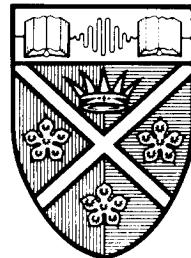


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# STRATHCLYDE PAPERS ON GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS



*WHO VOTES IN ABERDEEN?  
MARKED ELECTOR REGISTERS  
AS A DATA SOURCE*

*M C Dyer and A G Jordan*

No. 42

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AS A DATA SOURCE:

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Who Votes in Aberdeen? Marked Elector Registers as a Data Source:

M.C. Dyer and A.G. Jordan

I. INTRODUCTION

This article looks at non voting in the constituencies of North and South Aberdeen in the 1979 general election using both aggregate data based on marked electoral register and survey data based on a survey of two city wards.

The first part of this paper is based on the exploitation of the provision maintained in the Representation of the People Act 1983 that, "...documents, except ballot papers, counterfoils and certificates as to employment on duty on the day of the poll, shall be open to public inspection at such times and subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by the Clerk of the Crown..."

This provision gives access to examine marked electoral registers which record those voting. The main advantage of this source of voting/non-voting data is the reliability of classification - unaffected by the distortion caused by social norms, memory errors, etc., found in studies based on respondent recall.

Using data from the registers one is able to construct accurate turn-out figures for smaller units of analysis than the constituency figures available in election returns. Turn-out can be calculated by

polling stations, and even by street. One can also distinguish turn-out by sex.

A second source we employ is a survey of non voters in two wards in South Aberdeen (with a control survey of voters). (The survey allows examination of characteristics of non voters not available from the register).

## II. DATA FROM THE REGISTER

Our data show a turnout in South Aberdeen of 78.5% and in North Aberdeen of 69.7% of the effective electorate. The effective electorate was less than the total number of voters on the register for two reasons. Firstly, the register includes potential electors who were under 18 on the day of the election. Secondly, our analysis ignores postal voting. As postal papers are returned centrally they are not marked on the register as voting. Accordingly whilst we know who received postal ballots, and from the Returning Officer we know how many voted, we do not know who voted. As might be expected the "turnout" amongst postal voters was higher than amongst the rest of the effective electorate.

TABLE 1

South Aberdeen

On Register	66144
Under 18 on day of election	- 836
Effective Register	65308
Our Effective electorate	63670
	1638 Postal Votes Issued

North Aberdeen

On Register	65679
Data for 1 register missing and not analysed	- 935
Under 18 on day of election	- 723
Effective Register	64021
Our Effective Electorate	63102
	919 Postal Votes issued

This gave a turnout in North Aberdeen of 78.5% and 69.7% in South Aberdeen. This compares with Craig's (1980) figures of 78.6% and 69.7% respectively.

(1) Turnout by Local Government Ward had an even greater range within constituencies than that between the constituencies. Ward turnout varied from 59.6% to 78% in North Aberdeen and 72.7% to 88.6% in South Aberdeen. Turnout was geographically divided along two axes. The first (and more important) was political, dividing the city north and

south between the two constituencies, while the second, social, separated the newer western part of Aberdeen from more traditional areas to the east. (See Diagram A).

Diagram A

Variation in turnout between different parts of Aberdeen

Aberdeen North Council	West	Centre	East
	Post-War Housing Area (10 Wards)		Old Working Class Area Pre-War Housing + Working Class Private Rented Sector (10 Wards)
	Turnout 72%		Turnout 68%
			Coast
Aberdeen South	High Status Owner/ Occupier (7 wards)	Mostly Owner/ Occupier (5 wards)	Inner Old City (6 wards)
	Turnout 83%	Turnout 78%	Turnout 70%
	Fairly Recent Council Housing Area (4 Wards)	Traditional Working Class Fishing + Post-War Council Housing. (4 Wards)	
	Turnout 81%	Turnout 76%	

In North Aberdeen, a safe Labour seat, the general election turnout was just below 70%, in only four of the twenty wards did it rise above 75% and in two others it fell below 60%. By contrast in Aberdeen South the overall voting level was 78.6%, and in eleven of the twenty six wards it rose above 80%. It could be argued that the discrepancy between the two seats was in part, at least, a function of the marginality of the October 1974 result (a Conservative majority of only 365 in S. Aberdeen). But the variations between wards within each

constituency suggests a relationship to the social characteristics of the areas concerned. (See above). In Aberdeen North the ten westerly wards, dominated by a massive post-war housing scheme had a participation rate of 72%, whereas the ten easterly wards covering parts of the Victorian city and eastern littoral had an average turnout of only 68%. The housing pattern in Aberdeen South was more complex but variations were similar. The constituency can be divided into five areas. The seven wards in the south west, including the most desirable owner/occupier areas had a turnout of 83%, while in five other private housing wards between them and the inner city it fell to 78%, and in the six wards covering the old centre of Aberdeen it dropped even more sharply to 70%. Interestingly, the higher voting levels associated with owner/occupier wards was approached by four modern council house wards, where an average 81% turnout was recorded.

TABLE 2  
Turnout by Constituency, Ward and Party

Turnout	North Aberdeen			South Aberdeen		
	Labour	Conservative	Liberal	Labour	Conservative	Liberal
-59.9	2	-	-	1	-	-
60-69.9%	4	-	2	1	-	-
70-74.9%	8	-	-	3	1	1
75-75.9%	2	2	-	4	4	-
80%+	-	-	-	4	7	-
All Wards	<u>16</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>1</u>
Average turnout per ward	69.5%	78.1%	66.5%	74.6%	80.9%	74.6%

Even in the south east, a district which included remnants of an old working class fishing community and new council houses, a turnout of 76% was achieved: some 4% more than in the newer north west.

In terms of local government party allegiance Conservative wards exhibited the highest level of voter participation, with only one ward failing below 75% across the city. (See table 2). In the South, the four highest voting wards regularly return Conservative District Councillors, and even in the North the two Tory wards outvoted the rest in a very safe Labour constituency. Participation in Labour wards proved more varied and differences between the constituencies much sharper. In the South the average turnout per Labour ward was 5.1% greater than in the North, and while only two Labour wards in the North established a participation rate over 75%, eight did so in the South constituency. The discrepancy between Labour wards, reflecting the geographical observations already made, will be discussed later with reference to relative turnouts amongst council tenants. Turnout in the three Liberal wards were unexceptional in that the two in the North averaged 66.5%, and that in the South was no different from the Labour average.

