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Stability and Change in Party Preference

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This article analyses stability and volatility of party preferences using data from the Swiss Household-Panel (SHP), which, for the first time, allow studying transitions and stability of voters over several years in Switzerland. Analyses cover the years 1999–2007 and systematically distinguish changes between party blocks and changes within party blocks. The first part looks at different patterns of change, which show relatively high volatility. The second part tests several theories on causes of such changes applying a multinomial random-effects model. Results show that party preferences stabilise with their duration and with age and that the electoral cycle, political sophistication, socio-structural predispositions, the household-context as well as party size and the number of parties each explain part of electoral volatility. Different results for within- and between party-block changes underlie the importance of that differentiation.

Keywords: Electoral Research • Voting Intention • Panel Data • Volatility

Introduction[1]

Volatility is a central aspect of voting behaviour that is frequently analysed at the aggregate level at the basis of electoral outcome. At the individual level, we know however relatively little on the mechanisms behind volatility in voting behaviour. In this article we will look at such individual dynamics using data of the Swiss Household Panel (SHP) from 1999–2007.

We will take account of three different theoretical approaches. Firstly, stability is a central part of traditional models of electoral choice. According to the Columbia school (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948) and cleavage theory (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), stability is attributed to the high influence of (relatively fixed) socio-structural characteristics that link electoral groups and parties. In the Michigan Model of electoral choice (Campbell et al. 1960), voters and parties are primarily tied by psychological attachments,

[1] I like to thank Hanspeter Kriesi and the two anonymous reviewers for the helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this article.

which are – together with issues and candidate image – the central variables in the explanatory model of voting choice. These stable and enduring party identifications are acquired during political socialisation and predispose individuals to vote for the same party in successive elections. Despite processes of dealignment, party choice has shown to still depend on party attachments and socio-structural characteristics, so that we can expect them to also influence individual volatility. Besides, the Columbia school also emphasized the role of contextual influences on voting behaviour. In recent years, particularly within-household influences have come back into the focus of electoral research.

A second body of literature on volatility looks at opinion formation during campaigns and focuses mostly on psychological explanations. For our research question, we will apply Zaller's influential Reiceive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model (1992), according to which political sophistication has a central role as an indirect moderating variable in the explanation of opinion change. Thirdly we will take account of literature on aggregate dynamics of voting behaviour, which concentrates on party system characteristics and cleavages as explanatory variables. Bartolini and Mair (1990) argue that electoral volatility in Western democracies points to stability in the long run when party blocks are considered. Party blocks consist of parties located on the same sides of the relevant cleavages. Because relative stability at the aggregate level could mask volatility at the individual level, it is important to test findings with individual data, too (e.g. Zuckerman 1992: 553).

For our study, we combine insights from these different fields. Our aim is firstly to describe dynamics of party preferences in Switzerland and secondly to explain when and why changes between parties occur. Analyses systematically distinguish within-block and between-block changes. The main variable of interest is party preference measured by voting intention with the following question: "If there was an election for the National Council tomorrow, for which party would you vote?"

Literature on individual-level volatility in party preference is relatively scarce. In Switzerland, studies have been limited to data with two observation points (e.g. Nicolet and Sciarini 2006; Lachat 2007) and mostly relied on data on recalled voting. For Germany and the United Kingdom, there are a number of articles on stability of party preference using household panel data (e.g. Kohler 2002; Johnston et al. 2005; Zuckerman 2005; Zuckerman

et al. 2007).[2] The theoretical interest of these studies is however limited to the influence of socio-structural variables, particularly of within-household influences. More frequently analysed with panel data is the stability of party identification, where the question whether party identification reacts to short term influences is subject to an extensive debate (e.g. Falter et al. 2000; Green et al. 2002; Green and Yoon 2002; Wawro 2002; Clarke et al. 2004; Arzheimer and Schoen 2005; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006).

The next section outlines the theoretical framework and presents the hypotheses. The section afterwards describes the data source. A descriptive account of patterns of stability and change over nine years follows. Then, we model change in party preference as a function of the variables presented in the theoretical part. The last section concludes.

Theory

Contextual Influence

Literature provides much evidence that individual behaviour is influenced by the environment. Such contextual effects are attributed to households, neighbourhoods, regions, the workplace, other group affiliations or media content and have already been a central aspect in the early electoral studies by Lazarsfeld et al. (1948). Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) present the following elements in their line of arguments of why party preferences depend on social context: Firstly, citizens value political information but they prefer to obtain it inexpensively. Secondly, exposure and interpretation of information is biased according to previous preferences and predispositions. Thirdly, control over information is incomplete and information flow increases with the extent that individuals share the same locations in the social structure. Finally, information processing can be viewed as a social learning process, where citizens are rewarded or punished for political viewpoints that agree or conflict with the viewpoints of others.

This explanatory mechanism can relatively easily be extended from effects of social interactions to effects of media or elite discourse. Media effects are also driven by the need of information, by a biased perception

[2] For Germany, these authors present their hypotheses as referring to party preference, but empirical tests are based on party identification.

of information and by a limited control over information flow. Effects of media and of social interactions depend on the same variables: the intensity and frequency of information flow and the credibility of the information source (Brady et al. 2006: 2; Zaller 1992; Zuckerman et al. 2007). In the following, we will concentrate on two possible influences of information flow: the influences among household members and campaign effects. These variables should impact both within-block and between-block changes.

Because household members interact frequently and intensively and usually trust each other, household members strongly influence each other (Zuckerman et al. 2007). Most extensively studied so far have been effects between partners living in the same household (e.g. Lampard 1997; Brynin 2000; Johnson et al. 2002, 2005; Kan and Heath 2006; Zuckerman et al. 2007). Results show a strong political homogeneity, which is due to both initial selection and a considerable convergence over time. McPhee (1963) and Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) argue that preference change is mainly driven by disagreement between previously held preferences and incoming information. If disagreement is recognized, an individual reconsiders her preferences. Then, the current opinion is either retained in the face of contrary opinion or the positions are adjusted, where most adjustments increase homogeneity within an environment. Sears and Funk (1999) argue that also reinforcement of a preference by the environment or even absence of conflicting information has a stabilising effect.

Some analyses have tried to parcel out influences between partners (Kan and Heath 2006; Zuckerman et al. 2007). Although results are somewhat contradictory, they agree in their finding of a strong mutual influence between partners. Some studies take also preferences of other household members than partners into account (Brynin 2000; Johnston et al. 2005; Zuckerman et al. 2007) and confirm the picture of strong mutual influence. In line with these studies, we expect mismatches in preferences of household members to increase the probability of a change in party preference (Hypothesis 1a) and agreement in party preference to decrease the probability of a change in party preference (Hypothesis 1b).

