Electoral Volatility in Belgium (2009-2014)

Is there a Difference between Stable and Volatile Voters?

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Abstract

Increasing voter volatility has led to a renewed research interest in determinants of party switching. While previous research has mainly focused on the characteristics of volatile voters, less is known about how stable and volatile voters decide what party to vote for. Using panel data spanning two consecutive electoral cycles in Belgium, this study starts with the confirmation of earlier findings: we show that widely used determinants like political sophistication and disaffection add only modestly to our understanding of volatility. In a next step, we examine the vote choice process of stable and volatile voters. Our results indicate that in terms of determinants of the vote choice the two groups are somewhat different. In line with theoretical expectations about the effects of stronger voter volatility, we find that party switchers are guided more by proximity evaluations. The implication of these results is that party switchers might actually be enriching representative democracy. We close with some observations on how this finding qualifies our theoretical understanding of increasing levels of electoral volatility in liberal democracies.

Keywords: Electoral volatility; vote choice process; Belgium; fixed effects conditional logit model

Introduction

Over the last few decades, scholars have found electoral results to become increasingly unstable (Pedersen, 1979; Dassonneville and Hooghe, forthcoming; Drummond, 2006) and at the individual level, it seems that an increasingly large part of the electorate changes parties from one election to another or in the course of an election campaign (Lachat, 2007). This observation of steadily increasing levels of volatility has inspired a large number of scholars to investigate the individual-level causes of electoral volatility. A number of different theories have been proposed, focusing on the impact of political sophistication (Dassonneville and Dejaeghere, 2014; van der Meer *et al*, 2015), political dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction (Zelle, 1995) on the probability of voters changing parties. This work has important normative implications; while some authors expect that especially highly sophisticated voters will be ready to switch electoral preferences, strengthening representative democracy, others assume that volatility arises mainly out of dissatisfaction with the current functioning of democracy. What all these studies have in common, though, is an overall low explanatory power. Despite the fact that a large literature has already examined what are the determinants of electoral volatility, it seems that we cannot explain well in what ways volatile voters are different from stable voters.

If volatile voters do not systematically differ from voters who are loyal to their party, perhaps the conclusion should be that increasing levels of volatility are not fundamentally affecting democratic representation. This would challenge current views on the democratic implications of rising levels of electoral volatility. Previous work on dealignment and volatility has given rise to different expectations with regard to how volatility might be affecting this vote choice process. On the one hand, scholars who follow a traditional approach and characterise volatile voters as lowly educated and poorly informed about politics, have shown concern about the quality of the vote

choice of these volatile voters (Granberg and Holmberg, 1990). According to a more optimistic perspective, on the other hand, the erosion of loyalties to particular parties could imply that vote choices are becoming ‘truly’ informed (Dalton, 2013). While the traditional approach links volatility to particular political attitudes such as political disaffection or political sophistication, the more optimistic perspective account relates to the vote choice process. To gain insights in the plausibility of both perspectives on volatility, it is hence important to not only examine characteristics of volatile voters – an approach which thus far has offered conflicting findings – but also to ascertain what are the determinants of the vote choices made by stable as well as volatile voters. According to optimistic accounts, the choices of volatile voters are determined less by heuristics and habitual loyalties, and more strongly by ideological or issue proximity and mechanisms of accountability (Dassonneville, 2016).

In this paper, we shed light on the consequences of party switching. After briefly assessing characteristics of stable and volatile voters, we present the results of an analysis of the vote choice determinants in both groups. This analysis allows us to determine whether the optimistic or the pessimistic view on volatility is corroborated by empirical results. To do so, we focus on the Belgian context, a multiparty setting where recent elections have been marked by high levels of electoral volatility. We make use of the data from the Belgian Election Panel (2009-2014) and assess causes and consequences of volatility in the two main regions of Belgium – that each have their own party system. Belgium is good case for investigating the causes and consequences of volatility. In line with trends in other Western European countries, party alignments in Belgium have weakened over the last couple of decades – a trend referred to as depillarisation in Belgium (Deschouwer, 2012). Consequently, electoral volatility has increased over time, and current levels of volatility are comparable to what holds for other democracies in Western Europe (Dassonneville, 2012).

Previous work on the characteristics of stable and volatile voters

The fact that some voters change party allegiances while others do not has intrigued students of electoral behaviour for more than half a century now. Characterising vote switchers was considered of foremost importance for evaluating representative democracy, as it is vote switchers who hold the balance of power (Converse, 1962; Granberg and Holmberg, 1999). In the rich literature examining differences between stable and volatile voters, the debate between pessimistic and more optimistic points of view has revolved mostly around the characteristics and attitudes of volatile voters.

First, work investigating the relation between political sophistication and volatility has resulted in a fierce debate on the direction and form of this relation, as it resulted in a set of different and even contrasting hypotheses and arguments. Scholars have found evidence of a positive, a negative, and even a curvilinear relationship between sophistication and volatility (Berelson *et al*, 1954; Dassonneville and Dejaeghere, 2014; Lachat, 2007). Furthermore, the generally low explanatory power of models examining the impact of political sophistication on volatility clarifies that political sophistication is by no means a strong determinant of individuals' probability of switching parties. Overall, work investigating the link between political sophistication and volatility is thus not conclusive with regard to the debate between pessimists and optimists.

A second bundle of work examining individual-level determinants of volatility has focused on the importance of attitudes of political disaffection and dissatisfaction. This perspective to understanding the causes of volatility, that clearly takes a more pessimistic point of view, has been put forward in the work of Zelle (1995). The main premise in this work is that volatile voters are frustrated with politics and unsatisfied with the political system. A number of publications have offered indications that volatile voters are indeed less politically satisfied compared to stable voters

(Dalton and Weldon, 2005; Söderlund, 2008). With regard to disaffection and dissatisfaction as well, however, previous work is not consistently in line with such pessimistic accounts. It has been shown that a distinction should be made between dissatisfaction with one's previous party – which does indeed trigger party switching – and a more profound sense of disaffection of politics in general, which leads voters to abstaining from turning out to vote (Dassonneville *et al*, 2015).

In sum, despite a rich literature on the characteristics and attitudes of volatile voters, the current state of the literature does not allow concluding whether volatility is harmful for representative democracy or whether, on the contrary, it acts to strengthen democratic representation.

A different perspective for assessing the consequences of electoral volatility: vote choice determinants

With respect to voters' attitudes towards politics, political involvement or political sophistication, there is only scant evidence of differences between volatile voters on the one hand and stable voters on the other, and previous work focusing on these characteristics does not allow judging the impact of volatility for representative democracy. However, previous research does consistently find a strong link between partisanship and party switching. It is regularly found that citizens without a party identification, or without strong sociological predispositions towards one particular party, are more likely to be volatile (Lachat, 2007; Söderlund, 2008; Van Hauwaert, 2015). Voters without strong ties to a particular party are deprived of a powerful cognitive shortcut when voting, and are more likely to switch parties from one election to another. Given the central role of partisanship in the vote choice process (Campbell *et al*, 1980), there are good reasons to assume that volatility reflects a fundamental change of the vote choice process.

