Strategic voting or measurement error?

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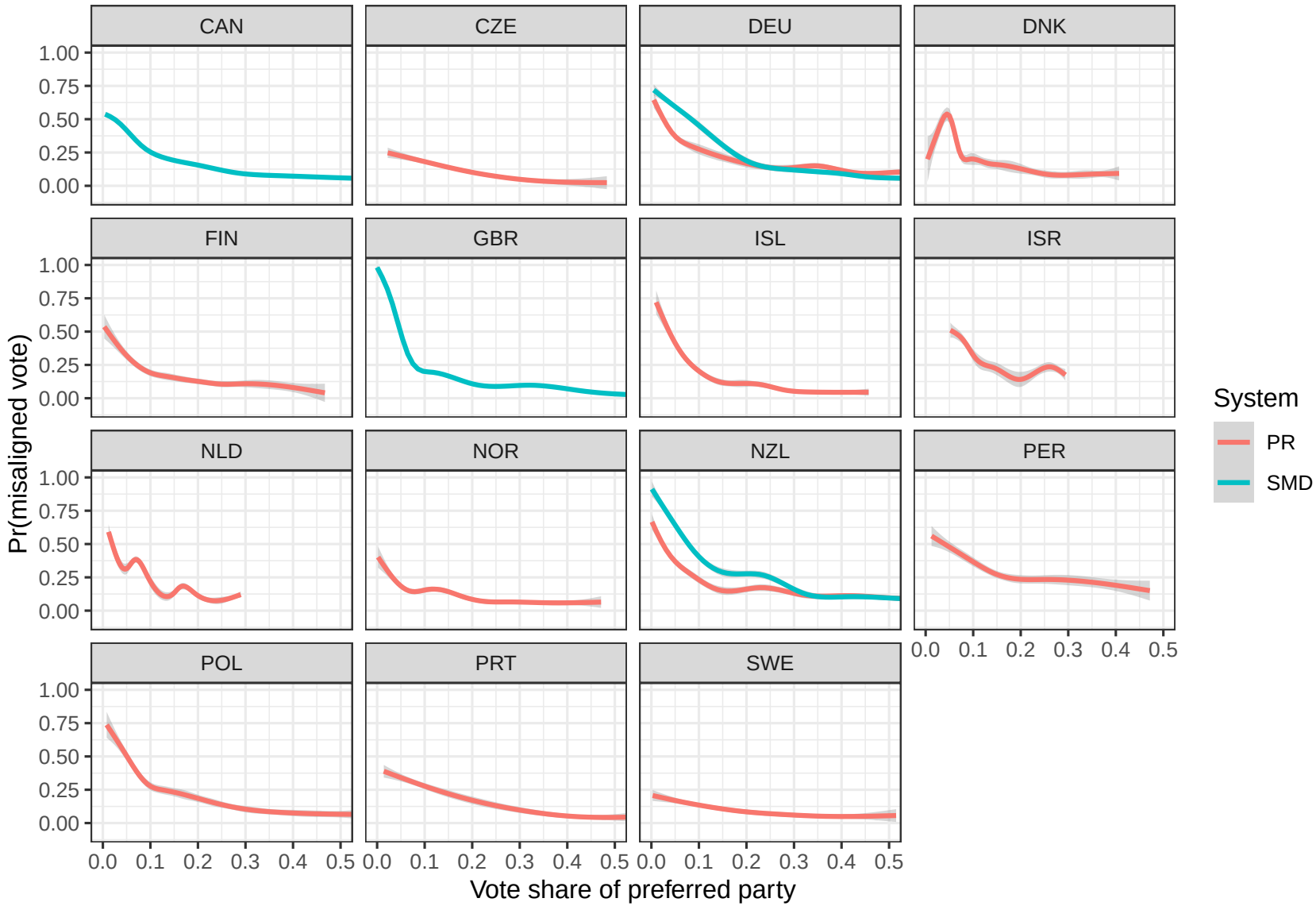
April 9, 2022

Motivation: a puzzling new consensus

> *[P]atterns of strategic voting across FPTP and PR bear striking similarities. In every election, smaller parties tend to lose votes to major parties. Because there tend to be more small parties in PR systems, tactical voting is actually more common [i.e. misaligned voting rate is higher] under PR than under FPTP.*
>
> — Abramson, Aldrich, Blais, Diamond, Diskin, Indridason, Lee & Levine (2010)

Evidence from CSES, BES, CES



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Existing explanations:

1. To determine which party is formateur
2. To determine which coalition is formed
3. To affect the distribution of power within a coalition

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But

- (except for 1) the same logic could lead to voting for a small party
- formateur considerations are relevant in e.g. Canada, UK too

Measurement error as alternative explanation

In survey-based studies of strategic voting, researchers infer voters' preferred party using questions like,

`On a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do feel about [e.g. the Liberal Party]?`

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Less obviously, under reasonable assumptions a greater share will be wrong for smaller parties. This will look like "strategic defection".