The second contextual influence we look at involves the electoral cycle and campaign effects. Although the most important campaign effect is to activate existing predispositions (e.g. Lazarsfeld et al. 1948; Bartels 2006; Andersen et al. 2005: 285), campaigns also increase the probability to be confronted with considerations which contradict previous preferences. Campaigns might also have indirect effects by encouraging voters to make

more sophisticated decisions (Kenney and Kahn 1999) or by changing the salience of considerations due to short term influences. In consequence, party preferences might be different during a campaign than between campaigns and we expect changes in party preference to become more frequent with closeness of electoral dates (Hypothesis 2). We consider particularly national elections, but also cantonal elections to be salient and thus to effect preference changes.

Political Sophistication

Research in political psychology has shown that the impact of information flow on opinion change varies among individuals. Especially Zaller's RAS-model has had an enormous influence on research on opinion formation. The central variable in the model is political sophistication, by which we understand an individual's reception and comprehension of communications from the political environment (Zaller 1992). The distinction between receiving and accepting information leads to a non-linear relationship between individuals' sophistication and attitude stability. The probability that someone is receptive to a signal is an increasing function of her political sophistication. Given reception of a signal, the probability that she believes or accepts the information is a decreasing function of her political sophistication. People most influenced by new information, then, are those with moderate levels of political awareness.[3] While this model is usually applied for explaining volatility within a campaign, there is no reason why the same mechanism should not apply to volatility over a longer time-span. We expect electoral volatility first to increase and then to decrease with political sophistication (Hypothesis 3). This relationship should hold for both changes within- and between party blocks.

Stability of Voting and the Role of Predispositions

The second important concept in Zaller's model, apart from political sophistication, is predispositions defined as stable individual-level traits. The nature of predispositions and the causal mechanism of their influence remain however vague in his theory. But predispositions play also a crucial

[3] An alternative explanation on how political sophistication effects volatility is cognitive mobilisation (Dalton 2000). Hardly any empirical studies however found empirical support for such an effect (Albright 2009). Neither did Schmitt-Beck et al. (2006) find such an effect.

role in traditional electoral theories which explain why voting behaviour is relatively stable. In the Columbia model (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948), predispositions are understood as socio-structural characteristics, first of all as social class. The link between social structure, the party system and stability of voting is made even more explicitly by cleavage theory (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini and Mair 1990). In the Michigan model (Campbell et al. 1960), predispositions consist of (stable) psychological attachments to parties. Irrespectively of the nature of predispositions – given that they affect voting choice – the stability of predispositions implies stability of voting choice (e. g. Butler and Stokes 1974; Miller and Shanks 1996; Clarke et al. 2004; Arzheimer and Schoen 2005). We will focus firstly on socio-structural predispositions and then on predispositions in the form of psychological attachments.

Cleavage theory claims that the political space of competition is shaped by divisions between social groups. Social class and religion are usually considered to be the most important socio-structural cleavages. While evidence is unambiguous that the relevance of the traditional social class cleavage has declined (e.g. Dalton 1984), empirical studies show that social class remains relevant when divisions within the old middle class are taken account of (see Güveli and de Graaf 2007 for a review, Lachat 2007 for Switzerland). Similarly, religion remains significant for voting when not only religious denomination but also religious practise is considered (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). We will test whether socio-structural characteristics still have the stabilising effect suggested by cleavage theory and sociological models of voting. The crucial point is that strength of socio-structural predispositions varies among individuals. While some groups may have strong ties to particular parties, others have no clear predisposition towards any party. The higher socio-structural predispositions are, the stronger is the probability to vote for a particular party. Because predispositions are stable, this implies that stability in voting intention increases with strength in socio-structural predispositions (Hypothesis 4). Cleavages should affect changes between party blocks but not changes within party blocks, because parties in the same block do not differ in their positions along the main cleavage lines (Bartolini and Mair 1990: 36).

In the Michigan model, predispositions consist of psychological attachments to parties (which depend however also on socio-structural characteristics). Also strength of these attachments varies between individuals. Strength of party identification has shown to be an important explanatory variable for the stability of electoral choice (Sciarini and Kriesi 2003; La-

chat 2007). Because we have no measure of strength of party preference in our data, we cannot directly test its influence on stability. But in any case, such an empirical test would remain somewhat tautological, because strength and stability are causally very proximate to each other (Selb et al. 2009).[4] To better understand mechanism behind stability, we therefore should focus at factors which are causes of both strength and stability of voting intentions and therefore less proximate causes.

Political socialisation is considered to be the most important cause of party identification (Campbell et al. 1960). We will however not directly consider it in our model. But additional to political socialisation, party identification stabilises further over time. Once an individual has formed a party attachment, it serves as a lens through which politics is perceived (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1967). A partisan interprets an ambiguous event to the advantage of the adopted party and to the disadvantage of the opposite party (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008: 148f.). We will capture this reinforcing mechanism of party preference with two variables. Firstly, a party preference should become more stable, the longer it has been held (Hypothesis 5).[5] Secondly, strength and stability of party preference should increase with life experience in the sense that changes in party preference become less frequent with age (Hypothesis 6). Hypotheses 5 and 6 should hold for both types of changes.

Influence from the Party System

At the aggregate level, literature on volatility of party strength has focused at party system characteristics and cleavages as explanatory variables. If the party system is indeed central for volatility, this should also be relevant at the individual level. To take account of the party system in Switzerland, we firstly distinguish two types of parties. As large parties we consider the four parties represented in the federal executive in Switzerland (Federal

[4] Also party identification and electoral choice are very proximate concepts in a causal system (e.g. Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Explaining stability in *party preference* by strength of *party identification* thus solves neither the problem of endogeneity nor of simultaneity. Empirical tests for Western European multi party systems even suggest that party identification and voting cannot be empirically distinguished, as party identification is not more stable than party preference (Budge et al. 1976; Falter et al. 2000).

[5] See Arzheimer and Schoen (2005: 631) and Schmitt-Beck et al. (2006) for an analogous argumentation for party identification.

Council) in the period of observation.[6] All other parties are considered as small parties. There are several reasons, why supporters of small parties should be more volatile than supporters of large parties (Hypothesis 7). Firstly, small parties have less decisive power both in legislative and executive bodies and weaker ties with other influential groups. Secondly, they have a kind of opposition role in Switzerland, as they are not represented in the federal executive. Often, rise in support for small parties is associated with a salient topic.[7] They have increasing support as long as the issue is salient and the governmental parties do not well integrate that issue into their policies.

