STRATEGIC VOTING IN INDIA

Its Extent and Determinants in the 2004 General Election

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Abstract

This study explores the issue of "strategic voting" in India by using individual-level, nationwide survey data from the 2004 general election. It finds that Indian voters are more "strategic" than "expressive" if their preferred party is unlikely to win a given parliamentary seat. Furthermore, the variables of being Muslim and education are found not to be statistically significant determinants of strategic voting.

Keywords: strategic voting, India, classes, castes, religions

Introduction

India is one of the oldest continuous democracies in Asia, excluding only a brief authoritarian interlude in the mid-1970s. Since independence, it has held as many as 15 parliamentary elections under a simple plurality rule, and it is by far the most populous democratic country

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in the world.[1] Yet, there is surprisingly a discernable paucity of individual-databased studies of Indian elections that address the issue of "strategic voting" or how voters cast their ballots when their preferred parties are unlikely to win—one of the most studied concepts in comparative politics.[2]

Indian election studies are voluminous, but the existing literature focuses primarily on the rise and demise of the so-called "Congress system" in India, and highlights more or less rigid communal voting patterns based on caste and religion. This mainly political sociology approach to Indian elections, which assumes that voters' cleavage-based preferences are enough to explain their final voting choices, pays little attention to the issue of strategic voting or, alternatively, the psychological factor of Duverger's Law.[3] The political sociology perspective implies that Indian voters are not strategic. The prevalent view on this issue, as it applies to the Indian case, is summed up by Bhatia when he writes, "This [Duverger's Law], according to Riker, also explains how the plurality rule decimates third parties [through strategic voting]. However, . . . this law does not

1. The first two elections, however, had a number of multi-seat districts.

2. We have quite an extensive list of studies of strategic voting (or Duverger's psychological factor) in comparative politics, but one of the most comprehensive analyses and reviews of the issue is found in Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For other important studies, see Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1954); John W. Galbraith and Nocol C. Rae, "A Test of the Importance of Tactical Voting: Great Britain, 1987," *British Journal of Political Science* 19:1 (January 1989), pp. 126–37; Ronald J. Johnston and Charles J. Pattie, "Tactical Voting in Great Britain in 1983 and 1987: An Alternative Approach," ibid., 21:1 (January 1991), pp. 95–108; Steven R. Reed, "Structure and Behavior: Extending Duverger's Law to the Japanese Case," ibid., 20:3 (July 1990), pp. 335–56; and John F. Hsieh, Emerson Niou, and Philip Paolino, "Strategic Voting in the 1994 Taipei City Mayoral Election," *Electoral Studies* 16:2 (June 1997), pp. 153–63.

3. Duverger's Law asserts that the plurality rule is responsible for a two-party system and the non-competitiveness of third parties. The psychological factor refers to "their [voters'] natural tendency to transfer their vote to the less evil of its two adversaries in order to prevent the success of the greater evil." See Duverger, *Political Parties*, p. 226. There are a few noteworthy studies of Duverger's Law and other effects of electoral institutions on political party systems in India. These include Rekha Diwakar, "Duverger's Law and the Size of the Indian Party System," *Party Politics* 13:5 (2007), pp. 539–61; Pradeep Chhibber and Geetha Murali, "Duvergerian Dynamics in the Indian States: Federalism and the Number of Parties in the State Assembly Elections," ibid., 12:1 (2006), pp. 5–34; E. Sridharan, "The Fragmentation of the Indian Party System, 1952–1999: Seven Competing Explanations," in *Parties and Party Politics in India*, ed. Zoya Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 475–503. Nonetheless, these studies do not directly address the issue of strategic voting but instead focus on the effect of Duverger's Law on the Indian party system. Moreover, unlike other studies based on aggregate data, our study uses individual-level survey data.

seem to be applicable in a society that is heterogeneous [like India]."[4] Chhibber also plays down the influence of electoral laws, and consequently strategic voting, by saying that "voters choose between candidates based on policy preferences; assuming that the state plays a large role in society, voters develop preferences over state policy and then begin to choose among candidates and parties based on those sets of preferences independent of the influence exerted by electoral laws."[5]

