for parties outside the top two.

Notice that [Figure 3](#) shows along the x-axis that close to 65 per cent of the sample thinks that their party has the best chance of winning the riding. This is clearly at odds with reality, given that only about 50 per cent of votes are cast for the candidate that ultimately wins the seat.<sup>5</sup> Voters’ overestimate of their party’s local chances probably reflects both a sample selection bias and widespread wishful thinking. We simply wish to emphasize that more Canadians should be in the bars toward the right side of these figures than there are in this sample (as indicated by percentage values in parentheses).

### **Statistical test of competitiveness on turnout**

In [Table 3](#) we present a formal statistical test of the differences visible in [Figure 3](#). The estimation is by ordered logit where LV is the dependent variable and the local chances rank of the voter’s preferred party enter as a series of dummy variables (estimates in [Appendix Table A1](#)).<sup>6</sup> [Table 3](#) shows contrasts in predicted probabilities of the “certain to vote” response between categories of the preferred party chances ranking. It indicates that there are strongly significant differences for all contrasts of ranks except second versus first, as one would expect, and for fourth versus third.

### **Local chances by party**

As we saw in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#), a voter’s likelihood of voting is related to their party choice. [Table 4](#) puts party preference and local chances rank together to show the



**Table 3.** Contrasts of Predicted Probabilities of “Certain to Vote” after Ordered Logit Estimation: LV as a function of binary categories of the local chances rank of the voter’s preferred party (PP)

PP rank		PP rank	Contrast of probabilities of “certain to vote” response	<i>p</i> <
5	vs.	1	−0.111	.000
5	vs.	2	−0.107	.000
5	vs.	4	−0.082	.000
5	vs.	3	−0.080	.000
3	vs.	1	−0.031	.001
4	vs.	1	−0.029	.009
3	vs.	2	−0.027	.001
4	vs.	2	−0.024	.008
2	vs.	1	−0.004	.576
4	vs.	3	−0.002	.432

**Table 4.** Average Chances Rank of Voter’s Preferred Party

Preferred party	Average rank	<i>N</i>
Conservative	1.3	6,612
Liberal	1.4	6,983
BQ	1.5	1,154
NDP	2.1	3,606
Green	2.9	2,342
PPC	2.8	604
<b>Total</b>		<b>21,301</b>

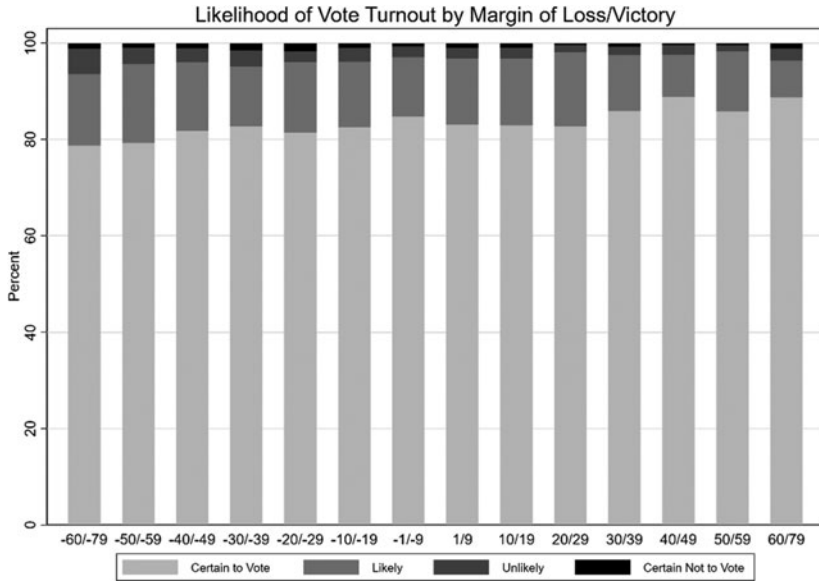
Source: 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-campaign wave.

intermediate step. We use voters’ preferred party to increase the number of respondents available, given that vote intention was not asked of those who said they were certain not to vote. Voters’ estimates of their preferred party’s relative local chances are, not surprisingly, unequally distributed across parties. In the aggregate, voters are quite accurately perceiving local competitiveness. Combined with the evidence that turnout (LV) is related to voters’ judgments of their preferred party’s chances, the *prima facie* indication is that voters of certain parties are less likely to vote than others merely as a function of the relative unpopularity of that choice.