Apart from party size, we include the number of parties into our models. These have shown to be important in comparisons between countries (Pedersen 1983; Bartolini and Mair 1990). Because party systems vary between cantons, we expect volatility of voting intention to increase with the number of parties in a canton (Hypothesis 8). Because changes in party preference due to party system characteristics do not refer to ideology but rather occur for strategic reasons, we expect party size and the number of parties to influence only changes within a party block.

Data

We base our analysis on data of the first nine waves of the SHP from 1999 to 2007. The data consist of a random sample of 5'074 Swiss private households drawn in 1999, where all household members above 14 years have been interviewed by telephone. These individuals have been followed over time with yearly questionnaires. This provides us with up to nine observation points per individual. A second random sample of 2'538 households has been followed starting in 2004. We exclude foreigners and individuals less than 18 years old, who do not have the right to vote, from the sample. Two different kinds of analysis will be carried out: in the section *Patterns of Change* we will look at trajectories over the whole period using the subsample of respondents who participated in all nine panel waves (N

[6] They cumulate to about 80% of the votes for the National Council in the period of observation. For the upper chamber of the National Parliament (two seats per canton), the four governmental parties occupy even more than 90% of the seats.

[7] In Switzerland, this holds e.g. for the Green Party (environment), the Swiss Democrats (foreigners) and for the Freedom Party (automobiles).

= 1'994). In the section *Explaining Changes in Party Preference* we will look at transitions between observation points which allow including all individuals having participated at least twice.

It is necessary to briefly address the two main problems regarding the representativeness of panel data: initial non-participation which is a problem of all survey data and attrition which is a particularity of panel data. We do not present the analysis of such effects here, but only their implications for further analyses. Firstly, data of the SHP should primarily be used for analytic purposes and less for descriptive statistics. Attention is particularly required where relative size of parties (voting shares) is concerned, as some parties are strongly overrepresented (SPS) and others underrepresented (SVP) in the sample. Secondly, there are two opposing effects linking the duration of the panel and stability observed. On the one hand, the more often we observe individuals, the more likely it is to observe a change in party preference. On the other, research on attrition shows that individuals staying in a sample are more stable in their behaviour than respondents leaving the panel (Lipps 2007). The more observations per individuals we require, the more likely is thus an overrepresentation of stable individuals. Examining these effects, we see that the number of changes increases quite linearly with the number of observations available which means that bias from attrition is limited. Thirdly we did not use weights for the results presented here. Weights provided with the SHP data have not been designed for transition analysis as applied here and correct for bias only to a very small extent. For the descriptive analyses, we ran our models also with weights provided, results however changed only marginally and weights have no effect on the conclusions.

For all analyses we distinguish changes between- and within party blocks, where parties are classed into three blocks: left parties, centre-right parties and conservative-right parties. The classical opposition between left and right divides the left block from the two right blocks. The cultural opposition between the promoters of an open, cultural liberal Switzerland and the defenders of Swiss traditions divides the conservative right from the left and the centre-right block (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008: 96).[8] This classification provides us with approximately equally sized party blocks according to voting shares. Each block comprises at least one of the four

[8] The distinction of three party blocks is in line with empirical analyses of the parties' positioning in the electoral campaigns (Kriesi et al. 2006: 942), of referendum votes (Hermann and Leuthold 2003), of party recommendations for referendum votes (Suter et al. 2009) and of voting behaviour of the members of the National Council (Kriesi 2001).

biggest (and governmental) parties. Small parties have been attributed to the three blocks according to their positions on the left-right axis established in expert surveys (Hug and Schulz 2007).[9] To test whether the construction of three party blocks is empirically reasonable for our analysis compared to only two party blocks (as considered by Bartolini and Mair), we can compare the number of changes between party blocks. If three party blocks are reasonable, changes between the left block and the centre-right block should have similar frequencies as changes between the centre-right block and the conservative-right block. This is indeed the case in our data. Among all transitions, 1'061 are changes between the left and the centre-right party block and 1'031 are changes between the centre-right and the conservative-right block. 418 changes occurred between the left and the conservative-right block.

Patterns of Change

In order to look at patterns of change from 1999 to 2007, we limit our analysis to respondents having participated in all nine yearly panel waves. While transitions between two waves can easily be represented in a transition matrix, a description of individual trajectories over nine panel waves is not straight forward because there are millions of different possibilities. We therefore classed individual patterns into one of the five following categories:

1. Stable party preference: the respondent named the same party in all waves.

2. No party preference: the respondent never indicated a party preference, but responded any of the following in all waves: does not know, vote for no party, does not vote, vote for candidates and not for parties.[10]

[9] Left parties: Social-Democratic Party (SPS), Worker's Party (PdA), Green Party (GPS), Socialist Green Alternative and Women Groups. Centre-right parties: Liberal Party (FDP and LPS), Christian-Democratic Party (CVP), Independent Alliance (LdU), Christian Social Party (CSP), Evangelical Party (EVP). Conservative-right parties: Swiss People's Party (SVP), Federal Democratic Union (EDU), Freedom Party (FP), Swiss Democrats (SD), Lega dei Ticinesi (LEGA).

[10] In the Swiss electoral system, citizens have the possibility to vote for any combination of candidates, irrespectively of the party affiliation of those candidates (panachage). Yet, most voters vote for candidates of the same party and provide a party name when asked about their voting choice.

3. Preference – no preference: the respondent expressed at least once no party preference (see Point 2) and at least once a party preference. Whenever she named a party preference it was for the same party.

4. Change within party blocks: respondents named at least two different parties during the nine years, but all the parties named belong to the same block. Answers not containing a particular party (see Point 2) are possible at any time.

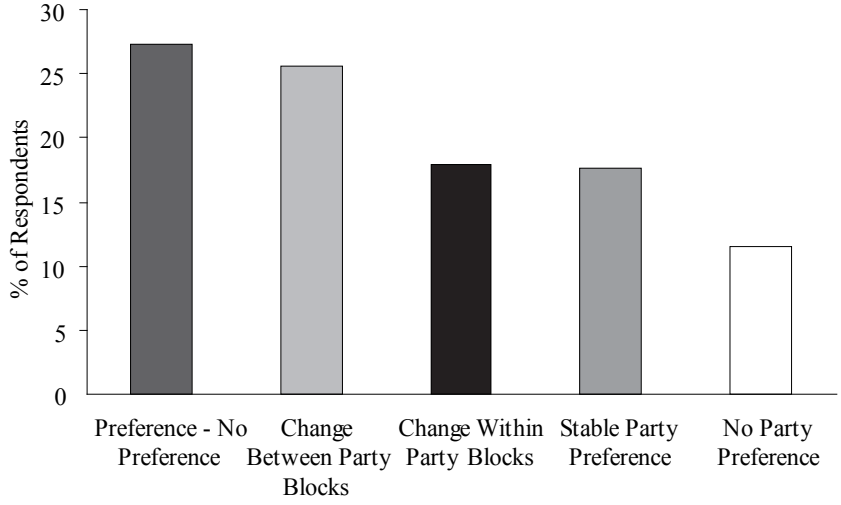
5. Change between party blocks: respondents named at least two different parties during the nine years, where the parties belong to different blocks. Answers not containing a particular party (see Point 2) are possible at any time.

