Understanding Loyalty in a Political Marketing Context: What Makes Voters Loyal to a Political Party?

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Abstract

Informed by political marketing research and key marketing constructs of brand loyalty and switching, this study examines voter loyalty both overall and in relation to individual political parties by examining the factors which influenced voter behavior in the 2005, 2010 and 2015 UK general elections. British Election Survey (2015) data (n = 30,073) is analyzed to test hypotheses relating to voter loyalty. Multinomial logistic regression models identify significant influences on voter loyalty and switching behavior by political party. The research identifies the key issues for retaining loyal voters and reducing switching behavior for each of the three main UK political parties. The study found key influences on party loyalty and vote switching vary by type and/or strength of impact for each party. Overall, policy issues were less influential on loyalty than other variables; notably, perceived party unity, positive feelings about the party and its leader, and party identification in the case of Labour.

Paper Type: Research Paper

Introduction

Whilst there has been some consideration of loyalty in political marketing research (e.g., Butler and Collins, 1994; Needham, 2006; Parker, 2012; Schofield and Reeves, 2015), the concept is comparatively under-researched. Hitherto, the literature has focused on predicting voting behavior but has neglected the factors which influence loyalty to a political party brand. This study examines both voter loyalty and switching behavior and identifies the statistically significant influences on this behavior in relation to individual political parties in the UK. More specifically, the paper analyses the factors which significantly influenced voter loyalty by political party through the 2005, 2010 and 2015 UK general elections. It examines the differences between these factors, and those which influenced voters to switch their vote in 2015 having previously voted for the same party in 2005 and 2010. The study also tests the relative importance of party policy in this context.

The significance of the 2015 general election

Fieldhouse et al. (2020) have argued that the 2015 election was significant because of what they termed electoral shocks e.g., increasing immigration, the impact of the global financial crisis, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, the Scottish independence referendum, and the precursor events which led up to Brexit. Furthermore, while the 2015 election result appeared to indicate a return to 'business as usual' under Britain's 'first past the post' system, it concealed a volatile election. As such, the 2015 election can be viewed as instigating a realignment in the UK's political arena: thereby marking the end of the traditional three-party domination (of

2

Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats), with the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the Greens.

Despite expectations of another hung parliament, the electorate returned a Conservative government majority with a total of 330 seats. This equated to 24 more seats than in 2010 and a 0.7% increase in its vote share, with the Conservatives benefitting from an improvement in economic conditions prior to the election. They also profited from well-targeted campaign spending, surging Scottish nationalism, and a high (78%) turnout amongst over 65-year-olds, in contrast to a lower turnout of 43% in the 18-24 age group (Ipsos, 2015). By comparison, the Labour Party, despite increasing its vote share by 1.4%, attained 26 less seats.

The Liberal Democrat Party had its worst result since its formation in 1988 and lost all but eight of its 57 MPs, resulting in the resignation of its leader and former coalition deputy prime minister Nick Clegg (Watt, 2015). Conversely, UKIP won the third highest aggregate vote share but given the nature of the first past the post system, won only one seat, because its electoral support was geographically dispersed rather than concentrated in winnable constituencies. The Green Party increased its vote share from 1% to 3.8%, benefitting from the Liberal Democrat electoral decline, and the general dissatisfaction with the major parties. However, like UKIP, due to the electoral system, the Greens only returned one MP to the House of Commons.

Rationale for the study

Given the significance of the 2015 election, our study responds to Fieldhouse et al.'s (2020, 1) call to action: "voters might be more likely to switch parties than in the past,

but that does not tell us which voters are switching to which parties, and why". We therefore examine vote switching in 2015 and identify the factors which significantly influenced this behavior. The study uses the 2015 British Election Survey (BES) data; a large representative sample of the British electorate. Our study is influenced by Schofield and Reeves' (2015) paper which used BES data from the 2010 UK general election to explain voter behavior using the three-factor theory of satisfaction. The BES (2015) includes a wide range of variables, including cross sectional data from the 2015 UK general election and longitudinal data relating to individual voting behavior in 2005, 2010 and 2015. Thus, our study aims to facilitate an in-depth evaluation of the factors influencing party loyalty and switching behavior among UK voters. It adds to a promising, yet underdeveloped area of voter behavior research which has begun to emerge in terms of longitudinal studies of voting within election campaigns (Baines et al., 2011), and across electoral contests (e.g., Newman's (2007) analysis of US elections between 1980 and 2000).

Furthermore, individual level voter behavior across elections has been neglected, despite Clarke et al.'s (2004) call for analysis of individual voter identification longitudinally across elections. Our paper therefore contributes to the literature by empirically examining the under-researched area of loyalty in the context of political marketing. It also adds to research in this field that uses different models and methodological approaches to predict and understand voting behavior (e.g., Baines et al., 2003; 2005; 2011; Ben-ur and Newman, 2010; Cwalina et al., 2004; 2010; French and Smith, 2010; Newman, 2007; O'Cass, 2002; O'Cass and Nataraajan, 2003). More specifically, our study contributes to the literature by identifying factors which are key for retaining loyal voters, and for reducing vote switching. The study also examines

the relative impact of strategic/tactical voting on smaller parties. Additionally, it contributes to understanding about the primacy of policy in voter loyalty (Baines et al., 2005; Brennan and Henneberg 2008; Cwalina et al., 2010) by testing the relationship between policy and loyalty, which has not been previously examined across multiple elections in the UK.

Structure of the paper

The paper is organized as follows. First, we review the literature on brand loyalty, brand switching and voter behavior. This approach was adopted to review both marketing literature and political marketing literature related to these constructs to develop relevant hypotheses. We then describe the research method, with a particular focus on the analysis of loyal and defecting votes in the 2015 UK general election using the BES (2015) data set, the measures employed, and the procedures undertaken. Next, we present and discuss the findings. Finally, we outline the contribution of the research, explain its limitations, and make recommendations for further research.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Brand loyalty

In the marketing literature there has been considerable attention given to the loyalty construct (e.g., Ailawadi et al., 2008; El-Manstrly and Harrison, 2013; Evanschitzy and Wunderlich, 2006; Gremler et al., 2020; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Johnson et al., 2006; Ngobo, 2017; Watson et al., 2015). There have been some distinct approaches to the study of brand loyalty, for example: satisfaction-loyalty relationships (e.g., Agustin and Singh, 2005; Ahrholdt et al., 2019; Schirmer et al.,

2018), multi-brand loyalty (e.g., Arifine et al., 2019), satisfaction/dissatisfaction and purchase relationships (e.g., Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Morgeson et al., 2020; Yi and La, 2004), emotion-loyalty dynamics (Ou and Verhoef, 2017), brand relationships and engagement (e.g., Aurier and de Lanauze, 2012; Fournier and Yao, 1997; So et al., 2016), and loyalty programs and related marketing activities (e.g., Breugelmans et al., 2015; Chaudhuri et al., 2019; Chen, 2021; Kim, 2021; Kumar, 2020; Liu and Ansari, 2020; Nastasoiu et al., 2021; Steinhoff and Palmatier, 2016).

Dick and Basu (1994, 99) defined loyalty as "the strength of the relationship between an individual's relative attitude and repeat patronage". Oliver (1999) identified four types or developmental stages of loyalty: cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conative loyalty, and action loyalty. Cognitive loyalty is based on belief, recent information, accumulated knowledge, and attribute performance (Oliver, 1999). If satisfaction is processed, then this leans towards affective loyalty where a "liking or attitude toward the brand has developed on the basis of cumulatively satisfying usage situations" (Oliver, 1999, 35). As this loyalty is based on feelings it is less prone to switching than cognitive loyalty. However, affective loyalty does not have the levels of loyalty which can be exhibited in the commitment of conative loyalty (Oliver, 1999). In conative loyalty, there have been "repeated episodes of positive affect towards the brand" and a "commitment to repurchase" (Oliver, 1999, 35). However, a limitation of conative loyalty is that it is based on intention, rather than action. To reach the stage of action loyalty, "readiness to act" is characterized by: "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/ service consistently in the future" (Oliver 1997, 392 quoted in Oliver, 1999, 36). It also includes a "desire to overcome obstacles that might prevent the act", such as "situational influences and

marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver 1997, 392 quoted in Oliver, 1999, 36).

Dick and Basu's (1994) concept of 'latent loyalty', where a consumer is psychologically loyal, but their loyalty has not manifested in observable behavior, was extended by Wolter et al. (2017). They found that where there is deep conative loyalty, satisfaction creates loyalty without conviction, whereas where there is customer-company identification, loyalty based on conviction is increased. When there are barriers to action faced by consumers, higher levels of conviction result in a higher chance of behavior, relative to individuals with lower levels of conviction (Wolter et al., 2017).