While most of the existing literature is doubtful about the existence of the strategic Indian voter, a few studies do show that at least some Indians vote strategically under certain conditions. For instance, Rudolph and Rudolph argue that minority Muslims often vote strategically. As they explain, "It appears that where Muslims feel themselves a distinct and vulnerable minority, they avoid antagonizing or seek the protection of mainstream parties by voting as the general electorate does; they support the likely winner and governing party to be. In constituencies with high proportions of Muslims, however, Muslims tend to vote for class and Muslim confessional parties and candidates."[6] In other words, when the Muslims are a numerical minority in an electoral district, they do not express their best choice in voting but, instead, vote for the winning party. This type of finding is also confirmed by a more recent study of another minority community in India, the Scheduled Castes.[7] As Chandra argues, "For substantial numbers of Scheduled Caste voters, preferences do not automatically translate into votes. . . . They treat the vote as an instrument through which to obtain the best possible outcome rather than as an opportunity to declare their preferences."[8] In other words, according to Chandra, Scheduled Caste voters are more likely to vote for their preferred party only when they are numerous enough to exercise

4. Ravi P. Bhatia, "Consequences of Electoral Systems on Coalition Governments," in *Coalition Politics in India: Problems and Prospects*, eds. Mahendra P. Singh and Anil Mishra (New Delhi: Manohar 2004), p. 263.

5. Pradeep K. Chhibber, *Democracy without Associations: Transformation of the Party System and Social Cleavages in India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 20–21.

6. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), p. 195.

7. The term "Scheduled Castes" is a legal term that refers to a socially, economically, and educationally disadvantaged population group in India that is officially recognized and protected by the Indian Constitution. The Scheduled Castes were also formerly known as the "depressed castes" or "Untouchables," who occupied the lowest status in the traditional caste system of India. The "Scheduled Castes" are today provided various sorts of preferential treatment including the reservation of parliamentary seats. For more about the Scheduled Castes, see Mukherjee Sandeep, *Guide to Reservation Policy* (Delhi: Verity Books, 2006).

8. Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 222.

leverage over the victory or defeat of another party's candidate. Otherwise, they are unlikely to do so.

These two studies imply that voters from a particular ethnic or caste group are unlikely to vote for their true preferences unless the proportion of members from that group is sufficiently large in the electoral district. Even though its findings are based on only aggregate district-level data and are limited to the Muslim constituencies, the Rudolph and Rudolph study is of great importance because it is the first attempt to provide tangible evidence for strategic voting in India. Chandra's work is similarly based on aggregate data but, compared with that of Rudoph and Rudoph, it employs a more nuanced analytical approach.

Nonetheless, Chandra's contribution to the literature on strategic voting in general is rather limited because her definition of strategic voting is not the same as commonly understood in the literature on comparative politics. In contrast, it is much more broad and flexible. For example, third-place party supporters who have voted for their first preference are considered to be strategic voters in her model if the voting has been done in an attempt to exercise leverage over a final outcome. Chandra's model also implies that when competition between the top two runners is very close, minor party supporters like members of the Scheduled Castes are more likely to vote for their first preference—a supposed act of strategic voting. However, in general, the expression of a first preference in an election is not viewed as strategic voting in the conventional sense.

Instead, the conventional meaning of "strategic voting" is that small-party supporters will abandon their preferred, but hopeless, party for their second-best, but more winnable, party in a district. Strategic voting in this sense is not limited to Muslim or Scheduled Caste communities. It may be also found among so-called national party supporters if they are a minority in a particular district. Thus, we need individual-based data and analysis to determine whether Indians engage in strategic voting at district level irrespective of their ethnic or religious identities and, if so, how extensive this strategic voting is. This type of approach also has clear advantages over the existing aggregate-databased studies. For instance, we can make a clear distinction between individual voters' preferences and their final choices using individual-level data, and we may also become better informed on individual voters' pre-election assessments about the likely winner.

This study represents one of the few attempts to analyze strategic voting in India, using individual-level survey data. This study is based on the 2004 National Election Study (NES) data collected by the CSDS. This face-to-face survey was done immediately after the elections by the CSDS. It is one of the largest systematic surveys of the political behavior and

attitudes of Indian voters to date. Using the method of stratified random sampling, more than 25,000 respondents were randomly selected by the CSDS out of the 32 states and union territories in India.[9]