Frequencies of the five different patterns are displayed in Figure 1. Most frequent (27%) are those changing between a particular party preference and no preference. 18 percent have a stable party preference defined as having named the same party in all waves. Together, these two groups with respondents having named only one party encompass 45 percent of the sample. The share of respondents having switched their party preference is of about equal size: 18 percent of respondents change only within blocks and 25 percent have changed at least once between blocks. 12 percent never articulated a party preference.

The fact that changes between party blocks are more frequent than changes within party blocks is an unexpected result. A closer look at the transitions between parties reveals that about half (51%) of all between-block changes involve the SVP (13% from or to a party of the left party block and 38% from or to a party of the centre-right party block). The frequent changes between party blocks thus reflect the rise of the SVP which has transformed the Swiss party system from the 1990's on and can be seen as a particularity of the period of observation considered. Apart from the transformation of the party system, the proportion of between-block changes depends heavily on the construction of party blocks and on how many waves of data we take into account.[11] For these reasons and because there are no comparable analyses for Switzerland, it is not easy to qualify these frequencies. Our results are however in so far in line with similar analyses for Germany and Great Britain (Clarke et al. 2004; Schmitt-Beck

[11] The consideration of only two party blocks (left and right) would have resulted in 27% of respondents changing within a party block and only 16% changing between blocks.

Figure 1: Patterns of Change over Nine Yearly Observations: Frequencies (N = 1'994)

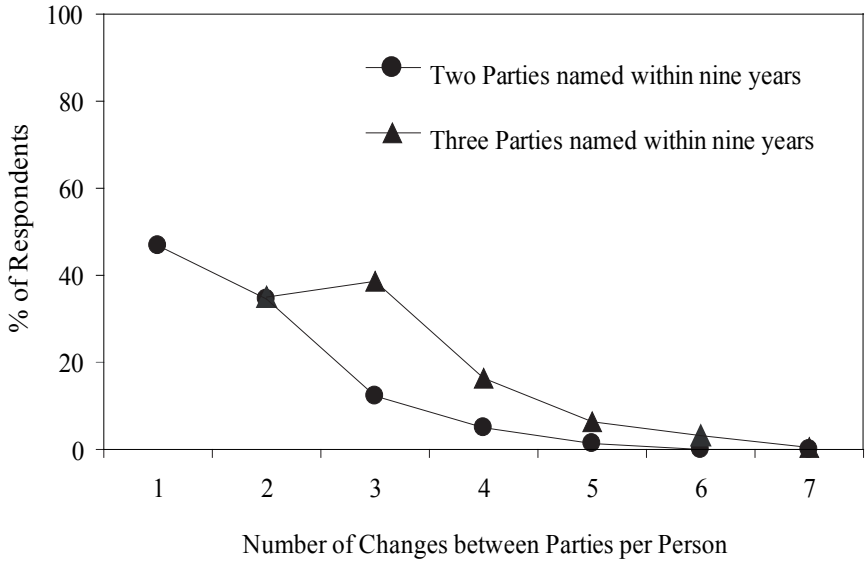


et al. 2006; Zuckerman et al. 2007), as that the most frequent pattern (and transitions) are changes in and out of party preference.[12] Despite the considerable amount of volatility within- and between party blocks, voting intentions are nevertheless relatively stable. Nearly half of respondents name only one party over the nine years and 63 percent remain within the same party block.

We will look now more closely at the subsample of respondents having changed their party preference (N = 867). This is important because measured changes might represent different things: "conversions" from one party to another, ambiguity between two or several preferences (Zaller 1992), measurement error (Achen 1975) or random changes (Converse 1967). Among the changers, we firstly look at the number of parties named in the nine years: 69 percent of the changers named just two parties, 26 percent named three different parties and only five percent named four or more parties. The fact that respondents switch mostly between two or three parties only, shows clearly that most changes do not represent random answers. It rather indicates that even among changers there is a certain amount of stability, in the sense that party preferences are limited to

[12] Results for Germany are based on data of the Socio Economic Panel (SOEP) which measures not voting intention but party identification. Schmitt-Beck et al. (2006) found that about 42% of voters changed their party identification within 18 years compared to 43% in nine years in our sample for Switzerland.

Figure 2: Number of Changes in Party Preference in % of Voters Changing between Parties (N = 867)



two or three parties. In the next step we investigate whether these changes are one-time changes and therefore reflect "conversions" or whether voters switch back and forth between their preferred parties. This is presented in Figure 2, which shows the relationship between the number of parties and the number of changes.

For respondents who named two different parties within nine years, it is more frequent to switch between them several times than to change preference just once. The same applies for respondents having named three or four parties. A change in party preference can therefore not generally be interpreted as a conversion in the sense that respondents abandon a party and form a preference for another party. It is more likely that preferences for several parties are present simultaneously. This corresponds to Zaller's view (1992) that individuals are usually ambiguous in their opinions and that answers given to a question depend on what consideration is at the "top of the head" in that particular moment. Neither models who interpret changes as a result of random answers (Converse 1967), nor models who attribute them to measurement error (Achen 1975) are supported by our data. Patterns also show that labels such as activation, conversion or demobilisation which are often used to classify transitions in two-wave panels

might be misleading. What is e.g. characterized as conversion is just as likely to represent ambiguity between two parties and what is characterized as demobilization and activation is more likely to represent a weak party preference, indicated by switching in and out of party preference.

Explaining Changes in Party Preference

In this section, we aim at explaining changes in preference between different parties by empirically testing the hypotheses derived in the theory section. To be able to include time-dependent explanatory variables, we will look at transitions as the unit of analysis rather than at patterns over all panel waves as in the previous section. The number of observations per respondent varies between two and eight (for those having participated in all nine waves). Additional advantages of focusing at transitions are that sample size increases both in terms of individuals and observations and that attrition effects should be smaller than when looking at the balanced panel only.

