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## Tactical Voting in Czechia: Forms and Determinants under Proportional Representation

*Abstract:* On the basis of a post-election questionnaire survey and self-reported voter motivations analysis, this article explores the extent, forms, and determinants of tactical voting in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections. The prevalence of tactical voting was estimated to be approximately 15%. A significant portion of the electorate harbored a strong aversion towards the ANO political party and its leader, Andrej Babiš. Consequently, regardless of their political preferences, these voters opted for SPOLU, the party with the best chance of defeating him. This strategic approach significantly influenced the election results, including having an impact on the overall winner. According to the binary logistic regression model, younger individuals and those with higher levels of education inclined more towards tactical voting. These findings correspond with studies from different countries, confirm the socio-demographic conditionality of tactical voting, and contribute to the wider discussion of this concept in proportional representation systems.

*Keywords:* elections, tactical voting, voter decision-making, proportional representation, political parties, Czechia

### Introduction

Elections are the cornerstone of representative democracy, offering voters a platform to freely articulate their political preferences and elect their representatives. In elections, voters may choose the political parties and candidates who best represent their attitudes, values, identity, or political beliefs. In such a case, we speak of expressive voting (Hamlin and Jennings 2011). Expressive voting presupposes that individuals cast their ballots in favor of the party they identify with the most, their top preference (Taylor 2015), in correspondence with the concept of sincere voting. But what are voters trying to achieve when they cast their ballots? On the one hand, they want to express their opinions, but on the other hand, they also hope to influence the outcome of the election (Alvarez et al. 2006).

In situations where voters primarily support a party lacking high prospects, as indicated by pre-election polls, they might opt for their second or even third choice. Such a strategic move amplifies the impact of their vote on the election results (Kim and Fording 2001; Fisher 2004; Daoust and Bol 2020). This phenomenon is termed “tactical voting” or “strategic voting.” While tactical voting is inherent in every election, it is particularly associated with electoral systems based on plurality, especially the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, which operates on a “winner takes all” principle. In such systems, candidates or parties other than the winner can be called losers. Supporters of minor parties

frequently resort to tactical voting to prevent their votes from being wasted on parties with almost no chance of victory (Garcia-Vinuela et al. 2013; Jenssen 2016).

Comparatively less research attention has been dedicated to studying the presence, forms, and extent of tactical voting in elections in a proportional representation (PR) electoral system (Jenssen 2016). Nevertheless, over the past three decades, the number of studies on this topic has seen a rise (Blais et al. 2006; Fredén 2014). The unique pre-election context of the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections, which were conducted under a PR system, indicated that there was a potentially significant prevalence of tactical voting. Consequently, the primary objective of the study described in this article was to validate the assumption empirically on the basis of a post-election questionnaire survey conducted on a representative sample of Czech voters. To fulfill this objective, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What proportion of votes cast in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections can be classified as tactical voting?
2. Which political parties benefited the most from tactical voting?
3. What specific forms of tactical voting were observed?
4. Who were the tactical voters in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics?

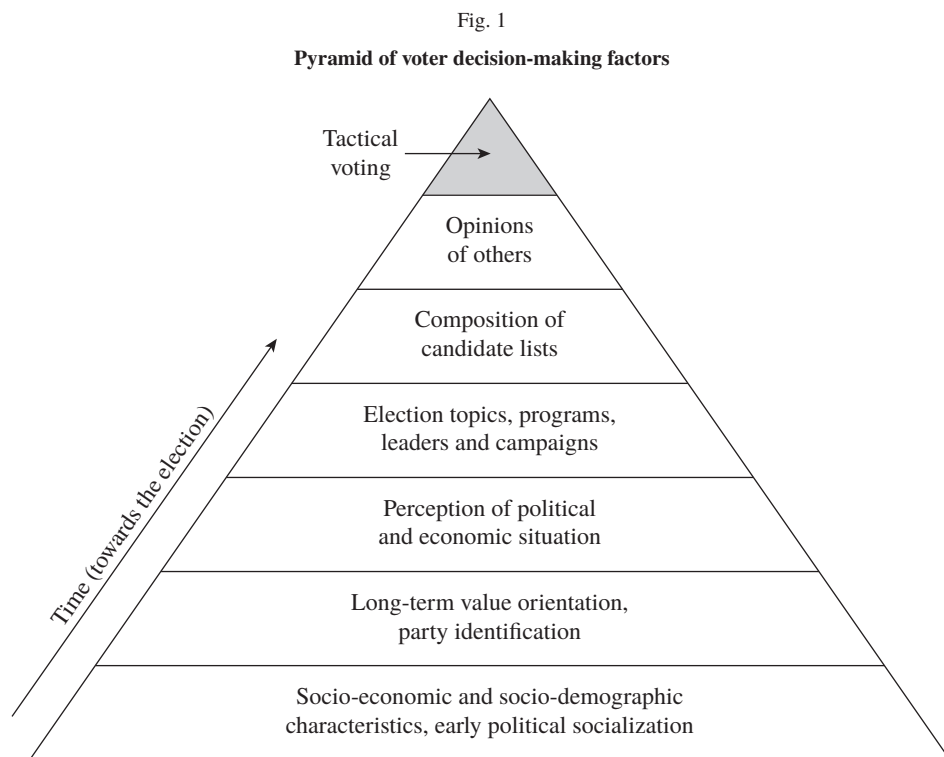
Czechia was selected as a case study for several reasons. It would be the first study of tactical voting in this country and one of relatively few in Central and Eastern Europe. In comparison with other countries, Czechia is characterized by weak party identification among voters (Bušta 2022) and by a significant proportion of voters who make their final voting decisions only a few days before elections (STEM 2021). Both of these factors create room for a greater extent of tactical voting. From a technical perspective, the high prevalence of tactical voting in the election under analysis contributed to the obtaining of statistically significant results, which can be challenging to achieve when tactical voting is less common.

