

The Electoral Impact of the 2001 UK General Election Campaign

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There is a long-standing debate in Britain about the influence of election campaigns on voting behaviour, with one group of observers arguing that campaigns are irrelevant, and another contending that they are important. This paper addresses this debate in the context of the 2001 British general election. After describing the controversy concerning campaign effects, we investigate the impact of the 2001 campaign, using data gathered in the British Election Study (BES).¹ We track aggregate-level campaign dynamics using data from the BES rolling campaign panel telephone survey (RCPS). Individual-level change over the course of the campaign is assessed using RCPS pre-post election panel data and pre-post election panel data from the BES face-to-face survey. We then use the RCPS panel data to investigate campaign effects on voting decisions. Multivariate models of electoral choice are estimated using both conventional logistic and multilevel logistic regression analyses. The results of these analyses parallel findings from earlier analyses of the BES panel data, and they clearly indicate the presence of significant campaign effects on voting in the 2001 British general election. The conclusion summarizes major findings, and briefly discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the rolling campaign survey design for studying campaign effects and other influences on electoral choice.

The Controversy about Campaigns

Positions taken by participants in the controversy about the importance of election campaigns in Britain are straightforward. One group contends that campaigning has minimal effects on voting behaviour and makes little or no difference to election outcomes. This argument takes into

account several general considerations about voter psychology. One obvious consideration is that most people are inattentive to politics in general, and to election campaigns in particular. Another is that parties and politicians are seen to be irrelevant at best and untrustworthy at worst. Still another is that in an era of class and partisan dealignment (e.g., Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000), few people see parties as offering real choices in elections.

In the British case and, indeed, in most Westminster-style parliamentary systems, it is also argued that, by the time the election is called and the official campaign starts, it is too late for national or local campaigning to make any significant difference to the outcome. The campaign is, at most, marginally significant and typically irrelevant since election outcomes are largely determined by events that occurred long before polling day. A frequently cited example is the 1997 British general election, which was widely regarded as a 'done deal' when it was called (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997; Denver, 1998). Labour's landslide victory in 1997 owed much to the Conservative government's dismal performance. In September 1992, Britain's ejection from the European exchange rate mechanism was a crucial factor undermining public confidence in the Conservatives' economic management abilities (e.g., Sanders, 1998). In addition, the government broke promises, especially on taxes and the public services, and a climate of bitter intra-party conflict developed among Tories over the Euro and other aspects of Britain's role in Europe. These factors, together with widely publicised 'sleaze' allegations involving the financial dealings of some of their MPs, did much to discredit the Conservatives and their leader, Prime Minister John Major. Moreover, Tony Blair's selection as Labour leader in July, 1994 and his subsequent creation of an ideologically centrist 'New Labour' party were important factors that occurred long before the official campaign got underway. These several

considerations lend credibility to assessments of the 1997 campaign such as that offered by

Anthony King:

The politicians, as they always do on these occasions, puffed, panted, and rushed about the country. They stretched every sinew and strained every nerve. They gave speeches, they gave interviews, they gave their all. No camera angle was neglected, no photo opportunity was missed. At times the politicians resembled those manic characters in the jerky, speeded-up film comedies of the 1920s. But nothing happened. The audience, for whose benefit all these entertainments were laid on, remained almost completely inert. Scarcely a cough or a sneeze could be heard from the pit (King, 1998: 179).

There are other prominent campaign nay-sayers as well. The regular studies of British general elections by David Butler and his colleagues have long maintained that campaigns are marginal or irrelevant in influencing election outcomes (see, e.g., Butler, 1952; Butler and Kavanagh, 1992, 1997). For example, in their statistical appendix to the 1997 Nuffield study, Curtice and Steed conclude that '[t]he 1997 election does not appear to support claims made that local campaigning can make a difference in respect of other parties' performances too. The Labour party targeted 90, mostly marginal Conservative constituencies... Yet...the performance in these constituencies was very similar to that in other Conservative/Labour contests' (Curtice and Steed, 1997: 312). Similarly, the next Nuffield report described the 2001 campaign as boring and predictable:

Inevitably, the conduct of the 2001 campaign must be considered in the context of a poor turnout. Had it encouraged apathy or at least failed to foster enough interest to overcome indifference? The public was perhaps becoming bored with the ritual of modern campaigns. The morning press conferences, the set-piece media interviews with prominent politicians, the party leaders' bus trips to encounters with voters (largely staged for the benefit of the cameras), instant rebuttals and the speeches before invited and largely sympathetic audiences may now be past their sell-by date (Butler and Kavanagh, 2002: 249).

In sharp contrast to these views, some British observers contend that campaigns matter. In doing

so, they have allies in the many political scientists who emphasize the mobilization functions of election campaigns, who argue that campaigns heighten interest, strengthen partisanship, and encourage turnout (e.g., Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Leighley, 1995). Campaigns also can have aggregate-level effects. When inter-party competition is close, the constituency-level efforts of rival parties and their candidates can be a crucial factor in deciding who wins. In assessing these latter claims, some commentators have noted there is limited scope for local campaign effects on election outcomes when swings in party support from one election to the next are quite uniform across the country. However, the amount of variation in swing has tended to be larger since the 1970s than it was in the 1950s and 1960s (Denver, 2003). For example, in the 1955 general election, the variation in the two-party (Conservative-Labour) swing, as measured by its standard deviation, was 1.4 percent (Butler and Stokes, 1969: 135). In 1997, the comparable figure was 4.3 per cent, and in 2001, it was 3.7 per cent (Curtice and Steed, 1997: 297; 2002: 305). Clearly, there is a stronger *prima facie* case for local campaign effects in a particular election when changes in party support are quite variable across the country.

Another reason why campaign effects are plausible involves growth in the scope and sophistication of political communications coupled with the long-term decline in the strength of party identification in the British electorate (Clarke et al., 2004: ch. 6; see also Dalton, 2000). In Britain and most other parliamentary systems, campaigns remain party-oriented events: ‘parties organize and structure the activities that take place during parliamentary elections, from local meetings addressed by constituency candidates to nationally televised public events, such as debates between major party leaders’ (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg, 2000: 52). When waging their campaigns, parties rely on grassroots party members as well as media, political, and

public relations consultants who attempt to ‘sell’ a party’s leader and its policies to targeted voters (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Farrell and Webb, 2000). Since it is easier to influence voter decision-making during an era of partisan dealignment, the context in which British elections take place has become more favourable for campaigns to matter.

Proponents of campaign effects have not been content to rely on circumstantial evidence to make their case. Rather, several empirical studies have found that local campaigns are influential.

Some of these studies have used constituency-level campaign spending as a surrogate measure of local party activity (e.g., Johnston and Pattie, 1995, 1997; Whiteley, Seyd and Richardson, 1994; Pattie, Fieldhouse and Johnston, 1995). Others have employed surveys of local party members, and have assessed campaign efforts by measuring members’ activity levels in various constituencies (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992, 2002; Whiteley and Seyd, 1994, 2003). Still others have relied on surveys of the parties’ constituency agents, the persons who run the local campaigns (Denver and Hands, 1985, 1997; Denver et al., 2002). The general conclusion of all of these investigations is that campaigns matter. Denver and Hands (1997: 305) state the case forcefully: ‘the easy generalization made in many academic studies – that, in modern conditions, local campaigning is merely a ritual, a small and insignificant side show to the main event – is seriously misleading.’

When considering these sharply differing views about the influence of election campaigns in contemporary Britain, it is useful to delineate more precisely some of the features of campaigns. Campaigns have both temporal and spatial dimensions. With regard to the temporal dimension, campaigning in a wide sense is now a permanent feature of political life – the day after a general election, the parties start the process of preparing for the next one. This ‘long campaign’ (Miller

et al., 1990) involves ongoing news and opinion management over the lifetime of a parliament.

There are also medium-term and short-term campaigns. It seems reasonable to define the beginning of the medium-term campaign as the date at which the government's budget is presented to parliament in the year preceding an election (e.g., March, 2000 for the June 2001 election). This is the last budget that can influence policy outcomes if an election is called the following year. Given the normal four-year election cycle for a majority government, this budget will be brought down in the third year of a parliament. Although the timing of the election call remains uncertain, this is when parties judge that they should ramp up their efforts. Once this medium-term campaign commences, parties establish their overall organisational structures, select their main policy themes, designate personnel for key roles, select target constituencies for special efforts, and decide which voters will be contacted. During the 'short' or official campaign, which starts when parliament is dissolved and an election is called, parties issue their manifestos, conduct press conferences, arrange leadership tours and key speeches, make party political broadcasts, increase their advertising and private polling, and intensify their efforts to contact the voters.

Viewed spatially, there are multiple geographically defined general election campaigns (Seyd, 2001; Whiteley and Seyd, 2003). There is the national campaign organised by party headquarters in London and concentrated largely around the party leadership. There are centrally coordinated local campaigns in which party headquarters provide constituency party organizations with personnel, technical support, services and literature. In these campaigns, local efforts are controlled from party headquarters. There also are decentralized constituency-level campaigns in which the activists organise their efforts according to their own priorities and

resources. Historically, analysts have focused most of their attention on the national campaigns, largely because of a longstanding view among both politicians and academic observers that, to the extent to which campaigns are influential, the parties' national-level activities are all that matter. However, as noted above, there is now growing evidence from a newer generation of research that local campaigns also are influential.