Within a political marketing context, loyalty has a significant influence on political party performance (Schofield and Reeves, 2015). Recent empirical evidence suggests that electoral loyalty (even among party members) should not be assumed, "as small but relevant segments of membership bases occasionally vote for another party" (de Vet et al., 2019, 690). By contrast, there are voters who loyally vote for the same party through perceived good and bad periods. In some circumstances, however, loyalty can mean more than voting for a political party in more than one election. It may denote for some committed voters a strong attachment to a political party, voter advocacy, contributions in kind, cash and knowledge sharing, and participation in party activities including rallies. Oliver (1999, 43) notes that: "consumers can become near-zealots on the basis of adoration and devotion and can be placed in self-sustaining social environments that reinforce their brand determination". Thus, this may equate to what Oliver (1999) terms 'fortitude' based on 'adoration and

commitment'. Scarrow (1994, 47) argues that party members are 'loyal voters' who act as "vote-multipliers" and become "ambassadors to the community", as people who can "win new party support through their normal daily contacts". As Scarrow (2015, 102) asserts, party members' "outside" role is concerned with "providing electoral support", "communicating party ideas" and "enhancing party legitimacy". Yet inevitably, the cause of party loyalty is not solely down to active membership, because the size of party membership is relatively small in comparison to the wider electoral constituency. Thus, both voters and party members use additional cues rather than solely their party affiliation when deciding where to place their votes (de Vet, et al., 2019).

A number of authors have connected brand loyalty to political party loyalty (Ahmed, Lodhi and Ahmad, 2017; French and Smith, 2010; Smith and Spotswood, 2013). Smith and Spotswood (2013, 190) state that "loyalty relates to the extent that voters repeat purchase (vote for) the same party/ leader over time", while Needham (2006, 180) argues that: "party brands provide a basis for long-term loyalty in an environment where products (policies) are fairly fluid".

Through Smith and Spotswood's (2013) notion of loyalty in a political context, we operationalize loyalty as voting for the same political party in three consecutive UK general elections. Our approach to measuring loyalty as loyal voting in consecutive elections has been viewed as both conceptually valid (Dean et al., 2015; French and Smith, 2010; Smith and Spotswood, 2013), and empirically valid (Schofield and Reeves, 2015; Southwell, 2010) in political research.

The 2015 UK general election disproportionally disadvantaged the smaller parties and increased the likelihood of strategic/ tactical voting (Butler and Collins 1994; Fisher, 2004). Indeed, de Vet et al.'s (2019) study of political party members, using a survey of grassroots members of six parties, found that in 2015, members of the smaller parties: the Greens, Liberal Democrats and UKIP had higher percentages of defecting votes: 15.8%, 12.1% and 6.9%, respectively, in comparison to Labour (4.9%) and the Conservatives (3.8%). Thus, we posit:

H1a: The proportion of loyal voters in 2015 retained from previous

UK elections (2005 and 2010) is higher in the Conservative and Labour parties

compared with the Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Green parties.

Brand switching

The antithesis of brand loyalty is disloyalty or brand switching (Pick and Eisend, 2014; Polo and Sesé, 2009), with Dawes et al. (2021) and Casteran et al. (2019) drawing attention to the category specific impact of long-term loyalty erosion faced by brands. Keaveney (1995) suggests that switching is initiated by several factors including perceived service failure and attraction to competitive offerings. Wirtz et al. (2014) found relationships between brand switching behavior and overall satisfaction, non-monetary factors (e.g., time and effort), inferior attribute performance, past brand switching behavior, product involvement and product category knowledge. However, switching costs may inhibit brand switching behavior (e.g., Evanschitzky et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2002; Patterson and Smith, 2003). These include lost performance costs, uncertainty costs, pre-switching search and evaluation costs, and post-switching cognitive and behavioral costs (Jones et al., 2002). Patterson and Smith (2003) have identified search costs, functional risk, competitor attractiveness and loss of benefits including social bonds. Burnham et al. (2003) argue

9

that switching costs include procedural costs (e.g., economic risk, evaluation, learning), financial costs (e.g., benefits loss, monetary loss) and relational costs (e.g., personal relationship and brand relationship losses).

In a political context, Phipps et al. (2010, 501) imply an opportunity cost in political brand switching, arguing: "the sacrifice of time and the psychic cost of supporting and being seen to support a politician not of one's normally preferred party are clearly 'prices' to be paid". Yet switching is problematic for political parties with voters increasingly "making their decisions based on short-term issues and superficial attitudes held toward the competing brands" (Dermody and Scullion, 2000, 202). Furthermore, a candidate's "epistemic value", i.e., "a voter's sense of curiosity or novelty in choosing a candidate" (Ben-Ur and Newman, 2010, 524) also influences voting behavior (Cwalina et al, 2004; 2010; Newman and Sheth, 1985; 1987).

Alternatively, vote defection may be, for some voters, a well thought-through choice based on ideological concerns, negative leadership evaluations and other considerations. Voters (including party members) may switch party allegiances because they feel 'pulled' by another party's programme, or conversely 'pushed' by what they perceive as incongruent policy (Polk and Kölln, 2017). French and Smith (2010) argue that while around 70 per cent of voters stay loyal to one party over consecutive elections; almost a third switch party and/or shift their level of allegiance. Gschwend (2007) compares 'sincere voters', who vote for his or her most preferred party (or party candidate) with 'strategic voters'. The latter vote for another party (or party candidate) other than their most preferred one if they expect to influence the outcome of the election by casting such a vote. Butler and Collins (1994) and Fisher

(2004) highlight this practice as 'tactical voting'. Hence, voters may be tactically motivated to support a viable party in their constituency rather than support their preferred party (Alvarez et al., 2006; Evans et al., 1998; Fisher, 2004; Herrmann et al., 2016; Lanoue and Bowler, 1992) to empower a workable government majority (Gschwend, 2007). This may have a particularly acute effect on smaller parties because of their perceived inability to win seats. Specifically, de Vet et al (2019) found that 'pull factors' i.e., the ideological distance to the most adjacent party were also significant. In 2015, while defection from smaller to larger UK political parties resulted mainly from strategic voting, the perceived ideological distances between the small and mainstream parties were also significant when choosing where to place a strategic vote. Therefore, the combination of strategic thinking and party positioning in the left-right ideological scale resulted in higher incidence of vote switching, while voters attempted to remain within the same perceived 'ideological bloc' (de Vet et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Southwell (2004) building upon Bowler and Lanoue (1992) introduce 'protest voting'. This is where a voter chooses a third-party candidate on the assumption that they are unlikely to win the election race or unseat an incumbent, to reduce an incumbent majority and thereby signal their dissatisfaction with the incumbent's performance / position. Moreover, dissatisfied voters may not necessarily switch but may stay away from the polls (Dejaeghere and Dassonneville, 2017). Mellon's (2021) panel study between two consecutive elections showed that across 104 election pairs, party switching contributed three times as much to aggregate volatility as turnout switching on average, and that party switching was the most important factor in 97% of election pairs. Moreover, he argues that turnout

switching found in recent US elections (e.g., Hill, 2017) does not generalize to most electoral contexts. In addition, Gomez's (2018) study of 73 elections in six west European countries found that electoral volatility was caused by party switching in 75% of total volatility, with differences in turnout only causing 17% of total volatility, and a further 8% by generational replacement (i.e., death of electors and replacement by new citizens reaching voting age).

The disproportionality inherent in the UK 'first past the post' system was particularly evidenced in 2015 as disadvantaging the smaller parties through more likely strategic / tactical voting. Thus, it would be expected that the smaller parties would have a higher proportion of defecting votes, even amongst their previously loyal voters. We therefore hypothesize that:

> *H1b*: The proportion of previously loyal voters (in 2005 and 2010) who switched in 2015 is lower in the Conservative and Labour parties compared with the Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Green parties.

Factors influencing voter behavior

The remainder of the review focuses on the factors which influence voting behavior more generally. Newman and Sheth (1985) used seven variables: issues and policies, social imagery, emotional feelings, candidate image, current events, personal events, and epistemic issues to predict voting behavior with over 90% overall accuracy. This model was modified by Newman and Sheth (1987), Newman (2002) and Ben-ur and Newman (2010) to a five-variable structure of political issues, social imagery, candidate personality, situational contingency and epistemic value. The Newman and Sheth (1987) model was adapted by Cwalina et al. (2004; 2010) and included: media,

issues and policies, current events, candidate image, personal events, social imagery, epistemic issues and emotion. Cwalina et al.'s (2004; 2010) research did not, however, have the multi-attribute predictive power of Newman and Sheth's model.

O'Cass (2002; 2003) and O'Cass and Nataraajan (2003) have attempted to analyze voter behavior using variables such as involvement, satisfaction, voter confidence, perceived control over political circumstances, and perceived risk. This research was extended by O'Cass and Pecotich (2005) who found that: 1) political opinion leadership, perceived risk and voter involvement are central to the voting process; 2) political opinion leadership is influenced by subjective knowledge, voter involvement and perceived risk, and 3) the consequences of political opinion influences are satisfaction and voter stability.

Baines et al. (2003) found that policies, party leaders, candidates and values predicted voting intention more effectively than other variables such as voter demographics, while Baines et al. (2005) found party image to have greater value in predicting votes than voter demographics. Policy issues have been found to be important influences on voter behavior in several studies (e.g., Cwalina et al., 2004; 2010; Newman and Sheth, 1987). Indeed, the importance of party positioning and branding on the basis of policy has been highlighted by authors (Baines et al., 1999; Marsh and Fawcett, 2011; Wring, 2001), with Baines et al. (2003) arguing that national and local policies are two of the technical service features offered by political parties.

