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## New Labour Landslide – Same Old Electoral Geography?

*R.J. Johnston, C.J. Pattie, D.F.L. Dorling,  
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Great Britain has a well-established electoral geography. Using the terminology developed by Key (1955) for the study of American elections, this has produced a long series of 'normal' elections, with none that can be identified as 'deviating', let alone 'critical'. Once established, the geography has remained largely stable in a relative sense, though not in an absolute one: the electoral map is similar to a topographic surface whose relative morphology remains constant but whose elevation changes (occasional periods of uplift punctuated by depression, and sometimes of tilting too). The 1997 general election continued that overall sequence, though with some interesting variations which point to the possible beginning of a new era of micro-geography within the same overall pattern. We illustrate that here by decomposing the map into three separate spatial scales – regional, inter-constituency and local.

### **Decomposing the Map: The Scale Components of British Electoral Geography**

The dominating feature of Great Britain's electoral geography has been the inter-constituency component. It reflects the basic social cleavage that has dominated British electoral politics throughout the twentieth century – socio-economic class. Other socio-economic factors in addition to class also help create inter-constituency variations in electoral support so that the party preferences of people living in a constituency are highly predictable from knowledge of a small number of aggregate features of its population, although those preferences tend to be skewed towards the majority view. Thus, pro-Labour areas tend to give more support to that party than the population composition would imply (see Miller, 1977; Johnston *et al.*, 1988). To a considerable extent, therefore, and as some critics have stressed (McAllister and Studlar, 1992), British electoral geography is nothing more than a mirror image of the country's socio-economic geography, with each election providing a slightly different distortion of that image.

Overlaid on this inter-constituency pattern, however, is a regional

geography. Holding constant individual voter characteristics, there are – and always have been – significant inter-regional differences in propensity to vote in certain ways, as illustrated by the relative strength of Labour in the northern conurbations and in south Wales, and the strong Liberal traditions in parts of rural Wales and south-west England. Bogdanor's comment that 'an elector in Cornwall would tend to vote the same way as an elector from a similar class in Glasgow' (1983: 53) is misleading. From the 1950s on, and especially from 1970 on, these regional differences were accentuated, as shown in Curtice and Steed's seminal paper (1982): the north–south and urban–rural divides were both intensified, with the Conservative party dominating the 'south' and the 'rural' (including the small towns, suburbia, and the rural areas) and Labour extending its hegemony in the 'north' and in the large cities. These divides became even greater during the Thatcher years and the elections of 1983 and 1987 saw a very polarized situation (Johnston *et al.*, 1988): they remained a major feature in 1992 (Pattie *et al.*, 1993), and there is evidence that they opened up slightly in the run-up to that election, contributing to John Major's majority of 21 seats (Russell *et al.*, 1996).

The reasons for these differences have been the focus of considerable research and debate. To some extent, Curtice and Steed argued, they reflect changes in the inter-constituency geography of population characteristics, consequent on economic restructuring and inter-regional migration, plus the growing strength of 'third parties' in some areas. Holding these constant, however – and contrary to the view of McAllister and Studlar (1992: 191) that 'people react in similar ways in different regions according to their individual characteristics' – the inter-regional differences remain (Pattie and Johnston, 1998). They reflect spatial variations in the 'feel-good factor' (see Sanders *et al.*, 1987; Price and Sanders, 1995; Sanders, 1994). Those feeling good, both personally and about the national economy, are more likely to reward the incumbent government than those feeling less optimistic about both the national and their personal economic circumstances, and to the extent that optimism and pessimism are regionally variable, the pattern of voting follows (Johnston and Pattie, 1997a). In addition, people separately evaluate not only their personal and the national situations but also the relative condition of their regional economy, and all three impact upon their propensity to reward or punish the incumbent government (Pattie and Johnston, 1995, 1998).

Economic voting, and voters' perceptions of government economic competence, was a factor in the 1997 election. The Conservative government's popularity tumbled soon after the 1992 general election, and its reputation for the management of the economy suffered a major blow with the withdrawal from the European ERM in September 1992, from which it never recovered during the succeeding five years, despite economic recovery later in the period (Kellner, 1996). An asymmetrical relationship developed,

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whereby economic optimists who had voted Conservative in 1992 tended to give the party continued strong support, whereas those who became pessimistic deserted it, but optimists who were supporting other parties did not transfer their allegiance to the incumbents to anything like the extent that they are assumed to have done in the 1980s (Johnston and Pattie, 1998). Furthermore, there remained an autonomous regional dimension to their partisan preferences: those who lived in the north in 1996 and felt good about the trend of their regional economy were less likely to reward the government with their voting intentions than were those who lived in the south and felt the same way (Johnston and Pattie, 1997b).