When discussing how campaigns influence voters, it is useful to distinguish between *conversion* and *activation* effects. Conversion is designed to persuade supporters of other parties to switch their votes, whereas activation is aimed at mobilising or reinforcing existing support (Alsop and Weisberg, 1988; Farah and Klein, 1989; Finkel, 1993). In general, parties should find it easier to activate long-time supporters and attract people who do not identify with a party than to convert supporters of rival parties. From this perspective, campaign activities aimed at opposition party supporters might seem to be inefficiently targeted. However, for opposition parties wishing to increase their vote shares, a pure-activation strategy clearly has limited utility. In addition to identifying who their supporters are and encouraging them to go to the polls, such parties must try to convert other people to their cause.

Another useful distinction is between *direct* and *indirect* campaign effects. Direct effects result from activities such as canvassing, exposing people to party political broadcasts, and reminding them to get out to the polls. In each case, the party appeals directly to the electorate. Indirect effects are reflected in changes in important explanatory variables such as party identification, issue concerns, and evaluations of the competence of the competing parties and their leaders that occur during an election campaign. Below, we focus on campaign effects during the official campaign, and study both direct and indirect campaign effects. These effects are assessed using

dynamic models of party choice in the 2001 general election. Before doing so, we briefly 'set the stage' by describing the rival parties' campaign strategies.

Campaign Strategies in 2001

In most general elections since the end of the World War II, the British Conservative Party has been the principal campaign innovator. For example, the Conservatives first developed modern political advertising in the 1950s. The party's relative abundance of resources and its links with business, in particular the advertising industry, explain much of its post-war campaigning dominance. But this changed in the 1990s, and most observers judged that Labour performed better than the Conservatives in the 1992 general election (Butler and Kavanagh, 1992).

Labour's superiority was maintained in both 1997 and 2001. In addition, the Liberal Democrats, even with their limited resources, have concentrated effectively on local campaigning, and this paid significant dividends in 1997 (Whiteley and Seyd, 2003). The two major parties have learned from the Liberal Democrats' methods.

In 2001, Labour's strategy was to retain seats gained in the 1997 landslide, so the party decided to run a defensive campaign (Seyd, 2001). Recognising that turnout was a potential problem, Labour organised 'Operation Turnout', targeting weak Labour supporters to encourage them to go to the polls. The party's strategy document made the point that if one in five of Labour's supporters who turned out in 1997 stayed home, and even if there was no switching to the Conservatives, then the party would lose 60 seats (Labour Party, 2000). As part of the defensive effort, resources from the national party were concentrated in seats won in 1997, which were described as 'priority seats'. In fact, Labour had been fighting a defensive campaign ever since

the 1997 election. The party had such a large majority in the House of Commons that it was able to encourage its newly elected members to stay in their constituencies for long periods, since they were not required in Westminster to maintain the government's majority. These stay-at-home Labour MPs were thereby free to direct the party's long- and medium-term campaigns in their constituencies.

Unlike Labour, the Conservatives did not have the luxury of fighting defensively; they had to go on the offensive to win back seats lost in the 1997 landslide. In the event, their 2001 campaign was widely criticised as being too narrow and lacking in themes that resonated with the electorate. Kenneth Clarke, former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, criticised his party's campaign for being a continuation of 'four wasted years for the Tory party' (Collins and Seldon, 2001: 66). The Conservatives had real problems articulating issues with broad appeal. The decision to concentrate on saving the pound, which became their principal theme as polling day approached, did not reflect the issue priorities of most people. Data collected in the 2001 BES clearly show that the electorate's principal concerns were the state of the National Health Service, the educational system and other public services.

The Conservatives launched their national campaign with an attack on Labour's 'stealth taxes'. The decision seemingly made sense; taxation was an issue that had worked well for them in the past (see, e.g., Butler and Kavanagh, 1992). Conservative leader, William Hague, quickly promised tax cuts of £8 billion, which included a populist commitment to cut highly unpopular fuel taxes. But the Tories' anti-tax quickly unravelled as different party spokespersons advanced conflicting claims about the size of the proposed tax cuts, and proved unable to answer questions about what services would have to be curtailed to pay for the lost revenue. In a widely

publicized episode, prominent Conservative MP, Oliver Letwin, told the *Financial Times* that his party might reduce taxes by £20 billion. Labour leaders were quick to point out that such cuts would decimate the public services, and the Conservatives were immediately put on the defensive on the tax issue. Overall, as the data from rolling campaign survey presented below indicate, the Conservatives were unable to land any serious blows on Labour during the campaign. Their attack strategy did not resonate with the electorate.

As in 1997, the Liberal Democrats' 2001 campaign strategy reflected their 'third party' status. Reacting to their national and local competitive positions, the Liberal Democrats ran an insurgency campaign which focused on maintaining the gains achieved in 1997 while simultaneously targeting Conservative-held constituencies where Liberal Democrat candidates had a chance of winning. Since the Liberal Democrats had run second to the Conservatives in 144 seats in 1997 and second to Labour in only eight, their 2001 strategy had to be predominantly anti-Conservative. The Liberal Democrats had abandoned their traditional position of 'policy equidistance' between Labour and the Conservatives after the 1992 general election (Denver, 2001). The Liberal Democrats strategy of moving to, even flanking, Labour on the left had paid dividends in 1997, and so they continued with this approach in 2001 (Bara and Budge, 2001). To avoid being seen as too close to Labour, the Liberal Democrats' plan was to criticise both parties at the national level, while targeting the Conservatives at the local level.

This approach both encouraged, and was encouraged by, what British political scientists call tactical voting. Tactical voters are people who do not cast a ballot for their preferred party in situations where that party is seen to have no chance of winning in a particular constituency. In this circumstance, tactical voters choose a less preferred party to keep a least preferred

alternative from winning. Analyses of the 2001 BES survey data indicate that tactical considerations affected the decisions of approximately 14 per cent of the voters. And, as the Liberal Democrats hoped, a large majority of the tactical voters opted for the Liberal Democrat candidate in their constituency.

Campaigning and Electoral Choice

To investigate the impact of 2001 campaign, we posed a series of questions in the 2001 BES post-election in-person survey asking if people had been contacted directly by the parties during the campaign.² Slightly over three-fifths of those interviewed reported seeing a party political broadcast, just under one-quarter were canvassed in person, less than one in ten was canvassed by phone, and one in twenty was contacted on polling day. As Figure 1 indicates, the parties were more likely to try to mobilise voters in marginal seats than they were in safe ones.³ Rates of face-to-face canvassing, phone canvassing and contacting on polling day were higher in the marginals than elsewhere. Only in the case of party political broadcasts were exposure rates slightly greater in safe seats than in marginal ones. The latter finding does not surprise. Since these programmes are carried nationwide by the media, one would not expect exposure to them to vary significantly by constituency-level party competition.

(Figure 1 about here)

Table 1 shows campaigning activities by the different parties, as reported by BES respondents. It is clear that Labour was more active than its rivals. Labour was ahead of the Conservatives in terms of the percentage of people who saw its party political broadcasts. It was slightly ahead of the Conservatives in doorstep canvassing and well ahead of them on telephone canvassing and

contacting electors on polling day. The Conservatives came second with significant leads over the Liberal Democrats in canvassing both face-to-face and by telephone. Interestingly, the Conservative lead over the Liberal Democrats in contacting people on polling day was much slimmer than was true for canvassing. This is consistent with the idea that the Liberal Democrats make very strong efforts to get their vote out. The Nationalist parties succeeded in reaching a majority of the Scottish and Welsh electors via their party political broadcasts, and they did reasonably well in canvassing.⁴

(Table 1 about here)

Constituency-level campaign spending indicates the extent of parties' capital investments in various local campaigns and, as discussed above, it is a useful proxy measure of party activity at the local level. It typically is measured in terms of the percentage of the legal maximum spent by each party in the constituency where the voter lives. Table 2 displays information on campaign expenditures in 2001 in seats won and lost by Labour, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats in 1997. On average, Labour and Conservative spending exceeded that for the Liberal Democrats by considerable margins. This is true both in an absolute sense (Panel A) and relative to the legal maximum that could be spent in various constituencies (Panel B). All three parties concentrated their efforts in seats they had won in 1997. In keeping with the defensive tone of its campaign, on average, Labour spent 77 per cent of the legal maximum in seats it had won in 1997, and only 41 per cent in seats it had lost. The Liberal Democrats concentrated their resources even more heavily, spending an average of 91 per cent of the legal maximum in seats they had captured in 1997, and only 28 per cent in seats they had lost. The Conservatives were less discriminating, allocating, on average, 88 per cent of the legal maximum

to constituencies where they were incumbent, and 63 per cent to ones where they were a challenger. More detailed analyses of party spending strongly indicate that parties behaved quite rationally when it comes to expenditures in seats lost in 1997. They concentrated their investments in seats where a close contest in the last general election provided evidence of a realistic possibility of winning in 2001 (see also Denver and Hands, 1997; Johnston and Pattie, 1997, 2002).

