Insincere voting under the successive procedure

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Abstract Most European parliaments use the successive procedure to reach decisions. This means that a parliament votes feasible alternatives one-by-one in a pre-determined order until one of them obtains a majority of votes. The paper has two objectives. First, I sketch a simple method making it easy to uncover instances of successful insincere voting under the successive procedure. Second, by focusing on data from one national assembly consistently using this procedure, I demonstrate that insincere or strategic voting is very rare. The finding does not indicate that politicians necessarily behave in a non-strategic or unsophisticated manner. It means only that strategic maneuvers may take place at earlier stages of the decision-making process, for example, in designing the voting agenda.

Keywords Insincere voting · Strategic voting · Successive procedure · Parliaments · Recorded votes

1 Introduction

In any voting system, voters may gain by revealing false or misleading preferences; the possibility of such insincere voting is an inherent feature of all kinds of voting procedures (Gibbard 1973; Satterthwaite 1975). Similarly, others have emphasized that "strategy is the essence of politics; a non-strategic politician cannot achieve his or her aims" (Morrow 1994: 1). After more than four decades of theoretical research, initiated by Farquharson's (1969) seminal analysis, insincere voting and sophisticated voting outcomes are well understood. An important step was that of McKelvey and Niemi (1978), who provided a simplified analysis of sophisticated voting, and who demonstrated that if there were a Condorcet winner, it would be the sophisticated outcome under any binary agenda. Later, sophisticated voting has been related to the uncovered set (Miller 1980; Shepsle and Weingast 1984; Banks 1985), to a wider range of agenda types (Ordeshook and Schwartz 1987), and to conditions of incomplete information (Jung 1989; Ordeshook and Palfrey 1988). Austen-Smith

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([1987](#)) distinguished between endogenous and exogenous agenda formation processes, and proved that in the former case, adoption of sophisticated agendas makes sophisticated and sincere voting observationally equivalent. He coined the term "sophisticated sincerity" to describe apparent sincere behavior which rests on strategic design of the voting agenda.

Insincere voting in real-world legislative settings has gained relatively limited attention.[1] Almost all of the empirical studies so far deal with roll call voting in the US Congress (e.g., Denzau et al. 1985; Riker 1982: 152–156; Krehbiel and Rivers 1990; Calvert and Fenno 1994; Groseclose and Milyo 2010). Although the theoretical literature covers different procedures, the empirical evidence, with few exceptions, relates to one class of parliamentary procedures, i.e., the sequential elimination (amendment) method or some variant of it utilized in congressional voting. In addition, most recent work has centered on the impact of adding or removing amendments (Enelow and Koehler 1980; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Wilkerson 1999; Jenkins and Munger 2003). Legislators may introduce killer amendments to try to transform bills that are sure winners into bills that are losers, while bills' proponents may counteract that tactic by voting insincerely. Bütikofer and Hug's study (2010) is among the few studies of strategic voting in a European legislature. Voting in the Swiss parliament, which is the assembly they analyze, follows a procedure close to the one used in the US Congress.

Results from the empirical studies are mixed. Examples of insincere voting can be found, but in general the opportunities for insincerity at the final stage of the legislative decision-making process are rare (Wilkerson 1999). Based on an extensive search, Groseclose and Milyo (2010: 65–66) report only ten cases in the entire history of the US Congress (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Similarly, Mackie (2003), in his extensive reanalysis of instances of strategic voting reported in the literature, finds existing evidence unconvincing (e.g., the famous case of the Powell amendment in the US House of Representatives). Although Bütikofer and Hug (2010) find evidence of strategic voting, it seems fair to conclude from the literature so far that clear-cut examples of successful insincere voting are few.