Speed et al. (2015) suggest that party policy is akin to a product and part of the human branding of political parties and leaders. The theme of human branding of political candidates is further developed by Guzmán et al. (2015) who examined perceived congruency between individual voters and political candidate brands. Building on this research, Van Steenburg and Guzmán (2019) found a positive relationship between voter self-image and candidate brand image which impacted their intended vote choice. Moreover, voters' negative evaluations of party leaders have been found to increase the probability of electoral disloyalty in the UK (Polk and Kölln, 2017). However, empirical evidence of leadership effects on voter choice is varied (Balmas et al., 2014; Wauters et al., 2018) with party leaders tending to have greater influence on voting in lower partisanship and majoritarian electoral contexts (e.g., UK) than proportional systems (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2013). Moreover, because the leader of the winning party becomes the UK prime minister, this probably provides an additional incentive to focus on the party leader in voting decisions. Despite this Baines et al. (2005, 1083) highlight the "relative decline in the importance of leader image, and the relative increase in the importance of policies". Capelos' (2010, 9) experimental study found that "images projected by political candidates function as 'gut level' affective (emotional) shortcuts, such that when citizens dislike the source of the policy, they also adjust their policy evaluations downward".

While we are constrained by the variables in the BES data set, there are some theoretical linkages to the themes in the extant literature regarding factors influencing voting behavior. For example, party identification is discussed in Baines et al. (1999), feelings towards party/ leader are alluded to in Newman and Sheth (1985), unity is briefly mentioned by Needham (2006), Scammell (1996) and Wring (1997) and

policy is well rehearsed in the extant literature (e.g. Baines et al., 2003; 2005; Ben-ur and Newman, 2010; Cwalina et al., 2004; 2010; Newman, 2002; Newman and Sheth, 1985). In addition, coverage of values is found in Baines et al. (2003; 2005) and Cwalina et al. (2010). Issues allied to personality self-perception can be discerned in Van Steenburg and Guzmán (2019) and Guzmán et al. (2015), and finally, risk is considered by O'Cass and Pecotich (2005). Despite the wide range and variability of factors which have been found to influence voting behavior, these have not been well tested in terms of their influence on party loyalty and switching behavior both generally, and in the case of individual political parties. Thus, this paper attempts to build a deeper understanding of the factors which drive loyalty and switching in specific political parties to address this gap in the literature. We therefore postulate:

H2a: The factors which influence loyalty vary between political parties;

H2b: The factors which influence switching behavior vary between political parties.

The literature highlights the importance of policy in voting decisions (e.g., Baines et al, 2005; Cwalina et al., 2010; Cwalina and Falkowski, 2018; Newman and Sheth, 1987; Schofield and Reeves, 2015). However, it also identifies other significant factors such as party leaders, partisan identity, values, image, feelings and events (e.g., Baines et al., 2005; Ben-ur and Newman, 2010; Cwalina et al., 2010). Furthermore, while Schofield and Reeves (2015) found policy issues to be a strong influence on voting behavior, they also found that the influence of policies varied by political party. Cwalina and Falkowski (2018) conducted a study of how voters

respond to messaging of negative policy decisions. They found that the communicative bundling, rather than separation, of such decisions can potentially mitigate dissatisfaction when voters perceive consistency between negative policy events. Brennan and Henneberg (2008) suggest that voter satisfaction with party values is linked to policy attributes, implementation and delivery. They imply a link between loyalty and policy dimensions, although this relationship is not empirically tested.

Cwalina et al. (2010, 353) build upon Newman and Sheth's (1985) work to argue: "issues and policies (refers to the personal beliefs of the voter about the candidate's stand on economic, social and foreign policy issues, which represent the rationale for the candidate's platform)". Ben-ur and Newman (2010, 523) stress, in particular, the centrality of economic policies when they state "political issues… represents the policies a candidate advocates and promises to enact if elected to office. This dimension captures a voter's rational considerations that normally would revolve around issues that people feel in their pocketbooks".

Newman (2002, 162) furthermore contends that political issues and policies can be "measured on a profile of benefits that the candidate advances in …[their] platform". Whilst Ormrod and Henneberg (2010, 114) argue that to:

> "target voters and the general voting public… expectations, needs and wants
> …are at the core of political marketing, as well as policy considerations… and
> thus such an orientation is expected to impact positively on all the behavioral
> constructs of [political marketing orientation]".

Results from earlier research found that voting behavior (i.e., both voting in consecutive elections and switching behavior) is inherently ideological or policy

related (e.g., de Vet et al., 2019; Schofield and Reeves, 2015). People generally vote for a political party because they perceive it to have issue competence and such issues / policies are salient with their own priorities, views and opinions (Bélanger and Meguid, 2008). Conversely, voters may defect because they feel 'pushed' by incongruent policy preferences, or 'pulled' by another party's programme (Polk and Kölln, 2017).

When set against mixed empirical evidence for leadership effects on voter choice and other variables such as party and candidate image, the primary importance of ideological and policy concerns come to the fore. This is especially so given the importance of both push and pull factors causing strategic and tactical voting from small to large parties in the 2015 UK general election. We therefore posit that:

H3: Policy issues have more influence on loyalty than other variables.

Methodology

Participants and measures

The sample for the study (n = 30,073) comprises a cross-section of voters from post-election wave 6 of the 2014-2018 British Election Study (BES) Internet Panel online survey conducted in May 2015 (Fieldhouse, et al., 2015). This includes voting behavioral data for the 2005, 2010 and 2015 UK general elections for the same individuals, thereby enabling the analysis of voting stability or change across the three elections. The sample characteristics are given in Table 1.

Table 1 near here

The study examines loyal voting and vote switching behavior relating to five political parties: Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, UKIP and the Green Party over the three UK General Elections: 2005, 2010 and 2015. It then identifies the statistically significant influences on loyal voter retention and switching behavior for each of the three main political parties. Fifty-two variables (Table 2), which have been found to be relevant predictors of voting behavior in previous research, were selected from the BES (2015) Panel data. These included: party identification, unity measures, like/dislike of the five parties and their leaders as of 2015, the ability of a party to handle the most important issue, agreement/disagreement about policies, left-right orientation of voters, voter values and opinions on equality, voter personality, and risk aversion.

Table 2 near here

The raw data on voting behavior in 2005, 2010 and 2015, by political party, for each of the 30,073 respondents was then used to compute three subgroups:

1. Loyal voters: voters who were loyal to the same political party in the 2005, 2010 and 2015 general elections.

2. Switchers: voters who were loyal to the same political party in 2005 and 2010 but who switched their allegiance in 2015.

3. New voters for each party in 2015, who had not been loyal to a different party in both 2005 and 2010.

These subgroups were computed for comparative purposes to facilitate the examination of party loyalty, switching behavior, new votes, and the identification of the statistically significant predictors of this voting behavior. Given that subgroup one was loyal across the three general elections, any significant predictors of this voting behavior represent the most critical loyalty variables. By comparison, subgroup two represents the previously 'most loyal' voters among those who defected in 2015 and who were arguably more difficult to switch compared with floating voters. The significant influences on their switching behavior are therefore key variables in achieving this change. The third subgroup of new voters who had no sustained allegiance to a different party in both 2005 and 2010 was computed to distinguish these voters from members of subgroup two.

Procedure

First, loyal voting for the five political parties (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Greens), and the comparison of loyal voting and switching behavior by party in 2005, 2010 and 2015 were analysed. Second, the switching behavior in 2015 for previously loyal voters in 2010 and 2005 was examined. We focus on the three main political parties (i.e., Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats) to identify the statistically significant influences on voting behavior. This focus is because of their large share of the votes compared with UKIP and Green Parties (Table 3). Moreover, the relatively small number of UKIP and Green party votes in the data set precluded the use of multivariate statistical analysis because of

19

the high ratio of independent variables to voters. For the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, the three nominal categories in the voting behavior outcome variable: loyal voting (subgroup one), vote switching (subgroup two) and new votes (subgroup three) and the use of continuous predictor variables from the BES dataset, enabled the use of multinomial logistic regression analysis. This procedure modelled the log odds of the behavioral outcomes as a linear combination of the independent variables. The data met the assumptions of the logistic regression model (see notes below Tables 5, 6 and 7). Given the focus of this paper on loyal voting and vote switching, only the comparative analyses of subgroups one (loyal voters) and two (switchers) is presented for the main political parties.