(Table 2 about here)

Taken together, the preceding data clearly show that the parties were very active in the 2001 election campaign. But, effort and effect are two different things, and evidence on the dynamics of voters' attitudes and behaviour is required to evaluate the impact of campaigning on electoral choice. In this regard, a necessary condition for campaign effects to exist is that there should be changes in the run-up to polling day in the percentage of people intending to cast a ballot, in patterns of party support, and in the distributions of key variables that determine voting behaviour. Thus, a good starting point for an analysis of campaign effects is to determine how many electors might be willing to change their minds as a result of what happened during the campaign. One measure is provided by data gathered in the 2001 BES pre-election in-person survey. All but a few of the respondents in this survey were interviewed before the official campaign began. Fifty-three per cent stated that they had decided how to vote, but 40 per cent were undecided, and 7 per cent said they would not cast a ballot.⁵ The story told by the rolling cross-section campaign telephone survey data is very similar. Sixty-two per cent of the respondents said that they had decided how to vote, with that figure increasing from 55 per cent of those interviewed on first day of interviewing to 71 per cent of those interviewed on the day

before the election. The ‘nearest neighbour’ regression line superimposed on the scatter of daily data points in Figure 2 shows the underlying upward trend in decided voters.⁶ The conclusion that there was substantial potential for changes in party support in the run-up to the election is reinforced by answers to a question in the 2001 BES post-election in-person survey asking respondents when they made their decision to vote.⁷ Fifty-four per cent said that they had decided a ‘long time ago’, and an additional 8 per cent said ‘last year’. However, 14 per cent said that they had made up their minds ‘this year’, and 24 per cent said they had done so during the official campaign, i.e., in the 30 days preceding the election. With approximately one-quarter of the electorate making their voting decision in the immediate run-up to polling day, there clearly was wide scope for campaign effects at the individual and aggregate levels in 2001.

(Figure 2 about here)

We can probe the dynamics of vote decisions in greater detail by examining the intentions and subsequent behaviour of participants in the 2001 BES pre-post-election in-person panel survey. Table 3 shows how pre-election intentions translated into votes or, in a substantial number of cases, non-votes. There was considerable movement in the three months preceding polling day. Seventy per cent of those who intended to vote Labour before the official campaign began actually did so, but 8 per cent switched to another party, and 22 per cent did not vote at all. Conservative vote intenders exhibited similarly high rates of volatility; 67 per cent stuck with the party, but 12 per cent moved to another party, and 21 per cent stayed home. Although the Liberal Democrat loyalty rate was higher than those for the other parties, 8 per cent switched and 16 per cent abstained. Considering all of the panellists, nearly one-third of those in the pre-election

survey who reported that they had decided how to vote either supported another party or did not vote at all. The large undecided group – fully two-fifths of pre-election respondents – provided additional dynamics. Sixty-one per cent of these people cast a ballot, with Labour having a slight edge over both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in gaining their support.

(Table 3 about here)

Data from the rolling cross-sectional telephone survey capture the aggregate-level evolution of party support and political attitudes during the official campaign. In this survey national samples (average N = 160) were interviewed every day. Figure 3 tracks voting intentions over this period by plotting the percentages of respondents in the daily surveys who said they would vote for various parties.⁸ Nearest-neighbour regression analyses are used to detect underlying patterns. The trend lines generated by these regressions reveal that there were discernible movements in party support as the campaign unfolded. Labour's vote intention share increased until about the middle of the campaign, and then receded such that the party finished about where it began. However, the Conservatives appear to have lost ground. Their voting intention share declined in the early part of the campaign, only to rally slightly at the end of May, before declining again immediately prior to polling day. For their part, the Liberal Democrats made gains in voting intentions throughout much of the campaign.

(Figure 3 about here)

Figure 4 examines changes in orientations toward the party leaders, one of the key determinants of voting in British general elections (Clarke et al. 2004, ch: 4; Stewart and Clarke, 1992). This figure plots the leaders' average 'like-dislike' scores (measured on 0-10 scales) for every day of

the campaign.⁹ Again, nearest-neighbour regression lines are used to depict underlying trends. The story of public feelings about the leaders is simple. Labour leader, Tony Blair, and Liberal Democrat leader, Charles Kennedy, both received lukewarm receptions at the beginning of the campaign, but their likeability ratings increased as polling day approached. In contrast, public feelings about Conservative leader, William Hague, started in the negative zone, and remained firmly rooted there as the campaign progressed. As media commentator Jeremy Paxman boldly put it during a campaign interview with Mr. Hague, it appears that many voters simply did not like him.

(Figure 4 about here)

Figure 5 shows the dynamics of links between issues and parties. Respondents in the rolling cross-section survey were asked which election issue they thought was most important, and which party was best able to handle that issue.¹⁰ Perhaps most salient is the large percentage who stated either that no party was able to handle the most important issue or that there were no important issues. Although such ‘no issue-no party’ answers declined slightly as the campaign wore on, on the eve of the election nearly a third of the electorate had either not selected an important issue or failed to connect an issue with a party. Regarding connections that were made, Figure 5 shows that Labour had a large lead throughout the campaign, and that the dynamics of this lead were modest. The pattern for the Conservatives was different; the party initially lost ground, rallied slightly, and then fell back again. Overall, the Conservatives finished in an even weaker position on the issues than when the election was called. In contrast, Liberal Democrats gained on the issues both at the beginning and towards the end of the campaign.

(Figure 5 about here)

Figures 6 and 7 illustrate aspects of the dynamics of the direction of party identification during the 2001 campaign.¹¹ Similar to the United States and a number of other mature democracies, party identification is a strong predictor of voting in Britain (e.g., Clarke et al., 2004, chs. 3, 4). Thus, it is not surprising that movements in partisanship resemble the dynamics of electoral choice (data not shown). However, contrary to what is often assumed about the mobilization of partisanship during elections, Figure 6 reveals that there was virtually no downward trend in the proportion of non-identifiers. The failure of the 2001 campaign to energise partisanship is also evident in Figure 7, which depicts movements in the strength of party identification. As the figure shows, there was very little upward movement in the trend-line for percentage of ‘very strong’ party identifiers as the campaign progressed (Figure 7A). Reflecting this non-dynamic, the trend-line for combined percentage of ‘weak’ identifiers and non-identifiers is essentially flat (Figure 7B).

(Figures 6 and 7 about here)

Evidence that the 2001 campaign did little to strengthen partisan attachments foreshadows one of the most striking findings to emerge from the rolling cross-sectional campaign survey. Figure 8 displays levels of public interest in the election. Again contrary to conventional scholarly wisdom about the mobilization effects of campaigns, Panel A of the figure illustrates that during much of the campaign the percentage of people who were ‘very interested’ trended downward.¹² And, as Panel B shows, there was a parallel upward trend in the percentage saying that they were ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ interested. The pattern of eroding interest reversed only in the week

before polling day. These data are important because analyses of the determinants of turnout long have indicated that interest in an election has predictably positive effects on the likelihood of voting (e.g., Milbrath, 1965). If interest in the 2001 British election had not rallied in the campaign's final days, turnout very likely would have been even lower than the dismal 59 per cent figure that actually obtained. Turnout in 2001 was down fully 12 per cent from 1997, and was the lowest for any election since 1918.

(Figure 8 about here)

To this point, we have examined aggregate data on the timing of voting decisions, changes in patterns of party support, and trends in key variables in models of turnout and electoral choice during the (official) 2001 election campaign. Taken together, these data suggest that the campaign may have had significant effects on political attitudes and voting behaviour. In the next section, we assess these effects by analyzing multivariate models of electoral choice.

Models of Campaign Effects on Electoral Choice

We address two questions regarding effects on voting during the official campaign. One question concerns whether the campaign activated or converted voters – reinforcing decisions already made or encouraging voters to switch to another party. Another question concerns whether the campaign influenced voters directly or indirectly. Direct influences refer to parties' mobilization efforts as well as other local organizational activities as proxied by constituency-level spending. Indirect influences refer to changes in attitudes towards parties, issues, and leaders that are prompted by the parties' campaigns. Previous research demonstrates that these attitudes have

significant effects on electoral choice, and, as illustrated above, changes in them may occur during the immediately run-up to an election.

When investigating campaign effects it is important to control for other possible determinants of electoral choice. In what is referred to as the *minimal effects model* of campaigning, the emphasis is on calibrating conversion and reinforcement effects (e.g., Finkel, 1993). Conversion refers to convincing supporters of other parties to switch their votes, and reinforcement refers to mobilising existing supporters to turn out. An obvious methodological problem with estimating either type of effect is to separate the influence of efforts during the official campaign from the many longer-term factors that can influence voting behaviour. Johnston and Brady, (2002) propose ways this might be done. Focusing on campaign-period surveys employing a rolling cross-sectional design, they advance two estimation strategies, depending upon whether a panel with a post-election wave is available. Their preferred approach to estimation exploits information contained in pre-post election panel data, where the pre-election wave is a rolling cross-section. Although their methods constitute an innovative attempt to leverage the information provided by such data, we believe there are several problems. Perhaps most serious is that the dependent variable is a measure of *vote intentions* taken during the pre-election rolling cross-sectional survey, rather than a measure of voting behaviour reported in the post-election wave of the panel. Intuitively, vote intentions would seem to be a questionable proxy variable for actual vote if the possibility of *campaign effects* on electoral choice is entertained. There is irony here, as Johnston and Brady's statistical model is specifically designed to calibrate campaign components in the effects of various independent variables on electoral choice. But, its utility would appear to be situationally dependent because the adequacy of vote intentions as

a proxy for vote will vary inversely with when significant campaign effects in a particular election occur. In particular, if campaign effects occur late, then a vote intention variable will not capture them since most respondents have been interviewed before the effects took hold. Subsequent analyses will show that such effects are (possibly much) weaker than is actually the case. This is not good news for analysts who have invested their research funds in a rolling cross-sectional survey as a vehicle for studying campaign effects on electoral choice.

