

Research proposal

Floating voter - "A person who does not vote consistently for any single political party"[i]

introduction

The research question I would like to ask is what makes people who change parties across elections? These voters are often called "floating voters" and, though always present in elections, are starting to grow in numbers and are leading to traditional understandings of British politics to change.

While these voters have been studied intensively in situations such as in the United States and in Eastern Europe, little research has been done into floating voters in the UK, despite the monumental political change they have brought about in the UK. Therefore, a space exists for me to explore this new area of research to create a worthwhile project.

The research questions

While talking to my academic supervisor we discussed what research question would allow for the most worthwhile contribution to the field and general audience while also feasible in the limitations of the laidlaw scholarship.

Therefore, the area of my research will be on what makes voters more likely to "float" and not consistently vote for the same person or party each election.

Objectives of the research

The objectives of my research would be to identify the variables that make voters move from supporting a specific political party to changing parties each year. I hope to do this through quantitative research. I hope to use a mixture of regression analysis and using matching to try and find similar voters to try and identify a single issue which makes their votes different. This would mean looking for people in similar positions and from the same area to try and see what makes them different. I hope to achieve this by using RStudio to design a programme to go through the data as it would be near impossible in the time allocated to be able to do that. I would do this by using data held by the British Election Study Data as this is up to date and gives an image of the Country now. This data is collected on a yearly basis, and is freely available to me as a student. In my further research if I find any services to compliment this, I will also use these.

However, another aspect of my research which will be developed further into my research is the international comparison of floating voters. There are two ways this can develop. Through my research into this area, I have identified two areas of comparison - either the increased polarisation and decline of floating voters in the U.S. especially after the 2020 election with even traditionally independent voters are choosing a political party[ii] and argued by some academics change in international trade[iii] or looking at countries with

different political systems and see how they experience floating voters. This would allow me to see if the use of First Past the Post was a variable I could consider.

At the end of the project my final objective is to be able to present my project through an article that I would have written about my research but also to be able to present a poster about my research to present to a wider audience. I also hope to gain access to explain my research to the wider community by contacting community centres and to try and show my research in local churches and libraries both in Durham and my local area in Newcastle.

Summary of the project

My hope for my project is to try and identify the variables such as immigration, economic background, social background etc which make voters move away from traditional parties and decide on who they vote for on different issues.

[i] John Mchardy Sinclair, *Collins English Dictionary* (Glasgow: Harpercollins, 2002).

[ii] Corwin D Smidt, "Polarization and the Decline of the American Floating Voter," *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 2 (2017): 365–81.

[iii] David Autor et al., "Importing Political Polarization? The Electoral Consequences of Rising Trade Exposure," *American Economic Review* 110, no. 10 (2020): 319–83