### **The number of affected voters**

We estimate the total consequences of the effects observed above by calculating an estimated total number of voters who are moved from the “certain to vote” category to another category of the LV variable. We start by taking the total number of eligible voters in the 2019 Canadian federal election (25,939,742) and then multiply by the sum of each of the non-first-rank-of-PP proportions multiplied by the estimate associated with each rank for how much less likely voters whose PP has that rank are to vote as compared to those supporting first-rank parties (the 0.004, 0.031, 0.029, 0.111 entries in Table 3 above), which results in

$$25,939,742 * [(0.180 * 0.004) + (0.099 * 0.031) + (0.055 * 0.029) + (0.021 * 0.111)] =$$



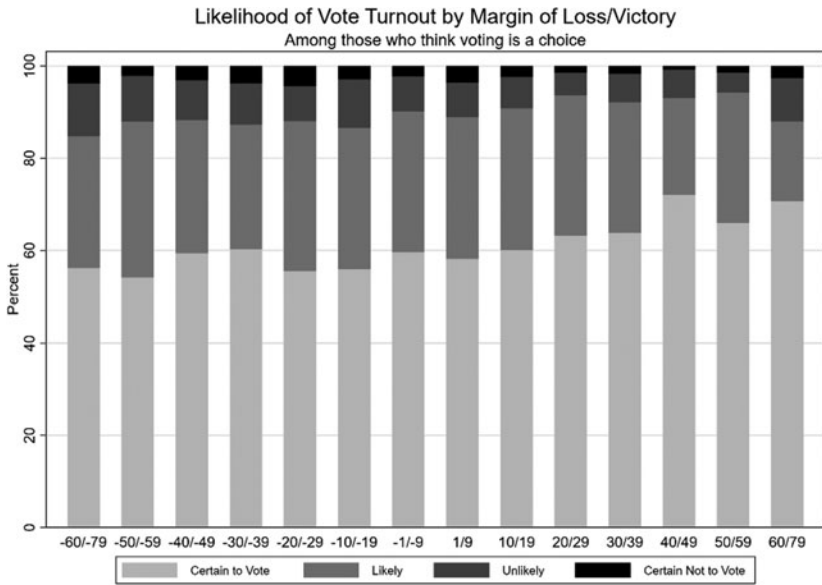
**Figure 4.** Likelihood of Vote Turnout by Margin of Loss/Victory *Source:* 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-campaign wave,  $N = 26,390$ . *Note:* The  $x$ -axis indicates margin of victory or loss (bands of 10, except outer bars).

**199,580** voters who would be “certain to vote” if they were to give their party the best chance of winning, but who are, in fact, less than certain to vote simply because they rank their party second through fifth.<sup>7</sup> While this number is less than 1 per cent of eligible voters, it is equivalent to roughly the voting-eligible population of two federal ridings.

### **Objective measures of competitiveness**

We now turn to corroborate the results so far with objective measures of competitiveness. Of voters who intended to vote for a party that had lost the riding in 2015, 82.5 per cent were certain to vote, compared with 85.7 per cent of those whose party had won the seat last time. (A  $t$ -test of this difference has a 95 per cent confidence interval of 2.3 per cent to 4.1 per cent.) This is a small difference, but we interpret this as potentially meaning that 3.2 per cent of the electorate were dissuaded from going to the polls simply because the party they prefer was likely not the best chance to win the current local race. And of course, this is almost certainly an underestimate of the true effect because of the biases we noted earlier.

