The Dynamics of Party Support for New Labour, 1991-2008

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Abstract

In this paper we show that, despite considerable dynamics in aggregate support for the Labour Party over the 1991-2008 waves of the British Household Panel Survey, the decision to move to and from supporting Labour was contemplated by only one third of the English sub-sample. An overwhelming majority of those whose support did not change over this period were averse to Labour. Extending recent work that employs discrete dynamic panel models to study party support, we model the dynamics of partisanship differentiating between stable and flexible Labour partisans. The propensity to be either a long-term Labour partisan or to change is a function of socio- demographics, and we find that New Labour appeared bereft of a core, stable constituency over the period where they won three consecutive mandates.

Keywords: Party identification; attitude stability; political representation; panel data models.

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Both the Labour Party and political life in England changed considerably over the 1991-2008 period. The time-span covers the lingering breaths of Thatcherism and the ideological moderation of the Labour Party that many believe gave way to its victories in three successive elections. Given the political transformation that occurred, we might expect to observe substantial volatility in patterns of support for Labour amongst the English electorate. However, both macro and micro studies of political behaviour suggest that political change is more often than not a function of small portions of the electorate changing their allegiances. This paper examines dynamics in the self professed support the English sub-sample to the British Household Panel Study (BHPS) gave to Labour over this eighteen year period. In doing so, we answer the question of whether or not it was a majority or only a small segment of the electorate whose partisan decisions had them shifting to and from Labour during the time.

This question and the ensuing empirical analysis is relvant because formal models of party support and vote choice allow voters to have different probabilities of being stable partisans (Adams et al. 2005: 21-23), but individual level empirical models of partisan identification usually fail to distinguish between these two types of voters or acknowledge their presence. Building on the recent work of Clarke and McCutcheon (2009) and Neundorf et al. (2011), we employ a Mixed Latent Markov model to decompose the English electorate into 'movers' and 'stayers'. We find to be valid the supposition that this sample is composed of both *stable* supporters who never update their (non)affiliation with Labour and and *volatile* supporters who alter their willingness to declare themselves Labour supporters.

Heretofore, 'mover-stayer' models of partisan identification have not explored the individual characteristics that make survey respondents more or less likely to be stable supporters of a political party over a long period. Given the voluminous literature on class and and Labour ties, we extend the modelling framework to analyze whether skilled and unskilled workers, among other socio-economic groups, are more or less likely to be volatile Labour (non)supporters. Affirming and providing nuance to the recent work of Clarke et al. (2009) showing a weak class-Labour linkage, we find skilled workers to be more likely to be in the 'mover' chain and unskilled workers no more likely than others to be stable Labour supporters over this long period.

Stable and Volatile Support for New Labour

Great Britain is one of the world's oldest established democracies, and the Labour Party has formed either the Government or Official Opposition for more than 70 years. Although still a major political force, the party found itself in perpetual opposition during the 1980s, even facing possible usurpation by an upstart Social Democratic Party (SDP) during this period. Changing times and the need to overcome successive election defeats in 1979, 1983, 1987, and (surprisingly) 1992 facilitated a substantial ideological moderation of the Party's platform and the selection of Tony
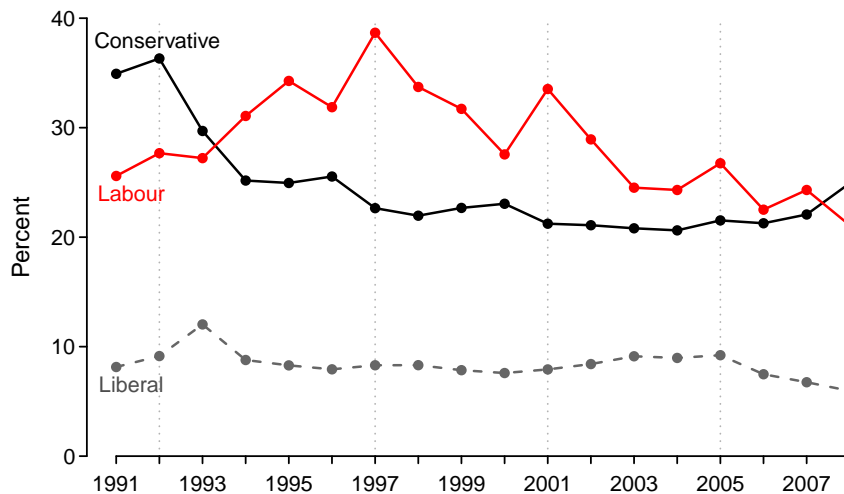
Figure 1: Proportions of partisans over time (1991-2008, BHPS data)

Blair as party leader in 1995.[4]

For seventeen consecutive years, panel respondents to the British Household Panel Study (BHPS; described below) were asked whether they supported a political party, and, if so, which one. Raw data presented in Figure 1 points to a substantial up-tick early on in support levels for Labour among the panel's English respondents. This is followed by a 'pulse-decay' trend whereby individual level support for the Party increased in the year following a Labour victory and declined in the interim period between elections. The size of the boost Labour received after an election declined after each of their victories. Contrary to the large movements we see to and from Labour, the aggregated proportions of Conservative and Liberal partisans is comparatively stable after 1994.

In short, data from the BHPS show that Labour support steadily increased in the 1990s, peaking at 40% of the English sample in the post-election survey of 1997. However, many of these supporters appear to have been transient and flexible–in 2008, only two years before an election where Labour finally lost its long grip on power, the proportion of supporters fell to approximately 20%.

Data displayed in Figure 1 suggest a high level of instability over the long period, but at least three very different stories may lie underneath these aggregate trends. Least likely is that Labour (non)support was highly stable over the period and the observed volatility is all or mostly an artefact of random measurement error. This view is similar to that held by Green and his colleagues (Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Green et al. 2002), whose view of partisanship is that of an identity that remains mostly stable throughout the life cycle. It is also a conceptualization that is in accord with how social scientists initially conceptualised parti-

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[4]Underscoring this ideological repositioning was the removal of 'Clause IV' of the Party's Constitution, which stated that the aim of the Party was 'to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production' (see Evans and Tilley (2011)).