Data Selection

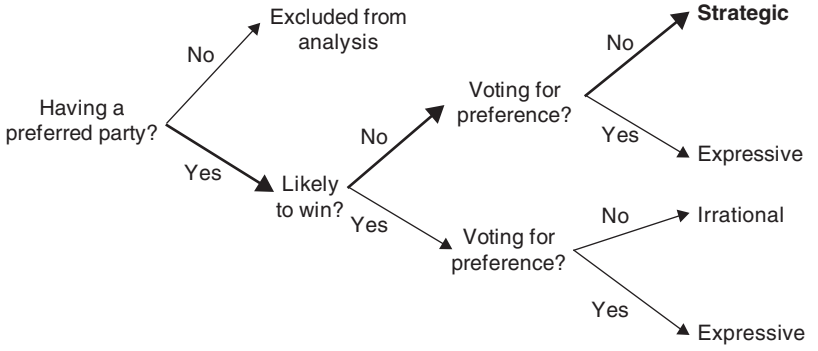
We define "strategic voting" as voting for someone other than a preferred candidate or party when the latter is expected to lose.[10] This type of voting is in contrast to "expressive" or "sincere" voting, by which we mean voting for one's preferred party, win or lose. To verify strategic voting, we have to exclude those cases in which voters express no preference among parties, and include only those that do show a clear preference. We also need additional information about whether voters think their favorite parties will win. Finally, we have to know voters' final voting choices. The tree of possible voting choices is shown in Figure 1. Strategic voting is one of the four plausible endpoints in this choice tree. Given voters' preferences and information about the likely winner, strategic voting occurs (1) when voters express clear preferences among competing political parties, (2) when their preferred party is unlikely to win, and (3) when they vote for some party other than their first preference.

Before moving on to data analysis, some important remarks are in order. First, this model does not include cases of abstention. In reality, voters may abstain from voting when their preferred candidate or party is unlikely to win. There may be other reasons voters opt to abstain as well. For example, they may simply be busy on election day, or not interested in a particular

9. For further information about the survey, see "Methodology of National Election Study 2004," *The Hindu*, May 20, 2004, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/elections2004/verdict2004/stories/2004052000070200.htm>, accessed January 25, 2009. Interested readers may also refer to the questionnaire used in the survey at one of the CSDS sites, <http://www.csdsdelhi.org/nes04.PDF>, accessed January 25, 2009. The CSDS does not open its raw data to the general public but only to the visitors to its data unit in Delhi.

10. This operational definition of "strategic voting" is not exactly the same as the aforementioned conventional notion of strategic voting. The conventional meaning of a strategic voter is one who votes for a more winnable party, even if he or she does not like it the most. In the operational definition, however, we may not completely exclude a logical possibility that our putative strategic voter votes for a party that is equally likely to lose, even if this seems to be irrational. In other words, our operational definition is close to the complementary notion of "expressive voting"; hence, it might be called strategic *defection* (from preferred parties). An ideal survey questionnaire would be designed to identify voters' second best choices that are more winnable than their first, but hopeless, preferences. These second best choices do not have to be *the most* likely winner in Q51 of the NES 2004 questionnaire but may be simply other equally winnable or quite competitive parties. However, the NES survey does not allow us to identify such ideal cases of second choice. This is why we have a limited definition of strategic voting.

FIGURE 1 *Preference, Likely Winner, and Strategic Voting*



SOURCE: By the author.

election, or they may think their single vote will have no effect on the final election results. In this study, however, we are interested only in what voters do if, and only if, they actually cast their ballots. Of the 27,189 respondents in our raw sample, 23,219 said they had cast their ballots.[11]

Second, those voters who showed no preference for any particular party were also excluded from our analysis. Individual party preference is the single most important piece of information that we could not obtain directly from aggregate-level data. Thus, cases of no preference are not useful for our analytical purposes. In the survey, only 13,719 respondents replied "yes" to the question "Is there any political party which you particularly like?" The answer "no" might mean either that they did not have any *strong* preference for a particular party or that they were indifferent to a set of given candidates. Others simply may not have wanted to reveal their true preferences for personal reasons.

Third, strategic voting is sometimes understood as being the sophisticated act of opting for the second-best party in order to prevent the most-disliked party from emerging victorious. This definition is much more strict and narrow than ours. It assumes a much more complicated process of calculation on the part of the voter. Given this model, voters abandon their preferred party not just because their votes will otherwise be wasted but also because they want to prevent their least preferred (or simply highly

11. This turnout in the sample is somewhat higher than that of the electorate as a whole, but this slight over-representation of voters will not have much effect on our study topic here.