Results

Loyalty in the 2005, 2010 and 2015 UK general elections by party

Voting behavior for the five main political parties in the last three UK general elections is shown in Table 3. The columns show the votes in 2015 for each of the five political parties, while the rows show which of the five parties the voters in 2015 previously voted for in 2010 and 2005. This data provides a measure of loyalty and an insight into switching behavior by party over time. From the 8549 total Conservative votes in 2015, 71.1% voted Conservative in 2010 and 56.4% in 2005. For Labour, from the 8787 votes cast in 2015, 56.5% voted for the party in 2010 and 55.9% in 2005. From the 2405 Liberal Democrat votes in 2015, 62.5% voted for them in 2010 and 44.6% in 2005. By comparison from the 3248 UKIP votes in 2015, only 16.1% voted UKIP in 2010 and 8.2% in 2005. For the Green Party, with 1419 total votes in 2015, the loyalty figures are 9.7% for 2010 and 7.3% for 2005. Overall, this indicates

20

that the majority of votes for the Conservatives and Labour in 2015 were from loyal people who voted for them in both 2010 and 2005. While the Liberal Democrat vote in 2015 derived mainly from those who voted for the party in 2010, only 44.6% had voted for them in 2005. By comparison, the majority of UKIP and Green Party votes in 2015 were not from loyal voters, but from people who had switched from other parties in 2015. As such, Hypothesis 1a is supported (i.e., The proportion of loyal voters in 2015 retained from previous UK elections (2005 and 2010) is higher in the Conservative and Labour parties compared with the Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Green parties).

Table 3 near here

The last section of Table 3 shows the change in the number of loyal votes over time by comparing loyal votes in 2010 and 2015 with those in 2005 and 2010. The Conservatives and Labour retained more of their loyal voters from both 2010 and 2005 compared with other parties. However, it is interesting that the number of loyal votes for the Conservative, UKIP and Green parties increased from 2010 to 2015 (compared with 2005 to 2010) while decreasing for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and overall. Moreover, it is notable that the proportion of loyal votes (relative to total votes in each UK general election) increased over time for the Conservatives from 65.7% (2005 to 2010) to 71.1% (2010 to 2015). For the Liberal Democrats, the proportion of loyal votes increased from 43.6% (2005 to 2010) to 62.5% (2010 to 2015), despite a 60.9% decline in overall votes for the party between 2010 and 2015. By comparison, the proportion of loyal votes decreased for Labour from 72.2% (2005 to 2010) to 56.5% (2010 to 2015). They also decreased for UKIP from 24.1% (2005

21

to 2010) to 16.1% (2010 to 2015), for the Greens from 27.9% (2005 to 2010) to 9.7% (2010 to 2015) and slightly overall from 59.7% (2005 to 2010) to 54.1% (2010 to 2015). The results indicate that loyalty (as measured by votes in 2010 rather than earlier in 2005) is a better predictor of votes in 2015. The significant reduction in Labour loyalty over this period relative to Conservative loyalty, despite the higher number of overall votes for the former in 2015, is also notable. The Conservatives had the largest number and proportion of loyal voters, and loyalty to the party increased over time. UKIP and Green Party loyalty also increased as the popularity of both parties developed.

Switching behavior in 2015 by party

Table 3 also shows the key features of vote switching behavior in 2015. From the voters who switched to the Conservative party in 2015, 5.5% previously voted Labour in 2010 and 10.2% in 2005, whereas 9.9% previously voted Liberal Democrat in 2010 and 8.4% in 2005. By comparison, 5.4% of Labour voters in 2015 previously voted Conservative in 2010 and 3.6% in 2005, whereas 20.9% voted Liberal Democrat in 2010 and 11.6% in 2005. From the Liberal Democrat voters in 2015, 13.2% voted Conservative in 2010 and 10.3% in 2005, while 8.5% voted Labour in 2010 and 15.4% in 2005.

UKIP and Green Party vote switching behavior provides an interesting comparison. From the UKIP votes in 2015, 35.8% voted Conservative in 2010 and 30% in 2005, 10.9% voted Labour in 2010 and 20.6% in 2005, and 15.7% voted Liberal Democrat in 2010 and 10.8% in 2005. This indicates that UKIP votes in 2015 were mainly derived from disaffected Conservative voters, but also from dissatisfied Labour and

Liberal Democrat voters. By comparison, from the Green party votes in 2015, 43.4% voted Liberal Democrat in 2010 and 25.1% in 2005, while 14.3% voted Labour in 2010 and 19.2% in 2005. This shows that Green Party votes in 2015 were mainly from disgruntled Liberal Democrat and Labour voters.

The switching behavior in 2015 from previously loyal voters in 2010 and 2005 by party is shown in Table 4. The columns show the parties which received the switched votes in 2015, and each row shows the parties from which the previously loyal votes in 2010 and 2005 were switched from. It is interesting that 62.22% of previously loyal Liberal Democrat voters and 47.06% of previously loyal Green voters switched in 2015. Moreover, the figure for the Liberal Democrats represents 69.44% of their total votes in 2015, compared with only 3.38% for the Greens. The previously loyal Liberal Democrat and Green party voter switching in 2015 is substantially higher than for UKIP (22.66%), Labour (22.07%) and the Conservatives (20.69%). Nevertheless, given the slightly higher figure for UKIP compared with Labour, H1b is supported (i.e. The proportion of previously loyal voters (in 2005 and 2010) who switched in 2015 is lower in the Conservative and Labour parties compared with the Liberal Democrats, UKIP and Green parties).

Table 4 near here

Voters who had previously been loyal to the Conservative party switched mainly to UKIP (60.1%) in 2015, and to a lesser extent to both Labour (15.3%) and the Liberal Democrats (13.2%). By comparison, previously Labour loyal voters switched to a range of parties, but interestingly most switched to either the Conservatives (22.9%)

or UKIP (21.5%). Similarly, voters who were loyal to the Liberal Democrats in 2010 and 2005 switched to a range of parties, with Labour (39.9%), Conservatives (19.5%) and Greens (16.2%) as the main beneficiaries. Voters who had previously been loyal to UKIP mainly switched to the Conservatives (45.7%) or to Labour (21.7%) in 2015, while previously loyal Green voters switched to a range of parties, but mainly to Labour (41.7%). Overall, UKIP (27.9%), Labour (21.6%) and, to a lesser extent, the Conservatives (15.0%) received most of the switched votes in 2015 from those who were previously loyal to other parties.

Factors influencing party loyalty

The probability associated with loyal voter retention and switching behavior relating to the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in 2015 across a range of independent variables was examined using multinomial logistic regression. For each party, loyal voters in 2015, 2010 and 2005 were used as the reference group, with those who voted for the party in 2005 and 2010 but switched in 2015 as the comparison group.

Factors influencing Conservative Party loyalty

The results for the Conservative Party (Table 5) show that the model outperforms the null model, giving improved prediction accuracies for the two subgroups, but particularly for the loyal votes (93.4%). The table displays the issues which are significant for switching from the Conservatives after being loyal to the party in 2005 and 2010, with loyal voters (voting in 2015, 2010 and 2005) as the reference group. From the 52 variables examined (Table 2), six negative and seven positive influences on switching behavior reached statistical significance. The β statistics represent the

multinomial logit estimates for the impact of each variable on switching behavior relative to loyalty, i.e., which variables distinguish between loyal and switching voters. For a one unit improvement in voter perceptions about the issues with negative β values, the log-odds of switching in 2015 (while holding all other variables in the model constant) decrease by 0.38 units for Conservative Party unity; by 0.37 units for Like the Conservative Party leader; by 0.28 units for Policy re: deficit reduction; by 0.16 units for Like the Conservative Party; by 0.15 units for Conservative handling of the most important issue; and by 0.10 units for Policy re: zero contract hours. These are the key issues for retaining loyal voters. It is interesting that only two are specific policy issues, one of which is the least influential variable, and one relates to the party's handling of the most important issue. The other three are concerned with perceptions of the party and its leader. Notably, perceived party unity and positive feelings about the Conservative Party leader have the most influence on party loyalty.

Table 5 near here

Factors influencing switching from the Conservative Party

For a one unit increase in voter perceptions about the issues with positive β values, the log-odds of switching in 2015 relative to remaining loyal increase by 0.22 units for Policy re: cuts in public spending; by 0.20 units for UKIP unity; by 0.19 units for Like the UKIP leader; by 0.14 units for Like UKIP; by 0.12 units for Liberal Democrat handling of the most important issue; by 0.09 units for UKIP handling of the most important issue; and by 0.08 units for Like the Labour Party leader. Negative perceptions of policy on public spending cuts have the highest influence on switching behavior. Additionally, perceived unity of another party (UKIP), positive feelings about

25

other party leaders (UKIP and Labour), liking UKIP, and the perceived credibility of other parties (Liberal Democrat and UKIP) in handling the most important issue are also significant influences on switching. Moreover, these results also indicate why most of the formerly loyal Conservative voters who switched in 2015 voted UKIP and to a lesser extent, Labour and Liberal Democrat (Table 4). It is interesting that overall, only three of the 13 predictors relate to specific policies. While policies on deficit reduction and, to a lesser extent, zero-hour contracts potentially reduced switching and were key to retaining loyal voters, policy on public spending cuts probably increased switching among formerly loyal voters. However, our analysis shows that the majority of the most influential predictors relate to perceived party unity and party and/or leader likes/dislikes.