Operationalisation of the Dependent Variable

The dependent variable has three categories: within-block changes in party-preference (1), between-block changes in party preference (2) and no change in party preference (3). The latter includes both stable party preferences and – if a party preference has been named in any of the previous waves – observations with no party preference. If no party preference has been indicated so far, observations are excluded from the sample, in order not to mix "stable non-identifiers" and "no-changers" who have had a party preference before. We adopt this way of coding to be able to detect indirect changes in party preference where some waves of "no preference" are in between two different parties. The coding of the dependent variable is illustrated in Table 1, for simplicity without the distinction of party blocks. The dependent variable contains 28'587 transitions,[13] of which eight percent are changes within the same party block and nine percent are changes between party blocks. Our model of choice is a competing-risk event history model with repeated events (see also Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006).

[13] For the analysis we dropped 228 cases with missing values in one of the independent variables, so that we end up with 28'359 transitions to be included in our model.

Table 1: Illustration of Coding of Dependent Variable

	Patterns								Coding of Transition (Dependent Variable)							
1	A	A	A	B	B	B	A	A	-	S	S	C	S	S	C	S
2	n	n	n	B	n	n	n	n	-	-	-	-	S	S	S	S
3	A	A	A	n	A	n	B	A	-	S	S	S	S	S	C	C
4	n	n	B	x	B	n	x	B	-	-	-	-	S	S	-	S
5	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Notes: Patterns: A = Party A; B = Party B; n = No Preference; x = Missing Information. Coding of Transition: S = No Change; C = Change in Party Preference; - = Excluded from Sample or Missing Observation.

As we have several transitions per individual in the data, we will adjust our model for individual heterogeneity with a random effects model (e.g. Oakes 1992; Baltagi 2005; Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2007) that takes into account unobserved effects across subjects. Individual effects are treated as random draws from a multinomial logistic distribution.

Operationalisation of Independent Variables

For *party preference of other household members* (Hypothesis 1), we take values from of the previous wave of the panel, so that the cause is certain to precede the effect. The reference category contains respondents not living with other (Swiss) adults. Three dummy variables (agreement, disagreement, other constellation) reflect constellations of party preference for respondents living with a partner. The category "other constellation" contains cases where one of the partners did not have any party preference or did not participate in the survey in the previous wave. Another three dummy variables (agreement, disagreement, other constellation) reflect constellations for respondents living with household members other than their partner. If there are two or more household-members besides a partner, their influence is coded as agreement if there are more agreements than disagreements and vice versa. If there are as many persons agreeing as disagreeing, it is attributed to the category "other constellation".

The electoral cycle (Hypothesis 2), is measured by the difference in terms of *days between the date of the interview and the date of the next or previous election* (whichever is closer).

Political sophistication (Hypothesis 3) is preferably measured through knowledge questions (Zaller 1992). As this information is however not available in the SHP, we will rely on both the educational level (three levels) and political interest (self-placement on a scale from 0 (not at all interested) to 10 (very interested)) which are frequently used as proxies.

Regarding the *strength of socio-structural predispositions* (Hypothesis 4) we largely follow the approach presented by Lachat (2007: 201ff.). As a first step we regress the different parties on social class, region (rural vs urban) and religion (see results in appendix). Secondly, for each individual, we calculate predicted probabilities to vote for each of the parties. Thirdly we keep for each individual the highest predicted probability to indicate predisposition strength, irrespectively of which party has the highest value. Finally we recode these maximum probabilities into the 0 to 1 range.

For the measurement of social class which is needed to calculate predisposition strength, we apply the class concept and coding-scheme developed by Kriesi (1989) and adopted by Lachat (2007) which distinguishes the following classes: self-employed farmers and other self-employed, unskilled workers, skilled workers, routine non-manual employees, managers and administrative specialists, technical specialists and social-cultural specialists. As common in literature, social class is preferably assigned at the individual level, taking partner's or parent's social position as a proxy in order to assign a social class to the maximum of respondents (e.g. Güveli and de Graaf 2007; Müller 1999: 153; Knutsen 2003).[14] For religion we included the following dummy variables: Catholic denomination and attendance of religious services at least once a month, catholic denomination

[14] Class positions are assigned according to respondent's current job if they were employed at the time of the interview. For those not employed, the assignment of a class position was attempted by using a (hierarchical) succession of proxies: respondent's last occupation from previous panel waves; respondent's recalled last job; respondent's occupation in later panel waves; spouse's current occupation; spouse's last occupation from previous panel waves; spouse's recalled last occupation; respondent's father's occupation; respondent's mother's occupation; respondent's father's occupation from previous waves; respondent's mother's occupation from previous waves; respondent's father's recalled last occupation; respondent's mother's recalled last occupation; father's or mother's occupation at age 15 for respondents up 40 years of age. With this procedure, only for 85 individuals (314 observations) out of the 6'962 individuals considered in the analysis, no class could be assigned.

and religious participation less than once a month, protestant denomination and attendance of religious services at least once a month, protestant denomination and religious participation less than one a month and all others (reference category). The region is measured by distinguishing rural and other communities based on the community typology of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office.

Because of left-truncation and right-censoring of the data, it is problematic to measure *time since last change in party preference* (Hypothesis 5) in terms of years since last party change. The problem of left-truncation arises as we do not know how long a party preference has been held before the first panel wave. Right censoring arises from the fact that we do not know how long a party preference will be held for ongoing spells or how long it lasted for respondents having left the panel. A strategy commonly used in duration models is to limit the sample to the balanced panel of those having participated in all waves and/or to drop left-truncated spells. In our case this is not appropriate, as we would induce a considerable selection bias and an enormous reduction of the sample size. We therefore opt for a relative measure of time, measured by the number of observations a party preference has been held (or not been changed) relative to the number of observations available for an individual so far. In other words, the variable "time since last party change" represents the actual duration of a party preference relative to the potential maximum duration.[15]

The coding of party size (governmental party vs. small parties, Hypothesis 7) has already been discussed in the theory section and is straight forward. For Hypothesis 8, we include the "effective number of parties" introduced by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). For the canton Appenzell Innerrhoden, where the effective number of parties cannot be calculated, we imputed observations with the mean value.

In addition to variables corresponding to the presented hypotheses we will include the following control variables into the model: gender, interview language to account for the linguistic regions in Switzerland and satisfaction with democracy which could be an indicator for changes in party preference out of protest. Satisfaction with democracy is measured on a scale form 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). Descriptive statistics of all independent variables are presented in Table 2.

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[15] A problem consists however in the coding of the first observation. Actual duration relative to potential duration is equal to 1 irrespective of whether a change has occurred or not.

