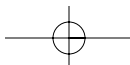


# ONE

## Political Choice in Britain

Jim Hill voted Labour in the 1955 general election. Jim worked as a welder for a Midlands company that was founded in 1912 and made castings for the motor industry. He belonged to the Transport and General Workers' Union. He rented a house, which he shared with his wife and three daughters, from the local council. Jim's wife, who had stopped working when they had their first baby, shopped at 'the stores'—the local Co-op was 5 minutes walk from their house. Jim did not think much about politics—although he paid his union dues and occasionally talked politics with his mates in the local pub. Like most people he knew, Jim had always thought of himself as 'Labour'. He thought that a Labour government was more likely to look after the interests of working class people like himself. Even so, he did not expect much to change if a Labour government was elected. Life in Britain would carry on pretty much as it had since the end of the war, regardless of which party was in power. There was bound to be the occasional spot of trouble in the empire, and you could never be sure what the Russians might do in Eastern Europe. But he could not be bothered with all that. The foundry where he worked would keep him employed, with reasonable pay, until he retired with his company pension. His family would get better (and free) medical treatment than anything he had experienced as a child in the 1920s and early 1930s. And his daughters would certainly be better educated than he was. He expected that they would marry local boys from the same sort of working class background that he had come from. He also expected that they would live quite close to him and his wife when they brought up their own families.

Jim's granddaughter, Melanie, still lives today in the Midlands town where her grandfather spent his life, although the foundry where he worked closed in the early 1980s. She lives in her own terraced house, which she is buying with her partner, in an area where 40 per cent of the population is Asian. After graduating from university in the early 1990s, she became a teacher. She left in 1996, disillusioned with work in the public sector, to become a customer services manager at a nearby airport. She expects to change her job again within the next five years.



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Melanie occasionally uses the local corner shop, but she buys most of her food and household goods from a superstore complex on the outskirts of town. As soon as she can afford it, she intends to buy a second house, which she will rent out and keep as an investment for her retirement. In the 1997 general election, Melanie voted Labour. In 2001, she thought about not voting at all, but finally opted for the Liberal Democrats.

It is clear that, in the early twenty-first century, Melanie's world lacks the social and economic certainty and cohesion that characterized her grandfather's life in the 1950s. Her employment position is far less secure. She has to plan for her retirement and her own healthcare in ways that her grandfather never thought necessary. She does not have one social milieu, but several: her extended family; her friends, who are scattered across Europe; her Asian neighbours; and her diverse set of colleagues at the airport, who travel to work daily from all over the region. She lives in an economic and social world that both enables and requires her constantly to make choices: which supermarket, which consumer goods, which television channel, which healthcare package, and so on. She has grown up in a world in which rights, and especially consumer rights, have become increasingly important; where class boundaries have become increasingly fluid; where alternative lifestyles have abounded; and where information sources have multiplied enormously.

When Butler and Stokes began their classic study of British voting behaviour in 1963, what appeared to be the relatively stable social and economic world of Jim Hill provided the backdrop to the 'tribal' pattern of British party politics that they observed. Party preferences were certainly not *just* about class. Nonetheless, class was believed to be a very important determinant of the way that most people thought about the political world and, compared with other socio-demographic characteristics, it appeared to be strongly correlated with the way they voted. Butler and Stokes found that a substantial majority of the working class typically supported Labour and a similar proportion of the (numerically smaller) middle class supported the Conservatives. Objective class positions, class identities, party identifications and voting preferences were all intimately related in ways that lent considerable credence to the 'sociological' approach to British electoral politics. According to Butler and Stokes, most people had relatively stable views both of themselves and of the main parties as political actors. Since these views were rooted in the social structure, it followed that important political changes in Britain were likely to be rooted in long-term—and almost inevitably very slow—changes in the social fabric.

It would be surprising if the economic and social changes that Britain has experienced over the last fifty years have left the political realm untouched. Indeed, in the 1970s, observers were already charting the decline of class voting and of party identification (or 'partisanship') in Britain. At the same time, other analysts were beginning to talk about the voter as consumer. Voters were appearing to become less tribal, and they were increasingly prepared to make choices between political parties based on the attractiveness of the alternative policy packages being offered.

