Stability and change in New Zealanders' political party support

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Like in many multiparty contexts, questions remain about the nature of stability and change in New Zealanders' partisanship. Here, we add to the literature by systematically analysing the stability and change in party support and voting using a large longitudinal national probability sample of New Zealand adults (Ns = 5,449–9,845). Support (measured from strongly oppose to strongly support) for two major and two minor parties was generally stable over two-year (.58-.84) and five-year (.51-.77) test-retest periods. Political identity centrality moderated this association such that party support was more stable among those whose political beliefs were central to their sense of self. Markov models identified relatively stable voting patterns for major parties (National and Labour), with low probabilities of switching between these parties at elections in 2014 (.04-.07) and 2017 (.04 -.12). These results suggest support for political parties (measured via behaviour and attitudes) is generally stable in New Zealand.

Keywords: *Partisanship, Political Identity, Party Support, Voting Stability, Multiparty Systems*

Introduction

Political parties have long received attention for their role in shaping voters' political attitudes and voting behaviour. In their seminal work on the topic, Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) documented that political partisanship was an enduring and rigid psychological attachment to a political party that shapes political behaviour. Such a conception has led many to characterise party identification as an "unmoved mover" (e.g., see Green & Palmquist, 1990)—and for good reason. Party identification in the United States (U.S.) is highly stable over time (Green & Palmquist, 1994; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002). This feature of partisanship helps to explain its capacity to shape both policy preferences (Carsey & Layman, 2006) and political values (Goren, Federico, & Kittilson, 2009).

Despite the important outcomes of stable political partisanship, there has been only limited focus on its stability in New Zealand. Indeed, questions over the stability of party attitudes within *multi*party systems have persisted over the years (e.g., see Green et al. 2002; Johnston 2006; Thomassen & Rosema, 2009). Whereas identification with one party in two-party systems like the U.S. is generally associated with low or no identification with the other party (Schickler & Green, 1997), citizens of multiparty systems may identify with more than one party (Green et al., 2002; Schickler & Green, 1997). Multiple parties may also adopt similar ideological stances (Johnston 2006), thereby obscuring differences between political platforms. For example, support for one party may be readily relinquished in favour of another when ideological disagreements arise in multiparty systems because there are viable, ideologically similar, substitutes. Alternatively, citizens may express *greater* stability in their party preferences if more nuanced ideological differences between parties make it easier for voters to find the 'best fitting' party.

In this study, we aim to provide insights into the stability of New Zealanders' political party support across the adult lifespan. Using a large longitudinal national probability sample, we examine the stability of party support (i.e., an attitudinal indicator of partisanship) across two- and five-year periods, and also investigate the hypothesis that political identity centrality (i.e., how important one's political beliefs are to their sense of self) moderates these stability estimates. To complement these analyses, we then examine stability and change in party votes (i.e., behavioural indicators of partisanship) across three successive national elections (2011, 2014, and 2017) over the same period. In doing so, our analyses increase understanding of the stability and centrality of party attitudes of New Zealanders, as well as voters in other multiparty systems.

Partisan stability in New Zealand and other multiparty systems

Partisanship in the United States is often assessed via party identification—that is, how strongly one identifies with a given political party (see Campbell et al., 1960). Yet limitations and issues with using party identification as a measure of partisanship have long been noted (e.g. Thomassen & Rosema, 2009). For example, difficulties in translating the concept of identity, and adapting the question wording for different parties has resulted in what Johnston (2006) refers to as a "measurement swamp" in the cross-national literature. The original measure also does not account for identification with multiple parties, which is more common in multiparty systems (see Green et al., 2002; Schickler & Green, 1997; Weisberg, 1980), or 'negative partisanship' based on dislike of parties (e.g., Caruana, McGregor, & Stephenson, 2015; Mayer, 2017; Rose & Misher, 1998).

Research on the stability of party attitudes in multiparty systems has consequently utilized inconsistent measures and produced disparate results. For example, Kuhn (2009) found low levels of stability in voting intentions using Swiss Household Panel data from 1999-2007, as only 18% of respondents reported voting for the same party in each wave (although a further 27% stated

either the same party preference or no preference across waves). Schmitt-Beck, Weick, and Christoph (2006) also assessed party identification over an extended period (1984-2001) in a German panel study. They found that only around 24% of respondents remained committed to the same party in every wave, casting doubt on the long-term stability of partisanship in multiparty systems. However, Schmitt-Beck et al. also noted that most of the instability in party identification occurred due to movement to-and-from the same party and identification as an "independent" voter. In other words, respondents were unlikely to switch between different parties, but rather, varied in the constancy in which they identified with a single party over time.

Using a unique scale assessing social identification with political parties, Huddy, Bankert, and Davies (2018) found evidence of stability in the strength of people's partisan identity in a multiparty system using data from the British Election Study. Their standardized estimates of stability ranged from .24 (over a period of 18 months) to .79 (over a period of 6 months), and were somewhat higher among Conservative (vs. Labour) Party identifiers. Others have found even stronger evidence of the stability of party attitudes in multiparty systems. For example, Richardson (1991) found the stability of party identification in Britain, the Netherlands, and West Germany to range between r = .66 – .79 over one to three years. Similarly, Schickler and Green (1997) found that party identification was highly stable in Britain, Germany, and Canada, reaching stability estimates comparable to the U.S. Using dummy-coded variables indicating whether or not a respondent most strongly identified with a given party, they found R^2 values generally greater than .83 over periods ranging from 5 months to 4 years. Thus, some studies suggest that partisanship can indeed be highly stable in multiparty contexts.

