Do voters still exhibit stable links to established parties in advanced democracies, and if not why not?

Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes. 1960. The American Voter. The University of Chicago Press: USA.

Overview

"From initial efforts to understand voting behaviour two major currents of thought have emerged, one primarily sociological, the other more psychological in emphasis." (p. 18)

Converse, P. 1969. "Of Time and Partisan Stability". Comparative Political Studies (2):139–171

Overview

"It is a commonplace expectation that newly established social and political institutions somehow accumulate a deepening stability with the passage of time." (p. 139)

Age plays a big factor: the cohort of new voters is invariably swing, while elderly voters either vote for one party or another. "The partisan stability of voting behaviour tends to accumulate quite notably over the adult years of participation in the electoral process" (p. 143).

But Converse argues that it's not *age* per se, but *length of time of psychological membership in a party*. And it starts in childhood: If a person's father had a party identification, then he is far more likely to have a party identification (not necessarily the one of his father). This shows that early exposure to politics helps to concretise political attachment.

Two mechanisms: 1. Length of attachment to a party increases loyalty to that party 2. Parents with strong partisan identifications have more partisan children

Converse offers a model that explains the "freezing" of partisans as a newly democratic society establishes itself. Some quick maths is involved. The conclusion is that "the severity of shock necessary to induce such system change must be progressively greater the more completely the system has jelled in these terms" (p. 167).

Tilley, J. 2003. "Party Identification in Britain: Does Length of Time in the Electorate Affect Strength of Partisanship?" British Journal of Political Science 33(02): 332–44.

He does some maths and finds that "this Note supports the claim that party identification has been a weakening phenomenon over the last forty years, it also lends credence to one of the main assumptions behind the party identification models developed in the 1960s, that repeated participation strengthens identification. The findings discussed in this Note thus show that there is a continued relevance for these models in Britain" (p. 344)

van der Eijk, C., Franklin, M. 2009. Elections and Voters. Palgrave Macmilan: UK. Ch. 7. (pp. 179-212)

Introduction to electoral change

Dealignment of voters caused by less relevant social cleavages Young voters are much less likely to be strong partisans It isn't actually necessary for voters to change their mind: all it takes is for young voters to come in while old voters die out. If the young have different political views, we will see a change.

Elections are often won or loss by margins of 1–2 percent. If we assume that at each election about 10% of the electorate turns over, and the incoming 10% favours a given party 30% more, then we can see a party win or lose an election purely by demographic change.

Dealignment—myth?

The idea is that voters dealign with old parties and vote for incoming ones. But "no realignment of the classic type has occurred in any country since the advent of academic election studies based on random samples of the mass electorate... [researchers] had failed to find even one whose aprty loyalties had been weakened and transformed." (p. 183).

It seems the case that most electoral change is either i) generational shift or ii) new voter mobilisation.

The swinging pendulum

It seems that voters can be induced to defect from their partisan party, but only temporarily—they will inevitably swing back. This is not a contributor to long-term electoral change.

Voters rarely change

"A cohort that gives strong support to some party when its members are young usually continues to do so in the future... remaining voters are set in their ways and those settled ways... continue to affect the future for as much as 60 years ahead." (p. 187)

This gels well with the pendulum effect: you may be able to gain or lose voters in the short term, but you won't be able to hold them for long

Although extremely rare, voters can abandon their partisanship (neutralise), and become free to adopt new partisan identities. "Another example occurred when the Dutch Labour Party, in government in the early 1990s, was forced to take thel ead in a neo-liberal restructuring of welfare arrangements in the country. This caused widespread disenchantment, particularly among its oldest and most established supportes, who withdrew their electoral support in sizeable numbers, not to return again." (p. 188)

Prospective vs retrospective voting

The question being: do voters vote retrospectively, holding incumbent government to account for their poor performance, or do voters vote prospectively, bringing a new party into the fray to try out their policies?

In a two-party system, it's impossible to answer this question. Because a vote against the government (retrospective vote) is necessarily a vote for the opposition. With multi-party systems, however, it's easier to untangle this effect, as parties form coalition governments. and parties in that coalition are not punished equally (it seems).

"van der Brug *et al.* (2007) conclude that in coalition governments it is not really government status that voters were taking into account when retrospecitvely judging parties on their past performance, but party size. large parties (including large opposition parties, who are also 'players' in the proportional vision) are those held responsible for economic conditions, not government parties. Moreover... in coalition systems, voters react to changes in economic conditions in a very prospective fashion... Their preference for right parties increases when inflation is a problem and their preference for left parties increases when unemployment is a problem, as though they see a party's ideological stance as a sign of its priorities should it take government office."