## Theoretical Background

To describe the voter decision-making process comprehensively, all the essential factors that could influence it need to be included. The psycho-social theory of electoral behavior (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Knoke 1974) proves instrumental in meeting this requirement. At its core, the model focuses on the dimension of time, arranging factors sequentially based on when they impact a voter's decision. Despite the emphasis on the stability of individual electoral preferences in classic sociological models, only a minority of people consistently vote for the same political party (Crewe 1986; Brody and Rothenberg 1988; Abramson 1992; Tavits 2008). A decline in class voting and party identification over time (Sanders 2017) correlates with an increase in the number of responsive voters, whose party affiliation is weaker, making them susceptible to altering their electoral preferences.

Scholars typically categorize voter decision-making factors into three to five stages (Talving 2016). These variations tend to have in common the fact that candidates and their perception in the eyes of voters are the last factor that comes into play. However, tactical voting should be placed at the forefront as a paramount factor influencing voting behavior

in the final days preceding an election. For this reason, I developed a modified version of the voter decision-making model (see Fig. 1). While primarily derived from professional literature dedicated to the psycho-social theory of voting (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Antunes 2010; Anderson and Stephenson 2011; Talving 2016), this model is complemented by concepts connected with responsive voting (e.g., Harrop and Miller 1987; Johnston and Pattie 2006).



In the concluding phase of voter decision-making, tactical voting assumes a pivotal role. While the term “tactical voting” is predominantly used in British English, its synonym, “strategic voting,” is more prevalent in American literature (e.g., Cain 1978; Blais and Nadeau 1996). Tactical voting was first discussed from the perspective of rational choice theory (Downs 1957), which is based on the assumption that voters behave in a way to maximize their utility, and their decision-making can be characterized as purposive. Although definitions of tactical voting vary, they all concur that tactical voters cast their vote for a party or candidate other than their most preferred choice. Moreover, these definitions align in highlighting that the primary motivation for tactical voters is not to express their political views but to influence the election outcome in a specific direction. The prevalence of tactical voting varies significantly across regions and time periods, usually remaining below 10% (Fisher 2000; Fisher and Curtice 2006).

Research on tactical voting across various countries illustrates its considerable diversity. For instance, in Canadian general elections, the prevalence of tactical voting ranged from

4% to 8% (Blais et al. 2005). Similarly, efforts to measure tactically motivated voting behavior in general elections in the United Kingdom yielded disparate results, fluctuating significantly from 5% in 1983 to 17% in 1987 (Johnston and Pattie 1991; Niemi et al. 1993). Notably, in the 2013 Norwegian parliamentary elections held under a PR electoral system, the share of tactical voting was measured at 18.3% (Jenssen 2016), which ranks as one of the highest values among the countries investigated. However, it should be mentioned that different authors' measurement of tactical voting in different elections in different countries may not always be comparable, primarily because of the varying methodological approaches used (Alvarez et al. 2006).

### *Tactical voting in proportional representation*

Tactical voting is most frequently associated with single-member district plurality electoral systems (Cox 1997). In such systems, supporters of marginal parties may choose one of the viable parties to avoid wasting their vote on a candidate with little chance of success (Duverger 1964; Kim and Fording 2001). Tactical voting typically occurs within the same or at least a similar party family. Individuals who prefer a party with minimal chances of winning may support another party from the same or a similar political spectrum, as a substitute for their first choice. However, there is a second fundamental form of tactical voting where voters do not select the party closest to their preferences; instead, they vote to oppose a specific party they strongly disapprove of, thereby supporting its primary adversary (Taylor 2015). Voters' decisions may often just be the result of rejecting alternatives they do not like and thus supporting parties among the unrejected remainder that have a realistic chance of success (Elliot 1998). This type of political behavior has also been labelled tactical voting (Baines et al. 2003).

In run-off elections (a two-round voting system), tactical voting is less relevant. In the first round, most voters express their opinions by voting for their first preference, even if it is a candidate with low electoral prospects. In the second round, only two candidates remain, making tactical voting essentially obsolete, as one of them will always be the voter's top choice (Farquharson 1969; Niou 2001; Muller and Page 2015). However, PR electoral systems offer ample room for various forms of tactical voting. PR systems are prevalent in over 80 countries worldwide, especially in Europe and Latin America, and mainly in elections for the lower (or sole) house of the national legislature (IFES 2022). Tactical voting in a PR system is influenced by different factors than in plurality systems, as the critical factor is not necessarily which party becomes the overall winner. Instead, the main focus shifts to which political parties pass the electoral threshold and have the potential to form a governing coalition.

Most PR systems set an electoral threshold that political parties must reach to secure seats in an elected body. In the context of the electoral threshold, two distinct types of tactical voting can be identified (Jenssen 2016). The first is the support vote, where a voter primarily favors a larger political party but votes for a smaller party they also support. The smaller party is not the voter's first choice but is on the cusp of surpassing the threshold, thus the voter wants to help it succeed. The second type is the defecting vote, where a voter contemplates voting for a smaller party with an expected electoral gain near or below

the threshold but ultimately decides to vote for a stronger party guaranteed to exceed the threshold in order to ensure their vote is not wasted. While PR systems generally record fewer wasted votes than plurality systems, the presence of numerous smaller parties means there are still many opportunities for votes to be wasted (Abramson et al. 2009).