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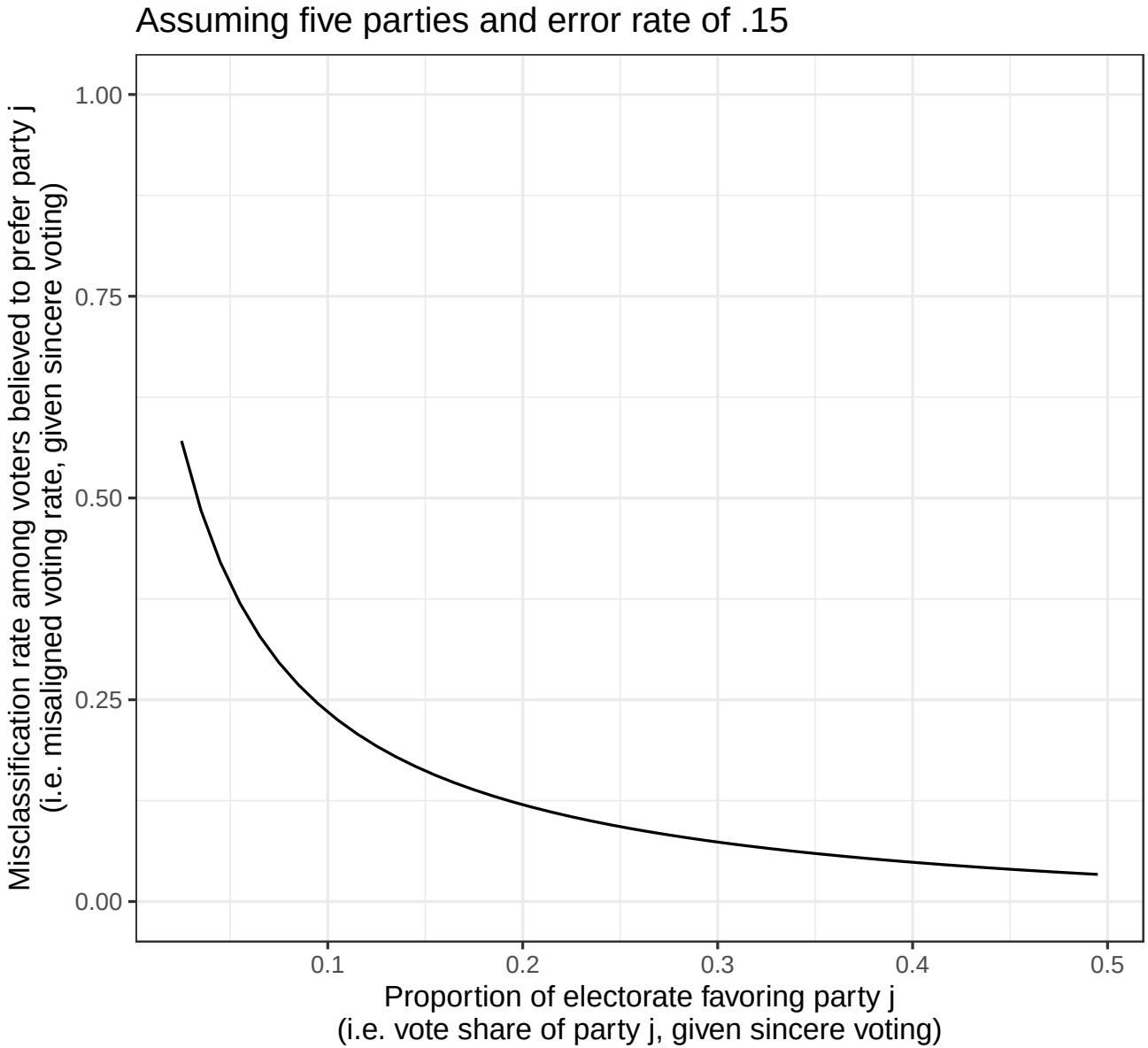
Then