Fortunately, there is an alternative. A straightforward approach to estimating campaign effects has been recommended by Finkel (1993, 1995). This involves specifying a model of electoral choice that contains a lagged endogenous (dependent) variable to control for forces on the vote operating before the official campaign begins. The model thereby demands panel data, ideally data where the first wave of interviewing is conducted immediately before the official campaign begins. Measuring vote intention in the pre-campaign wave controls for factors influencing party choice before the official campaign started, thereby making it possible to estimate various kinds of effects associated with that campaign.¹³

In the present context, two caveats are in order. The first reflects the aforementioned difficulty with the Johnston-Brady approach, namely that the initial wave of the BES 2001 rolling campaign panel survey – or any rolling campaign survey for that matter – is conducted *over the course of the official campaign*. As just discussed, in this wave of interviewing some respondents' vote intentions are ascertained early in the campaign, thus providing considerable scope for detecting campaign effects. However, other respondents are interviewed much later in the campaign, and it can be expected that their vote intentions will, in part, reflect campaign effects. The bottom line is that using the Finkel approach with RCPS panel data should provide

conservative estimates of campaign effects, as some of these effects have already been absorbed into the vote intentions variable. The second caveat is particular to the 2001 BES rolling campaign survey data, namely the absence of questions designed to measure parties' local campaign contacts. Hence, parties' local campaign efforts are measured only via the constituency-level spending variables.

Although a multinomial dependent variable might be employed, we avoid the possible estimation problems associated with such variables (Greene, 2003: ch. 21) by creating a series of dichotomous dependent variables for Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat voting. Accordingly, binomial logit (Long, 1997: ch. 3) is used for estimation purposes. There is only one complication, namely that the constituency-level spending variables are not measured at the individual level. Since the constituency spending variables are aggregate-level measures, there is a possibility of exaggerating the significance of their effects if they are treated as if they were individual-level data (see, e.g., Hox, 2002: 5). We address this threat to inference by checking the results of our garden-variety logit analysis with multilevel logit analyses.¹⁴ An example of the type of model we estimate is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{VOTELAB}_t = & f(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{VINTLAB}_{t-1} + \beta_2 \text{MLAB}_t + \beta_3 \text{MCON}_t + \beta_4 \text{MLDEM}_t \\ & + \sum \beta_{5-k-1} \text{ICAMP}_t + \beta_k \text{CLASS}) \end{aligned}$$

where: VOTELAB_t = vote in 2001 general election, scored 1 if individual voted Labour and 0 otherwise; VINTLAB_{t-1} = vote intention measured in the RCPS, scored 1 if individual intended to vote Labour and 0 otherwise; MLAB_t = constituency spending by Labour; MCON_t = constituency spending by the Conservatives; MLDEM_t = constituency spending by Liberal

Democrats; $ICAMP_t$ = party identification, party leader images, party-issue linkages and economic evaluations. Controlling for prior vote intention, these variables proxy the impact of exposure to the national-level activities of the parties and other sources of political information during the official campaign. In keeping with traditional specifications of British vote functions, CLASS is a control for social class.

The results of the logit analyses that ignore the hierarchical structure of the data are presented in Table 4. The Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat models all fit the data quite well, with McKelvey R^2 s ranging from .60 to .84, and voting behaviour percentages correctly classified ranging from 90.5 to 95.3. Regarding individual predictors, the vast majority of the hypothesized effects are statistically significant and correctly signed. For example, positive feelings about Tony Blair enhance the probability of a Labour vote, while diminishing the probability of a Conservative or a Liberal Democrat vote. Similarly, people believing that the Liberal Democrats are best able to handle important issues are most likely to support that party and less likely to support either Labour or the Conservatives. Many more such examples could be provided, but the larger point is that the effects of important variables such as party leader images, party preferences on salient issues, party identification and economic evaluations, persist net of controls for vote intentions. This indicates the presence of significant campaign components in the effects of these variables.

(Table 4 about here)

A simple way to calibrate the collective strength of these components is to rerun the voting analyses including vote intentions and social class as the only predictors. Doing so indicates that

inclusion of the several predictor variables other than vote intentions increases the McKelvey R^2 from .48 to .82 for Labour voting. For Conservative and Liberal Democrat voting, the comparable increases are from .53 to .84, and from .24 to .61, respectively. These are large increments, thereby indicating that campaign components in major predictors of electoral choice were decidedly nontrivial in Britain in 2001.

In addition, we observe that the constituency spending variables are significant in all three models. Net of all other factors, the probability of voting for one of the three parties grew when the party in question increased its constituency spending. Spending by opposition parties mattered as well. Labour and Conservative voting probabilities declined as Liberal Democrats spending increased, and the probability of voting Liberal Democrat declined in constituencies where Labour spent heavily. To illustrate the magnitude of these effects, we consider scenarios where voters identified with the party whose vote is being analyzed, and all other variables are set at their mean values. As Figure 9 illustrates, under these conditions, a Labour identifier had a .68 probability of casting a Labour ballot.¹⁵ However, this probability fell to .41 if Labour spent only the minimum amount in the constituency, and it climbed to fully .79 if Labour spent the maximum allowed. The comparable change in Conservative vote probabilities (not shown) is virtually identical -- .37 points. In the Liberal Democrat scenario (not shown), the comparable increase is smaller, 10 points.

(Figure 9 about here)

The multilevel analyses displayed in Table 5 tell virtually identical stories. Comparing Tables 4 and 5 shows that all variables that are significant in the regular logit analyses remain significant

in the multilevel analyses, and all variables that are insignificant in the former are insignificant in the latter. Moreover (constants aside), the estimated parameters for the several predictors tend to be very similar in the two sets of analyses. Finally, we note that other approaches to estimation (not shown) also tell similar stories. These include logit analyses with instrumental variables for vote intentions, and linear probability models with and without instrumental variables for vote intentions, and with and without robust standard errors.

(Table 5 about here)

Conclusion: Campaign Effects in 2001

The analyses presented above indicate that the parties' campaigns significantly influenced electoral choice in the 2001 British general election. It appears that a substantial amount of the impact of campaigning operated by activating predispositions. This was particularly true for Labour, which was able to target its local campaigns on sympathisers and the uncommitted more effectively than did the Conservatives. The Liberal Democrat campaign was also effective in this regard. In contrast, the Conservatives tried – with little success – to convert people who favoured other parties. An indication of the failure of their direct campaigning is the fact that they ended up reminding many of their rivals' supporters to go to the polls instead of concentrating on their own supporters. Their canvassing did not accurately identify their electoral base.

Campaign effects were associated with several major variables in what we (and earlier Stokes) term the valence model of electoral choice (Clarke et al., 2004; see also Stokes, 1963; 1992).

Controlling for vote intentions, logit analyses of the BES RCPS data reveal that party leader images were influential, as were perceptions of party competence on important issues. Party identifications – which have substantial dynamics and reflect party and leader performance evaluations – mattered as well. Net of these several effects, economic evaluations affected the likelihood of voting for the governing Labour Party. There is also evidence that the local campaigns mattered. With controls for vote intentions and the impact of variables that proxy national campaign effects, the constituency spending indicators show predictable effects in all of the voting models. These effects are confirmed by multilevel analyses which account for the fact that candidate spending occurs at the level of the constituency rather than that of the individual voter. Taken together, these findings suggest that British parties are not wasting their time when they engage in vigorous local campaigning. Finally, although we do not report details here, it is noteworthy the vast majority of the effects detected using the BES RCPS data also are evident in comparable analyses of the BES in-person survey panel data. In the 2001 British case at least, data collected using different modes and different designs tell very similar stories about what mattered for electoral choice. Part of that story is that the parties' campaigns mattered.

A note on the utility of the RCPS design is also in order. As Johnston and Brady (2002) observe, the rolling cross-sectional survey design was developed to turn a necessity into a virtue. The necessity was to conduct interviews over several days during a campaign; the virtue was to control the timing of these interviews such that they would provide observers with a portrait of the evolution of vote intentions and factors affecting party support during the campaign period. RCPS do a reasonably good job in this regard. Although the size of 'daily replicates', i.e., the number of respondents to be interviewed each day, is typically relatively small, moving average

and nearest-neighbour smoothing techniques allow the analyst to discern aggregate movements in important variables. However, as discussed above, the RCPS design – at least as implemented to date in Britain and elsewhere – is less attractive for doing individual-level analyses of campaign effects. The principal problem is the absence of a clean baseline measure of party support before the official campaign begins. Johnston and Brady’s attempt to solve this problem has several problems, including the ironic use of vote intentions as a measure of voting behaviour. Abandoning their approach for the more conventional ‘lagged endogenous variable’ specification recommended by Finkel moves the problem to the right-hand side of the model, but does not eliminate it. But, there is no reason in principle that a RCPS design must include only a two-wave panel. A three-wave panel that begins with a large first-wave survey just before an election is called would provide the needed baseline. Perhaps this will be purchased at some cost in panel attrition and panel conditioning, but we believe this a price may be minimal and, hence, worth paying.