(ii) Turnout in the public sector housing areas. Whilst electors living in areas of owner occupation usually voted more heavily than electors in areas dominated by council housing, it was also clear that there were substantial differences in participation within the council house sector. Consequently, we attempted to disaggregate council

housing in order to avoid too gross generalisations concerning the participation by council house tenants.

For housing management purposes Aberdeen District Council classifies much of their stock into five main types from Category I to V. The classification is partly subjective, being based on the judgement of officials, and partly objective in terms of demand, the percentage of tenants in rent arrears and annual vacancy turnover. Category I comprises the least sought after properties and those most difficult to manage, whilst Category V comprises the most popular.

The Housing Department produced specimen streets/part streets of council housing types for several wards. (Borderline streets were categorized as such - e.g. I/II represents a marginal case). The relationship between housing type and turnout is not completely stable, one category IV street polled only 58% whereas the average for that type was 82.6%. But nevertheless there is an almost perfect monotonic relationship between turnout and housing type.

TABLE 3  
Voting and Council House Type

Housing Type	Average Turnout
I	46.1
I/II	55.5
II	63.2
III	68.9
III/IV	65.3
IV	72.6
V	82.6

Even with a single local government ward great variability is found in council house voting. For example;

TABLE 4  
Middlefield Ward, Aberdeen North (Overall turnout 59.7%)

	<u>Vote</u>	<u>DNV</u>	<u>Housing Type</u>
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	
Manor Avenue	155	(47.5)	II/ I
Manor Walk	69	(46.3)	II/ I
Logie Terrace	10	(45.5)	II/ I
Logie Place	92	(47.2)	II/ I
Logie Gardens	24	(43.6)	II/ I
Logie Avenue	122	(46.2)	II/ I
Heatheryfold Pl.	72	(64.9)	III/IV
Heatheryfold Dr.	73	(64.6)	III/IV
Heatheryfold Cr	323	(66.3)	III/IV

This phenomenon of turnout varying by housing type is not the result of some kind of architectural determinism. In Aberdeen

potential tenants from less stressed backgrounds can refuse harder to let property and wait until more desirable locations are available. This tends to a concentration of tenants with non-housing problems in the hard to let areas.

Earlier work has drawn attention to the relationships between housing tenure and voting patterns, but our material underlines the variability within a housing class: some types of council housing produces very high turnouts and others well below average. This is a warning against single line reasoning about "the council voter" and adds weight to Fittan's argument that neighbourhood effect is likely to be at the level of street sub-group rather than constituency. (Fittan, 1973)

### (iii) Sex and Voting

At least since the pioneering work of Tingsten (in the 1930s) the propensity of men to vote in greater proportions than women has been a generally observed feature of political behaviour. For example, Verba, Nie and Kims' (1978) seven nation inquiry leads them to the generalization, "Even when men and women have comparable levels of individual and institutional resources, female potential activity rates remain well below those of their male counterparts" (p.252). They do observe though that the participating gap between the sexes is less for voting than in overall political activity (p.235). A study by Crewe, Fox and Alt, notes, however, that the well known tendency for women to vote in Western liberal democracies in smaller proportions is now not

only insignificant in British elections but attributable to their greater longevity than their sex (1976, p. 59).

Although recent studies have then detected a closing of the gap in both Britain and the United States, the arguments for parity of participation have tended to exclude certain groups, especially elderly women, from the calculations (See Hills, 1981 p. 323). Our data, however, show quite unambiguously that women proportionately outvoted men in Aberdeen North by 2.6% and by 1.0% in Aberdeen South.

From other data at our disposal we found women also voted more heavily than men in Aberdeenshire and Banffshire. Unfortunately from a single observation we cannot establish whether this is a novel or traditional feature of electoral participation in the region, the reflection of a national secular trend towards parity and even female dominance, or a feature peculiar to the 1979 General Election.

TABLE 5

	<u>SOUTH ABERDEEN</u>		<u>NORTH ABERDEEN</u>
	<u>% of Voters</u>	<u>Turnout</u>	<u>% of Voters</u>
Male	45.1	78.0%	47.4
Female	54.9	79.0%	52.7
Effective Electorate	100%	78.5%	100%

Across the city as a whole there was a tendency for female dominance in each ward to increase as the overall turnout declined. In the twenty three higher turnout wards women only outvoted men on average by 1.0%, but in the twenty three lower turnout areas the difference between the sexes rose to 2.2%. The association was particularly marked in Aberdeen North where in the eight wards where fewer than 70% of the electorate voted female dominance was as high as 4%, but in the four highest turnout wards males held a slender 0.9% lead. Although Aberdeen South presented a less clear pattern the general trend was still evident. Females voted only 0.6% more than males in the eleven wards where turnout was above 80%, but by an average of 1.1% more in the wards where turnout was lower. The overall superiority of female participation was reflected in the observations that while in only seven wards did more than 80% of men vote women did so in no fewer than eleven, and while in three wards fewer than 60% of males cast a ballot the same was true of females in only one.

Female dominance was associated with party in that across the city the twenty nine Labour wards showed on average a 2.4% female bias, while in Conservative wards there was parity between the sexes. In only three Labour wards did men vote more heavily than women, while men voted more heavily than women in both Conservative wards in the North and in five Conservative wards in the South. To a certain extent the distinction was a function of higher turnout in Conservative areas, and in Labour wards there was a tendency for female dominance to decline as the general level of voting increased. Nevertheless, party still

emerges as an independent factor, for we note in table 6 that in each turnout band women vote more heavily in Labour than in Conservative areas.