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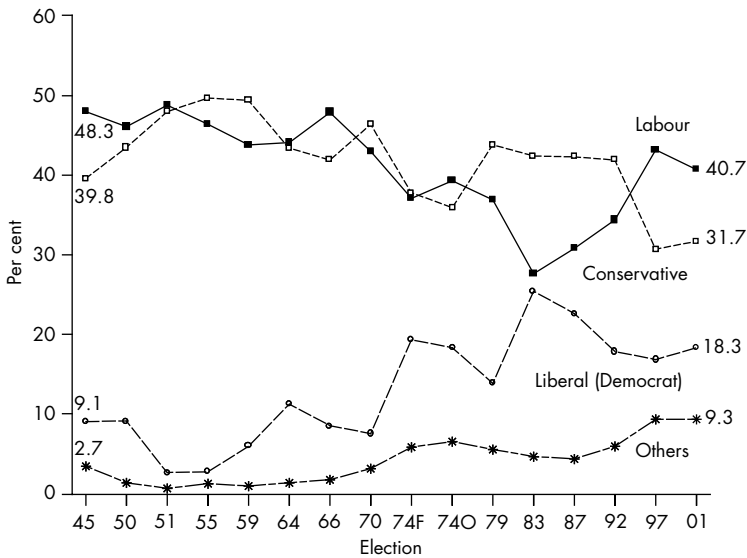


Figure 1.1 Vote shares, United Kingdom, 1945–2001 general elections

Source: Butler and Kavanagh (2002: Appendix 1).

The patterns of party support that analysts have sought to explain are shown in Figure 1.1. In the fifteen general elections between 1945 and 1997, voting for the two major parties has been very similar—averaging slightly over 41 per cent for Labour and slightly over 42 per cent for the Conservatives. This is not to say that party support levels have not varied. Labour voting has ranged from a low of 28 per cent in 1983 to a high of nearly 49 per cent in 1951. The comparable figures for the Conservatives are 31 per cent in 1997 and almost 50 per cent in 1955; and, for the Liberals (Democrats), approximately 3 per cent in 1951 and 25 per cent in 1983. In 2001, the Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrat vote shares were 41 per cent, 32 per cent, and 18 per cent, respectively. The remarkable change in the fortunes of the main political parties—not just Labour’s victory in 2001—clearly requires more attention.

The attendant levels of turnout in general elections are displayed in Figure 1.2. Between 1945 and 1997, turnout averaged just over 76 per cent, ranging from a low of slightly over 71 per cent in 1997 to a high of 84 per cent in 1950. Although there was a gentle downward trend, movements over time were irregular—if turnout fell in one election, then it tended to rebound in the next one. However, this did not happen in 2001 when the turnout rate dropped to 59.4 per cent (Electoral Commission 2001: 11–12). This was the lowest since the ‘Khaki’ election of 1918 and certainly since the end of Second World War. The dramatic decline in voter

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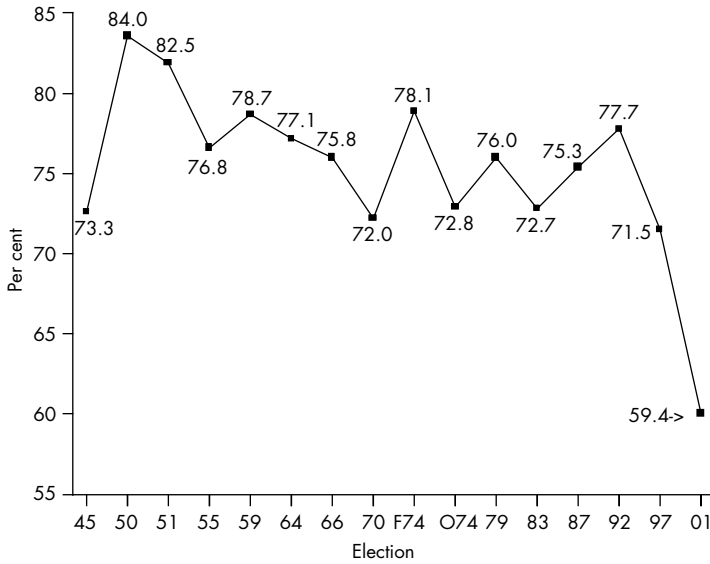


Figure 1.2 Voting turnout, United Kingdom, 1945–2001 general elections

Source: Butler and Kavanagh (2002: Appendix 1).

turnout in UK general elections has provoked interest in the questions of why people vote and others do not.