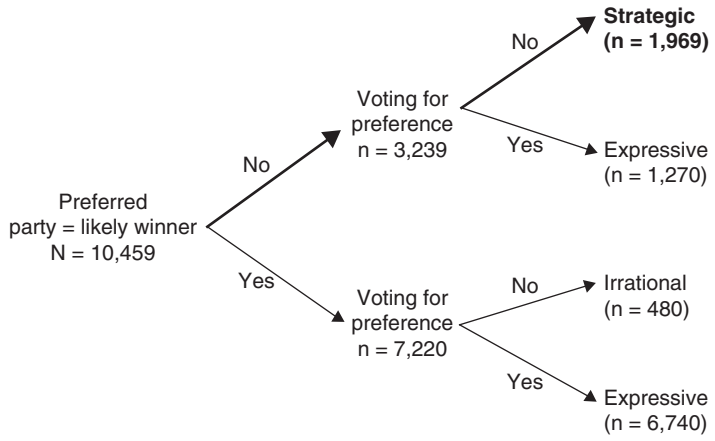
disliked) party from possibly winning. This understanding is much closer to Duverger's psychological factor, but its application to Indian politics is somewhat difficult. In fact, only 18.5% of the whole sample said "yes" to the question, "Is there any political party which you particularly dislike?" As a result, if we define strategic voting as noted above, we will have too many missing cases in our model estimation.

Fourth, our definition of strategic voting may include cases of voting for alliance parties by those voters who do not find their preferred party symbol on the ballot. A political party may be engaged in strategic alliances with other parties at the state level and thus not field its own candidates in mutually agreed districts in deference to its alliance partners. This is a kind of logrolling in candidate placement among strategically allied parties. Yet, India's pre-election alliances are not as solid as, for example, Malaysia's so-called Barisan Nasional (National Front) party alliance that is, in effect, a single political party campaigning under a single unified banner. The Indian type of electoral alliance is quite different, especially in the sense that it is designed to strategically increase each party's vote share by preempting competition within the same alliance bloc—even if members of the bloc do not necessarily share a common support base or manifesto. For this reason, votes for such alliance parties are viewed in this study not as votes for one's own mirror-image parties but rather as votes for second-best choices in the absence of the preferred party. This is, by definition, strategic voting. Even if political elites engage in strategic alliances, not all of their mass followers necessarily cast their ballots for alternative alliance parties as intended by the elites. Yet, such strategic alliances by political elites are likely to induce a significant portion of their mass followers to transfer votes to alliance parties.

Fifth, our analysis deals with only those cases in which individual voters' expectation about the likely winner is available. A total of 85.8% of all respondents in our entire sample identified a particular party when asked, "Who do you think is most likely to win from your parliamentary constituency?" In other words, most Indian voters have their own expectations about the most likely winner and do not refuse to tell which party it is.

Finally, other minor cases of voting behavior, such as irrational or inconsistent preferences and actions, have been deleted from the sample. For instance, we have deleted obviously irrational cases where the most-liked and most-disliked parties were the same. Also, some inconsistent cases have been deleted. For example, some respondents said they had no preferred party in response to the question of "Is there any political party which you particularly like?" but the data spreadsheet still listed a particular party name on it to the follow-up question of "If so, which party?"

FIGURE 2 *Overall Results of Sample Analysis*



SOURCE: Center for the Study of Developing Societies, *National Election Study 2004: Post-poll Survey*, 2004.

The Extent of Strategic Voting in India

All the aforementioned considerations reduce the valid sample size for this study to 10,459. The analysis of this sample is presented in Figure 2. In our entire selected sample, 18.8% participated in strategic voting. The rate of strategic voting becomes much higher, 60.8%, when we calculate it with reference to a smaller sample of 3,239 cases in which one's preferred party was not the likely winner. In other words, when the preferred party was expected to lose, only 39.3% stood by their first preferences, and the other 60.8% voted strategically. This contrasts with the fact that when the preferred party was the likely winner, 93.4% voted for it. Needless to say, this difference is statistically significant. That is, the likelihood of victory is crucial in determining whether potential supporters of the losing party actually vote for it or not. Unless the preferred party is likely to win, it tends to be abandoned in the voters' final choice.