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san identification in the 1950s and 1960s (Campbell et al. 1960; Jennings and Niemi 1974). An alternative view is that over the 1991-2008 period, the entire English electorate was volatile and subject to updating their decision to support Labour or not to do so. This would mimic work that conceptualises party support as an attitude prone to short-term updating in light of party performance (c.f. Ordeshook 1976; Page and Jones 1979; Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; MacKuen et al. 1989).

A more nuanced story is that within the English sample, there existed one group of 'stable' voters who were steadfast in their decision to (not) declare themselves Labour supporters and another segment of 'volatile' (non)Labourites who moved in and out of declaring themselves (non)supporters of the Party at least once during the long duration. Two reasons justify this belief.

First, arguments that individuals' partisanship is either strictly stable or constantly prone to rapid shifts do not comport with long term patterns of party support that are seen in aggregate time series, which reveal small but noticeable movements in identification that have consequences for party fortunes (Erikson et al. 2002; Bartle et al. 2011). We contend that slight changes in aggregate party support levels observed in the BHPS time series and elsewhere is due to the presence of both stable and volatile partisans in a single electorate. Year-on-year shifts in Labour support among English voters are not large because a significant percentage of this electorate can be classified as stable (non)supporters who can be shown to declare themselves as (not) backing Labour in all waves. As party (non)supporters overwhelmingly vote for (against) the Party on election day, this sub-group in the electorate serves to anchor the party system, and provides an estimate of the floor and ceiling levels of Labour support within the sample.

Change comes because a subsection of the English sample can be classified as volatile partisans, and a percentage of this subgroup will shift between supporting and not supporting Labour from one year to the next. This is the group within an electorate that produces partisan volatility, opportunities and challenges for parties in established democracies. The challenge is that respondents in this group are not the type who will support the party through thick and thin, when it has an unpopular leader or performs poorly when in government, and so forth. However, those in this group also constitute the segment of an electorate who can be attracted to the party when it presents itself as an attractive alternative to its rivals. We expect to find that the size of Labour's base in the *stable* partisan group is not sufficiently large enough to give the Labour a chance of winning an election, and thus the party must gain enough supporters among the *volatile* group to win in England.

The second reason for the belief that there should be both stable and volatile support for (against) Labour lies in the findings of previous research. In their analysis of long-term patterns of partisan (in)stability in West Germany over the long 24 year period covered by the German Socio-Economic Panel, Neundorf et al. (2011) find that two distinct types of partisans existed in that region: 'stayers' or *stable* party supporters who have a zero probability of changing their (non) support for a party over the period and 'movers' or *volatile* party supporters who switch at least once during the duration. This finding builds on the work of Clarke and Mc-Cutcheon (2009), who used short four to five wave election study panels to show

that electorates in the U.S., Canada, and Britain appear to be divided into the two types. To reiterate, stable partisans are akin to the 'unmoved movers' first theorized by Campbell et al. (1960), and volatile party supporters are those who had a propensity to update their declared identifications in a manner described by, among others Jackson (1975) and Fiorina (1981).

In estimating the complex Mixture Latent Class Markov (MLM) models below, the first question we ask is similar to that asked by Neundorf et al. (2011) in their study of West German partisans. Namely, what is the size of the electorate that was "in-play" for the Labour Party during the time it transformed itself from a decidedly left-of-centre party in the electoral wilderness to a formidable centre-left governing party? Similar to the results found in other electorates, we believe that many are socialised or have prior political and societal beliefs to be so repelled or supportive of Labour that time or changes in party positions and success over the period did little to change their views. As our interest lies in the dynamics of Labour Party support, our expectation is that the stable sub-group will be quite large because members comprise what should be a small number of stable Labour supporters *and* those who firmly refrain from supporting Labour throughout the time frame covered by the panel.[5] A minority of the English sample will be consigned to the flexible subgroup, and constitute those willing to update their support to turn for or against Labour at least once over the course of the panel.

Models acknowledging the possibility that a mixture of causal mechanisms exist within an electorate (e.g. Rivers 1988; Clarke and McCutcheon 2009; Neundorf et al. 2011) are relative newcomers and remain rare in the voting behaviour literature. To date, MLM models that have been employed to study voting behaviour (Clarke et al. 2004; Clarke and McCutcheon 2009; Neundorf et al. 2011) have not employed known covariates to predict respondents' classification into latent subgroups (i.e. movers and stayers or stable and flexible party supporters). We believe that the English case offers a compelling substantive reason to extend what will be shown below to be a complex MLM model to allow known co-variates to predict the propensity of a panel respondent to be a stable or a flexible partisan. In the British voting behaviour literature, there are lengthy arguments as to whether or not there is a class or socio-demographic basis for Labour Party support, and those who looked at early election studies suggested that class was a significant driver of the choice between the Conservatives and Labour in the 1960s (Butler and Stokes 1974). However, those who have looked at this linkage over time claim that this linkage saw a marked decline in the 1970s that continues to the present day(Clarke et al. 2004: 57).

In the empirical models below, if a respondent's social position was a significant driver of their decision to support a party during the 1991-2008 period, we should

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[5]It is worthwhile to remember that this stable non-Labourites include either those who consistently support no or another party, but also those who move between non-support and support for another party. An overwhelming majority of those we estimate below to reside in the flexible mixture move between non-support and support for Labour. Our analyses and a wide literature documents how shifts from a major party in one ideological camp to one in another is quite rare (Clarke and Suzuki 1994; Zuckerman and Kroh 2006; Zuckerman et al. 2007).

see that social demographics and class identification predict both the (non)support of Labour when the respondent enters the panel *and* the propensity of the respondent to be a stable or flexible party supporter. However, given events of the period, there is reason to expect this not to be the case. While close ties between social groups and parties underpin the development of many party systems and contemporary researchers still speak of 'natural pairs' of social groups and parties (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Dalton et al. 1984; Manza et al. 1995; Goldthorpe 1999; Brooks et al. 2006; Elff 2007), Labour's platform change and other political and social events during the period may have served to further sever the bond between workers and Labour.