Focusing on the vote choice process instead of analysing attitudes, furthermore, can effectively give insights in the consequences of rising levels of volatility for the functioning of electoral democracy. Doing so allows for a more direct test of optimists' claim that volatility could imply strengthened mechanisms of proximity voting and accountability, and thus strengthened democratic representation. By analysing the vote choice process of volatile and stable voters and by investigating to what extent different vote choice determinants are of importance for both groups of voters, in this paper we thus aim to settle the debate between pessimistic and optimistic accounts of the impact of volatility.

What are the expectations of both accounts, with regard to the vote choice process? They relate to the role of different vote choice determinants within the funnel of causality leading to the vote choice (Campbell *et al*, 1980). Within this theoretical concept of the funnel of causality, both long-term and short-term factors have their place and affect the vote choice. The distinction between factors on the long term and short-term factors has been summarised by Lewis-Beck *et al* (2008, p. 26): 'Social demographic factors such as gender, race, and social class are long term. Two important predispositions are also considered long term: party identification and political ideology. By contrast, the candidates competing in a campaign and the issues raised in it are considered short-term factors.'

Growing levels of volatility are linked to a decreased role of 'long-term' factors, such as partisanship, on the vote choices made by volatile voters than what holds for voters voting for the same party election after election (Lachat, 2007). Scholars examining the consequences of electoral dealignment have argued that if such long-term factors are becoming less important, this loss of impact will be compensated by short-term factors becoming increasingly important (Schmitt and Wüst, 2006; Walczak *et al*, 2012). Applied to the case of stable versus volatile voters, the expectation would then be that volatile voters – who are less likely to have partisan attachments –

base their vote choice to a larger extent on short-term factors, such as issues or leaders. For some of these short-term factors, their increased weight could be interpreted as strengthening democratic representation. More proximity considerations and mechanisms of accountability are generally considered the two essential mechanisms that allow for elections to serve as a mechanism that ensures democratic representation (Przeworski *et al*, 1999). If proximity voting and accountability are guiding the vote choices of the volatile to larger extent, this would hence be in line with Dalton's (2013: 150) optimistic accounts of how dealignment can 'make electoral politics more democratic'.

The over-time increase in levels of volatility renders investigating this question all the more important. Knowing whether and what vote choice determinants are particularly important in affecting the vote choice of volatile voters can shed light on changes in democratic representation. If particular vote choice factors are having a stronger impact on the choices made by volatile voters, the increase in electoral volatility can be thought to fundamentally affect the extent to which elections are an effective mechanism to link public opinion to the policies that representatives pursue (Przeworski *et al*, 1999). If, by contrast, the vote choice process of volatile and stable voters is fairly similar, the implication would be that an increase in levels of electoral volatility is unlikely to affect the functioning of elections as a means of generating democratic representation.

In examining what determines the vote choices of volatile and stable voters, our work is most similar to a recent study by Dassonneville (2016). This piece on the British case shows that the choices of stable and volatile voters differ in particular with respect to the importance of long-term vote choice determinants. That is, the choices of stable voters are strongly determined by long-term factors such as socio-demographic characteristics or partisanship, while the impact of these factors is strongly reduced among the volatile. With regard to the importance of short-term factors, however, Dassonneville's (2016) results are more mixed, leading to the conclusion that '[t]o a considerable extent, we simply cannot explain what exactly determines the vote of switchers'

(Dassonneville, 2016: 288). Clearly, more research is needed to tease out what determines the vote choices of volatile voters and whether their vote choice calculus differs fundamentally from what holds for stable voters. The added value of the current paper hence lies in adding insights another electoral context (or two, considering the two party systems within Belgium) for answering this research question. In addition, with regard to a number of crucial aspects, the Belgian context differs quite strongly from the British case, as we explain in the next section.

Belgium: a multiparty system with high levels of volatility

We investigate what characterises volatile voters and what determines their vote choices by means of an analysis of voting behaviour in Belgium. For a number of reasons, the Belgian context is particularly relevant for investigating our research questions. Belgium uses a proportional electoral system, resulting in a multiparty system with ample opportunities for voters to switch parties – both between government and opposition as well as among government parties and among opposition parties. Despite the large number of parties, levels of volatility are actually quite average comparatively. In line with what is found across Western Europe, levels of volatility have also been increasing in Belgium since the late 1990s (Dassonneville and Hooghe, forthcoming). Electoral politics in Belgium has for a long time been dominated by socio-demographic cleavages. The fact that these cleavages dominated not only politics, but society at large – a phenomenon labelled as ‘pillarisation’ (Lijphart 1968) – resulted in a context in which citizens developed strong sociological predispositions towards a particular party. Over time, however, those cleavages have eroded and attachments to traditional cleavage parties have waned – giving evidence of a process of dealignment (Deschouwer, 2012).

Second, voting is compulsory in Belgium and even though it is not strictly enforced this does result in fairly low levels of abstention. Given that previous research has indicated that switching between parties is fundamentally different from switching between voting and abstaining (or vice versa) (Dassonneville, Blais and Dejaeghere, 2015), it is important not to confound both types of instability in voting behaviour. Doing so in a context of low turnout levels would imply dropping a substantial number of respondents from an analysis where the focus is on switching between parties. Our focus on the Belgian case therefore implies that most switches observed are changes between parties, which makes for a dataset with sufficient statistical power to analyse in-depth the consequences of party switching. As an important limitation, however, this focus on the Belgian high-turnout context implies that the data do not allow analysing switching to or from abstention.

Third, Belgium basically can be considered a country with two different party systems: a Dutch-language party system and a French-language party system (Brack and Pilet, 2010). Analysing voting behaviour in a Belgian context therefore is regularly done by means of separate explanatory models for each of the party systems. We take this trait of the Belgian electoral context into account and verify the robustness of our results when estimating the model for each of the regions separately. This implies that our analysis of voting behaviour in Belgium is comparative. The advantage thereof is that if findings hold for the two party systems, one can be more confident about the generalisability of the analytical results.

By means of an analysis of voting behaviour in Belgium, we seek to gain insights in the consequences of electoral volatility. We first establish whether, in line with previous work investigating the characteristics of volatile voters, party switchers do not differ strongly from stable voters in terms of their levels of political sophistication or attitudes of political disaffection. Subsequently, we shift the focus to the consequences of volatility for democratic representation,

and we analyse what determines the vote choice of stable and volatile voters respectively and whether the vote choice process of both groups differs substantially, as theory would assume.