TABLE 6

Average Percentage Female Dominance in Aberdeen by Turnout in Labour and Conservative Wards in 1979\*

Ward Turnout	Aberdeen North				Aberdeen South			
	Lab. Wards		Con. Wards		Lab. Wards		Con. Wards	
	% Female Lead	% Female Lead	% Female Lead	% Female Lead	% Female Lead	% Female Lead	% Female Lead	% Female Lead
-69.9	+4.3 (6)	-	-	-	-5.8 <sup>1</sup> (2)	-	-	-
70-74.9	+2.4 (8)	-	-	-	+5.0 (3)	-0.1 (1)	-	-
75-79.9	-0.7 (2)	-1.2 (2)	-	-	+3.3 (4)	+1.2 (4)	-	-
80+	-	-	-	-	+2.2 (4)	-0.3 (7)	-	-
All	+2.9 (16)	-1.2 (2)	-	-	+2.0 (13)	+0.2 (12)	-	-

1.

\*No. Wards in brackets

Higher male turnout relates to unusually low female turnout amongst nurses in residence at the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

As party strength, especially in Scotland, still remains a good guide to the social class composition of the electorate, and as no more than one of the wards held by Labour and Conservative District councillors could be described as marginal in the two-party battle, the party allegiance of a ward is not an unreliable indicator of the social

class of the residents. It may not be tempting the ecological fallacy too far to draw conclusions regarding participation of males and females within each social class from the party colour of each ward. It is in the working classes that females vote more heavily than men. While Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) found reasons why a sex difference between male and female voting should decline (p. 43) they give no reason to expect higher female voting than males.

TABLE 7

Average % turnout by sex in Labour and Conservative Wards

	Aberdeen North		Aberdeen South		All	
	Lab. Wards	Con. Wards	Lab. Wards	Con. Wards	Lab. Wards	Con. Wards
Male	68.2	78.7	74.0	80.8	70.8	80.5
Female	70.9	77.6	76.0	81.0	73.2	80.5

From the circumstantial evidence in the table, our data indicate that while sex is a variable worth consideration it is still far less important than social class (as indicated by party). Second, that amongst non-manual voters (i.e. Con wards) there is virtual parity of participation between men and women in Aberdeen, and third, that working class women in the city, by around 2.5%, were more likely to vote than working class men in 1979.

Two overall conclusions seem to be indicated. If there existed in the past a greater propensity for men to vote than women in

Aberdeen, that gap has been closed. Second, to the extent that women outvote men in both constituencies it is a function of greater participation by women in working class Labour areas. This second observation, however, need not arise from an increasing interest in politics on the part of working class women, but from a decline amongst working class men. A secular decline in voting in working class areas (which almost certainly affects both sexes) but which was greater amongst working class men would result in working class women voting the more heavily. Consequently, while theories of voting parity between males and females have tended to concentrate on the increased politicisation of women (Hills, 1979), and such approaches might be relevant to explaining the phenomenon amongst Aberdeen's middle class, consideration of differentials in Labour areas might have to be discussed within the context of working class disengagement from the electoral process.

### III. NON VOTERS: SURVEY EVIDENCE

#### (i) Introduction.

This discussion is based upon a survey of 175 Non-Voters and 125 Voters in two wards in South Aberdeen. In the 1979 General Election turnout one ward, Queen's Cross (Conservative in local elections) was 80.2% and the other Abbotswell (Labour) had a similar (80.0%) turnout. Taken together the wards were representative of South Aberdeen in terms of party and turnout. As we were able to identify both voters and

non-voters, we were able to draw two systematic random samples of (a) non voters and (b) voters in the two wards.

Predictably the response rate amongst non-voters was low, 39%, as an important cause of non-voting is removal, infirmity and death, but it represented around three quarters of non-voters who were contactable and could have voted, rather higher than the response rate of 70% amongst those who did vote. We did, however, discover from new arrivals and neighbours the distribution of absentee electors in such categories, enabling us to construct a profile of the 20% of the electorate who failed to vote, and to estimate what proportion of non-voting was due to inability and what to unwillingness to cast a ballot.

TABLE 8  
Sources of Non-Voting, General Election, 1979.

		Causes of Non-Voting %	Non-Voters as % of Electorate
Removal	Removal	18	4
Inability	Infirmity/Death	17	3
to vote	Absence	9	2
	Sub total	44	9
<hr/>			
Probably	"Voted"	14	3
Unwillingness	Not interested in Politics	7	1
to vote	Too Busy	5	1
	Student	3)	1
	Other excuse	4)	
	No Excuse Offered	8	2
	Refusal	11	2
	Respondents not contacted or accounted for	5	1
	Sub-total	57	11
	Total	101	20
N = 175			

Some 18% of non-voters were said to have moved house before the election, (and in several instances before the register was compiled) A further 17%, mostly old persons, had either died prior to May 1979 or were too ill to vote. 9% of non-voters were working away from home at various points between Aberdeen and Hong Kong. Students, whose absence from the polls may well have been a combination of lack of interest, removal, ignorance of local registration or a preference to vote in a home constituency, constituted a further 3% of the non-voters. Lack of interest in politics and/or the election was admitted by only 7% of non-voters, although we may well assume that those offering no excuse (8%) and refusals (11%) also had little interest in political events. Doubtless, too, some of the 5% "too busy to vote" were not enraptured by the campaign, especially when preoccupied with preparing for an impending marriage or moving house. Fourteen percent of non-voters, fully 35% of those interviewed, claimed to have actually voted.

In the context of the total electorate, no category of non-voting was of outstanding significance. There was no evidence of a significant body of electors refusing to vote out of dissatisfaction with the political system or the electoral process.

If a distinction is made between "removals", "illness/death", and "absence" on the one hand as "unavoidable" non-voting and other categories as "avoidable" non-voting, then we may conclude that of the 20% non-voting in these two wards, only about half could have done so.

