Do volatile voters vote less correctly?

An analysis of correct voting among vote (intention) switchers in U.S. presidential election campaigns

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Abstract

The literature on electoral volatility and the literature on electoral campaigns hold contradictory views on voters switching vote (intention) during the campaign. In this note, we shed new light on this contradiction, making two contributions. First, we investigate the extent to which stable and volatile voters choose the correct party. Second, we distinguish *levels* of correct voting and the impact of the *act of switching* on the correctness of the vote. Our analyses of vote-switching in American elections show that, while volatile voters are less likely to vote correctly, they are more likely to switch from an incorrect to the correct party than vice versa. Furthermore, we show that following the campaign more closely makes voters more likely to switch vote (intention) towards the correct party.

Keywords: Electoral volatility, vote (intention) switching, correct voting, American National Election Studies, electoral campaigns.

Levels of electoral volatility are on the rise and an increasingly large portion of the electorate decides late what party to vote for (Dalton, 2013; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2017; He, 2016). These trends have led to a renewed interest in the causes of unstable voting behaviour and volatile party preferences (Dassonneville & Stiers, 2018).¹ Overall, the literature on campaign switching has resulted in a rather gloomy image of volatile voters, as these studies argue that it is mostly the non-interested and non-knowledgeable voters who switch vote (intention) during a campaign (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & MacPhee, 1963). As these voters are expected to switch votes rather randomly, they would create noise in the signal the electorate sends on Election Day. This view, however, contrasts to the literature on electoral campaigns, in which it is argued that campaigns help voters to bring their vote in line with their political opinions (Andersen, Tilley, & Heath, 2005; Gelman & King, 1993). This would mean that voters who switch their voting preference during a campaign would, on average, be more likely to switch towards the party that represents their views best.

We argue that the litmus test of volatile voters' impact on the functioning of electoral democracy consists of a direct analysis of the quality of their vote choices. In pursuing such a direct test, we rely on a large literature on the concept of correct voting and investigate whether it is stable or volatile voters who cast a vote that is most congruent with their own political views and opinions (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997; Lau, Andersen, & Redlawsk, 2008). Second, in order to gauge the impact of vote switching for representative democracy, we argue that it is important to distinguish between a description of the quality-level of switchers' choices and the impact of the *act of switching* on the quality of their vote choice. In other words, does switching votes between parties improve or worsen switchers' choices?

Using the data of the American National Election Studies, we find that those who switch their (intention to) vote in the course of an election campaign are – overall – *less* likely to vote correctly compared to voters holding stable preferences. However, when focusing on the impact of the act of switching, we find that the campaign does help to bring votes in line with opinions, as vote-switchers are more likely to switch towards a correct party choice than vice versa. This holds in particular for those who follow the campaign closely. For evaluating the impact of volatility, it is thus of foremost importance that we distinguish between the overall quality of switchers' choices on the one hand and how campaign switching affects the quality

¹ In this study, we refer to 'campaign volatility' as voters who indicate an intention to vote for the candidate of one party during the campaign, and indicate to have voted for the candidate of another party on Election Day. Doing so, we follow previous studies on electoral volatility in the U.S. context (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Granberg & Holmberg, 1991) and elsewhere (Dassonneville, 2012; Dassonneville & Stiers, 2018)."

of their choice on the other: while campaign switchers are on average making choices that align less well with their preferences and opinions, by changing during the campaign they are more likely to vote for the correct party than they were at the start of the campaign.

Campaign volatility: The floating voter?

The earliest students of voting behaviour already investigated why some voters change in vote (intention) between different parties. The Columbia School scholars found that voters who are attentive to politics form a stable party preference; vote-switching, in contrast, was found to be a sign of a lack of political interest and knowledge (Berelson et al., 1963). From these observations, they concluded: “The notion that the people who switch parties during the campaign are mainly the reasoned, thoughtful, conscientious people who were convinced by the issues of the election is just plain wrong. In fact, they were mainly just the opposite” (Lazarsfeld et al., 1965, p. 96). Following these findings, they categorised volatile voters as “floating voters”.