Factors influencing Labour Party loyalty

The results for Labour loyalty (Table 6) show that the model outperformed the null model, giving improved prediction accuracies for all three subgroups (notably 91.9% for the loyal votes). The table shows the variables which were significant for voters switching from Labour after being loyal in the two previous general elections (with loyal voters as the reference group). Seven variables have negative β values and were significant in reducing switching in 2015 and are therefore critical for Labour Party loyalty. The most important influences among this group were: party identification (0.36), Labour Party unity (0.34) and positive perceptions of both the Labour Party leader (0.31) and the party (0.26). Party unity and positive feelings about the party leader were also important for reducing switching and maintaining loyalty. Furthermore, it is notable that party identification (which was not statistically significant for Conservative loyalty) is the most critical factor for Labour. Only one

policy issue is significant, and it has the lowest impact (0.11) of all the significant influences on loyalty. Additionally, Labour's perceived ability to handle the most important issue is also one of the least important influences when compared with factors such as party identification, party unity and liking of both the party leader and the party.

Table 6 near here

Factors influencing switching from the Labour Party

Fifteen variables (with positive β values) had a significant influence on formerly loyal Labour voters switching in 2015. This is a broader range of issues (including reference to Conservative, Liberal Democrat, UKIP and Green parties and their leaders) when compared with those which influenced switching from the Conservative Party. It also explains why a significant number of formerly loyal Labour voters switched to each of the main parties (Table 4). Only one positive predictor relates to policy, and as such, only two of the 22 significant predictors are policy issues. While one re: measures to protect the environment (0.11) is the least influential restraint on loyal vote switching from Labour, the other re: immigration level (0.21) is the second most important influence on switching. However, as was the case with Conservative switching, most of the predictors relate to likes/dislikes, together with a range of other variables including other party unity, the perceived ability of other parties to handle the most important issue, left/right values and equal opportunities for ethnic minorities.

Factors influencing Liberal Democrat Party loyalty

Table 7 shows the results for Liberal Democrat loyalty and switching behavior. It should be noted that only 51.1% of loyal votes were classified by the model, while

84.4% of switched votes were classified. This probably results from the large numbers of formerly loyal Liberal Democrat voters who switched in 2015. There are fewer statistically significant predictors of loyalty compared with the Conservative and Labour parties. Five variables are significant in reducing switching relative to loyal votes in 2015; the most influential relate to party unity (0.29) and liking both the Liberal Democrat leader (0.26) and the party (0.19). These variables are similar to those which reduce switching and maintain loyalty in the Conservative and Labour parties, with the exception of party identification, which is crucial for Labour loyalty. Two policy issues re: immigration (0.15) and re: deficit reduction (0.14) are significant; however, they have the lowest impact of all the negative influences on switching.

Table 7 near here

Factors influencing switching from the Liberal Democrat Party

Six variables significantly increased switching from the Liberal Democrats in 2015. Perceived Conservative Party unity (0.23) and, to a lesser extent, UKIP unity (0.14) were the main issues. Liking the UKIP and Green Party leaders and liking both the Labour and Green Parties were weaker influences. As with switching from the Labour party, this explains the large number of formerly loyal Liberal Democrat voters who switched to each of the main parties (Table 4). Notably, no specific policy issues are significant positive predictors of switching compared with three for the Conservatives, and two for Labour. Overall, most of the significant switching predictors relate to likes/dislikes and to a lesser extent with unity/disunity while policy has a much weaker influence.

In summary, our analysis shows that despite some similarities, the factors which influence both loyalty and switching behavior vary between the political parties, supporting Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 2b, respectively. However, the results show that policy issues have less influence on loyalty than other variables. As such, Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study is differentiated from previous research because of its comprehensive examination of political party loyalty and vote switching in the 2015 UK general election with reference to previously loyal voting behavior in 2005 and 2010. The focus on the 2015 general election is important because it represents a realignment in UK politics: the end of the three-party domination of Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, and the rise of UKIP, the SNP and the Greens. As such, the comparison of loyal voting with switching behavior of previously loyal voters for the main political parties has highlighted key issues which make an important contribution to the political marketing literature and voter behavior research.

In relation to loyal voting and switching by previously loyal voters among individual political parties in 2015, the majority of votes for the Conservatives and Labour were from voters who had been loyal from 2005, with the highest proportion in the Conservative party votes. The majority of Liberal Democrat voters had been loyal from 2010 but only 43.6% from 2005, and only a minority of UKIP and Green voters in 2015 were loyal. By comparison, relatively large numbers of formerly loyal

Conservative, Labour and particularly Liberal Democrat voters defected in 2015 (in contrast to the small numbers of UKIP and Green switchers). Meanwhile, UKIP, Labour and to a lesser extent, the Conservatives received most of the votes from those who were previously loyal to other parties. The findings have highlighted the statistically significant influences on this loyal voting and switching behavior for the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, which vary by type and strength of impact.

For the Conservatives, while policies were relatively more important for reducing switching and retaining loyalty compared with the other parties, other issues such as perceived party unity and positive feelings about the party and its leader were more influential. The main weakness driving switching behavior was Conservative policy on public spending cuts, whereas the main external threat to loyalty was from positive perceptions of other parties, notably UKIP unity and liking both UKIP and its leader. For Labour, as with the Conservatives, perceived party unity and positive feelings about the party and its leader were key strengths for reducing switching. However, the most important influence on loyalty was party identification. The key internal weaknesses regarding switching behavior were Labour Party policy on immigration and left-right values relating to ordinary people getting their fair share. Interestingly, the external threats to Labour loyalty were more wide-ranging than for the other two parties, but the main issues relate to perceived Conservative, UKIP and Liberal Democrat party unity. For the Liberal Democrats, the primary strengths for retaining voter loyalty were the positive perceptions of the party's unity, its leader and the party in general, with party policy on immigration and deficit reduction as secondary

elements. While there were no particular weaknesses relating to switching behavior, the key threats to loyalty included perceived Conservative and UKIP unity.

Contribution

Overall, the findings show that policies relating primarily to economic factors, secondarily to immigration and, to a lesser extent, to environmental issues were significant influences on voter loyalty/disloyalty. However, policy issues had a less critical impact on loyalty in all three of the main parties compared with other variables, notably perceived party unity and liking both the party and its leader, and party identification in the case of Labour. The results show that feelings about both the parties and their leaders had high predictive utility in influencing voter loyalty and switching behavior. They also highlight the criticality of unity in influencing voting behavior. Moreover, regarding the practical value of the findings, political parties need to market themselves effectively to gain votes, minimize post-voting dissonance and promote brand loyalty. Therefore, public perceptions of party performance on the variables which are significant influences on loyalty and switching behavior need to be monitored. Additionally, party performance on these key issues and communication about improvements in these areas need to be managed effectively to potentially increase voter loyalty.

The study makes several other contributions. First, it uses a large secondary data set with details of voter behavior over three successive UK general elections to examine party loyalty. This approach to researching loyalty has not previously been undertaken in political marketing research. The study therefore contributes to knowledge by empirically examining loyalty, which itself is an under-researched subject in the

context of political marketing research. In doing so, it adds to research over the last two decades that uses a variety of new models to predict and understand voter behavior (e.g., Baines et al., 2003; 2005; 2011; Ben-ur and Newman, 2010; Cwalina et al., 2004; 2010; French and Smith, 2010; Newman, 2007; O'Cass, 2002; O'Cass and Nataraajan, 2003). The study also demonstrates how political science data can be used effectively in consumer behavior studies and provides a theoretically grounded method for predicting brand loyalty and switching behavior. Our study also shows that understanding the brand loyalty construct in the context of voting is complex and multi-faceted.

Specifically, the study contributes to knowledge in that it identifies key factors for retaining loyal voters and reducing vote switching. The findings show that feelings about both the parties and their leaders have high predictive utility in influencing voter loyalty. This represents an important contribution, given that previous research has neglected the link between feelings towards a party and its leader and loyalty. It also highlights the importance of emotion in voter decision making, which has not hitherto been linked to the brand loyalty construct. Moreover, previous political marketing research has also neglected the importance of party unity. As such, this study makes a further theoretical contribution by moving beyond existing political marketing research which occasionally and briefly mentions unity or disunity (e.g., Needham, 2006; Scammell, 1996; Wring, 1997), to demonstrate the predictive utility of unity as a determinant of voter loyalty.

The paper also further contributes to knowledge about the primacy of policy in voter loyalty (Baines et al., 2005; Cwalina et al., 2010). It offers an empirical test of

Brennan and Henneberg's (2008) conceptual argument of a link between policy and loyalty across multiple elections in the UK. The findings show that policies relating to economic factors, immigration and environmental issues were influential in voter loyalty/disloyalty. This compliments and extends the research of Schofield and Reeves (2015), which identified the predictive utility of these policy areas in relation to satisfaction, in that the results confirm their value in predicting loyalty. Nevertheless, the findings also show that, overall, policy issues have less influence on loyalty than perceived party unity, party identification and positive feelings about a party and its leader. The study also shows that smaller parties are likely to be more negatively impacted by the effects of strategic and tactical voting than larger parties. Hence this paper offers a new methodological approach to study what has been termed "epistemic value" in relation to switching behavior (Ben-Ur and Newman, 2010; Cwalina et al., 2004; 2010; Newman and Sheth, 1985; 1987).