Our samples, which closely accorded with the known levels of voting with respect to ward and sex, reflected the commonly observed relationship between age and participation. Non voting was particularly marked amongst electors under 35 years of age, while participation of those between 35 and 54 seems to have been reinforced by marriage, for not only did a mere 16% of married people not vote, but the single, widowed, and particularly the small group of divorcees had well below average turnout. Amongst Aberdeen-born electors, who included the bulk of younger people on the register, some 24% failed to vote, but they were less reluctant than migrants from the rural hinterland in the rest of the Grampian Region, 32% of whom stayed away from the polls, apparently carrying with them to the city a marked indifference to voting so characteristic of their places of origin. By contrast, of the 35% of the electorate born outside the Region, 89% voted. Associational membership, such as church attendance, and T.U. membership showed no significant relationship to voting.

The most important finding, however, to emerge from the survey was that only 21% of non-voters, the equivalent of 4% of the electorate as a whole claimed never to have voted in any election, and of these 79% were under the age of 35. Only 7% of 1979 non-voters over 34 years, 2% of that older age group, had never cast a ballot. Thus, while it is important to distinguish between 1979 voters and non-voters, in that the former include the more habitual voters, the distinction is not qualitatively absolute, especially if one assumes that in the course of

time that most of the younger non-voters will become active. (For similar conclusions see Crewe et al, 1976, p.47)

(ii) The electoral consequences of non voting.

How did the party preferences of non-voters compare with voters? And what impact would an increased or decreased turnout have had on the result? According to our survey, 42% of the voters across the two wards supported Labour at the 1979 General Election, 39% the Conservatives, 11% the Liberals and 8% the S.N.P. By contrast non-voters were distributed 42% Conservative, only 32% Labour, 14% Liberal and 12% S.N.P. Thus it would appear that Labour would have been marginally disadvantaged by a general increase in participation over these two wards.

It is, however, more instructive to note the contrast between voters and non-voters within each ward than across them (See Table 9). In Labour Abbotswell we found that non-voters were twice as Conservative as voters, while in Conservative Queen's Cross non-voters were twice as Labour as those participating in the election.

This finding underlines the observations made by other research that where a party in a region or constituency is particularly dominant the opposition is even weaker than one might have otherwise expected, and that such dominance is the product of very local factors; the variations in non-voting reflect ward dominance and not the constituency majority.

TABLE 9

Distribution of Party Support in the 1979 General  
Election amongst Voters, and party leanings of  
Non voters by ward

	<u>Abbotswell (Lab)</u>		<u>Queen's Cross (Con)</u>	
	<u>Voters</u>	<u>Non-Voters</u>	<u>Voters</u>	<u>Non-Voters</u>
Conservative	15	32	64	52
Labour	74	41	9	22
Liberal	2	15	21	13
S.N.P.	9	12	6	15
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

By comparing the General Election result in each ward with District local election results we can assess what impact a significantly lower level of participation might have had. What emerges from such a comparison is the remarkable stability within each ward of the two-party share of the poll despite a variation of turnout in Abbotswell from 34% to 80%, and from 41% to 80% in Queen's Cross. The only important difference in the distribution of party support between the two levels of election between 1974 and 1980 seems to have been caused by the intervention of the S.N.P. and Liberals. Thus within each ward there is no evidence here that turnout significantly affects the share of party support.

TABLE 10

District Election Results Compared with the 1979 General  
Election Results in Abbotswell and Queen's Cross

	Abbotswell					Queen's Cross					
	T/O%	Cont%	Lab%	Lib%	SNP%		T/O%	Cont%	Lab%	Lib%	SNP%
1974 District	41	17	83	-	-		52	87	13	-	-
1977 District			Labour	Unopposed	44		89	11	-	-	
1979 General* Election	80	15	74	2	9		80	65	9	21	6
			(17)**	(83)**				(88)**	(12)**		
1980 District	34	16	84	-	-		41	85	15	-	-

\*from sample

\*\*share of two-party vote (Con-Lab)

Our data does not, however, demonstrate that an increase or decline of turnout would not affect the outcome of General Elections in the South Aberdeen constituency. Had Labour wards achieved turnouts similar to those of the Conservatives across the constituency Labour might well have carried South Aberdeen. On the other hand, a general increase in turnout across all wards would have made the Conservatives more secure.

(iii) The causes of non-voting

In examining the possible causes of voting and non-voting at the individual level we explored four avenues (a) general disposition towards the political system, (b) knowledge of the local electoral situation, (c) the role of the parties as political mobilisers, and (d) the role of the family in stimulating participation.

It will be appreciated that this section excludes evidence from many of those unable to vote in the 1979 election (i.e. non-contacts), so it follows that our comparison here between voters and non-voters is essentially between voters and that section of the non-voting population which was most likely to be deliberately non-voting. Thus the non-voters who responded to our questionnaire were more likely to differ attitudinally from voters than non-respondent non-voters, whose values would presumably more closely accord with those of the registered electorate as a whole. Consequently, it follows that if there were negative attitudes towards politics amongst non-voters they were more likely to be reflected by our respondents than not.

(a) General disposition towards the political system. Although high turnout levels cannot be taken as evidence of support for the political system, one cannot regard low levels of participation as a strong endorsement of the prevailing institutions. It seems, therefore, reasonable to hypothesise that within the context of South Aberdeen where there are no deep communal divisions, that a high propensity to vote will be evident amongst those in whom citizen competence is well developed - i.e. amongst those professing an interest in politics, those with positive feelings towards government and politicians, and those believing in the efficacy of the electoral process. Although there was some evidence to support such a view in Abbotswell and Queen's Cross, the polarity of attitudes between voters and non-voters was not so pronounced, rather there was a divergence of opinion between manual and non-manual electors.

Both voters and non-voters seemed to share attitudes which were likely to encourage them to take part in elections, for while they found the workings of government difficult to comprehend, which perhaps dampened their interest in politics, they were positive towards M.P.s, and felt that government and party matters affected their daily lives.

Interest in politics was predictably greater amongst voters (63%) than amongst non-voters (41%) (see table 11), although very few of them admitted to great enthusiasm, being no more "very interested" (6%) than non-voters; and while just over half of non-participants indicated no interest at all in politics so did three out of ten voters. Consequently while the turnout amongst those who said they were "interested" or "very interested" in politics was high at 85%, 70% of those who said they were uninterested, nonetheless, presented themselves at the polls.