Meanwhile, it is possible in our model, at least in theory, for our putatively strategic voters to vote for their most disliked parties even when they did not vote for their most liked parties. In other words, the opposite of expressive voting is not necessarily wholly strategic voting as assumed in our model. In fact, Indian voters sometimes acted irrationally by voting for their most disliked parties. Of the 1,969 strategic voters in Figure 2, 49 (2.5%) voted for their worst choices. This appears to be quite irrational.

Yet, many of these apparently irrational choices actually look reasonable from another viewpoint: a majority of these seemingly irrational voters (n = 31) cast their ballots for the likely winner. This might be due to the "bandwagon effect." Even though they individually detested the particular party, they may still have voted for it, following the bulk of voters from the district. Nonetheless, it is hard to explain the remaining 18 cases. In this utter irrationality, the voters opted for their worst evils, which were not the likely winners either. If we exclude these seemingly irrational and inexplicable cases, the rate of strategic voting will decline slightly. Nevertheless, the number of such votes is too small to invalidate the entire argument outright. Hence, we dismiss it here.

If we interpret the term "particularly like" as being a *strong* preference, it means that many weak preference holders have been left out of our sample. This, in turn, implies that the actual rate of strategic voting may be higher. The reason is that, arguably, voters will less likely engage in strategic voting when they are die-hard supporters or when their preference is intense. Thus, the estimated rate of strategic voting in our study is most likely a minimum rate, and it may actually be higher among weak preference holders.

Strangely enough, of those who predicted that their most-liked parties would win (n = 7,220), 6.6% did not actually vote for them. It is not easy to explain this phenomenon. Some respondents (n = 30) even voted for their most disliked parties. This is obviously irrational. The rest (n = 450) voted neither for their preferred parties nor for the likely winner, not to mention the most disliked parties. This might, among other things, stem from vote buying. Alternatively, it may be driven by a more complicated incentive to check and balance the competing parties in the district. Arguably, we could conjecture that some voters voted for a nationally or statewide dominant party even though it was unlikely to win at the district level.

Nevertheless, from a comparative perspective, the rate of strategic voting in India is not low at all. Of those voters who supported parties other than the likely winner, 60.8% voted strategically. Meanwhile, of those who clearly showed their preference among competing parties, 18.8% did so. These figures may be compared with those of economically advanced Germany, Britain, and South Korea, barring methodological differences and semantic problems of course. First, estimates for the desertion rate for small parties in Germany have varied from 13.5% to 70.9% in single-member district contests, even though the precise meaning of "desertion" does not necessarily mean strategic voting as conceptualized in this study.[12] Also, a study of British elections finds that 17.1% of the electorate votes

12. Cox, *Making Votes Count*, p. 81.

strategically, while others report the rate to range from 5% to 7%.[13] These British figures are not directly comparable with ours because they count *the whole electorate*. Nonetheless, they do give us some point of comparison, as imperfect as it may be. In our study, strategic voting among all the respondents is 7.2%, which is similar to a high estimate for Great Britain. Finally, a Korean study—which used a research method similar to ours—shows that the rate of strategic voting by supporters of a third-place presidential candidate is about 28%.[14] This is far smaller than the corresponding Indian rate of 60.8%, even though the South Korean rate, unlike ours, refers to presidential elections. One might question the true comparability of data between South Korea and India, but the difference in their respective rates of strategic voting is big enough for us to legitimately argue that Indian voters are more strategic than are South Korean voters.

The Determinants of Strategic Voting in India: Logistic Regression Model

In this section, we are interested in what determines strategic voting in India. Our model posits that strategic voting is a logistic function of information, participation in partisan activities, education, middle-class identification, Scheduled Caste membership, being Muslim, and strategic alliances.[15] As mentioned above, some aggregate-databased studies, such as the Rudolph and Rudolph study and the one by Chandra, argue that Muslim or Scheduled Caste voters do not vote simply according to their first preferences. In this study, we check to see if these arguments remain robust against individual-level survey data. In particular, our model seeks to delineate whether Scheduled Caste (or Muslim) voters

13. Richard G. Niemi, Guy Whitten, and Mark N. Franklin, "Constituency Characteristics, Individual Characteristics, and Tactical Voting in the 1987 British General Election," *British Journal of Political Science* 22:2 (April 1992), pp. 229–40. The terms "strategic voting" and "tactical voting" are often used interchangeably, especially in Great Britain.