In estimating the MLM models below, we establish that the rise and fall of support for 'New Labour' was the result of movements among a sub-group that comprised about one-third of the English BHPS sample. In an extension of the models of Clarke and McCutcheon (2009) and Neundorf et al. (2011) results also show that the propensity to be a stable or an unstable Labour supporter is linked in what are sometimes counter-intuitive ways to socio-demographic aspects such as class, union membership, and housing status that have a long history in discussions of British political behaviour (Butler and Stokes 1974).

Model

Producing empirically valid longitudinal models of individual-level party support that can separate the 'stable' from the 'volatile' party supporters requires a series of steps, including the consideration of autocorrelation, measurement error, a person's initial party support or partisan state, and heterogeneity. Responses of the same individual are usually autocorrelated, meaning that an individual's identity is persistent: once formed we expect it to to show a high degree of stability and not be 'recreated' at each point of measurement. Party identity, like most survey based proxies of concepts, is measured imperfectly (Green et al. 2002; Clarke et al. 2004; Clarke and McCutcheon 2009), necessitating a modeling framework that can separate true change from change that is spurious due to measurement error.[6] Third, when people enter a panel, they differ in their propensity to identify with Labour or not, and this requires modelling individuals' 'initial condition' as a function of observed covariates.[7]

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[6]The standard linear measurement error models based on path-analytic or covariance structure formulations (e.g. Wiley and Wiley 1970) are not applicable here, since mean and variance are not independent.

[7]In a recent analysis using German panel data Neundorf et al. (2011) showed that socio-demographic characteristics of the individual (e.g. age, gender, employment class, and education) predicted initial partisan states, and their inclusion improved model performance. As outlined below, this finding also obtains with BHPS data. Neundorf et al. (2011) did not take the additional step and have the socio-demographic characteristics of West German predict whether the respondent was a likely 'mover' or 'stayer'.

Finally, we argue that the partisan identification found in the English sample does not follow a homogeneous pattern of over-time stability or change. Rather, it is comprised of two different (ideal-typical) groups: individuals who update their Labour (non)support ('volatile' supporters), and people who do not alter their initial choice to (not) continue supporting Labour throughout the series ('stable' supporters). Much of what drives respondents' propensities to be volatile or stable (non)supporters of Labour remain unobserved, but we do test whether, in line with what is argued in the traditional voting behaviour literature in Britain, the voters' socio-demographic characteristics (particularly class) have a role in their classification as one of the two types. As noted above, these matters necessitate a modelling technique for classifying voters into one or two of these theoretically meaningful ideal types, allowing peoples' classifications as volatile or stable partisans to be a function of observed socio-economic characteristics, and a framework that acknowledges survey based measures of party support to be imperfect indicators of 'true' partisan identification.

These issues are addressed by employing Mixture Latent Class Markov (MLM) models (Paas et al. 2007; Vermunt et al. 2008). The basic building block of those models is a Markov transitioning structure, employed for the purpose of describing the dynamics of changing from one state to another. *Markov models* were introduced in the social sciences by Lazarsfeld (1959) in the 1950s to analyse nominal level variables with measurements containing over time autocorrelation. Applying these models to survey data entails the strong assumption that measurement error is absent, a supposition that Donald Green and his associates (Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Green et al. 2002) have convincingly argued is not valid.

Work begun by Clifford Clogg (1979, 1981) in the late 1970s that continued into the 1990s (cf. Langeheine 1988; Hagenaars 1990; Collins and Wugalter 1992; Vermunt et al. 1999; Langeheine and van de Pol 2002) extended the standard Markov models to *Latent Markov* models, which allowed levels of measurement error to be both estimated and incorporated into the log-linear models.[8] This formulation allows observed categorical responses to be probabilistically connected to an unobserved (latent) nominal classification representing the 'true [partisan] state' purged from error. This yields a latent class model where, in our case, the observed indicators are an individual's reported party support over each annual wave of the BHPS. An individual's latent state at the beginning of the panel is predicted by regressing it on observed individual characteristics.

Since a Latent Markov model is already formulated as a finite mixture model (McLachlan and Peel 2000), the extension to Mixed Latent Markov models for the purpose of uncovering underlying heterogeneity within the panel is straightforward (van de Pol and Langeheine 1990; Meiser and Ohrt 1996; Dias et al. 2008; Yamaguchi 2008). The basic idea is to introduce a latent mixing variable, which divides the population into mutually exclusive and exhaustive sub-populations. This set-up can be used to model and test our expectation that different groups of vot-

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[8]The basic form of the model was introduced in Wiggins (1973) and is also known as hidden Markov model (Zucchini and MacDonald 2009).

ers exhibit patterns of either long-term partisan stability or partisan volatility of party identification. The mover-stayer model (Blumen et al. 1955; Goodman 1961), specifies one subgroup where the probability of transitions is restricted to zero and another where latent partisan states are allowed to change.

These points are operationalized via the following empirical model: To begin, let i index individuals ($i = 1, \ldots, I$) observed in BHPS survey wave t ($t = 1, \ldots, T$). We assume that an individual's measurements y_{it} are not free of error, but are related to the 'true state' of their party identification at a measurement occasion, θ_t, through a measurement error model. The key claim arguing for the presence of moving and staying partisans necessitates the inclusion of a time-constant discrete latent variable ξ (with levels $\xi = 1, \ldots, M$), which allows for the estimation of separate subsets of individuals following different movement patterns. Observed individual characteristics are denoted by x_i, while an individual's covariate vector at time of panel entry is denoted by x_{i0}. Our full model is specified as:

$$P(\boldsymbol{y_i}|\boldsymbol{x_i}) = \sum_{\xi=1}^{M} \sum_{\theta_0=1}^{T} \cdots \sum_{\theta_T=1}^{T} P(\xi|\boldsymbol{x_i}) P(\theta_0|\xi, \boldsymbol{x_{i0}}) \sum_{t=1}^{T} P(\theta_t|\theta_{t-1}, \xi) \sum_{t=1}^{T} [P(y_{it}|\theta_t, \xi)]^{\mathbb{I}_{it}} \quad (1)$$

To allow for missing responses on the party identification question to be incorporated into the model, $\mathbb{I}_{it}$ is an indicator function equal to 1 if individual i provides a response at measurement t and 0 in the case of non-response.[9]

The model's probabilities are parametrized by a series of logit equations. To begin, let s ($s = 1, 2$) denote the 'true party ID state' of an individual, with $s = 1$ if the respondent supports Labour and $s = 2$ if they support another or no party.