- share of voters classified as preferring j: $(1 - \varepsilon)\pi_j + \varepsilon/K$ (increasing in π_j)
- share of voters **incorrectly** classified as preferring j: $(1 - \pi_j)\varepsilon/K$ (decreasing in π_j)
- $\Longrightarrow$ misclassification rate (i.e. Pr(does not prefer j | classified as preferring j) higher for smaller parties


Assuming five parties and error rate of .15
Misclassification rate among voters believed to prefer party j
(i.e. misaligned voting rate, given sincere voting)
1.00
0.75
0.50
0.25
0.00
0.1
0.2
0.3
0.4
0.5
Proportion of electorate favoring party j
(i.e. vote share of party j, given sincere voting)

Evidence from Canada

In the Canadian Election Study in 2019 and 2021, we asked voters who they wanted to win in their riding.

Comparing to inferred preference:

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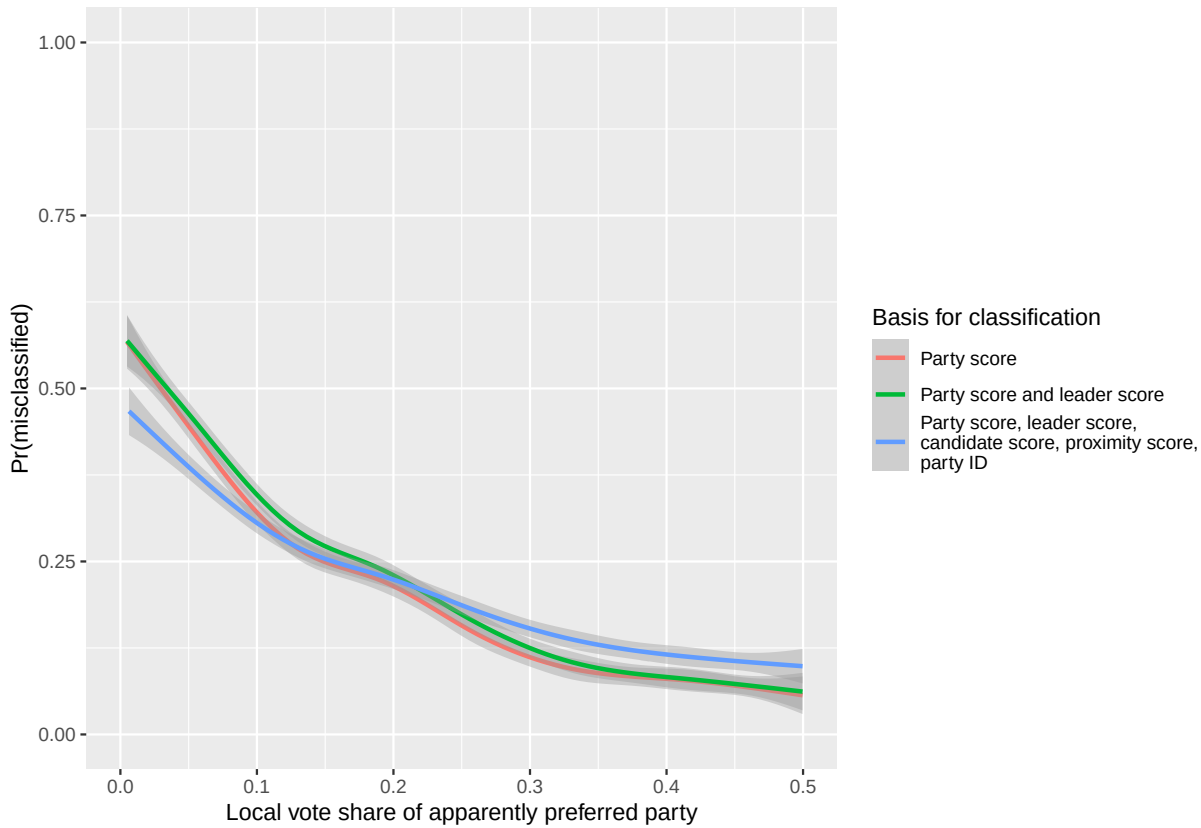

Is this just Canada?

Let x_{ij} be rating assigned by voter i to party j in CSES etc.

Let $\tilde{x}_{ij} = x_{ij} + \epsilon_{ij}$ be *perturbed rating*, where $\epsilon_{ij} \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 2)$.