More than 70% of both sets of respondents in our survey felt that "politics and government are too complicated for most people to understand what is going on", and about a fifth of both indicated that this was because "government makes no attempt to explain its actions." The ambivalence towards government, however, was more than counterbalanced by support for M.P.s. Only 16% of voters and non-voters agreed that M.P.s were worse than they had been hitherto, about the same proportion considered them better, and held they were more concerned "to serve their fellow men" than being "just out for themselves". Interestingly, while non-voters were hardly less likely to

TABLE 11  
1979 Voters (N=88)      1979 Non-Voters (N=68)

	Non- Manual	** (Con)	** Manual	** (Lab)	All	Non- Manual	Manual	All	*T/O
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>(i) Interest in Politics</b>									
(a) Very Interested	6	(7)	5	(8)	6	8	3	6	80
(b) Interested	80	(79)	42	(57)	63	51	29	41	86
(c) Not Interested	14	(14)	53	(35)	32	41	68	53	70
<b>(ii) Politics and government are too complicated for most people to understand what is going on</b>									
(a) Agree	76	(71)	79	(81)	77	65	84	74	81
(b) Disagree	22	(29)	15	(14)	29	27	10	19	80
<b>(iii) Reasons why people have difficulty understanding what govt. is doing</b>									
(a) Problems too complex	27	(32)	15	(14)	22	14	26	19	82
(b) People don't care	24	(29)	41	(32)	32	46	29	38	77
(c) Govt. makes no attempt to explain its actions	45	(36)	44	(54)	44	38	39	38	82
<b>(iv) Affect the activities of govt. have on one's life</b>									
(a) Much affect	18	(32)	31	(16)	24	30	26	28	77
(b) Some affect	69	(54)	31	(51)	52	49	35	43	83
(c) Little or no affect	12	(14)	38	(32)	24	16	35	25	79
<b>(v) How much it matters which party runs the country</b>									
(a) Very much	59	(64)	51	(60)	56	51	23	38	85
(b) Not much	39	(29)	44	(40)	41	46	65	54	75
<b>(vi) Principal concerns of M.P.s</b>									
(a) To serve fellow men	69	(71)	49	(46)	60	62	42	53	82
(b) Just out for themselves	20	(18)	36	(41)	27	24	48	35	76
<b>(vii) Are M.P.s better or worse than they used to be?</b>									
(a) Better	16	(21)	10	(11)	14	16	19	18	76
(b) Worse	14	(21)	18	(16)	16	11	23	16	80
(c) The Same	55	(54)	59	(62)	57	59	42	52	79

\*Turnout surveys all registered voters expressing the attitude.

\*\*Attitudes of Conservative and Labour voters in brackets.

agree than voters that the activities of government had much or some affect on one's daily life, they were markedly less convinced that it mattered very much which party ran the country.

Much sharper differences appeared when the responses were analysed by social class. Whereas more than half non-manual voters and non-voters expressed some interest in politics, under half of manual voters and only 32% of manual non-voters did so. Whereas more than 60% of non-manual electors, voters and non-voters, were of the opinion that M.Ps desired to serve their fellow men, less than half of both groups of manual respondents endorsed their view, and were more likely to perceive M.Ps as worse than they used to be. Even more significantly, whereas only an eighth of non-manual voters and nonvoters held that the activities of government had little or no affect on their daily lives, more than a third of both sets of manual electors endorsed such a view.

Manual non-voters were particularly negative, and as a group appeared even qualitatively different from the somewhat sceptical manual voters. 68% of manual non-voters indicated that they were not at all interested in politics, 65% that it didn't matter which party ran the country, and were the only group which held that M.P's were more "basically just out for themselves" (48%) than desirous of serving their fellows (42%). Conversely, the most positive were non-manual voters, 86% of whom expressed some degree of interest in politics, 87% of whom said that governmental activities affected their daily lives, 69% that M.P.s were oriented towards their fellow men, and 59% that it

mattered very much which party ran the country; while non-manual non-voters in general expressed more positive opinions than manual voters.

Predictably the attitudes of Conservative voters were very similar to those of non-manual voters, while Labour supporters broadly reflected those of manual voters. It was, however, noticeable that supporters of Labour were significantly more interested in politics than manual voters and less inclined to think it mattered little which party ran the country.

Finally in this section we sought to discover what the respondents felt about the act of voting itself, and what satisfaction they derived from going to the polls. More than half the voters in 1979, and a similar proportion of non-voters who said they had voted, claimed they did so primarily out of habit and a sense of duty:- "I always vote", "I feel obliged to", "You are told to use your vote", "It was my duty". Only one in five respondents linked voting to the expressed desire to see a particular party prevail:- "I strongly believe Labour will make the working class better off", "I wanted the Conservative to win", "I wanted Sproat in". 6% of "voters" could not remember why they had voted at all.

Then we asked all the respondents a question with structured responses how they normally felt when casting a ballot, (see Table 12). 1979 voters (47%) were much more inclined than 1979 non-voters (21%) to

indicate the act of voting gave them some satisfaction, and 90% of those expressing such sentiments voted in 1979. This would seem to support our view that while 80% of 1979 non-voters had voted at some time they were more likely to be irregular and less positive participants generally than the 1979 voters. Replies to this question were strongly related to that which had asked the respondents how much they felt it mattered which party ran the country. Amongst 1979 voters 65% of those indicating the colour of the party in office mattered very much also gained satisfaction out of voting, while amongst those for whom it mattered little 44% voted out of a sense of duty.

TABLE 12  
Feelings About Voting

	1979 Voters (N=88)				1979 Non-Voters (N=68)				T/O*
	Non- Manual	(Con)	Manual	(Lab)	All	Non- Manual	Manual	All	
Satisfaction	51	(57)	41	(43)	47	22	19	21	90
Duty	27	(32)	28	(24)	27	35	26	31	78
Waste	4		10	(11)	7	5	10	7	77
Nothing	16	(11)	18	(22)	17	16	16	16	81
Never Voted	-		-		-	19	23	21	0
D.K.	2		3		2	3	6	4	66
	100		100		100	100	100	100	

\* Turnout surveys all those expressing the attitude

(b) Knowledge of the local electoral situation. Discussions on voting and of turnout, usually involve assumptions concerning the nature of voter rationality (Downs, 1957). High turnout in marginal seats can be seen as a function of an appreciation by the electors that

relatively small numbers of votes could have a decisive impact on the result. To what extent can the turnout in Abbotswell and Queen's Cross be attributed to the voter's knowledge of the local electoral situation?