Data and methods

For analysing the causes and consequences of volatility, we make use of the data from the Belgian Election Panel (2009-2014). This representative panel study consists of five waves of surveys, among a random sample of respondents drawn from the Belgian National Register. The data cover respondents in the two main regions of Belgium: Flanders and Wallonia, thus excluding the Brussels Region. Of these waves, two were conducted in the run-up towards the regional and European elections of 7 June 2009. In a first wave, 2,331 Belgian voters were interviewed face-to-face, which made for an initial response rate of 48.3%. The second pre-electoral wave consisted of a phone survey, in which 1,845 of the initial respondents participated. Finally, 1,698 of these respondents were also interviewed over the phone in the weeks after Election Day. In 2014, the same sample of respondents was contacted again to take part in a pre-electoral survey before the federal, regional and European elections of 25 May 2014, and 1,542 valid paper surveys were collected. Finally, 707 respondents were interviewed by phone in the weeks after the 2014 election (Dassonneville *et al*, 2014). For the purpose of the current study, we focus on party switching, taking into account the reported vote choice in the 2009 and 2014 post-electoral surveys. Relying on panel data covering multiple elections, we can operationalise party switching and stability in a straightforward manner, and we do not have to rely on recall questions asking respondents to report their voting behaviour in previous elections. Such recall questions, while regularly used to investigate party switching, are known to result in an underestimation of the true amount of volatility (van der Eijk, and Niemöller, 2008). For this reason, there is a general consensus in the

literature that relying on panel-data is essential for investigating voter volatility (van der Meer *et al*, 2015). The Belgian Election Panel thus offers the ideal type of data to investigate our research question.

As evident from the declining number of respondents in each subsequent panel wave, the data suffer from an attrition problem. As a result, those who continue participating in the study might not be representative for the whole population, possibly biasing the results (Bartels, 1999; Deng *et al*, 2013). To correct for the bias introduced by panel attrition, a weighting component is created, ensuring the representativeness of the respondents included in the analyses (Vandecasteele and Debels, 2007). For all analyses presented in this paper holds that the data are weighted by socio-demographic characteristics as well as by this attrition weight.¹

For analysing the determinants of volatility, we focus on the 2009 and 2014 regional elections. We thus examine party switching between elections at the same level of governance. It should be stressed that regional elections in Belgium can be considered elections of first order because of the high level of autonomy for the regions and the absence of statewide parties (Deschouwer, 2012; Schakel and Jeffery, 2013). We construct a dichotomous variable, with respondents scoring 0 if they reported voting for the same party for the 2009 and 2014 regional elections and 1 if they reported having voted for another party at the occasion of the 2014 regional elections compared to what they had reported in 2009.² As indicated before, we present an in-depth analyses of the dynamics of party switching only.³ Given the dichotomous nature of volatility, we estimate series of binary logistic regressions examining the determinants of party switching.

For examining the determinants of party switching, we assess the relation between switching on the one hand and political sophistication and attitudes of political disaffection on the other. We examine the impact of political sophistication by means of three different proxy measures of political sophistication, taking into account that numerous definitions and

operationalisations of political sophistication have been proposed in the literature (Lachat, 2007; Marthaler, 2008; Singh and Roy, 2014). We hence examine the effect of political interest, respondents' level of education and political knowledge. To allow for the possibility that the effect of political sophistication is curvilinear, we include the main and squared effect of political interest as well as knowledge in the analyses. Second, we examine the possibility that vote switching in Belgium is an expression of 'frustration'. We include a measure of political disaffection, which is a fairly stable attitude towards politics and political actors in general. We focus here on institutional disaffection more specifically (Torcal and Montero, 2006) and use political trust as an indicator of respondents' level of institutional disaffection. Doing so is in line with previous work investigating the attitudinal correlates of party switching, starting with Zelle's (1995) study of volatility in Germany. Furthermore, we also include a specific measure of dissatisfaction. We include an indicator of voters' reported level of satisfaction with the policies pursued by the regional government (Gherghina, 2011), which was measured on a scale from 0 (very unsatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied). Self-evidently, we control for a number of socio-demographic characteristics in these analyses. More information on the operationalisation of all these variables as well as descriptive statistics can be found in Appendix A.

After this initial step, we examine vote choice determinants of stable voters and party switchers. We thus present a model explaining the 2014 vote choice of voters in our dataset. We estimate a conditional logit model for explaining the vote choice in the Belgian multiparty context. Doing so allows taking into account characteristics of the parties that citizens choose between. That is, the model takes into account that the choice of a voter is 'conditional on the characteristics of the choices' (Alvarez and Nagler, 1998: 56). For doing so, we first restructure the data in such a way that there are as many records by respondent as there are parties this respondent can choose from.

Estimating a fixed effects conditional logit specification, we take into account a number of alternative-specific variables. These are characteristics of the different choices (i.e., parties) the individual can choose from and are thus situated at the voter-party-dyad level. As a first alternative-specific variable, we include an indicator of the extent to which a voter feels close to particular party (with values ranging from 0 = not close to a party to 4 = very close to a party). We also follow previous studies modelling the vote choice in multiparty systems (Giebler and Wagner, 2015; Greene and Haber, 2015; Kayser and Peress, 2012) and include as alternative-specific variables the left-right distance between a voter and a party.⁴ We furthermore take into account a rich literature on the personalisation of politics (Karvonen, 2010) and include the respondent's evaluation of the party leader (on a scale from 0 to 10). Finally, we assess the impact of economic evaluations on the vote choice as well. A respondent's evaluation of the state of the economy is basically an individual-specific constant, which implies it cannot be included as a predictor in a fixed effects conditional logit model. Such individual-level variables can be included in a fixed effects conditional logit model when interacted with party-specific variables. This can be done when there is a specific expectation of such an individual-level variable affecting the probability of voting for one or a set of parties in particular (Kayser and Peress, 2012). Theoretically, there is such an expectation for economic evaluations. Indeed, economic evaluations should affect the vote by affecting the probability of voting for an incumbent versus an opposition party. That is, if one evaluates the economy positively this should increase the probability of voting for an incumbent party. In contrast, a more negative evaluation should increase the probability of voting for an opposition party (Stegmaier and Lewis-Beck, 2013). For this reason, we follow the lead of Kayser and Peress (2012) and account for economic voting in a fixed effects conditional logit framework by interacting respondents' retrospective evaluation of the state of the national economy (on a scale

from -2 ‘strongly worsened’ to 2 ‘strongly improved’) with a government party dummy. The descriptive statistics of all variables used in the vote choice models are included in Appendix B.

When estimating a fixed effects conditional logit model, individual-specific factors are not explicitly modelled – as they do not differ for different choice options. Their impact is however controlled for by means of fixed effects for each of the individuals in the analyses.