To see this in more detail, in [Figure 4](#) we place voters in bins according to how the party they preferred in 2019 had done in 2015. The bins range from a loss of nearly 80 points (left side) to a victory with that same margin (right side). Losers by more than 70 points are Green Party supporters in Cape Breton–Canso or Red Deer–Mountain View; NDP and Conservative supporters in Bonavista–Burin–Trinity; and Liberals in Battle River–Crowfoot. The steady increase in the height of the light grey bars in [Figure 4](#) from about 78 per cent to 85 per cent shows that voters whose party



**Figure 5.** Likelihood of Vote Turnout by Margin of Loss/Victory among Those Who Think Voting Is a Choice *Source:* 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-campaign wave,  $N = 26,390$ . *Note:* The x-axis indicates margin of victory or loss (bands of 10, except outer bars).

lost by a large margin were less likely to vote. Notably, the wasted vote effect appears to operate here only on those whose party lost. Figure 5 shows a much steeper gradient, as expected, among voting-is-a-choice voters.

We test this relationship with an ordered logit model with an interaction to estimate effects among duty and choice voters separately. We find a significant effect whereby each additional (positive) 10 points on the margin of loss/victory pushes a voting-is-a-choice citizen out of the “certain to vote” category by nearly a full percentage point (0.92 points; see Appendix Table A2 for estimates).

**Effects of competitiveness on strategic voting**

We are concerned with strategic voting in this research note because we see it as the other of voters’ two possible responses to their preferred party being locally uncompetitive—that is, if they decide not to vote for that preferred party. While non-voting is probably of greater normative concern, casting a vote strategically is also suboptimal from a citizen’s perspective, as it is surely less satisfying than voting one’s first preference (Singh, 2014).

For some voters, a rational response to Canada’s FPTP system will be to desert their preferred party if it is not among the top two likely winners. For many duty-bound voters who realize their preferred party has no chance, this “holding-one’s-nose” and voting for a second or third choice to defeat a much less-liked alternative is preferable to staying home.

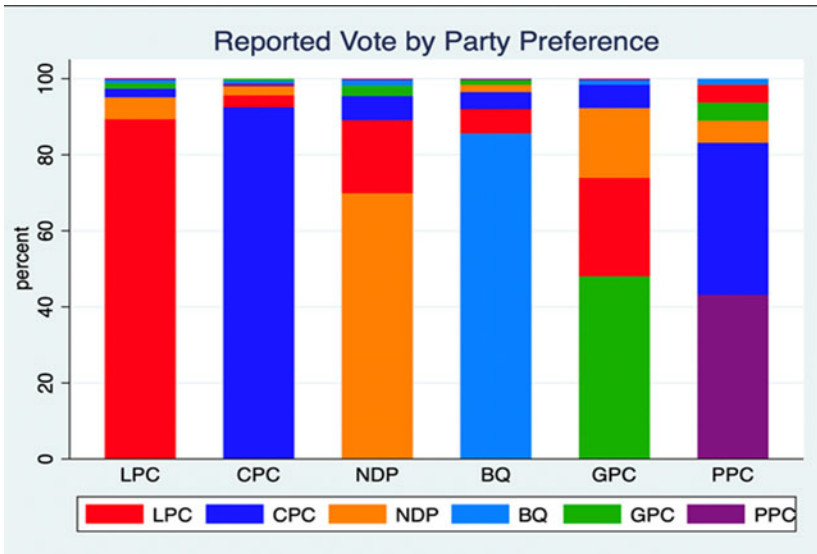


Figure 6. Reported Vote by Party Preference Source: 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre- and post-campaign wave,  $N = 6,054$ .

It is natural to think that the Liberals and Conservatives are the least likely to be deserted by those who prefer them, but it is the local district where voters' strategic decisions are located, and so it is theoretically possible that strategic voting could be distributed relatively evenly across supporters of all parties. It is worth showing, then, that the unequal distribution of the effect on turnout across parties is also visible in strategic voting.

To set the table, we offer Figure 6, displaying the actual reported party vote broken down by our preferred party measure. We use the standard colours associated with each party. Recall that PP is based on respondents' feelings about parties and their leaders, so there may be other influences on desertion of that party, including the local candidates and short-term policy dissatisfaction.