Although the political ignorance of the electorate is widely recognised there was some reason to expect that in South Aberdeen the 1979 voters would have some awareness of the closeness of the contest as the seat had changed hands in 1966 and 1970. The majorities for the winning candidate had been less than a thousand in October 1974 and 1979. The sitting M.P., Iain Sproat, was a highly publicized Tory Populist.

Our data supported the view that voters generally had a greater knowledge of the electoral situation than non-voters; so that although less than a tenth of all respondents perceived the majority of the incumbent as less than a thousand, voters (47%) were significantly more likely than non-voters (25%) to regard the seat as vulnerable to a change in its party allegiance from Conservative to Labour. Turnout amongst those estimating Sproat's majority as under 1,000 was 90%, 86% amongst those saying it fell between 1,000 and 5,000, and 88% amongst those suggesting the seat might have been captured by Labour. On the other hand it was also the case that 51% of voters felt unable to offer any estimate of the M.P.'s majority, and only 46% considered Labour might have taken the constituency. Consequently, we find that while knowledge was related to participation, 78% of those disbelieving the

seat could have changed hands voted as did 76% of those with no idea what the majority was.

Although there must have been some voters who got to the polls out of appreciation of the local electoral situation and nothing else, our conclusion is that knowledge does little to explain the turnout of 80%. It seems to us more reasonable to assume that the more knowledgeable are more likely to vote whatever the constituency arithmetic because they are more likely than the rest to be interested in politics and electoral participation. It is more likely that the higher turnout in the marginal constituencies is principally through the mobilisation of the more ignorant and apathetic by the parties. (see also Denver and Hands (1974)). Indeed, it may well be that one reason for the ignorance of the electorate was that the party activists tended to assume that the public was as aware of the situation as themselves, and in their frenetic efforts at mobilisation failed to propagate that basic information. As far as we are aware no literature was produced by the parties to impress upon the voters the tactical importance of their vote.

Other data from the registers also indicate that the individual voter's tactical awareness is not a very potent factor. When we looked at turnout in Conservative local government wards in the 1979 general election in South Aberdeen they did, indeed, average 5% greater turnout than Labour wards. However, the higher turnout in Conservative areas was also found in:

- (i) local government elections (1980) in S Aberdeen (+6.2%)
- (ii) in the general election in safe Labour N Aberdeen (+7.8%)
- (iii) and in the local elections (1980) in N Aberdeen (+8.6%)

There is a tendency for heavier polling in Conservative neighbourhoods irrespective of whether it is a winnable local government election or a foregone general election.

(c) The role of the parties as mobilisers. The literature on elections has long recognised the centrality of party as the mobiliser of mass electorates. Parties get people to the polls in two main ways. Firstly, and more importantly, by drawing upon long-standing loyalties which are activated through the media and the national campaign, and secondly, through the activists of constituency parties. In Aberdeen North where the local campaign was virtually non-existent in what was a safe Labour seat turnout was around 70%, while in marginal Aberdeen South it was nearer 80%. Some of the difference between the two is probably a function of party activity in the South. In seeking to identify the importance of the two roles played by party in affecting turnout we asked questions about strength of partisan identification on the one hand and detailed questions concerning exposure to the campaign on the other.

The importance of partisanship as an incentive to vote was strongly hinted when we found that 85% of those feeling it mattered very much which party ran the country voted. Some sense of

partisanship as against no sense of partisanship did seem to divide voters from non-voters, for whereas 84% of those with a very strong sense of party allegiance, 90% of those professing fairly strong identification and even 81% of those weakly identifying with a party voted, a mere 52% of those with no party identification cast their ballots. While only 9% of voters indicated no sense of party allegiance, fully 34% of non-voters did so. It was also the case that manual voters (61%) and Labour voters (59%) professed a stronger sense of allegiance ("very strong" and "fairly strong") than non-manual (41%) and Conservative voters (46%), which seemed to hint at the importance of the Labour Party in linking to the electoral process a large number of people with relatively negative attitudes towards participatory norms. We shall return to this point later.

The local campaigns waged by the parties varied in style, method and location. The Labour Party, for example, used the "Reading System" in wards like Abbotswell with its heavy concentration of council tenants and blue collar workers, so that on election day a precise check was made at the polls of who had voted and "knockers-up" sent, but in areas like Queen's Cross, Labour's effort was minimal, in recognition of its Conservative allegiance. The Conservatives approached the campaign somewhat differently, eschewing house to house visits, preferring coffee mornings held in the houses of supporters to enable the M.P. to impress his claims upon friends and neighbours. Some activities were supplemented by the updating of transport lists for those wanting lifts to the polls. Although there was a tendency

for the Conservatives to concentrate their efforts in middle class wards some presence of a sporadic nature was attempted in Labour parts, while the party was surprisingly not very active in Queen's Cross. The Liberals and the S.N.P. both proved unable to mount credible campaigns.

TABLE 13

At the last General Election did any representative of the political parties knock on your door and ask you to vote for their candidate?