We include in the analyses all parties for which we could operationalise the choice-specific variables – in practice the parties for which the questionnaire included measures on its left-right position as well as an evaluation of its party leader.⁵ As such, the analysis includes all the main parties (In Flanders: CD&V (Christian-Democrats), Groen (Greens), N-VA (Nationalists), SP.A (Social-Democrats), Open VLD (Liberals), Vlaams Belang (extreme right) and PVDA+ (extreme left); in Wallonia: CDH (Christian-Democrats), ECOLO (Greens), PS (Socialists), MR (Liberals) and PTB-Go! (extreme left)).

For all our models holds that independent variables were measured in 2014 because we are interested in predicting the vote choice in the 2014 regional elections. However, where possible, missing data on socio-demographic variables was complemented with data of the 2009 survey waves. In addition, it is important to note that most of the information we use in our models has been gathered in the pre-electoral waves, while we predict the vote choice as reported in the post-electoral wave. This small lead-time between the two waves reduces problems of endogeneity when relying on survey data – although it does not eliminate them.

To gain insights in the importance of different vote choice determinants for volatile and stable voters, we estimate separate models for both groups of voters. Subsequently we present marginal effects of the main vote choice determinants for these two groups of voters. We present a model based on a pooled dataset of respondents in Flanders and Wallonia. However, given the

presence of different party systems, we also verify the robustness of the results when analysing voting in the Flemish and Walloon Region separately.

Results

Before examining differences in what determines the vote choice of stable and volatile voters, we examine to what extent some regularly invoked attitudes and characteristics are related to switching in a Belgium.

Therefore, we investigate the relationship between political sophistication, political disaffection and dissatisfaction on the one hand and party switching on the other by means of a series of logistic regression models explaining volatility. The full results of these analyses are presented in Appendix C but for summarising them it suffices to say that none of the indicators of political sophistication appears to be related significantly to the probability of switching parties. Furthermore, neither political trust nor government satisfaction appears significantly related to volatility. When examining what predicts party switching in each of the two main regions of Belgium separately, there are no indications of significant effects of political sophistication, political trust or dissatisfaction either (results available from the authors).

In terms of their political attitudes, their involvement in politics or political disaffection, those respondents who switched parties between 2009 and 2014 do not appear to differ substantially from stable voters. Our examination of the determinants of party switching confirms our general observation from the review of the literature: switching is still to a large extent a black box, and existing theories do not explain well who is stable and who switches votes. This is also evident from the pseudo- R^2 values of our full models, ranging from 0.034 to 0.038 only (see Appendix C). As a result, an analysis of the attitudes and characteristics of volatile voters cannot

shed light on whether the more pessimistic or on the contrary the more optimistic interpretations of the impact of volatility are justified. Such analyses do not offer support for either of these two theoretical assumptions.

If the attitudes of stable and volatile voters are fairly similar, this leads to the question whether the vote choice process of stable and volatile voters is fundamentally different. Investigating this possibility in more depth will give valuable insights in what are the consequences of volatility for representative democracy. If particular vote choice determinants are significantly more or less important among volatile voters than what holds for stable voters, the implication is that rising levels of volatility could fundamentally change the role of elections in linking public opinion to the policies pursued. Our analyses will thus clarify whether the choices made by volatile voters are affected more by accountability-mechanisms or proximity-considerations, and whether an increase in dealignment thus affects the quality of democratic representation as well.

Before analysing differences in what determines the vote choice of stable and volatile voters respectively, it is insightful to assess differences in the outcome of this vote choice calculus for both groups first. In Figure 1 we present the distribution of the reported vote choices of the respondents in our sample. We present this distribution for stable voters on the one hand (i.e., those who voted for the same party in 2009 and 2014) and party switchers on the other, and do so for the two regions.

Assessing the distributions, a number of differences stand out. For the Flemish region, it can be noted that the Christian-democratic party CD&V received more support among stable voters than among switchers. Among those who switched parties, on the other hand, there is more support for the green party (Groen) as well as for the smaller parties (the ‘Other’-category) than what holds for stable voters in the Flemish region. Differences are more pronounced in the Walloon region,

where the traditional parties PS and MR receive considerably more support among stable voters than what holds for party-switchers in Wallonia.

The differences in party support presented in Figure 1 illustrate that stable voters and party switchers voted differently in the 2014 regional elections. This observation makes it all the more important to assess *how exactly* both groups of voters arrived at somewhat different decisions.

Figure 1. Comparison of the reported vote choice of stable and volatile voters, 2014 regional elections

Note: Proportion of voters choosing a particular party. Data: BEP, 2009-2014. Data are weighted by socio-demographics and to correct for attrition in the panel. Categories with limited number of voters are combined.

Are some vote choice determinants of more or less importance for those who switch parties? In order to answer this question we now estimate fixed effects conditional logit models explaining the vote choice in the 2014 elections. We test for the impact of partisanship, ideological distance,

leader evaluations, as well as economic evaluations, and estimate separate models for stable and volatile voters.

The results of these analyses are listed in Table 1. Looking at the coefficients for stable voters first, we note – not surprisingly – that a stronger feeling of closeness to a political party significantly increases the probability of voting for this party. Furthermore, the vote choices of stable voters are affected significantly by their evaluations of the party leaders. As stable voters evaluate a party leader more positively, this positively affects the probability of voting for that party. The results of the second model in Table 1 shed light on what factors determine the vote choices of voters who switched parties between 2009 and 2014. In line with what we observed for stable voters, feelings of closeness to a party as well as leader evaluations significantly affect voters' choices. In particular with regard to the strength of partisan attachments, however, the effect is weaker among volatile voters than what holds for voters remaining loyal to the party they preferred in 2009. The results in Table 1 also indicate that retrospective evaluations of the economy did not affect the choices of voters in the 2014 regional elections in Belgium. Neither for stable nor for volatile voters do we find indications of economic evaluations significantly and positively affecting voters' choices. This might be due to our focus on the regional level.⁶ The fact that the ideological compositions of governing coalitions at the regional and federal levels differed before the 2014 elections might have muted clarity of responsibility, limiting the extent to which evaluations of the state of the economy affected voters' choices in regional elections. With a focus on accountability mechanisms, thus, our results do not allow judging the impact of party switching for representative democracy.

Finally, and most importantly, comparing the two sets of coefficients, we do observe an interesting contrast: while ideological proximity to a party does not appear to affect the vote choice of stable voters, those who switched parties are significantly affected by proximity considerations.

The significant and negative coefficient indicates that as a volatile voter is more distant from a party on a left-right scale, her probability of choosing this party is significantly reduced.

Table 1. fixed effects conditional logit models explaining (individual-level) electoral volatility 2009-2014.

	Stable	Volatile
	b	b
	(s.e.)	(s.e.)
Strength of partisanship	1.083*** (0.177)	0.371* (0.146)
Ideological distance	-0.203 (0.129)	-0.349** (0.125)
Leader evaluation	0.562*** (0.120)	0.436*** (0.097)
Economic evaluation*party in government	-0.106 (0.348)	-0.536+ (0.306)
Party in Government	0.616+ (0.362)	-0.358 (0.360)
Number of observations	1019	656
Pseudo R ²	0.669	0.342

Note: entries are log odd coefficients, standard errors are reported between parentheses. Data: BEP, 2009-2014. Data are weighted by socio-demographics and to correct for attrition in the panel. Significance levels: +: p<0.1; *: p<0.05; **: p<.01; ***: p<0.001.