This article studies insincere voting under the successive procedure. If insincere voting takes place at all, under this or other relevant procedures of parliamentary voting, we should expect to find it in countries where there are multiple parties, no majority party, minority governments, open rules with regard to the handling of amendments in parliament, and ample opportunities for the opposition to formulate policy proposals (see, e.g., Rasch and Tsebelis 2011). The Norwegian parliament votes consistently according to the successive procedure when more than two alternatives are feasible. This case shares all of the features mentioned above, as indicated in Table 1, except that majority governments were formed after the elections in 2005 and 2009 (Rasch 2011). Thus, if insincere voting is to be expected anywhere in parliaments using the successive procedure, the Norwegian Storting (parliament), during times of minority governance, should be a likely candidate. If insincere voting is *not* found in Norway's parliament, such behavior could hardly be significant in any parliament with less favorable conditions.[2]

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[1]In contrast, the literature on strategic voting in mass elections is rapidly increasing. Most analyses consider plurality elections, but there are also some studies of run-off and list PR systems (Cox 1997; Abramson et al. 2010). In general, the effect of strategic voting is to impose a limit on the number of viable candidates or lists, and smaller parties tend to lose votes to major parties. Worth noting is that strategic voting is widespread, particularly in electoral systems with small constituencies.

[2]Less favorable conditions could mean situations with a disciplined majority party or majority cabinet. Or they could refer to parliaments with restrictive rather than open rules, and limited capacity for the opposition to make serious, well-founded proposals on their own.

Table 1 Percentages of seats for parties and governments, 1989–2013

Parties	1989–93	1993–97	1997–01	2001–05	2005–09	2009–13
Socialist Left Party (SV)	5.5	7.9	5.5	13.9	8.9	6.5
Labor Party (A)	38.2	40.6	39.4	26.1	36.1	37.8
Center Party (SP)	6.7	19.4	6.7	6.1	6.5	6.5
Christian People's Party (KRF)	8.5	7.9	15.2	13.3	6.5	5.9
Liberal Party (V)	0	0.6	3.6	1.2	5.9	1.2
Conservative Party (H)	22.4	17.0	13.9	23.0	13.6	17.8
Progress Party (FRP)	13.3	6.0	15.2	15.8	22.5	24.3
Governments						
Syse 1989–90 (H/KRF/SP)	37.6					
Brundtland 1990–93 (A)	38.2					
Brundtland 1993–96 (A)		40.6				
Jagland 1996–97 (A)		40.6				
Bondevik 1997–00 (KRF/SP/V)			25.5			
Stoltenberg 2000–01 (A)			39.4			
Bondevik 2001–05 (KRF/V/H)				37.5		
Stoltenberg 2005–09 (A/SV/SP)					51.5	
Stoltenberg 2009–13 (A/SV/SP)						50.8
N (number of seats)	165	165	165	165	169	169

Entries are percentages of seats held by each of the main parliamentary parties and the percentages of seats controlled by the various governments

In the next two sections, I present in detail the main parliamentary voting methods, and the successive procedure particularly. Thereafter, a hypothesis on the frequency of insincere voting is derived and tested on data from the Norwegian Storting. The analysis demonstrates that insincere voting is uncommon. I show instances of successful insincere voting to be extremely rare or non-existent in the data covering thousands of roll call votes since 1990.

2 Parliamentary voting procedures

Voting procedures translate individual votes on available alternatives (possible outcomes) into collective choices. To be able to work on any number of alternatives, voting procedures consist, on the one hand, of a balloting method and, on the other hand, of more or less complex decision rules (e.g., Merrill 1988). The first component specifies how and in what form votes are cast, whereas the latter specifies how votes are summed up or aggregated in order to produce an outcome. Decision rules include both a dominance relation defining the requirements for winning—for instance simple majority—and rules determining an agenda or a voting sequence, in the event that more than one ballot is needed to reach a decision in the case at hand.

If an assembly must choose between three or more mutually exclusive alternatives, a large number of procedures—each with different properties—could be used (e.g., Dummett 1984; Riker 1982; Nurmi 1987; Miller 1995). In the European parliamentary setting,

however, it turns out that two main approaches are followed (Rasch 1995). National parliaments tend to apply either variants of the *elimination* (*amendment*) *procedure* or some sort of *successive procedure*. The first method essentially votes alternatives two-by-two, while the latter takes them one-by-one (definitions below). The successive procedure has been analyzed only sporadically.[3] For example, Nurmi's (1983) summary analysis of normative properties of various voting procedures omits the successive procedure and Riker (1982, 1986) mentions it only briefly.