This study also extends brand loyalty/ disloyalty research by demonstrating the utility of the loyalty construct in political marketing. Much existing political marketing research has noted the importance of loyalty at a conceptual level but has not empirically demonstrated its predictive power (e.g., Brennan and Henneberg, 2008; Butler and Collins, 1994; Dermody and Scullion, 2000; Needham, 2006). Hence, this paper makes a significant contribution, in that it is one of the few political marketing studies which examines loyalty empirically, and the only one to examine loyalty across multiple elections. In essence, this paper empirically tests Smith and Spotswood's (2013, 190) assertion that "loyalty relates to the extent that voters repeat purchase (vote for) the same party/ leader over time".

Management implications

We propose the following actionable managerial implications:

(i) Political parties would benefit from greater use of polling to identify which factors lead to loyalty and switching in and between elections, to develop an action learning method to boost forthcoming electoral prospects.

(ii) Perceptions of party leader image should be measured to encourage a self-reflective leadership style to maximise positive outcomes.

(iii) The centrality of party unity and its importance to electoral performance should be reinforced. The challenge is to balance this with internal party democracy and at times, media (over)reporting of party disunity.

(iv) The factors which serve parties well in maintaining and enhancing loyalty should be communicated internally to reinforce key messages to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of national and local campaigning activities.

(v) Similarly, increasing awareness of the factors which are likely to influence vote switching could avoid and/or mitigate ineffective or damaging electoral campaigning effects, and competitor campaigning actions.

(vi) The factors which influence competitor loyalty and vulnerability should also inform the effectiveness and efficiency of competitor-oriented campaigning.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

While the study makes an important theoretical contribution to the political marketing literature, its limitations are acknowledged. Most of these limitations stem from the nature of the BES (2015) secondary data within the context of this study. First, the study focused on five political parties in the UK, but the analysis of factors influencing loyalty and switching behavior was restricted to the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties because of the relatively low numbers of votes for the UKIP and Green parties in the BES data set. Second, while the BES employs weighting to correct for underrepresentation in the survey resulting from panel attrition, the relatively low numbers in certain demographic sub-categories e.g., age, income and ethnicity may potentially bias the analysis. Future research should therefore compare BES results with other data sources and check for heterogeneity in loyal voting and switching behavior based on voter socio-demographics. Third, in using the BES data we were constrained by externally set questions, especially when measuring values. For example, predictor variable limitations include: 'values: for some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence', when the death penalty is not used in the UK for punishment of any crime. In addition, regarding 'left-right values: there is one law for the rich and one for the poor', clearly there is only one legal system irrespective of social class. While such value measures are included in the original BES data set to measure individual voter attitudes and not voter reactions to specific agendas of political parties, future research could adapt the variables and study voter attitudes based on more specific agendas as espoused by the main political parties; this data could be obtained initially through qualitative analysis of political party policy documents. Fourth, there may be factors influencing individual party loyalty depending on the position of the party during a particular election e.g., strength of opposition and upcoming new challengers,

yet the BES data set does not have specific variables to test this argument. Future research could examine the influence of these variables together with the mediating/indirect effects of variables given that this study focused on their direct effects. Fifth, given the study's focus on loyalty and switching, and the manuscript word limitation, new voters for political parties who had not been loyal to another party in both 2005 and 2010 were excluded from the analysis. Future research should therefore identify the statistically significant predictors of new votes.

Given the nature of the first past the post constituency-based voting system in the UK, predictors of loyalty and switching behavior may be distorted by strategic or tactical voting. Nonetheless, the study has demonstrated the importance of maintaining loyalty and has identified significant issues both in general and by party. It therefore provides a foundation for future studies in this area.

To address some of the aforementioned limitations and to advance knowledge we posit the following testable future research questions:

(i)   Which factors continue to be significant predictors of loyalty and switching behavior by party in the 2019 and 2024 UK elections? Has the size of their impact changed? What new factors have emerged?

(ii)   What are the significant predictors of new votes in comparison to those for loyal and switched votes for the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in 2019 and 2024?

(iii)   Using a larger sample of votes for smaller parties, what are the significant predictors of their loyal, switched and new votes in comparison with those for the three main political parties in 2019 and 2024?

(iv)   What are the bases of loyalty and switching at different electoral scales, democratic and socio-demographic contexts e.g., local elections, local political contests, proportional based electoral systems, domestically and internationally, or other countries' national elections?

(v)   This study identified party unity as a key issue, which has been neglected in most previous research. What are the electoral and/or internal party perceptions and understanding of party unity and how is this balanced with the needs of internal party democracy?

Declaration of Interests

There are no declarations of interest to be made by the authors of this paper.

Data Availability Statement

The raw data analyzed in this study is by Fieldhouse, E., J. Green, G. Evans, H. Schmitt, C. van der Eijk. 2015 "*British Election Study Internet Panel Wave 6*", http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data-objects/panel-study-data/page/3/

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Table 1: Study sample characteristics

Category	n	%	Category	n	%
Gender			**Ethnicity**		
Male	14915	49.7	White British	27024	90.0
Female	15112	50.3	Any other white background	1251	4.2
			White and Black Caribbean	65	0.2
Age			White and Black African	28	0.1
18-25	2906	9.7	White and Asian	94	0.3
26-35	3549	11.8	Any other mixed background	123	0.4
36-45	4328	14.4	Indian	213	0.7
46-55	5613	18.7	Pakistani	98	0.3
56-65	7597	25.3	Bangladeshi	47	0.2
66+	5835	19.4	Any other Asian background	69	0.2
			Black Caribbean	83	0.3
Marital Status			Black African	102	0.3
Married	15661	52.2	Any other black background	22	0.1
Living with Partner	3399	11.3	Chinese	137	0.5
Separated (after marriage)	516	1.7	Other ethnic group	214	0.7
Divorced	2189	7.3	Prefer not to say	446	1.5
Widowed	1162	3.9			
Single (never married)	6818	22.7	**Age at Completion of Formal Education**		
Civil Partnership	282	0.9	15 or under	3452	11.5
			16	6642	22.2
Region			17-18	6198	20.7
East of England	2445	8.1	19	1376	4.6
East Midlands	1845	6.1	20+	10437	34.9
London	3668	12.2	Still at school/Full time student	1627	5.4
North East	1118	3.7	Can't remember	198	0.7
North West	2680	8.9			
Scotland	5355	17.8	**Income - Gross Household**		
South East	3483	11.6	Under £5,000 per year	684	2.3
South West	2230	7.4	£5,000 to £9,999 per year	1542	5.2
Wales	2898	9.7	£10,000 to £14,999 per year	2455	8.2

West Midlands	2055	6.8		£15,000 to £19,999 per year	2352	7.9
Yorkshire & Humberside	2250	7.5		£20,000 to £24,999 per year	2467	8.2
				£25,000 to £29,999 per year	2299	7.7
Family Income				£30,000 to £34,999 per year	1988	6.6
<£20	245	31.7		£35,000 to £39,999 per year	1681	5.6
£21-£30	159	20.6		£40,000 to £44,999 per year	1401	4.7
£31-£40	138	17.9		£45,000 to £49,999 per year	1170	3.9
£41-£50	94	12.2		£50,000 to £59,999 per year	1463	4.9
£51-£60	49	6.4		£60,000 to £69,999 per year	1033	3.4
£61-£70	25	3.2		£70,000 to £99,999 per year	1238	4.1
£70+	61	7.9		£100,000 to £149,999 per year	477	1.6
				£150,000 and over	202	0.7
Own or Rent Home				Prefer not to answer	5636	18.8
Own – outright	11182	37.2		Don't know	1850	6.2
Own – with a mortgage	8793	29.3		Missing	89	0.3
Own (part-own) through shared ownership	195	0.6				
Rent – from a private landlord	3846	12.8				
Rent – from local authority	1621	5.4				
Live with family or friends - pay rent	1038	3.5				
Live with family or friends - rent free	1165	3.9				
Other	494	1.6				
Missing	1693	5.6				