14. Jungug Choi, "Strategic Voting and the Effective Number of Presidential Candidates in New Democracies," *Korean Political Science Review* 37:4 (2003), pp. 191–208.

15. Critics may point out that this model has left out a number of important variables in Indian studies, but we believe that a good model should follow Occam's Razor. The selection of our variables thus refers strictly to previous studies and theoretical arguments. For instance, one might wonder why the variable of gender, which is important in other Indian studies, is missing from our analysis. However, we argue that gender *per se* does not affect strategic voting. No other earlier studies of strategic voting have argued that it matters. The variable might, if ever, influence strategic voting because it may be related to the variable of education or literacy level, which is included in the model. In addition, we have done some preliminary analyses with regard to other variables including gender and locality. These variables are not significantly correlated to strategic voting or they turn out to be statistically insignificant once we control for selected variables.

are different from non-Scheduled Caste (or non-Muslim) voters in terms of strategic voting, once we control for other variables. These two independent variables are binary variables just like our dependent variable of strategic voting.

Other studies argue that strong partisan attachments discourage strategic voting, whereas better education and greater information facilitate it.[16] In our model, we break down education groups into four categories: totally illiterate, primary and middle school graduates, high school graduates, and college graduates and postgraduates. Concerning information, we assume that voters are more informed about election-related matters, including how close the race is, when they have more opportunities to get news via radio, television, and/or newspaper. We measure partisan attachments with reference to participation in campaign activities. In particular, we assume that voters are more partisan when they are involved in more of the following campaign activities: election meetings, processions and rallies, door-to-door canvassing, money contribution and collection, and distribution of election leaflets or posters.

We also include another binary variable, middle-class identification, in the model. One of the key arguments in comparative politics is that middle classes constitute a strong buttress of democracy. In this study, we are interested in determining whether middle-class status is relevant to strategic voting and, consequently, political party system formation as well. Middle-class status in this model is self-identified. It is, in other words, middle class "for itself," which is not necessarily middle class "in itself." Thus, our model posits that if voters believe they belong to the middle class, they are more likely to vote strategically. Non-middle class voters may consider themselves either working class or neither class.

Finally, the last independent variable—strategic alliance—is only a control variable included to control for the effects of electoral alliances among parties on strategic voting. We expect that elite-level strategic alliances—that is, joint candidate placement and seat adjustment—will increase the rate of strategic voting by inducing voters to cast ballots for allied parties when their preferred parties are not on the ballot. Of course, not all supporters of a particular party will alternatively vote for a political ally of their preferred party. If so, it would be meaningless to make any distinction between strategic alliance and strategic voting.

16. For instance, see David J. Lanoue and Shaun Bowler, "The Sources of Tactical Voting in British Parliamentary Elections, 1983–1987," *Political Behavior* 14:2 (June 1992), pp. 141–57; and Richard Niemi, Guy Whitten, and Mark Franklin, "Constituency Characteristics, Individual Characteristics, and Tactical Voting in the 1987 British General Election," pp. 229–40.

TABLE 1 *Determinants of Strategic Voting: A Logistic Regression*

Independent Variables	*β*	*S.E.*	*P*	*EXP (β)*
Education	0.02	0.05	0.72	1.02
Middle classes	0.16	0.08	0.04*	1.17
Partisanship (participation)	–0.10	0.03	0.00**	0.90
Information	0.13	0.04	0.00**	1.14
Scheduled caste	–0.27	0.10	0.01**	0.76
Muslim	0.17	0.12	0.16	1.19
Alliance	0.15	0.03	0.00**	1.16
Constant	0.02	0.10	0.85	
Case number: 3,134 Chi square 66.92 d.f.: 7 model sig.: 0.00				

SOURCE: Ibid. to Figure 2.
*Significant at .05.
**Significant at 0.0l.

In India, political parties may engage in strategic alliances with other parties in some states but not in others. Thus, the configuration of strategic alliances may vary from state to state. For instance, Party A might be allied with Party B in one state but not in another. In this study, we divide the states into five categories according to the number of alliance blocs, whose value ranges from 0 to 4. Thus, "alliance" is observed at the state level, unlike other individual-level variables. The four alliance blocs are the Congress (I) and its allies; the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) and its allies coalesced into the National Democratic Alliance (NDA); the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and its allies; and the Samajwadi Party (SP, Socialist Party) and its allies.[17] Many parties including the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP, Party of the Majority) did not belong to any such bloc in the 2004 general election.