The next step is to specify this nominal level dependent variable measuring latent party support s, to be a function of party support that is reported by the BHPS respondent and a level of measurement error that is assumed to be time invariant for reasons of identification. Consequently, there is a probabilistic link between a person's survey response and their true partisan state for each wave of the survey:

$$\log \left[\frac{P(y_{it} = l|\theta = s)}{P(y_{it} = s|\theta = s)} \right] = \delta_{ls} \quad (2)$$

The fact that individuals enter the panel with quite different socio-economic characteristics is captured by modelling the probability that an individual is in one latent state (i.e. Labour Party support) or another as a function of mixture membership (unobserved heterogeneity) and P individual covariates at the time of panel

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[9]This assumes that responses are missing at random (Rubin 1987), and missing responses or sample dropout are not a function of ones party ID.

entry, x_{i0}:[10]

$$\log \left[\frac{P(\theta_0 = 1 | \boldsymbol{x}_{i0}, \xi_i)}{P(\theta_0 = 2 | \boldsymbol{x}_{i0}, \xi_i)} \right] = \alpha_0 + \sum_{p=1}^{P} \alpha_p x_{i0p} + \eta_s \xi \tag{3}$$

The model's transition dynamics are parametrized by a series of logit equations modeling the probability of being in state r instead of s as a function of overall intercepts, time effects and the mover-stayer latent variable:[11]

$$\log \left[\frac{P(\theta_t = r | \theta_{t-1} = s, \xi)}{P(\theta_t = s | \theta_{t-1} = s, \xi)} \right] = \beta_{0rs} + \beta_{1rst} \text{time}_{it} + \beta_{2rs} \xi, \tag{4}$$

with the β coefficients are set to zero for $r = s$. Including time in our model specification yields a time-heterogeneous Markov transition structure, allowing transition probabilities in and out of Labour to be free to differ between surveys.[12] The variable $\mathbb{D}_{\xi=2}$ is an indicator variable for the second mixture component (signifying our 'movers'). The time effects are identified by imposing a corner constraint, setting the last transition $\beta_{1rsT} = 0$.

This brings us to the last step which is to explain why an individual is classified as either a mover or a stayer (i.e. having zero transition probabilities). We model the probability of being a mover as a function of Q individual characteristics:

$$\log \left[\frac{P(\xi_i = 2)}{P(\xi_i = 1)} \right] = \gamma_0 + \sum_{q=1}^{Q} \gamma_q x_i \tag{5}$$

This model setup allows us to treat the basic problems of panel data analysis outlined above in one jointly estimated model. This strategy is preferable to fitting separate regressions, since it takes into account the uncertainty of each model part and produces conservative standard errors (Skrondal and Laake 2001).

Data and Variables

The British Household Panel Study (BHPS) is an annual survey of occupants of British households that began in 1991, and all waves contain a question asking

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[10]For reasons of identification we choose the corner constraint $\eta_2 = 0$.

[11]The latent variable $\boldsymbol{\xi}$ has two levels, one representing 'stayers' ($\xi = 1$), one representing movers ($\xi = 2$). To achieve a latent group of 'stayers' the value of ξ is set to -100, yielding an effective zero probability of changing party support.

[12]Setting all transition probabilities to be equal would allow us to freely estimate different levels of measurement error per survey wave. But as our results show (cf. Figure 2) this specification is not defensible with this data set.

individual respondents which political party they support.[13] This extensive time-coverage allows us the opportunity to analyse the individual level dynamics in support or identification with Labour during a period that includes New Labour's ascendancy and its relative decline. Although the BHPS contains respondents from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, we restrict our sample to respondents domiciled in England. The 'two-party-plus' system pitting Labour against the Conservatives with the Liberal Democrats as the main minor party operates in pure form only in England. Elsewhere, parties focused on nationalist concerns make the choice set more complex.

The question content of the BHPS is aimed at measuring the social and economic circumstances of a representative sample of British households. The fact that it contains comparatively few questions on the topic of political attitudes and that fieldwork is not tied to election periods means that respondents are not subject to receiving the political stimuli that are present on and surround the timing of election studies.[14] Therefore, it is likely to produce a more 'conservative' estimate of Labour identifiers (cf. Sanders et al. 2002; Clarke et al. 2004).

The branching style of the party identification questions on the BHPS necessitates making a choice as to whom is a party supporter. In each survey wave, respondents receive the following question battery: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party?" Respondents who answer "yes" are asked "which one." Respondents who answer "no" are asked a follow-up questions that first ask if they think of themselves as "a little closer to one political party than to the others." If they still reply "no," they are asked "if there was a General Election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support." In keeping with the recent literature arguing in favour of partisan stability (cf. Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Green et al. 2002), we only consider BHPS partisans as those who responded "yes" to the first two questions, excluding those who would only support a party if there would be an election. As laid out above, the focus of this paper is on Labour support only. The party identification variable was therefore dichotomized for every respondent for each time point into Labour partisans and all other non-Labour options.