The significance of the “threshold gap”—the difference between the share of votes a party must obtain to secure seats and the party’s anticipated electoral gain—is crucial. When this threshold gap is minimal, there is widespread adoption of tactical voting among voters considering the respective party (Garcia-Vinuela et al. 2013). In this regard, pre-election opinion polls are essential. They enable voters to gauge the electoral potential of individual parties, significantly shaping their considerations regarding tactical voting (Fey 1997; Herrmann 2014; Evrenk and Sher 2015). Voters may even use betting odds to predict election results, as bookmakers are usually highly accurate (Rhode and Strumpf 2004). Variations in voter information about projected results can lead to situations where two otherwise similar voters vote differently based on their expectations of different election outcomes (Herrmann 2014).

Tactical voting in PR elections is influenced not only by the presence of an electoral threshold but also by the necessity to form a majority coalition (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005). In PR systems, it is uncommon for a winning party to secure a majority of seats on its own. Consequently, voters may take into account which party could be part of a potential coalition and conclude that voting for a party bound for the opposition is a wasted vote (Jenssen 2016). For example, in the 2003 Israeli legislative election, approximately 10% of voters did not vote for their preferred party because they wanted their preferred coalition, which did not include that party, to secure a majority of seats (Blais et al. 2006). Similar instances of strategic coalition voting have been observed in New Zealand (Bowler et al. 2010) and Austria (Meffert and Gschwend 2010). Despite frequent discussions about the declining influence of the left–right political dichotomy (Kitschelt 1994), its importance in tactical voting for preferred coalitions is still manifest in that voters support rather right-wing or rather left-wing potential governing coalitions (Bargsted and Kedar 2009; Indridason 2011).

Voters often overlook the fact that, in PR elections, the overall winning party does not matter as much as who will be able to form a ruling coalition. Nevertheless, which party gets the most votes remains (at least psychologically) important to voters. Consequently, there is an opportunity to observe a similar type of tactical voting as under the plurality (FPTP) systems. Voters identify which parties have a chance to win and typically confine their choices to the top contenders (Herrmann and Pappi 2008). The “bandwagon effect,” which Evrenk and Sher (2015) described, is another influential factor in voting behavior. This term refers to a situation in which a voter, instead of selecting their most preferred party, votes for the expected winner simply to be on the winning side.

With numerous political parties in PR systems, it is not often feasible to frame voting as a choice between lesser evils (Jenssen 2016). Most voters in PR systems favor multiple political parties, often casting tactical votes for parties with which they have a positive affiliation (Oscarsson and Rosema 2019; Rekker and Rosema 2019). When a voter’s preferences align closely with two parties, tactical voting becomes a critical factor in their ultimate decision. Research by Bolstad et al. (2013) revealed that individuals who wavered between two parties and opted to vote for one of them for tactical reasons later developed

a stronger preference for that party in subsequent elections, highlighting how tactical voters can evolve into sincere voters over time.

The susceptibility to tactical voting is conditioned by the individual characteristics of voters. Tactical voting can be primarily influenced by the strength of voters' loyalty to their favorite political party. The stronger the voter's party identification, the less likely they are to engage in tactical voting (Gschwend 2007; Daoust and Bol 2020). This may also be associated with a higher prevalence of tactical voting among younger voters, where party loyalty is often weaker compared to older people (Bušta 2022). Studies also suggest that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in tactical voting (Miranda and Meloni 2016). Education can contribute to a better understanding of the political landscape and a willingness to adapt voting behavior to achieve preferred outcomes. Overall, political sophistication plays a key role in this context as well (Cox 1997), as tactical voting typically requires better voter awareness, including knowledge of the current political situation (Evrenk and Sher 2015).

One of the primary advantages of PR electoral systems is their ability to reasonably reflect voter preferences and the political views of the entire society (or at least those participating in elections). However, a "perfect" representation of societal preferences can only be achieved if each voter votes for their top choice, thereby expressing their political opinions. From this perspective, tactical voting, alongside factors such as the electoral threshold or the formula translating votes into seats, contributes to disparities in representation. Daoust and Bol (2020) even claimed that tactical voting should ideally not exist in any democratic system because it can threaten the functioning of democracy and unnaturally favor some political parties at the expense of others. Despite its potential drawbacks, tactical voting remains an important aspect of electoral behavior (not only) in proportional representation systems.

### Context of the 2021 Czech Parliamentary Elections

The 2021 Czech parliamentary elections, which determined the composition of the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of the legislative body), featured a total of 22 political parties. Several pre-election coalitions were formed, comprising two or three parties, but for simplicity, these coalitions will also be referred to as political parties. In these elections, 200 seats were up for grabs and allocated proportionally among the successful parties, based on the Imperiali quota. To secure seats, a party needed to exceed the 5% electoral threshold. In cases where parties formed a pre-election coalition, two-party coalitions required a minimum of 8%, while coalitions with three or more parties needed at least 11% of the vote.