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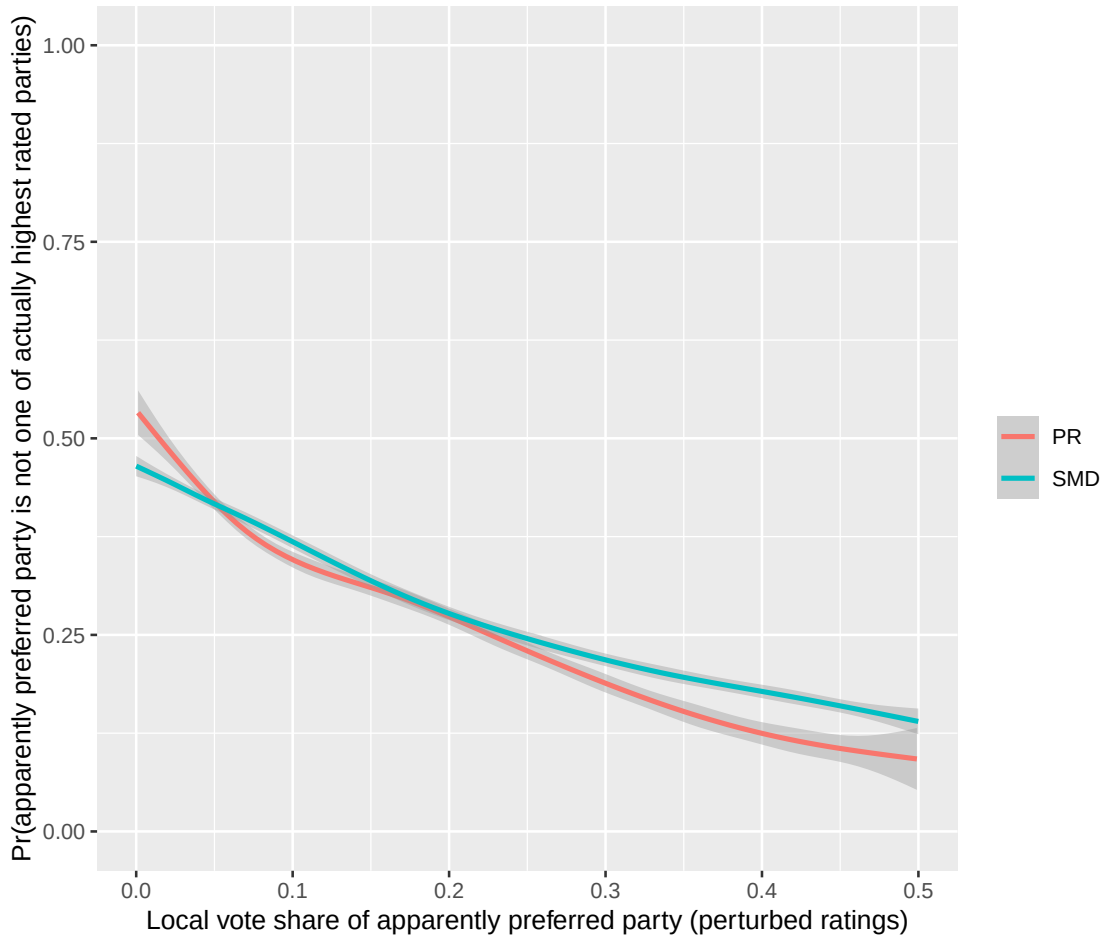
Infer preferred party from perturbed ratings.

Compute how often voters do not assign highest rating to inferred preference.

Misclassification rate from perturbed ratings, CSES BES CES



Implications

What does this mean?

- Likely: over-estimates of strategic defection from small parties, especially in PR systems
- Possibly: over-estimates of misaligned voting rate, especially in PR systems

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What should we do about it?

- Get direct preference measures for more surveys
- **Try to adjust all estimates based on what we learn from surveys with direct preference measures**

Adjusting based on Canada survey

Assumption: The probability of a voter actually casting a misaligned vote, as a function of how predictable the voter's top preference is and whether she *appears* to cast a misaligned vote, is the same everywhere.