In this book, we analyse the changing political choices that voters in Britain have made over the last four decades. In particular, we explain why voters made the party choices that they did in the 2001 general election, and why many people chose not to vote at all in that contest. We recognize that the social and economic context in which contemporary voters think and act is very different from that of their grandparents. The electoral context has also changed, in part because of the choices that were made by earlier cohorts of voters and to which political parties have responded. Notwithstanding this changing context and the changing way in which scholars have sought to understand why voters behave as they do, we argue that the core calculus of voting in Britain has not changed substantially since at least the early 1960s. Indeed, it is questionable whether, even in the 1950s, people like Jim Hill were on the sort of sociological autopilot that often has been assumed in analyses of British voting behaviour. On the contrary, we argue that the most important influences on voting have always been based on a reasoned calculation made by the voter. In making these claims, we do not espouse a narrowly cast rational choice approach. Rather, following broadly in the tradition established by Donald Stokes, we see voters as making summary judgements based primarily on what he called ‘valence’—on their perceptions of the likely competence of competing parties’ managerial teams.

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This chapter discusses the main theoretical frameworks that inform our analysis. It then describes the principal data sets that are used to conduct the analyses and to ascertain which framework tells the better story of electoral choice. The chapter concludes with an overview of the specific arguments and findings that are presented in the following chapters of the book.

### **SOCIOLOGISTS, ECONOMISTS AND VOTING**

#### *The Sociological Framework*

Since the 1950s, two theoretical frameworks have informed most electoral research conducted in advanced democracies—in Brian Barry's terms, the frameworks of 'sociologists' and 'economists' (Barry 1971). The sociological framework has represented the orthodoxy in British electoral research since the early 1960s (Butler and Stokes 1969). This framework contains three core ideas. The first is that relatively fixed social characteristics, such as social class or region, work through long-term socialization processes to predispose individuals to support one party rather than another. Second, the results of these socialization processes can be either reinforced or undermined by the individual's social context—for example, by the kind of work the individual does, the sort of neighbourhood he or she lives in, and the informal groups to which he or she belongs. The third idea is that social characteristics and social contexts produce a distinctive social psychology of voting. Over time, and again largely as a result of socialization, most individuals tend to develop stable and enduring affective attachments to particular political parties. These party identifications serve both to colour the ways in which individuals interpret political information and to predispose them to vote for the same party in successive elections.

Proponents of the sociological approach argue that it offers a plausible and parsimonious account of the relative electoral stability that, in their view, has characterized British party politics for much of the post-war period. The proportions of votes secured by the major parties, although they have varied enough to produce periodic changes in government, never fluctuated dramatically. Indeed, the parties' vote shares at successive elections were marked more by their stability than their volatility. This was entirely consistent with the claim of the sociological approach that people's political preferences are rooted in their positions in the social structure. The approach never claimed that all variation in voting preferences would be determined by social structure. Other contingent factors, such as the condition of the economy, specific issues, perceptions of party leaders, or events, would cause some people to switch their votes between elections. But, most people would continue to vote according to their structural positions and their party identifications and this, in turn, would be associated with relative electoral stability. Electoral

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change would be glacial because social structure, and the patterns of partisanship that depend on it, evolve slowly.

The sociological account of British electoral behaviour began to be challenged soon after it was proposed. First, Crewe, Sarlvik, and Alt (1977) observed a marked decline in the strength of party identification, although there was little evidence of the extensive social structural change that might have been expected to produce it. Second, the correlation between vote and the key social structural variable in the sociological framework—social class—began to weaken (e.g. Franklin 1985; Rose and McAllister 1986). In subsequent decades, the strength of party identification has continued to decline, and the correspondence between class and voting has continued to weaken. As a result, many electoral analysts in Britain—like their counterparts in many other advanced democracies—have moved away from models of the vote that place primary importance on ‘sociological’ factors such as social location and long-term partisan attachments. Instead, they specify voting models where the principal explanatory variables are leader and party images, issue perceptions, and assessments of economic performance.

The sociologists’ response to the above findings has taken several forms. The response to declining levels of party identification has been to focus more attention on the role of ideology and values (Rose and McAllister 1990; Heath et al. 1991, 1994; see also Scarbrough 1985). One response to the weakening correlation between class and vote has been to investigate the electoral impact of ‘class-related’ cleavages such private versus public sector statuses (Dunleavy and Husbands 1985). Another response has been to ‘save the relationship’, by developing a more elaborate conceptualization of social class, and new measures of the correlation between class and vote. With regard to the latter approach, the argument is that, once class is properly conceptualized and the correlation between class and vote is properly calculated, the class–vote relationship remains strong, subject only to periodic obfuscation by policy convergence among the competing parties (Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 1985, 2001). However, there are difficulties. The dilution of the simple equation of ‘middle class equals Conservative, working class equals Labour’ substantially weakens the theoretical parsimony and explanatory power of the concept of class. Moreover, as shown in Chapter Three, alternative measures of the correlation between class and vote do not negate the key empirical fact that non-manual workers have become less inclined to support their ‘natural’ party, the Conservatives, while manual workers have become less likely to support their ‘natural’ party, Labour. However measured, the correlation between class and vote has weakened substantially since the 1960s.

