

Chapter 7

**Partisanship, Participation,
and the Electorate**



SIGNIFICANT CHANGES HAVE OCCURRED IN VOTING behavior and in partisan attachments in the British electorate over time. Such changes have had far-reaching implications for the British political system in general and for party politics in particular. The aim of this chapter is to examine what light our model of political participation throws on the task of explaining voting behavior. Voting is not, of course, an example of high-intensity participation, but that it is the baseline activity in a continuum of participation makes it interesting in its own right. If the modified general incentives model performs well in explaining voting behavior as well as the high-intensity types of participation involved with party activism, the validity of the model is greatly strengthened.

The literature on electoral behavior is large, but it can be classified into distinct research traditions, each of which has an underlying theoretical model of electoral choice. There are many similarities between these models, making it possible to define a standard model that incorporates the key variables that have figured in most models of electoral choice. It turns out that this standard model has many similarities with the modified general incentives model, though the latter is more general and encompassing than the former. Thus the modified general incentives model provides an excellent theoretical framework for explaining the dynamics of party support among the electorate.

We begin this chapter by reviewing different research traditions in the analysis of electoral behavior in Britain, which leads in to a discussion of the standard model of voting behavior. We then examine the relationship

between the modified general incentives model and the standard model of voting behavior. In a subsequent section we specify a vote function based on this model, which links time-series observations of voting intentions to a set of predictor variables derived from the modified general incentives model. This is followed by a section that discusses methodological issues involved in estimating the vote function for the Labour and Conservative parties, and subsequently we examine some estimates of these models. The final section discusses the findings and draws some conclusions about the determinants of party support in Britain.

Models of Electoral Dynamics in Britain



The modern literature on the dynamics of electoral support originates with Butler and Stokes's (1974) classic discussion of electoral change in Britain. As is well known, their model relies heavily on the Michigan school of electoral research, which focuses chiefly on social psychological variables as determinants of electoral choice (Campbell et al. 1960). As Butler and Stokes point out, political parties play a key role in this model: "Individual electors accept the parties as the leading actors on the political stage and see in partisan terms the meaning of the choices which the universal franchise puts before them" (1974: 20).

Thus partisanship, or the fact that "most electors think of themselves as supporters of a given party in a lasting sense" (Butler and Stokes 1974: 39), is the key mechanism by which voters can make sense of electoral politics. Party identification is seen as a long-term psychological attachment by voters to one or another of the major political parties, and it is the most enduring feature of their political attitudes and beliefs. Parties represent certain values and policy goals in the public's mind and also are perceived as being capable of affecting the world in ways that matter, such that they organize the voter's choice at election times. The existence of partisanship allows voters to hold the government of the day accountable for public policies, since that government must inevitably be a party government. In addition, partisanship creates a process of selective perception that acts as a filter and selects information that tends to reinforce party attachments over time.

Partisanship plays such a dominant role in the model that it is thought to be self-reinforcing over time, such that an individual who supports a party at a given election is more likely to do so at a subsequent election.

This implies that young people are more likely to be volatile in their voting behavior than are older people, because they have not yet fully acquired partisan attachments. Butler and Stokes supported the latter inference by showing that, while only 23 percent of people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four in their 1970 survey had very strong partisan attachments, 63 percent of the those between the ages of sixty-one and seventy were in this category (1974: 58).

In their model partisanship is the product of enduring social cleavages, principally social class, and it is transmitted across the generations by means of socialization processes within the family. Thus the political environment within which the individual lives creates and reinforces partisan attachments along class lines. Butler and Stokes's surveys showed that in 1963 some 86 percent of respondents in the British Election Study with a higher managerial occupation were Conservative identifiers and 75 percent of unskilled manual workers were Labour identifiers (1974: 77). In addition, 86 percent of Conservative identifiers had a Conservative voting preference in that year, and 91 percent of Labour identifiers had a Labour voting preference (46). Thus their basic model is very simple: social class measured by occupational status largely determines partisanship, and in turn partisanship largely determines voting behavior. Clearly, this is a relatively static model, given that the occupational structure of society and the socialization process associated with the acquisition of partisanship change rather slowly.

This simple but powerful model had much appeal, but it did face a number of problems, particularly in relation to the task of explaining electoral change. Moreover, these problems became more apparent over time. One problem was that Butler and Stokes themselves did an extensive and pioneering series of panel surveys in the 1960s to analyze political change, and paradoxically in view of their basic model these showed great instabilities in both partisanship and voting behavior. When they tracked changes in voting behavior during that decade, they were obliged to conclude that "in the five intervals of change that we have examined in the 1960s, there were never as much as two-thirds of the public positively supporting the same party at two successive points of time" (Butler and Stokes 1974: 268).

Clearly such volatility poses problems for a model that emphasizes the central importance of stable partisanship in explaining electoral choice. Butler and Stokes never really dealt with this inconsistency, although they did attempt to discuss other variables that might explain the changes

in voting patterns but for a variety of reasons tended to discount them. They examined three types of variable: voters' ideological beliefs, their evaluations of party leaders, and their issue perceptions.

In the case of ideology Butler and Stokes quickly discounted it as a relevant factor in influencing voting for all but "a tiny minority" (337), because the surveys appeared to show that the great majority of voters did not have stable ideological beliefs. In relation to party leaders, they conceded that public attitudes to leadership might play a role in explaining voting behavior but argued that the effects were rather weak in comparison with partisanship (364). Finally, in relation to issue perceptions, they were skeptical about the influence of attitudes to such issues as nationalization, immigration, and social welfare because of the great instabilities in opinions over time.

Such instabilities suggested that opinions on these issues were really nonattitudes, that is, unreflective responses to survey questions that shifted more or less at random over time (see Converse 1964). Furthermore, the surveys also showed that many voters did not appear to differentiate between the parties on these issues. As a consequence, Butler and Stokes concluded that issues play a rather residual short-term role in influencing voting behavior and that they are only really significant for individuals whose partisanship is weak.

Overall, the panel surveys demonstrated that significant instabilities in voting intentions and partisanship existed over time, and Butler and Stokes were rather skeptical about the importance of the variables that might have accounted for these, except in the case of individuals who had weak partisan attachments. The paradox was, however, that their own data suggested that only a relatively small minority of voters had nonexistent or weak partisan attachments, thus the weakness or absence of partisanship clearly could not explain electoral volatility.

Butler and Stokes did examine the circumstances in which a voter's party identification was likely to be weak, arguing that this can happen, for example, if an individual's parents have divided or weak party loyalties, which serves to inhibit the intergenerational transmission of partisanship. Alternatively, it might happen as a consequence of social mobility, when a voter moves out of the social environment in which his or her partisanship was developed and sustained. They added a third, rather ad hoc, reason for weak partisanship: when a major economic or political upheaval such as a war or serious economic depression occurs, causing a disruption in normal party loyalties. In this situation enough people might change their party attachments in the short run so as to precipitate

a major realignment of the party system. This line of argument was developed to explain the realignment of the party system after World War I, but it fits very uneasily with the rest of their model.