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Procedure: for each voter in every survey,

- use discrete choice model fit in Canadian data to get probability each party is the top choice
- call the maximum probability the *preference predictability*, and corresponding party is inferred to be preference
- get predicted probability of misaligned vote, given preference predictability and whether or not appeared to cast misaligned vote (using estimated relationship in Canadian data)

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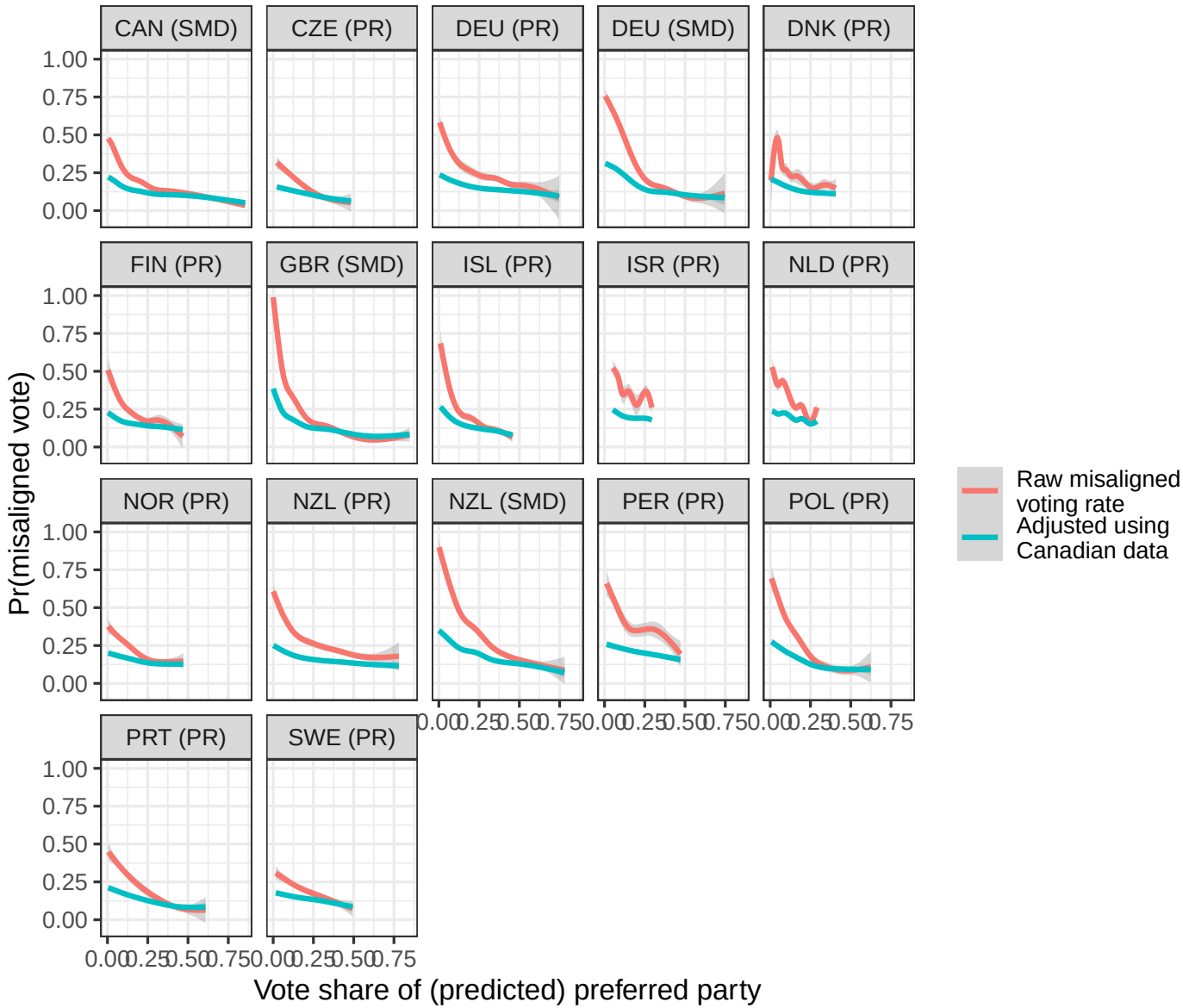
Conclusion: much lower rate of "strategic defection" everywhere, but especially PR systems


CAN (SMD)
CZE (PR)
DEU (PR)
DEU (SMD)
DNK (PR)
FIN (PR)
GBR (SMD)
ISL (PR)
ISR (PR)
NLD (PR)
NOR (PR)
NZL (PR)
NZL (SMD)
PER (PR)
POL (PR)
PRT (PR)
SWE (PR)
Pr(misaligned vote)
0.00
0.25
0.50
0.75
1.00
Vote share of (predicted) preferred party
Raw misaligned voting rate
Adjusted using Canadian data