

Elections and electoral geographies

Session organizer: Paul Norman (University of Leeds)

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The geography of Australia's Marriage Law Postal Survey outcome

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After years of public debate about same-sex marriage, the Australian Government put the issue to the electorate in the 'Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey' in late 2017. The survey asked voters whether the law should be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry. Nationally, 61.6% of voters responded 'yes'. But there were marked variations by electoral division, with the proportion of yes votes varying from 26.1% to 83.7%. The aim of this paper is to explore the geographical pattern of the percentage of voters responding 'yes' by federal electoral division and determine the correlates of the pattern. Results of the survey by federal electoral division were obtained from the ABS; other variables by electoral division were obtained from the 2016 Census. Multiple linear regression was employed to establish the relationship between the extent of yes responses at an electoral division scale and the characteristics of those electoral divisions' populations. In 133 of 150 electoral divisions there was a majority of 'yes' responses. Most of the electoral divisions where 'no' responses dominated were located in western Sydney. Strong predictor variables of the percentage 'yes' vote included the proportion of the population describing themselves as having no religion, the proportion with post-school educational qualifications, the proportion of couples being same-sex couples, and the proportion born in Oceania, Europe and the Americas. To a large extent, the geographical pattern of responses in the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey can be understood by a small number of characteristics of an electoral division's population.

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Immigrant proximity, ethnocentrism and Radical Right vote: a two-level test of the halo effect in England

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Literature on the bases to Radical Right voting have posited a so-called 'halo effect' to these parties' support, whereby native populations living in areas adjoining communities with high immigrant populations will be more likely to vote for a Radical Right Party than similar voters in areas themselves having high immigrant density. Whilst this concept builds upon similar theoretical bases to conflict and contact theory, the 'halo' mechanism has not been rigorously operationalised, and has only been tested in some local contexts, in France and Sweden in particular. This paper tests these theories on UKIP using the following research questions: 1) Is it possible to operationalise the halo effect? 2) Does the halo effect have an association with Radical Right voting in the UK? 3) If so, does this relationship hold in full voting models controlling for a number of known relevant factors? This paper builds more sophisticated aggregate and individual models of the halo effect. This is done additively, at first testing the halo effect independently before progressively controlling for key socio-demographic characteristics, additional area characteristics including relative deprivation and economic conditions, and finally a distance measure controlling for the proximity of these immigrant populations. Early results have identified spatial order halo variables have an effect on both Radical Right vote share at an aggregate level and propensity to vote at the individual level (univariate) which hold to a lesser extent when accounting for key socio-demographic factors. Further model specifications will control for the additional factors listed above.

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Changing patterns of UKIP support: Preliminary findings from the SCoRE comparative survey
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Electoral support for the 'radical right' parties such as the French FN, the German AfD, the Dutch PVV and UKIP in Britain have received considerable attention in political science, particularly for those elections where they have been successful (e.g. UKIP prior to the 2016 Referendum on leaving the EU). Comparative research on radical right parties in political science has focused mainly on national-level indicators and individual motivations when explaining variations in support for these parties. Whilst some research has used local data to look at how support varies within individual countries, there has been a notable absence of comparative research that formally and simultaneously examines: the regional and 'neighborhood' contexts, and individual determinants of radical right support. The SCoRE (Sub-National Context and Radical Right Support in Europe) project is developing a multilevel analysis for four countries: France, Germany, the Netherlands and GB. In this paper we report principally on the UK both on analysis of existing available secondary political, demographic and socio-economic data from official sources; and also on the comprehensive SCoRE survey of voting. Fieldwork for the latter was undertaken in the GB just after the 2017 General Election and used the same instrument administered by other partner countries (also in 2017). We use multilevel variance-components models to distinguish between different 'sources' of party support and do so number of different voting outcome measures, as well as demonstrate changes in UKIP support between the 2015 and 2017 General Elections

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Voting cleavages at the 2017 general election: was there a 'youthquake'?
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Some analysts of voting at recent UK general elections have identified a decline, even disappearance, of the traditional class cleavage in the pattern of support for the two main parties, a claim contested by others who argue that such a cleavage still exists but in a new form; the cleavage now reflects not differences in occupational status but rather in educational qualifications, the major route to career success in a post-industrial society. Analysts of voting at the 2017 UK general election then suggested the emergence of a new cleavage by age, termed by some as a 'youthquake'. Were either or both of those cleavages major characteristics of the voting pattern then and, if so, were they new? Deploying a new method of exploring patterns in multi-way contingency tables in the search for intersectionality, this paper uses data from the British Election Study surveys for the last four general elections plus the 2016 Brexit referendum to identify the strength of cleavages by age, sex, and educational qualifications at each contest. It finds evidence for the existence of all three, with the age cleavage becoming more pronounced in 2017.

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Using online e-petition data to estimate EU referendum results for UK Parliamentary Constituencies
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The United Kingdom's 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union (EU) is perhaps one of the most important recent electoral events in the UK. The political sentiment of the electorate, with a narrow vote to leave the EU, confounded pollsters, media commentators and academics alike, and has challenged elected Members of the Westminster Parliament. Unfortunately, for many areas of the UK this referendum outcome is not known for Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies, rather it is known for the coarser geography of counting areas. This has implications because it is Parliamentary Constituencies which return an MP. This paper uses novel data and machine learning algorithms to estimate the Leave vote percentage for these constituencies where it was not reported. We utilise information on political sentiment captured by signatories to UK government e-petitions as input data. A range of machine learning algorithms are tested on these data which provides methodological advances beyond traditional regression or ad-hoc approaches. We highlight that such methods are just one of a range of modelling approaches and there is scope for political scientists to apply machine learning algorithms to gain confirmatory or alternative insight in a range of different applications. Our

results are found to correlate well with other estimates which use different methods and data to those outlined in this paper.

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