1. retrospective punishment in single-party governments,
2. prospective mandate voting in coalition systems.

Are there differences in voting behaviour between new and established democracies?

"We expect more idiosyncracy in preference formation among voters of new democracies" (p. 209). Explained using the idea that many of these societies were Communist and tried to suppress group differences as group differences were thought to be incompatible with the socialist ideal. Therefore, group differences are muted and you see less lines of cleavage.

Furthermore, new democracies are expected to have *parties* that are less stable and more mutable, as they need to adapt their policy positions and ideological profiles in an environment of great change. "This, however, prevents voters from learning where parties stand in left-right and policy terms, making it more difficult for voters to develop stable preferences and decide which party to vote for." (p. 209)

However, their multivariate regression doesn't seem to show anything much: "the differences between these two groups of countries are slight and largley not statistically significant when considering the importance of fcators that generate preferences for parties. **Voters in both kinds of countries evidently use very much the same considerations when evaluating parties as potential recipients of their votes.**" (p. 211)

Conclusion

This chapter gives us an overview of how electorates change (generational rather than ideological change), and some findings of voting behaviour. Specifically, it's very difficult to change a voter once he becomes a partisan, and ii) voters vote prospectively (to give mandate) in coalition syetems, and retrospectively (to punish) in a single-party or two-party system.

Clarke et al., 2004. Political Choice in Britain. Oxford University Press: USA

Overview

There are two different approaches to explain why voters vote as they do: the sociological and the institutional. In the sociological view, class, ethnicity, gender or race anchor political preferences; and since they change slowly, if at all, political change necessarily is gradual as well.

Featuring prominently in the sociological view is the Michigan-style explanation, where party orientation is fixed during adolescence or young adulthoood within families or other primary groups. Once acquired, these party orientations are very stable.

Parties help to anchor voters and promote the stability of long-term political competition and the overall order of the system. "Schema theory of political psychology": parties act as cognitive simplifications that allow voters to shortcut thinking about the issues and decisions they need to make.

The individual rationality framework is based on rational choice: people vote to maximise their utility. The first such model was the *spatial model* developed by Anthony Downs (1957). The Downsian political model predicts that parties will try and position themselves on the ideological spectrum to gain the most votes—see Hotelling.

This model was criticised by Stokes. Amongst other things, Stokes thinks it's not the case that we can put ideology on a unidimensional line. Furthermore, most people agree on the goals; for example, nearly everyone agrees on property rights, economic growth, low inflation, effective healthcare, low crime rates etc. Parties and voters don't disagree on the goals but rather how to achieve them: in the *valuence model*, voters vote for parties and leaders they think are most likely to achieve those goals from attributes such as ability, trustworthiness or previous record.

The *valence model* exemplifies the pendulum effect. Voters punish incumbent governments when the society is doing badly and vote for the opposition instead, and vice-versa.

Another model is the *issue-priority* model by Budge and Farlie (1983). In this model, parties distinguish themselves by identifying themselves with a set of issues and policies. Depending on which issue is most important with the voters, voters will vote for the party who has identified most strongly with those issues. For example, if inflation is high, voters will tend to vote for parties on the right, and if health services deteriorate, voters will not punish a ruling left-of-center party as they know the party will make that a priority.

Conclusion

Overall, "sociological modles can tell only a limited part of the story of political choice in Britain... The fundamental limitations of sociological models are their inability to deal with information that lacks an obvious social group referent, and their inability to keep pace with the short- and medium-term changes in the variables they purport to explain (Dalton and Wattenberg 1993). As noted, Butler and Stokes were well aware that polity and economy move faster than society. Hence, the later chapters of their book effectively abandoned their sociological model and turned attention to potentially mutable factors such

as party-issue linkages, party leader images, economic conditions, and election campaigns." (p. 36).

Levendusky, M. 2012. The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans. The University of Chicago Press: London

Overview

In the 1970s, it seemed like American voters were becoming less partisan and less polarised. Yet this trend has very sharply reversed in the present. "Party has experiencea renaissance... [and] is one against the driving factor behind political behaviour." Levendusky argues that this is because of the increasing polarisation of political elites (people holding political office—Congressmen, governors, etc.). As political elites become more polarised, they clarify what it means to be a Republican or Democrat. Voters then change their ideology to fit their party identification (e.g. a liberal Republican becomes a conservative Republican), a process Levendusky calls "sorting".