The third, local element of the electoral geography of Great Britain operates at the scale of one or a few constituencies only. Some parts of it may be relatively long-lived, such as the weaker support given to the Labour party in the Dukeries coalfield of north Nottinghamshire, compared to that in adjacent South Yorkshire (Johnston, 1991; Jones, Johnston and Pattie, 1992), whereas others may reflect local situations of immediate concern only – such as the race issue in the Wolverhampton area in 1964 and Enoch Powell’s advice a decade later to his former constituents there that they should vote Labour on the sovereignty issue related to membership of the (then) EEC (Taylor and Johnston, 1979: 294–300). The popularity (or otherwise) of a candidate can cause the voting in one constituency to deviate from the general trends, as analyses of voters’ reactions to rebel MPs have shown (Pattie *et al.*, 1994). Finally, the intensity of local campaigning can have a significant impact on the outcome in a constituency (Pattie *et al.*, 1995), especially where it involves canvassing for tactical voting (Johnston and Pattie, 1991).

**From 1992 to 1997**

The following sections analyse the outcome of the 1997 general election in Great Britain, with special reference to change between 1992 and 1997, in the context of the above three-component model. In these analyses of change, we have not used the traditional indicator – two-party (Conservative–Labour) swing – because of its disadvantages when more than two parties are in contention. Our preferred measures of change in detailed analyses at the local scale are the individual cells in constituency flow-of-the-vote matrices, since these allow us to examine how voters were shifting their support in some detail. But less detail is required for the regional and inter-constituency analyses and in this case we use a single absolute measure, the change in the percentage of the votes cast for a party between two elections.<sup>1</sup>

*The Regional Scale*

Table 1 shows inter-regional variations in voting at the 1992 and 1997 general elections according to a 22-region division of the country used in many of our

earlier analyses (see Johnston *et al.*, 1988, for full details). The table shows very substantial inter-regional differences in party support (statistically significant, using ANOVA tests) at both dates. The Conservatives were strongest, and Labour weakest, in the southern regions plus the more rural areas of the north; the Liberal Democrats were strongest in the south-west and Wessex, in the area around London and in the rural areas; and abstentions were greatest in the conurbations (especially Inner London).

TABLE I  
REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN THE PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTES CAST WON BY EACH PARTY  
AND IN THE PERCENTAGE OF THE ELECTORATE WHO ABSTAINED.

	<i>Conservative</i>		<i>Labour</i>		<i>Liberal</i>		<i>SNP/PC</i>		<i>Abstain</i>	
	92	97	92	97	92	97	<i>Democrat</i>		92	97
							92	97		
Strathclyde	20	13	51	58	8	7	20	20	26	30
EC Scotland	25	17	43	51	11	10	20	20	24	27
Rural Scotland	31	22	21	28	22	22	25	26	27	28
Rural Wales	32	22	34	42	17	15	16	18	21	25
South Wales	25	17	60	64	10	11	5	5	22	28
Rural north	46	34	33	43	21	20			22	28
Industrial NE	29	18	56	67	14	11			25	32
Merseyside	28	19	52	63	17	14			26	32
Gtr Manchester	35	24	47	56	16	16			25	32
Rest of NW	41	31	43	54	14	12			20	27
W Yorkshire	37	28	46	55	15	13			24	31
S Yorkshire	26	16	58	63	15	16			28	36
W Midlands Con	42	30	44	54	12	11			25	32
Rest W Midlands	47	37	34	43	18	16			20	26
E Midlands	46	34	38	48	15	14			20	27
East Anglia	51	39	28	39	19	18			20	25
South-west	46	35	18	23	34	35			19	25
Wessex	48	37	20	28	30	29			19	25
Outer south-east	53	40	20	32	25	23			21	26
Outer metropolitan	56	42	22	33	21	20			20	26
Outer London	49	34	33	47	16	15			24	30
Inner London	35	24	47	58	15	13			32	37

*Note:* Because of minor party involvement, especially in 1997, percentages may not sum to 100 per cent.

But what of changes between the two elections? On average, the Conservative share of the votes cast fell by 11.4 per cent (Table 2). Nine regions experienced an even greater average decline – all but three (Rural north, Greater Manchester and West Midlands Conurbation) are in southern England, and only the south-west and Wessex of the southern regions experienced a below-average loss. In general terms, therefore, as a comparison of Tables 1 and 2 shows, the Conservative performance was worst

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in the regions where they performed best in 1992 – the non-Conservative vote increased by almost 15 percentage points in outer London and the adjacent inner Home Counties ring (outer metropolitan), compared to only around 10 percentage points in the urban areas of Scotland and Wales.

TABLE 2  
REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN THE CHANGE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTES CAST WON BY EACH PARTY AND IN THE CHANGE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF THE ELECTORATE WHO ABSTAINED.