Table 2: Predictors of voting behavior identified in previous research

_____

Party identification: 'Not very strong' (1) - 'Very strong' (3)
Like/dislike Conservative Party Leader 2015: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike Labour Party Leader 2015: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike Liberal Democrat Party Leader 2015: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike UKIP Party Leader 2015: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike Green Party Leader 2015: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike Conservatives: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike Labour: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike Liberal Democrats: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike UKIP: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Like/dislike Green Party: 'Strongly dislike' (0) - 'Strongly like' (10)
Conservative Party handling of the most important issue: Very badly (0) - Very well (10)
Labour Party handling of the most important issue: Very badly (0) - Very well (10)
Liberal Democrat Party handling of the most important issue: Very badly (0) - Very well (10)
UKIP handling of the most important issue: Very badly (0) - Very well (10)
Green Party handling of the most important issue: Very badly (0) - Very well (10)
Conservative Party unity: 'Very divided' (1) - 'Very united' (5)
Labour Party unity: 'Very divided' (1) - 'Very united' (5)
Liberal Democrat Party unity: 'Very divided' (1) – 'Very united' (5)
UKIP unity: 'Very divided' (1) - 'Very united' (5)
Green Party unity: 'Very divided' (1) – 'Very united' (5)
Policy - cuts to public spending in general: 'Not gone nearly far enough' (1) - 'Gone much too far' (5)
Policy - cuts to local services in my area: 'Not gone nearly far enough' (1) - 'Gone much too far' (5)
Policy - cuts to NHS spending/ services: 'Not gone nearly far enough' (1) - 'Gone much too far' (5)
Policy - private companies running public services: 'Not gone nearly far enough' (1) - 'Gone much too far' (5)
Policy - measures to protect the environment: 'Not gone nearly far enough' (1) - 'Gone much too far' (5)
Policy - increases in tuition fees for university students: 'Not gone nearly far enough' (1) - 'Gone much too far' (5)
Policy - immigration level increase/decrease: 'Should decrease a lot' (1) - 'Should increase a lot' (5)
Policy - deficit reduction necessary/unnecessary: 'It is completely unnecessary' (1) - 'It is completely necessary' (4)
Policy - reduce deficit by taxation/spending cuts: 'Only by increasing taxes' (1) - 'Only by cutting spending' (5)
Policy - employers should be allowed to hire workers on zero-hour contracts: 'Should definitely be illegal' (1) - 'Should definitely be legal' (4)
Policy - European integration: 'Unification has already gone too far' (0) - 'Unification should be pushed further' (10)

Policy – redistribution: Government should try to make incomes equal (0) - Government should be less concerned about equal incomes (10)

Left-right value - Government should redistribute incomes: 'Strongly disagree' (1) - 'Strongly agree' (5)

Left-right values - big business takes advantage of ordinary people: 'Strongly disagree' (1) - 'Strongly agree' (5)

Left-right values - ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth: 'Strongly disagree' (1) - 'Strongly agree' (5)

Left-right values - there is one law for the rich and one for the poor: 'Strongly disagree' (1) 'Strongly agree' (5)

Left-right values - management will always try to get the better of employees: 'Strongly disagree' (1) - 'Strongly agree' (5)

Values - young people today don't have enough respect for traditional British values: 'Strongly disagree' (1) 'Strongly agree' (5)

Values - for some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence: 'Strongly disagree' (1) 'Strongly agree' (5)

Values - schools should teach children to obey authority: 'Strongly disagree' (1) 'Strongly agree' (5)

Values - censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards: 'Strongly disagree' (1) 'Strongly agree' (5)

Values - people who break the law should be given stiffer sentences: 'Strongly disagree' (1) 'Strongly agree' (5)

Equal opportunities for ethnic minorities: 'Gone much too far' (1) - 'Not gone nearly far enough' (7)

Equal opportunities for women: 'Gone much too far' (1) - 'Not gone nearly far enough' (7)

Equal opportunities for gays and lesbians ('Gone much too far' (1) - 'Not gone nearly far enough' (7)

Personality self-perception: agreeableness (10 item personality inventory – TIPI)

Personality self-perception: conscientiousness (10 item personality inventory – TIPI)

Personality self-perception: extraversion (10 item personality inventory – TIPI)

Personality self-perception: neuroticism (10 item personality inventory – TIPI)

Personality self-perception: openness (10 item personality inventory – TIPI)

Risk aversion: generally speaking, how willing are you to take risks? 'Very unwilling' (1) – 'Very willing' (7)

Source: Post-election wave 6 of the 2014-2017 British Election Study (BES) Internet Panel online survey 2015 - http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data-objects/panel-study-data/

Table 3: Party loyalty: Comparison of loyal voting and switching behavior by party in 2005, 2010 and 2015

Previous Votes in 2010 & 2005\		Con (2015) n (%)	Lab (2015) n (%)	LibDem (2015) n (%)	UKIP (2015) n (%)	Green (2015) n (%)	Total
		Votes For Each Party in 2015:					
Conservative	**2010**	**6081 (71.1)**	472 (5.4)	317 (13.2)	1164 (35.8)	93 (6.5)	8127
	2005	**4819 (56.4)**	320 (3.6)	249 (10.3)	974 (30.0)	65 (4.6)	6427
Labour	**2010**	466 (5.5)	**4964 (56.5)**	205 (8.5)	354 (10.9)	203 (14.3)	6192
	2005	870 (10.2)	**4913 (55.9)**	370 (15.4)	671 (20.6)	273 (19.2)	7097
LibDem	**2010**	846 (9.9)	1843 (20.9)	**1503 (62.5)**	510 (15.7)	616 (43.4)	5318
	2005	714 (8.4)	1024 (11.6)	**1072 (44.6)**	350 (10.8)	356 (25.1)	3516
UKIP	**2010**	134 (1.6)	77 (0.9)	20 (0.8)	**523 (16.1)**	20 (1.4)	774
	2005	120 (1.4)	46 (0.5)	16 (0.7)	**266 (8.2)**	10 (0.7)	458
Green	**2010**	33 (0.4)	92 (1.0)	26 (1.1)	20 (0.6)	**138 (9.7)**	309
	2005	46 (0.5)	121 (1.4)	32 (1.3)	30 (0.9)	**104 (7.3)**	333
Did Not Vote	**2015**	-	-	-	-	-	2256
	2010	496 (5.8)	670 (7.6)	167 (6.9)	316 (9.7)	145 (10.2)	1794
	2005	680 (7.9)	698 (7.9)	191 (7.9)	406 (12.5)	132 (9.3)	2107
Total Votes*	**2015**	**8549**	**8787**	**2405**	**3248**	**1419**	**24408**
	2010	8604	7062	6160	844	366	23036
Loyalty (2010 to 2015)		**6081 (71.1)**	**4964 (56.5)**	**1503 (62.5)**	**523 (16.1)**	**138 (9.7)**	**13203 (54.1)**
Loyalty (2005 to 2010)		**5654 (65.7)**	**5101 (72.2)**	**2684 (43.6)**	**203 (24.1)**	**102 (27.9)**	**13744 (59.7)**

Notes: Con = Conservative Party; Lab = Labour Party; LibDem = Liberal Democrat Party; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; Green = Green Party.

*Includes votes from people who previously voted for other political parties in 2010 and 2005.

Table 4: Switching behavior in 2015 for previously loyal voters in 2010 and 2005

Switched From\	Con (2015) n (%)	Lab (2015) n (%)	LibDem (2015) n (%)	UKIP (2015) n (%)	Green (2015) n (%)	Other (2015) n (%)	Don't Know n (%)	Total n (%)	Party Loyalty*	[1] (%)	[2] (%)
					Switched To:						
Conservative	-	179 (15.3)	154 (13.2)	703 (60.1)	32 9 (2.7)	83 (7.1)	19 (1.6)	1170 (28.8)	5654	13.69	20.69
Labour	258 (22.9)	-	122 (10.8)	242 (21.5)	114 (10.2)	390 (34.6)	-	1126 (27.7)	5101	12.81	22.07
LibDem	325 (19.5)	666 (39.9)	-	183 (10.9)	271 (16.2)	225 (13.5)	-	1670 (41.2)	2684	69.44	62.22
UKIP	2 (45.7)	10 (21.7)	4 (8.7)	-	3 (6.5)	8 (17.4)	-	46 (1.1)	203	1.42	22.66
Green	7 (14.6)	20 (41.7)	9 (18.8)	3 (6.3)	-	9 (18.7)	-	48 (1.2)	102	3.38	47.06
Total	611 (15.0)	875 (21.6)	289 (7.1)	1131 (27.9)	420 (10.3)	715 (17.6)	19 (0.5)	4060 (100)	13744	16.63	29.54

Notes: Con = Conservative Party; Lab = Labour Party; LibDem = Liberal Democrat Party; UKIP = United Kingdom Independence Party; Green = Green Party.

Party Loyalty* = Voters who were loyal to the party in 2005 and 2010 (before switching); 1 = % of total votes by party in 2015; 2 = % of switchers previously loyal to the party in 2005 and 2010.