### *The ‘Individual Rationality’ Framework*

Although social–structural factors play a role in voting, in our view, they are not as important as the ideas associated with a second framework, that is, the individual

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rationality framework. Some of these ideas derive from the 'economic' or rational choice approach, as articulated in Downs' classic study, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). First, the act of voting depends on a calculation of the personal costs and benefits of voting—a calculation that takes account of the perceived probability that the individual's vote will have a decisive effect on the election outcome. The fact that this probability is usually miniscule creates a 'paradox of voting' in which it is irrational to vote even when there are substantial differences in the benefits that would be received were alternative parties to hold office (see Aldrich 1993). The implication of this paradox is that the decision to vote must involve something more than a narrowly rational, personalized calculation. Second, people support the party that they perceive to be closest to their own positions in the dominant issue space, a space that is typically best represented by a unidimensional, left-right continuum. Third, rational vote-seeking parties, *ceteris paribus*, position themselves in the dominant issue space such that they can maximize the number of votes they receive.

Downs' ideas about individual rationality have informed many studies of voting behaviour. His analysis of costs and benefits has been featured in several subsequent studies of voting turnout—although analysts have also followed Riker and Ordeshook's (1968, 1973) strategy of adding 'efficacy' and 'citizen duty' terms to the core cost-benefit calculation. The cost-benefit approach also has been used to explore the role of economic performance as a determinant of voting preferences. This has generated a debate over whether voters are mainly egocentric or sociotropic, and prospective or retrospective, when forming their political judgements (e.g. see Lewis-Beck 1988). In addition, the suggestion that voters prefer the party closest to them in the dominant issue space has spawned a long-running series of issue-proximity voting studies, where rival groups of scholars have sought to establish whether 'closeness' to a party matters more or less for voters than being broadly on the same side of the ideological divide. Downs' claim that successful vote-seeking parties shift their own general ideological or more specific issue positions in response to changes in voters' policy preferences has been used, in the British context, to analyse a number of major electoral changes. These have included the Conservatives' acceptance of Keynesian demand management and the welfare state after 1945; the Conservatives' success, under Margaret Thatcher, in recognizing that the centre of gravity of British public opinion had shifted to the right, and that the electorate was now ready to embrace monetarist economics and trade union reform; and Labour's move to the centre under Blair in the 1990s, which helped to produce Labour's general election successes in 1997 and 2001 (Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 2001). Finally, some scholars have developed a rational choice interpretation of party identification. The idea is that people can develop a habit of voting for one party as a way of reducing the costs of continuously collecting and evaluating political information (e.g. see Key 1968). Relatively early in their political lives, they make judgements about which party is closest to their

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own ideological and issue positions, and they tend subsequently to continue to support that party unless a major political trauma causes them to reassess their early judgements. These ideas have been developed further by Fiorina (1981), who argues that party identification is best seen as a running tally, or an accumulation, of voters' retrospective evaluations of the performance of major parties and their leaders. In this sense, partisanship is a rational, rather than an affective, sociologically driven, phenomenon.

The rational choice approach to electoral behaviour has been criticized from several perspectives (for a review, see Green and Shapiro 1994). Two major weaknesses stand out. First, the approach seriously understates the extent to which people, as political actors, perceive and evaluate the world in non-rational terms. Critics argue that the political arena is not directly analogous to the economic realm where fairly narrow self-interested calculation can be assumed to underpin both consumer and producer/supplier behaviour. Moreover, to the extent that rational choice models include non-rational elements, they lose their theoretically distinctive and rigorous character. The second weakness follows from the first. Since rational choice models ignore substantively important, non-rational factors that motivate behaviour, attempts to operationalize and test rational choice voting models rarely, if ever, provide satisfactory explanations of the phenomena under investigation. Simply put, critics argue that rational choice accounts of voting tend to fail empirically.