In Europe the successive procedure dominates. It is the main approach to legislative voting on multiple alternatives in most countries, although with some variation in voting order details (Rasch 1995, 2000).[4] The European Parliament also sticks mainly to successive voting. In addition to Britain, variants of the elimination procedure seem to be found only in Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Ordeshook and Schwartz (1987) observed a mix of different procedures or agendas in the US Congress. The same could be true at least for other countries mainly following the elimination (amendment) framework. Voting in the Norwegian parliament has been studied extensively, and in this case, the successive procedure—together with a number of more specific order-of-voting rules—is entirely predominant (Rasch 1987). However, with the exception of Scandinavian countries, the assertion that the successive procedure dominates is not based on close inspection of voting practices. Rather, information on European legislatures has been provided by legislative specialists who answered a questionnaire. All questions concerned institutional rather than behavioral matters. In answering, the specialists relied on standing orders and other documents, and some specialists also contacted parliamentary staff to obtain information that was more precise or more reliable. Most respondents could not be considered specialists in social choice theory, but were highly experienced legislative scholars (Döring 1995; Rasch 2000). Whenever possible, other sources of information (other informants or literature) have been consulted as a check.[5] Voting is often strikingly complex, and is therefore hard to interpret and to understand. One possible source of misclassification should be mentioned. Because parliaments often vote laws in smaller parts (e.g., article by article), it is possible to misinterpret this practice and thus to say that a successive procedure is used, although, in fact, the parliament in question leans on the elimination procedure. To misinterpret the successive approach as one of elimination voting should be much less likely. Although we have sketched the two main approaches used in parliamentary voting, it is not yet possible to tell just how stringently the two procedures are applied in day-to-day proceedings.

3 Defining the successive procedure

Suppose an assembly must select one alternative from a fixed and finite set of feasible alternatives ($n \geq 3$). The alternatives are formulated as mutually exclusive options, and therefore

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[3]But see Miller (1995), Bjurulf and Niemi (1978), and Grofman (1981).

[4]Schwartz (2008) identifies three types of procedures (agendas). He uses the names "Euro-Latin," "Mex-Italian," and "Anglo-American." The first one is a successive procedure, and the latter an amendment procedure. Schwartz unfortunately lacks any justification or documentation as to the claims he makes on where the various procedures are used, but he is right in emphasizing the difficulties of establishing a credible procedural geography.

[5]See, e.g., Pappi (1992) (the German Bundestag), Bütikofer and Hug (2010) (Swiss parliament), and Ramstedt (1961) (the Nordic countries, France, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and various international organizations).
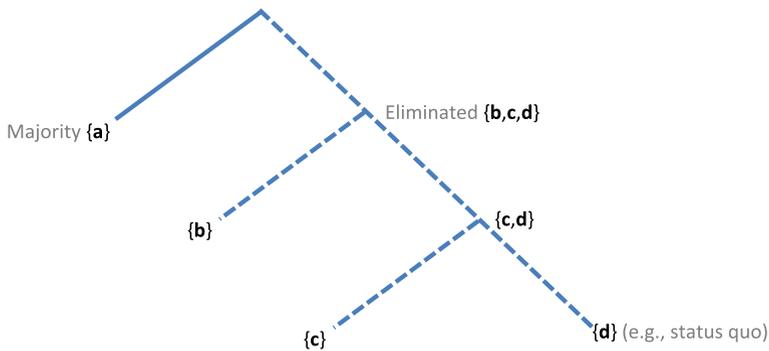
Fig. 1 An example of successive voting in which there are four alternatives (possible outcomes) and a voting order *abcd*. Alternative *a* has been adopted at the first of potentially three voting stages, and no further voting takes place