To gain further insights into the importance of these independent variables in affecting the choices of stable and volatile voters, we also calculated the marginal effects of these variables, for both groups of voters. These marginal effects – for the four independent variables of interest⁷ – are

presented graphically in Figure 2. The table with results is included in Appendix D. The left panel of Figure 2 shows significant and strong effects of partisan attachments and leader evaluations among stable voters. In the right panel, we include the marginal effects of the independent variables among party-switchers. Assessing the differences between both models, it is evident that long-term factors are somewhat less important among party-switchers. While a one-unit increase on the partisan attachment scale (that runs from 0 = not close to a party, to 4 = very close to a party) increases stable voters' probability of choosing a party with 10.3%, the marginal effect is only 5.1% among party-switchers. In addition, the effect of ideological distance differs between groups. Among stable voters, the effect is in the expected – negative – direction, but unlike what holds for party-switchers, this effect does not reach statistical significance. This absence of statistical significance, furthermore, holds despite the fact that the sample size for the analyses of stable voters' choices is somewhat larger compared to the sample of volatile voters.

Figure 2. Average marginal effects of vote choice determinants explaining voting in the 2014 regional elections

Note: Average marginal effects and 90%-confidence intervals for stable volatile voters respectively. Estimates are based on estimates of Stable and Volatile respectively (Table 1). Data: BEP, 2009-2014.

We also verified whether these basic patterns hold when analysing the determinants of voters' choices in the two main regions of Belgium separately. The full results of these analyses are reported in Appendix E. The smaller sample sizes for these analyses make for more uncertain estimates. However, the main patterns are the same when analysing voting behaviour in both regions separately as well. That is, partisan attachments and leader evaluations are somewhat stronger for stable voters, while proximity evaluations are stronger predictors of the vote choice of party-switchers than what holds for voters who chose the same party in the 2009 and 2014 regional elections.

Conclusion

While the first accounts on party switchers were fairly negative and presented an image of 'floating volatile voters' or voters who are disaffected from politics, recently, more optimistic accounts of vote switching have emerged as well. According to such optimistic points of view, if rising levels of volatility are driven by a growing group of high politically sophisticated apartisans (Dalton, 2013), the implication might be that vote switchers are actually realising democratic representation more strongly than voters who habitually vote for the same party. They would be doing so because they are not affected by partisan attachments, which frees them and enables them to choose a party that closely matches their opinions or to punish incumbents who do not perform well. If that is indeed the case, the implication could be that some fundamental mechanisms that allow for democratic representation, such as proximity voting or accountability (Przeworski *et al*, 1999) would actually be strengthened by the presence of a growing group of volatile voters.

So far, however, research examining the characteristics of volatile voters has not resulted in firm conclusions on what a typical volatile voter is like. In the context of the Belgian 2014

elections, we do not find indications of levels of political sophistication or feelings of political disaffection (political trust) and dissatisfaction being strong predictors of party switching either. As a result, a focus on characteristics of stable and volatile voters does not allow drawing a conclusion on whether the pessimistic or the more optimistic interpretations of the impact of volatility are warranted. Research investigating more directly whether volatile and stable voters are choosing differently, furthermore, is virtually missing. By analysing the consequences of volatility in terms of the vote choice process, we hence sought to contribute to this important debate. If the absence of an attachment to one particular party implies that volatile voters take other factors into account when making their vote choices, these differences should inform our judgement of the impact of volatility on representative democracy.

Our analysis of the vote choice process shows that partisan attachments and evaluations of party leaders affect the choices of stable voters and party-switchers alike. However, both factors appear to have a somewhat stronger effect among voters choosing the same party in two subsequent elections. We find no indication of stronger accountability mechanisms among party switchers. However, our focus on elections at the regional level and a rather low clarity of responsibility might explain why we find no indications of economic voting here. For another short-term factor, however, the results show an interesting contrast between stable voters and party-switchers: ideological proximity does not significantly affect stable voters' choices but it does so among those who switched parties. This is a relatively small, yet important difference, as ideological distance is a factor by excellence that is linked to rational voting behaviour (Downs, 1957).

Our results, therefore, offer a glimpse of volatile voters casting votes that are 'truly informed' (Dalton, 2013). The implication thereof is that party switching might actually be contributing to democratic representation, which is in sharp contrast to more pessimistic accounts

of the impact of volatility, that stress in particular how volatility endangers governability and even the stability of democratic regimes (Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007; Powell and Tucker, 2014).

The observation of a difference in terms of proximity considerations is an important finding, a finding furthermore, that gives reason for optimism on the consequences of party switching. Nevertheless, our analyses are also limited in a number of ways – and these limitations call for some caution when interpreting our results.

First, while we find a contrast in terms of proximity voting, overall the differences in what affects the vote choice of stable voters and party-switchers are not that pronounced. Perhaps by now, volatility has become so widespread that differences between volatile and stable voters have disappeared. As the pool of voters who switches parties increases and switching becomes more common, it should not come as a surprise that we do not find large differences between those who switch parties and those who do not. In our dataset, the group of party-switchers in our analyses amounts to 43%, and if we consider a broad definition of volatility – including switching to or from abstention as well – we find that almost 50% of the respondents switched votes; volatility hence is by no means an expression by a small and very particular group of voters, as nearly one voter on two switches from one election to another.

Second, in this paper we focused on volatility in terms of party switching only. This group of voters has more positive attitudes towards the political system and towards political parties than what holds for voters switching to or from abstention (Dassonneville, Blais, and Dejaeghere, 2015). The fact that among this group of rather involved voters we find some indications that are in line with the more optimistic perspectives on the consequences of volatility, and dealignment in general, should therefore not come as a complete surprise

Third, we have focused our analyses on voters and their behaviour only. As a result, the conclusions we can draw in terms of the consequences of volatility for the quality of democracy

are limited to the impact of voters only as well. Political parties play a crucial role in representative democracies (Schumpeter, 1962) and it is quite reasonable to assume that parties adapt to a context of dealigned electorates as well (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012). In order to qualify the full impact of increasing levels of volatility for democracy it is hence essential to look at how parties as well react to and change their strategies in response to increasingly volatile electorates.

Importantly, however, our results offer no reasons to be particularly concerned about party-switchers. These party-switchers appear to be affected more strongly by ideological considerations than what holds for voters who vote for the same party in subsequent elections. In doing so, these party-switchers are contributing to the realisation of democratic representation.