Besides social class, classic works of voting behaviour in Great Britain (cf. Butler and Stokes 1974) suggest that additional socio-demographic characteristics are important for capturing individual differences in party support, and we model initial partisan (in)stability as a function of these *observed* individual attributes.[15] Com-

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[13]More information on the BHPS is available on the web gateway to the survey at: http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/survey/bhps

[14]Fieldwork for the BHPS begins on September 1st of the year and more than 90% of the annual surveying is concluded by the end of the calendar year, whereas British general elections are traditionally held in April to June.

[15]The categorical social class measure is implemented using the European Socio-economic classification (Rose and Harrison 2010), which follows closely the scheme devised by John Goldthorpe (cf. Goldthorpe 1995; Goldthorpe and McKnight 2006). Besides using the usual detailed occupational codes (based in ISCO88), it uses an individual's supervisory status and, for employers, the number of employees to determine class positions (see Harrison and Rose 2006 for the assignment matrix used).

Table 1: Fitted Models

		N mix	N par	LogLik	LR test ΔLL	p	BIC
M1	preferred MLM	2	85	−21021			42793
M2	- full stability	1	30	−24746	3725	0.000	49758
M3	- full updating	1	64	−21552	530	0.000	43669

Note: 'N mix': Number of mixture components. 'N par': number of parameters. Likelihood ratio test p-values based on 100 bootstrap replications.

mon socio-demographic features that are measured by the BHPS include age, education and housing status.[16] Finally, we include the English census region where the respondent lives as a regional control. Our sample is restricted to those in employment, making other control variables – such as being recipient of transfer incomes – unnecessary.

Results

In order to test the key argument that the patterns of individual level partisan support in the English BHPS are heterogeneous, we ran three different iterations of the Latent Markov model. Table 1 presents fit statistics obtained after estimation of a series of rival models corresponding to competing theoretical models of party support. Model 1, our preferred full specification, allows for a mixture of stable and volatile partisans. Model 2 represents a situation where there is only a single mixture and the panel exhibits full over-time partisan stability. This is a model where partisan identity, once formed, does not change over the life course, and where all observed changes to and from support for Labour are artefacts of measurement error. In contrast, Model 3 again uses only a single mixture but allows every respondent to update their party support. Here, all panellists have a non-zero probability of changing their party identification. Likelihood ratio tests clearly reject the latter two models and favour our more complete specification, signifying that a heterogeneous mix of different types of (non)Labour partisans existed in the English electorate over the 1991-2008 period.[17] Therefore, the results we present below are based on the parameters generated by Model 1.

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[16]Education is coded as a respondent's highest degree achieved. Housing status divides respondents into homeowners, mortgage holders, private renters, and those in social housing.

[17]This conclusion also holds when adding an additional penalty for the number of parameters via the Akaike Information Criterion.

Table 2: Partisan composition of electorate (total percentages)

	Loyal	Volatile
Labour	13	14
Other	54	19
Overall Share	67	33

Note: Calculated from marginal probabilities of latent partisan state and mixture membership. Standard errors not displayed (all <1%).

Transition dynamics

Our first interest concerned the percentage of the English electorate who was steadfast in their (non)support for Labour over the period and the percentage that was open to change. Table 2 reports the model implied composition of the electorate, or the predicted total proportions of loyal and volatile Labour (non)partisans. Despite the considerable political changes taking place over the 1991-2008 period, the model suggests two thirds of the English population never changed their decision to (not) align themselves with Labour. In contrast, the other third of the electorate was comprised of flexible partisans who shifted in and out of supporting Labour over the period. New Labour's rise and fall, at least in England rested on just one in three citizens changing their decisions.

Results reported in Table 2 establish the degree to which the British electorate was composed of different partisan types. More than half the sample did not react to Labour's attempt to attract new supporters and remained independent or supporters of other parties, but an estimated 13% of the English electorate continuously remained Labour partisans for the entire 1991-2008 period. These were core Labour identifiers who supported the Party in good and bad times and throughout rise and decline of New Labour. Far less predictable allies were the third of the electorate classified as volatile who neither supported nor opposed Labour indiscriminately. However, using marginal probabilities we can discern that some are more likely overall to lean towards Labour, while others tend to independence or supporting other parties.

The basis for Labour's strong support in the late 1990s and early 2000s becomes obvious if we now turn to the predicted gains and losses of Labour among these volatile supporters. Figure 2 plots predicted probabilities of Labour's gains or losses among volatile partisans from one year to the next.[18] Most interesting are the time periods where Labour gains among volatile partisans outweighed those in this group who moved away from Labour. During some of its last years in opposition in the

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[18]All predicted transition probabilities are significantly different from zero, except for Labour losses in 1994. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, we do not display confidence intervals in the graph.
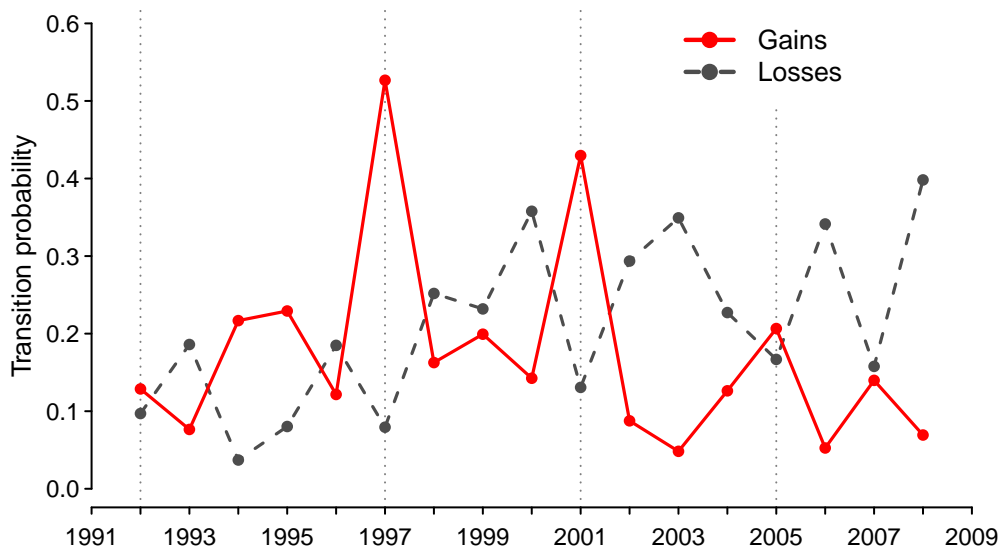
Figure 2: Predicted gains and losses of Labour among volatile partisans