Supporters of the NDP, Green Party and PPC were much more likely than supporters of the two biggest parties to desert (30 per cent, 52 per cent and 57 per cent, respectively, versus 11 per cent, 8 per cent and 14 per cent for the LPC, CPC and BQ, respectively; all differences except BQ versus Liberal and PPC versus Green are significant at  $p < .05^8$ ). This is not just a function of a crowding of parties on the left of the political spectrum, since Liberal voters seem to rarely desert their preferred party, and the highest rate of voters casting a vote at odds with their preference is among PPC supporters.

Table 5 gives the rate of strategic voting by party preference. Voters with particular party preferences (namely, the PPC, the Green Party and the NDP) are much more likely to go to the polls and mark a ballot for a party that is not their first choice. Collectively, supporters of these three parties represent 89 per cent of all strategic voters.

**Table 5.** Strategic Voting by Party Preference

Preferred party	Percentage of the sample	Rate of strategic voting (%)	Share of all strategic voters (%)	<i>N</i>
PPC	2.9	40.2	14.91	55
Green	11.7	33.3	45.53	168
NDP	17.6	14.6	28.46	105
Liberal	32.5	1.6	7.59	28
Conservative	29.5	0.6	3.25	12
BQ	5.8	0.4	0.27	1
<b>Total</b>				369 (7%)

Source: 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre- and post-campaign wave.

When we tabulate the rate of strategic voting by the chances rank of each voter's preferred party, we find that 35 per cent, 45 per cent and 40 per cent of voters who rank their party's chances third, fourth and fifth, respectively, go on to desert their preferred party. Among voters who estimate the chances of their preferred party below second in the riding (approximately one in five respondents who had a preferred party and reported voting), a significant fraction (approximately 39 per cent) vote strategically.

## Discussion

This research note adds depth and nuance to the widely acknowledged finding that the proportionality of the electoral system has an effect on voting turnout. In almost all of that work, the implicit normative criterion is *overall* turnout. That is, the burden of the dissuasive effect of the electoral system is treated as being borne by the polity as a whole rather than identifiable sets of voters. We show that in this Canadian election it is more specifically voters who held minority political (party) preferences in particular ridings who are more likely to stay away from the polls. We strongly believe this result will generalize to any FPTP system, as Gallego et al.'s aggregate evidence suggests (2012).

Even though the election results would likely be unchanged if these dissuaded voters did turn out to vote and voted sincerely—because their parties almost never win their districts—the clear implication is that the official popular vote result exaggerates the leading parties' actual support, for the two reasons we document. An important extension of the FPTP electoral system's famous "psychological effect" (Duverger, 1954) is evidently to punish certain parties and their perspectives by keeping some of their supporters from going to the polls at all. We provide individual-level evidence that accounts for findings from aggregate-level studies that find that in majoritarian systems, a significant number of individual voters are less satisfied with democracy than in proportional systems (see, for example, Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Singh, 2014). Our evidence suggests that this is because some voters' votes are not as meaningful or effective as the votes of other citizens. Because citizens tend to live in particular places for extended periods,

and both their preferences and patterns of electoral geography change only slowly, for a significant number of citizens, this is a life sentence: they are likely to feel deterred from voting over a long sequence of elections (Cutler and Hooper, 2015).

Voters in Canada have a weaker intention to vote and engage more in strategic voting when they believe their preferred party is less likely to win a local seat. Plurality voting systems present deterrents to the full and sincere participation of voters, and these deterrents are unequally distributed, falling disproportionately on those voters who hold political perspectives that happen to be in a minority in their electoral district. This is not surprising, but it is significant, given the democratic system's goal of effective equality of electoral participation.