Table 2: Summary Statistics of Independent Variables

Independent Variables	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.
Household Members (Ref.: No Other Hh-member)	0.46	0.50	0	1
Partner: Disagreement	0.10	0.30	0	1
Partner: Agreement	0.20	0.40	0	1
Partner: Other Constellation	0.19	0.39	0	1
Other Hh-member: Disagreement	0.03	0.17	0	1
Other Hh-member: Agreement	0.04	0.19	0	1
Other Hh-member: Other Constellation	0.04	0.21	0	1
Distance to National Elections (in years)	1.00	0.68	0	2
Distance to Cantonal Election (in years)	0.99	0.55	0	2.21
Socio-structural Predispositions	0.51	0.25	0	1
Time since last Party Change	0.87	0.26	0.13	1
Age (years of age divided by ten)	4.87	1.58	1.8	9.5
Interest in Politics	6.38	2.34	0	10
Educational Level (Ref.: Low Education)	0.12	0.33	0	1
Intermediate Education	0.63	0.48	0	1
High Education	0.25	0.43	0	1
Small Party (Ref.: FDP, CVP, SPS, SVP)	0.10	0.30	0	1
Effective Number of Parties	4.44	0.88	0	6.7
Satisfaction with Democracy	6.18	1.80	0	10
Male (Ref.: Female)	0.46	0.50	0	1
German Speaking	0.70	0.46	0	1
Italian Speaking	0.04	0.19	0	1
French Speaking	0.26	0.44	0	1

Results

The model which tests for the hypotheses derived in the theory section is presented in Table 3. The zero-model (M0) includes only the random intercept of respondents. In Model 1, all independent variables are added.[16] The overall performance for Model 1 in terms of McFaddens Pseudo-R^2 is 0.05 and in terms of the reduction of unexplained individual heterogeneity, the variation in individual intercepts is reduced by 66 percent. Most hypotheses can be confirmed in terms of significance of the coefficients and the direction of the effects. Because many variables are dummies or are coded into a range between 0 and 1, the size of coefficients can be directly compared. Changes in predicted probabilities for the minimum and maximum value of each variable are also presented in Table 4.

Coefficients of party preferences of household members generally confirm our hypotheses. Disagreement in party preference with a partner or with other household members increases the probability of a change in party preference (Hypothesis 1a), while agreement has a stabilising effect (Hypothesis 1b). Taking the differences between agreement and disagreement and considering that effects of a partner and of other household members add together, preferences of household members might add up to a relatively high maximum impact on the predicted probabilities relative to the other variables (up to 4.1% for within-block changes and up to 14.2% for between-block changes). Coefficients of within-household effects are ambiguous about the questions whether agreement or disagreement has a stronger impact or whether partners or other household are more influential. But we can say that the hypothesis by McPhee (1963) and Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), who argue that it is disagreement that primarily drives preference change, cannot be supported, as most coefficients for agreement are higher in absolute value than for disagreement. We also see that living with other household members by itself already has a stabilising effect on party preference, as indicated by the coefficients of "other constellations". And according to our results, the most influential within-household constellation is agreement between partners: it decreases the probability for a within-block change by 1.9 percent and the probability for a between-block

[16] We also ran a series of alternative models in order to test for miss-specifications of the model. These involve the inclusion of interaction effects between political sophistication and predisposition strength as suggested by Lachat (2007), interactions between within-household influences and gender and a non-linear relationship of the time variable. None of these effects has shown to increase the fit of the model.

Table 3: Results of Random-Effects Multinomial Logistic Model

	Model 0	Model 1	
		Within	Between
Household Members (Ref.: No Other Hh-member)			
Partner: Disagreement		0.15*	0.30**
Partner: Agreement		-0.64**	-0.93**
Partner: Other Constellation		-0.17*	0.04
Other Hh-member: Disagreement		0.38**	0.36**
Other Hh-member: Agreement		-0.15	-0.32**
Other Hh-member: Other Constellation		-0.26*	-0.24*
Distance to National Elections (in years)		-0.30**	-0.21**
Distance to Cantonal Election (in years)		-0.13**	0.06
Socio-structural Predispositions		0.02	-0.56**
Time since last Party Change		-1.16**	-1.14**
Age (years of age divided by ten)		-0.07**	-0.08**
Interest in Politics		0.16**	0.09*
Interest in Politics: Squared Term		-0.01**	-0.01**
Educational Level (Ref.: Low Education)			
Intermediate Education		0.06	-0.15
High Education		0.28**	-0.26**
Small Party (Ref.: FDP, CVP, SPS, SVP)		1.13**	-0.17*
Effective Number of Parties		0.13**	0.02
Satisfaction with Democracy		-0.01	-0.04**
Male (Ref.: Female)		0.02	0.07
German Speaking		-0.48**	0.25**
Italian Speaking		0.09	-0.18
Constant		-1.84**	-0.43
Log Likelihood (Model)	-15’593	-14’746	
Pseudo-R^2 (McFadden)		0.054	
Variation between Individuals (u_i)	1.89**	0.66**	
Reduction of u_i		0.65	

Notes: *Dependent Variable:* No Change in Party Preference (Reference Category), Change within Party Blocks, Change between Party Blocks; *Confidence Levels*: * = 95%, ** = 99%; *N (Observations)* = 28’359; *N (Individuals)* = 6’962.

Table 4: Changes in Predicted Probabilities Caused by Independent Variables

	Within	Between
Dummy Variables (change compared to reference category)		
Other Household Members (Ref.: No Other Hh-member)		
Partner: Disagreement	0.5	2.9
Partner: Agreement	-1.9	-5.5
Partner: Other Constellation	-0.7	n.s.
Other Hh-member: Disagreement	1.7	3.4
Other Hh-member: Agreement	n.s.	-2.4
Other Hh-member: Other Constellation	-0.9	-1.8
Educational Level (Ref.: Intermediate Education)		
Low Education	n.s.	n.s.
High Education	0.5	-2.2
Party Size (Ref.: Governmental Party)		
Small Party	8.1	-2.1
Intervall Variables (Prob. Max. Value minus Prob. Min. Value)		
Distance to National Elections (in years)	-2.3	-3.4
Distance to Cantonal Election (in years)	-1.3	n.s.
Sociostructural Predispositions	n.s.	-4.5
Time since last Party Change (Relative, Index 0 to 1)	-4.8	-10.2
Age (years of age divided by ten)	-2.0	-5.3
Effective Number of Parties	1.5	n.s.

Notes: Predicted Probabilities assume an individual Effect of 0 (Mean of Random Variable). Explanatory Variables are held at their Mean (Continuous Variables) or at their Mode (Categorical Variables), which results in a Probability of 4.4% for a Within-block Change and a Probability of 9.7% for a Between-block Change.

change by 5.5 percent. Generally, results confirm the importance of including influences of other household members besides partners into the model and our findings are largely in line with existing literature for Germany and Great Britain (e.g. Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006; Zuckerman et al. 2007).