The limitations of the rational choice approach have led a number of scholars to propose alternative models of turnout and party support. In doing so, they have maintained their distance from sociological determinism while recognizing that voters' cost-benefit calculations are more indecisive, impressionistic, and sometimes emotionally driven than rational choice theory would allow. Ironically, Donald Stokes, one of the most influential advocates of the social-psychological approach, articulated an early version of a broader model of voter rationality. Stokes (1963, 1992) distinguished between what he termed 'position' and 'valence' issues. Position issues typically require the voter to make a spatial assessment, such as the extent to which government should redistribute income from rich to poor. On such issues, the parties can be expected to take differing positions, and in Downsian fashion, voters determine which party is closest to their own preferred positions when making their electoral choices. In contrast, valence issues arise when there is broad agreement about the desired policy outcome—such as the achievement (or maintenance) of low unemployment, low inflation, high educational standards, or good healthcare. Voters support the party that appears to offer the best chance of delivering competent performance in these policy areas.

Recent proponents of more general models of voter rationality have placed particular emphasis on the heuristics or cognitive shortcuts that individuals employ in order to make electoral choices under conditions of uncertainty (e.g. Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). Voters often have neither the resources nor the inclination

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to inform themselves fully about the political choices that are available to them in any given election. As a result, they contrive to use judgemental shortcuts that enable them to avoid or reduce the transaction costs of constantly updating their stock of political information.

Here, we propose an approach that combines a focus on valence issues with the idea that voters use such shortcuts when making their electoral decisions. In our view, the most important factor underlying electoral choice is valence—people's judgements of the overall competence of the rival political parties. These judgements, in turn, are arrived at through two principal and related shortcuts: leadership evaluations and party identification. The importance of voters' perceptions of party leaders as heuristic devices derives in part from the fact that parties themselves can be highly amorphous institutions. Parties typically have local, regional, and national organizations that do not always convey a single, unified political message. The platform that a party presents at election time is frequently the result of public, intra-party debate among competing personalities who have previously articulated different policy positions and even represented different intellectual traditions. In these circumstances, it is not always clear to voters what 'the party' actually stands for. How better, then, to crystallize one's view of a party than by making a judgement about the character and competence of its leader? The leader is not an amorphous, vaguely perceived entity. Rather, he or she is a clearly identified, single individual who, if elected, will take ultimate responsibility for any hard choices that the government needs to make. For many voters, then, assessing the leader is a very convenient way of assessing the likely competence of the party in office.

However, leader images are not the only heuristic that voters use in order to estimate parties' likely performance. As noted above, voters' competence assessments are also informed by their party identifications. Following Fiorina (1981) and others who have conceptualized partisanship in terms of an individual rationality approach, we view party identification as a store of accumulated information about political parties. Partisan attachments are frequently updated on the basis of the voter's assessment of the parties' political and economic performance, and it is used to inform electoral choice.

Our approach to political choice also contributes to the understanding of people's decisions to vote. In addition to the narrow calculation of the personal costs and benefits associated with the act of voting, it is possible that people consider the group and system-wide benefits that might accrue from their participation. Some people believe, for example, that the legitimacy and successful functioning of the political system requires widespread citizen participation. Such individuals might be expected to vote—even if the personal benefits of voting were substantially outweighed by the time and effort involved in doing so. By taking a broader view of political calculation, we believe that it is possible to offer a more plausible characterization of the psychology of political participation.

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In sum, our investigation is guided by three sets of theoretical ideas. Following the sociological tradition, we assess the extent to which electoral choices are determined by voters' social locations, in particular by their class location. Following the individual rationality approach pioneered by Downs, we investigate the extent to which people's issue positions—and their closeness to the different parties on key issues—affect their vote choices. We also use this approach to explore costs and benefits associated with the decision to go to the polls. Finally, and consistent with the work of Stokes, Fiorina and others, we examine the relevance of broader notions of individual rationality. Voting models informed by these ideas are what we call *valence politics* models. They focus on how judgements about parties' likely performance in office affect electoral choice, how such judgements are conditioned by cognitive shortcuts, such as leadership images and party identification, and how perceptions of group and system benefits affect citizens' decisions to vote.

### **QUESTIONS, DATA, AND METHODOLOGY**

Two key questions addressed in this book are why British citizens vote and why they make the particular party choices that they do. We also address a third set of questions. To what extent do British citizens engage with the political process beyond participation in elections? And, what does the pattern of engagement over the last four decades tell us about the health of contemporary British democracy? To answer these questions, we draw on the two theoretical frameworks discussed above, and we use as much representative data as we can to test their competing claims. Data gathered in the 2001 British Election Study (BES) are particularly useful since the study was explicitly designed to test rival explanations of voter turnout and party choice. The core data set in the 2001 BES is a two-wave panel in which respondents were interviewed face-to-face both before (in March–April) and after (June–August) the 2001 election. The post-election wave, with an additional top-up sample to compensate for panel attrition, is also used as a free-standing, post-election cross-section. In addition we employ a second data set—completely separate from the first—based on a rolling cross-section survey conducted during the 2001 campaign. In this survey an average of 160 respondents were interviewed by telephone each day during the official 4-week campaign. Many of these respondents (78 per cent) were re-interviewed immediately after the election.