mid 1990s, Labour inflows outnumbered outflows. However, after the party gained a majority in the House of Commons, the only time the numbers of supporters in this group increased were during election periods. In 1997 more than 50% of these unpredictable voters switched from being independent or supporters of other parties to the Labour Party, while only about 10% stopped identifying with the party. This mobilization effect was still quite effective in the 2001 election (election years are denoted by dotted lines). However, when Labour defended its majority for the second time in 2005, predicted losses and gains are about equal. From this vantage point, the very close outcome in this election does not surprise. Generally, Figure 2 clearly shows that over time, the party built up and then lost support among these volatile partisans, with outflows becoming more profound with fewer and fewer voters switching into Labour partisanship in non-election years after the Party's initial victory.

The loss of support among these volatile supporters is further elucidated in Figure 3, where we calculated average transition probabilities among the volatile partisan mixture across the whole panel. The figure shows that among volatile supporters the trend is to leave Labour. On average there is a 12 % chance that someone who previously identified with Labour loses his or her identity. The chance that someone who did previously not identify as Labour partisan now does so is only 4 %. While these number are instructive, they hide considerable movement that occurs through time, particularly in election seasons, as is clearly visible in Figure 2.
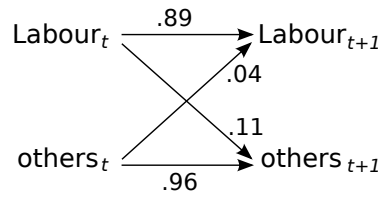
Figure 3: Average transition probabilities of volatile supporters

Predicting partisan volatility

The empirical results, presented in Table 1, support the argument that two different types of partisans exist in the British electorate. Two-thirds of the individuals in the English sub-sample of the BHPS are stable (non)supporters of the Labour Party, while the remainder move in and out of identifying with Labour and non-identification or identification with another Party.[19] The question then turns to whether or not those consigned to the volatile mixture have socio-demographic characteristics that differ from those likely to be stable (non)Labour partisans.

This question is answered, in part, by looking at the effects of selected socio-demographic covariates on an individual's party support when entering the panel and on their probability of being a volatile supporter. Above we raise the question as to whether voters from groups traditionally tied to Labour were indeed so by the beginning of the 1990s and whether they were loose or flexible partisans during the period of party change. Answers to this question appear in Table 3, which gives estimated logit coefficients and 95% confidence intervals of the initial state equation (eq. 3) and the mixture assignment equation (eq. 5). In the estimation, the social characteristics of respondents at $t = 0$ (x_{i0}), when they first entered the panel, was used in order to predict whether the respondent supported the Labour Party or not. Secondly, we believe the underlying latent trait that classifies an individual as a stable or volatile partisan is a function of time-invariant individual characteristics (x_i). In order to achieve this, the mode of social class, union membership and housing, as well as the highest obtained education and mean age during the panel is included as mixture covariates.

To provide an example of how to interpret the coefficients, we first turn to the age effect. The negative slope coefficient with confidence bands that do not cross zero for the 15-30 year age category on the initial partisan state signals that younger voters were much less likely to belong to the latent class indicating Labour partisanship when they entered the panel. This is likely a function of the fact that voters are more likely to avoid declaring an affiliation with a political party in their early years (Dalton 1984), and possibly a function of the fact that many of those who entered the panel during the early 1990s were socialized during the Thatcher era. Although

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[19]To reiterate the point made in footnote 5 above, in advanced democracies, most of the movement of volatile partisans is between a major party and non-identification. Shifts from a major party in one ideological camp to one in another is quite rare (Clarke and Suzuki 1994; Zuckerman and Kroh 2006; Zuckerman et al. 2007)

Table 3: Effect of covariates on initial condition and assignment to mover versus stayer mixture. Maximum likelihood estimates and 95% confidence intervals.

	Initial partisan state			Volatile Supporter		
	est	95% CI		est	95% CI	
Social class						
Higher Service class	−0.262	−0.486	−0.037	−0.132	−0.382	0.117
Lower service class	−0.110	−0.284	0.065	−0.024	−0.223	0.175
Higher white collar	−0.025	−0.233	0.184	−0.354	−0.610	−0.097
Petty bourgeoisie	−0.454	−0.716	−0.193	−0.144	−0.393	0.104
Manual supervisors	0.095	−0.135	0.326	−0.030	−0.361	0.301
Lower white collar	−0.096	−0.276	0.085	0.089	−0.141	0.319
Skilled workers	0.441	0.218	0.664	0.381	0.063	0.700
Unskilled workers	0.410	0.241	0.578	0.215	−0.026	0.455
Wald test	47.5, p=0.000			15.9, p=0.026		
Union member	0.404	0.324	0.483	0.101	0.018	0.184
Housing						
Owner	−0.275	−0.457	−0.092	−0.189	−0.400	0.022
Mortgage	−0.226	−0.341	−0.110	−0.164	−0.308	−0.020
Social	0.399	0.232	0.566	0.105	−0.165	0.374
Renting	0.101	−0.083	0.285	0.248	−0.041	0.537
Wald test	38.0, p=0.000			843, p=0.038		
Education						
Primary/still at school	−0.090	−0.246	0.066	0.030	−0.176	0.236
Lower secondary	−0.246	−0.376	−0.116	0.022	−0.138	0.183
Higher secondary	−0.103	−0.294	0.088	−0.014	−0.245	0.218
Higher vocational	−0.049	−0.208	0.111	−0.039	−0.206	0.128
Degree	0.487	0.302	0.672	0.001	−0.217	0.218
Wald test	32.2, p=0.000			0.3, p=.990		
Age						
15−30	−0.364	−0.531	−0.198	0.312	0.099	0.525
31−45	0.063	−0.100	0.227	0.074	−0.081	0.228
46−60	0.112	−0.067	0.290	−0.362	−0.518	−0.205
61 older	0.190	−0.192	0.571	−0.024	−0.317	0.269
Wald test	32.1, p=0.000			27.5, p=0.000		
Female	−0.035	−0.125	0.055	0.111	0.015	0.207
Transition dynamics	32 df., see Figure 2					
Wald test	796.5, p=0.000					
N observations	122,814					
N individuals	6,823					
LogLik	21,021					