## Notes

1 The data is from the 2019 Canadian Election Study (CES) Online Survey (<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/DUS88V>). It was in the field from September 13 to October 21, 2019 (pre-election,  $N=37,822$ ) and October 24 to November 11, 2019 (post-election,  $N=10,337$ ). We present analysis using unweighted data. The CES provides post-stratification weights that can be used to adjust the data to be representative of the population proportions of province, gender, age group and education. We prefer unweighted data because for the online survey there is no obviously correct correction for the sampling design. We ran the statistical procedures in this research note with the CES weights and found the coefficients were typically about 5 per cent higher in absolute value, with standard errors also marginally higher, resulting in nearly identical  $p$  values. Conclusions drawn here are not affected by the choice of weighted versus unweighted data.

2 "... how likely is each party to win the seat in your own local riding? Use the slider to place the party's chances from 0 (No chance at all of winning your riding) to 100 (Absolutely certain to win your riding)"

3 The test for differences was an ordered logit with dummy independent variables representing each vote intention party. Contrasts were estimated with the Stata margins command and are available from the authors. The only contrasts in Figure 1 whose 95 per cent confidence interval contained 0 were PPC vs. NDP and PPC vs. GPC.

4 In the choice panel, the significant differences were the CPC with every other party and the LPC with all parties except the BQ. In the duty panel, significant were LPC with all parties except the NDP, the CPC with all parties except the BQ, the NDP with all parties but the LPC, and the BQ with all parties but the CPC.

5 Authors' calculations from official Elections Canada results.

6 Appendix Table A1 presents three models. One includes only the preferred party's rank. The second adds controls for duty and age, which are powerful determinants of turnout. The third model estimates separate rank effects for duty and for choice respondents. The difference between rank 3 and rank 1 is apparent in the first two models and for the choice voters in the third model. (For choice voters, there is even a significant difference between rank 2 and 1.)

7 The 95 per cent confidence interval is 79,064 to 280,123.

8 We estimated a logit of deserting preferred party on dummy variables for each preferred party and used pairwise multiple comparisons with a Bonferroni correction. Results available from the authors.

## References

- Achen, Christopher H. 2019. "Understanding Voter Turnout in Canada: What Data Do We Lack?" *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 42 (1): 1–8.
- Anderson, Christopher and Christine Guillory. 1997. "Political Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy: A Cross-National Analysis of Consensus and Majoritarian Systems." *American Political Science Review* 91 (1): 66–81.
- Arnold, Felix. 2018. "Turnout and Closeness: Evidence from 60 Years of Bavarian Mayoral Elections." *Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 120 (2): 624–53.