These studies hence considered volatile voters to be the least politically involved part of the electorate, and this view is supported by a number of more recent studies. Dassonneville (2012), for example, shows that, while the more sophisticated voters make up their mind before the start of the electoral campaign, the least sophisticated are more likely to switch party choice during the campaign. This raises doubts on the ‘quality’ of these vote-switches (see also Dassonneville, 2014). Relatedly, scholars who investigate the determinants of campaign deciding find support for the hypothesis that those who decide late what party to vote for are not interested and not involved in politics (Schmitt-Beck & Partheymüller, 2012). Thus, the literature on electoral volatility characterizes vote-switchers as voters who change party preference rather randomly. Hence, from this literature, it can be expected that stable voters, in general, cast a vote that is more in line with their political views than what holds for voters switching party preference:

Hypothesis 1: Stable voters vote for parties that are more in line with their own political views than what holds for volatile voters.

This view on volatile voters is, however, in stark contrast with the literature on campaign effects, as these studies show the positive impact of campaigns on voters’ understanding of politics. Hansen and Pedersen (2014), for instance, show that campaigns

increase levels of political knowledge and political efficacy in the electorate – narrowing the knowledge gap between different educational groups. Similarly, van der Meer, Walter, and Van Aelst (2016) show that campaigns help people to position parties on policy scales – especially for those issues that were prevalent in election debates.

Besides these knowledge effects, the literature on campaign effects also demonstrates the effect of campaigns in strengthening voters' vote intentions or helping undecided voters to make up their mind (Geers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017). Most importantly for our study, research on electoral campaigns suggests that “campaigns help citizens cast votes in line with their pre-existing attitudes and proclivities” (Arceneaux, 2006, p. 160-161). More specifically, previous studies have argued that election campaigns are of importance because they “enlighten” voters, helping them to choose the party or candidate that represents their views best (Andersen, Tilley, & Heath, 2005; Gelman & King, 1993; Erikson, Panagopoulos, & Wlezien, 2010). Hence, following the literature on electoral campaigns, it can be expected that, in general, voters who switch vote (intention) during the campaign are more likely to switch towards the party that represents their political views best than vice versa:

Hypothesis 2: Volatile voters are more likely to switch towards the party that represents their political opinions best than vice versa.

Furthermore, as the literature indicates that it is exposure to the campaign information specifically that ‘enlightens’ voter’s preferences, this campaign effect should be strongest among voters who follow the campaign most strongly:

Hypothesis 3: More campaign exposure increases the probability of switching towards the party that represents the voter’s views best

Data and methods

In this note, we analyse in a direct way the link between volatility and the quality of the party choice. For doing so, we analyse whether or not a voter casts a vote for a party that represents her political views best. In a number of highly influential studies, Lau and his colleagues explicitly aim to operationalise voting for the party that corresponds best to one’s political views (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997; Lau et al., 2008). They do this by investigating the extent to which citizens vote “correctly”. For defining correct voting they focus on “*the values and*

beliefs of the individual voter, not on any particular ideology that presumes the values and preferences which *ought* to be held by members of different social classes, for instance, and not on any larger social goods or universal values” (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997, p. 586, emphasis in original). Although it admittedly is rather bold to indicate which party choice would have been the correct choice for a certain voter, Lau and Redlawsk’s operationalisation is designed to encompass a broad set of measures, based on what the voter herself thinks is important. As a result, their measure can be considered less normatively loaded than measures sometimes used in other studies that are based on a single dimension to measure the “quality” of the vote – as for instance ideological proximity (Dassonneville et al., forthcoming; Hooghe & Stiers, 2017).