Having largely discounted other factors, Butler and Stokes concluded that the main factor explaining long-term changes in partisanship, and thus voting behavior, is generational replacement. They argue that "demographic change is sufficient to yield a 10 percent turnover of the electorate within a five-year Parliament" (1974: 211). However, it is fairly clear that generational replacement provides an inadequate explanation of the observed instability of partisanship, since the instability is just too large. The strains these inconsistencies set up in their theoretical argument are apparent when at the end of the book they write: "We have shunned the adoption of any single model of change, trying instead to distinguish in the system we are studying some persistent processes that give partial clues to change" (406). This theoretical agnosticism sits rather uneasily alongside the clearly defined model developed earlier.

Despite this, Butler and Stokes's book was clearly a landmark study, and other writers tended to reflect and react to the theoretical framework Butler and Stokes developed. Crewe and his associates, for example, produced a comprehensive critique of the model, as the instabilities in voting behavior and partisanship became more apparent over time (Crewe, Sarlvik, and Alt 1977; Sarlvik and Crewe 1983). Crewe pointed out that in the 1951 general election the Conservative and Labour parties combined received the support of 79.9 percent of the electorate (i.e., voters and nonvoters). However, by the time of the October 1974 general election, the two parties received the support of only 54.7 percent of the electorate, a dramatic change in just over twenty years. This development was due principally to the rise in the Liberal and Nationalist votes, neither of which were predicted by a model that emphasized the self-reinforcing character and long-run stability of partisanship.

Since Butler and Stokes's pioneering work, a number of different theoretical approaches to the study of partisanship and electoral behavior in Britain have been developed. One such approach, associated with Dunleavy and Husbands (1985), adopted the idea of production and consumption sectors as significant determinants of voting behavior, an idea that was originally developed in the Marxist literature (see Habermas 1976). These sectors are vertical divisions in society that crosscut social class and relate to the different ways in which production and consumption is organized in society.

Dunleavy and Husbands argue that voters' sectoral status has an

influence on their partisanship and voting behavior, independently of that of social class. Production sectors are usually measured in terms of the voter's employment status in the public or private sectors, and consumption sectors relate chiefly to different types of housing tenure. Their evidence suggests that council tenants and public sector workers were more likely to be Labour voters and that owner-occupiers and private sector workers were more likely to be Conservatives, with both effects working independently of social class (Dunleavy 1980a, 1980b).

This idea provided a more promising rationale for electoral change than did the slow processes of generational replacement, since they pointed out that large changes had occurred in both production and consumption sectors in Britain over time, with a significant decline occurring in trade union membership and a rise occurring in state dependency (Dunleavy and Husbands 1985: 129–46). Clearly if sectoral status influences voting behavior, and there have been large-scale changes in production and consumption sectors over time, this fact, along with the processes of generational replacement referred to earlier, might possibly explain the observed instabilities in partisanship and voting behavior.

However, Dunleavy and Husbands's work subsequently faced criticisms on both methodological and substantive grounds. The measurement of the sectoral model was criticized on methodological grounds for failing to control for other relevant variables (Harrop 1980). When controls for family background, socioeconomic status, political values, and leader images were included, sectoral status appeared to have a very weak influence on the vote (Rose and McAllister 1990: 148–49).

Another line of criticism of Butler and Stokes's model called into question the status of partisanship as a variable that is conceptually and methodologically independent of voting behavior. The concept was originally developed in the United States, where split-ticket voting for candidates from different parties has long been commonplace and has grown over time (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976: 47–73). Clearly in the United States voting behavior and partisanship are not the same thing, but things may be different in Britain, where the institutional opportunities for split-ticket voting are rare. As a result it has been argued that party identification is merely another name for voting intentions (Budge, Crewe, and Farlie 1976; LeDuc 1980). Rose and McAllister articulated this view most strongly when they argued, "Demonstrating a high correlation between party identification and party vote supports the hypothesis that these are but two names for the same thing" (1986: 132).

However, this argument is problematic, since it implies that a strong relationship between two or more variables necessarily implies that they are indistinguishable from one another. Taken to its logical conclusion it implies that a valid causal link between variables can only exist if the relationship between them is, perversely, not too strong. While it is true that one interpretation of a very high correlation between variables is that they are both observable indicators of some underlying common latent measure, another equally valid interpretation is that these are different variables linked by a strong causal relationship. We will return to this issue later.

Rose and McAllister developed an alternative ideologies model of electoral choice, which challenges the relevance of partisanship (1990: 148–56). They argue that once broad underlying values, or ideologies, of the electorate are taken into account partisanship has a very weak influence on voting behavior. They define ideologies as “the expression of the values of a social group, such as the working class or churchgoing Catholics” (90; see also Scarborough 1984; Evans 1999). These values are measured by means of a factor analysis of a large number of issue indicators in the British Election Study and thus are essentially composite measures of broad issue perceptions. In this analysis, the electorate votes on the basis of broad perceptions of the policy goals and performance of the parties as well as economic evaluations play a central role in defining these goals.

However, Rose and McAllister’s inference that party identification has a relatively trivial influence on voting once ideological values are taken into account is not well grounded. To test the rival impact of ideologies on the one hand and partisanship on the other, it is necessary to examine the impact of these variables on voting behavior in a properly specified multivariate model. Instead, Rose and McAllister merely assume that values are causally prior to partisanship and enter them into a vote function prior to partisanship, using a stepwise regression technique. Thus they are not testing rival theories so much as estimating the residual influence of partisanship after the values measure has been imposed on the model.

The methodological weakness of this approach can be seen by considering what would happen if this procedure had been reversed and partisanship entered into the model first. In this case it would have appeared that ideology had a vestigial influence on voting behavior once partisanship had been taken into account. Clearly, a much more reliable procedure would be to estimate the influence of ideology and partisanship on

the vote simultaneously to see which one encompasses the other rather than imposing a causal sequence on the model.

Another development in the literature relates to the role of leadership evaluations in influencing voting intentions. As mentioned earlier, Butler and Stokes argue that images of the party leaders had an influence on voting behavior independent of partisanship but that the effects were rather weak (1974: 362–68). Subsequent research has shown that voter images of the party leaders, particularly that of the prime minister, play an important independent role in influencing voting intentions and that the effects are quite strong (Rose and McAllister 1990: 134–42; Clarke and Stewart 1995). Clearly, any model of voting intentions that omitted leadership evaluations would be misspecified.

It also appears clear from subsequent research that issue evaluations play a more important role in influencing voting intentions than Butler and Stokes recognized. Issue perceptions have played a prominent role in the literature on voting behavior arising from the rational choice tradition, which is a rather different theoretical approach to that of Butler and Stokes and the Michigan school.

As the discussion in chapter 2 indicates, rational choice theories of voting became prominent after the publication of Anthony Downs well-known book *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). As mentioned earlier, in the Downsian model, voting behavior is driven exclusively by the “utility incomes” generated from the issue positions adopted by parties. Downs explains, “Each citizen in our model votes for the party he believes will provide him with a higher utility income than any other party during the coming election period” (38).

A voter judges these utility incomes on the basis of the past performance of both the incumbent and opposition parties and also on the promises that the parties make about the future. In the face of uncertainty, Downs argues, some voters will choose on the basis of “ideological competency, not on specific issues” (99), since uncertainty makes it difficult to evaluate all the issues that might be relevant to defining the voter’s utility income. According to Downs, ideology is “a verbal image of the good society and of the chief means of constructing such a society” (96), and in Downs’s model voters use ideology to reduce information-processing costs.