- Banducci, Susan A. and Jeffrey A. Karp. 2009. "Electoral Systems, Efficacy, and Voter Turnout." In *The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems*, ed. Hans-Dieter Klingemann. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bernauer, Julian and Adrian Vatter. 2011. "Can't Get No Satisfaction with the Westminster Model? Winners, Losers, and the Effects of Consensual and Direct Democratic Institutions on Satisfaction with Democracy." *European Journal of Political Research* 51 (4): 435–68.
- Bickerton, Jim and Glenn Graham. 2020. "Electoral Parity or Protecting Minorities? Path Dependency and Consociational Districting in Nova Scotia." *Canadian Political Science Review* 14 (1). <https://ojs.unbc.ca/index.php/cpsr/article/view/1748>.
- Blais, André. 2002. "Why Is There So Little Strategic Voting in Canadian Plurality Rule Elections?" *Political Studies* 50 (3): 445–54.
- Blais, André. 2004. "Strategic Voting in the 2002 French Presidential Election." In *The French Voter*, ed. Michael S. Lewis-Beck. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Blais, André and Kees Aarts. 2006. "Electoral Systems and Turnout." *Acta Politica* 41: 180–96.
- Blais, André and Christopher H. Achen. 2018. "Civic Duty and Voter Turnout." *Political Behavior* 41 (2): 473–97.
- Blais, André and Marc André Bodet. 2006. "How Do Voters Form Expectations about the Parties Chances of Winning the Election?" *Social Science Quarterly* 87 (3): 477–93.
- Blais, André and R. K. Carty. 1990. "Does Proportional Representation Foster Voter Turnout?" *European Journal of Political Research* 18 (2): 167–81.
- Blais, André and R. K. Carty. 1991. "The Psychological Impact of Electoral Laws: Measuring Duverger's Elusive Factor." *British Journal of Political Science* 21 (1): 79–93.
- Blais, André, Eugénie Dostie-Goulet and Marc André Bodet. 2009. "Voting Strategically in Canada and Britain." In *Duverger's Law of Plurality Voting*, ed. Bernard Grofman, André Blais and Shaun Bowler. New York: Springer.
- Blais, André and François Gélinau. 2007. "Winning, Losing, and Satisfaction with Democracy." *Political Studies* 55 (2): 425–41.
- Blais, André and Thomas Gschwend. 2010. "Strategic Defection across Elections Parties, and Voters." In *Citizens, Context, and Choice*, ed. Russell J. Dalton and Christopher Anderson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blais, André, Peter John Loewen, Daniel Rubenson, Laura B. Stephenson and Elisabeth Gidengil. 2018. "Information on Party Strength and Strategic Voting: Evidence of Non-Effects from a Randomized Experiment." In *The Many Faces Of Strategic Voting*, ed. Laura B. Stephenson, John H. Aldrich and André Blais. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Blais, André, Richard Nadeau, Elisabeth Gidengil and Neil Nevitte. 2001. "Measuring Strategic Voting in Multiparty Plurality Elections." *Electoral Studies* 20 (3): 343–52.
- Brockington, David. 2004. "The Paradox of Proportional Representation: The Effect of Party Systems and Coalitions on Individuals Electoral Participation." *Political Studies* 52 (3): 469–90.
- Curini, Luigi and Willy Jou. 2016. "The Conditional Impact of Winner/Loser Status and Ideological Proximity on Citizen Participation." *European Journal of Political Research* 55 (4): 767–88.
- Cutler, Fred and Graeme Hooper. 2015. "Winners, Losers, and Electoral System Change." In *Parties and Party Systems: Structure and Context*, ed. Richard Johnston and Campbell Sharman. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Daoust, Jean-François and Damien Bol. 2020. "Polarization, Partisan Preferences and Strategic Voting." *Government and Opposition* 55 (4): 578–94.
- Duverger, Maurice. 1954. *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*. New York: Methuen.
- Endersby, James W., Steven E. Galatas and Chapman B. Rackaway. 2002. "Closeness Counts in Canada: Voter Participation in the 1993 and 1997 Federal Elections." *Journal of Politics* 64 (2): 610–31.
- Ezrow, Lawrence and Georgios Xezonakis. 2011. "Citizen Satisfaction with Democracy and Parties' Policy Offerings." *Comparative Political Studies* 44 (9): 1152–78.
- Gallego, Aina, Guillem Rico and Eva Anduiza. 2012. "Disproportionality and Voter Turnout in New and Old Democracies." *Electoral Studies* 31 (1): 159–69.
- Johnston, Richard, J. Scott Matthews and Amanda Bittner. 2007. "Turnout and the Party System in Canada, 1988–2004." *Electoral Studies* 26 (4): 735–45.