Also the context of the electoral cycle influences individual-level volatility (Hypothesis 2), particularly for national elections. The probability for a within-block change is 2.3 percent higher at the national election date than in between national elections (3.4% for between-block changes).

Cantonal elections have about half of the impact of national elections and are not significant for between-block changes.

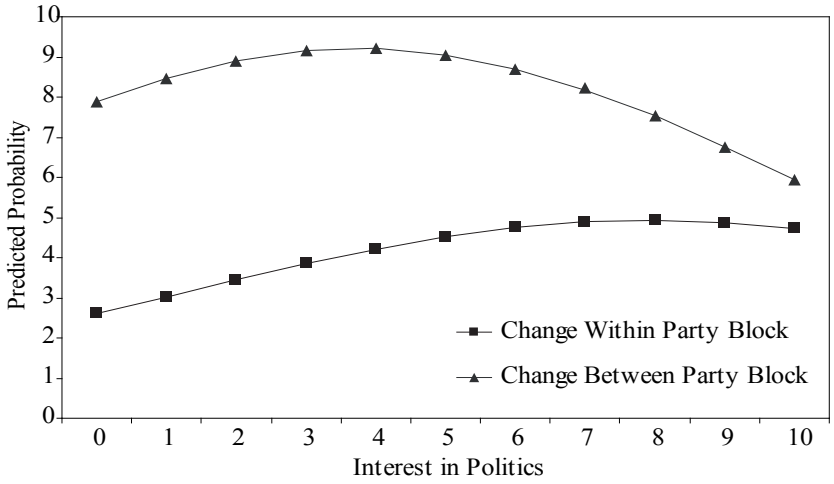
Evidence for the hypothesis regarding political sophistication is mixed (Hypothesis 3). As expected, there is a significant non-linear effect between political interest and voting intention. A look at predicted probabilities however shows a rather different relation for within-block changes and between-block changes (see Figure 3). For within-block changes, the positive effect dominates, while the negative effect dominates for between-block changes. While between-block changes are most frequent for respondents with below-average levels of interest in politics, within-block changes are most frequent for highly interested respondents. This pattern is partly confirmed by the education variable, with tertiary education levels decreasing the probability for between-block changes and increasing the probability for within-block changes. With the exception of Lachat (2007),[17] other studies on volatility of party preference or party identification did not test for non-linear influence of political sophistication and remained vague on why political interest should influence party change (Arzheimer and Schoen 2005, Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006, Zuckerman et al. 2007). Our results demonstrate the appropriateness of Zaller's theory and of including a quadratic term of political sophistication into the model. They reveal however also the necessity to further reflect and investigate on the effect of political sophistication, particularly on the striking differences of between- and within-block changes.

Hypothesis 4 on the stabilising effect of socio-structural predispositions for between-block changes is supported by the data. The stronger an individual is predisposed towards a party according to his socio-structural characteristics, the less likely become changes between party blocks. The probability of a between-block change for respondents with the strongest socio-structural predispositions is 4.5 percent lower than for respondents who have no clear predispositions. This result is in line with findings from Lachat (2007: 132ff.) on recalled voting in Switzerland and from aggregate-level analysis by Bartolini and Mair.[18] Even though the relevance of socio-structural variables might have decreased since the studies by La-

[17] His results (based on Swiss electoral surveys and on variables of recalled voting) confirm the non-linearity of the relationship between political sophistication and volatility. However, results for between- and within-block changes hardly differed for Switzerland.

[18] Lachat however did not separate between socio-structural and psychological predispositions.

Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities of Change in Party Preference for Interest in Politics



zarsfeld and his collegues (1948) and by Butler and Stokes (1974), they still have a stabilising effect on voting intentions.

Also reinforcing mechanisms of existing preferences as claimed by the Michigan Model of voting are supported by our data. The duration, a party preference has been held (Hypothesis 5), is in fact the most influential explanatory variable for between-block changes and the second most influential variable for within-block changes (after party size). Because we included time since last change not in terms of years, but rather as a relative measure, we cannot specify the relationship between duration and change more precisely. Also age has a stabilising effect on party preference (Hypothesis 6). Because of multicollinearity, we were however not able to separate cohort- from age effects and therefore cannot exclude the possibility that the relationship is not caused by life experience as stated in the hypothesis, but rather by cohort effects.[19] Our results for duration and age are in line with those obtained by Schmitt-Beck et al. (2006) for changes in party identification in Germany.

Lastly, also the two party-system characteristics show considerable effects on within-block changes. The distinction between small and governmental parties (Hypothesis 7) is the variable which most affects the probability for within-block changes. The probability for a change between party

[19] The relationship between life course and stability has been discussed in detail e.g. by Krosnik and Alwin (1989, 1991).

blocks increases by eight percent when respondents had a preference for a small party in the previous wave. Also the effective number of parties in a canton influences volatility within party blocks (Hypothesis 8), however to a much smaller extent than party size. While the number of parties does not affect between-block changes, the size of the party has a small influence on between-block changes that was not expected by the model. But taken together, our results confirm results of aggregate level analysis at the country level (Pedersen 1983; Bartolini and Mair 1990).

Conclusions

In this paper we have been looking at stability and change of party preference at the individual level using data of the Swiss Household Panel (1999–2007). In the first part, we described patterns of change. Most frequent are respondents who change in and out of a party preference. With nearly half of respondents having switched at least once between parties, volatility reveals to be rather high. Furthermore, these changes occur not primarily within party blocks, as changes between party blocks are also relatively frequent. We therefore cannot confirm the hypothesis by Bartolini and Mair (1990) of stability between party blocks, at least for the period of observation. Apart from the possibility of measurement errors, there are two main explanations for this high volatility. Firstly, gross changes between parties are much more frequent than net changes in electoral results. Secondly, the frequent between-block changes are mostly due to the rise of the SVP, which has transformed the Swiss party system from the 1990s onwards. We further found that changes over nine years involve mostly just two parties and that it is quite common to move back and forth between two (or three) parties. Despite this remarkable volatility, there is nevertheless a high stability in voting intention. 45 percent of respondents named only one party during the nine years and 63 remained within the same party block. And looking at transitions, only 17 percent involve a within- or between block change.