Downs’s work is purely theoretical, but it has influenced much subsequent empirical work on electoral behavior in Britain. In the consumer voting model introduced by Himmelweit and her colleagues (1981), for example, voters choose between parties on the basis of the benefits they

bring. She writes that “the individual, with his personal set of attitudes and beliefs, looks for the best match, or the least mismatch between these and his or her perception of the platforms and the records of the parties” (11). In this model demographic variables influence the goals and values of voters, which in turn explain their attitudes to issues and their perceptions of the parties. These attitudes and perceptions in turn determine their voting behavior, although normative pressures from other individuals and reference groups in the electorate also influence voters, something that is not true of the original Downsian model.

Similarly, in the prospective model developed by Sanders (1991, 1993), the key causal variable is voter’s expectations of the effects of government policies on the economic welfare of their families in the future, or egocentric economic evaluations. The model is not wholly Downsian, but it is influenced by the idea that voters weigh up issues and link these issue evaluations to political parties when they are deciding how to vote.

Another model, the retrospective sociotropic economic evaluations model (Fiorina 1981; Whiteley 1983), is again derived from the Downsian tradition, but in this case the key causal variable is past evaluations of the economic performances of the parties in managing the national economy. This is not to be confused with the voter’s egocentric evaluations of the effects of government policies on their own family incomes in the future.

Fiorina introduced a rational choice interpretation of party identification that radically differs from the concept discussed by Butler and Stokes. He defines partisanship as a running tally of retrospective evaluations of the parties, which are based on the performance of the parties in delivering benefits to the voter over time (Fiorina 1981: 90). In this model partisanship is no longer anchored in socialization processes that take place in early life, so it has the advantage of explaining the instabilities in partisanship that Butler and Stokes observed but were unable to explain in their theoretical model. Clearly, if economic management (or mismanagement) can influence partisanship, it is likely to be much more volatile than is true in a model where changes in partisanship depend on generational replacement.

A further model that was influenced by the rational choice tradition is the saliency model of Budge and Farlie (1983). In this model, issues take center stage in influencing the vote, but they influence it via processes of party mobilization. Thus the parties campaign on those issues they feel to be their strongest vote winners and ignore issues raised by their opponents on which they are perceived to be weak. Thus issue perceptions deter-

mine the vote in this model but only insofar as parties succeed in raising the saliency of their own preferred issues positions in comparison with those of their opponents.

In the light of this discussion, there is enough of a consensus in the literature to discern a standard model of voting behavior in Britain, even though there are disagreements about which variables are the most important. Such a model incorporates variables that most researchers would acknowledge to be essential components of a vote function if it is to be properly specified.

This standard model suggests that voting behavior in Britain is directly influenced by three classes of variables: party identification, issue perceptions, and leadership evaluations. These variables directly influence the vote and are in turn influenced themselves by other factors, notably demographic variables such as social class, age, sex, and the like. At the same time it is known that the direct influence of such demographic variables on voting behavior is very weak, once the effects of partisanship, issues, and leadership evaluations are taken into account (Whiteley 1986).

The standard model is not so well defined that there is universal agreement about which issues should be included in the specification or precisely how leadership evaluations should be measured. Thus in the popularity function literature, which uses time-series analysis of poll data, the focus has been exclusively on economic issues (Goodhart and Bhansali 1970; Whiteley 1986; Norpoth 1992; Clarke and Stewart 1995). In contrast, in the values and ideologies literature referred to earlier (Scarborough 1984; Rose and McAllister 1986, 1990), issues such as attitudes toward social welfare and nationalization are thought to play an important role as well as are evaluations of the economy. Equally, while there is a broad consensus about the measurement of partisanship, as we have seen there are significant differences over the conceptual meaning of this measure. In the light of this discussion it is interesting to examine the links between this standard theory of voting and the general incentives theory introduced earlier.

Modified General Incentives Theory and the Vote Function



It may be recalled that the general incentives theory is grounded in the assumption that participation occurs in response to different kinds of

incentives and that five classes of incentives are relevant: selective, collective, group, expressive, and social. The basic theory was subsequently modified to take into account the individual's socioeconomic status, which influences his or her participation through the resources that high status bestows. It is interesting to examine how these different types of incentive relate to the standard model of voting behavior.

The first point is that leadership evaluations and issue perceptions are clearly examples of collective incentives for participation. The issue position adopted by political parties and the competence and effectiveness of the party leaders are both examples of collective goods. Thus the effects of the positions adopted by the parties, particularly in relation to the economy, cannot be confined only to those electors who vote for the governing party. Clearly opposition supporters, and more to the point non-voters, share in the policy effects along with government supporters, and this creates incentives to free ride on the efforts of others.

A similar point can be made about the performance of party leaders. Voters who strongly support a party leader have nonetheless an incentive to free ride on the efforts of others and not to vote for that party, because their vote makes no difference to the outcome of an election, and in any case they will receive the benefits of leadership if that party leader is subsequently elected. This means that if voters were rational in the classical sense, and they only took into account issues and leadership evaluations in determining their vote, they would not vote. However, it will be recalled that the general incentives theory is not purely a rational choice account of political participation, even though it has its origins in the rational choice tradition. Thus it is important to take into account such collective incentives in the model.

However, applying the model to voting behavior does have implications for selective incentives, since they are not relevant to this type of participation. Turning up at the ballot box to vote clearly produces little or no social interaction with other people, and so process incentives appear absent. A similar point can be made about outcome incentives, since there is no possibility for advancing a political career by voting in an election. Ideological incentives are absent too, since in the general incentives theory they are relevant to participation only insofar as they are shared by other people who interact with the individual, something ruled out by the secret ballot. Thus selective incentives are irrelevant in the standard model.

As we mentioned in chapter 2, rational choice theorists have sought to

inject selective incentives into the vote function as a means of avoiding the paradox of participation (e.g., Riker and Ordeshook 1973: 63). But these attempts have not been very successful, since they create as many problems as they seek to solve; if civic duty is a selective incentive that explains voting, it is not clear why it should vary across constituencies, or in the same constituencies over time, or among local, national, and European elections (Green and Shapiro 1994: 52). Moreover, there is also a collective action problem in explaining why civic duty motivates participation. Thus invoking such a concept does not solve the problem but merely relabels it. Overall, the conclusion must be that selective incentives cannot be used to explain voting behavior in national elections, and thus purely rational choice accounts of voting fail for this reason.

A second point relates to political efficacy, which figures in the modified general incentives theory. It will be recalled from the discussion in chapter 2 that political efficacy is important in high-intensity participation because a few individuals can be influential in changing political outcomes. However, the same cannot be said about political efficacy in relation to voting. In a vote function, the probability that the individual can influence outcomes is effectively zero, so it makes little sense to incorporate it into the specification of the model.¹ For this reason, we omit measures of efficacy from the vote function. A similar point can be made about the costs of political action, which can be substantial in the case of political activism but are negligible in relation to voting.

A key variable in the modified general incentives theory that it shares with the standard voting model is party identification. In the general incentives model party identification is interpreted as an expressive motive for participation and is not based on purely cognitive calculations of costs and benefits, as is the case in Fiorina's model (1981). Equally it is not based on socialization processes within the family, as in Butler and Stokes's (1974) analysis. Rather party identification is interpreted as a heuristic device adopted by voters that enables them to judge the political parties with only a modest expenditure of effort and low information-processing costs.