- Karp, Jeffrey A. and Susan A. Banducci. 1999. "The Impact of Proportional Representation on Turnout: Evidence from New Zealand." *Australian Journal of Political Science* 34 (3): 363–77.
- Karp, Jeffrey A. and Susan A. Banducci. 2008. "Political Efficacy and Participation in Twenty-Seven Democracies: How Electoral Systems Shape Political Behaviour." *British Journal of Political Science* 38 (2): 311–34.
- Maeda, Ko. 2016. "Voter Turnout and District-Level Competitiveness in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems." *Journal of Elections Public Opinion and Parties* 26 (4): 452–69.
- Merolla, Jennifer L. and Laura B. Stephenson. 2007. "Strategic Voting in Canada: A Cross Time Analysis." *Electoral Studies* 26 (2): 235–46.
- Norris, Pippa. 1997. "Choosing Electoral Systems: Proportional Majoritarian and Mixed Systems." *International Political Science Review* 18 (3): 297–312.
- Singh, S. P. 2014. "Not All Election Winners Are Equal." *European Journal of Political Research* 53 (2): 308–27.
- Söderlund, Peter. 2017. "Candidate-Centred Electoral Systems and Voter Turnout." *West European Politics* 40 (3): 516–33.
- Spitzer, Aaron John. 2018. "Reconciling Shared Rule: Liberal Theory, Electoral-Districting Law and 'National Group' Representation in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 5 (2): 447–66.
- Stephenson, Laura B., Allison Harell, Daniel Rubenson and Peter John Loewen. 2020. "2019 Canadian Election Study—Online Survey." <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/DUS88V>, Harvard Dataverse, V1.
- Stephenson, Laura B., Allison Harell, Daniel Rubenson and Peter John Loewen. 2021. "Measuring Preferences and Behaviours in the 2019 Canadian Election Study." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 54 (1): 118–24.
- Vowles, Jack, Gabriel Katz and Daniel Stevens. 2017. "Electoral Competitiveness and Turnout in British Elections, 1964–2010." *Political Science Research and Methods* 5 (4): 775–94.
- Wilford, Allan M. 2017. "Polarization, Number of Parties, and Voter Turnout: Explaining Turnout in 26 OECD Countries." *Social Science Quarterly* 98 (5): 1391–1405.



## Appendix

**Table A1:** Estimates of Likely Vote by Rank of Intended Vote Party

Ordered logit estimates			
(1 “certain not to vote” to 4 “certain to vote”)	1	2	3
Ranked intended vote 2nd	-0.0308 (0.0547)	-0.0520 (0.0600)	-0.220 (0.0810)
Ranked intended vote 3rd	-0.231 (0.0627)	-0.164 (0.0700)	-0.255 (0.0966)
Ranked intended vote 4th	-0.214 (0.0772)	-0.163 (0.0860)	-0.184 (0.121)
Ranked intended vote 5th	-0.707 (0.124)	-0.349 (0.140)	-0.0614 (0.190)
Age		0.0271 (0.0014)	0.0272 (0.0014)
Duty		1.986 (0.0449)	1.910 (0.0577)
Ranked intended vote 2nd * Duty			0.371 (0.123)
Ranked intended vote 3rd * Duty			0.195 (0.141)
Ranked intended vote 4th * Duty			0.0517 (0.171)
Ranked intended vote 5th * Duty			-0.623 (0.268)
Ordered logit cut points			
cut1	-4.785 (0.0793)	-2.563 (0.105)	-2.593 (0.106)
cut2	-3.548 (0.0459)	-1.279 (0.0808)	-1.308 (0.0824)
cut3	-1.771 (0.0261)	0.712 (0.0741)	0.683 (0.0757)
<i>N</i>	18,962	18,663	18,663

2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-election wave

**Table A2:** Estimates of Likely Vote by Margin of Victory / Loss of Preferred Party in 2015

(1 “certain not to vote” to 4 “certain to vote”)

Ordered logit coefficients	
	b/se
Margin (−81 to +72)	0.0038 (0.0001)
Duty (1 = Duty)	2.12 (0.042)
Margin * Duty	−0.0003 (0.001)
Ordered logit cut points	
cut1	−3.69 (0.075)
cut2	−2.33 (0.042)
cut3	−0.38 (0.028)
<i>N</i>	21,354
LR Chi2 (3)	2990
pr > ch2	<.0000005

Source: 2019 Canadian Election Study, pre-election wave.

Notes: Post-estimation contrasts of effects on predicted probability of being in the “certain to vote” category. (Marginal effect of a change of one point of margin of victory or loss, with standard error in parentheses.) Choice voters: .00093 (.00021),  $p < .0005$ . Duty voters: .00025 (.00007),  $p < .001$ .

**Cite this article:** Cutler, Fred, Alexandre Rivard and Antony Hodgson. 2022. “Why Bother? Supporters of Locally Weaker Parties Are Less Likely to Vote or to Vote Sincerely.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 55 (1): 208–225. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423921000755>