Note: Categorical variables are effect coded. Initial states include region fixed effects.

those in this age group are *less* likely to support Labour at the outset, the *positive* and significant slope coefficient for this age group in the volatile supporter column indicates that they were more prone than others to move into and out of or out and into supporting Labour as the years progressed. This replicates well the established fact that younger voters have more unstable party attachments than older citizens (cf. Jennings 1989; Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Topf 1995). In contrast, the English voters in late middle age seem most set in their partisan ways. Although they were no more or less likely to identify with Labour than the rest of the sample, they were far less likely to be consigned to the volatile mixture.

Above we noted that much of the early academic discussion surrounding the nature of party identification in Britain highlighted the linkages between class status and support for the Labour Party. Wald tests on both the initial partisan states and the mixture chains indicate that both are significantly associated with class. As expected manual workers, whether skilled or not, were much more likely to be Labour partisans when they entered the panel. However, they were far less likely to belong to the stable Labour partisan base indicating that rather than being the core Labour supporters described by Butler and Stokes (1974), their support for New Labour was much more tenuous. In short, the "natural pairing" (Goldthorpe 1999: 64) between the British working class and the Labour Party is far from unshakable. The same holds true for those who are members of unions. They too have a high propensity to be Labour supporters at the beginning of our period of observation or when they enter the panel, but they also had a higher probability of being assigned to the mixture classifying them volatile partisans.

The partisan patterns of individuals from the service classes as well as higher grade white collar employees, like office clerks and mid-grade managers – usually depicted as core targets of the 'New' Labour strategy – suggests that New Labour was less than successful in convincing these people to begin identifying with the Party. The higher white collar employees began far less likely than others to belong to the latent Labour partisan class, *and* they were more likely than others to remain stable identifiers. In short, many in these occupations began in the non-Labour latent class and remained there for close to two decades. Those in the higher service classes are less likely to have begun in the Labour Party, but also no more likely than those in better paying, non-manual occupations to have been volatile Labourites.

Looking at housing, an indicator of accumulated wealth, the Wald tests of joint significance again suggest that an English person's type of domicile had a strong effect on both initial partisanship and the probability of being a volatile partisan. Individuals who lived in social housing (including renting it from a subsidized government agency) had a clear tendency to be Labour supporters. Opposite those stood the home owners with a mortgage who are less likely to support Labour, and were likely to remain steadfast in their non-support over the course of the panel.

Contrary to the other socio-economic co-variables, which influenced initial partisan states as well as the probability of being a volatile supporter, education was only relevant as a predictor of one's initial propensity to belong to the Labour or non-Labour latent classes. Its effect is due to two education groups: those holding a degree were much more likely to be Labour partisans, while those with a higher

secondary education had the opposite tendency. The inability of education to explain the mixture the individual is assigned into is also relevant for our case as some have argued that those with lower levels of education will only see their partisanship strengthen if the party can be relied upon to provide benefits to that group (Shively 1979).

In sum, we find that two different types of Labour (non)partisans existed across the British electorate in the 1991-2008 period. The majority of voters were stable, either steadfastly supportive of Labour or opposed to identifying with the Party at all times. However, approximately one in three of the English respondents to the BHPS sample moved in between partisan states. The socio-economic predictors of the interviewees' initial partisan states did not surprise and are in line with what is shown by classic and recent work (Butler and Stokes 1974; Clarke et al. 2004). However, as we discuss below, the socio-demographic predictors of stability suggest a very different view of British party politics that that put forth by Butler and Stokes (1974).

Conclusion

In the wake of what many would call a surprising electoral defeat in 1992, the Labour Party went through an ideological retrenchment, which had as its penultimate outcome the election of Tony Blair as party leader. In elite circles, this was a substantial manoeuvre that changed the character of British political life. The "New Labour" project made the party attractive to those wishing for a "Third Way" in between socialist and free market capitalist economic policies, but the change was inimical to many in the unions and on the "Old Left." On the surface, these changes suggest we should see substantial dynamics in the levels of support for the Party over the 1991-2008 period covered by the British Household Panel Study (BHPS), particularly in England where the Party worked to attract new supporters in the population rich southern half of the country. Results presented in Figure 1 confirm that Labour support in England was volatile over the length of the BHPS. In the early 1990s and late 2000s, party support hovered at just over 20 percent of the sample, but during Blair's first mandate and immediately after Labour's 2001 triumph, Labour was comfortably over 30 percent.

Graphical and time series analyses of aggregate shifts in party support and policy and ideological preferences (Bartle et al. 2011) are useful to chart changes in the political preferences of the electorate across time and analyze whether policy preferences respond to changes in party support or vice versa (Erikson et al. 2002). However, such investigations cannot tell us who or the percentage of those in the electorate responsible for generating the dynamics. Building on the recent work of Clarke and McCutcheon (2009) and Neundorf et al. (2011), we employed a Mixed Latent Class Markov (MLM) model to test the hypothesis that two types of voters existed within the English sample of the BHPS: 1) stable supporters who remained (non)supporters of Labour throughout the entire period; and 2) volatile supporters

who moved to and from (non)support for Labour at least once during the life of the panel. Model fit statistics presented in Table 1 show that, although the MLM model requires the estimation of far more parameters, the specification was superior to parsimonious models that depicted the English electorate as completely stable or volatile. In sum, we found the English electorate to exhibit heterogeneity not just in which party they supported but in the nature of their partisan behaviour. Results in Table 2 show that the volatility in Labour Party support shown in Figure 1 appears to come from the behaviour of just the one-third of the electorate that was consigned to the volatile mixture in the MLM model.