Notes

- ¹. The socio-demographic weight was generated through an iterative proportional fitting procedure. For the attrition weight, we implemented a propensity score weighting method, based on a logistic regression explaining participation in the final survey wave. More details on the weighting procedure and the constructing of the weights can be found in Appendix F.
- ². Respondents voting for the French-speaking Liberal Party MR in 2009 and the French-nationalist FDF in 2014 are coded as stable since these parties were in cartel in 2009 but split in 2011.
- ³. Note however, that when taking a somewhat broader operationalisation of volatility and incorporating voters who switched to or from abstention as well, the results of the analyses predicting volatility as well as those of the vote choice analyses are essentially the same. These results are available from the authors.
- ⁴. Taking the difference between a respondent's reported self-placement on a 0-10 left-right scale and the mean ideological position that all respondents in the survey attribute to a particular party.
- ⁵. Though note that for the extreme-right Vlaams Belang, not the party leader (Gerolf Annemans) but another – and more well-known – politician of the party was evaluated (Filip Dewinter).
- ⁶. Furthermore, this absence of significant effects of economic evaluations sustains when we focus on accountability of the party of the regional Prime Minister only (and not all parties in the regional coalition). These results are reported in Appendix G.
- ⁷. For economic evaluations, we only considered parties that were in government for calculating the average marginal effect of the interaction term.

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Appendices

Appendix A: measurement and coding of the variables in the analyses explaining the characteristics of stable and volatile voters

Sex: sex of the respondent: 0=male, 1= female.

Age: age of the respondent, calculated by subtracting the year of birth from the year in which the interview is conducted.

Region: region in which the respondent lives: 0=Dutch-speaking region (Flanders), 1=French-speaking region (Wallonia).

Religious practice: answer on the question how often the respondent participates in religious activities. Scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (once a week or more often).

Social class: social class of the respondent, divided in three categories: inactive (retired, student, unemployed, houseman/wife, other not active), self-employed, manual worker, and non-manual worker.

Political trust: sumscales of questions probing trust in political parties; the regional government, the regional parliament, the federal government, and politicians. For each institution, the respondent could indicate her/his trust on a scale ranging from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (fully trust).

The answers on these questions load on one factor ‘political trust’ (eigenvalue=3.908; Cronbach’s Alpha=0.94).

Government satisfaction: answer to the question how satisfied the respondent is with the policy pursued by the regional government on a scale from 0 (very unsatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied). This question was probed with respect to the government of the region the respondent lives in.

Political knowledge: sumscale of answers on five knowledge questions. For each question, the respondent was given four possible answer to choose from. These have been recoded to indicate a correct (1) or wrong or ‘don’t know’ (0) answer, and subsequently added up to construct one scale.

Political interest: answer on the question how interested the respondent is in politics in general. Respondents could indicate their interest on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all interested) to 10 (very much interested).

Educational level: the level of education of the respondent. Respondents are divided in three categories: (1) no degree/primary degree/uncompleted secondary degree, (2) completed secondary degree, (3) higher education/university.

Table A.1. Descriptive statistics of variables in the logit analyses

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Volatile (dependent)	0.432	0.496	0	1
Sex	0.490	0.500	0	1
Age	52.875	17.463	18	101
Region	0.403	0.491	0	1
Religious practice	1.395	1.770	0	6
Social class	1.397	1.363	0	3
Political trust	0.432	0.202	0	1
Satisfaction	0.471	0.240	0	1
Political interest	0.542	0.274	0	1
Political knowledge	0.608	0.256	0	1
Education	0.988	0.802	0	2

Appendix B: measurement and coding of the variables in the analyses explaining the vote choice process of stable and volatile voters

Party identification: indication of the extent to which the respondent identifies with a party, ranging from 0 (no party identification) to 4 (very close).

Distance to party: distance between the respondent's self-placement on the ideological axis ranging from 0 (left) to 10 (right) and the party's position on this axis. The parties' positions were calculated by taking the average of the positions the respondents assigned to the different parties.

Leader evaluation: respondent's evaluation of the leader of the parties respectively on a scale from 0 (no appreciation) to 10 (a lot appreciation).

Economic evaluation: respondent's retrospective evaluation of the Belgian economic situation on a scale from -2 (strongly decreased) to 2 (strongly increased).

Party in government: indication of whether the party was in government before the elections of 2014 (code 1) or not (code 0).

Table B.1. Descriptive statistics of variables in the fixed effects conditional logit analyses:
stable voters

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Vote (dependent)	0.159	0.366	0	1
PartyID*	0.312	0.924	0	4
Distance to party	2.785	1.951	0.097	8.524
Leader evaluation	4.683	2.800	0	10
Economic evaluation*party in government	-0.229	0.700	-2	1
Party in government	0.482	0.500	0	1

*: in total, 28.99% of the stable voters indicated to identify with a political party

Table B.2. Descriptive statistics of variables in the fixed effects conditional logit analyses:
volatile voters

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Vote (dependent)	0.146	0.353	0	1
PartyID*	0.182	0.693	0	4
Distance to party	2.606	1.799	0.097	7.539
Leader evaluation	4.889	2.740	0	10
Economic evaluation*party in government	-0.228	0.699	-2	1
Party in government	0.476	0.500	0	1

*: in total, 53.14% of the volatile voters indicated to identify with a political party

Appendix C: Logit analyses explaining electoral volatility

Table C.1. Logistic regression models explaining (individual-level) electoral volatility 2009-2014 with political interest as indicator of political sophistication

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)
sex (ref. = man)	0.274 (0.267)	0.241 (0.274)	0.276 (0.277)	0.209 (0.286)
Age	-0.012 (0.010)	-0.009 (0.010)	-0.010 (0.011)	-0.009 (0.011)
Region (ref. = Flanders)	-0.604* (0.281)	-0.650* (0.283)	-0.679* (0.309)	-0.689* (0.309)
Religious practice	-0.025 (0.077)	-0.016 (0.076)	0.008 (0.078)	0.013 (0.078)
Social class (ref. = inactive)				
Self-employed	-0.789 (0.553)	-0.790 (0.564)	-0.828 (0.572)	-0.832 (0.584)
Manual worker	0.373 (0.534)	0.365 (0.525)	0.387 (0.531)	0.391 (0.523)
Non-manual worker	-0.141 (0.329)	-0.136 (0.335)	-0.069 (0.347)	-0.075 (0.351)
Political interest		-0.064 (2.466)		0.555 (2.639)
Political interest ²		-0.762 (2.176)		-1.191 (2.318)
Political trust			-0.733 (0.969)	-0.613 (0.962)
Government satisfaction			-0.489 (0.731)	-0.470 (0.739)
Constant	0.584 (0.677)	0.757 (0.906)	1.005 (0.853)	1.055 (1.067)
N	354	353	338	338
Pseudo R ²	0.030	0.037	0.033	0.038