In New Zealand, extant research on partisan stability is scarce, and mostly predates the 1996 shift to mixed-member proportional (MMP) representation, which ushered in a viable multiparty political era (see Vowles, 2005). Dalton and Weldon (2007) identified similar rates of feeling close to a party in New Zealand (56.3%) compared to the U.S. (57%) between 1996 – 2000, suggesting similar rates of partisanship. Lamare (1984) also found that party identification nullifies the impact evaluations of policies, political issues, and party candidates have on vote choice. Yet, other studies suggest party identification may not translate to stable partisan behaviours over time. Aimer (1989) adapted the party identification scale for the New Zealand context and found high rates (86%) of identification during the 1987 election. Identification also corresponded closely to vote choice (79% rate of matching), yet only 54% - 66% of Labour and National Party identifiers repeatedly voted for their party across three successive elections. Leithner (1997) also found generally low rates (roughly 60%) of loyal voting for the National and Labour parties from 1935 – 1987. More recently, Vowles (2016) identified a decline in the percentage of New Zealanders reporting strong or close party identification since 2005, which was just below 40% in 2014. Vowles' data also showed a general increase in voter volatility from 1972-2014, with around 40% of NZES participants switching their vote (between parties or to-and-from abstention) in 2014.

Although multiparty systems possess unique qualities that may influence stability (i.e., more parties and potentially greater ideological diversity), these factors can vary across contexts. Indeed, this may help to explain the variability in stability estimates found across studies. Analysing data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, Dassonneville, Blais, and Dejaeghere (2015) showed that the effective number of parties in a system moderates the volatility in party votes. Switching votes between parties occurred more often in systems with a greater number of parties *regardless* of how much participants liked the party for which they had previously voted (although the number of parties made no difference when participants expressed strong dislike for the party for which they previously voted). Given the effective number of parties in New Zealand has been relatively lower and more stable in recent years (i.e., 3.3 – 2.9 in 2014 and 2017 respectively, Vowles, 2018), this may suggest relatively high levels of stability in party support and voting behaviour during the period examined here.

Other factors may also hint at higher levels of stability. For example, partisanship tends to be more prevalent in older systems and is fostered through parental socialization (Dalton & Weldon, 2007). New Zealand's two main political parties (National and Labour) are longstanding in the political landscape (having been established over 85 years ago), which may increase the odds of inter-generational transferal of party preferences. New Zealand's parties are also reasonably well ideologically polarized (Dalton, 2008), which may make it easier for New Zealanders to perceive differences between parties and, therefore, maintain support and voting for a given party. Thus, several factors in multiparty contexts may shape partisanship and the stability of party attitudes and behaviour, and these factors may point toward relatively high stability in New Zealand.

Overview of the present study

We contribute to the literature by examining the stability of political party support across the adult lifespan for four main political parties in New Zealand: The National Party, the Labour Party, the Greens, and New Zealand (NZ) First. The centre-right National Party (in government from 2008 – 2017) and the centre-left Labour Party are the two major parties in New Zealand that traditionally receive the most support during general elections (e.g., the parties received 44.45% and 36.89% of the vote in 2017, respectively). The Greens (6.27% of the 2017 vote), in contrast, are an environmentally focused minor party who also advocate for greater societal equality, and often work closely with the Labour Party. Finally, NZ First (7.20% of the 2017 vote) tends to combine populist sentiment with nationalism (e.g., promoting restrictions to immigration), yet progressively advocate for senior citizens. In this sense, NZ First inconsistently aligns with the left and the right, and has formed governments with both National and Labour (see Vowles, 2018).

Although party identification is most commonly used to assess partisanship, notions of party support are widely used in its description. For example, Bartle and Belluci (2009) define partisanship as "a long-term tendency to

support one party rather than another" (p. 1), whereas Petrocik (2009) asserts that "it represents an expression of support that influences behavior and other party-related attitudes and assessments." (p. 564). As such, we use ratings of support for each party (ranging from strongly support to strongly oppose) as an attitudinal indicator of partisanship. Indeed, measures of party support are useful in that they allow for both negative partisanship (i.e., partisanship defined by opposition toward parties; Caruana et al., 2015) and the presence of simultaneous support for multiple parties. We then assess the stability of party vote as a behavioural indicator of partisanship (see Bartels, 2000, for the strong association between partisanship and voting in the U.S.) and, crucially, whether party support predicts future party vote while adjusting for the effect of prior party vote.

Research has demonstrated the utility of party support measures to examine partisanship in New Zealand. Highlighting the presence of multiple party commitments, Greaves et al. (2015) conducted a latent profile analysis of party support ratings and found that, whereas 14% of the sample exclusively supported the Labour Party, a further 16.4% supported both the Labour Party and the Greens. Moreover, Satherley, Yogeeswaran, Osborne, and Sibley (2018) showed that party support was predictive of party-consistent attitude change at the 2016 flag change referendums, suggesting partisanship is highly central to New Zealanders. Thus, by examining the stability of explicit measures of party support for the first time, our analyses provide further insight into their utility in assessing partisanship in multiparty contexts. Whereas most past research in New Zealand has examined aggregated indices of partisan stability (for example, examining overall net volatility in voting; see, e.g., Leithner, 1997; Vowles, 2016), our analyses also provide a more systematic party-by-party examination of stability including specific patterns of party vote change (i.e., the probabilities of shifting between specific parties, or to-and-from abstention), as well as moderators of these effects, over time.

Although we generally expected people's party support to be stable over time, the amount of stability should vary depending on the party examined. Indeed, past research has found that preferences for minor (versus major) parties are more susceptible to change (Kuhn 2009; Richardson 1991; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2006). Kuhn (2009) argues that the decline in stability for minor parties results from their relatively low power and that support for minor parties tends to fluctuate in relation to particularly salient topics. Greater hostility between ideologically adjacent parties may also promote more out-party negativity among supporters of those parties (Richardson, 1991). Preliminary analyses in New Zealand seem to support this notion. Greaves, Osborne, Sengupta, Milojev, and Sibley (2014) showed that support for the two major parties (namely, the National Party and the Labour Party) was more stable than support for the minor parties (including the Greens), albeit over only a one-year period (i.e., 2009-2010). As such, we expected support for NZ First and the Greens to be less stable than support for the National Party and the Labour Party. In terms of voting behaviour, New Zealand voters may cast strategic votes between their favoured parties based on their anticipated electoral outcome (Bowler, Karp, & Donovan, 2010). This may lead to lower impressions of stability when assessing party votes over time, particularly for concurrent Labour and Green party supporters who may switch their party vote between these parties more often.