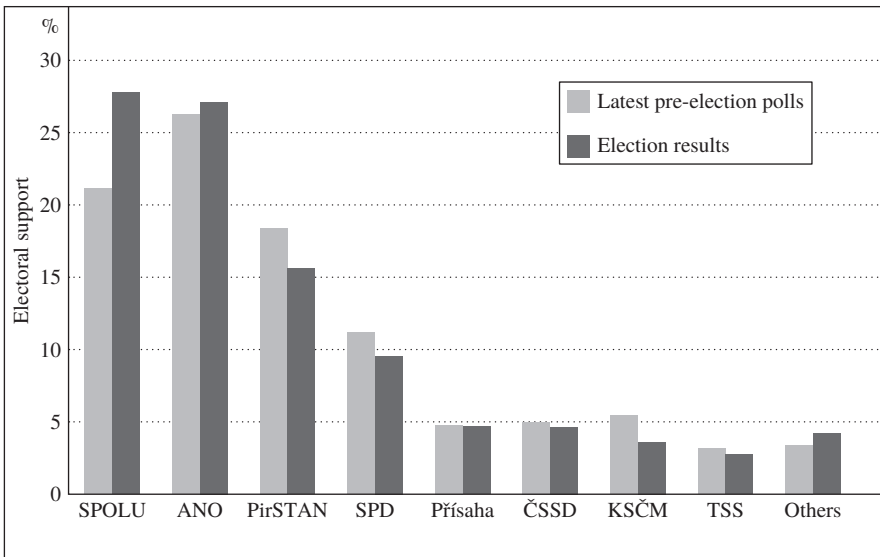
Pre-election surveys revealed a significant overlap between SPOLU (a coalition of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), Christian and Democratic Union–Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU–ČSL), and TOP 09) and PirSTAN (a coalition of the Czech Pirate Party (Piráti) and Mayors and Independents (STAN)) supporters. Close to 40% of potential voters for either of these parties considered both options, and until the last moment, they had not made a final decision (Pileček and Kostelecký 2022). Ideologically, these two parties

shared similarities, as both upheld liberal democratic values and vehemently opposed the government led by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and his political party ANO 2011 (ANO). Numerous anti-government demonstrations took place in the public space and for voters seeking an end to the rule of ANO and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), voting for either SPOLU or PirSTAN was a logical choice.

Three months prior to the elections, public opinion polls consistently placed ANO and PirSTAN as the leading parties in terms of electoral preferences, with SPOLU trailing in third place by approximately 3% (Mahdalová 2021). However, the last few weeks of the election campaign were more successful for SPOLU. Its leader, Petr Fiala, made a more favorable impression on voters during his media appearances than did Ivan Bartoš, the leader of PirSTAN. As a result, SPOLU advanced to second place in the final polls before the elections, holding a slight lead over PirSTAN (Fig. 2). For voters considering both of these alternatives, SPOLU suddenly appeared stronger and more capable of challenging ANO. Tactical voting, as the last factor in the decision-making process of voters (Fig. 1), played a pivotal role in the shifts in electoral preferences during the last week before the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections.

Fig. 2

#### Comparison of election results with the latest pre-election polls



Data: Czech Statistical Office (CZSO 2021b); Median (Janda 2021); STEM (Bohuslavová 2021).

Note: The latest pre-election polls are presented as averages of two polls on representative samples of the Czech adult population, with data collected approximately 10 days before the election.

“If voters in PR elections indeed change their vote according to their perception of the election’s outcome, then small swings in party support may have a strong influence on short-term voter behavior” (Herrmann 2014: 443). In the final two weeks before the election, there was a widespread perception in society that support for SPOLU was surging and that

this party had a genuine chance to steal the overall victory from Andrej Babiš. Voters, including some who had traditionally abstained from voting, began to gravitate toward SPOLU. However, this shift was not primarily because SPOLU had grown ideologically closer to these voters, but rather because it presented a realistic opportunity to defeat the party they wanted to see lose (Havlík and Lysek 2022).

The strong aversion of many voters to Andrej Babiš and his ANO political party was a fundamental prerequisite for the potential widespread use of tactical voting beyond its conventional forms. Another factor influencing tactical voting was that the then Czech president, Miloš Zeman, declared he would entrust the formation of a new government to the winner of the election, the leader of the party with the highest electoral gain, and not to the leader most likely to be able to form a coalition with the majority of seats (Pokorná 2021). These words had a significant psychological impact and (at least in the eyes of voters) the battle for the overall winner position became more important than ever.

Although the final pre-election polls predicted ANO as the party with the best chance of victory, SPOLU narrowly emerged as the winner, receiving 27.8% of the votes (Fig. 2). ANO, despite being favored, came in second with 27.1%. PirSTAN and the far-right populist party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) also successfully crossed the electoral threshold, securing 15.6% and 9.6% of the vote, respectively. The remaining 18 parties failed to reach the 5% electoral threshold, with the Přísaha and ČSSD parties coming very close to success. This marked the first time in the history of the independent Czech Republic (since 1993) that no clearly left-wing party was represented in the lower house of Parliament.

## Methodology and Data

Empirical investigation of tactical voting is essential due to its significant impact on individual party gains and seat distribution, and consequently the formation of governing coalitions. However, inconsistencies in methodological approaches across studies make it challenging to compare results from different elections and countries (Alvarez et al. 2006). Garcia-Vinuela et al. (2013) highlighted a common mistake in many studies: the focus has been primarily on voters of minor parties, while other types of strategic voting behavior were overlooked. Therefore, I chose an approach that would avoid this inaccuracy.