Endnotes

1. The several data sets gathered in the 2001 BES, with questionnaires and other supporting documentation, may be downloaded from the study's website: www.essex.ac.uk/bes
2. The party contact questions are: (a) 'Did a canvasser from a party call at your home to talk with you during the election campaign?' [IF 'YES'] 'Which party or parties did they represent?' (b) 'Did anyone from a political party telephone you during the election campaign to ask you how you might vote?' [IF 'YES'] 'Which party or parties did they represent?' (c) 'Did any political party contact you on election day itself to see whether you had voted or intended to vote?' [IF 'YES'] 'Which party or parties did they represent?' (d) 'Did you see any of Party Election Broadcasts that were shown on television during the election campaign?' [IF 'YES'] 'Which parties' Election Broadcasts did you see?'
3. When working with the 2001 BES face-to-face survey data, sample size limitations prompt us to define marginal seats as constituencies in which the winning party's majority in 1997 was less than 10 percent of the votes cast.
4. There are too few cases to permit reliable analyses of SNP and Plaid Cymru efforts at telephone canvassing or their attempts to get their supporters to the polls on election day.
5. The questions are: (a) 'If you do vote in the general election, have you decided which party you will vote for, or haven't you decided yet?' [IF 'DECIDED'] 'Which party is that?'
6. The trend line in Figures 2-8 are estimated using nearest-neighbour (LOESS) regression (see, e.g., Fox (2000)). Here, EVIEWS 4.1 (Lilien et al., 2003) is used to compute the nearest neighbour regressions, with a polynomial of degree 1 and a bandwidth of .5.
7. The question is asked of voters only: 'How long ago did you decide that you would definitely vote the way you did? Was it: (i) a long time ago, (ii) some time last year, (iii) some time this year, (iv) during the election campaign. Options (i)-(iv) were presented to the respondent on a show card.
8. The rolling campaign telephone survey vote intention question sequence is identical to that used in the face-to-face pre-campaign survey.
9. The question is: 'Using the 0 to 10 scale, where 10 means *strongly like* and 0 means *strongly dislike*, how do you feel about: (i) Tony Blair, (ii) William Hague, (iii) Charles Kennedy, (iv)

John Swinney [asked in Scotland only], (v) Wyn Jones [asked in Wales only].’ The order in which the leader names were mentioned was randomised.

10. The questions are: 'In your opinion, what is the *single most important issue* in this Election?' [IF AN ISSUE IS MENTIONED] 'Which party is best able to handle this issue?'

11. The question sequence is: (a) '*Generally speaking*, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Scottish Nationalist [in Scotland only], Plaid Cymru [in Wales only] or what?' (b) [IF NO PARTY MENTIONED in (a)] 'Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others? If yes, please tell me which party?' (c) [IF PARTY MENTIONED IN (a) OR (b)] 'Would you call yourself very strongly, fairly strongly, or not very strongly [PARTY MENTIONED]?''

12. The question is: 'How interested are you in the general election that is to be held on June 7th this year?'

13. Using the vote intention variable from the pre-election survey as the control for prior party choice can cause simultaneity bias problems (e.g., Greene, 2003: 307-14). The nature of this bias is to underestimate campaign effects and to overestimate effects that occur before the (official) campaign begins (the latter effects being proxied by the lagged endogenous variable). Given this, an analysis that includes a lagged endogenous variable provides a conservative estimate of campaign effects.

14. Multilevel modelling permits estimates of the slopes and intercepts of the individual level variables to vary across constituencies, and provides correct standard errors for variables measured at the second (constituency) level. See, e.g., Hox (2002); Kreft and de Leeuw (1998), Raudenbush and Bryk (2001). The multilevel models are analysed using HLM 5 (see Raudenbush et al., 2001).

15. Probabilities are calculated using the STATA/SE 8.0 and the CLARIFY program (Tomz, Wittenberg and King, 1999).

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Figure 1
Exposure to the 2001 General Election Campaign

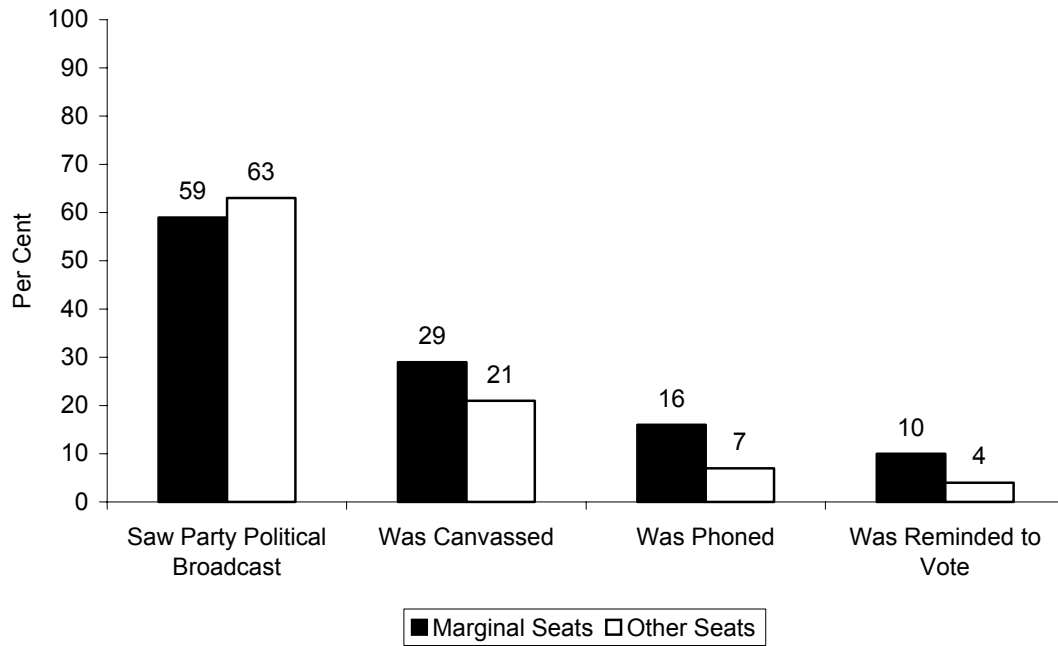


Figure 2

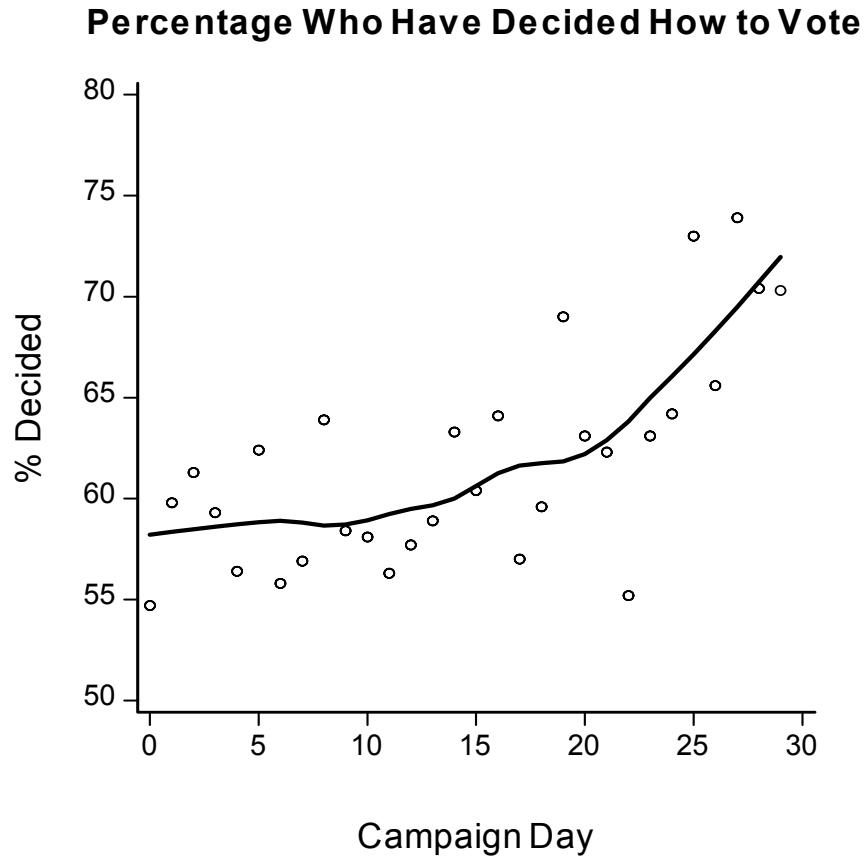


Figure 3

**Party Vote Shares Over the Course of the 2001 British
Election Campaign, Rolling Cross-Sectional Survey,
Entire Daily Samples**

