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Background

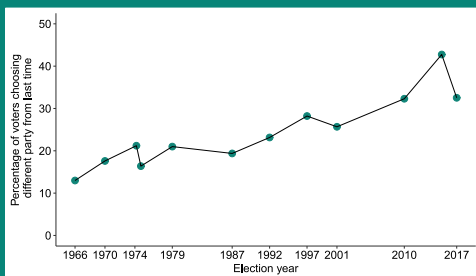
The goal of this project is to understand when and why voters switch their support to different parties both in Britain and across the world.

Previous studies have either used vote recall data to study switching or else looked at only a handful of cases.

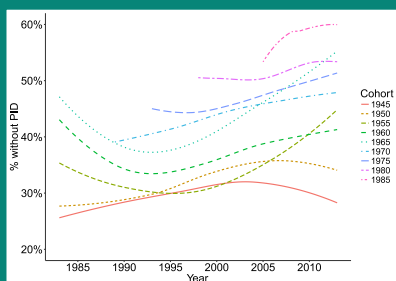
I am constructing a large set of inter-election panel studies (interviewing the same voters at two elections) I have currently identified studies covering 27 countries and 114 pairs of elections. This will be combined with data on party positions, social changes and electoral systems at each election.

The data is drawn from election studies, household panels and social surveys and allows the testing of hypotheses at the individual, country or election level.

In Britain, the percentage of voters switching parties between elections has been rising for 50 years.



The level of voters without a party identification has been increasing for each new generation that enters the electorate.



Bottom Up Explanations of Volatility

Cognitive mobilization: as the electorate becomes more educated, they have less need to use simple partisan cues. Although the timing lines up, the individual data in the UK does not support this explanation.

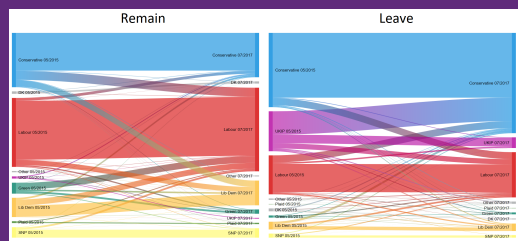
The ratchet effect: people gain party attachments through socialisation. This means a less partisan generation will exert less socialisation pressure on their children. British Election Study data shows that parental partisanship predicts whether a child has a party attachment.

Analysis on BHPS/Understanding Society shows that socialisation partially explains why minorities still have high partisanship in the UK.

New issues and dimensions: the 2000s saw the rise of non-economic issues such as crime, the environment, immigration and Europe.

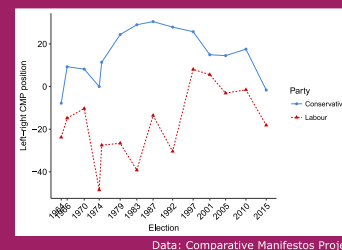


Very visible role of second dimension in UK 2015-2017 vote switching along leave/remain lines.

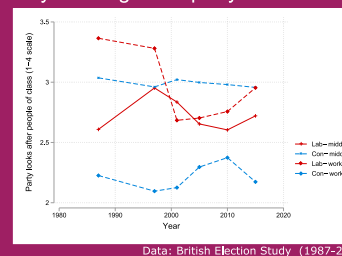


Top Down Explanations of Volatility

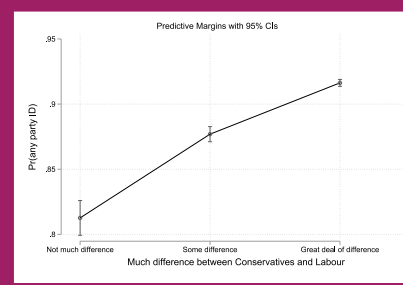
Party positioning: Labour and Conservatives converged from 1997 onwards which may encourage switching



At the same time fewer voters perceive Labour as a distinctively working class party

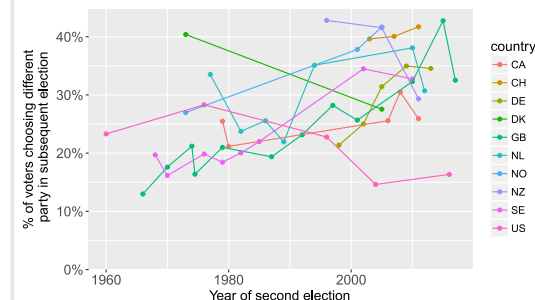


This may encourage switching between parties due to smaller distance between them and encouraging rise of minor parties. Perceiving a difference between parties predicts higher levels of party attachment:



Very Preliminary Comparative Results

Previous research has claimed dealignment is universal but there are actually a wide variety of patterns.



- 59 election pairs in 14 countries
- 220,000 respondents
- No overall time trend in volatility
- No obvious electoral system patterns
- No consistent effect of education
- Younger voters always switch more (except in Russia 2000-2004)
- More evidence for the effects of political events than societal change

References

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