In our analysis of the quality of the vote, we make use of the operationalisation of correct voting of Lau et al. (2008). More precisely, their measure of correct voting in the American National Election Studies (1972-2012) – that is freely available – will be used here (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997).² Our focus on the U.S. context allows us to speak directly to earlier work, as the concept of the floating voter was first described in the American context as well (Berelson et al., 1963). The ANES Time Series data set consists of cross-sectional surveys based on equal probability samples (American National Election Studies, 2010). In each election year, a representative sample of respondents is surveyed before and after the election. For the purposes of this study, the sample of election studies is limited to those elections for which the correct voting measure is available – i.e. all American Presidential Elections between 1972 and 2012.³

The independent variable of interest is whether or not the voter was volatile. In this study, the focus is on changes in vote (intention) during the electoral campaign. It needs to be noted, however, that in the survey questions under investigation, respondents were asked to indicate their preferred *candidate* rather than their preferred party. In the pre-electoral survey, respondents were asked which candidate they were planning to vote for. In the post-election survey, the same respondents were asked which candidate they actually voted for. The measure of campaign volatility is coded as 0 if the respondent indicates the same vote intention and vote, and is coded as 1 if the respondent switched between the intention during the campaign

² Note, however, that Lau and Redlawsk design four very similar yet slightly different measures, according to four different methods to determine what is the correct vote for every respondent. The results presented here use the weighted sum procedure. Replications of the findings of this paper using the three alternative procedures, are included in Appendix A, and show substantively the same results.

³ In the case of panels that covered multiple elections, we only include information from the first election survey in which respondents participated.

and the actual vote. As we are interested in switching candidate preference rather than voters deciding late the candidate of which party to vote for, we only take into account voters who reported an intention to vote for the candidate of one of the two major running parties.⁴

Our analysis proceeds in three steps. We first compare average levels of correct voting between stable and volatile voters.⁵ Subsequently, we make use of the panel structure of the data set to investigate whether campaign switching improves or worsens the level of correct voting among switchers. Finally, we investigate the characteristics that explain whether voters switch votes towards the correct or the incorrect party during the campaign. We focus on three possible explanatory variables. As the literature on campaign volatility argues that it is the least interested and least knowledgeable that switch parties randomly, we examine whether political interest and political knowledge help explaining whether a volatile voter ends up voting for the correct party. We include interest as self-reported interest in public affairs and knowledge as a variable indicating whether the respondent could correctly identify the party that held a majority in the House before the election, and after the election if that variable was included (in the latter case, the knowledge variable amounts to 0, 0.5, or 1). We also examine whether voters following the campaign more closely are more likely to end up voting for the correct party. For doing so, we include a summary measure that is available in the ANES data, indicating the number of mediums through which the voter indicates having followed the campaign (from the possibilities television, radio, and magazines).

Results

We investigate the correctness of the vote of voters who switch during the election campaign. In total, 4.45% of the respondents in the sample switched vote-intention during the electoral campaigns under investigation. To get a view on the correctness of the vote of these voters, and whether this is different from the correctness of stable voters, Table 1 summarises the proportion of volatile and stable voters casting a correct or incorrect vote respectively.

⁴ However, the data allow for a broader comparison if we include voters that were undecided or respondents that did not have the intention to turn out at the time of the pre-electoral interview. More explanation on this possibility as well as the results of this broader measure are included in Appendix B.

⁵ Note that one of the elements that is used to calculate the “correct” choice for each voter is the respondent’s party identification. As partisans might be more likely to choose the correct party in the first place and less likely to switch during the campaign overall, we also conducted the analyses using a measure of correct voting in which party identification was not included. The results, reported in Appendix C, are in line with the results presented here.