We also consider nuances in the stability of party support. The instrumental approach to partisanship (i.e., partisanship as reflecting a 'running tally' of party evaluations; Fiorina, 1981) generally explains stability in terms of enduring expectations about political parties (e.g., Franklin & Jackson, 1983). Yet high stability of partisanship is specifically hypothesised by expressive approaches to partisanship (i.e., partisanship as a deep psychological attachment to a party; Campbell et al., 1960), which argue that the motivated defence of partisan identities foster party-congruent perceptions and attitudes (rather than vice versa; see Bolsen, Druckman, & Cook, 2014). As such, we examined political identity centrality as a moderator of party support and hypothesized that, although party support should generally be stable, those who report higher identity centrality (i.e., those who consider their political beliefs to be more important to their sense of self) should have more stable levels of support. Finally, we also account for age differences in the stability of support in our models, given that the stability of partisanship increases with age (e.g., Green et al., 2002; Sears & Funk, 1999; Stoker & Jennings, 2008). Thus, we generally expected higher levels of stability in older age.

METHODS

Sampling Procedure

We used data from Time 4 (2012), Time 6 (2014) and Time 9 (2017) of the NZAVS, a national probability longitudinal panel study of New Zealand adults sampled from the New Zealand electoral roll. The Time 4 NZAVS consisted of 12,179 participants, 5,107 of whom were obtained through booster sampling and were completing the survey for the first time. The Time 6 NZAVS consisted of 15,820 participants, 9,075 of whom had completed Time 4 (a retention rate of 74.5% of the Time 4 sample). Finally, the Time 9 (2017) NZAVS consisted of 17,072 participants, with 6,776 participants retained from the Time 4 sample (a 3-year retention rate of 55.6%). For each wave, participants received a postal copy of the questionnaire and also had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire online. Participants could also enter a prize draw for grocery vouchers for participation. Non-respondents received multiple reminders to complete the study through phone and email.

Data collection for each wave spanned approximately one year, with Time 4 collection running from 19.09.2012 – 16.09.2013, Time 6 from 21.10.2014 – 19.08.2015, and Time 9 from 13.08.2017 – 17.06.2018. Thus, we refer to each wave according to when data collection began (2012, 2014, and 2017 respectively). Note that the Time 4 (2012) wave assesses participants' party support in 2012/13, as well as their retrospective party vote from the 2011 election (we opted to use the Time 4/2012 wave, rather than the Time 3/2011 wave, as NZ First support was not assessed in the Time 3 questionnaire).

Participants

Participants who completed the 2012 and 2014 waves of the NZAVS had a mean age of 50.71 years (*SD* = 14.56, range = 18 – 93) in 2012, and 63% of the sample were women. Participants were able to report more than one ethnicity, with 89% of the sample reporting New Zealand European, 14% Maori, 4% Asian, and 4% Pacific. Finally, 41% of the sample were religious, 72% were employed, and 80% were born in New Zealand.

Participants who completed the 2012 and 2017 waves of the NZAVS had a mean age of 51.24 years (*SD* = 14.35, range = 18 – 93) in 2012, and 63% of the sample were women. Participants were able to report more than one ethnicity, with 91% of the sample reporting New Zealand European, 12% Maori, 4% Asian, and 3% Pacific. Finally, 40% of the sample were religious, 73% were employed, and 80% were born in New Zealand.

Measures

To assess support for the National Party, Labour Party, Green Party, and NZ First, participants were asked to "Please rate how strongly you oppose or support each of the following political parties", on a scale from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 7 (*strongly support*). These items were asked in 2012, 2014, and 2017. Voting behaviour was assessed with the item "Did you vote in the New Zealand election in 2014 (2017)" (yes/no) for the Time 6 and Time 9 NZAVS, and "Did you vote in the last (2011) New Zealand general election?" (yes/no) in the Time 4 NZAVS, followed by, "If yes, to which party did you give your party vote?" (open-ended). Political identity centrality was measured with the item, "How important are your political beliefs to how you see yourself?" (1 = *not important*, 7 = *very important*) in both 2014 and 2017.

Model Estimation

To estimate the rank-order stability of party support, we ran a series of models regressing party support in 2014 (for the 2-year estimates) and 2017 (for the 5-year estimates) on the same attitude measured in 2012. These analyses adjusted for the main effect of age (including quadratic and cubic components) and gender measured in 2012, as well as the main effect of identity centrality as measured in either 2014 or 2017 (as this variable was not included in the 2012 wave of the NZAVS). For these analyses, age was scaled by a factor of 10, and age, party support, and political identity centrality were mean-centred. We further included gender by party support and political identity centrality by party support interaction terms, and interaction terms between party support and linear, quadratic, and cubic terms for age. Non-significant higher-order interactions for age were dropped from the model until either a higher-order interaction was significant, or only the linear age interaction term remained (regardless of whether or not it was significant; for similar analytical approaches examining human values and personality traits, see Milfont, Milojev, & Sibley 2016 and Milojev & Sibley, 2014, respectively).[1]

The resulting models allowed us to estimate the simple slope for party support (i.e., the stability coefficient) at each age from 18 – 80 based on the standardized regression terms, as well as at high and low levels of political identity centrality. Although participants' ages ranged to 93 in our analyses, we calculated point estimates for ages up to 80 years because sample sizes were increasingly small at the tail end of the distribution (i.e., less than 1% of the sample was over the age of 80). As such, estimates beyond 80 years of age would have increasingly large standard errors.

RESULTS

Rank-order stability estimates

Table 1 displays correlations between measures across each wave examined. The standardized parameters for the formal regression models assessing the stability of party support are displayed in Tables 2-5. National Party support exhibited the highest stability over both the 2-year and 5-year test-retest periods (.84 and .77, respectively), which reflects the party's status as the most electorally successful party over the period examined. Labour and Green party support displayed comparable levels of stability over the 2-year test-retest period (.71 and .72, respectively), and the 5-year period (.65 and .68, respectively). Although Labour support could be expected to be more stable given its major party status, these findings capture the relatively lower levels of electoral success for the Labour Party over the 5-year period compared to National. Consistent with our hypothesis, NZ First support was the least stable over time. In short, support for political parties tended to be highly stable over time, with some variation depending on major vs. minor party status.[2]

[1] We took this approach to adjust for the positive association between age and partisan stability identified in prior research. Because we were not testing for specific hypotheses relating to age (except that stability would generally be higher in older age), we tested for cubic and quadratic terms in an exploratory manner to account for potential non-linear trends. Gender interactions were also included, as the NZAVS tends to over-represent women in particular.

