

# Flawed Measures, Flawed Inferences?

A Panel Study on the Accuracy of Recalled Vote Choices in  
Belgian Elections (2009-2014)

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CSES Plenary Session, Berlin, October 8-11, 2014

- ▶ Who switches parties is an old question in electoral research
- ▶ Increased instability in voting behavior

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- ▶ Recall questions in cross-sectional surveys are regularly relied on (part of CSES modules as well)

# Errors in recall questions

- ▶ Fierce criticism: *"recall data should not be incorporated into models of voting behavior"* (Weir, 1975: 53)
- ▶ Memory problems
  - Cognitive capacities
  - Political involvement
  - Time
- ▶ Cognitive dissonance

# Overreported stability

- ▶ Easier to remember
- ▶ Tendency to appear consistent

# Research on sources of errors in recalls

Previous research finds weak evidence

*"We were surprised to find that only a relatively small number of factors appeared to be associated at all with recall behavior" (van der Eijk and Niemoller, 2008: 328).*



# Implications for research on electoral volatility

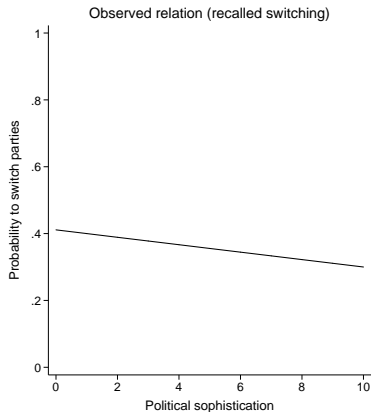
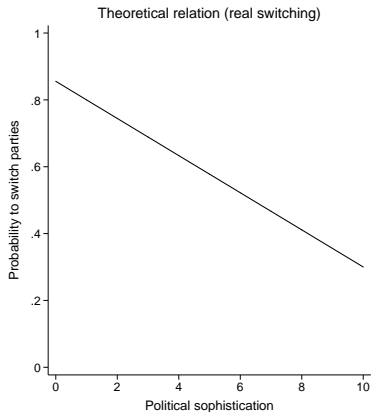
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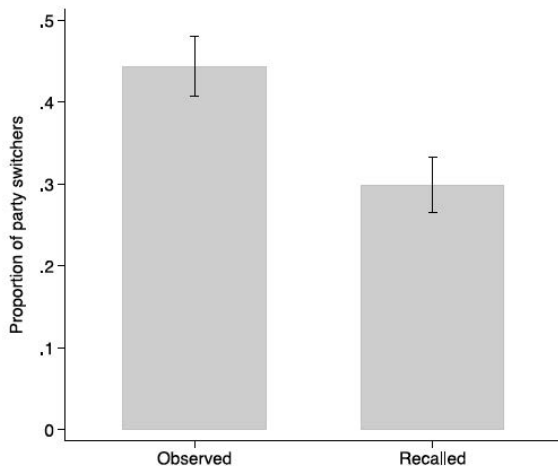
- ▶ Belgian Election Panel (BEP) 2009-2014
- ▶ 792 respondents (48% RR)
- ▶ 'Real' behavior 2009 vs. recall in 2014

**Table 1.** Accuracy of recall by stability of the vote

	Stable voters	Party-switchers	Total
Accurate recall	90.1%	35.9%	66.1%
Inaccurate recall	9.9%	64.2%	33.9%
N	384	265	690

*Source:* BEP, 2009-2014. Unweighted data.

**Figure 2.** Bias in measuring volatility when using recall question



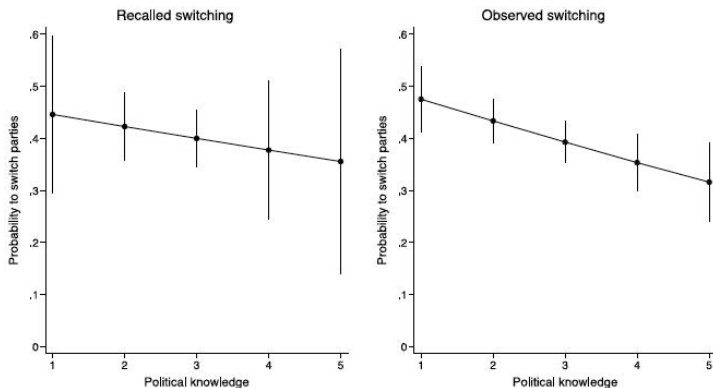
Source: BEP, 2009-2014. Unweighted data.

**Table 2.** Binary logistic regression explaining accurate recall of the 2009 vote

	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	b	se	b	se	b	se
Dutch (ref: French)	-0.016	0.172	-0.144	0.197	-0.239	0.239
Female (ref: male)	-0.277	0.172	-0.324	0.190	-0.473*	0.229
Age	0.012*	0.006	0.017*	0.007	0.015	0.008
Low educated (ref: middle)	0.151	0.233	0.135	0.264	0.015	0.313
High educated (ref: middle)	0.184	0.198	0.004	0.219	-0.051	0.261
Political interest	0.070	0.041	0.046	0.047	0.037	0.056
Political knowledge	0.042	0.065	0.051	0.072	-0.075	0.086
Poll - 2009 result of 2009 party			0.049***	0.014	0.029	0.016
Switched parties (observed)					-2.531***	0.232
Constant	-0.415	0.384	-0.121	0.424	1.788**	0.550
<i>N</i>	668		615		595	
pseudo $R^2$	0.021		0.047		0.257	

Source: BEP, 2009-2014. Unweighted data. Unstandardized coefficients and their standard errors are reported. Significance levels: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

**Figure 3.** Marginal effect of political knowledge on the probability to switch parties



Marginal effects and 95%-confidence intervals of knowledge on the probability to switch parties. Based on estimates of Model I and Model III in Table 3. All other covariate set at their mean values.



# Conclusion

- ▶ Reason for concern: flawed measures of recall
- ▶ Underestimation of real amount of vote switching (33% vs 44%)
- ▶ Predictors of vote switching are no strong predictors of accuracy
- ▶ No flawed inferences



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## **Elections and Voting Behaviour**

*Supported by the*

*ECPR Standing Group on*

*Public Opinion and Voting Behaviour in a Comparative Perspective*

15-22 January 2015, Leuven (Belgium)