VOTES WON BY EACH PARTY RETAINED.			<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal Democrat</i>	<i>Abstain</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>Abstain</i>	Strathclyde	-7.0	6.4	-1.0	4.7
<i>at</i>		EC Scotland	-8.1	7.8	-0.2	3.4
7	92 97	Rural Scotland	-9.7	7.0	0.4	1.6
		Rural Wales	-9.9	7.6	-1.7	4.4
0	26 30	South Wales	-8.6	4.1	0.8	4.9
0	24 27	Rural north	<b>-12.2</b>	<b>9.9</b>	1.0	<b>6.2</b>
6	27 28	Industrial NE	-11.0	<b>10.8</b>	<b>-2.9</b>	<b>6.5</b>
8	21 25	Merseyside	-9.3	<b>10.6</b>	<b>-2.6</b>	5.7
5	22 28	Gtr Manchester	<b>-11.5</b>	9.1	0.4	<b>6.9</b>
	22 28	Rest of NW	-10.9	<b>10.5</b>	<b>-2.1</b>	7.1
	25 32	W Yorkshire	-9.6	8.7	<b>-2.1</b>	6.4
	22 28	S Yorkshire	-9.4	4.8	0.7	7.8
	25 32	W Midlands Con	<b>-11.9</b>	9.6	0.6	<b>6.9</b>
	26 32	Rest W Midlands	-10.2	9.3	<b>-2.0</b>	<b>6.3</b>
	25 32	E Midlands	<b>-12.1</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>-1.7</b>	7.0
	20 27	Anglia	<b>-12.5</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>-1.7</b>	5.3
	24 31	South-west	-11.3	5.8	1.2	<b>6.0</b>
	28 36	Wessex	-10.9	8.2	-0.8	5.7
	25 32	Outer south-east	<b>-13.0</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>-2.5</b>	5.5
	20 26	Outer metropolitan	<b>-13.4</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>-1.7</b>	<b>6.4</b>
	20 27	Outer London	<b>-15.4</b>	<b>13.8</b>	1.0	5.3
	20 25	Inner London	<b>-11.8</b>	<b>10.3</b>	-0.1	5.1
	19 25	Mean	-11.4	9.6	-1.3	5.8
	19 25					
	21 26	R <sup>2</sup>	0.37	0.24	0.07	0.24
	20 26					
	24 30					
	32 37					

Note: Changes greater than the national figure are in bold.

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On average, the t (Table 2). Nine but three (Rural 1) are in southern southern regions therefore, as a rmance was worst

The changing geography of Labour support is not a mirror image of Conservative decline, however, and its performance at winning over more converts from the 1992 non-Labour-voting electorate was above average in some of the regions where the Conservatives also performed relatively well (or, more accurately, not as badly as their national average) – notably in north-east and north-west England. But elsewhere Labour benefited from Tory discomfort. The Tory performance was particularly bad in its south-eastern ‘heartlands’ and Labour’s vote share increased by an above average amount there.

The Liberal Democrats’ share of the vote fell by 1.3 percentage points on average between 1992 and 1997. They were net gainers in some regions,

however: in Rural Scotland, South Wales, Rural North, Greater Manchester, the West Midlands conurbation, South Yorkshire, the Southwest and Inner London. These regions are very different in their nature, and suggest concentrations of support for the Liberal Democrats reflecting the operation of very localized influences.

Finally, with regard to abstentions, the percentage not voting increased by 5.8 percentage points overall. The change was less than the average in two main blocks of regions, however: Scotland and Wales, and southern England (excluding outer metropolitan); the growth in abstentions was greater than average in the English northern conurbations and Midlands.

All of these differences by region are statistically significant (at the 0.05 level or better) according to ANOVA tests. The associated  $R^2$  values are not very high in most cases, however, accounting for less than 25 per cent of the variation in all cases except those involving the Conservative party: intra-regional variation is substantial. The 'best fits' at the regional scale are for Conservative net change, suggesting that its performance had a substantial regional component – much more so than the performance of either of its opponents (especially the Liberal Democrats) or abstentions.

The overall pattern which emerges from Table 2 is that the regional geography of the vote became less pronounced between 1992 and 1997: spatial polarization decreased somewhat in absolute terms. This conclusion applies particularly to the geographies of support for Conservative and Labour: Conservative vote share fell most where it was strongest, and was countered in most of those areas by an above-average increase in support for Labour. The regional geography of the Liberal Democrat vote did not change in a uniform way, however: it became even more varied – not only between regions but also within them. Finally, the geography of abstentions changed: the fall in turnout was smaller among the Scots and Welsh than in many parts of England, for example, and there were intriguing regional variations within England although, as with the changing geographies of Liberal Democrat support, there was very considerable intra-regional variation too.

The regional patterns are significant in themselves, and of considerable interest, but they are only the start of the analysis, for two reasons. First, and following the critiques of McAllister and others, it may be that they are mere artefacts of inter-constituency and local scale differences and we can only conclude that they are 'real' once those have been held constant. Secondly, the regional differences, although significant, conceal more than they reveal (as the  $R^2$  values in Table 2 indicate): there is much more to the geography of New Labour's landslide which needs to be explored.

#### *The Inter-constituency Scale*

At the inter-constituency scale, rather than treating constituencies as

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It is that the regional differences between 1992 and 1997: terms. This conclusion for Conservative and Labour as strongest, and was an increase in support for Labour that vote did not change – not only between constituencies but abstentions changed: less than in many parts of the country. Regional variations within the Labour and Liberal Democrat constituencies are also significant too.