The heterogeneous patterns of support identified by the MLM models speak to the long literature concerning the nature of partisan identification in mature democracies. Until recently, the literature on the subject tended to view the electorate as a monolithic entity when it came to the stability of their attitudes or identities with the parties. The continued presence of volatile partisans within an identified subset of the electorate after controlling for measurement error via latent class modelling suggest that aggregate support for the Labour Party is too high for the entire English electorate to be in accord with theories of partisanship that depict the voter as stable "unmoved movers" (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002). However, the fact that the maximum swing to and away from Labour was 20% over such a long period and that this happened within a minority subset of the electorate also suggests that the entire electorate was not constantly looking to update their Labour support in response to short-term political or economic events (Fiorina 1981). As has been said elsewhere (Neundorf et al. 2011: 478), the heterogeneity present within electorates makes it erroneous to make sweeping claims that declare party support or identification to be entirely stable or fluid and vulnerable to rapid shifts.

The fact that only a minority of voters were classified into the volatile mixture leads to the question, why so much stability? We believe the answer lies with the theory and logic of "bounded partisanship" (Zuckerman et al. 2007), which claims that most voters in western democracies know what party they are not, with many bouncing between non-identification and supporting one of the major parties. Our findings reflect this–of the two-thirds of the electorate in the stable mixture, an overwhelming majority were non-supporters of Labour. Only 13% of the sample declared themselves Labour and remained supportive of the party throughout the entire 18 year period, but a majority of the English electorate "effectively turned its back on [Labour] by never choosing to support it" (Zuckerman et al. 2007: vii). Flexible Labour supporters outnumbered firm supporters by a margin of 33-13%.

This paper extended the work of Clarke and McCutcheon (2009) and Neundorf et al. (2011) by conditioning the mixtures and initial partisan states onto socio-demographics. Labour had long established ties with the trades unions and working classes that date to the founding of the party in the late 19th Century. In the early and mid 20th Century, this key socio-demographic group provided the party with a substantial basis of support. Analyses and re-analyses of survey data from the 1960s also showed a significant class–party linkage during this decade, but this association weakened throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Butler and Stokes 1974; Ne-

undorf et al. 2011). Our analyses show that workers of all types were more likely to be Labour supporters when they entered the panel, but they were no more likely than others to be in the stable mixture—indeed, those in the 'skilled' worker category were more likely to be flexible Labour supporters, moving to and from supporting the panel over the life of the BHPS.

The results presented in Table 3 show that across all of the demographic and social groups modelled to predict the mixtures, there is not a single instance where those significantly more likely to identify with Labour at the outset are also more likely to be in the stable mixture. In short, it is now an open question as to who or which groups Labour can rely on in this decade as the Party begins its quest to recapture power from the Conservative-Liberal Democratic Coalition Government. There is little doubt that short-term factors, such as economic performance or party leader traits, are important in propelling a party to electoral victories. However, rare is it that a political party can make full use of short-term factors that are working in their favour when they do not have a base to build upon. As Labour tries to regroup, they appear to have the added challenge of regrouping with a smaller, less defined set of core supporters.

The findings presented in this paper lead to a larger question concerning parties and party renewal in advanced democracies. Single datasets and short-term election study panels cannot alone determine whether the bonds between social groups and parties are loose or unwavering. It is erroneous to state that a social group strongly supports a party because its members vote for the party in an election or group of elections. The long-term study of partisan identification that separates voters into stable and volatile supporters better captures the extent to which partisan bonds truly exist or are frayed. The extent to which what has occurred in the case of 'New Labour' is common to all parties, or just parties attempting to repackage themselves has consequences for party systems. If broken ties and flexible partisans dominate the electorates in all advanced democracies, then we can expect a period of strong volatility where elections are won and lost on short-term forces and turnover in government is common. If this pattern is more likely among parties undergoing an ideological renewal similar to Labour's reinvention in the early 1990s, party leaders might pause to think whether such reinvention strategies may only bring short term gains and fail to give the Party a new basis for support. One dataset cannot answer the extent to which, across advanced democracies, once loyal social groups are abandoning their bonds to political parties. As long-term panels grow in size and quantity, a comparative project on the durability of partisan bonds across more than a couple of election cycles is likely to be fruitful for understanding the nature of alignments and de-alignments.

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Appendix

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of independent variables

	Initial state x_{i0}		Mixtures x_i	
	mean	sd	mean	sd
Social class				
Service class I	0.13	0.34	0.12	0.33
Service class II	0.20	0.40	0.20	0.40
Higher white collar	0.12	0.32	0.12	0.32
Lower white collar	0.18	0.39	0.14	0.34
Petty bourgeoisie	0.10	0.30	0.16	0.37
Supervisors	0.05	0.22	0.08	0.27
Skilled workers	0.07	0.25	0.07	0.25
Unskilled workers	0.16	0.36	0.12	0.32
Union Member	0.03	0.18	0.18	0.39
Housing				
Owner	0.16	0.37	0.15	0.35
Mortgage	0.70	0.46	0.67	0.47
Social	0.08	0.27	0.10	0.31
Renting	0.06	0.23	0.08	0.28
Education				
Primary/still at school	0.21	0.41	0.17	0.38
Lower seondary	0.21	0.41	0.31	0.46
Higher secondary	0.16	0.37	0.14	0.34
Higher vocational	0.30	0.46	0.21	0.41
Degree	0.11	0.32	0.17	0.38
Age				
15-30	0.22	0.42	0.35	0.48
31-45	0.40	0.49	0.35	0.48
46-60	0.34	0.48	0.26	0.44
61 older	0.03	0.18	0.04	0.20
Female	0.50	0.50		