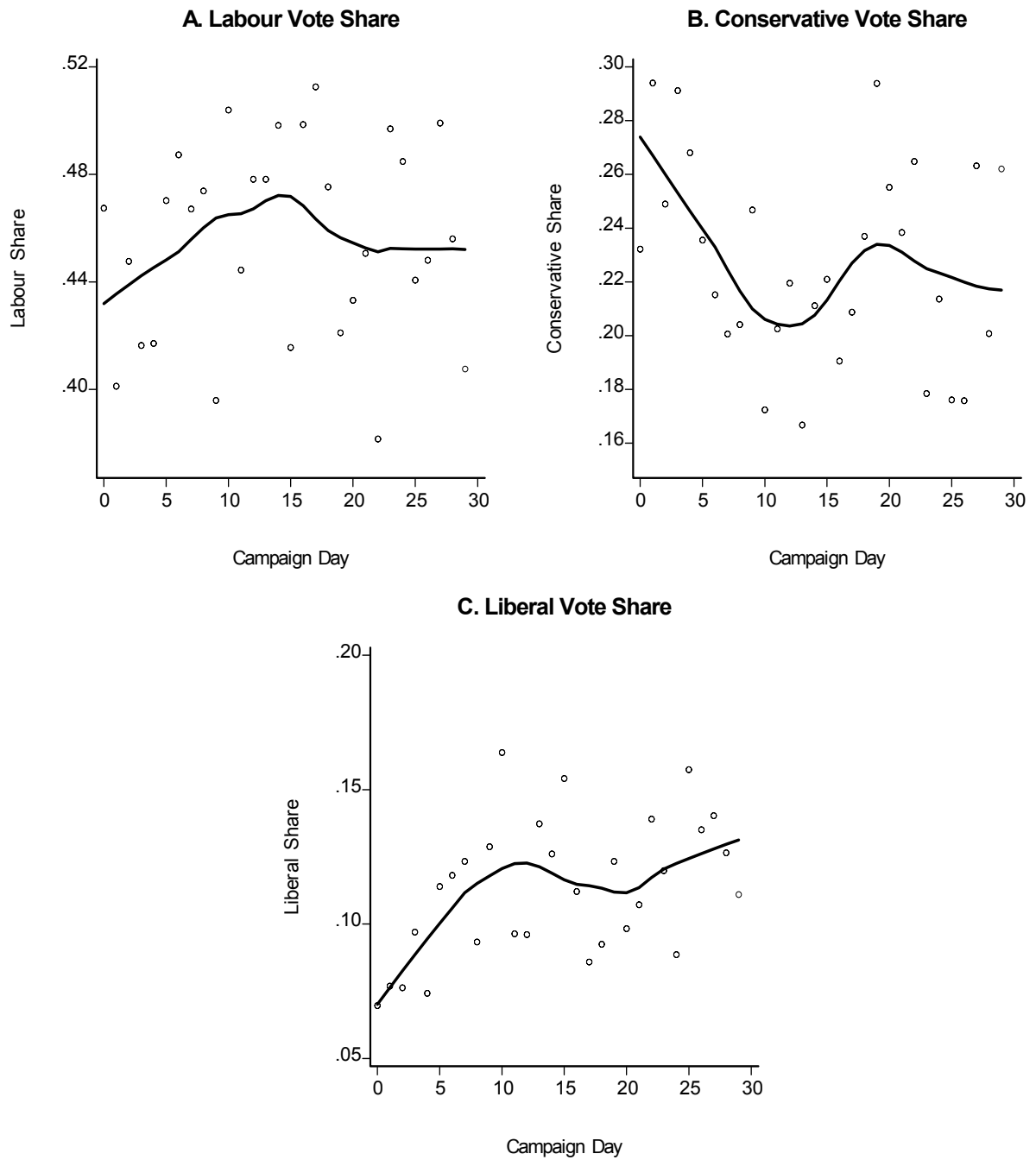


Figure 4

Feelings About the Party Leaders During the 2001 General Election Campaign

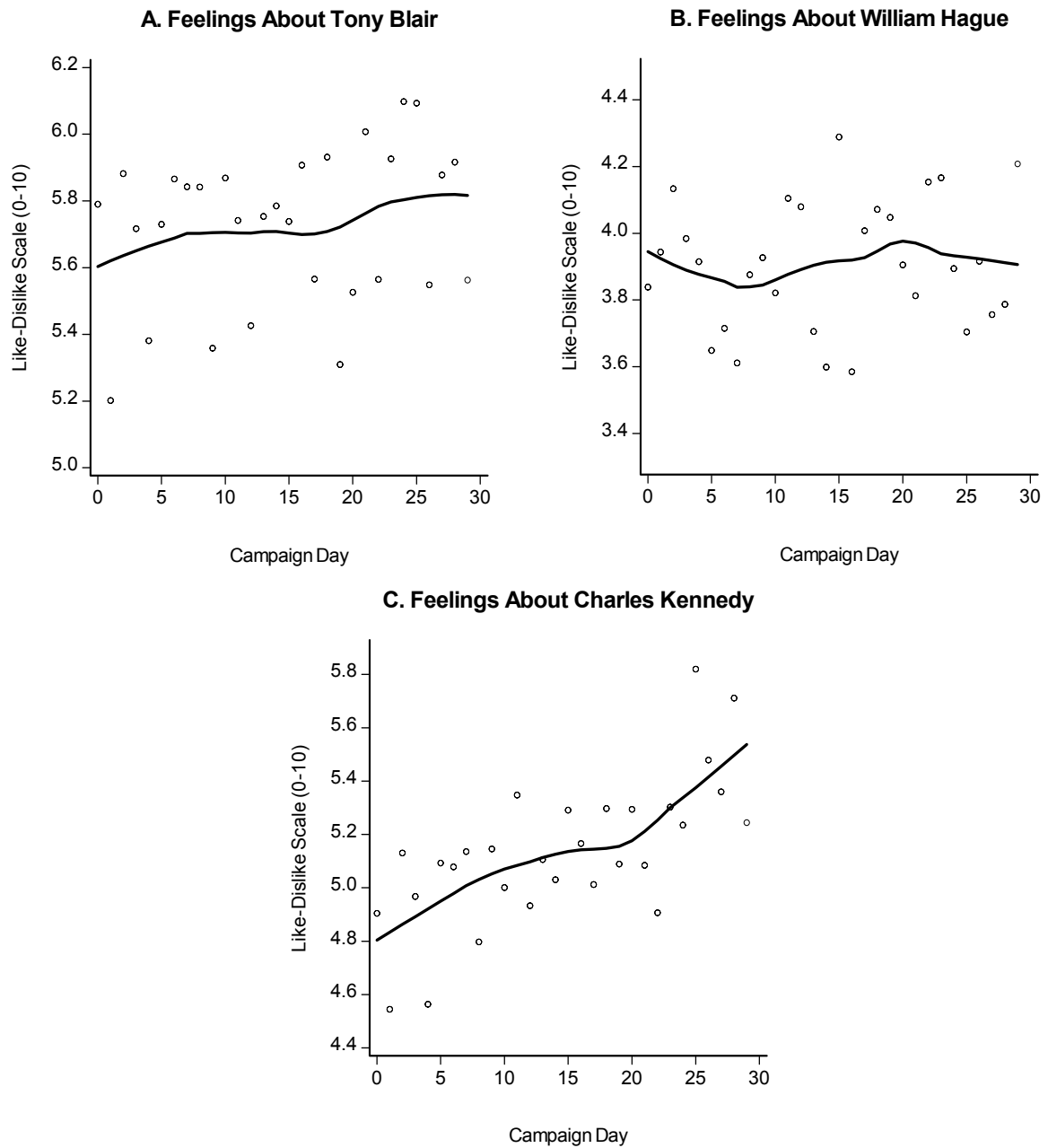


Figure 5

Percentages Favouring Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats on Most Important Election Issue