, and of considerable importance for two reasons. First, and secondly, it may be that they are mere coincidences and we can only observe a constant. Secondly, the evidence is more than they reveal (as opposed to the geography of

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homogeneous geographical groupings – defined by regional location – we treat each constituency as a separate unit and look for continuous rather than discrete variations over space, in the manner typical of ecological analyses. At the first stage of this analysis, we employ eleven variables taken from the 1991 Census (for a key to the variables, see Table 3): these reflect what are widely taken as the main socio-economic correlates of variations in voting behaviour across Great Britain, and represent the continuity in the country's electoral geography. We then add further variables relating to the geography of the country's labour markets between 1992 and 1997, before finally adding the regional variables to see if there are differences between parts of the country which cannot be associated with the ecological relationships. All of the analyses reported in this section use multiple linear regression.

For the labour market analyses we use unemployment data taken from the NOMIS database. Two variables are included, as indicated in Table 3, to indicate the level of unemployment in the constituency (the number of registered unemployed in '00s) and the change in the number of unemployed between January 1996 (the earliest date on which data were available for the new constituencies) and April 1997.

There are considerable collinearities between the 11 census-based variables and the two indicating recent labour market performance, and so principal components analyses were undertaken to obtain interpretable independent variables. Five components with eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 were extracted, and the loadings on the structure matrix (oblimin rotation) are given in Table 3. The first four of the five components are readily interpreted, the fifth less so.

I. *Financial Britain*: The high positive loadings on EMPM, EDUC and FINA and the high negative loading for MANU contrast the areas dominated by white-collar, well-educated people employed in service industries with those dominated by manufacturing – the high negative loading for long-term illness indicates the concentration of those individuals in Britain's manufacturing areas. Constituencies with high positive scores on the component are therefore areas with high employment in financial services and in the professions and management; constituencies with high negative scores are manufacturing areas.

II. *Suburban Britain*: The negative loadings for UNAP and UNCH indicate that the constituencies with the smallest numbers unemployed were also those with relatively small changes in that number over the period immediately preceding the 1997 election; the high positive loading for OWNE indicates that unemployment was lowest, and falling most, where owner-occupation was greatest (i.e. the more affluent

TABLE 3  
THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES (AND THEIR MNEMONICS) USED IN THE  
INTER-CONSTITUENCY SCALE ECOLOGICAL REGRESSION ANALYSES

EMPM	% economically-active population who are employers or managers;
ENWA	% economically-active population employed in the energy and water industries;*
EDUC	% population aged over 18 with a higher educational qualification;
AGRI	% economically-active population employed in agriculture, forestry or fishing;
FINA	% economically-active population employed in financial services;
FORC	% economically-active population in the armed forces;
LONG	% population aged over 16 with long-term illnesses;
MANU	% economically-active population employed in manufacturing industry;
NONW	% population aged over 16 with (self-assigned) non-white ethnicity;
OWNE	% population aged over 16 living in owner-occupied properties;
PENS	% population aged over 16 who are of pensionable age;
UNAP	number of unemployed (in '00s) in April 1997
UNCH	% change in the number of unemployed – January 1996 to April 1997

\* This employment category (which includes all mining and quarrying, the oil industry and the nuclear power industry as well as water) is the best available for identifying the country's mining constituencies.

#### Structure Matrix: Rotated Factor Analysis

	I	II	III	IV	V
EMPM	0.85	0.56	–	–	–
EDUC	0.87	–	–	–	–
FINA	0.84	–	–	–	–
LONG	-0.69	-0.46	0.47	–	–
MANU	-0.72	–	–	0.31	–
OWNE	–	0.75	–	–	0.31
UNAP	–	-0.75	–	0.30	–
UNCH	–	-0.71	–	–	–
PENS	–	–	0.95	–	–
AGRI	–	0.26	0.41	-0.69	–
FORC	–	–	–	-0.81	–
ENWA	–	–	–	–	0.84
NONW	–	-0.39	-0.46	–	-0.63

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FACTORS USED IN THE REGRESSION ANALYSES

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 Energy and water industries;  
 Manufacturing;  
 Agriculture, forestry or fishing;  
 Public services;

Manufacturing industry;  
 Ethnicity;  
 Public services;

to April 1997

Energy, the oil industry and the mining industry;  
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areas), an interpretation strengthened by the small positive loading for EMPM, whereas the negative loadings for LONG and NONW suggest the concentration of unemployment in the areas where relative disadvantage is concentrated. High positive scores on the component therefore reflect the more suburban areas.

III. *Retirement Britain*: The single high positive loading on PENS scales constituencies according to their percentages of old people, and the smaller loadings indicate that they are to some extent concentrated in the areas with most long-term ill and in rural areas, and with few non-white residents.

IV. *Urban Britain*: The two high negative loadings indicate that Britain's rural areas are where the country's armed forces are concentrated: the more positive a constituency's score on this component, the less rural, and the more urban it is.

V. *Coalfields Britain*: The two high loadings indicate that non-white residents are relatively absent from those parts of the country with high percentages employed in the energy and water industries. Many non-whites live in relatively deprived inner city areas (high unemployment, few old people). High positive scores on the component therefore reflect mainly coalfield areas (hence the name): high negative scores indicate inner city areas.

