Why do Voters Switch Parties?
Constructing the Comparative Study of Inter-Election Panels (CSIEP)

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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.

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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