The role of heuristics in political decision making has been explored in recent work by political psychologists. The work of Sniderman and his collaborators was referred to in chapter 6. They write:

Citizens frequently can compensate for their limited information about politics by taking advantage of judgmental heuristics. Heuristics are

judgmental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice. (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991: 19)

Thus partisanship can be interpreted in terms of the likeability heuristic referred to in chapter 6 (see Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991: 93–119), although for voters it is more likely to be influenced by impersonal mechanisms such as the media than by face-to-face mechanisms associated with party activists.

A similar point can be made about group incentives for participation. It will be recalled that in the general incentives model citizens are motivated to participate if they think that the group to which they belong is competent and effective. Thus group incentives can be interpreted in terms of a competency heuristic; citizens make a rough judgment of the competency of a political party using indicators such as levels of unity or disunity and the coherence of the message it is trying to get across. This is a much easier task than monitoring the details of policy formation and implementation across the whole range of governmental activities, and it allows the citizen to make such judgments without incurring large costs of information processing.

The fifth and final variable in the general incentives model is social incentives for participation based on social norms. In our earlier work, indicators of such incentives have not always been statistically significant predictors of activism (see Seyd and Whiteley 1992: 112; Whiteley, Seyd, and Richardson 1994: 119). However, in the context of electoral behavior social norms may influence voting behavior in two ways. First, the influence operates via processes of political mobilization and campaigning of the type discussed in chapter 2. Second, social incentives operate through citizen perceptions of the relative popularity or unpopularity of the political parties in the electorate.

Mobilization processes operate at the national level via the media and at the local level through the activities of political parties and other organizations in campaigning, and they have not generally been incorporated into the standard model. In the case of media effects, this is because of the difficulty of identifying them in the presence of many other influences on voting behavior (Newton 1992). In the case of local campaigning, it is because of a prevailing attitude among many researchers that they are unimportant (see Butler and Kavanagh 1992: 245).

However, there is increasing evidence that voters are mobilized by national media campaigns during and prior to elections (Miller et al. 1990; Miller 1991; Newton 1992; Norris 1993). In addition evidence is growing that the local campaigning activities of political parties have a significant impact on both the vote and turnout (Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley and Seyd 1994; Pattie et al. 1994; Denver and Hands 1997). In this way pressure from other people, which is the basis of the social incentives effect, might well influence the vote.

The notion that voting behavior might be influenced by citizens' perceptions of the attitudes and opinions of their fellow citizens was originally introduced by Noelle-Neumann (1984). She suggested that there is a "spiral of silence" operating in relation to political issues, such that the perceived unpopularity of an issue position will make sympathizers reluctant to publicly support it and will encourage opponents to publicly oppose it. This sets up a dynamic that makes an unpopular issue even more unpopular, since waverers perceive that there is little support for it, which encourages them to oppose it. This dynamic process can effectively crowd out an issue from public debate and remove it from the political agenda.

This idea can be applied to the vote function, since it implies that public perceptions of the standing of the political parties in the polls will have a significant influence on support for those parties at any given point in time. In other words the desire to conform to majority opinion may make some individuals change their vote away from what is perceived to be an unpopular party to favor what is perceived to be a popular party. In this sense social norms might influence voting behavior.

Overall, this discussion implies that the standard voting model is a special case of the general incentives model. It shares collective incentives, expressive incentives, group incentives, and social incentives with the general incentives model but omits selective incentives. In the light of this discussion we will examine next the specification of the vote function to be estimated.

Specification of the Vote Functions for Labour and the Conservatives



The vote function, based on the general incentives theory, can be written as follows:

$$V_{ijk} = a_{jk} + b_{1jk}IP_{ijk} + b_{2jk}L_{ijk} + b_{3jk}PID_{ijk} + b_{4jk}G_{ijk} + b_{5jk}S_{ijk} + u_{ijk} \quad (1)$$

where

V_{ijk} is the probability that individual i will vote for party j at time k .

IP_{ijk} is the probability that the issue preferences of individual i will favor party j at time k .

L_{ijk} is the probability that the evaluations of individual i of the political leaders will favor party j at time k .

PID_{ijk} is the strength of identification of individual i with party j at time k .

G_{ijk} is individual i 's perceptions that party j is effective as an organization and deserves support at time k .

S_{ijk} is individual i 's perceptions that party j is likely to win the next election at time k , and thus social norms favor voting for that party.

u_{ij} is an error term, where $E(u_{ijk}) = \sigma_{ijk}^2$ and $E(u_{ijk}u_{lmn}) = 0$, when $i \neq l$; $j \neq m$; $k \neq n$.

This is a very broad specification, and the indicators of the various variables need to be examined in detail. The model could be estimated using individual-level panel data, but it will be estimated using aggregate-level time-series data instead. This is because until 2001 adequate indicators of the variables are not available in the British Election Studies, which is the only source of individual-level panel data on electoral behavior in Britain.² The model contains indicators of collective, expressive, group, and social incentives but not indicators of selective incentives, political efficacy, or socioeconomic status. The first two are excluded on the theoretical grounds discussed earlier, since selective incentives are not relevant to voting and political efficacy is objectively zero in a national election. Socioeconomic status is excluded because the model is estimated using aggregate time-series data obtained from monthly Gallup surveys in Britain.³ Clearly, an individual's socioeconomic status does not change sufficiently in a month to have any impact on the vote.

There are certain advantages to using aggregate time-series data; first, it is possible to track changes in the variables over many time periods, not just the limited number of time points available in a panel survey. Second, it is possible to estimate the impact of various recurring political events or exogenous political shocks to the system that might influence relationships between the variables in the vote model; again, the limited number of observations over time available from a panel survey makes

this difficult. Third, it is possible to evaluate the effects of objective changes in the economy, such as increases in interest rates or unemployment on party popularity, alongside changes in voters' subjective perceptions of the economy, something that cannot be done with individual-level data (see Kramer 1983). Finally, aggregating the variables eliminates a lot of random noise that is present in individual-level data and gives a better insight into the forces that influence overall party success or failure in an election, as distinct from the influence of specific variables on the voting behavior of individuals.

Two vote function models are estimated, one predicting Labour vote intentions and the second predicting Conservative vote intentions. The predictor variables in these two vote functions include Labour and Conservative party identification; voter evaluations of the Labour and Conservative party leaders; objective and subjective economic issue evaluations; an indicator of group incentives; and an indicator of social norms. The details of the question wording and the variables appear in the appendix. The models are estimated using monthly observations from January 1992 to April 1997 and thus cover an entire Parliament from the general election of 1992 to the general election of 1997.⁴

The party identification and leadership evaluation variables are interpreted as indicators of a likeability heuristic toward the parties and the party leaders. As mentioned earlier in a purely rational choice account of voting, these variables would be subject to the paradox of participation and would not be significant predictors of voting for that reason. But in the present account they are indicators of affective feelings toward the parties, which in part are used to short-circuit the complicated calculations required to assess the costs and benefits of supporting one party rather than another.

The influence of issues or collective incentives concentrates on objective and subjective evaluations of the economy. In relation to the impact of the objective economy, this was measured using three different indicators: interest rates, the inflation rate, and unemployment. One interpretation of the effects of such variables on party support derives from the so-called reward-punishment model (Key 1966; Lewis-Beck 1988). According to this model the electorate rewards the incumbent party for a good economic performance and punishes it for a bad one. If the reward-punishment model applies, each of these variables would have a negative impact on support for the Conservatives, since increases in these measures repre-

sent public “bads.” It would also imply a positive or a negligible impact on support for the Labour party, depending on whether Labour benefited from a bad economic performance by the incumbent Conservative government.