The results of the ecological regressions of three dependent variables for each party and for abstentions – the 1992 and 1997 patterns and percentage change between those two dates – using the five factors as independent variables are in Table 4.<sup>2</sup> The geographies of Conservative and Labour support and of abstentions are very predictable at this scale (as indicated by the high R<sup>2</sup> values), in both 1992 and 1997; those of the Liberal Democrats are much less so.

The Conservative share of the vote in 1992 was significantly related to only two of the components – Financial Britain and Suburban Britain; in 1997 it was also linked to Retirement Britain. As shown by many other analyses, the Conservatives won most support in the parts of the country dominated by the new service economy, and in the areas where older people were concentrated. The much lower constant value in 1997 than 1992 indicates the general decline in the party's standing in all areas, however, a finding buttressed by the smaller regression coefficients too. For change between 1992 and 1997, the negative coefficients for the first two components indicate that the Conservative share of the vote fell most in the areas dominated by the service industries and in the suburbs (i.e. the party's heartlands). The significant coefficients for the third and fourth factors show that the

Conservative vote held up relatively well in constituencies with older populations and in the rural areas (both areas where the party traditionally does well), whereas that for the fifth indicates that the 1997 Conservative vote did not drop by as much, other things being equal, in coalfield areas as elsewhere.

Labour's performance and changing performance are related to all of the components, with 14 out of 15 regression coefficients significant. In both 1992 and 1997 it performed best in the old manufacturing areas (I), the areas of high unemployment and relatively small decline in unemployment (II), the areas with relatively few residents of pensionable age (III) and the areas with few people employed in agriculture and in the armed forces (IV); in addition it performed better in 1997 the greater the proportion of non-whites in the population (V). Between 1992 and 1997, Labour's share of the vote increased less in the more rural areas (IV), the coalfields (V), and the areas with more

TABLE 4  
INTER-CONSTITUENCY SCALE REGRESSIONS OF PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTES CAST WON BY EACH PARTY, THE PERCENTAGE OF THE ELECTORATE WHO ABSTAINED, THE CHANGE IN EACH PARTY'S VOTE SHARE, AND THE CHANGE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF THE ELECTORATE WHO ABSTAINED, 1992-97.

Factor	Conservative			Labour		
	92	97	C	92	97	C
Financial	<b>7.02</b>	<b>6.04</b>	<b>-0.97</b>	<b>-10.07</b>	<b>-9.62</b>	<b>0.45</b>
Suburban	<b>7.47</b>	<b>6.82</b>	<b>-0.65</b>	<b>-7.06</b>	<b>-6.56</b>	<b>0.49</b>
Retirement	0.23	<b>0.57</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>-3.48</b>	<b>-4.36</b>	<b>-0.87</b>
Urban	0.01	-0.40	<b>-0.41</b>	<b>4.57</b>	<b>5.21</b>	<b>0.64</b>
Coalfields	-0.53	-0.24	<b>0.29</b>	-0.47	<b>-0.85</b>	<b>-0.39</b>
Constant	<b>41.56</b>	<b>30.17</b>	<b>-11.38</b>	<b>36.19</b>	<b>45.81</b>	<b>9.62</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	<i>0.65</i>	<i>0.66</i>	<i>0.17</i>	<i>0.73</i>	<i>0.69</i>	<i>0.08</i>

  

Factor	Liberal Democrat			Abstention		
	92	97	C	92	97	C
Financial	<b>3.34</b>	<b>3.87</b>	<b>0.53</b>	<b>-0.93</b>	<b>-1.62</b>	<b>-0.69</b>
Suburban	<b>1.99</b>	<b>1.97</b>	-0.02	<b>-3.41</b>	<b>-3.09</b>	<b>0.32</b>
Retirement	<b>2.70</b>	<b>2.95</b>	0.25	<b>-0.29</b>	<b>-0.57</b>	<b>-0.28</b>
Urban	<b>-2.31</b>	<b>-2.28</b>	0.03	-0.15	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.46</b>
Coalfields	-0.13	0.18	<b>0.31</b>	<b>-1.67</b>	<b>-1.68</b>	<b>-0.02</b>
Constant	17.98	<b>16.68</b>	<b>-1.31</b>	22.77	<b>28.54</b>	<b>5.76</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	<i>0.34</i>	<i>0.32</i>	<i>0.02</i>	<i>0.61</i>	<i>0.59</i>	<i>0.13</i>

Note: C = change. Coefficients significant at the 0.05 level or better are in bold.

pensioners (III), but not in the rural areas (II). Labour invaded s

The inter-constituency regressions for Conservative were very similar in both the suburbs, Retirement regressions for Conservative were relatively low. Between 1992 and 1997, the geography of change in Labour's performances in Financial areas and in coalfield areas.

Finally, abstentions in rural areas, the unemployment rate, pensioners, and the percentage who abstained and abstention rate were well also.