[2] As with any analysis of this nature, it is worth noting that our samples may contain bias that influence our stability estimates (such as, for example, overestimating stability among a sample that is more interested in their political attitudes, and committed to completing surveys over time). Analyses by Sibley et al. (2017) indicate, relative to another major election polling source, the NZAVS does well at tracking party support over time. Yet the study does tend to over-estimate Green party support, and slightly underestimate Labour Party support. However, around 7% of the sample for our 5-year stability estimates provided the minimum rating of political identity centrality, with a mean at about the mid-point of the scale, suggesting our sample is not notably biased towards those with an interest in politics. In this sense, because the NZAVS is an omnibus study that assesses a range of psychological variables, it may be less prone to over-sampling the politically engaged than a survey with explicit ties to political beliefs. Application of sample weighting based on gender, ethnicity, and region also had minimal effects on our standardized stability estimates (with some slightly decreasing, and others slightly increasing).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations across waves.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1. Gender (2012)	-														
2. Age (2012)	.137*	-													
3. Political identity centrality (2014)	.053*	.095*	-												
4. National support (2012)	.063*	.098*	-.124*	-											
5. Labour support (2012)	-.105*	-.096*	.100*	-.568*	-										
6. Green support (2012)	-.175*	-.179*	.107*	-.474*	.516*	-									
7. NZF support (2012)	.031	.052*	-.044*	-.126*	.163*	.092*	-								
8. National support (2014)	.078*	.113*	-.123*	**.842***	-.579*	-.507*	-.129*	-							
9. Labour support (2014)	-.099*	-.061*	.120*	-.569*	**.721***	.464*	.101*	-.532*	-						
10. Green support (2014)	-.182*	-.203*	.129*	-.515*	.494*	**.757***	.015	-.493*	.536*	-					
11. NZF support (2014)	.026	.076*	-.017	-.120*	.112*	.022	**.583***	-.125*	.193*	.111*	-				
12. National support (2016)	.077*	.115*	-.128*	**.780***	-.560*	-.523*	-.097*	**.822***	-.542*	-.541*	-.102*	-			
13. Labour support (2016)	-.130*	-.064*	.077*	-.555*	**.658***	.506*	.073*	-.561*	**.680***	.547*	.106*	-.620*	-		
14. Green support (2016)	-.173*	-.180*	.116*	-.485*	.485*	**.710***	-.012	-.502*	.487*	**.740***	-.008	-.523*	.611*	-	
15. NZF support (2016)	.018	.085*	-.002	-.207*	.191*	.090*	**.496***	-.198*	.178*	.099*	**.563***	-.196*	.256*	.148*	-
Mean	.37	49.10	4.10	4.06	4.13	4.11	2.71	4.12	4.09	4.16	3.15	3.99	4.58	4.26	3.10
SD	.48	15.03	1.71	2.00	1.74	1.84	1.59	2.06	1.65	1.82	1.56	1.99	1.75	1.84	1.58

Note. * $p < .001$. Test-retest correlations between party support measures are boldface.

Table 2. Regression model assessing moderators of National Party support stability from 2012 – 2014 and 2012 – 2017.

	National support (2014)				National support (2017)			
	β	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*β*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
National support (2012)	**.840****	.878	.009	< .001	**.770****	.794	.012	< .001
Gender	.002	.008	.027	.763	.005	.020	.035	.564
Age	.044**	.062	.009	< .001	.022	.030	.023	.198
Age^2	-.019*	-.015	.005	.005	-.007	-.006	.007	.423
Age^3	-	-	-	-	.033*	.008	.004	.045
Political identity centrality	-.019*	-.022	.008	.006	-.037**	-.045	.011	< .001
Support × gender	-.009	-.016	.012	.177	.002	.003	.016	.867
Support × age	.012*	.009	.004	.033	.058**	.042	.011	< .001
Support × age^2	-.018*	-.005	.003	.029	-.029*	-.009	.003	.006
Support × age^3	-	-	-	-	-.030*	-.004	.002	.042
Support x identity	.051**	.031	.004	< .001	.076**	.046	.005	< .001

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$. Standard errors are of the standardized coefficients. Focal standardized 2-year and 5-year test-retest stability estimates are boldface.
$N(2014) = 7{,}288$, $R^2 = .72$, $N(2017) = 5{,}481$, $R^2 = .63$.

Table 3. Regression model assessing moderators of Labour Party support stability from 2012 – 2014 and 2012 – 2017.

	Labour support (2014)				Labour support (2017)			
	β	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*β*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
Labour support (2012)	**.715****	.691	.013	< .001	**.653****	.682	.017	< .001
Gender	-.018*	-.061	.028	.027	-.046*	-.170	.037	< .001
Age	-.016	-.018	.010	.067	-.013	-.016	.013	.223
Age^2	.003	.002	.005	.698	.009	.007	.007	.376
Political identity centrality	.051**	.049	.008	< .001	.031*	.033	.011	.004
Support × gender	-.005	-.008	.017	.625	.004	.007	.022	.752
Support × age	.019*	.013	.006	.030	.040**	.029	.008	< .001
Support × age^2	-.023*	-.007	.003	.049	-.042*	-.013	.005	.003
Support × identity	.080**	.044	.005	< .001	.082**	.050	.007	< .001

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$. Standard errors are of the standardized coefficients. Focal standardized 2-year and 5-year test-retest stability estimates are boldface.
$N(2014) = 7{,}261$, $R^2 = .53$, $N(2017) = 5{,}483$, $R^2 = .45$.

Table 4. Regression model assessing moderators of Green party support stability from 2012 – 2014 and 2012 – 2017.