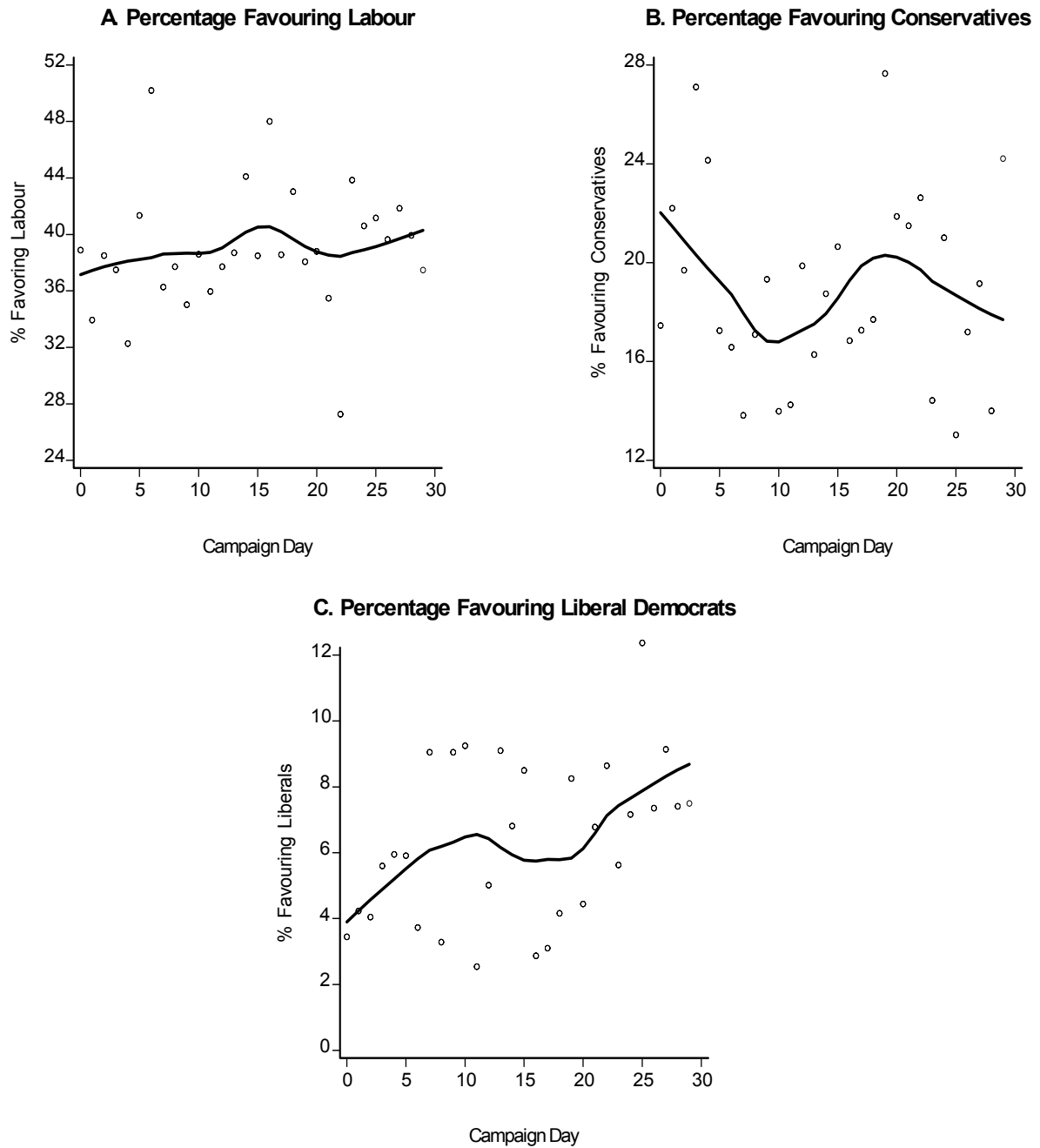


Figure 6

Percentage of Respondents Not Declaring a Party Identification

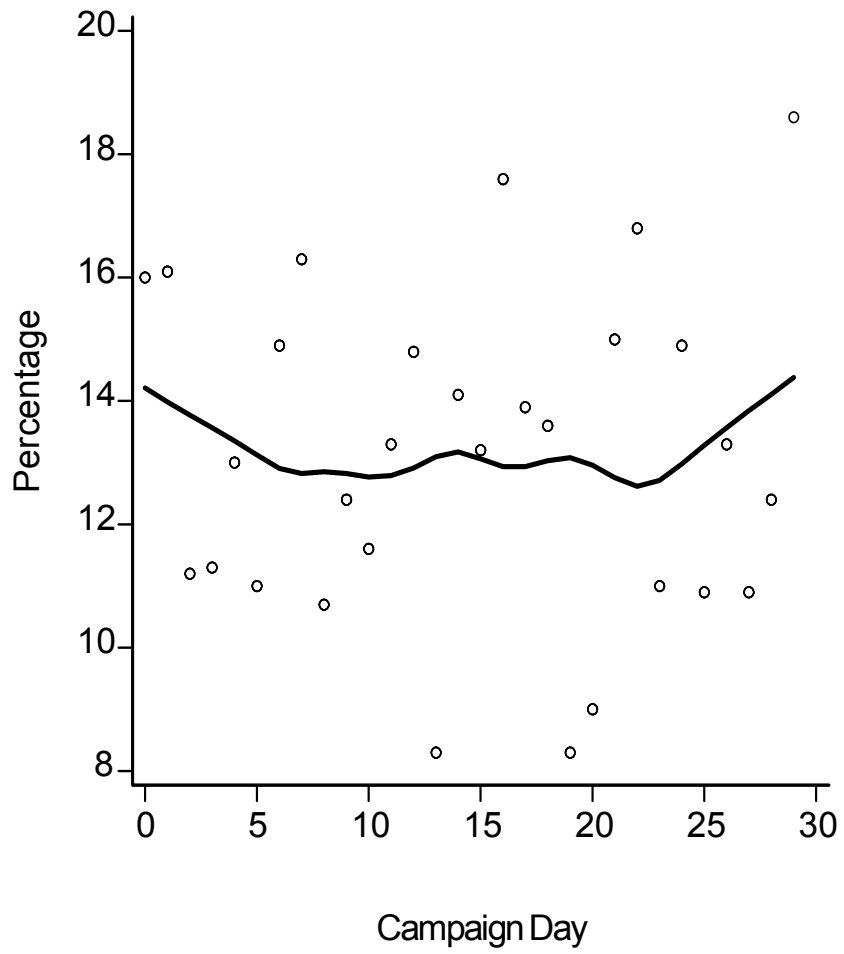
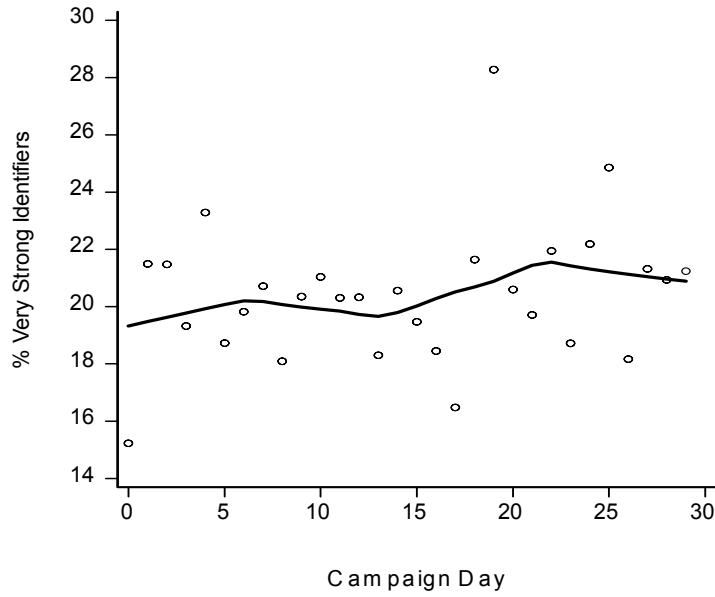


Figure 7

**Dynamics of Intensity of Partisanship,
2001 General Election Campaign**

A. Percentage of Very Strong Party Identifiers



B. Percentage of Weak Identifiers or Nonidentifiers

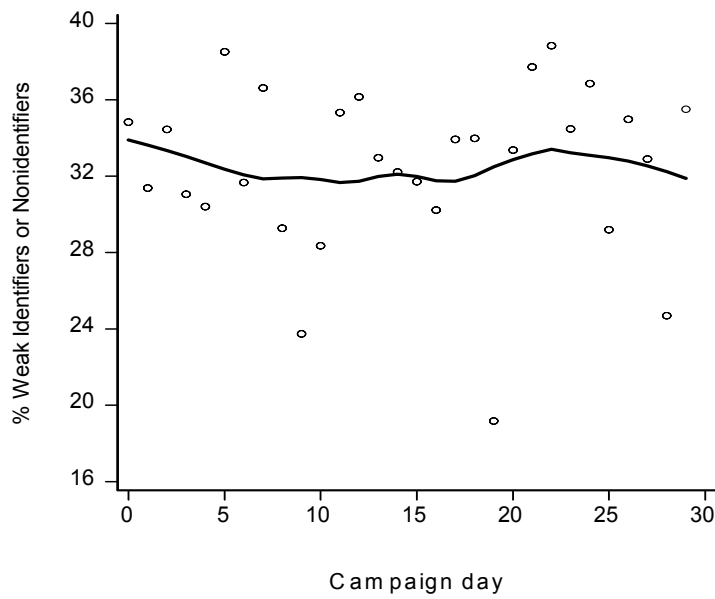


Figure 8

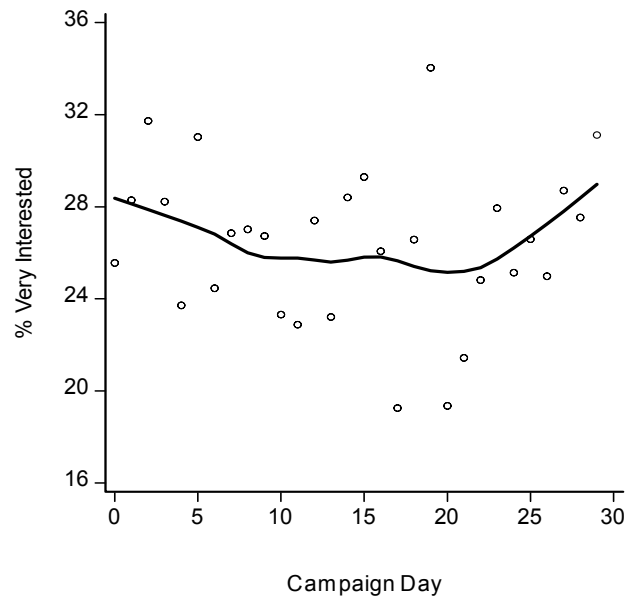
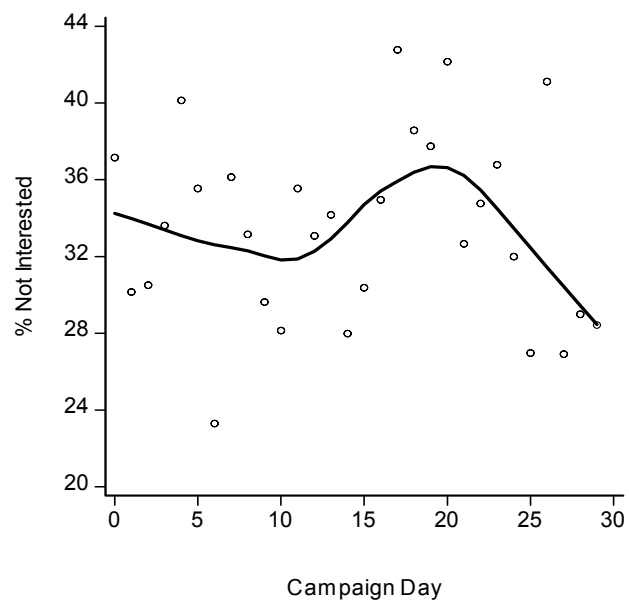
**Dynamics of Interest in the Election,
2001 General Election Campaign****A. Percentage Very Interested in Election****B. Percentage Not Interested in Election**