The test results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 1. All of the variables except education and being Muslim are statistically significant; therefore, we can surmise that they have some effect on strategic voting. To put it another way, we may confidently reject the hypothesis that they have no effect on strategic voting. Concerning education, however, we

17. The classification and counting of alliance blocs are based primarily on Appendix I(a), "Lok Sabha Election Results-Party Position (Statewise)," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34:51 (December 18, 2004), pp. 5540–5543; and E. Sridharan, "Electoral Coalitions in 2004 General Elections: Theory and Evidence," ibid., pp. 5418–5425.

do not have definitive evidence for its effect on strategic voting. This fact does not change even if we try another model without the control variable of "alliance." This test result does not support the conclusions from some other studies that found that education does indeed affect strategic voting.[18] However, this is not the only study that has found no statistical significance of education. For example, I also report a similar result when using data from South Korean presidential elections. This implies that advanced education is not absolutely required for strategic voting; conversely, poor education does not necessarily block voters from voting strategically.[19]

More important than education is information. A single variable model including education alone shows that education is statistically significant. But when the variable of information is included, the effect of education turns out to be insignificant.[20] This means that education itself does not matter but information does. In our model, strategic voters are more exposed to mass media news than are non-strategic voters. Voters do not need an advanced education but only some minimal knowledge about elections, including candidates' competitiveness, to vote strategically. This type of information is often easily obtained in everyday life, without the need for a formal advanced education. Of course, we do not think that completely illiterate voters are likely to vote strategically. In fact, they arguably may have more difficulty getting information about elections than well-educated voters.[21] Instead, what we are saying here is that advanced education beyond simple reading and understanding is not a necessary precondition for strategic voting. For instance, we cannot say that middle-school graduates are less strategic in voting than are college-educated voters.

Table 1 also shows that the self-identified status of being middle class affects strategic voting in a positive way. One of the implications of this new finding is that middle-class status helps reduce the number of political parties via strategic voting. If this is the case, we can further hypothesize that the ever-increasing size of the middle class in the booming Indian economy will eventually help to reduce the fragmentation of the Indian party system. However, it goes without saying that the marginal effect of the middle class on strategic voting is limited, and, in turn, the effect of strategic voting

18. For example, see Niemi, Whitten, and Franklin, "Constituency Characteristics, Individual Characteristics, and Tactical Voting."

19. Choi, "Strategic Voting and the Effective Number of Presidential Candidates," pp. 197–201.

20. The same is also true with the variable of middle classes.

21. In India, poor and uneducated people are often quite dependent on political patronage for their living and are thus well-connected to politics. This implies that even illiterate Indians might carry significant knowledge about politics.

on the party system is further limited. Elite-level coordination and the formation of voters' preferences theoretically come before voting, including possible strategic voting, in the causal mechanism of party system formation. In other words, the downsizing effect of strategic voting on the effective number of political parties is more limited when a greater number of candidates or parties compete for a seat and/or when voters' first preferences are widely distributed over many political parties or candidates.

Unlike other variables, partisanship and Scheduled Caste status have a negative effect on strategic voting. This means that voters from the Scheduled Castes are less likely to engage in strategic voting compared to other caste groups, as are those voters who actively participate in campaign activities for a particular party. Low involvement of Scheduled Castes in strategic voting is contrasted with Muslims' voting behavior. If we run a logistic model without the control variable of "strategic alliance," the effect of Muslim identity is found to be statistically significant at the .05 level, but it turns out to be insignificant with the control variable in the model as in Table 1. Either way, Muslim voters do not show a negative coefficient like Scheduled Caste voters. Even though both Scheduled Castes and Muslims belong to disadvantaged minority groups in India, their voting behavior diverges. We cannot attribute this difference to information, education, or partisanship, because the contrasting effects of the Muslim and Scheduled Caste variables have been drawn out after we controlled for these three variables. The test results show that having the status of Scheduled Caste per se is something by which voters are driven to vote for their preferred candidate.[22]

Our finding regarding the non-strategic nature of Scheduled Caste voters does not necessarily contradict Chandra's argument that Scheduled Caste voters are "strategic." After all, she argues that they do not simply express their preferences in voting but tend to vote for their most-preferred candidate only when they are likely to exercise some leverage over a final election result. For instance, suppose that (1) there are three candidates (a leading candidate A, a close runner-up B, and a prospective loser C); (2) a Scheduled Caste voter's first preference is C; (3) all Scheduled Caste voters *as a group* may exercise critical influence over whether candidates A or B will be the final winner; and (4) all other groups have already made up their minds.