	Green support (2014)				Green support (2017)			
	β	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*β*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
Green support (2012)	**.712****	.709	.010	< .001	**.676****	.692	.012	< .001
Gender	-.041*	-.155	.029	< .001	-.037**	-.144	.037	< .001
Age	-.073**	-.092	.010	< .001	-.054**	-.071	.013	< .001
Political identity centrality	.042**	.044	.008	< .001	.077**	.086	.011	< .001
Support × gender	.017	.026	.015	.073	.001	.001	.019	.945
Support × age	-.008	-.005	.005	.297	.003	.002	.006	.705
Support × identity	.076**	.042	.004	< .001	.067**	.040	.006	< .001

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$. Standard errors are of the standardized coefficients. Focal standardized 2-year and 5-year test-retest stability estimates are boldface.
$N(2014) = 7{,}250$, $R^2 = .59$, $N(2017) = 5{,}461$, $R^2 = .52$.

Table 5. Regression model assessing moderators of New Zealand First support stability from 2012 – 2014 and 2012 – 2017.

	NZ First support (2014)				NZ First support (2017)			
	β	*B*	*SE*	*p*	*β*	*B*	*SE*	*p*
NZ First support (2012)	**.579****	.582	.016	< .001	**.508****	.534	.020	< .001
Gender	.005	.017	.031	.574	.003	.011	.039	.776
Age	.057*	.061	.020	.002	.062*	.070	.026	.006
Age^2	.015	.009	.006	.140	-.038*	-.024	.008	.002
Age^3	-.028	-.005	.003	.138	-.030	-.006	.004	.192
Political identity centrality	-.006	-.006	.009	.525	.026*	.025	.012	.035
Support × gender	-.001	-.001	.021	.945	-.010	-.017	.027	.522
Support × age	-.019	-.013	.013	.306	-.006	-.004	.018	.813
Support × age^2	-.005	-.001	.004	.721	-.013	-.005	.005	.373
Support × age^3	.043*	.005	.002	.023	.052*	.007	.003	.025
Support × identity	.027*	.016	.006	.011	.004	.003	.008	.730

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$. Standard errors are of the standardized coefficients. Focal standardized 2-year and 5-year test-retest stability estimates are boldface.
$N(2014) = 7{,}222$, $R^2 = .34$, $N(2017) = 5{,}449$, $R^2 = .25$.

Table 6. Standardized stability estimates solved at high and low levels of political identity centrality.

	National support		Labour support		Green support		NZ First support	
	2014	2017	2014	2017	2014	2017	2014	2017[1]
High centrality	.890	.844	.792	.733	.785	.742	.606	.512
Low centrality	.790	.695	.639	.573	.639	.611	.553	.504

Note: Party support stability estimates solved at +/- 1 SD from the mean, estimated based on the standardized parameters presented in Tables 2-5.
[1] Political identity centrality was not a significant moderator of the 5-year stability of NZF support.

Notably, the stability estimates of party support were significantly moderated by political identity centrality, except for the stability of NZ First support over the 5-year test-retest period. Table 6 displays the stability estimates for party support across each period solved at high and low levels of identity centrality based on the models presented in Tables 2-5. Over the two-year period, moving from low to high identity centrality produced a .05 - .15 increase in party support stability across the parties. Over the five-year period, stability estimates of party support among those with high identity centrality were between .13 to .16 units higher than at low levels of centrality. These results are consistent with the expressive approach of partisanship, which emphasizes stability as a product of strong social identities.

Results also revealed age differences in the stability of party support for most parties. Figure 1 displays the trajectory of 5-year support stability across the lifespan for each party, with different age functions observed for each party. In terms of the major parties, Labour Party support generally increased in stability with older age, but National Party support decreased in younger age, before increasing again between roughly ages 36 – 60, and decreasing thereafter. Although we expected party support for these parties to generally increase with age, the cubic function of National Party support stability was only marginally significant given our sample size (i.e., $p = .042$) for the 5-year period, and the function was more consistent with expectations over the 2-year period (i.e., stability increasing with age, albeit at a decreasing rate). In terms of the minor parties, age did not moderate the stability of Green party support, whereas a cubic function was identified for NZ First support. Specifically, the stability of party support for NZ First was low amongst the young, increased to a plateau in mid-life, and increased further amongst the oldest in our sample. This pattern seems consistent with NZ First's role in New Zealand politics as a relatively less salient party that tends to advocate for senior citizens' rights.

Markov Models of vote stability and switching

To examine whether test-retest stability estimates of party support aligned with the stability of voting behaviour, we utilized Markov Modelling to investigate the patterns of stability and change in respondents' reported party vote across three national elections (2011 and 2014, both of which the National Party was elected into government, and 2017, where the Labour Party formed a government). For these analyses, we categorized party votes into four major categories: 'National Party', 'Labour Party', 'minor party', or 'no vote' in the election. Minor party votes were predominantly for the Green party (11.8-16.8% of the sample across the years) relative to NZ

Table 7. Results of the Markov Model estimating the effects of National and Labour Party support on the log-odds of changing vs. retaining National or Labour Party vote from 2011 – 2014.

	2014 vote					
Predictors among National Party voters in 2011	Labour vote vs. National vote		Minor vote vs. National vote		No vote vs. National vote	
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
National support	-1.128**	.107	-.666**	.070	-.262*	.115
Labour support	1.156**	.124	.110	.071	.274*	.102
Predictors among Labour Party voters in 2011	National vote vs. Labour vote		Minor vote vs. Labour vote		No vote vs. Labour vote	
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
National support	.934**	.106	.090	.059	.328*	.126
Labour support	-.449**	.109	-.284**	.066	-.386*	.158

Note: N = 5,449. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .001$

Table 8. Results of Markov Model estimating the effects of National and Labour Party support on the log-odds of changing vs. retaining National or Labour Party vote from 2014 – 2017.

	2017 vote					
Predictors among National Party voters in 2014	Labour vote vs. National vote		Minor vote vs. National vote		No vote vs. National vote	
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
National support	-.808**	.053	-.640**	.059	-.453**	.097
Labour support	.591**	.048	.227**	.057	.105*	.073
Predictors among Labour Party voters in 2014	National vote vs. Labour vote		Minor vote vs. Labour vote		No vote vs. Labour vote	
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
National support	.627**	.085	.039	.054	.289*	.085
Labour support	-.629**	.103	-.305**	.059	-.172	.136

Note: N = 9,845. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .001$

First (3.3-5.1%) or other party (5.1-6.3%) votes. National and Labour Party voters comprised 35-40.5% and 20.8-33.9% of the sample across the years, respectively. Those explicitly indicating that they did not vote made up 5.2-7.9% of valid responses across the years, while people who indicated that they were unsure or did not report who they voted for (3.9-6.1% of valid responses) were excluded from these analyses.