	<u>Voters (N=88)</u>			<u>Non-Voters (N=68)</u>				
	<u>Non- Manual</u> %	<u>(Con)</u> %	<u>Manual (Lab)</u> %	<u>All</u> %	<u>Non- Manual</u> %	<u>Manual</u> %	<u>All</u> %	
Contacted by any party	39	(43)	62	(57)	49	19	29	(24)
Contacted by:								
(i) Conservatives	25	(21)	21	(27)	22	16	16	(16)
(ii) Labour	18	(29)	46	(35)	31	11	10	(10)
(iii) Liberals	16	(18)	10	(27)	11	3	3	(3)
(iv) S.N.P.	8	(11)	15	(27)	14	5	13	(9)
	<u>Abbotswell</u>			<u>Queen's Cross</u>				
	<u>Voters</u> %	<u>Non-Voters</u> %	<u>All</u> %	<u>Voters</u> %	<u>Non-Voters</u> %	<u>All</u> %		
Contacted by any party	64	33	58	26	8	22		
Contacted by:								
(i) Conservatives	25	16	23	14	8	13		
(ii) Labour	45	12	38	6	4	6		
(iii) Liberals	13	2	11	14	4	12		
(iv) S.N.P.	15	2	12	6	-	5		

Our data shows that twice as many voters (49%) as non-voters (24%) reported personal canvassing by party workers, and that 89% of those canvassed voted while 73% of those who were not did so. Our findings also reflected the relative efforts of the parties. Labour contacted three out of ten participants in the election, whilst Conservatives met

only one in five. Manual voters (62%) were most exposed to party activity, 46% of them by Labour, while only 39% of non manual voters were individually canvassed by party activists. The class distinction was essentially a reflection of the differences between the two wards, as it was clear that Labour's effort in Abbotswell was not matched by the Conservatives in Queen's Cross, whose electors there seemed to have less chance of contact by the Tories than those in the Labour ward.

One might be tempted to conclude that mobilisation by the local parties made little difference to the level of turnout as participation was no greater in Abbotswell than in Queen's Cross. The explanation, however, is somewhat more complicated. If one accepts the proposition, seemingly confirmed by both survey and aggregate data that working class electors are less disposed towards voting than middle class electors, then the question is why turnout in the two wards under scrutiny was the same. The answer almost certainly is that strong campaigning by the Labour Party did increase participation in Abbotswell, while in Queen's Cross the level of voting was more a function of class than intense Conservative activity. Abbotswell achieved the third highest turnout in the twelve Labour wards, Queen's Cross ranked only seventh of the thirteen held by the Conservatives on the District Council. Had the Conservatives put more effort into Queen's Cross they might have raised the turnout there to the levels noted in some of the party's other safe wards (up to 88%). (Denver and Hanks, 1974, have made a similar point.)

The concept of partisan identification has come under critical scrutiny (Crewe, 1974). Nonetheless we find that the standard partisan identification questions usefully discriminate between manual/Labour and Conservative/non manual voters. Broadly speaking, the manual Labour voter turns out despite a much weaker endorsement on questions on the significance of the electoral process.

(d) The role of the family in stimulating participation. Our study of the registers had given us the impression of relatively high turnouts amongst two-voter (apparently husband and wife) households and lower turnouts amongst multi-voter households (mostly, husband, wife and children), and single voter households. When we looked systematically at the registers for our special study wards of Queen's Cross and Abbotswell the two voter household turnout was clearly highest in both areas (See Table 13). Wolfinger & Rosenstone (1980, p.44) likewise concluded that "marriage leads to higher turnout". In Aberdeen this apparent connection was striking.

TABLE 14  
Voting/Non Voting and Household Size  
(Queens Cross and Abbotswell)

<u>No. of Voters</u>	
<u>per household</u>	<u>% Turnout</u>
1 male	75
1 female	78
1 male/1 female	84 male 86 female
2 male	74
2 female	77
2 + male	56
2 + female	66
2 + mixed	78 male 76 female

This finding encouraged us to examine family as an agent of mobilisation. Consequently, we asked four questions on the topic:- "At the last general election did you discuss with other members of the family how you would vote?" "Were you encouraged by any other member of your family to vote at the last general election?" "did you encourage any member of your family to vote at the last general election?" "When you went to the polls did you go on your own or with someone?" "Who was it?" Inevitably five or six months after the event our data must be somewhat unreliable but we consider it worth presenting as it connects with our earlier findings. (See Table 15).

Discussion with other family members as to how one might vote was undertaken by 58% of voters and 34% of non-voters, with manual non-voters (23%) significantly less communicative than other groups. Discussion was particularly heavy amongst the married in that not only did 56% of married voters talk the matter over but so did 41% of married non-voters, which may help to explain why fully 86% of these electors cast their ballots. The importance of the home environment seemed more clearly evident amongst the single electors, for while fully 57% of single voters discussed how they would vote with other family members only 21% of single non-voters had done so. It was interesting to note that in the 18-34 age cohort (see Table 15), which contained most single people and a number of married electors, 60% of voters had discussed their electoral choice in the family as against 32% of non-voters, which may help to explain the growth and development of turnout amongst the youngest age group. The widowed and divorced, the weakest voting group, were also predictably the least likely to discuss their vote with other family members.

Despite a willingness to indicate political discussion within the family very few respondents admitted they had been encouraged to vote by another family member (11% of voters and 9% of non-voters), and only one person said she would not have voted without such pressure. Significantly, single voters were most likely to perceive family pressures on them to (29%) as against only 7% of single non-voters. Although so few seemed to be the recipients of advice to vote, fully

31% of voters and even 12% of non-voters claimed they themselves had encouraged other family members to the polls. The main family mobilisers were males in that while only 23% of females encouraged others to vote, 43% of males claimed they did so, in their roles as husband and father.

TABLE 15

	Voters (N=88)			Non-Voters (N=68)		
	Married 35-54	Single 18-34	Other 55+	Married 35-54	Single 18-34	Other 55+
(i) Discussed with family members who to vote for	55 (60)	57 (60)	44 (41)	41 (46)	21 (32)	27 (21)
(ii) Was encouraged by family member to vote	9 (15)	29 (20)	- (-)	8 (13)	78 (8)	13 (5)
(iii) Encouraged family member to vote	35 (42)	21 (25)	17 (19)	21 (23)	- (4)	- (11)
(iv) Went to vote with family member	62 (61)	50 (55)	22 (52)			

Voting itself seemed to be a family activity in that 62% of married voters, 50% of single voters, and even 22% of widowed and divorced went to the polling station with another family member. It seems, therefore, that family plays some role in voter mobilisation. It is,

however, difficult to estimate the importance of that role, but amongst the youngest voters it could be very significant.