Table 1 suggests that volatile voters are less likely to cast a correct vote than what holds for stable voters, as the proportion of correct votes among this group is substantially lower. As can be seen in Table 1, 54.67% of the volatile voters casted a correct vote – a considerably smaller proportion than the 83.95% of stable voters casting a correct vote. This difference is significant, with $p < 0.001$. Our more direct test of the quality of switchers’ vote choices hence suggests that, as a group, campaign switchers cast votes that are of lower quality compared to voters who do not change preferences over the course of an election campaign.⁶

Table 1. Crosstab volatility and correct voting

	Stable	Volatile	Total
Incorrect vote	16.05% [15.30;16.84] (1,663)	45.33% [40.75;49.99] (238)	17.40% (1,901)
Correct vote	83.95% [83.16;84.70] (9,409)	54.67% [50.01;59.25] (277)	82.60% (9,686)
Total	100.00% (11,072)	100.00% (515)	100.00% (11,587)

Note: Values are weighted column percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

The observation that volatile voters are – overall – casting lower quality votes as such does not allow concluding that campaign volatility is a “threat” to democracy. For doing so, we have to take a dynamic perspective and investigate the extent to which switching improves or worsens the quality of switchers’ choices. Given that we have two measures of respondents’ candidate preferences in some weeks time – a vote intention and a reported vote choice – the number of correct intentions before the elections and the number of actual casted correct votes can be compared. Doing so allows examining to what extent voters switched from an incorrect intention to a correct vote or vice versa. Table 2 displays the proportion of correct intentions and correct votes of voters who switched party choice during the campaign.

⁶ Figure D.1 in Appendix D displays the proportion of correct votes for stable and volatile voters respectively for every election study under investigation and shows that the conclusion holds in every election year under investigation.

Table 2. Correct intentions and correct votes among volatile voters

Intention	Vote
45.33 %	54.67%
[40.75;49.99]	[50.01;59.25]
(238)	(277)

Note: Values are weighted percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

The results in Table 2 lead to a more positive assessment of campaigns in providing voters with useful information about the parties' stances. As can be seen in the Table, 45.33% of the voters held an incorrect vote-intention before the election. However, 54.67% of the volatile voters ended up casting a correct vote – a difference that is significant, with $p=0.09$. These results imply that electoral campaigns help volatile voters choosing the party that represents their views best. Campaigns hence do “enlighten” these volatile voters, although their level of correct voting is still far from reaching the 83.95% correct votes among stable voters.

Finally, we investigate the factors that help explaining why voters are more likely to switch vote (intention) toward the correct party. To do so, we estimate logistic regression models predicting correct voting including measures of political interest, political knowledge, and following the campaigns. The results are summarised in Table 3.

The results in Table 3 suggest that political interest and knowledge do not add to explaining which voters are more likely to switch vote (intention) to their correct choice than vice versa, though effects are in expected directions. The campaign measure has a positive and significant effect on correct voting among switchers: for those voters who switch party preference during the campaign, more campaign exposure increases the probability of switching towards the correct party. This effect is substantively important; respondents scoring lowest on the media index scale have a predicted probability of 37% of voting for the correct party, this increases to 57% for the voters who follow the campaign through all different channels.

Table 3. Explaining switching vote (intention) to a ‘correct’ party

	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)
Female	0.007 (0.190)	0.189 (0.187)	0.111 (0.302)	0.132 (0.294)
Age	0.002 (0.005)	0.006 (0.006)	0.006 (0.007)	0.002 (0.008)
Education: Grade school or less (ref.)				
Education: High school	-0.106 (0.401)	-0.369 (0.407)	-0.255 (0.434)	-0.320 (0.403)
Education: Some college	-0.219 (0.318)	-0.272 (0.304)	-0.318 (0.326)	-0.444 (0.298)
Education: College or advanced degree	-0.454 (0.283)	-0.744* (0.313)	-0.630** (0.214)	-0.725*** (0.131)
Income	-0.081 (0.106)	-0.041 (0.126)	0.156 (0.094)	0.119 (0.108)
Political interest	0.257 (0.179)			0.291 (0.158)
Political knowledge		0.180 (0.186)		0.086 (0.292)
Following the campaign			0.323*** (0.087)	0.214*** (0.040)
Constant	-0.108 (0.613)	-0.294 (0.689)	-1.737** (0.603)	-1.918*** (0.497)
N	429	433	264	264
Pseudo R ²	0.039	0.042	0.037	0.046

Note: entries are log-odds coefficients, standard errors are clustered by election study and reported in parentheses. Election-study dummies were included but are not shown. Only switchers are included. Data: ANES 1972-2012. *: p<0.05; **: p<0.001; ***: p<0.001.