Note: Entries are log odd coefficients, standard errors are reported between parentheses. Data: BEP, 2009-2014. Data

are weighted by socio-demographics and to correct for attrition in the panel. Significance level: *: $p < 0.05$

Table C.2. Logistic regression models explaining (individual-level) electoral volatility 2009-2014
with educational level as indicator of political sophistication

	Model 1	Model 2
	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)
sex (ref. = man)	0.290 (0.268)	0.284 (0.278)
Age	-0.011 (0.010)	-0.009 (0.011)
Region (ref. = Flanders)	-0.588* (0.282)	-0.672* (0.312)
Religious practice	-0.027 (0.078)	0.007 (0.078)
Social class (ref. = inactive)		
Self-employed	-0.754 (0.552)	-0.796 (0.576)
Manual worker	0.363 (0.546)	0.376 (0.537)
Non-manual worker	-0.139 (0.334)	-0.046 (0.359)
Educational level (ref.=non/primary)		
Secondary education	0.171 (0.378)	0.072 (0.404)
Tertiary education	0.027 (0.371)	-0.053 (0.399)
Political trust		-0.707 (0.971)
Government satisfaction		-0.502 (0.751)
Constant	0.439 (0.755)	0.929 (0.923)
N	354	338
Pseudo R ²	0.031	0.034

Note: Entries are log odd coefficients, standard errors are reported between parentheses. Data: BEP, 2009-2014. Data are weighted by socio-demographics and to correct for attrition in the panel. Significance level: *: $p < 0.05$

Table C.3. Logistic regression models explaining (individual-level) electoral volatility 2009-2014
with political knowledge as indicator of political sophistication

	Model 1	Model 2
	b (s.e.)	b (s.e.)
sex (ref. = man)	0.269 (0.271)	0.254 (0.283)
Age	-0.012 (0.010)	-0.010 (0.011)
Region (ref. = Flanders)	0.604* (0.285)	-0.682* (0.312)
Religious practice	-0.024 (0.077)	0.008 (0.078)
Social class (ref. = inactive)		
Self-employed	-0.795 (0.558)	-0.820 (0.575)
Manual worker	0.365 (0.532)	0.413 (0.526)
Non-manual worker	-0.138 (0.331)	-0.048 (0.349)
Political knowledge	0.445 (2.127)	-0.128 (2.269)
Political knowledge ²	-0.018 (0.072)	-0.007 (0.076)
Political trust		-0.707 (0.965)
Government satisfaction		-0.460 (0.719)
Constant	0.492 (0.928)	1.095 (1.112)
N	354	338
Pseudo R ²	0.030	0.035

Note: Entries are log odd coefficients, standard errors are reported between parentheses. Data: BEP, 2009-2014. Data are weighted by socio-demographics and to correct for attrition in the panel. Significance level: *: $p < 0.05$

Appendix D. Average marginal effects of the models displayed in Table 1. These average marginal effects are displayed in Figure 2.

Table D.1. Average marginal effects of the models displayed in Table 1

		Marginal	CI lower	CI upper
		effect	bound	bound
PartyID	Stable	0.103	0.058	0.147
	Volatile	0.051	0.010	0.091
Distance to party	Stable	-0.019	-0.043	0.004
	Volatile	-0.048	-0.085	-0.011
Leader evaluation	Stable	0.053	0.042	0.064
	Volatile	0.060	0.054	0.066
Economic evaluation*party in government	Stable	-0.009	-0.058	0.040
	Volatile	-0.076	-0.154	0.002
Party in government	Stable	0.058	0.006	0.111
	Volatile	-0.049	-0.131	0.032

Note: Average marginal effects and 90%-confidence intervals for stable volatile voters respectively. Estimates are based on estimates of Stable and Volatile respectively (Table 1). Data: BEP, 2009-2014.

Appendix E: Analyses of the vote choice process for the Belgian regions separately

Table E.1. Fixed effects conditional logit models explaining the vote choice process of stable and volatile voters in the regions separately

	Flanders		Model 2 Wallonia	
	Stable b (s.e.)	Volatile b (s.e.)	Stable b (s.e.)	Volatile b (s.e.)
Party ID	0.819*** (0.192)	0.348 ⁺ (0.180)	17.247*** (0.855)	0.379 (0.342)
Ideological distance	-0.210 ⁺ (0.122)	-0.312* (0.139)	-0.151 (0.231)	-0.430* (0.200)
Leader evaluation	0.702*** (0.131)	0.540*** (0.126)	0.381 ⁺ (0.231)	0.066 (0.188)
Economic evaluation*party in government	0.034 (0.467)	-0.768* (0.372)	-0.176 (0.466)	0.087 (0.416)
Party in Government	0.964* (0.461)	-0.442 (0.443)	-0.252 (0.542)	-0.584 (0.616)
Number of observations	739	547	280	109
Pseudo R ²	0.693	0.408	0.719	0.160

Note: entries are log odd coefficients, standard errors are reported between parentheses. Data: BEP, 2009-2014. Data

are weighted by socio-demographics and to correct for attrition in the panel. Significance levels: ⁺: p<0.1; *: p<0.05;

***: p<0.001.

Table E.2. Average marginal effects of mixed effects conditional logit models explaining the vote choice process of stable and volatile voters in the regions separately (Table E.1.)

		Flanders			Wallonia		
		Marginal effect	CI lower bound	CI upper bound	Marginal effect	CI lower bound	CI upper bound
PartyID	Stable	0.067	0.033	0.102	2.296	0.421	7.171
	Volatile	0.039	-0.002	0.081	0.074	-0.013	0.161
Distance to party	Stable	-0.017	-0.038	0.004	-0.020	-0.076	0.036
	Volatile	-0.035	-0.070	-0.001	-0.084	-0.141	-0.026
Leader evaluation	Stable	0.058	0.048	0.068	0.051	0.022	0.079
	Volatile	0.061	0.055	0.068	0.013	-0.055	0.081
Economic evaluation*party in government	Stable	0.002	-0.049	0.053	-0.024	-0.130	0.082
	Volatile	-0.092	-0.179	-0.004	0.016	-0.105	0.137
Party in government	Stable	0.080	0.020	0.139	-0.034	-0.155	0.088
	Volatile	-0.050	-0.133	0.033	-0.114	-0.305	0.078

Note: Average marginal effects and 90%-confidence intervals for stable volatile voters respectively. Estimates

are based on estimates of Stable and Volatile respectively in the regions separately (Table d.1.). Data: BEP, 2009-2014.

Appendix F: Weighting the analyses

In order to provide a solution for panel attrition in the data, we calculated attrition weights. The method that we used is ‘Inverse Probability Treatment Weighting (IPTW) Using the Propensity Score – the same method that has been used to weigh the GLES data (Blumenstiel and Gummer, 2013). This method creates a weighting variable in which the representativeness of the panel respondents is ensured (Austin, 2011). Panel data are particularly suited for the IPTW method since by definition in the first wave of the study all respondents (so also future non-respondents) took part and completed the questionnaire. In contrast to what holds for cross-sectional studies, thus, there is data available on the characteristics of non-respondents from the second wave on (Rizzo, Kalton and Brick, 1994). This information of the first wave makes it possible to calculate weights specifically created to correct for panel attrition (Vandecasteele and Debels, 2007).