Figure 2 displays the results of a Markov Model estimating vote transitions across the 2011, 2014, and 2017 elections without covariates. Consistent with the results for the stability of party support, voting for the National Party tended to be most stable over time. The stability of voting for the Labour Party tended to be somewhat lower across the 2011 – 2014 elections, but was highly stable from 2014 – 2017. Across both election cycles, the probability of switching votes between these two major parties was very low, ranging from .04 (Labour voters becoming National voters in 2017) and .12 (National voters becoming Labour voters in 2017). Consistent with past research showing that some New Zealanders solely support Labour, whereas others support both Labour and the Green Party (Greaves et al, 2014), the highest probabilities for vote switching occurred to-and-from the Labour Party and minor parties (predominantly Green Party voters).

New Zealanders can strongly support multiple parties, particularly Labour and the Greens (Greaves et al., 2015), and may also engage in strategic voting based on their perceptions of party performance (Bowler et al., 2010). Thus, we ran two additional models that included support for the National Party and Labour Party as covariates (see Tables 7 and 8). These models reveal whether a) party support is distinct from, and not simply a restatement of,

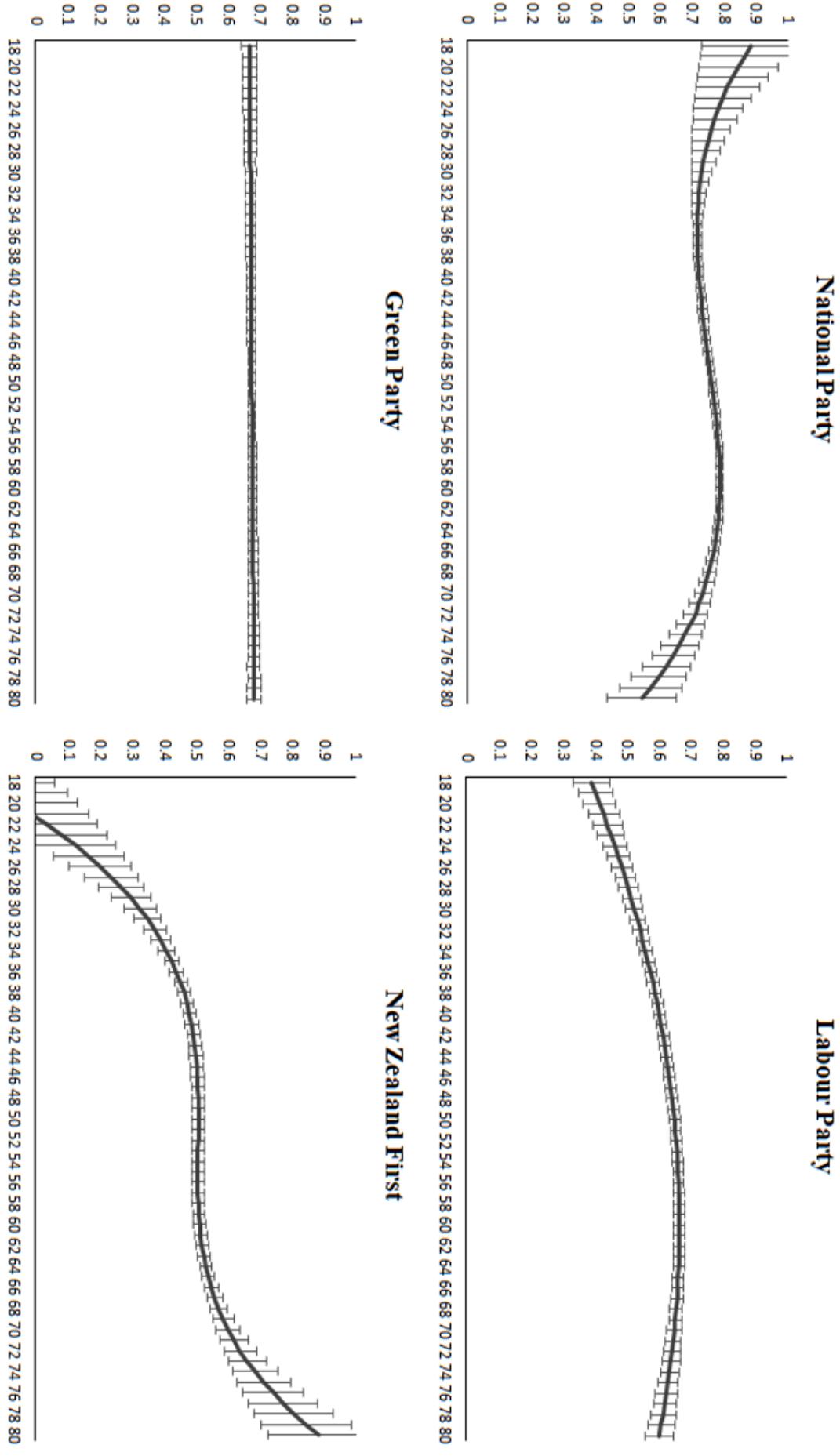

Figure 1. Standardized 5-year stability estimates of party support (y-axis) as a function of age (from 18 – 80 years; x-axis). Error bars represent standard errors of the estimates.