In the second part we tried to explain why changes in party preference from one party to another occur. We based our theoretical framework on approaches from different research fields. Firstly we recurred to traditional models of voting – cleavage theory, the Columbia model and the Michigan model – where stability in electoral choice plays a central role. As regards to socio-structural predispositions (measured by social class, religion and

region), they still reveal to have a stabilising effect. More precisely, results show that stability of voting intentions depends on the strength of socio-structural predispositions. As regards psychological predispositions, data show a reinforcing mechanism of party preference: Stability increases with the duration a party preference has been held and the older the respondent becomes. Another central aspect of the Columbia model, the consideration of contextual effects, has also shown to be highly relevant, both for within-household influences and for electoral campaigns. Secondly, we demonstrated that political sophistication has a non-linear influence on changes in party preference. Zaller's RAS-model is thus well suited to explain the effect of political sophistication which has remained vague in most existing analyses on individual volatility. Thirdly we included variables of party (system) characteristics that have shown to be relevant in studies on aggregate-level volatility. The size of parties and the effective number of parties in a canton indeed have an influence on volatility at the individual level, too.

Unlike other studies using panel data, we distinguished within- and between block changes in our analysis. Socio-structural predispositions on the one hand, which represent respondent's positions along cleavage lines, only effect changes between party blocks but are irrelevant for changes within party blocks. Party-system related reasons for preference changes on the other hand, effect particularly within-block changes. Another important difference of the two types of changes involves political sophistication. Between-block changes are most frequent among respondents with lower interest in politics and lower educational levels. Within-block changes are most frequent among respondents with higher interest in politics and high educational levels.

The broad theoretical approach demonstrates that it is fruitful to combine insights from different research fields, as each is able to explain a part of individual-level volatility. However, this approach also leaves many questions open: particularly the influences among household members and the striking differences for the effect of political sophistication on within- and between-block changes require more in-depth analysis and theoretical reflections. But even with this broad approach, a large part of the variance in volatility remains unexplained and shows the need for further research on that topic. Lastly, because our model is not specific to any particular party, the model and hypotheses should be transferable to other party systems as well.

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Appendix

	FDP	CVP	SVP	LPS	EVP	PdA	GPS	Ex. Right	Other
Ref.: Self Employed Farmers									
Self-employed	0.31	0.17	0.02	-0.43	-0.94	0.71	-0.27	1.15	-0.89
Unskilled Workers	-0.61	-0.36	-0.19	-1.29**	-0.92	0.20	-0.24	1.34	-1.52**
Skilled Workers	-0.55	-0.60	-0.44	-1.66*	-1.51	0.31	-0.79	0.85	-1.38
Routine Non-manual Employees	-0.24	-0.28	-0.86**	-1.52**	-0.88	0.39	-0.36	0.80	-1.20
Managers and Admin. Specialists	0.19	-0.16	-0.98**	-0.77	-1.24	0.07	-0.44	0.91	-1.17
Technical Specialists	-0.04	-0.39	-1.09**	-1.00	-1.07	0.22	-0.14	0.59	-0.97
Social-cultural Specialists	-1.17**	-1.13**	-2.52**	-2.35	-1.27	0.18	-0.20	0.01	-1.34**
Ref.: No Religious Denomination									
Practicing Protestant	1.02**	1.21**	0.82**	0.52	1.71**	-0.75**	0.15	0.97**	0.02
Nonpracticing Protestant	0.78**	0.22	0.63**	0.36	-1.42**	-0.98**	-0.22**	-1.81**	-0.16
Practicing Catholic	0.85**	3.18**	0.92**	0.05	-0.74	-0.93**	-0.03	-1.79**	-0.19
Nonpracticing Catholic	0.73**	1.73**	0.32**	0.67**	-2.81**	-0.78**	-0.33**	-1.73**	-0.25
Rural (Ref.: urban)	0.15	0.77**	0.74**	0.01	0.74**	-0.39	-0.27	0.96**	0.27
Constant	-1.08**	-2.13**	-0.29	-1.65**	-1.60	-3.09**	-0.87	-3.33**	-2.62**

Notes: Dependent Variable: Voting Intention. Reference Category: Preference for SPS. Because of the many small parties in Switzerland, some parties have been grouped together: The category PdA involves also Green and Socialist Alternative groups and the category Extreme Right contains Swiss Democrats, Freedom Party, EDU and LEGA. Respondents with no party preference have been excluded. Party Names: see Footnote 9. Model: Multinomial Logistic Regression clustered by Individuals. McFadden Pseudo-R^2 = 0.09; Confidence Levels: * = 95%; ** = 99%; N (Observations) = 21'438; N (Individuals) = 6'194; Pseudo-log Likelihood: -34'538.

Stabilität und Wandel von Parteipräferenzen

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Stabilität und Volatilität von Parteipräferenz anhand der Daten des Schweizer Haushalt-Panels (SHP) von 1999–2007, die es zum ersten Mal ermöglichen, Wählerwanderungen bzw. -stabilität in der Schweiz über mehrere Beobachtungszeitpunkte hinweg zu betrachten. In den Analysen wird systematisch zwischen Wechsel innerhalb und Wechsel zwischen Parteifamilien unterschieden. Der erste Teil untersucht die Muster der Parteienpräferenz, die eine relativ starke Volatilität in der Wahlabsicht zeigen. Verschiedene Theorien zu den Ursachen von Wechseln zwischen Parteien werden in einem zweiten Teil anhand eines multinomialen Random-Effects Modells getestet. Die Resultate zeigen, dass sich Parteipräferenz mit ihrer Dauer und mit dem Alter stabilisiert und dass der Wahlzyklus, politisches Interesse, soziostrukturelle Prädispositionen, der Haushaltskontext sowie Parteigrösse und Anzahl Parteien einen Teil der Volatilität erklären. Unterschiedliche Resultate für Wechsel innerhalb und zwischen Parteifamilien unterstreichen die Bedeutung dieser Differenzierung.

Stabilité et volatilité des préferences partisanes

Cette contribution analyse la stabilité et la volatilité des préférences partisanes en utilisant les données du Panel Suisse de Ménages (PSM) de 1999 à 2007; celles-ci permettent, pour la première fois, d'analyser au niveau individuel les transitions et la stabilité du choix électoral en Suisse sur plusieurs années. La première partie présente les différents types de transitions en distinguant notamment les changements entre et à l'intérieur des différentes familles de partis. Diverses théories expliquant cette volatilité sont testées dans la deuxième partie avec un modèle « Random-effects » multinomial. Les résultats montrent que les préférences partisanes se stabilisent avec leur durée et avec l'âge, mais aussi que le cycle électoral, l'intérêt politique, les prédispositions socio-structurelles, les caractéristiques du ménage ainsi que la taille des partis et le nombre de partis expliquent une partie de la volatilité. Il ressort notamment des différences importantes dans les résultats relatifs aux changements entre et à l'intérieur des familles politiques.

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