An alternative interpretation of these effects is provided by the issue-priority model (Budge and Farlie 1983; Clarke et al. 1992). This applies when parties are seen as having different policy priorities in relation to the management of the economy. If the Conservatives are seen as being particularly averse to inflation and Labour is seen as unreliable on this issue, an increase in inflation under a Conservative government might benefit rather than harm the Conservatives. This is because voters believe that the main alternative to the incumbent party would have a worse performance on inflation than would the government.

A similar point can be made about unemployment; if this is seen as a distinctive Labour issue, then a rise in unemployment under a Conservative government would help Labour and hurt the Conservatives. Equally, this would also be true if the incumbent party was Labour, again because voters perceive that the main alternative to the Labour party would have a worse performance on this issue. When the Conservatives are in office, this is the same outcome as the reward-punishment model. Thus it is only possible to distinguish between the two alternative models by focusing on the effects of inflation on party support during our estimation period.

With regard to the subjective economy or perceptions of the relationship between the economy and political support, Gallup surveys regularly ask a question about the most important issues facing the country, and economic issues consistently dominate the responses to this question. Accordingly, three indicators of the subjective economy are used in the vote function: the percentage of voters who perceive that inflation is the most serious issue facing the country; the percentage who feel the same way about unemployment, and the percentage of voters who think that Labour is the best party at managing the economy in the Labour vote function and the percentage who think this about the Conservatives in the Conservative vote function.⁵

The group incentives variable is measured by voter perceptions that the electorate has a favorable opinion of a party. If a party is thought to have a favorable image among voters this could act as an incentive for individuals to support it, particularly those voters who do not strongly identify with any party or think highly of the party leaders. This is what is meant by a group incentive to support a party. The percentage having a

favorable opinion of Labour is used in the Labour vote function, and the percentage having a favorable image of the Conservatives is used in the Conservative vote function.

The social incentives indicator measures the percentage of respondents who think that Labour will win the general election in the case of the Labour vote function and the percentage of respondents who think that the Conservatives will win the general election in the case of the Conservative vote function. The idea behind this is that if individuals perceive that a party is likely to win the next general election, this might encourage them to support it, because they want to conform to a perceived social norm that favors that party.

The political “shocks” in the vote functions relate to political events that might influence the relationship between the predictor variables and party support. Some of these are recurring events such as the annual party conferences, which focus media attention on the parties, allowing them to present themselves in a favorable light. It seems plausible that political support for the parties will receive a temporary boost as a result of the annual conferences.

A second recurring, but in this case unpredictable, shock occurs when a party leader resigns, dies, or is challenged for the leadership. This focuses attention on that particular party for a short period of time, which may harm it in some circumstances and help it in others. For example, John Major resigned as leader of the Conservative party in June 1995 specifically to run again for the office as a way of asserting his authority over a quarrelsome parliamentary Conservative party. Arguably, this exercise harmed him in the eyes of the voters because it drew attention to his political weakness. In contrast, when the Labour leader, John Smith, died suddenly in May 1994 and Tony Blair was subsequently elected party leader, this may well have helped Labour because of the upsurge of public sympathy caused by Smith’s untimely death. These possibilities are tested by means of dummy variables in the vote functions.

A third recurring but unpredictable shock is provided by by-elections. During the estimation period the Conservative government lost a series of by-elections to the opposition parties, which may have produced a temporary setback in their national standing in the polls. Labour won four of these by-elections, the most spectacular victory being in Wirral South in February 1997. Again, these by-election victories may have given a temporary boost to Labour in the polls.

The vote functions will be estimated in a form that allows us to exam-

ine both the short- run and long-run influences of the variables on political support. Thus before we examine estimates of the models, it is necessary to discuss some methodological issues explaining how this can be done in the context of time-series models of party support.

Modeling the Vote Function over Time



As mentioned earlier, there are many studies of the aggregate dynamics of party support. A number of these studies have assumed that the time-series measures used to model party support are stationary processes, that is, that the variables fluctuate around a constant mean and have a constant variance over time.⁶ This is a very important property for accurately modeling the relationship between time-series variables, since if it is violated and the series are nonstationary the researcher runs the risk of estimating “spurious regressions” (see Granger and Newbould 1974, 1986), which give entirely misleading results.

The problem of making spurious inferences with nonstationary data arises because many series that are totally unrelated to each other theoretically nonetheless grow in a rather similar way over time. Accordingly, if they are included in a regression model, statistically significant relationships can be found between them.⁷ This problem can be dealt with by differencing the series, such that the researcher models the changes in one variable against the changes in another. This means that when the series are incorporated in differenced form into a model they should only be significantly related if they are causally linked in some way.

However, differencing a series produces its own problems, because it necessarily ignores possible long-run relationships between variables. For example, it seems plausible that there is a long-run equilibrium relationship between Labour voting intentions and Labour party identification, such that if Labour partisanship strengthens in the electorate this should increase Labour vote intentions at the same time, which should in turn stimulate partisanship, and so on. Such an equilibrium relationship will be hidden by differencing the series. In certain circumstances, it is possible to estimate both short-run and long-run relationships between variables of interest using what is known as an error-correction model. Such a model may be specified if nonstationary series are cointegrated.⁸

An error-correction model of the relationship between series implies that if one series is influenced by a short-term shock of some kind the

other series will subsequently respond in a similar way, such that divergences between these series set up by the initial shock will eventually be "corrected." In an error-correction model, the coefficient of the error-correction mechanism measures the speed and strength of the adjustment resulting from the equilibrium relationship. Methodologically, it is important to test whether the variables in the vote function are stationary and, if they are not, to model them in differenced form. If in addition an equilibrium relationship can be demonstrated between key variables in the model, that is, if they cointegrate, it is possible to capture the long-run relationship between the equilibrium variables in an error-correction model.

One final requirement is to ensure that the predictor variables are weakly exogenous to vote intentions. This relates to the question of causality discussed earlier. Variable X_t is weakly exogenous to variable Y_t if the latter does not contemporaneously affect the former. Weak exogeneity still holds if Y_{t-1} affects X_t , however, because there is no contemporaneous feedback in such a model resulting from the fact that Y_t is a function of X_t and thus unbiased estimates of the coefficients can still be obtained (Charezma and Deadman 1992: 251–69). If X_t is strongly exogenous to Y_t , then neither contemporaneous nor lagged values of Y_t affect X_t , and this implies that Granger causality (Granger 1988) exists in the relationship between the variables. Earlier research has shown that party identification and leader evaluations are both weakly exogenous in time-series models of Labour and Conservative vote intentions (Clarke, Stewart, and Whiteley 1997, 1998).