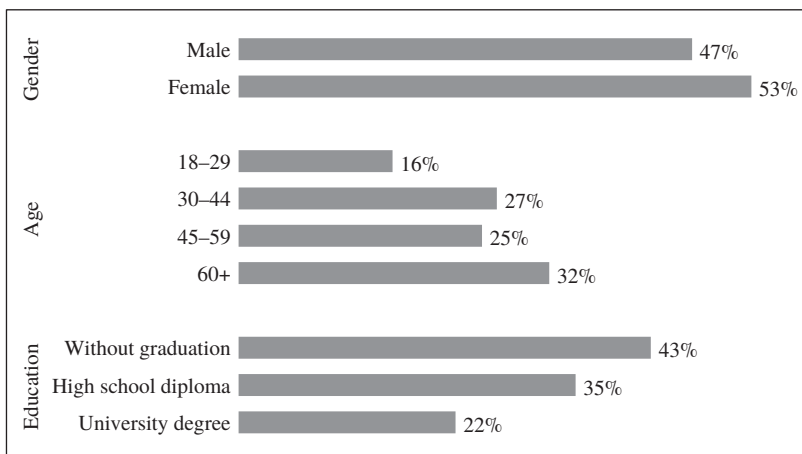
In general, three different methodological approaches to measuring tactical voting can be identified. The first is the ecological inference method (Curtice and Steed 1988; Johnston and Pattie 1991; Miranda and Meloni 2016), which analyzes secondary aggregated data. However, this approach risks the ecological fallacy, where conclusions about individual voting behavior are drawn from aggregated data (Lokar et al. 2019). To mitigate this issue, most scholars prefer individual-level data obtained through questionnaire surveys. These surveys can be categorized into two groups: analysis of self-reported voting motivations, where respondents directly state their main reasons for choosing and voting for a party (Niemi et al. 1992; Evans and Heath 1993), or indirect analysis involving questions assessing party preferences, perceived success probabilities, and finally, revealed voting choices (Alvarez and Nagler 2000; Muller and Page 2015; Daoust and Bol 2020).



The questionnaire survey was also used in the research of tactical voting in the Czech parliamentary elections 2021. This survey was conducted approximately two weeks after the elections (in October 2021), utilizing a representative and robust sample of the Czech adult population. The sample of 1,826 respondents represented Czech voters proportionally in terms of gender, age, education, and place of residence. The selection of respondents was guided by a quota prescription for the socio-demographic structure of the population (Fig. 3) and the place of residence, aligning with the typology of Czech districts based on the election results. Data collection was conducted through the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) method, facilitated by the Czech National Panel.

Fig. 3

Socio-demographic structure of the sample of 1,826 respondents



For none of the quota-monitored characteristics did the sample of respondents differ by more than three percentage points compared to census data (CZSO 2021a). However, it should be noted that the data collection method has its limitations. The sample was confined to the online (internet-using) population and was not a random selection, as respondents registered on the Czech National Panel were approached. Although the research presented here uses data from a socio-demographically representative sample, other data collection methods, such as stratified random sampling, could potentially yield even more rigorous results.

The questionnaire commenced with a screening question (Q1), “Did you participate in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections?,” followed by Q2: “Which political party did you vote for?” Of utmost relevance for the analysis of tactical voting was Q3: “(State specifically) what was the main reason you voted for this party?” Additionally, the respondents’ basic socio-demographic information (gender, age, education, and place of residence) was collected. Participants’ preferences for individual political parties were gauged using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from very positive to very negative. These preferences were instrumental in identifying instances of tactical voting. The questionnaire also delved into respondents’ interest in politics and whether they had participated in the

preceding Czech parliamentary elections, held in 2017, along with their voting choice in that election.

A crucial coding process involved the answers provided to Q3, which was open ended. This coding was contingent on whether the respondent engaged in tactical voting or not. Factors considered included the party the respondent voted for, and attitudes toward individual political parties. If the respondent's rationale for supporting a particular party implied tactical voting and at the same time this party was not their most preferred one, their vote was deemed to be tactical. The motivations behind tactical voting were subsequently categorized into specific forms through an inductive coding method. This approach involved the progressive integration of detailed codes into more general, content-superior categories (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Silver and Lewins 2014).

The study employed a multifaceted analysis, combining descriptive statistics, weighting techniques, and binary logistic regression to analyze tactical voting patterns in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections. The initial analysis involved descriptive statistics, which allowed the proportion of tactical votes and their diverse manifestations within the sample of 1,826 respondents to be calculated and thus helped to estimate the impact of tactical voting on the electoral outcomes of individual political parties participating in the elections. To refine the overall extent of tactical voting within the dataset, the data underwent a weighting process. This step was imperative due to the lack of perfect proportionality in the sample in regard to support for different political parties.

Additionally, the study employed binary logistic regression to delve deeper into the factors influencing tactical voting. Through this approach, the study explored the dependence of tactical voting on various socio-demographic characteristics of voters, their level of interest in politics, participation history, and voting consistency. Each independent variable was carefully categorized, with one specific category chosen as a reference point. This selection allowed for a nuanced understanding of how the prevalence of tactical voting varied across different categories within each variable.

The chosen methodological approach, while robust, does bear certain limitations that must be acknowledged. One potential weakness lies in the risk of overestimating self-reported tactical voting. Instances categorized as tactical voting included situations where a voter contemplated voting for multiple parties to which they had equally close personal affiliations but ultimately chose one for tactical reasons. While this behavior might not align perfectly with the conventional definition of tactical voting as selecting a party that is not the voter's most preferred, it does align with the broader definition of tactical voting as an attempt to influence electoral outcomes rather than express personal political preferences.