#### The Local Scale

At this final scale, we see Labour's own peculiar features in the constituencies to 1992. Many of the constituencies: whether they are target areas for canvassing; and the political environment are explored here are:

1. Constituency marginality;
2. The strength of the Conservative government; and
3. The nature of the local economy.

#### Marginality and the Local Scale

The regional analyses show that Labour's support was strongest in 1997 in the constituencies where it was relatively weak in 1992. This is at the relationship between Labour's support in 1997 to the nature of the constituency in 1992. In the second place in the constituencies, 226 were Labour-Conservative and the Conservative-Conservative-Liberal Democrat. 38 were spread across the constituencies in statistical analysis.

## OLD PARTIES REVIEW

encies with older party traditionally Conservative vote coalfield areas as

related to all of the significant. In both areas (I), the areas employment (II), the and the areas with (IV): in addition non-whites in the the vote increased the areas with more

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Year	C
1997	
1992	0.45
1996	0.49
1996	-0.87
1991	0.64
1995	-0.39
1991	9.62
1999	0.08

Year	C
1992	-0.69
1999	0.32
1997	-0.28
1991	0.46
1998	-0.02
1994	5.76
1999	0.13

in bold.

pensioners (III), but more in the service industry (I) areas, and the suburbs (II). Labour invaded some Conservative heartlands.

The inter-constituency geography of support for the Liberal Democrats was very similar in both 1992 and 1997: relative strength in Financial Britain, the suburbs, Retirement Britain, and the rural areas. Compared to the regressions for Conservative and Labour, however, the  $R^2$  values were relatively low. Between 1992 and 1997, the only significant links to the geography of change in Liberal Democrat support were the party's better performances in Financial Britain (a further invasion of the Tory heartlands), and in coalfield areas.

Finally, abstentions were greatest in both years in the older manufacturing areas, the unemployment concentrations, the areas with relatively few pensioners, and the inner cities. Where Labour did well larger numbers abstained and abstentions tended to increase most where Labour did relatively well also.

#### *The Local Scale*

At this final scale, we treat each constituency as a separate spatial unit with its own peculiar features which influenced the outcome there in 1997 relative to 1992. Many of the relevant features relate to the electoral context in the constituencies: whether they are considered marginal or safe by the parties; whether they are targeted by one party or more for intensive campaigning and canvassing; and the political composition of the local authority. Those which are explored here are:

1. Constituency marginality;
2. The strength of the parties in the local milieu (notably in local government); and
3. The nature of the local campaign and tactical voting.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Marginality and the Local Milieu*

The regional analyses showed that the Conservative vote fell most where it was strongest in 1992 whereas the Labour vote increased most where it was relatively weak. To explore this broad generalization further, we look at the relationship between our change variables and marginality, according to the nature of the constituency contest – defined by the parties in first and second place in the estimated 1992 results. Of the 639 constituencies, 226 were Labour–Conservative contests (i.e. Labour occupied first place and the Conservative second), 187 were Conservative–Labour, 157 were Conservative–Liberal Democrat, and 31 were Labour–Nationalist; the other 38 were spread across the remaining contest types, and were too few to allow statistical analysis.

Three independent variables were included in all of the analyses:

*Margin*: defined as the difference in percentage points between the share of the votes 'won' by the first- and second-placed parties in the 1992 estimated results;

*By-election*: a dummy variable indicating whether a by-election had been held in the constituency (or a major part of it) between 1992 and 1997 (1 = by-election held; 0 = otherwise); and

*Third/second*: the ratio of the share of the votes 'won' by the third- and second-placed parties in the 1992 estimated results (the larger the ratio, the smaller the gap between the two).

In addition, for contests involving the Liberal Democrats a dummy variable was included to indicate whether the seat was one of the 34 identified by the party as its major campaigning targets.

*LibDem Target*: a dummy variable (1 = target; 0 = otherwise) indicating whether the seat was on the Liberal Democrats' target list.<sup>4</sup>

It is widely accepted that one of the problems faced by the Liberal Democrats when contesting Parliamentary constituencies is the party's lack of experience of government. To counter this, the party stressed during the 1997 campaign that it was involved in running more local governments than the Conservatives. Where the party was in power locally, therefore, voters could evaluate its 'governing potential' – with the implication that the stronger the Liberal Democrat presence in a local government, the better would be performance. To test this, we calculated for each constituency the percentage of the seats held by the Liberal Democrats in the main local council.<sup>5</sup> The following variable was included in all the equations.

*LibDem Council*: the percentage of council seats held by the Liberal Democrat party immediately prior to the 1997 general election was included in all of the equations.

In addition, much recent work has demonstrated the importance of the local campaign in accounting for the constituency vote (see e.g. Pattie *et al.*, 1995; Denver and Hands, 1997; Seyd and Whiteley, 1992). An effective local campaign boosts the share of the vote for one's own party, and reduces the vote share of one's rivals. To measure the intensity of the local campaign, we have employed local parties' reports of how much they spent on the campaign, as a percentage of the legally permitted maximum expenditure in each seat. This is a surrogate for actual campaign intensity, but it correlates well with other measures of local campaigning (Pattie *et al.*, 1994; Denver and Hands, 1997). Three variables were available for each of 572 seats:

*ConSpend*: the amount spent by the local Conservative party in 1997 as a percentage of the legal maximum;

*LabSpend*: the percentage of

*LibDemSpend* 1997 as a pe

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*LabSpend*: the amount spent by the local Labour party in 1997 as a percentage of the legal maximum;

*LibDemSpend*: the amount spent by the local Liberal Democrat party in 1997 as a percentage of the legal maximum.