Estimating the Vote Functions

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In the light of this discussion, we begin the analysis of the vote function by testing whether the variables in the model are stationary. Figure 7.1 contains a plot of the Labour and Conservative voting intentions series over the estimation period, and this plot certainly suggests that the series are nonstationary. In figure 7.1 the Labour series increases continuously from the start of 1992 and only gives the appearance of leveling out toward the start of 1996. In contrast, there is a rapid loss of Conservative support in late 1992 and early 1993, and the series reaches record low levels of support before recovering slightly in the run-up to the 1997 general

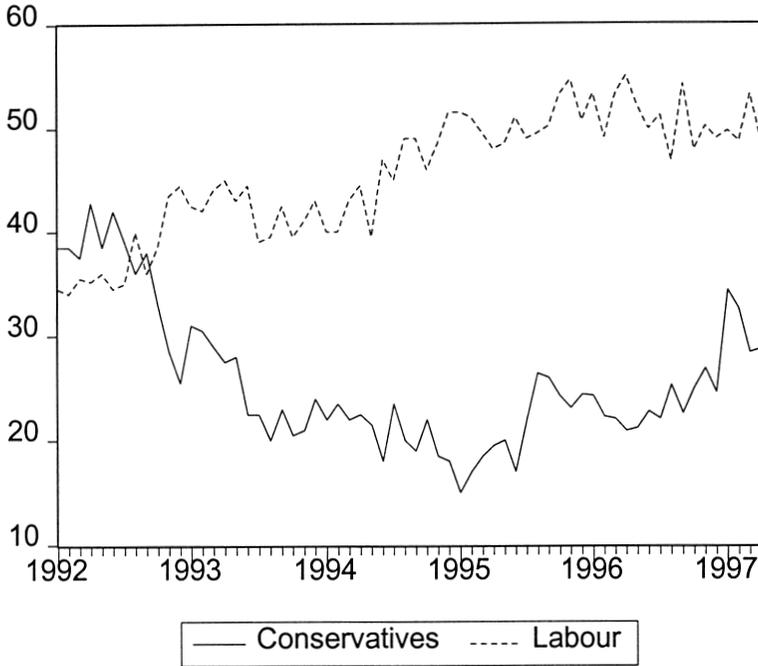


Fig. 7.1. Labour and Conservative voting intentions, 1992-97

election. Clearly neither series fluctuates around a constant mean. There is a formal statistical test of stationarity called the Dickey-Fuller test (Dickey and Fuller 1979), which is applied to all of the series in the two vote functions, with the results appearing in table 7.1.

The first column in table 7.1 tests whether the original series is stationary. In this test the null hypothesis is that the series has a unit root, or is nonstationary. This means that if the null hypothesis is accepted then the series trends upward or downward over time. On the other hand if the null hypothesis is rejected it means that the series is stationary and can be incorporated into an estimation equation without fear of spurious regression effects. It can be seen that all of the series apart from two, Labour party identification and public perceptions of the Conservative party, appear to be nonstationary, although these are close to being nonstationary as well. Clearly, differencing the series makes them all stationary, so the evidence in table 7.1 indicates that the variables in these models

should be differenced if reliable estimates of the vote functions are to be obtained.

The second question in the analysis concerns long-term equilibrium relationships that might be present in the variables in the vote functions. Intuitively, there should be a theoretical reason for believing that variables are in equilibrium, and in addition they should closely track each other over time and not significantly deviate from one another if they are perturbed by a shock of some kind.

In figures 7.2 and 7.3 the relationship between voting intentions, party identification, and leader evaluations is plotted for Labour and the Conservatives respectively. It can be seen that in both figures the series tend to track each other fairly closely over time, the relationship being closer

TABLE 7.1. Unit Root Tests for the Stationarity of Variables in the Voting Intention Models, 1992M1 to 1997M4

Variable	Original Series	Differenced Series
Labour vote intentions	-2.49**	-13.30
Conservative vote intentions	-2.30**	-10.50
Labour party identification	-3.51	-12.20
Conservative party identification	-2.38**	-11.73
Labour leader evaluations	-2.59**	-12.12
Conservative leader evaluations	-2.10**	-7.38
Perceptions that Labour is best at managing the economy	-2.86**	-10.92
Perceptions that the Conservatives are best at managing the economy	-2.15**	-10.42
Interest rates (with trend)	-1.88**	-5.51
Inflation	-2.11**	-8.95
Unemployment	-2.87**	-6.15
Perceptions of inflation as most important problem	-2.50**	-10.94
Perceptions of unemployment as most important problem	-1.54**	-12.21
Perceptions that public has a favourable opinion of Labour	-1.77**	-8.24
Perceptions that public has a favourable opinion of Conservatives	-5.51	-6.82
Perceptions that Labour will win general election	-1.20**	-8.56
Perceptions that Conservatives will win general election	-1.80**	-8.99

** fails to reject null hypothesis of unit root, i.e., indicates that the series is non-stationary, $p < 0.05$ level.

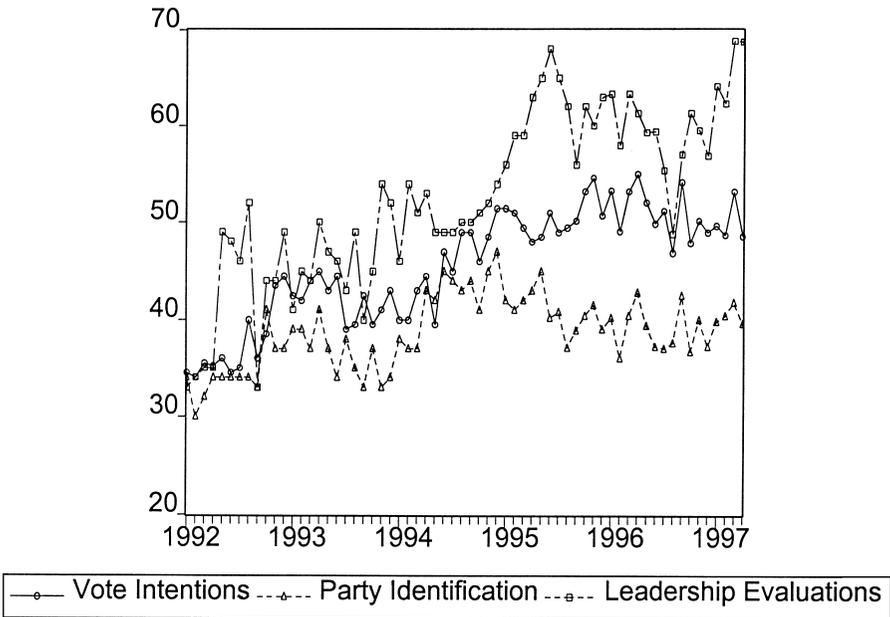


Fig. 7.2. Voting intentions, party identification, and leader evaluations for Labour, 1992–97

for the Conservatives than it is for Labour. In the case of Labour the variables appear to diverge a little at the start of 1995, but it is noticeable that fluctuations in each of the series are fairly in phase with each other throughout the entire period. The equilibrium relationship is particularly evident in the case of the Conservative series, where the variables track each other very closely.

To test whether these variables are in equilibrium or cointegrate, we employ the Engle-Granger (1987) two-step procedure. This involves regressing voting intentions on party identification and leadership evaluations, all without differencing, and then testing the residuals of this model for stationarity. Intuitively, if all three variables are in a long-term equilibrium relationship, partisanship and leadership evaluations should be significant predictors of party support and the residuals should be stationary. If the residuals of the model are not stationary and show evidence, for example, of a trend growth this means that the variables are not in equilibrium since they are drifting apart from each other.