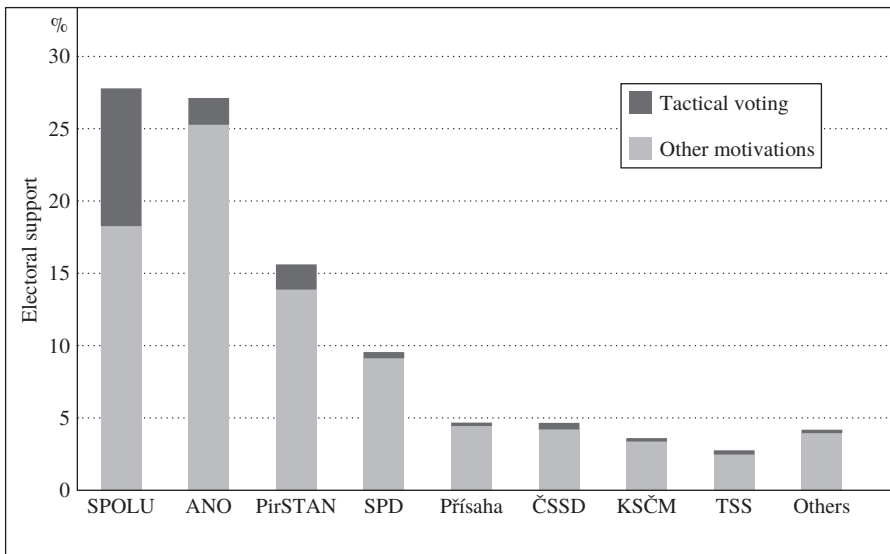
Although the questionnaire survey was conducted shortly after the elections under analysis, the retrospective approach also has its limits. Responses might be influenced by the above-mentioned bandwagon effect, which might also affect reporting past voting behavior, not just the vote itself. The answers might be influenced by the fact that the respondents already knew the election results, which could potentially have had an impact on how the respondents described their motivations for choosing a political party. Thus, the study operates within the constraints of the available data. While acknowledging the complexities of voter behavior and decision-making processes, it aims for the most accurate representation of tactical voting patterns in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections.

## Research Results and Discussion

The results of the questionnaire survey indicate that tactical voting significantly impacted the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections, and accounted for approximately 15% of the overall votes. When examining the parties most affected by tactical voting, it is obvious that SPOLU benefited the most, with more than a third of its voters engaging in tactical voting (specifically 34%). Without these tactically motivated voters, SPOLU would not have won the election. ANO—primarily among voters who did not want SPOLU to win—and PirSTAN also received a notable number of tactical votes. For the PirSTAN political party, the share of such voters reached 10%. The prevalence was even slightly higher (11%) for ČSSD, but these votes were insufficient to cause the party to cross the threshold. For all other parties, the contribution of tactical voting to their electoral performance was only marginal (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4

Contribution of tactical voting to the results of the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections



Although no comparable studies exist in the Czech context, the 15% share of tactical voting observed in the elections under analysis stands out internationally, especially for a PR system. Contrary to the belief that tactical voting is more prevalent in plurality systems, this study demonstrates its fundamental importance even in PR elections. Analyzing Fig. 4, it becomes evident that tactical voting primarily occurred among the strongest political parties, despite the lack of the substantial motivation of helping them surpass the electoral threshold. In contrast, smaller parties, even those on the edge of the threshold, rather tended to lose their voters. These findings align with the conclusions of Garcia-Vinuela et al. (2013) regarding Spanish general elections, or Daoust and Bol's (2020) research from Germany emphasizing the similarities of tactical voting in different electoral contexts.

### *Forms of Tactical Voting*

Tactical voting in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections manifested in diverse forms, with the most prevalent motivation being a strong aversion to one of the potential winners (as outlined in [Table 1](#)). This sentiment often led voters to choose a political party they perceived as having the best chance to defeat the party they disliked. Such behavior mirrors the ancient proverb that says “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” The extent of tactical voting was notably influenced by the intense negative campaigning of two fundamentally opposing political ideologies represented by the most powerful parties—a situation often associated with increased tactical voting, especially among voters with significant differences in preference for these fiercely competing rival parties.

Even if a voter did not have a strong affinity for either of the two major parties, they were likely to feel a greater aversion to one over the other. In such cases, tactical voting became a crucial factor in their decision-making process if they aimed to influence the election outcome. Many voters, driven by their aversion to ANO as a potential winner, chose to support SPOLU. The results indicated that a significant portion of voters cast their ballots for SPOLU primarily to prevent ANO from winning the election. A similar pattern of voting behavior was observed, although to a much lesser extent, in the opposite direction, where some voters supported ANO to prevent SPOLU (or PirSTAN) from becoming the overall winner.

In an international context, the leader of ANO, Andrej Babiš, bears similarities to former American President Donald Trump. Both are successful businessmen and billionaires whose political styles incorporate elements of populism ([Buštková and Guasti 2019](#)). The phenomenon observed in the 2020 United States presidential election, where 44% of Biden voters cast their votes against Trump rather than in support of the Democratic nominee ([Matthews 2020](#)), finds parallels in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections. Here, 23% of SPOLU voters admitted to tactically casting their votes against ANO and Andrej Babiš rather than in explicit support of SPOLU. However, this was a spontaneous response, thus the actual share of such voters may be even higher. This aversion-driven tactical voting reflects a broader trend where voters strategically align against candidates they vehemently oppose, underscoring the interplay of emotions and strategy in political decision-making.