only one of them can be the outcome. Before voting begins, alternatives must be arranged in some sequence or order of voting (known to everyone). The *successive procedure* now works by voting the alternatives one-by-one, up or down, in the order specified. Thus, the initial ballot clarifies whether a majority supports the first alternative. If this single alternative receives a majority of votes, it is adopted and no more votes need be taken (see Fig. 1); all other alternatives—not compatible with the accepted one—are automatically eliminated. If, however, a majority decides against the first alternative, this alternative is removed and will not be considered further. The assembly then moves on to the second alternative specified by the voting order selected. The third stage of the voting process is reached only if the second alternative is voted down. Voting proceeds until one alternative obtains a majority. At least one of the two alternatives remaining at the last possible step (the $(n-1)$'th ballot with n alternatives) has to be the outcome, if no single alternative at an earlier stage of the voting process has been able to attract a majority. As Riker (1982: 73) emphasizes, at each stage the procedure in effect divides the alternatives into two sets, the singleton and the remainder, and places them against each other.

Figure 1 shows the structure of the successive procedure, in an example with four mutually exclusive options. It displays a voting order beginning with a (first stage) and b (second stage). On the final stage of the voting process, c is voted against d. The latter alternative in practice often will be an informal status quo option, i.e., the outcome that is realized if all formal proposals are voted down one by one in $n-1$ ballots. In the example of Fig. 1, the first proposal on the agenda wins directly, and no further voting is needed. All other alternatives are eliminated. Alternative a wins either because it has a majority of first-preference votes, or because a has sufficient backing of first-preference and subsidiary (second-, third-preference, etc.) votes combined.

By way of contrast, the elimination procedure proceeds by comparing pairs of alternatives, removing one of the two at every voting stage (e.g., Riker 1982: 69–73). After the alternatives are arranged in some order, the initial poll is taken between the first two alternatives.[6] The winner of this contest is paired against the third alternative of the predetermined voting order. The majority winner at this second stage then goes on to meet the fourth alternative on the list, and so on. With n alternatives on the agenda, exactly $n-1$ ballots

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[6]In reality, the procedure compares subsets of alternatives. The comparisons, however, are done such that the subsets have all but one element in common.

are carried out. During the voting process, and in contrast to the successive procedure, alternatives are *always* eliminated one by one; under successive voting, a subset of $n - 1$ alternatives could be eliminated in one vote (on the first stage). Also, contrary to what might be observed in connection with the successive procedure, a winner is never selected before the final ballot; victories at earlier stages are only preliminary.

Simple majority is the decision rule analyzed in this article and most of the literature on voting procedures. However, contrary to the elimination (amendment) procedure, the successive procedure also may work in supermajoritarian settings. In fact, the successive procedure is probably the sole parliamentary practice employed in multi-alternative cases where a qualified majority or unanimity is required to reach decisions (as, e.g., in the case of constitutional amendments; see Rasch and Congleton 2006).[7]

If none of the alternatives before a parliament using the successive procedure has a clearcut majority of first-preference support, the outcome at least partly must be based on *ex ante* or *ex post* subsidiary voting, e.g., second-preference votes in addition to first-preference votes. In the *ex post* case, a member of parliament votes in favor of a lower ranked alternative only after higher ranked alternatives have been eliminated. Thus, the legislator votes directly in accordance with his or her preferences; whenever two alternative sets are compared, the one containing the alternative highest on the legislator's preference scale is chosen (Farquharson 1969). This non-strategic, myopic behavior is termed *sincere* voting. Voting is based solely on the voter's own preferences.

Sincere successive voting Sincere voting under the successive procedure implies that the voter, at any stage of the voting process, votes in favor of the alternative set containing his or her highest ranked alternative (of those not yet rejected). It is assumed that only *ex post* subsidiary voting takes place.