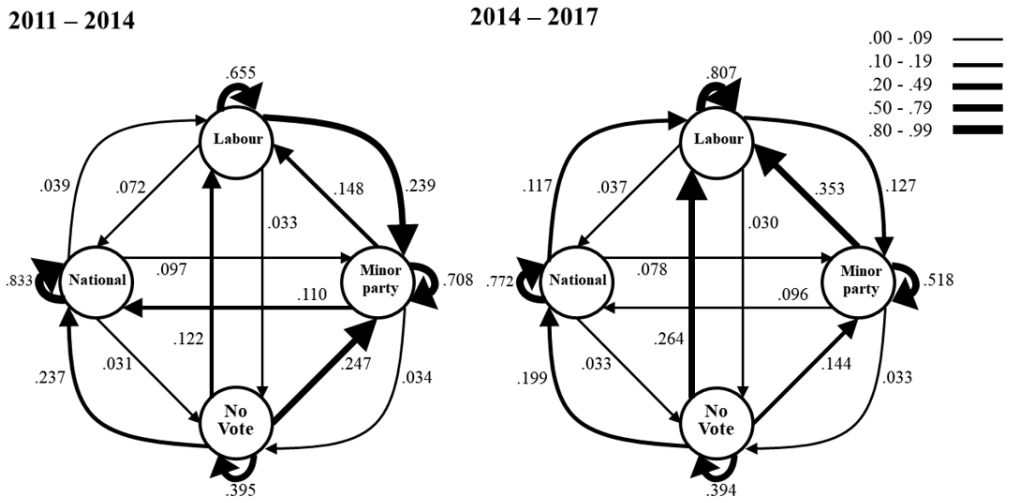

Figure 2. Markov Models estimating the transition probabilities of maintaining the same vote, and switching votes between major and minor parties, and non-voting, across the 2011 – 2014 (left) and 2014 – 2017 (right) New Zealand general elections (N = 6,232).

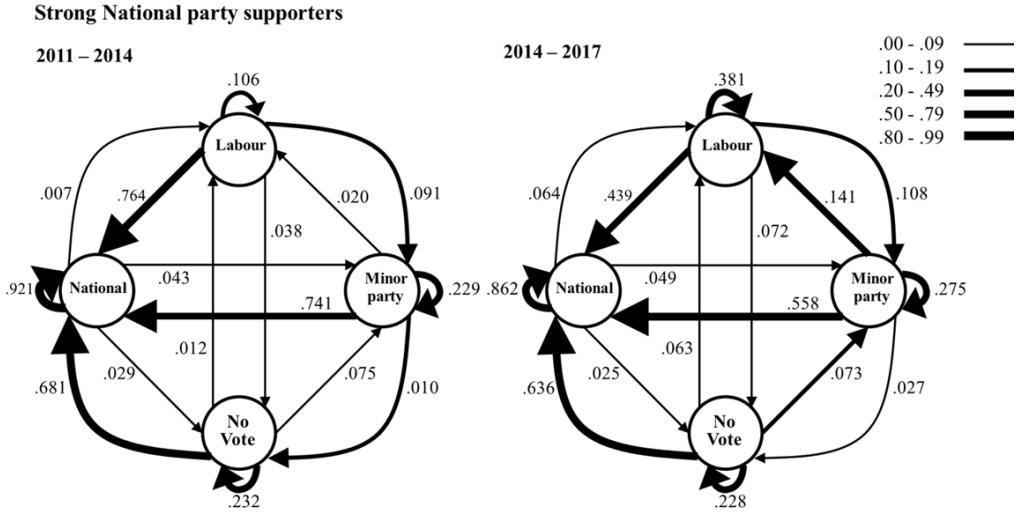

Figure 3. Transition probabilities of maintaining vs. switching party vote across elections among those maximally supportive of the National Party (Labour Party support held at mean levels; $N_{2011-2014}$ = 5,449. $N_{2014-2017}$ = 9,845).

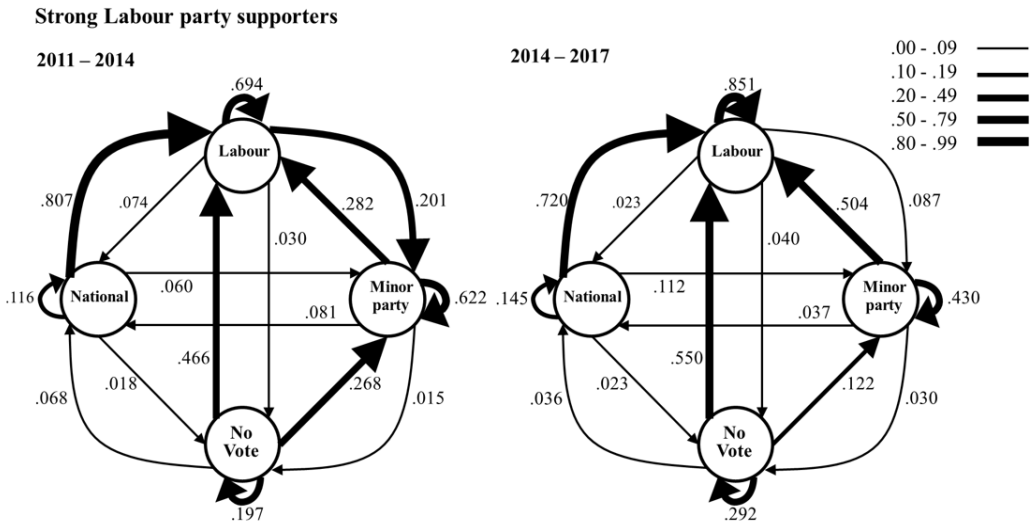

Figure 4. Transition probabilities of maintaining vs. switching party vote across elections among those maximally supportive of The Labour Party (National Party support held at mean levels; $N_{2011-2014}$ = 5,449. $N_{2014-2017}$ = 9,845).

voting, and b) whether participants vote strategically, where supporters of a given party (Labour) may nonetheless demonstrate high probabilities of voting for minor parties (e.g., the Greens) when Labour performs poorly (or vice versa).

Consistent with our expectations, party support significantly predicted future voting behaviour, even when accounting for prior party vote. The probabilities of stable voting vs. vote switching across elections are displayed in Figure 3 (solved at maximal support for the National Party and mean support for the Labour Party) and Figure 4 (maximal support for the Labour Party and mean support for the National Party). Compared to the model without party support covariates, these models demonstrate that consistent party voting across elections was even more probable among voters strongly supportive of the National or Labour Party. Moreover, people who were strongly supportive of National or Labour who (for whatever reason) did not vote for these parties in a prior election had very high probabilities of returning their vote to their strongly supported party in the following election.