The sentiments of SPOLU voters encapsulate the complexity of tactical voting in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections. Comments such as “I had already decided to vote for the opposition; I preferred PirSTAN more, but SPOLU had a better chance of defeating ANO,” “Because above all I wanted ANO not to win and I thought that SPOLU had the best chance of defeating them,” and “They were the only ones who could defeat Andrej Babiš,” illustrate the mindset of these voters. Interestingly, due to their lack of awareness of pre-election opinion polls, some respondents opted for PirSTAN for similar reasons, believing it to be the stronger of the two opposition parties. This fact confirms the words of [Herrmann \(2014\)](#) that even identical voters with the same party preferences might choose different parties or candidates based on their different expectations of the election results.

In the context of PR elections, a common form of tactical voting occurs when voters choose only from the viable parties that are almost certain to exceed the electoral threshold. During the 2021 parliamentary elections, more than 5% of voters considered opting for a small political party but ultimately voted for a major party to avoid wasting their votes.

Table 1

**Classification of forms of tactical voting in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections**

	% of tactical voting	% of total
<b>Aversion to a potential winner</b>	<b>48.82</b>	<b>7.34</b>
<i>ANO must not win</i>	43.86	6.59
<i>SPOLU or PirSTAN must not win</i>	4.96	0.75
<b>Selection only from viable parties (defecting vote)</b>	<b>34.79</b>	<b>5.23</b>
<i>Lesser evil</i>	33.35	5.01
<i>Best substitute</i>	1.44	0.22
<b>Helping a party exceed the 5% threshold (support vote)</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>0.62</b>
<b>Voting for a preferred coalition</b>	<b>9.54</b>	<b>1.43</b>
Unclassifiable	2.71	0.41
Total	100.00	15.03

These voters primarily sought the “lesser evil” among the viable political parties. In contrast, only a few respondents declared that they wanted to find a viable party that aligned closely with the political values of the party they most preferred and would have voted for if its electoral potential had been higher. This form of tactical voting could be called a search for the best substitute.

Only 0.6% of votes were motivated by the intention to assist a weaker political party in surpassing the 5% electoral threshold. The majority of these votes were directed towards ČSSD, with a smaller portion going to KSCM. Voters who supported these parties expressed the desire to maintain the representation in Parliament of traditional left-wing politics focusing on social issues and addressing the concerns of the disadvantaged sectors of society. Additionally, the presence of an electoral threshold influenced the voting decisions of some individuals who backed the political party Přísaha, a newcomer to the political scene with limited recognition among the public. These voters aimed to provide Přísaha an opportunity to showcase its ideas on the national political stage and thus indicated a willingness to support new voices in the political landscape.

The last classifiable form of tactical voting involved choosing a preferred coalition. In this form, voters strategically considered their choice in the context of the future ruling coalition and national government. To make an informed decision, voters must be aware of which parties are likely to form a coalition and must understand that strong support for a specific party enhances the chances of its being able to form its preferred coalition. In the lead-up to the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections, it was evident that SPOLU and PirSTAN intended to collaborate after the elections. Consequently, considering the proportional nature of the electoral system, the shift of support from potential PirSTAN voters to SPOLU appeared less justified. At the same time, uncertainty surrounded SPOLU’s stance on the improbable but still possible coalition with ANO. This uncertainty led some undecided voters to lean toward PirSTAN, which even more noticeably distanced itself from any cooperation with ANO.

Given the political landscape in the preceding two election periods (from 2013 to 2021) where the government was formed by a coalition of ANO and ČSSD, it might have

been expected that some of the ANO voters would strive to maintain this government and support the weakening ČSSD, which pre-election polls indicated would garner around 5% of votes. However, there was minimal tactical voting in this direction. Surprisingly, some former ČSSD voters, driven both by tactical considerations and the influence of ANO's pre-election campaign, which specifically targeted ČSSD voters, opted for ANO. This course of events exemplifies an instance where not only voters but also political parties overlooked important attributes of the electoral system. Parties aimed to maximize their individual electoral gains without fully considering the proportional principle underlying seat distribution.

### *Characteristics of Tactical Voters*

The conditionality of tactical voting in terms of socio-demographic and other selected individual determinants was tested using binary logistic regression. Gender, age, education, interest in politics, electoral participation in 2017, and voting consistency entered the model as explanatory variables. The Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients showed statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ , Chi-square = 76.947) and the existence of a relationship between the analyzed predictors and tactical voting. The overall strength of the regression model is not very high (Cox & Snell  $R^2 = 0.041$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.075$ ). This is partly due to the relatively large sample size. However, these low values point in particular to the fact that most of the variability in the use of tactical voting remains unexplained by the model. Tactical voting is not dominant in one specific group of voters but permeates all voter segments.

The analysis of socio-demographic predictors revealed several noteworthy patterns regarding tactical voting in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections (Table 2). Age emerged as the most significant determinant, with middle-aged groups being more likely to engage in tactical voting than seniors, and voters aged 18 to 29 being almost three times more likely to vote tactically than those over 60. With a reported 37% share of tactical voting, this trend was even more pronounced among young voters who did not have the right to vote in the 2017 parliamentary elections and were participating in lower house elections for the first time. Education level also played a significant role. University-educated voters showed a higher propensity for tactical voting than those with lower levels of education.