We extend our analyses of voting behaviour to earlier elections for two reasons. One is that some of the voting patterns observed in 2001 originate in earlier changes in the attitudes and preferences of the British electorate—and these changes must be analysed to provide a compelling account of what happened in that election. Another reason is that we make claims about the sources of party support that run counter to many previous BES-based analyses. In particular, and as discussed above, emphasis is placed on the importance of valence judgements.

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Accordingly, we analyse earlier data to ascertain whether the factors affecting electoral choice in 2001 differed from those operating in earlier elections, or whether valence and alternative choice calculations have always been at the core of voting decisions in Britain.

To provide a longer-term perspective on the 2001 findings, several additional data sets are used extensively. We rely heavily on data gathered in the previous BES post-election cross-sectional surveys conducted since 1964. These data are vital for mapping changes in the distribution of theoretically important variables, and well as over-time changes in the relationships between such variables and voting behaviour. We also employ BES and British Election Panel Study (BEPS) datasets gathered over the 1963–70, 1974–9, 1992–7, and 1997–2001 periods. These multi-wave panels are crucial for investigating the dynamics and determinants of party identification in Britain over the past four decades. A third important data set is based on monthly Gallup surveys, which we conducted between January 1992 and December 2002. These data are employed in both aggregate- and individual-level forms. The aggregate-level Gallup data enable us to document changes in electoral preferences in the wake of the 1992 Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) crisis. These aggregate data also shed light on whether the factors that produced Labour's victory in 2001 were a continuation of those at work before the 1997 general election. Individual-level analyses of the Gallup data are valuable for assessing whether the effects of theoretically interesting explanatory variables observed in analyses of various BES data sets are consistently evident during the 1992–2001 period that witnessed the rise of New Labour.

Other types of data are also employed. Information gathered in annual British Social Attitudes (BSA) surveys helps us to gauge levels of participation in various kinds of political activities, and augments our investigation of the nature of partisanship in Britain. Data from the British Household Panel Surveys (BHPS) and special surveys commissioned by Sanders et al. (2002) are used for the latter purpose as well. In addition, we marshal aggregate-level data from numerous surveys conducted by various organizations over the 1947–2001 period. These data permit us to develop a long-term perspective on electoral politics and democratic life in Britain. Some of these data were collected by commercial polling agencies, such as Gallup, MORI, NOP, and ICM, and some were gathered in Eurobarometer surveys conducted by the European Commission. Data on parties' ideological positions gathered in the Manifestos Project (Budge et al. 2001) play a significant role in our analyses of the dynamics and determinants of voting turnout between 1945 and 2001.

## **POLITICAL CHOICE IN BRITAIN CONSIDERED**

Chapters Two–Four of this book begin the empirical analyses of political choice in Britain by addressing the main question in electoral research: why do voters make

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the party choices that they do? Chapter Two discusses the theoretical frameworks outlined above. The sociological framework identifies various aspects of an individual's social location as potential sources of differential voting patterns. These aspects include social class as well as region, gender, ethnicity, age, and home ownership. The sociological approach also claims party identification to be a key explanatory variable. However, since the individual rationality framework makes a similar claim, we treat partisanship as a 'signature variable' of both approaches. This framework contains both the Downsian and the valence approaches. Our characterization of the Downsian approach focuses on issue positions and proximities, that is, the closer that an individual voter locates him or herself to a particular party on a key issue dimension, such as the left-right continuum, the more likely he or she is to vote for that party in an election. The valence approach specifies that heuristics and other types of calculation inform voters' party preferences. In addition to partisanship, these include leadership images, evaluations of economic performance, and assessments of issue competence.

Chapter Three assesses the extent to which the sociological, Downsian, and valence perspectives explain patterns of party support in the United Kingdom between 1964 and 2001. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part develops a set of 'consistency measures' that explore the degree of bivariate association between vote choice and the key signature variables associated with each perspective. The empirical results show that all three approaches are relevant for understanding vote choice in Britain. Between 1964 and 2001, leader images and partisanship consistently have the largest effects on voting while issue proximities and social location are significant but less important. However, the relationship between vote and social class progressively weakens over time. This decline in the role of class is not matched by a compensating rise in the explanatory power of other social location variables. This implies that the overall importance of the sociological approach has declined since 1964. The second part of Chapter Three presents multivariate models that build on the bivariate analyses conducted in the first part. The results support the notion that, with the exception of the declining role of social class, the relative importance of the various signature variables associated with the sociological and individual rationality frameworks has remained more or less constant from the mid-1960s onwards.