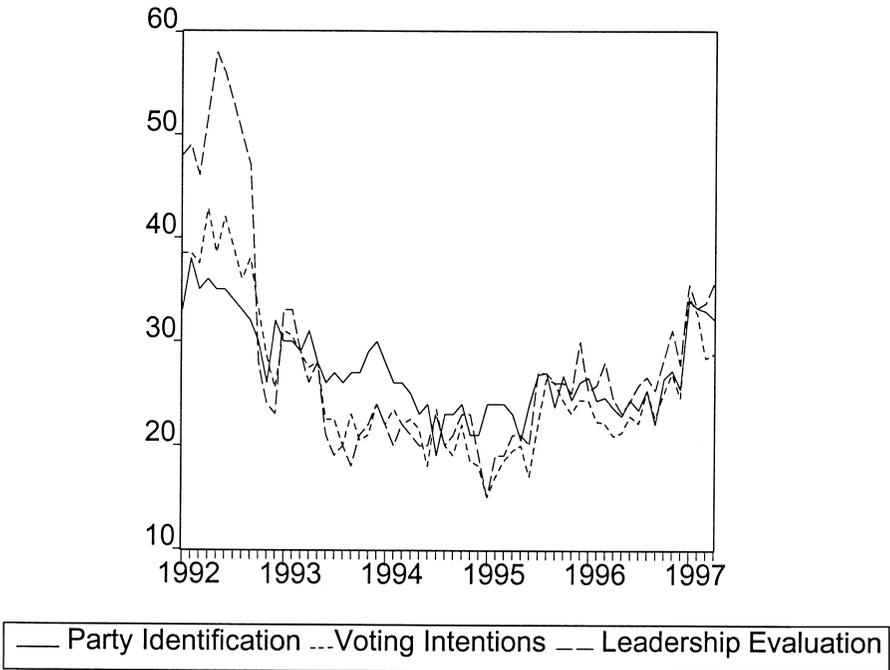


Fig. 7.3. Voting intentions, party identification, and leadership evaluations for Conservatives, 1992–97

From table 7.2, which includes the cointegrating regression models for the two parties, it is apparent that party identification and leadership evaluations are both significant predictors of voting intentions for both parties. There is a battery of diagnostic tests in table 7.2 designed to assess whether the model is well behaved.⁹ The goodness of fit of the models is reasonable, but not surprisingly there is clear evidence of autocorrelation in the residuals produced, in part, by the fact that the variables are measured in undifferenced form. However, from the point of view of the cointegrating relationship it is evident that the augmented Dickey-Fuller test is statistically significant, indicating that we can accept the hypothesis that the model residuals are stationary. Thus these variables are in a long-term cointegrating or equilibrium relationship with each other.

Table 7.3 contains estimates of the vote function for Labour, the model being estimated in error-correction form. The first model contains all the variables discussed in the theoretical specification, and the second

TABLE 7.2. Cointegrating Regressions of Vote Intentions, Leader Approval, and Party Identification for the Labour and Conservative Parties, 1992M1 to 1997M4

Predictor Variables	Labour Vote Intentions	Conservative Vote Intentions
Constant	3.40 (0.8)	-0.43 (0.22)
Party identification	0.52*** (4.3)	0.51*** (5.0)
Leadership evaluations	0.42*** (8.4)	0.44*** (10.2)
R^2	0.73	0.91
Standard error	3.06	2.07
Durbin-Watson test	1.06**	1.54**
RESET test	0.004	4.88***
Normality test	2.28	2.88
ARCH test	0.86	0.22
Heteroscedasticity test	0.001	0.08
Augmented Dickey-Fuller		
Unit root test of residuals	-4.65**	-6.25***

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

TABLE 7.3. Error Correction Models of Labour Vote Intentions, 1992M2 to 1997M4

Predictor variables		
Constant term	0.04 (0.1)	-0.14 (0.4)
Δ Labour leader evaluations (t)	0.24*** (3.3)	0.19*** (3.2)
Δ Labour party identification (t)	0.27*** (2.7)	0.28*** (2.9)
Δ Labour best party on the economy (t)	0.23** (2.0)	0.30*** (3.2)
Δ Inflation most important problem (t)	-0.17 (1.0)	—
Δ Unemployment most important problem (t)	0.07 (1.0)	—
Error correction mechanism ($t - 1$)	-0.47*** (4.3)	-0.38*** (4.0)
Δ Interest rates (t)	1.27 (1.1)	—
Δ Inflation (t)	-1.71* (1.8)	-1.73** (2.0)
Δ Unemployment (t)	1.67 (0.6)	—

(continued)

TABLE 7.3.—*Continued*

Predictor variables		
Δ Percent thinking public has favourable opinion of Labour (t)	0.06 (0.6)	—
Δ Percent thinking Labour will win election (t)	-0.11** (1.8)	—
Labour party conferences (t)	3.16*** (2.8)	2.5** (2.3)
Smith becomes leader (t)	-2.20 (0.9)	—
Blair becomes leader (t)	0.15 (0.1)	—
Labour by-election wins (t)	1.26 (1.0)	—
R^2	0.55	0.50
Standard error	2.09	2.11
Durbin-Watson test	2.09	2.08
RESET F test	0.03	0.06
Normality test (χ^2)	2.52	2.32
Heteroscedasticity test	0.79	0.05
ARCH F test	0.36	0.73
Unit root test of residuals	-7.88***	-8.18***

Note: Dependent variable is Δ Labour vote intentions (Δ is the difference operator).

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

model includes only those variables that are robust predictors of the vote. The estimates indicate that evaluations of the Labour leader, party identification, and perceptions that Labour is the best party in managing the economy are all statistically significant predictors of Labour voting intentions. The coefficients on all of these variables are rather similar, such that a 10 percent increase in voters' evaluations of the Labour leader translates into an increase of about 2.5 percent in voting intentions; the same change in party identification produces an increase in voting intentions of almost 3.0 percent; and for perceptions that Labour is the best party for managing the economy, the increase is just over 2.0 percent.

Clearly, perceptions of economic competence play an important role in influencing the Labour vote, although perceptions that inflation and unemployment are the most important problems facing the country do not significantly increase Labour support in this model. However, there is weak evidence of an issue-priority effect associated with inflation. It appears that an increase in inflation reduces Labour support, an effect no doubt associated with the legacy of high inflation during the last Labour government in the 1970s. The only other robust result in the model, apart

from the error-correction mechanism, relates to Labour party conferences. Not surprisingly, these annual events appear to give a short-term boost to Labour support.

The error-correction mechanism measures the speed with which a deviation from the equilibrium relationship between voting intentions, partisanship, and leader evaluations is restored after it is perturbed by a political shock. The estimates show that some 47 percent of the effect of an exogenous shock on voting intentions is corrected by the equilibrium relationship within a month of it occurring. Thus the equilibrium relationship between these three variables is quite strong. The effect in the most parsimonious version of the model is rather weaker but still highly significant.

None of the other postulated effects appears to be statistically significant or robust predictors of Labour voting intentions. Thus perceptions that the party is viewed favorably by voters do not appear to influence voting intentions; nor does the indicator of social norms, the percentage of voters who think that the party is going to win the next general election. The latter variable appeared significant in the first model, but this result was not robust, as can be seen from the most parsimonious version. It is also the case that various political shocks associated with the appointment of a new leader, or victories in by-elections, do not appear to influence vote intentions independently of the other variables in the model.

The various diagnostic tests indicate that the model is statistically well behaved; there is no evidence of autocorrelation, heteroscedasticity, or nonnormality in the residuals, and the unit root test suggests that the residuals are stationary. The RESET test indicates that the functional form of the model is satisfactory. The most parsimonious model contains partisanship, leader evaluations, perceptions of managing the economy, inflation, and the Labour party conference dummy variable. The results indicate that the standard model encompasses the modified general incentives model, since the extra variables in the latter are not statistically significant.