Marginality is significantly related to the volume of change in six out of the eight regressions relating to *Conservative–Labour* and *Labour–Conservative* contests (Table 5). In the former, the wider the margin, the greater the loss of votes by the incumbent Conservative party (recall that the change values for Conservative are almost all negative): the Conservatives lost votes in greatest number where their hold was relatively safe. The Liberal Democrat share of the vote increased most where the Labour party had the least chances of winning (i.e. the margin was widest). Where Labour was challenging the Conservatives from second place, therefore, the incumbents retained more of their support, the closer the contest. Labour's gains were also greater the less secure it was in second place, as shown by the positive coefficient for third/second, whereas the Liberal Democrats picked up most additional votes where the gap between their third-placed candidate and the Labour runner-up was largest: holding margin constant, the closer the contest between Labour and the Liberal Democrats in these Conservative-held seats, the better the Labour performance and the poorer its opponents'. Abstentions, too, increased more in safer Conservative seats than in the more marginal ones. In the *Labour–Conservative* contests, the wider the margin between the two front-runners the smaller the net decline in both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat vote: the Conservatives also performed relatively well where they were strongly placed relative to the third-placed Liberal Democrats (with the reverse being the case for the latter party). Labour's support, meanwhile, was related to marginality in these seats: the wider Labour's lead over the Conservatives, the smaller the increase in its share of the vote.

Marginality was significant in three of the regressions for the *Conservative–Liberal Democrat* contests. For the Conservatives and Labour, the wider the margin the greater the net loss (or, for Labour, often, the smaller the net gain) of votes, but for the Liberal Democrats, the narrower the margin, the greater the gain in votes. LibDem target was a crucial variable, however: in those seats where the party focused its campaigning resources, the Conservative vote fell more than it did in the untargeted seats, while the Labour net increase was less than average and the Liberal Democrat growth substantially greater, representing a considerable return to the second-placed party for its focused investment. (Abstentions also increased less in those targeted seats.) Finally, constituencies where there were by-elections between 1992 and 1997 saw significant falls in the Conservative net share of the vote, relative to those not contested between the two general elections. These

TABLE 5  
REGRESSIONS OF THE IMPACT OF CONTEST TYPE ON CHANGES IN THE PERCENTAGE OF  
THE VOTES CAST WON BY EACH PARTY AND CHANGES IN THE PERCENTAGE OF THE  
ELECTORATE WHO ABSTAINED, 1992-97.

	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal Democrat</i>	<i>Abstain</i>
<i>Con-Lab Contests</i>				
Margin	<b>-0.14</b>	0.02	<b>0.12</b>	<b>0.05</b>
By-election	-0.75	-0.59	1.22	1.88
Third/second	<b>4.69</b>	<b>6.80</b>	<b>-13.10</b>	<b>-2.51</b>
LibDem council	0.08	-0.01	0.01	0.04
ConSpend	<b>0.04</b>	-0.03	-0.01	-0.02
LabSpend	<b>-0.06</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>-0.04</b>	<b>-0.03</b>
LibDemSpend	0.01	-0.02	<b>0.05</b>	-0.02
Constant	<b>-10.99</b>	<b>5.74</b>	3.79	<b>9.21</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	<i>0.14</i>	<i>0.20</i>	<i>0.45</i>	<i>0.18</i>
<i>Con-Lib Dem Contests</i>				
Margin	<b>-0.16</b>	<b>-0.09</b>	<b>0.23</b>	-0.04
By-election	<b>-3.91</b>	0.47	4.21	0.52
Third/second	10.36	4.01	-9.84	-2.65
LibDem target	<b>-1.69</b>	<b>-4.34</b>	<b>5.86</b>	<b>-1.06</b>
LibDem council	0.02	-0.01	<b>0.06</b>	0.05
ConSpend	<b>0.04</b>	<b>-0.06</b>	0.03	0.01
LabSpend	-0.01	<b>0.08</b>	<b>-0.06</b>	<b>-0.02</b>
LibDemSpend	<b>-0.04</b>	<b>-0.10</b>	<b>0.14</b>	-0.02
Constant	<b>-9.41</b>	<b>18.55</b>	<b>-14.43</b>	<b>8.55</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	<i>0.29</i>	<i>0.45</i>	<i>0.47</i>	<i>0.09</i>
<i>Lab-Con Contests</i>				
Margin	<b>0.11</b>	<b>-0.18</b>	<b>0.07</b>	-0.01
By-election	-0.61	-1.41	-1.31	-0.02
Third/second	<b>4.12</b>	1.33	<b>-5.51</b>	<b>-4.09</b>
LibDem council	0.06	-0.01	0.03	0.04
ConSpend	<b>0.03</b>	<b>-0.04</b>	<b>0.02</b>	<b>-0.02</b>
LabSpend	<b>-0.01</b>	0.01	-0.01	-0.01
LibDemSpend	<b>-0.02</b>	-0.02	<b>0.03</b>	-0.01
Constant	<b>-15.24</b>	<b>13.24</b>	-1.34	<b>9.04</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	<i>0.44</i>	<i>0.22</i>	<i>0.16</i>	<i>0.08</i>

Note: Coefficients significant at the 0.05 level or better are in bold.

include Christchurch, Eastleigh and Newbury, all won by the Liberal Democrats at by-elections in 1993 and 1994.