These analyses provide suggestive evidence that is in line with the mechanism that we proposed. That is, that voters switch towards a correct party choice because they are exposed to campaign information. In line with the literature on campaign effects, it seems that campaigns indeed help to ‘enlighten’ voters. These are, of course, only tentative findings, and future research should further explore the role of campaigns for the electorate to bring their vote in line with their opinions.

Conclusion

Voters who switch vote (intention) between parties in the course of an election campaign are regularly referred to as “floating” voters, who are not very knowledgeable and not politically involved, and as a result cast votes for parties that do not represent their views. The literature

on electoral campaigns, however, argues that campaigns help voters to bring their vote in line with their opinions. This study set out to investigate these contrasting claims by examining the quality of the vote of stable and volatile voters respectively.

Performing a direct test of the quality of the vote, our results are clear: campaign switchers – as a group – vote less correctly. When characterising campaign switchers it is thus fair to refer to them as a group of voters that casts – on average – lower quality votes compared to stable voters. Importantly, making use of the panel structure of our data set we gain more precise insights in the impact of the *act of switching* on the quality of voters' choices. The results of our dynamic analysis show that switching improves the quality of campaign switchers' votes. Even though the effect is modest, campaigns appear to enlighten switchers' choices, improving the overall quality of their votes. Moreover, the analyses among campaign switchers showed that it is especially those who closely follow the campaign who switch towards the correct party.

However, it needs to be noted that although the proportion of correct votes differs substantially between the groups, the group of vote-switchers is small, and in absolute numbers they make up a marginal proportion of the electorate. The findings presented in this note should therefore be validated in future research. This analysis should also be conducted in other settings and contexts. Even though the U.S. context allows building on a rich research tradition, it also leads to the question to what extent our results can be generalised. In countries where there are multiple options to switch to ideologically close parties, perhaps switchers are casting higher quality votes.

Despite these limitations, and with respect to the data at hand in particular, our results offer an important insight in the contrast between the literature on volatility and the literature on electoral campaigns. The original and gloomy picture of “floating” voters casting low quality votes is confirmed when we investigate the level of quality of their vote choices. By having switched votes during the campaign, however, the quality of their choices has somewhat increased – which implies that the act of switching actually contributes to a good representation of their preferences. Even though multiple factors can feed in a party choice, representative democracy is best served if citizens vote according to their own preferences and opinions. Campaign switchers are generally less likely to cast a correct vote compared to stable voters, it appears from our results, but they would have been even less well-off had they not switched votes at all.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Results using alternative measures of correct voting

Weighted mean procedure

Table A.1. Replication Table 1 using the weighted mean procedure

	Stable	Volatile	Total
Incorrect vote	16.34% [15.29;17.13] (1,699)	43.51% [38.82;48.32] (212)	17.59% (1,911)
Correct vote	83.66% [82.87;84.41] (8,986)	56.48% [51.68;61.18] (283)	85.41% (9,269)
Total	100.00% (10,685)	100.00% (495)	100.00% (11,180)

Note: Values are weighted column percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

The difference is significant, with $p < 0.001$.

Table A.2. Replication Table 2 using the weighted mean procedure

Intention	Vote
43.51% [38.82;48.32] (212)	56.49% [51.68;61.18] (283)

Note: Values are weighted percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

The difference is significant, with $p = 0.001$

Unweighted sum procedure

Table A.3. Replication Table 1 using the unweighted sum procedure

	Stable	Volatile	Total
Incorrect vote	16.26% [15.50;17.05] (1,685)	44.90% [40.33;49.55] (237)	17.58% (1,922)
Correct vote	83.74% [82.95;84.50] (9,390)	55.10% [50.45;59.67] (278)	82.42% (9,668)
Total	100.00% (11,075)	100.00% (515)	100.00% (11,590)

Note: Values are weighted column percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

The difference is significant, with $p < 0.001$.