Table 5: Predictors of Conservative Party loyalty and switching behavior

1. Classification of votes:

	n	Predicted	%	Null %
Voted Conservative in 2015, 2010 & 2005	4364	4078	93.4	65.8
Voted Conservative in 2005 & 2010 & Switched in 2015	1170	496	42.4	17.6
Voted Conservative in 2015*	1097	301	27.4	16.5

2. Variables Influencing Party Loyalty: (Reference Group: Voted for the Conservative Party in 2015, 2010 & 2005)

	β	SE	Wald	*p*	*Exp* β	C.I. (95%)
Comparison Group: Voted for the Conservative Party in 2005 & 2010 & Switched in 2015						
Conservative Party unity	-0.38	0.06	38.50	<0.001	0.69	0.62 - 0.77
Like Conservative Party Leader	-0.37	0.02	242.28	<0.001	0.69	0.66 - 0.72
Policy re: deficit reduction	-0.28	0.07	18.23	<0.001	0.75	0.66 - 0.86
Like Conservative Party	-0.16	0.03	24.84	<0.001	0.85	0.80 - 0.91
Conservative handling most important issue	-0.15	0.04	15.75	<0.001	0.86	0.80 - 0.93
Policy: zero-hour contracts	-0.10	0.04	6.78	0.009	0.91	0.84 - 0.98
Policy re: cuts in public spending	0.22	0.07	9.78	0.002	1.24	1.08 - 1.42
UKIP unity	0.20	0.05	16.31	<0.001	1.22	1.11 - 1.35
Like UKIP Party Leader	0.19	0.02	100.80	<0.001	1.20	1.16 - 1.25
Like UKIP	0.14	0.03	26.83	<0.001	1.15	1.09 - 1.21
LibDem handling most important issue	0.12	0.05	5.31	0.021	1.12	1.02 - 1.24
UKIP handling most important issue	0.09	0.03	10.24	0.001	1.10	1.04 - 1.16
Like Labour Party Leader	0.08	0.03	11.84	0.001	1.10	1.05 - 1.14

Notes: Assumptions of the multinomial logistic regression model were met: nominal DV with mutually exclusive categories (loyal votes, switched votes from previously loyal voters, new votes from those who had not been loyal to a different party in 2005 and 2010); continuous IVs; independence of observations. Diagnostic tests re: multicollinearity (VIF values: 1.24 - 8.42; tolerance statistics: 0.13 - 9.21); linearity between the continuous IVs and the logit transformation of the DV: no significant interaction terms (p>0.05); outliers/leverage: observations with residuals >3 removed, Cook's distance < 0.5. Maximum Likelihood logit model: final -2LL: 8636.56; χ2 = 3021.65; df = 106; p <0.001. Goodness-of-fit: χ2= 15169.80; df = 13154; p <0.001. Nagelkerke: 0.44; Cox & Snell: 0.36. Durbin-Watson statistic: 1.54. * new voters who had not been loyal to a different party in 2005 and 2010. An *Exp* β (odds ratio) >1 (<1)

indicates that the risk of the outcome falling in the comparison group relative to the risk of the outcome falling in the reference group increases (decreases) as the variable increases. For all variables, the confidence intervals indicate that the relationship between the dependent and independent variables in this sample is true of the voting population.

Table 6: Predictors of Labour Party loyalty and switching behavior

1. Classification of votes:	n	Predicted	(%)	Null %	
Voted Labour in 2015, 2010 & 2005	3823	3514	91.9	62.3	
Voted Labour in 2005 & 2010 & Switched in 2015	1126	513	45.6	18.3	
Voted Labour in 2015*	1190	218	18.3	17.4	

2. Variables Influencing Party Loyalty: (Reference Group: Voted for the Labour Party in 2015, 2010 & 2005)

	β	SE	Wald	*p*	*Exp* β	C.I. (95%)
Comparison Group: Voted for the Labour Party in 2005 & 2010 & Switched in 2015						
Party identification	-0.36	.066	29.82	<0.001	0.70	0.62 - 0.80
Labour Party unity	-0.34	.060	31.42	<0.001	0.72	0.64 - 0.80
Like Labour Party Leader	-0.31	.020	229.67	<0.001	0.74	0.71 - 0.77
Like Labour Party	-0.26	.029	77.94	<0.001	0.77	0.73 - 0.82
Labour handling most important issue	-0.16	.042	14.76	<0.001	0.85	0.78 - 0.92
LRV: income redistribution	-0.11	.053	4.42	0.036	0.90	0.81 - 0.99
Policy re: measures to protect environment	-0.11	.051	4.28	0.039	0.90	0.82 - 1.00
Conservative Party unity	0.31	.051	37.00	<0.001	1.37	1.24 - 1.51
Policy re: immigration level	0.21	.045	21.48	<0.001	1.23	1.13 - 1.35
LRV: ordinary people don't get a fair share	0.21	.068	9.25	0.002	1.23	1.08 - 1.41
UKIP unity	0.20	.052	14.51	<0.001	1.22	1.10 - 1.35
Lib Dem Party unity	0.18	.059	9.08	0.003	1.20	1.06 - 1.34
Like Green Party	0.14	.029	22.72	<0.001	1.15	1.08 - 1.21
Like UKIP Party Leader	0.13	.019	43.59	<0.001	1.14	1.09 - 1.18
Like Conservative Party Leader	0.13	.023	33.24	<0.001	1.14	1.09 - 1.20
Equal opportunities for ethnic minorities	0.13	.055	5.87	0.015	1.14	1.03 - 1.27
Green handling most important issue	0.10	.039	6.28	0.012	1.10	1.02 - 1.19
Like Green Leader	0.09	.022	15.38	<0.001	1.09	1.04 - 1.14
LRV: income redistribution	0.07	.019	14.72	<0.001	1.08	1.04 - 1.12
Like UKIP	0.07	.026	6.09	0.014	1.07	1.01 - 1.12

UKIP handling most important issue	0.07	.031	4.54	0.033	1.07	1.01 - 1.13
Personality - neuroticism	0.05	.021	5.74	0.017	1.05	1.01 - 1.10

Notes: Assumptions of the multinomial logistic regression model were met: nominal DV with mutually exclusive categories (loyal votes, switched votes from previously loyal voters, new votes from those who had not been loyal to a different party in 2005 and 2010); continuous IVs; independence of observations. Diagnostic tests re: multicollinearity (VIF values: 1.51 - 7.92, tolerance statistics: 0.12 - 0.89); linearity between the continuous IVs and the logit transformation of the DV: no significant interaction terms (p>0.05); outliers/leverage: observations with residuals >3 removed, Cook's distance < 0.5. Maximum Likelihood logit model: final -2LL: 9024.77; $\chi 2$ = 2320.83; df = 106; p <0.001. Goodness-of-fit: $\chi 2$= 13057.88; df = 12170; p <0.00.1. Nagelkerke: 0.37; Cox & Snell: 0.32. Durbin-Watson statistic: 1.64. * new voters who had not been loyal to a different party in 2005 and 2010; LRV: Left-right values. An *Exp* β (odds ratio) >1 (<1) indicates that the risk of the outcome falling in the comparison group relative to the risk of the outcome falling in the reference group increases (decreases) as the variable increases. For all variables, the confidence intervals indicate that the relationship between the dependent and independent variables in this sample is true of the voting population.

Table 7: Predictors of Liberal Democrat Party loyalty and switching behavior

1. Classification of votes:

	n	Predicted	(%)	Null%
Voted Liberal Democrat in 2015, 2010 & 2005	934	477	51.1	31.2
Voted Liberal Democrat in 2005 & 2010 & Switched in 2015	1670	1409	84.4	55.8
Voted Liberal Democrat in 2015*	389	67	17.2	13.0

2. Variables Influencing Party Loyalty: (Reference Group: Voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2015, 2010 & 2005)

	β	SE	Wald	*p*	*Exp* β	C.I. (95%)
Comparison Group: Voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2005 & 2010 & Switched in 2015						
Liberal Democrat Party unity	-0.29	.063	22.00	<0.001	0.75	0.66 - 0.84
Like Liberal Democrat Leader	-0.26	.024	124.76	<0.001	0.77	0.73 - 0.81
Like Liberal Democrat Party	-0.19	.028	44.48	<0.001	0.83	0.78 - 0.88
Policy re: immigration level	-0.15	.058	6.97	0.008	0.86	0.77 - 0.96
Policy re: deficit reduction	-0.14	.068	4.14	0.042	0.87	0.76 - 0.99
Conservative Party unity	0.23	.058	15.39	<0.001	1.26	1.12 - 1.41
UKIP unity	0.14	.053	7.24	0.007	1.15	1.04 - 1.28
Like Green Party Leader	0.12	.026	20.15	<0.001	1.13	1.07 - 1.18
Like Labour Party	0.08	.034	5.49	0.019	1.08	1.01 - 1.16
Like Green Party	0.07	.033	5.13	0.023	1.08	1.01 - 1.15
Like UKIP Leader	0.06	.026	6.00	0.014	1.07	1.01 - 1.12

Notes: Assumptions of the multinomial logistic regression model were met: nominal DV with mutually exclusive categories (loyal votes, switched votes from previously loyal voters, new votes from those who had not been loyal to a different party in 2005 and 2010); continuous IVs; independence of observations. Diagnostic tests: multicollinearity (VIF values: 1.28 - 3.37; tolerance statistics: 0.29 - 0.78); linearity between the continuous IVs and the logit transformation of the DV: no significant interaction terms (p>0.05); outliers/leverage: observations with residuals >3 removed, Cook's distance < 0.5. Maximum Likelihood logit model: final -2LL: 4663.51; $\chi2 = 1048.09$; df = 106; p <0.001. Goodness-of-fit: $\chi2= 5909.60$; df = 5878; p = 0.38; Nagelkerke: 0.35; Cox & Snell: 0.30. Durbin-Watson statistic: 1.69. * new voters who had not been loyal to a different party in 2005 and 2010. An Exp β (odds ratio) >1 (<1) indicates that the risk of the outcome falling in the comparison group relative to the risk of the outcome falling in the reference group increases (decreases) as the variable increases. For all variables, the confidence intervals indicate that the relationship between the dependent and independent variables in this sample is true of the voting population.