The equivalent model for the Conservatives appears in table 7.4. Once again party identification, leader evaluations, and perceptions that the Conservatives are best at managing the economy all play a significant role in explaining variations in voting intentions, just as they did in the Labour model. However, it is also apparent in this model that changes in the objective economy, particularly in interest rates and unemployment, had a direct effect on voting intentions, in addition to changes in objec-

TABLE 7.4. Error Correction Models of Conservative Vote Intentions, 1992M2 to 1997M4

Predictor Variables	A	B
Constant term	-0.68*** (2.9)	-0.29 (1.5)
Δ Conservative leader evaluations ($t - 1$)	0.15* (1.8)	—
Δ Conservative party identification (t)	0.39*** (4.4)	0.37*** (4.8)
Δ Conservatives best at managing the economy (t)	0.32*** (3.4)	0.47*** (8.8)
Δ Inflation most important problem (t)	-0.13 (1.2)	—
Δ Unemployment most important problem (t)	-0.02 (0.6)	—
Error correction mechanism ($t - 1$)	-0.60*** (5.6)	-0.64*** (7.1)
Δ Interest rates	-2.54*** (3.5)	-2.11*** (3.4)
Δ Inflation (t)	0.20 (0.3)	—
Δ Unemployment (t)	-4.06** (2.5)	-2.51* (1.9)
Δ Percent thinking public has favorable opinion of Conservatives (t)	-0.05 (0.6)	—
Δ Percent thinking Conservatives will win election (t)	-0.05 (1.3)	—
John Major challenged for leadership ($t - 1$)	4.45*** (3.1)	4.21** (3.0)
Conservative by-election losses ($t - 1$)	-1.23** (2.1)	-1.45** (2.7)
European & local elections 1994 ($t - 1$)	6.25*** (4.2)	5.68*** (3.7)
Conservative party conferences (t)	1.16* (1.8)	—
R^2	0.82	0.81
Standard error	1.24	1.29
Durbin-Watson test	1.92	2.19
RESET test	7.66***	5.67***
Normality test	1.60	1.47
ARCH test	0.39	0.70
Heteroscedasticity test	0.16	0.89
Unit root test	-7.19***	-8.68***

Note: Dependent variable is Δ Conservative vote intentions.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

tive perceptions of economic competence. No doubt this is because the Conservatives were incumbent and therefore were held directly responsible for interest rate changes and unemployment by the electorate. An increase of 1 percent in interest rates translated into a decline in Conservative voting support of about 2 percent, and an increase of 1 percent in unemployment reduced voting intentions by about 2.5 percent.

As mentioned earlier a negative sign on unemployment in the Conservative vote model cannot distinguish between an issue priority and a reward-punishment model. But the same point does not apply to interest rates since there is no evidence that either party is regarded by the electorate as "owning," or being more competent on, the interest rate issue. Thus the interest rate effect is consistent with a reward-punishment model of economic effects. In any event, both the objective and subjective economies had an important influence on Conservative support.

The various political shocks associated with the party conference, the loss of by-elections, the leadership challenge to John Major, and the particularly disastrous European and local government elections of 1994 all appear to have influenced Conservative voting intentions in predictable directions. Moreover, the error-correction mechanism appears to have been slightly stronger in the Conservative vote function than it was for Labour, since 60 percent of the effects of a shock on voting intentions are restored by the cointegrating relationship within a month of it occurring. In the most parsimonious model the effect is even stronger.

Overall, the Conservative voting intention model has a better fit than its Labour equivalent, largely because the objective economy and the political events have a bigger impact on Conservative voting intentions than they do on Labour voting intentions. The signs of the objective economic variables in the model are consistent with a mixture of reward-punishment and issue priority models of the economic effects. Thus voters punished the Conservatives for interest rate rises and increases in unemployment, but they did not punish them for an increase in inflation. In contrast, Labour support is reduced by increased inflation. It seems likely that the Conservatives are insulated from the effects of rising inflation because they were identified as being strong supporters of anti-inflation policies in the minds of the voters. The diagnostics suggest that the Conservative models are statistically well behaved¹⁰ and that the residuals are nonstationary, suggesting reliable inferences can be made from these estimates. Again, the standard model appears to encompass

the modified general incentives model, since the extra variables in the latter are not statistically significant.

Conclusions: General Incentives and Voting Intentions

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The evidence from the estimates of the vote functions suggests that electors will vote for a political party as a result of their party identification and their evaluations of the leader of that party. Issue preferences are also an important factor in explaining the vote, particularly the perception that a party is the best at handling the economy. In addition there is evidence that the objective economy influences voting intentions alongside subjective perceptions of economic competence, particularly in the case of the governing party. The Conservative incumbents were damaged by increases in interest rates and unemployment during this period, although interestingly there was no evidence that Labour was particularly helped by changes in these variables.

In terms of our earlier discussion it is clear that heuristics are important for guiding voting behavior. In the absence of detailed knowledge about how the economy works, or the complex causal chains that operate to link governmental action and policy outcomes, voters appear to use two related heuristics. One is a likeability heuristic and the other a managerial heuristic.

Party identification in particular involves a likeability heuristic, a mechanism for reducing complex calculations to a simple and economical form. If voters like a party and begin to identify with it, this directly influences the likelihood that they will vote for it. As the cointegration evidence suggests, this likeability heuristic is also closely associated with perceptions of managerial competence, and in turn this is linked to the objective performance of the economy in the case of the governing party.

The managerial heuristic is apparent in relation to perceptions of economic competence and also in relation to evaluations of the party leaders. If the economy is in difficulty, voters blame the managers, both in the form of the parties and also of the party leaders. The logic of this process is much like that of football supporters' calling for the resignation of the team manager when their team is doing badly. Football supporters do not have to work out the precise tactical or strategic problems facing their favorite club and how these should be solved if it is to win again.¹¹ Rather, they can simply blame the manager and call for his replacement. Such a

heuristic makes it possible to pass judgment on complex policy issues and thereby exercise democratic accountability without having specialist knowledge or insight into the causal processes at work.

These findings attest to the continuing importance of social psychological processes in influencing the vote. The earlier skepticism about rational choice accounts of voting is reinforced by the findings of this chapter. Few, if any, of the variables that are important determinants of the vote can be derived easily from a classic rational choice account of decision making. But this is hardly surprising, since the paradox of participation inhibits a theoretically coherent rational choice account of voting behavior in any case. The variables that appear to be the most important influences on voting intentions are grounded in social psychological processes and do not fit at all well into a narrow cost-benefit model of political action.

Also, the standard model encompasses the modified general incentives model in both cases. This is because the indicators of group incentives and the measures of social norms are not significant predictors of vote intentions when both figure in the theoretical specification of the modified general incentives model. Perhaps not surprisingly the best model of a low-intensity activity like voting is different, although not radically different, from the best model of high-intensity participation.

Having started out with a discussion of high-intensity participation in the earlier chapters, our analysis has come full circle in this chapter to examine voting behavior. For theoretical reasons the model of voting behavior is not the same as the model of party activism. However, we can observe great similarities in these models. In the final chapter we bring the threads of the discussion together to try to assess the implications that follow from the findings of this book.