Figure 9
Labour Constituency Campaign Spending Scenarios,
Labour Identifiers

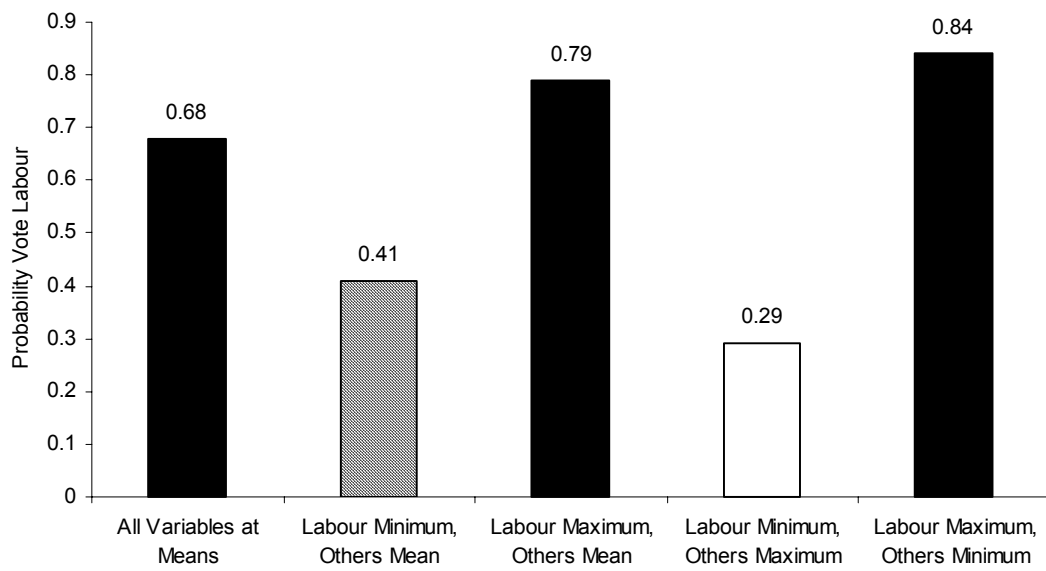


Table 1: Exposure to the 2001 General Election Campaign

Of the 63 per cent who saw a party political broadcast, the following:

Saw a Labour party political broadcast	84%
Saw a Conservative party political broadcast	78%
Saw a Liberal Democrat party political broadcast	66%
Saw an SNP party political broadcast (in Scotland)	57%
Saw a Plaid Cymru party political broadcast (in Wales)	51%

Of the 23 per cent canvassed face-to-face, the following were:

Canvassed by Labour	50%
Canvassed by the Conservatives	47%
Canvassed by the Liberal Democrats	32%
Canvassed by the SNP(in Scotland)	42%
Canvassed by Plaid Cymru (in Wales)	37%

Of the 8 per cent canvassed by telephone, the following were:

Telephoned by Labour	48%
Telephoned by the Conservatives	34%
Telephoned by the Liberal Democrats	11%

Of the 5 per cent reminded to vote, the following were:

Reminded to vote by Labour	49%
Reminded to vote by the Conservatives	27%
Reminded to vote by the Liberal Democrats	21%

Source: 2001 BES post-election face-to-face survey.

Table 2: Candidate Expenditures in 2001*A. Candidate Expenditure in £ Sterling*

Overall:	Labour	Conservatives	Lib Dem
Mean	5860	6486	3062
Std Deviation	2356	2866	2809
(N)	(640)	(638)	(632)

By 1997 Election Outcome:

	Labour	Conservatives	Lib Dem
Mean: Won Seat	6897	8575	8547
Lost Seat	3921	5758	2632
eta =	.61	.43	.55
p =	.00	.00	.00

B. Candidate Expenditure as Per Cent of Legal Maximum

Overall:	Labour	Conservatives	Lib Dem
Mean	64	70	33
Std Deviation	26.1	29.0	29.5
(N)	(640)	(638)	(632)

By 1997 Election Outcome:

	Labour	Conservatives	Lib Dem
Mean: Won Seat	77	88	91
Lost Seat	41	63	28
eta =	.66	.37	.56
p =	.00	.00	.00

Source: Electoral Commission (2002), *Election 2001 - Campaign Spending*.

**Table 3: Pre-Campaign Vote Intentions and Voting Behaviour in 2001
(Horizontal Percentages)**

Vote Intentions (Pre-Election Survey)	Voting Behaviour (Post-Election Survey)				
	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Cons</i>	<i>LibDem</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>No Vote</i>
Labour	70%	1	6	1	22
Conservative	4%	67	6	2	21
Liberal Democrat	4%	1	77	3	16
Other Party	3%	0	3	64	31
Undecided	22%	17	18	4	39
Will not vote	6%	6	3	1	84

Note: validated voters and non-voters
N = 2112 with missing data removed.

Source: 2001 BES pre-post election in-person panel survey.

**Table 4: Campaign Effects Voting Models,
2001 British General Election Rolling Campaign Panel Survey
Binomial Logit Estimates**

	Vote		
	<i>Labour/not</i>	<i>Cons/not</i>	<i>LibDem/not</i>
Vote Intention:			
Labour	1.93***		
Conservative		2.48***	
Liberal Democrat			2.82***
Most Important Issue:			
Labour	0.73***	-0.82***	-0.19
Conservative	-1.59***	1.16***	-1.12***
Liberal Democrat	-1.64***	-1.82***	2.07***
Other Party	-0.63	-2.00	-1.02
Party Leader:			
Blair	0.35***	-0.18***	-0.15***
Hague	-0.04	0.37***	-0.12***
Kennedy	-0.31***	-0.23***	0.36***
Party Identification:			
Labour	0.83***	-2.01***	-0.85***
Conservative	-1.92***	1.59***	-0.91***
Liberal Democrat	-0.56*	-1.02**	1.01***
Other Party	-1.52***	-2.21***	-1.62***
Economic Evaluation Index	0.21***	-0.03	-0.03
Constituency Campaign Spending:			
Labour	1.87***	0.05	-1.45***
Conservative	-0.22	1.61***	0.07
Liberal Democrat	-0.72**	-0.82*	0.43*
Social Class	-0.11*	-0.00	0.14*
Constant	-3.61***	-1.40*	-1.56**
McKelvey R ²	.82	.84	.60
% Correctly Classified	91.2	95.3	90.5

*** .001; ** .01; *.05; one-tailed test.

Source: 2001 BES rolling campaign panel survey.

**Table 5: Campaign Effects Voting Models,
2001 British General Election Rolling Campaign Panel Survey,
Multilevel Binomial Logit Estimates**

	Vote		
	<i>Labour/not</i>	<i>Cons/not</i>	<i>LibDem/not</i>
Vote Intention:			
Labour	1.94***		
Conservative		2.46***	
Liberal Democrat			2.61***
Most Important Issue:			
Labour	0.83***	-0.86***	-0.32
Conservative	-1.56***	1.10***	-1.09***
Liberal Democrat	-1.51***	-1.83***	1.97***
Other Party	-0.70	-1.93*	-0.81
Party Leader:			
Blair	0.35***	-0.15***	-0.14***
Hague	-0.02	0.39***	-0.14***
Kennedy	-0.26***	-0.25***	0.36***
Party Identification:			
Labour	0.95***	-2.23***	-0.91***
Conservative	-1.67***	1.56***	-0.93***
Liberal Democrat	-0.62**	-0.90**	1.04***
Other Party	-1.09**	-2.53***	-1.61***
Econ Evaluation Index	0.18***	-0.05	-0.01
Constituency Campaign Spending:			
Labour	1.71***	0.21	-1.35***
Conservative	-0.14	1.54***	-0.02
Liberal Democrat	-0.68**	-0.89**	0.52*
Social Class	-0.09	-0.00	0.12*
Constant	-3.03***	-0.47*	-2.33**

*** - $p \leq .001$; ** - $p \leq .01$; * - $p \leq .05$; one-tailed test;
robust standard errors

Source: 2001 BES rolling campaign panel survey.