The rationale behind IPTW is the following. In a first step, the determinants of dropout are searched for. Subsequently, based on this knowledge, the probability for each respondent to participate in the next wave is calculated. The attributed weight, then, is the inverse of this probability. By taking into account the appropriate determinants, this inverse of the probability of participating thus ensures that those respondents who have the profile of respondents of whom we would expect to drop out but actually do participate, receive a higher weight than those of whom it could be expected that they would continue participation. Thus, in this way, the results are corrected to the factors driving dropout/participation, and ensure a more equal representation.

Since the IPTW technique is based on predicting – for every respondent – the probability of participating in a next wave by means of observed information in the previous wave, it is important to consider well which variables to take into account in these regressions. The covariates that should be included are the variables that are related to panel (non-)participation. These

covariates can be traced by including them in a series of regressions of which the explanatory power is compared. Using this method, the variables that add to the explanation of participation in the next wave can be included, and the variables not adding any explanatory power can be dropped. To make an appropriate weight for the BEP data, we start with a general model including variables of the first wave to explain the participation in the second wave. The variables that are included in this general model have been selected on the basis of earlier research on panel attrition (Olson and Witt, 2011). Next, we searched for other variables that help to explain continued engagement in the study. We do this by estimating series of logistic regression models of which we compare the explanatory power, and keeping the variables that increase this power with more than 0.05%

Proceeding in this way, we calculated the attrition weights based on a model that predicts participation in subsequent survey waves best. The determinants included in our final model were: region of residence (i.e., Flanders or Wallonia), sex, age, occupation, political knowledge, willingness to turn out, vote intention, political interest, political trust, marital status, number of children, political efficacy, newspaper reading, listening to radio, visiting a party website, visiting website politician, reading press of party, discussion with colleagues, discussion with family.

A logistic model predicting the probability of participation in the later waves including these variables is thus estimated, and every respondent is then assigned the weight that corresponds with the inverse of this probability. In Table F.1, we display the results of the model explaining participation in the fifth wave, on the basis of which we calculated the attrition weight used to weigh the analyses in this paper.

Table F.1. Logistic regression model explaining participation in wave 5 of the Belgian Election

Panel

Determinant	B (s.e.)
Region	-0.457 (0.277)
Sex	0.025 (0.124)
Age	0.003 (0.005)
Educational level (ref. = non/primary)	
Secondary	0.461** (0.166)
Tertiary	0.566** (0.176)
Occupation	-0.087 (0.151)
Vote-intention	0.013 (0.016)
Political interest	0.117*** (0.032)
Political trust	-0.040 (0.043)
Living together	-0.362* (0.147)

	-0.047
Number of children	(0.047)
	0.117*
Willingness to turn out	(0.057)
	0.087
Political knowledge	(0.045)
	0.106
Political efficacy 1	(0.054)
	0.064
Political efficacy 2	(0.052)
	0.026
Political efficacy 3	(0.067)
	0.198**
Evaluation economic situation	(0.070)
	0.018
Newspaper reading	(0.031)
	-0.008
Listening to radio	(0.035)
	-0.049
Visiting party website	(0.151)
	0.065
visiting website politician	(0.152)
	-0.004
Read press party	(0.064)
	-0.014
Discussion with colleagues	

	(0.064)
Discussion with family	0.088 (0.063)
Constant	-3.372*** (0.553)
N	1959
Adjusted R ²	0.0927

Note: Entries are log odd coefficients, standard errors are reported between parentheses. Data: BEP, 2009-2014. Significance levels: *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

It is important to note that the weight for the fourth and fifth waves of the study contain rather high values. In line with what is commonly done in such a case (Chen *et al*, 2015), we therefore winsorise the weights setting as a maximum value three times the median value in the sample. However, this reduces the total weighting since the largest values are fixed to a lower value. We correct for this by calculating the total weight before and after the winsorising. Then, we multiply each weight with the ratio of these two, ensuring the total weighting after winsorising equals the total weighting before winsorising.

This method does not allow providing a correction for non-response in the first wave of the panel study but serves to account for panel attrition in subsequent panel waves. As an alternative, the data from the first wave are weighted to the known population distributions using the method of Iterative Proportional Fitting. With this weight, the representativeness of the first wave is ensured. Since the IPF-weight ensures the representativeness of the general dataset, combining this weight with the specific weights correcting for panel attrition combines the two correcting mechanisms. Therefore, the panel-weights that account for attrition in the data are multiplied with

the IPF-weight that ensures the representativeness of the first wave, which gives us the final weights.

Note that these final weights were winsorised as well using the procedure described above.

Appendix G: Analyses using only party Minister-President as ‘party in government’

Table G.1: fixed effects conditional logit models explaining (individual-level) electoral volatility 2009-2014 with only the party of the Minister-President as ‘party in government’.

	Model 1 (stable voters)	Model 2 (volatile voters)
	b	b
	(s.e.)	(s.e.)
Party ID	1.074*** (0.195)	0.380** (0.142)
Ideological distance	-0.206 (0.141)	-0.348** (0.121)
Leader evaluation	0.588*** (0.111)	0.437*** (0.089)
Economic evaluation*party Minister-President	0.240 (0.345)	-0.584 (0.393)
Party Minister-President	-0.108 (0.392)	-0.667 (0.465)
Number of observations	1019	656
Pseudo R ²	0.662	0.342

Note: Entries are log odd coefficients, standard errors are reported between parentheses. Data: BEP, 2009-2014. Data are weighted by socio-demographics and to correct for attrition in the panel. Significance levels: **: p<0.01; ***: p<0.001

Table G.2. Average marginal effects of vote choice determinants explaining voting in the 2014

		Marginal	CI lower	CI upper
		effect	bound	bound
PartyID	Stable	0.111	0.060	0.162
	Volatile	0.052	0.013	0.092
Distance to party	Stable	-0.021	-0.050	0.007
	Volatile	-0.048	-0.084	-0.012
Leader evaluation	Stable	0.061	0.052	0.070
	Volatile	0.060	0.055	0.065
Economic evaluation*party	Stable	0.056	-0.039	0.090
Minister-President	Volatile	-0.089	-0.197	0.018
Economic evaluation*party	Stable	-0.011	-0.078	0.056
Minister-President	Volatile	-0.092	-0.499	0.015
regional elections				

Note: Average marginal effects and 90%-confidence intervals for stable volatile voters respectively. Estimates are based on estimates of Stable and Volatile respectively in the analyses with only the party of the Minister-President as 'party in government' (Table G.1). Data: BEP, 2009-2014.