Table A.4. Replication Table 2 using the unweighted sum procedure

Intention	Vote
44.90% [40.33;49.55] (237)	55.10% [50.45;59.67] (278)

Note: Values are weighted percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

The difference is significant, with $p = 0.07$.

Unweighted mean procedure

Table A.5. Replication Table 1 using the unweighted mean procedure

	Stable	Volatile	Total
Incorrect vote	17.14% [16.37;17.95] (1,773)	43.61% [38.91;48.42] (213)	18.37% (1,986)
Correct vote	82.85% [82.05;83.63] (8,853)	56.39% [51.58;61.09] (281)	81.63% (9,134)
Total	100.00% (10,626)	100.00% (494)	100.00% (11,120)

Note: Values are weighted column percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

The difference is significant, with $p < 0.001$.

Table A.6. Replication Table 2 using the unweighted mean procedure

Intention	Vote
43.61%	56.39%
[38.91;48.42]	[51.58;61.09]
(213)	(281)

Note: Values are weighted percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

The difference is significant, with $p=0.002$.

Appendix B: Results with a broader definition of volatility

In our study, we use two measures; a pre-election vote-intention and a post-election reported vote choice. The first that asks the respondents during the campaign which party they think they will vote for. For this intention to vote, five different possible answers were recorded: An intention to vote for the Democratic candidate, intention to vote for the Republican candidate, undecided, the respondent does not intend to vote, or an intention to vote for another candidate. For the reported vote choice question, four answers were recorded: Did not vote, voted for the Democratic candidate, voted for the Republican candidate, or voted for a major third party candidate (for those elections in which there was a major third party running).

While the main results reported in the manuscript only focus on respondents who switch between the major parties, for the supplementary analyses reported here, we create a measure of campaign volatility that incorporates as much information that we have available as possible. Therefore, we include undecided voters who end up voting for one of the candidates and code them as volatile voters. In the same way, we include voters that did not intend to vote but turned out to vote for one of the candidates as volatile voters. Table B.1 lists the different possible combinations of the intention to vote and the reported vote, and indicates whether a combination could be included in the analyses or not (the Included/excluded in the analyses column) and how voters in these categories were coded (the Code column).

Table B.1. Coding campaign volatility

Vote intention	Vote	Included/excluded in analyses	Code
Democratic candidate	Did not vote/refuses	Excluded	
Democratic candidate	Democratic candidate	Included	Stable
Democratic candidate	Republican candidate	Included	Volatile
Democratic candidate	Major third party candidate	Included	Volatile
Republican candidate	Did not vote/refuses	Excluded	
Republican candidate	Democratic candidate	Included	Volatile
Republican candidate	Republican candidate	Included	Stable
Republican candidate	Major third party candidate	Included	Volatile
Undecided/Don't know	Did not vote/refuses	Excluded	
Undecided/Don't know	Democratic candidate	Included	Volatile
Undecided/Don't know	Republican candidate	Included	Volatile
Undecided/Don't know	Major third party candidate	Included	Volatile
Not turning out	Did not vote/refuses	Excluded	
Not turning out	Democratic candidate	Included	Volatile
Not turning out	Republican candidate	Included	Volatile
Not turning out	Major third party candidate	Included	Volatile
Other candidate	Did not vote/refuses	Excluded	

Other candidate	Democratic candidate	Included	Volatile
Other candidate	Republican candidate	Included	Volatile
Other candidate	Major third party candidate	Excluded	

The information in Table B.1 clarifies which voters are coded as volatile voters in these additional analyses. For instance, if a voter reports not to intend to turn out, and she reports to have voted for one of the parties' candidates, we know she changed her mind and code her as volatile voter. Likewise, someone reporting to intended to vote for an 'other' candidate but eventually voting for one of the major parties, can be coded as a volatile voter. However, a voter indicating the intention to vote for an 'other' candidate than those of the two major parties and reporting to have voted for the candidate of a major third party, cannot be included in the analyses. As there was no option to indicate an intention to vote for a major third party candidate during the campaign, we cannot know whether a voter voting for a candidate of a major third party changed if her intention to vote was an 'other' candidate than those of the Democratic Party or the Republican Party.