The purpose of insincere voting is to secure an outcome of the voting process that is as good as possible. Voters are required to utilize at least some information on others' preferences (or the social preference relation) and likely behavior. Such voting takes the form of *ex ante* subsidiary voting, that is, the voter votes in favor of some single alternative although it is not ranked highest among the remaining alternatives. Note that under the successive procedure, as long as a voting order is specified, no voter can gain by voting for a (single) worst alternative or against a (single) best alternative. In this sense, therefore, it is not possible to gain by voting *contrary* to one's preferences.[8] The reason is that as soon an alternative gets a majority of votes, it also becomes the decision of the legislature in question. If a voter feels that this outcome is the worst possible, he or she will of course oppose it. Likewise, if one believes that the alternative being voted on is the best available, its chances are always hurt by voting against it.

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[7]It can be argued that the US House vote on impeachment of President Clinton in fact was based on the successive procedure. After a motion to adjourn had been rejected, and a motion to table appeal was voted down, the House proceeded with votes on each of four (compatible) articles of impeachment. If, for example, the motion to adjourn had been accepted, further voting at least would have been interrupted. See Kurrild-Klitgaard (2000) for an interesting analysis of this case.

[8]Because it deals with strategic voting in the context of the amendment procedure, strategic voting in most of the literature is said to occur when legislators vote against their most preferred alternative at one stage of the voting process in order to produce an outcome at the final stage that is better than it otherwise would be. In the successive context, strategic voting must be defined differently, and does not involve voting contrary to one's preferences in any straightforward sense.

Insincere (strategic) successive voting Insincere or strategic voting under the successive procedure implies that the voter votes for a single alternative before his or her highest ranked alternative (of those remaining) has been singled out for voting, the aim being to secure an outcome of the voting process that is as good as possible. Insincere voting, thus, means *ex ante* subsidiary voting.

The number of feasible alternatives and the voting order so far have been regarded as fixed. In a broader perspective, sophisticated actors may, however, be expected to try to influence the voting agenda. Thus, even if *ex ante* subsidiary voting does not take place, we cannot exclude the possibility that voters have approached the voting process in a highly strategic or sophisticated fashion (Austen-Smith 1987). Non-sophisticated instances of *ex ante* subsidiary voting, however, should not occur.

Again, a comparison with the elimination procedure might be useful. Sincere voting in this case also means voting strictly in accordance with one's own preferences. Insincere or strategic voting, however, implies voting contrary to true preferences at earlier stages of the voting process, i.e., in favor of the lower ranked of two alternatives, to make the outcome as good as possible given the preferences and likely actions of others. Thus, the legislator may gain by voting *against* his or her *best alternative*, or in *favor* of his or her *worst alternative*.

I have presented both the successive and the elimination procedures. Which is more susceptible to strategy and skill by the legislators? Voting outcomes may be manipulated in many ways. The set of alternatives available on the floor can be influenced by adding or deleting proposals strategically. Agenda manipulation (with a fixed set of alternatives) may be related to the choice of voting method, the choice of the order in which alternatives are considered, or the labeling of the alternatives (which in turn may affect the ordering). Further, insincere voting is a way to manipulate, but also, under some circumstances, a way to counteract manipulative agenda setting (McKelvey and Niemi 1978; Riker 1986).

The successive procedure, on the one hand, seems to be more sensitive to order-of-voting effects than the elimination procedure is, in principle opening up vast opportunities to affect the outcome by manipulating the voting order (in particular, to the extent that voting is sincere). On the other hand, elimination voting over multiple alternatives might easily become much more complex than successive voting, allowing some voters to take others by surprise during the process of sequentially eliminating single alternatives.

It is hard to tell whether the members of European parliaments find relevant the theoretical possibilities to manipulate outcomes, and it is hard to tell how frequently such possibilities are indeed exploited in practice. Several instances of strategic voting in the Swedish Riksdag have been reported in the literature (Bjurulf and Niemi 1978; Bjurulf 1973; Lewin 1988; Hadenius 1981). Similarly, concerning the Finnish Riksdag, Nurmi (1997: 43) writes that "legislative majorities almost routinely resort to the preference misrepresentation in order to manoeuvre the weakest possible contestant to confront their favorite candidate in the final pairwise vote."[9] Both Sweden and Finland use the elimination procedure. In Norway, where the successive procedure is used, it has been hard to come up with any clear-cut cases of strategic voting in parliament (see Rasch 1990 for an example).[10] These simple observations could indicate a general pattern with respect to the frequency of strategic voting under the elimination and successive procedures, respectively.

