

The Floating Voters and Third-Party Voting in Britain

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Abstract

According to the party dealignment thesis, party identification has become weaker in Britain since the end of the 1960s. Accompanying this trend have been a growing number of voters who profess no party affiliation, and at the same time have become more volatile. These floating and volatile voters have often been assumed to represent a big hope for the advance of third parties. However, this assumption has not been subjected to rigorous empirical verification. Using the 1979-92 BES data, the author finds that independent voters are not more likely than average party identifiers to vote for third parties in Britain. However the effect of volatile voters on third-party voting is always strong and significant, even controlling for other potential influences. This implies that a growing pool of volatile voters may help to consolidate the existence of third parties in Britain.

Key Words: party dealignment, floating voters, overall volatility, spatial voting, multivariate logistic regressions