Findings were, however, slightly more nuanced for strong Labour supporters. Strong Labour Party supporters who voted for Labour in 2011 had a reasonably high probability (.201) of voting for a minor party (e.g., the Greens) in 2014, whereas strong Labour supporters who voted for a minor party were likely to maintain a minor party vote in 2014. Yet, in 2017, when the Labour Party gained momentum under Jacinda Ardern's leadership, strong Labour supporters who voted for a minor party in 2014 had a .50 probability of voting for Labour in 2017, while strong Labour supporters who voted Labour in 2014 were only about one third as likely to switch to a minor party vote in 2017 compared to the same probability of switching from 2011 – 2014. These results are consistent with the presence of voters who are highly supportive of *both* the Labour and Green parties, and seem to reflect an element of strategic voting (such that these voters will switch their votes between the two parties, depending on perceived party performance).

DISCUSSION

Stability is considered a crucial aspect of partisanship that indicates a commitment to a party, rather than a fleeting judgement. It implies citizens remain committed even in the face of undesirable performance or policies, yet its presence in multiparty systems has remained in question. In this study, we assessed the stability of party support and voting as attitudinal and behavioural indicators of partisanship in New Zealand, where stability has not been systematically analysed in recent years. By examining party support, we also provide useful information on an attitudinal measure that can accommodate the presence of multiple party commitments, as well as both 'negative' and 'positive' partisanship in multiparty systems. We used a longitudinal national probability sample of New Zealand adults to assess the 2 and 5-year stability of party support (attitudinal partisanship), and the stability of party voting (behavioural partisanship) between three national elections from 2011 – 2017. The results demonstrated high levels of stability in New Zealanders' support for both major and minor parties over 2-year (.58 - .84) and 5-year (.51 - .77) test-retest periods. Moreover, stability estimates were generally higher among participants who indicated that their political beliefs were important to their sense of self (.61 - .89 for the 2-year period, and .51 - .85 for the 5-year period). Finally, generally high levels of stable party voting between national elections were observed (consistent party vote probabilities of .66 - .83).

To place these estimates within context, the stability of support for major parties in particular does not stray far from the 2-year test-retest estimates demonstrated by Big-Six personality traits, which are generally considered highly stable over time (i.e., .73 - .92; Milojev & Sibley, 2014). In contrast, the stability of party support generally exceeded the 3-year test-retest estimates of Schwartz values (.55 - .60; see Milfont, Milojev, & Sibley, 2016; note that these papers used the same modelling method used here). These results therefore demonstrate that party support, at least in New Zealand, reflects stable and meaningful attitudes toward political parties. Support also represents more than a restatement of voting behaviour, as party support predicts future voting behaviour while adjusting for prior vote. This is particularly consequential when considering the sway political parties can have on citizens' attitudes. Highly stable support for parties, particularly among those whose identities are invested in politics, might indicate greater susceptibility to follow the party position on political issues. Such effects have already been demonstrated in New Zealand (see Satherley et al., 2018; Satherley, Osborne, & Sibley, 2019), thus reinforcing the view that partisanship can have detrimental effects, beyond the U.S.

Our findings also reveal nuances in the stability of partisan attitudes in multiparty systems in general. Consistent with our hypothesis and past research (e.g. Kuhn, 2009; Richardson, 1991), support for major parties was generally more stable than support for minor parties. Yet, our results also suggest the presence of multiple party commitments (e.g., Greaves et al., 2015), which may lead to lower attitudinal, and particularly behavioural (i.e. voting), partisan stability in multiparty systems. Our results demonstrate that strong Labour supporters maintained reasonably high probabilities of switching their vote to a minor party (most likely the Greens) in 2014, when Labour was performing relatively poorly, compared to 2017, when Labour's popularity soared under Jacinda Ardern's leadership. This is broadly consistent with Bowler et al.'s (2010) analyses of strategic voting in the 2002 New Zealand election, indicating New Zealanders were more likely to vote for their second-choice party if they believed that their preferred party would not win. For example, Labour supporters may have switched to a Green vote to instead ensure the party stayed above the 5% parliamentary threshold when it seemed Labour was unlikely to win, but returned their vote to Labour when the prospect of victory seemed greater (or vice versa). Overall, these findings suggest behavioural measures of partisanship, such as party voting, may be inherently less stable in multiparty systems.

Our party-by-party approach to examining stability in support and voting may also explain the relatively higher image of stability conveyed here compared to Vowles (2016) who found both relatively low party identification in 2014 (40%) and relatively high vote volatility (just

under 40% of New Zealand Election Study participants switched their vote across the 2008 – 2014 elections). Our results show that stability in voting is much higher for major parties to compared to minor parties and non-voting. Thus, composite measures of volatility across parties (like those presented by Vowles, 2016) will produce an average estimate. Moreover, data from Vowles (2018) shows that the effective number of parties in New Zealand has been relatively stable since 2005, and much lower than the period between 1996-2002. For example, the effective number of parties was at 2.9 and 3.3 in 2017 and 2014, respectively, compared to a peak of 4.4 in 1996. Thus, a smaller and more stable number of represented parties may have given way over time to more stable support for those parties in recent years. Finally, the low probability for people to switch votes between the Labour and National parties appears consistent with the ideological polarization of parties in New Zealand (Dalton, 2008). Despite the two major parties being centre-left and centre-right, New Zealanders still appear to perceive large enough differences between the parties to consider them quite distinct.

Finally, it should be noted that our analyses are impacted by the political context at the time. Although our analyses are longitudinal, they remain limited to a relatively small, stable timeframe (2011 – 2017) in New Zealand politics. As such, indices of stability may change depending on the political context of the time. This is hinted at in our analyses, as the stability of support and voting for Labour, a major party who underwent a number of leadership changes and tended to poll poorly, was lower than for National, a successful party that maintained reasonably steady electoral support over the period. Data from the 2020 election would provide a strong test of the impact of political conditions on the stability of support and voting for National, as their vote share dropped by 18.9 percentage points from the previous election, whereas the Labour Party's vote share soared as a result of their internationally-praised response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Future analyses could examine specifically where the votes of prior National Party voters shifted (e.g., to Labour, the ACT party, or to abstention), and whether the sharp drop in votes for the National Party also corresponded with a drop in ratings of support for the party.

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