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[9]On Finland, also see Lagerspetz (1993).

[10]Rasch (1990) analysed a case from 1988, and found that at most two of 157 MPs voted insincerely. One of them or both likely believed that their action would affect the outcome of the voting process, but, as it turned out, their votes were not pivotal. Thus, it was a case of unsuccessful insincere voting.

When is it possible to gain from insincere voting under the successive procedure? It is well known that if preferences over a set of proposals are cyclical (at least a top cycle), the voting order is crucial for the outcome. No matter how the cycling alternatives are ordered, some voters will have an incentive to vote insincerely (in the *ex ante* subsidiary fashion). But it is also true that some voters may gain by voting insincerely even if a Condorcet winner exists, provided that the Condorcet alternative is placed "too early" in the voting order. That is, the Condorcet winner is singled out for voting before it can attract sufficient *ex post* subsidiary support to win a majority.

These simple remarks mean that in successive voting over multiple alternatives, assuming that no alternative is ranked first by a majority, it is always (i.e., regardless of whether preferences cycle) possible to form a voting order where some voter(s) may secure a better outcome by shifting from sincere to insincere voting. Thus, depending on the principles of agenda formation, and partly on the frequency of cycles, opportunities to vote insincerely could occur quite often.

Is insincere voting a common feature of parliamentary proceedings? To answer that question, it is useful to distinguish between *successful* and *unsuccessful* insincere voting. The latter type does not really matter and is of no interest here. If, however, the outcome is altered because a sufficient number of legislators vote insincerely, the maneuver of insincere voting is successful. As mentioned earlier, insincere voting takes the form of *ex ante* subsidiary voting. If such voting leads to the adoption of a single alternative, all remaining alternatives necessarily are eliminated. Accordingly, the final decision is based on an interrupted voting sequence of less than $n - 1$ ballots (see Fig. 1 as an example). Every instance where insincere voting determines the outcome, therefore, can be located empirically by searching for interrupted voting sequences. Thus, we may single out the following observation:

Observation 1 Under the successive procedure, successful insincere voting results in interrupted voting sequences of less than $n - 1$ ballots (assuming n feasible alternatives on the agenda).

Should insincerity and interrupted voting agendas be expected to be common in Storting voting? For two reasons, insincere voting most likely is rare. First, any *ex ante* subsidiary vote needs a satisfactory, public explanation, because constituents might interpret the vote to reflect their interests poorly. Similar problems have been analyzed thoroughly in the context of the elimination (amendment) procedure (Wilkerson 1990; Austen-Smith 1993; Denzau et al. 1985). Second, a well-functioning committee system combined with reasonable rules of agenda formation in the Storting typically remove any incentive for insincere voting. Because of the germaneness requirements of the committee process, issues—to the extent multiple alternatives exist—tend to be unidimensional. If preferences are single peaked (or nearly so), voting will begin on one of the most extreme alternatives, and successively approach alternatives in the center of the preference distribution. That is, the parliament uses a *median voting order*. Condorcet winners are voted last, or at least placed sufficiently late on the agenda. As long as this is the case, no one can gain by insincere voting (Hylland 1976; Rasch 1987, 2000). Our two arguments lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis Successful insincere (or *ex ante* subsidiary) voting will be (extremely) rare.

The hypothesis is restricted to voting under the successive procedure in the Norwegian parliament. It will, however, apply equally well to other assemblies using the successive procedure as long as the two arguments on which it rests are relevant.