The results of the analysis using this broader measure of electoral volatility are summarised in Table B.2.

Table B.2. Replication of Table 1 using a less strict coding of volatility

	Stable	Volatile	Total
Incorrect vote	17.51% [16.74;18.30] (1,863)	46.04% [43.65;48.46] (876)	20.76 % (2,739)
Correct vote	82.49% [81.70;83.26] (9,409)	53.96 % [51.54;56.35] (1,044)	79.24 % (10,453)
Total	100.00% (11,272)	100.00% (1,920)	100.00% (13,192)

Note: Values are weighted column percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses

As can be seen in Table B.2, the results using the broader definition of electoral volatility are in line with those with a more limited measure of volatility presented in the text. The difference between the two groups is significant, with $p < 0.001$.

Note that the analysis as presented in Table 2 in the text cannot be replicated with this broader measure. Table B.1 indicates the difficulties when comparing the proportions of correct intentions and correct votes of volatile voters specifically (as in Table 2 in the manuscript). For the correct voting variables, made available by Lau and Redlawsk, we have three values; the

correct vote for every voter is either the candidate of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or the candidate of a running major third party. However, this ‘third party’ is not an answer category for the vote intention. Furthermore, investigating switching preference, we cannot code an intention not to turn out or an undecided voter as ‘incorrect’ intentions. Therefore, the only possible comparison we can make to compare proportions of correct voting of volatile voters, is to compare voters with an intention to vote for one of the two major parties, switching to the other major party by Election Day.

Appendix C: Results using correct voting measures without partisan identification

Note that these analyses do not include the election of 2012, due to coding issues in the replication file for 2012. As a result, the number of observations is somewhat lower in this additional analysis.

Table C.1. Replication of Table 1 using correct voting without pid

	Stable	Volatile	Total
Incorrect vote	21.65% [20.76;22.58] (1,901)	46.55% [41.83;51.33] (224)	22.92 % (2,125)
Correct vote	78.35% [77.42;79.24] (7,227)	53.45% [48.67;58.17] (252)	77.08 % (7,479)
Total	100.00% (9,128)	100.00% (476)	100.00% (9,604)

Note: Values are weighted column percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses

Table C.2. Replication of Table 2 using correct voting without pid

Intention	Vote
46.55 % [41.83;51.33] (224)	53.45% [48.67;58.17] (252)

Note: Values are weighted percentages. 95% confidence intervals between squared parentheses; unweighted number of cases in round parentheses.

Appendix D: Electoral volatility and correct voting in the different elections under investigation

Figure D.1: Proportion of correct votes for stable and volatile voters respectively in the different elections under investigation.

Figure D.1 shows that in every election the same conclusion arises: volatile voters are consistently and significantly less likely to vote correctly than what holds for stable voters. The election study of 1996 stands out for its small proportion of correct votes among volatile voters. It could be speculated that this is due to the fact that there was a major third candidate running in this election (Ross Perot).⁷ Also in 1980 and 1992 there were such candidates (John Anderson and Ross Perot), but this does not seem to result in low proportions of correct votes in these years.

⁷ Lau and Redlawsk (1997, p. 592) hypothesise that, given the limited cognitive resources voters dispose of, they are more likely to make a correct choice when there are less alternatives available. They find, then, that the mean number of correct votes is higher when there are two candidates running in the elections compared to elections in which there was an important third-party candidate.