What's the difference between sorting and mass polarisation? In essence, mass polarisation means that the moderates either move to the left or the right: the distribution becomes bimodal. *Sorting* simply means that conservative Democrats shift to become liberal Democrats and liberal Republicans shift to become conservative ones, but preserving the overall distribution.

Why do voters sort? Cue taking from elites

Voters don't have time to become informed on the political issues of the day. So they *take cues* from the political elite, who tell them what to think and do. Therefore, as elites become more polarised, voters will follow.

Overall, we're all rather familiar with the dangers of partisan polarisation. But the author argues that sorting is actually a *good* thing: it increases the number of voters who vote "correctly". After all, the trend in the 1950s and 60s was *depolarisation*: parties were not partisan enough, and voters did not possess two "clear and distinct alternatives" for the country.

Flanagan, S. and Dalton, R. 1984. Parties under stress: Realignment and dealignment in advanced industrial societies. West European Politics, 7:1, 7–23.

Overview

In the 1950s and 60s, voters were very centrist and predictable. Parties were 'catch-all' parties that absorbed many smaller, fringe parties. This changed completely in the 1970s, where frozen alignments and strong partisan attachments gave way to huge electoral volatility.

There are two main processes in the electorate: realignment, and dealignment.

Realignment: parties and their electorates adjust to fit a new cleavage dimension. Dealignment: people become less partisan, parties become less relevant.

Realignment predicts a temporary phase of partisan instability followed by a new stable partisan alignment, but dealignment predicts a long-term decline in party attachments and perhaps even a withering away of political parties as we know them. The question now is whether we can determine which process of change is at work.

So both mechanisms agree at the time of writing (1984); but as of right now (2018) realignment seems to be the correct mechanism.

Realignment

As old class alignments and cleavages weaken due to social change, voters don't have as strong a link to old parties as they used to. For example, the traditional working-class/middle-class cleavage weakened in the 80s with the rise of the new white-collar worker, and new issue dimensions (sexual equality, human rights, environmental health) have arose, leading to the formation of new parties that better capture these shifting cleavages.

Ecological realignment

A shift in voting patterns that results from *changes in the relative size of social groups or economic strata* (p. 17). For example, the agrarian sector has decline substantially in recent decades, and the working class has been replaced by the new middle class.

Sectoral realignment

When parties realign themselves and get a new base of support: southern Democrats moving to Republican party

Dealignment

"Many of the changes associated with post-industrial development are *fundamentally altering the context of political competition and the attitudes of citizens*" (p. 13, emphasis mine).

The idea here is that the arrival of modern technology has obsoleted the many traditional functions of a party.

- Oversight and watchdog roles: now taken up by the news media
- Aggregation and screening of interests to give public clear alternatives: new cross-cutting issues like environment, nuclear energy don't fit into the traditional social cleavages, and are very narrow.

A *narrow* issue is one that is very small/niche, parties are unwilling to take a clear stance on them for fear of losing more votes than they gain?? (p. 14—go read it again)

- As issues become more and more technical, parties delegate and lose control over policy implementation; the bureaucracy actually holds more and more of the power
- Rise of corporatism: many interest groups hold positions of bargaining power *vis-a-vis* elected governments.
- Better informed voters: with the rise of new media, voters no longer need to take the "cognitive shortcut" of following the party line.
- Shift in issue types: traditional parties are unwilling to take unambiguous and decisive stances on new narrow and cross-cutting issues

Dealignment v. realignment

"Signs of dealignment are clearest in the United States. Due to the longevity of the two parties, the long ballot, and other institutional facotrs, party identification assumes a more durable form in America than in most other electoral settings. However, Paul Beck demonstates a clear decline in these partisan loyalties, a weakening of cross-generational partisan inheritances, and a rise in anti-party sentiment." (p. 18)

Evidently, the US did not dealign. See Levendusky.

How can parties stay relevant? Conclusion

"For parties to command broad electoral support and be enduring, they will have to move away from the responsible party model and become more pragmatic, flexible, decentralised and loosely structured, so that they are more receptive to new interests and more adaptable to local as well as national changes. Thus,

the cohesion of large parties is likely to decline as legislators are encouraged to respond to constituency demands rather than those of party leaders. An increase in the use of party praimaries is one solution to growing participation demands that would move parties in this direction.