Table 2 Interrupted voting sequences in the Norwegian Parliament, 1990–2011

Parliamentary year	Number of interrupted sequences	Explanation of the cases (Source: Parliamentary records)
1990–93	4	1. Erroneous voting (O.tid. 1990–91 p. 117)
		2. Winner voted too early[*] (S.tid. 1990–91 pp. 1772–76)
		3. Erroneous voting (S.tid. 1991–92 pp. 1762–70)
		4. **Insincere voting** (S.tid. 1992–93 pp. 118–23)
1993–97	2	1. Winner voted too early[*] (S.tid. 1995–96 pp. 1507–09)
		2. Erroneous voting (S.tid. 1996–97 pp. 859–66)
1997–01	1	1. **Insincere voting** (S.tid. 1997–98 pp. 3689–91)
2001–05	0	–
2005–09	0	[Majority government]
2009–11	0	[Majority government]

[*] "Winner voted too early" means that an alternative with a majority of first preference votes has been voted earlier than the $(n-1)$'th stage of the process

4 Data

Norwegian parliamentary records 1990–2011 have been used to locate interrupted voting sequences. More specifically, I consulted the index volumes for each year to find all cases of questioning, explanation, controversy, irregularity, or surprise related to voting. The actual voting in these cases, as reported in the minutes, was examined further. Interviews with the staff of the Archives of the Storting, an office under the Information and Documentation Department of the assembly, confirmed that it would be highly unlikely to miss any interrupted voting sequences by the suggested procedure. The efforts resulted in a total of seven interrupted sequences for two decades of voting, as shown in Table 2. Some sampling tests for shorter periods, where every vote was examined, revealed no additional cases. Figures 2 and 3 contextualize the information. The first figure shows the total number of votes recorded electronically. A major reform in state budget voting in parliament was introduced in 1997, reducing the number of votes dramatically. Some other reforms have also worked in the same direction. These reforms also have meant a dramatic reduction in the average number of alternatives per issue, as seen from Fig. 3.

The third column of Table 2 gives an interpretation of what happened in the various cases of interrupted voting. Here we find three categories. First, some of the cases turned out to be trivial instances of erroneous voting. For example, in 1991–1992 some MPs realized that they had pressed the wrong button on the electronic voting device, thereby causing an unexpected elimination of some alternatives on the agenda. The president allowed a revote, and the outcome was corrected.

Second, there are cases where an alternative that commands a majority of first preference votes is voted on too early. Typically, if a majority alternative exists, it is voted last to allow each legislative group to express or signal their first preference alternative on the floor. Violations of this principle of agenda formation hardly occur, but may happen if the agenda setter does not realize in advance that a majority alternative (in first preferences) really exists.
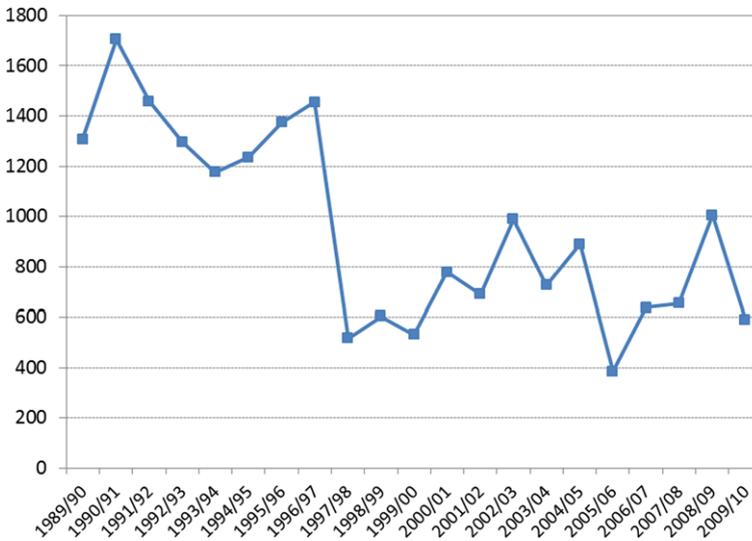
Fig. 2 Total number of recorded votes each year, 1989–2011. Source: NSD (Norwegian Social Science Data Services), voteringsarkivet (voting archive)
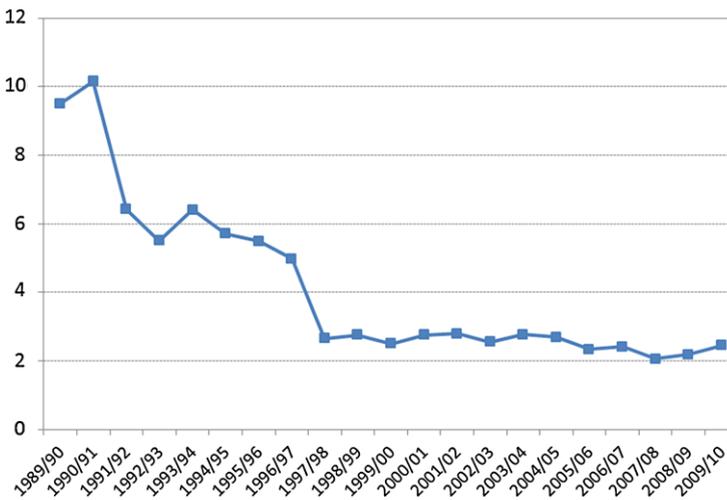