In this setting, voting by Scheduled Caste members is seen as being "strategic" by Chandra if they exercise some leverage by denying votes to candidate B and instead voting for candidate C in unison. However, this

22. This is not a big surprise, given that Scheduled Caste groups do not have their second-best choices for which they might duly consider voting strategically, especially given the highly sectionalized electoral configuration.

type of "strategic" voting in Chandra's model is defined as non-strategic in this study. In our model, Scheduled Caste voters are viewed as being "non-strategic" as long as they vote for their preferred choices, no matter how sophisticated their decision-making process may look. In other words, the category of strategic voters in our model does not include the strategic voters extrapolated in Chandra's study. Unfortunately, we cannot tell which case of "expressive voting" in this study refers to "strategic voting" in her sense because our data provide no information about the perceived closeness of district-level electoral races. We simply leave open the possibility that many cases of "expressive voting" by Scheduled Caste members who preferred the BSP in elections might be classified as strategic voting in Chandra's model.

Conclusion

Using nationwide survey data from the 2004 general election, this study has explored how Indian voters cast their ballots when their favorite parties are unlikely to win in their respective electoral districts. We have found, first, that a majority of Indian voters are willing to discard their preferred parties in final voting if these parties are unlikely to win. In other words, Indian voters are more strategic than expressive if their favorite parties are unlikely to win a given parliamentary seat.

Second, this study has found that Scheduled Caste voters are a notable exception to the above-mentioned tendency of strategic voting in India. Unlike others in the general electorate, they are more expressive than strategic. To put it another way, the very status of being Scheduled Caste per se tends to drive voters *not* to abandon their favorite parties even when these parties are unlikely to win. Members of the Scheduled Castes tended to vote for their first preferences even when we controlled for such variables as education, information, middle-class status, and participation in partisan activities.

Third, concerning the determinants of strategic voting in India, one might be surprised to find that the variable of education does not turn out to be significant. This is contrary to many studies of advanced democracies that often highlight the importance of this variable in strategic voting. In India, well-educated voters are not necessarily more strategic than poorly educated ones. What matters is not formal education, but information. Even poorly educated Indian voters—who are often likely to be dependent on political patronage for their livelihoods—may have a keen interest in elections and politics. Consequently, they may also collect plentiful information about election-related matters through various sources.

In addition, our analysis has shown that strong partisanship, much like the status of being Scheduled Caste, discourages strategic voting, whereas

self-identified middle-class status encourages it. Those voters who take an active role in various campaign activities in support of a particular party pay little attention to the party's likelihood of defeat in elections. Their strong partisan attachments keep them standing by the party, win or lose. Meanwhile, the positive effect of middle-class status on strategic voting has potential long-term implications for the Indian party system. In particular, it may help reduce the current fragmentation of the system over the long term, especially given India's remarkable economic growth and the consequent huge expansion of its middle class.

Finally, a previous aggregate-databased study of Muslims argued that they are strategic in voting.[23] However, our survey data do not provide strong support for this argument. When we run the logistic regression model without the control variable of "strategic alliance," the effect of Muslim identity is found to be statistically significant at the .05 level. In contrast, Muslim identity turns out to be insignificant with the variable in the model as shown in Table 1. That is, the existence or non-existence of alliance politics at the state level affects Muslim voting. In particular, this means that if votes for allied parties are controlled for, Muslims do not vote strategically. This contrasts with other variables in the model, whose statistical significance does not rely on the inclusion or exclusion of the "alliance" variable.

In sum, existing studies of elections in India pay little attention to the fact that Indian voters indeed change their final choices so that a likely winner gets more votes, while minor candidates lose out. This study has shown that strategic voting is not limited to a particular state or section of the Indian population. Instead, it is observed throughout India except with the Scheduled Castes. The prevalence of strategic voting notwithstanding, the party system at the district level does not follow Duverger's Law strictly. The reason, inter alia, is that many Indian voters happen to prefer the party they themselves expect to win a district seat. Almost all such voters vote "expressively."

23. Rudolph and Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*, p. 195.