Another means by which parties may adapt to a changing post-industrial environment is by abdicating to a continuing shift in decision making authority... the forces of realignment and dealignment are not only destabilising the party systems in advanced industrial societies; they are also likely to have a long-term impact on the role and type of parties that will emerge in the decades ahead." (p. 21)

Inglehart, R. (1981). Post-materialism in an Environment of Insecurity. APSR, 75(5): 880–900

Overview

We see a shift from materialism to post-materialism as people have their economic needs met. The hypothesis is that postwar affluence led to an intergenerational shift from Materialist to post-materialist values among Western publics.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

There are two hypotheses on how material wealth affects value change. First is the *scarcity hypothesis*: that people prioritise material values when they lack it. The second is the *socialisation hypothesis*: people prioritise material values when they lack it, but *only during a critical period of their young adulthood.*. In other words, there is a substantial time lag between material deprivation (or growth) and changing political views. An example would be the "miser who experienced poverty in early years and relentlessly continues piling up wealth after attaining material security" (p. 882)

The Japanese post-war cohort shows this difference very starkly, and provides strong support for the socialisation hypothesis. In 1953, a strong majority (65 percent) of the Japanese public agreed that financial security was the most important thing. This figure declined steadily in subsequent surveys" by 1978 only 45 percent of the public still took this view. (p. 883)

What's most interesting is that cohorts do not change over time. In 1953 the youngest cohort expressed a 60 percent support for that view, and in 1978 this had declined merely 4 percent. This was because their formative years were espent in the relatively deprived pre-war era.

In 1953 the spread between youngest and oldest was only 18 percent, and this spread grew to 44 percent in 1978. This lends strong support to the socialisation hypothesis: younger cohorts who spent their formative years in a period of

unprecendented economic growth and wealth predictably express less Materialist views.

The effect of exogeneous shocks on materialism

The period of early 1970s was the "oil shock": many Western countries suffered a period of economic instability. And predictably, the cohort that was 15-24 years at that point in time experienced a drop in post-materialist views.

What political views do post-materialists hold?

Expectation: 1. Post-materialists are more politically active, because they don't have to worry about feeding themselves. 2. Post-materialists are relatively dissatisfied with the status quo political system because parties have been very materialist so far. 3. Post-materialists are more approving of revolutions and unconventional political actions that disrupt economic growth, since they threaten things they value less than Materialists do.

Multivariate analyses controlling for age, education, income and ideological sophistication seem to support all three hypotheses. In particular, a strong relationship persists between Post-Materialist values and a predisposition for unconventional protest (p. 891)

Post-Materialists hold a completely different view wrt nuclear power because of their different priors: "Materialists take it for granted that economic growth is crucial, and weigh the costs and risks of nuclear energy against the costs and risks of alternative energy sources. Post-Materialists take economic security for granted and weigh the costs and risks of nuclear power against various no-cost alternatives—among which, reduced material consumption seems not only acceptable, but, to some, actually desirable: insofar as it might lead to a more decentralised, less impersonal society that allows freer play for individual self-expression" (p. 897)

Conclusion and my views

The move to post-materialism is caused by periods of economic stability and growth, but mainly during the critical pre-adult years. Otherwise, economic growth does not affect Materialist attitudes much after the cohort's critical period. The vast majority of this shift is an intergenerational one.

We should probably check if we have continued to shift towards Post-Materialism values.

Stoker, L. and Jennings, K. 2009. "Of Time and the Develoment of Partisan Polarization". American Journal of Political Science 52(3): 619–35

Rabinowitz, G., Macdonald, S.E. (1989). A directional theory of issue voting. American Political Science Review 83(1):93–121.

Overview

Directional theory purports to explain how voters position themselves relative to candidates.

Instead of merely taking the distance between candidate and voter (proximity theory), directional theory also takes into account the magnitude.

They also introduce the "region of acceptibility", where candidates that are too far away from the center of the region are penalised for crossing the boundary.

The spatial theory makes different predictions from the directional theory. Under the spatial model, the most popular candidate will be the one in the middle of the region of acceptability (assuming a normally distributed electorate in the region). However, the directional model predicts that 'any candidate within the region of acceptability... [is] equally desirable' (p. 109)

Similarly, when the electorate has a clear directional preference, the dominant position is the "most extreme position in the direction of that preference still lying within the region of acceptability" (p. 109)

The implications of this model means that centrist voters will enjoy very 'shaky and unstable support' (p. 110) due to the short length of their 'intensity' vectors.

My views

I think this makes no sense. Consider two candidates A and B vying for voter X. A is -4, B is -2, X is -2.

Even though X and B have completely aligned preferences, the directional model predicts that candidate A will be preferred by voter X.

However, they run several regressions and show that this counterintuitive relationship is true: "traditional theory predcits that the support curve will peak at the candidate's position and decline from there, while directional theory predicts a monotonic relationship between respondent position and candidate evaluation" (p. 105), but the curves resemble the predictions of the directional model more than they do the traditional one.