

Analysis of BES panel data

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I use [panel data from the British Election Study](#) to test some of John Zaller's assertions about political interest, political knowledge, and attitude stability.

The first thing I found interesting is how little political interest fluctuates within-respondent over time. Among respondents who took part in 5+ waves¹, the mean within-respondent standard deviation in political interest is 0.996.²

Now let's look at the predictive power of interest and knowledge. I measure interest as the self-reported interest in wave 1, measured on a 0-10 scale. Knowledge is measured as the number of correct answers to a question asking to match 5 prominent political figures in the United Kingdom with their official position. Attitude (in)stability is measured as the within-respondent standard deviation in stated attitude toward immigration.³ For this analysis, I restrict the sample to respondents who participated in 5+ waves. Each point shows one respondent; lower values on the y-axis indicate *more* stability in attitudes.

¹ There are 30 waves in total.

² Of course, the people who attrite are perhaps precisely those with unstable interest, but wave 1 interest is surprisingly weakly predictive of attrition.

³ Attitude toward immigration is measured by asking respondents to indicate on a 7-point scale whether they think immigration is good or bad for the British economy.