Fig. 3 Average number of votes per issue, 1989–2011. Source: NSD (Norwegian Social Science Data Services), voteringsarkivet (voting archive)

Third, I have found two cases of insincere voting. On 8 October 1992, members of the Conservative Party voted insincerely.[11] The parliamentary leader of the party in a brief speech recommended that party members vote in favor of a specific proposal even if it meant that they, as a result, would not be able to vote for their own proposal. The issue had to do with alternative locations for a new airport in the Oslo area. Conservatives supported the

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[11] See Norwegian parliamentary records S.tid. pp. 118–123 for 1992–1993.

sitting Labor government's proposal, thereby preventing an even worse alternative (in their view) from being adopted (i.e., an alternative supported by the Center Party and the Christian People's Party). Most likely, majority preferences in this case were cyclical (Hylland 2006). Regardless of which voting order the presidium or the majority selected, incentives for insincere voting would arise.

The second instance of insincere voting happened on 19 June 1998.[12] Four parties (Center Party, Liberal Party, Christian People's Party, and Conservative Party) in reality voted for postponement of a decision on the location of a new opera house in Oslo, although postponement implied that no vote would be taken on their own favorite location. In all probability, postponement was the Condorcet winner (Rasch 1998). Insincere voting, therefore, in this particular case likely was a reaction or countermove to an unfortunate voting order. If postponement had been voted on later (i.e., by using a median voting order), no insincerity would have been observed.

5 Conclusion

Most European parliaments use the successive procedure to reach decisions if multiple alternatives exist. Still, successive voting has gotten scant attention in the literature. The purpose of this article has been to analyze insincere voting empirically in one legislative assembly only. This is a useful case for further investigation because it concerns a parliament with multiple parties, no majority party, high levels of parliamentary activity, and numerous minority governments. In short, it is an assembly where insincere voting could easily occur.

Under the successive procedure, insincere voting takes the form of *ex ante* subsidiary voting. To the extent that insincere voting is successful, it will result in interrupted voting sequences. This simple observation makes it possible to reveal all instances of (successful) insincere voting in parliaments employing the successive procedure. Searching more than two decades of roll calls in the Norwegian parliament, I found only two cases of insincere voting. Clearly, insincerity at this stage of floor voting is very rare. Two reasons explain why. First, legislators are reluctant to vote insincerely because it may be difficult to explain the behavior satisfactorily to constituents and the public. Second, incentives for insincere voting seldom arise because issues typically are one-dimensional (or nearly so) at the voting stage, and because the parliament employs median voting orders (i.e., begins voting on each issue with extreme alternatives). If these reasons are relevant also in other parliaments using the successive procedure, insincere voting also should be expected to be rare in those cases. In addition, we should remember that no voting problems of any kind tend to occur on the floor in parliaments with disciplined majority parties or disciplined majority coalitions, which is the case in most countries.

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[12]See Norwegian parliamentary records S.tid. pp. 3689–3691, 1997–1998.

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