The increased voter turnout in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections (a turnout of 65.4%, while in 2017 it was 60.8%; CZSO 2021b) might have played a role, as some traditional non-voters participated and voted strategically against the party they disliked. Furthermore, the analysis revealed a link between voting consistency and tactical voting. Tactical voting was more likely to occur among floating voters, who lacked a strong attachment to a particular political party and voted in 2021 for a different party than in 2017. This finding emphasizes the flexibility of tactical voters, who tend to change their allegiance based on strategic considerations rather than ideological or party loyalty.

The results of this study coincide with the conclusions drawn from research examining the characteristics of tactical voters (Gschwend 2007; Jenssen 2016; Miranda and Meloni 2016; Daoust and Bol 2020). The patterns observed in tactical voting behavior, particularly concerning age, education level, electoral participation, and consistency (or party identification), echo the trends identified in these prior studies. This consistency across different

Table 2

**Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for socio-demographic predictors of tactical voting (results of a binary logistic regression model)**

Characteristics (Independent variables)	Dependent variable			
	Use of tactical voting (Yes = 1 / No = 0)			
	OR	95% CI for OR		Sig.
Lower		Upper		
<b>Gender</b> , reference cat. (RC): Male (N = 857)				
Female (N = 969)	0.78	0.58	1.04	0.09
<b>Age</b> , RC: 60+ (N = 587)				<b>&lt;0.01</b>
18–29 (N = 291)	<b>2.95</b>	1.86	4.69	<b>&lt;0.01</b>
30–44 (N = 488)	<b>2.06</b>	1.36	3.13	<b>&lt;0.01</b>
45–59 (N = 460)	<b>2.21</b>	1.47	3.30	<b>&lt;0.01</b>
<b>Education</b> , RC: Without graduation (N = 779)				<b>&lt;0.01</b>
High school diploma (N = 637)	1.29	0.89	1.87	0.18
University degree (N = 410)	<b>1.82</b>	1.22	2.71	<b>&lt;0.01</b>
<b>Interest in politics</b> , RC: Great (N = 364)				0.12
Moderate (N = 1,033)	1.33	0.92	1.93	0.13
Minimal (N = 372)	1.03	0.65	1.64	0.91
None at all (N = 57)	2.03	0.95	4.34	0.07
<b>Participation in 2017</b> , RC: Yes (N = 1,251)				<b>&lt;0.01</b>
No (N = 192)	1.41	0.90	2.22	0.13
Do not remember (N = 293)	0.95	0.59	1.55	0.84
Did not have the right to vote (N = 90)	<b>2.79</b>	1.53	5.10	<b>&lt;0.01</b>
<b>Voting consistency</b> , RC: Yes (N = 792)				
No (N = 459)	<b>1.54</b>	1.09	2.19	<b>0.02</b>

Note: Voting consistency means that the voter voted for the same party in 2021 as in 2017. This step of the analysis was filtered from respondents who did not participate in the 2017 election or who do not remember who they voted for.

studies adds robustness to the understanding of tactical voting behavior and emphasizes the significance of these determinants.

## Conclusions

The main aim of this article was to analyze the extent, forms, and determinants of tactical voting in the 2021 Czech parliamentary elections. Although these are elections with a PR system in which a political party wins seats if it exceeds the 5% electoral threshold, the

dominant factor and reason for tactical voting was not primarily the threshold but the battle for the position of overall winner. The presence of the electoral threshold was also considered by voters—not with the aim of assisting small parties to surpass it, but rather to ensure their votes were cast for viable political parties and thus not wasted. In this regard, tactical voting distorts proportional representation in favor of large political parties at the expense of small ones. Without the influence of tactically motivated voting, more political parties would likely succeed and win seats in Parliament.

The phrase “a divided Czech society” was often heard in the media in connection with the said elections. The extremely high proportion of tactical voting, which was motivated by voters’ aversion to one of the two strongest parties, confirms the aptness of this statement. Duverger’s law refers to the tendency of voters in elections within a plurality system (typically FPTP) to support one of the two strongest parties, even if neither is the party they most prefer and identify with, or which shares their political values and attitudes (Duverger 1964). Voters not only want to express their opinions through their vote, they also want to influence the election outcome, and in a “winner takes all” system, casting a vote for a small party would preclude such an effect. The PR system does not require this type of electoral behavior, yet research conducted using the example of the Czech parliamentary elections suggests that, even in PR systems, similar tendencies among voters can be observed.

In Czechia, this behavior has been fueled by the significant polarization of society into two opposing groups. In recent years, the fundamental cause of the polarization has been the politician Andrej Babiš and his populist party, ANO. Therefore, people who are opponents of Andrej Babiš often do not vote for their preferred party but for the party that has the greatest potential to defeat “the enemy.” The open-ended answers of the respondents clearly showed that a controversial politician can be a significant catalyst for tactical voting. To a certain extent, tactical voting was probably also present in the Czech presidential election in January 2023 and will likely be present in future elections as well. Given that this is the first predominantly quantitatively focused study on tactical voting in Czechia, it would be appropriate to maintain a consistent methodological approach in future research. Such consistency would ensure the comparability of results and enable the monitoring of trends in the use of tactical voting within the Czech electoral environment.

This article contributes to the broader discussion of the concept of tactical voting in the context of PR electoral systems. The high incidence of tactical voting is connected with an increasing inconsistency in voting behavior and with a growing share of voters who flexibly respond to the development of the political situation, including often leaving their final electoral decision until the last moment. As has been documented in other research as well, this study has confirmed the socio-demographic conditionality of tactical voting and its higher prevalence among younger voters (due in particular to their lower party identification and loyalty) and among more educated individuals (due to their greater political sophistication).

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