



Changing Choices, Changing Elections. A study of volatility and vote-switching in six Western European countries

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Abstract

It is often argued that elections in established Western European democracies have become more unstable during recent decades. Much scholarly work has thus focused on the study of changes in election results in order to understand the causes of this apparent increase. In doing so, volatility has been usually associated with voter instability, but the individual-level mechanisms of electoral change have been subject to very scarce research. This thesis is an attempt to shed more light on this providing a comparative account with data from dozens of elections in six Western European countries. It first investigates how and to what extent different types of behavior translate into changes in election results. Findings show that most of the volatility is caused by the action of switching voters. Due to the presence of cancelling out, the relationship between the proportion of switchers and volatility is, however, far from perfect, although it can be approximated by introducing some of the variables that intervene in the translation of switching into net change. The second part of the thesis focuses on vote-switching and provides two main findings. First, inertia molds voters' preferences and impacts on their subsequent behavior, which explains why most of the switching that takes place in elections is produced by young adults. Second, variations in the number of switchers across elections tend to be caused by the impact of short-term factors in the form of cyclical peaks. These peaks are usually followed by subsequent periods of stability. Sometimes, however, volatility produces changes in the terms of competition and generates a new equilibrium in the number of switchers at subsequent elections. This seems to be the reason why Western European voters appear more unstable in recent decades.

**Jury:**

Prof. José Ramón Montero (University of Madrid), Prof. Wouter van der Brug (University of Amsterdam), Raul Gomez Martinez (candidate) Prof. Mark Franklin (Supervisor, EUI), Prof. Adrienne Héritier (EUI).

Bio:

Raul holds BA degrees in Law and in Political Science (University of Murcia), an MA degree in Social Sciences (CEACS, Juan March Institute), and MRes degrees in Political and Democratic Theory (Autonomous University of Madrid), and in Political and Social Sciences (European University Institute).

His main interests lie in electoral behavior, public opinion, political parties, democracy, and comparative politics.

Raul's PhD thesis focuses on vote-switching and electoral volatility in six Western European democracies. He has also published work on political parties and intra-party conflict.