TABLE 16  
Family and the Election

	<u>Voters (N=88)</u>					<u>Non-Voters (N=68)</u>					T/O %
	Non- Manual %	(Con) %	Manual %	(Lab) %	All %	Non- Manual %	Manual %	All %			
(i) Discussed with family members who to vote for	57	(57)	51	(60)	58	43	23	34	86		
(ii) Was encouraged by family member to vote	14	(12)	8	(10)	11	3	13	9	91		
(iii) Encouraged family member to vote	29	(25)	33	(32)	31	8	16	12	92		
(iv) Went to vote with family member	51	(54)	64	(62)	57						
Turnouts											
(i) Did not discuss vote with family. 73%											
(ii) Was not encouraged by family member to vote. 79%											
(iii) Did not encourage a family member to vote. 76%											

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In Aberdeen voting in general elections is something that almost everyone does with varying rates of regularity, for although much of the discussion in this article has focussed on the distinction between voters and non-voters most our non-voters had participated in an election at some time or another. The distinction, therefore, between voters and non-voters in 1979 is one of degree rather than kind, which helps to explain the similarities of response between our two samples. The main difference between our two groups of electors is that the 1979 voters almost certainly contained more habitual voters than did the 1979 non-voters. We found no evidence of a substantial group of non-voters who had deliberately rejected electoral participation. Indeed, the claims of voting were strong amongst non-voters, 31% of whom regarded it as their duty to vote and 21% of whom gained satisfaction out of so doing, and non-voters (7%) were no more likely than voters (7%) to regard exercising their franchise as a waste of time. Voting is an activity in which virtually all our respondents saw themselves as participants. For our electors, voting is a social instinct. We were, therefore, initially less impressed by the high levels of turnout amongst the politically interested, those most aware of the local electoral situation, and those for whom voting provided affective rewards, than by the more moderate, though impressive, participation of the uninterested and apathetic. 70% of those professing no interest in politics voted, as did 79% of those for whom the government had little or no effect on their lives, 75% for whom it

mattered little which party ran the country, 80% of those who thought M.P.s were worse than they used to be, 78% who held the seat to be safe, and 81% of those feeling nothing when casting their ballot.

Our second conclusion was that of all the factors accounting for varying rates of participation, partisanship was the most important. Whereas turnout amongst those professing any sort of party identification was above 80%, for the one in eight of the electorate confessing no party identification it was only 52%. Partisanship we believe also helps to explain why voters, despite agreeing with non-voters that politics and government are too complicated for most people to understand, held, in contradiction to non-voters, that it mattered very much which party ran the country. Amongst the electorate as a whole fully two thirds of those with strong or a very strong sense of party identification believed it mattered very much which party was in power as against less than 40% of weak identifiers and only 29% of non-identifiers. We are, therefore, inclined to the view that it is allegiance to party more than to participatory norms that gets out the vote in Queen's Cross and Abbotswell.

Party linkage and voting we believe is particularly important for the mobilisation of manual workers and their families, which in this context is principally with the Labour Party. We noted from the attitudinal questions a very low interest in politics amongst manual workers as a whole: 53% of such voters and 68% of non-voters expressing no interest at all. 38% of manual voters felt that

government had little affect on their lives, and 48% of non-voters that M.P.s were just out for themselves. By contrast, 60% of non-manual non-voters (let alone non-manual voters) expressed some interest in politics, only 16% that government had little affect on their lives, and 62% held that M.P.s prime concern was to serve their fellow men. We might, therefore, conclude that non-manual electors were appreciably more favourably disposed towards the system than manual electors. On the other hand while only 41% of non-manual voters, 21% of non-manual non-voters, and 29% of manual non-voters indicated very strong or fairly strong party support, 61% of manual workers did so. It would appear, therefore, that for manual voters partisanship is the critical factor separating them from the other groups under consideration. It might also mean that the reliance by the Labour Party on the turnout of manual voters makes it more vulnerable than the Conservatives to any weakening of party identification as its clientele may depend much more heavily on partisanship as a voting stimulus. The evidence suggests that such a weakening is already taking place, and that but for the strength of local campaigning by Labour in Aberdeen South many Labour voters "not strongly" linked to the party might well have abstained. Looking ahead, therefore, one may well speculate that should the Labour Party seriously decline as an electoral force many of its working class supporters might sink into abstention. By contrast, as strength of support for the Conservatives declines amongst non-manual electors its erstwhile supporters, although not identifying strongly with other parties, may continue to vote out of a sense of civic duty and the possession of sufficient citizen competence to adopt other electoral

strategies. In which case the pattern of voter participation will become more like that of the United States where education seems to be the critical factor in accounting for variations of turnout (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980).

Factors other than party identification reinforced by local party campaigning appeared to have much less influence on turnout. The disposition to vote was stronger amongst non-manual electors, which may well help to explain higher turnouts in Conservative wards - although there were some for whom disposition was not reflected in their behaviour. Knowledge of the local electoral situation may have played a reinforcing role for a few reluctant voters, but with less than one tenth of the electorate possessing an accurate estimation of the Conservative majority, it can hardly have been a crucial factor. Family influences seemed to have been a factor in the equation, and may well have been more important than our data recognises, especially if it is through family that the concept of party identification develops. Associational membership was not related to the propensity to vote, thereby underlining the distinction between voting and other forms of political participation.

Although our conclusions here are only strictly applicable to a small fraction of the electorate of Aberdeen, and our samples do not include wards with more moderate and low turnouts, the evidence we have presented suggests that partisan identification is the key to variation in turnout. In the rural parts of Northern Scotland, where non-

partisanship in local government has been and still remains a strong tradition in local politics, voting in general elections has been lower than in urban areas; and we speculate that the decline of participation in inner areas of large cities is less a function of decreasing marginality than a weakening of party identification amongst the traditional working class.

Research utilising marked electoral registers is time consuming, but given the authoritative nature of the data available it might be particularly useful in the initial stages of the design and organisation of localized survey work. Where census boundaries are compatible with electoral boundaries particularly reliable relationships between voting turnout and social characteristics could be established.

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