This conclusion is reinforced in the final part of Chapter Three, which examines the calculus of party support using individual-level monthly data for the period between 1992 and 2001. The results show that leader images, partisanship, and evaluations of economic competence consistently exert large and significant effects on party preferences, with a secondary role being played by social location. Important changes in party preference occurred in the wake of the September 1992 ERM crisis. This crisis, in combination with New Labour's move to the right under Tony Blair after 1994, helped to produce shifts in voters' leadership perceptions, their party identifications, and their economic competence perceptions that endured through to 2001.

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Chapter Four provides a detailed analysis of the sources of party support in 2001. We concentrate on the main UK-wide choices that were available to most voters—Labour, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats. Although the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru are significant forces in their respective national assemblies, they are relatively minor players in Westminster politics. Accordingly, perceptions of these parties played a small part in the calculations of an overwhelming majority of British voters. Our analysis of vote choice in 2001 specifies a series of multivariate models that capture the effects of the key variables from each of the sociological and individual rationality frameworks. As in Chapter Three, the evidence provides some support for both. Party identification, leader images, issue positions and proximities, and economic evaluations all exerted sizeable effects on vote choice. Tactical voting was also in evidence, benefiting the Liberal Democrats at the expense of Labour and the Conservatives. Our summary conclusion about the outcome of the 2001 election is that Labour won because it held all of the important cards—it enjoyed substantial leads over its competitors on all of the key determinants of vote choice. In contrast to many earlier studies of British electoral politics, we make strong claims about the effects of evaluations of party leaders on electoral choice. Since voters' reactions to the leaders might be rationalizations of pre-existing voting preferences, we conduct a variety of statistical tests to determine whether our inferences regarding the effects of leader evaluations are warranted.

Chapter Five provides an analysis of the impact of the 2001 election campaign. The analysis focuses on two questions. Did the campaign mobilize political interest and participation? And, did it sway voters' political choices? Data from the BES pre-post-election panel survey and the BES rolling cross-section campaign survey are used to investigate these questions. Contrary to what is commonly assumed about the function of election campaigns, the 2001 campaign did little to mobilize political interest or partisanship. Indeed, there is evidence of demobilization during the early part of the campaign, with interest in the election recovering only in the week prior to polling day. However, the local campaigns, conducted by party activists, contributed significantly to turnout and party choice. The analyses also indicate that tactical voting did not occur spontaneously but, rather, was driven by Liberal Democrat grassroots campaigning. More generally, campaigning by all of the major parties affected the vote shares that they received.

Chapter Six addresses important theoretical questions that arise from analyses in Chapters Three and Four, which document that party identification is a powerful predictor of electoral preference. This was true in the 1960s and it remains true today. The theoretical issue arises because models in the sociological and the individual rationality frameworks both claim party identification as a major explanatory variable. However, they conceptualize it differently. According to sociological models, party identification is a long-term, stable, affective orientation, whereas for models in the individual rationality framework, party identification

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is a summary, potentially mutable, tally of current and past party performance evaluations. Thus, an important observable difference concerns whether party identification manifests impressive levels of individual stability, as claimed by the sociological model, or whether it displays the substantial dynamics claimed by models in the individual rationality framework.

Analyses presented in Chapter Six show that, since the early 1960s, there has been considerable individual-level instability in party identification in Britain. Moreover, and contrary to the claims of some earlier studies (e.g. Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002), this instability is not simply a consequence of random measurement error. Analyses also show that partisanship can be effectively modelled as a response to judgements about party leader performance and economic evaluations. Taken together, these findings suggest that partisanship in Britain corresponds closely to the characterisation provided by the valence politics model. Since the two other main predictors of vote choice—leader perceptions and economic evaluations—are also derived from the valence model, we conclude that electoral choice in Britain has been, and remains, primarily about valence.

