

## Abstract

In this paper, I propose non-instrumental benefits to sincere voting as the explanation for why people vote for candidates certain to lose and for why weak third parties continue to exist. Building on this idea, I provide a framework where the decision of whether to vote sincerely or strategically is an endogenous choice that responds to election-specific characteristics, rather than a characteristic of a voter. I demonstrate that models I build with non-instrumental benefits to sincere voting generate theoretical predictions consistent with existing empirical evidence that standard models cannot match. Using both pivotal voter and group rule-utilitarian frameworks, I show that third party vote shares are lower and the extent of strategic voting is higher when the election is expected to be close or when the stakes of the election are high. I also show that adding a heterogeneous non-instrumental sincere voting benefit implies partial strategic desertion of weak parties by their supporters and a lower participation rate for minor party supporters compared to major party supporters. Furthermore, I present theoretical predictions on the impact of electorate size on third party vote shares and on the correlation between third party voting and turnout. Finally, using data from U.S. presidential elections between 1920 and 2012, I present empirical evidence consistent with the prediction of this paper that closeness of the election at the state level reduces third party vote shares. Empirical results also indicate that the marginal impact of state-level closeness on third party vote shares is increasing in both state-level and national-level closeness.