Chapters Seven and Eight investigate determinants of voter turnout. Traditionally, turnout has not been regarded as a problem in Britain, and analysts have paid relatively little attention to it. As Figure 1.2 illustrates, turnout generally remained quite high throughout much of the post-Second World War period, although there was a gradual, if irregular, downward trend. However, in 1997 and especially in 2001, the decline accelerated sharply. These recent declines, combined with falling turnout in local elections and persistently low turnout in elections to the European Parliament, have led a number of academic analysts and media commentators to conclude that nonvoting has become a serious problem. Chapter Seven begins by relating voting to other forms of political participation. The analyses show that voting in various elections constitutes a distinctive type of political participation. We then discuss several models that purport to explain why people participate in democratic politics and why they decide to vote (or not to vote). The relative deprivation or equity–fairness model stresses the gap between what an individual expects and what he or she gets out of life. The civic voluntarism model focuses on the resources that individuals bring to bear on the decision to vote or not and the mobilization efforts that are made by other actors. The social capital model emphasizes social trust and the individual's involvement with social organizations. The cognitive mobilization model highlights the role of political interest, political knowledge, and media usage. Finally, the general incentives model supplements a broadly defined Downsian-style cost–benefit analysis with variables that take account of a variety of other incentives, such as 'doing one's democratic duty'.

Chapter Eight provides operational specifications for each of these models of the decision to vote. It then tests each model using data drawn from the 2001 BES pre- and post-election surveys. Because each model receives some support from the data, we conduct statistical tests to determine whether any model is superior

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to the others. The tests indicate that each model makes a significant contribution to the explanation of turnout. Accordingly, we estimate a composite model of turnout that combines elements of the several specific models. Analyses of the composite model reveal that the crucial individual-level influences on electoral turnout are calculations of efficacy-discounted benefits and costs of participation, sense of civic duty, and age. The final section of Chapter Eight analyses the aggregate-level dynamics of turnout, using proxy variables for the efficacy and benefit terms in the individual-level models, as well as linear and quadratic trend terms to control for various long-term forces. These analyses indicate a substantial portion (not all) of the decline in turnout in 1997 and 2001 was caused by the one-sided nature of the contests, coupled with the perception that the two major parties did not offer a distinctive menu of policy choices.

Chapter Nine extends our investigation to consider voters' orientations towards themselves as political actors, as well as their orientations towards elections, parties, various political institutions, and the wider democratic process. Using survey data gathered over the past four decades, we consider whether contemporary British voters are less interested in politics than their forebearers, less politically efficacious, less inclined to participate in various political activities, and less satisfied with the democratic process. Notwithstanding the declines in turnout in 1997 and 2001, we find that, in almost all of these respects, *contemporary Britons are almost indistinguishable from earlier generations*. Average levels of political interest and political efficacy, and willingness to engage in non-electoral actions, have changed little over the last forty years. Contemporary British voters are not particularly interested in politics and they do not feel particularly efficacious. But their predecessors felt almost exactly the same way. And, in terms of judgements about the overall performance of democracy in Britain, people were more satisfied in 2001 than at any time since 1973 when measures of democracy satisfaction were first recorded. We find that democratic satisfaction is largely driven by valence politics considerations. The main sources of satisfaction are positive evaluations of state institutions, economic and social policies, and political leadership in general.

Commentators have inferred from falling turnout in the two most recent general elections that British voters are increasingly disillusioned with the democratic process. The evidence presented in Chapter Nine indicates that this inference is incorrect. However, analyses in Chapter Eight do suggest that there is a dynamic in attitudes towards electoral participation and, by extension, to a citizen's role in the democratic process. That dynamic concerns sense of civic duty. Younger people are less likely to believe that voting is a civic duty, and less likely to believe that nonvoting is a serious violation of that duty. Moreover, there is evidence that these age differences reflect generational differences, rather than wholly the result of life-cycle processes. If so, processes of generational replacement will eventually produce an electorate where average levels of civic duty are lower than is presently the case. Since sense of civic duty is a primary determinant of turnout,

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*ceteris paribus*, such an electorate will be less likely to manifest high levels of electoral participation.

Finally, Chapter Ten concludes with a summary of major theoretical and empirical claims. Our analyses indicate that British electoral politics over the past forty years can be best understood using an individual rationality framework. The three major predictors of *electoral choice*—leadership images, partisanship, and evaluations of economic performance—are key elements of the valence model. Analyses of *turnout* demonstrate the explanatory power of cost–benefit calculations that are augmented by assessments of overall benefits to the political system in general—which are elements of the general incentives model. Beyond electoral participation, *satisfaction with the democratic process* itself depends primarily on assessments of institutional and policy performance—that is, on valence judgements. Thus, the individual rationality framework and, in particular, its valence politics model, provide powerful analytic leverage for explaining political choice in Britain. Contemporary voters, like Melanie, who reluctantly went to the polls in 2001, clearly live in a world of valence politics. Our analyses demonstrate that her grandfather, Jim, lived in a much more valenced world than many earlier observers have assumed.