Most striking, however, is the role of local campaign spending. In all three groups of constituencies, the more a challenger party spent, the greater the increase in its votes, and the smaller the increase (or the larger the decrease) in the shares of the vote for its rivals. In addition, campaign spending by challenger parties helped reduce the level of abstention: the more challengers spent on their campaign, the less abstention grew. By and large, however,

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incumbent parties did not seem to benefit from their own campaign efforts. In Conservative–Labour, and Labour–Conservative seats, the local campaign seems to have been asymmetric, giving an advantage to challengers but not to incumbents. In this respect the effect of local campaigns in 1997 was similar to that in earlier elections (see Pattie *et al.*, 1995). In Conservative–Liberal Democrat seats, however, incumbent campaigning seems to have had rather more of an impact: the more the Conservatives spent there in 1997, the fewer votes they lost, and the fewer Labour gained.

Although most of these regressions indicate significant relationships which are in line with expectations, and show the impact of a spatially-differentiated campaign focused, in varying ways, on the marginal constituencies, few of them have large  $R^2$  values: the nature of the local contest influenced the outcome, but rarely dominated it.

Some of the detailed outcome of 1997 general election was created by local scale variables, therefore, through carefully-orchestrated strategies focused on the key constituencies: the magnitude, if not the fact, of Labour’s (and the Liberal Democrats’) success depended in part on careful local campaigning. Labour and Liberal Democrat challengers were best able to mobilize voters in the marginal seats that they needed to win in order to ensure victory. The overall haemorrhage from Conservative incumbents was stemmed somewhat in more marginal seats but this was insufficient to ensure a fifth successive victory. Finally, the differential patterns of changing votes between the Conservative–Labour and Conservative–LibDem marginals suggests the presence of tactical voting on a considerable scale, a topic to which we now turn.

*Tactical Voting*

There was considerable discussion of tactical voting during the election campaign, most of it focusing on the desirability of supporters of a third-placed party (either Labour or Liberal Democrat in most cases) in a Conservative-held seat voting tactically for the second-placed challenger to try to oust the incumbent. It was not promoted by the party leaders nationally (though implicitly condoned at least by Paddy Ashdown), but much canvassed in many constituencies, not only by the parties themselves but also by *ad hoc* pressure groups.

The concept of tactical voting suggests that movements between parties (and in and out of non-voting) between elections varies according to which party is most likely to defeat the incumbent. We have estimated the inter-party movements in each constituency from a national flow-of-the-vote matrix.<sup>6</sup> We focus on the flows relevant to tactical voting in the three main constituency types, and the summary data (all flows are expressed as percentages of the original total – e.g. Conservative-to-Labour flows as a percentage of those

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TABLE 6  
INTER-PARTY VOTER MOVEMENTS IN CONSTITUENCY FLOW-OF-THE-VOTE MATRICES

From	To	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
<i>All constituencies</i>					
Conservative	Labour	2.7	14.2	9.7	2.1
Conservative	Liberal Democrat	2.3	12.2	5.3	1.7
Labour	Conservative	0.6	4.8	1.8	0.6
Labour	Liberal Democrat	1.3	17.2	3.4	2.0
Liberal Democrat	Conservative	1.2	5.6	3.2	0.8
Liberal Democrat	Labour	3.1	27.5	17.3	4.7
Non-Voting	Conservative	3.9	19.6	12.1	3.4
Non-Voting	Labour	6.4	29.5	19.3	3.6
Non-Voting	Liberal Democrat	2.3	18.8	6.5	2.5
CL/CD		0.2	4.8	2.1	0.8
DL/LD		0.2	22.0	6.7	3.7
NVL/NVD		0.4	8.1	3.5	1.4
CD/DC		0.5	9.4	1.9	1.1
LC/LD		0.2	1.4	0.6	0.2
NVC/NVD		0.6	4.7	2.0	0.6
<i>Conservative-Labour contests</i>					
Conservative	Labour	6.1	13.0	10.4	1.1
Conservative	Liberal Democrat	2.3	8.7	4.3	0.8
Labour	Liberal Democrat	1.3	5.0	2.5	0.5
Liberal Democrat	Labour	11.9	27.5	20.7	2.7
Non-Voting	Labour	12.0	29.5	22.5	2.2
Non-Voting	Liberal Democrat	2.9	10.3	5.6	1.1
CL/CD		1.2	4.8	2.5	0.6
DL/LD		2.6	22.0	8.8	3.1
NVL/NVD		1.9	8.1	4.2	1.0
<i>Conservative-Liberal Democrat contests</i>					
Conservative	Labour	2.7	12.1	7.3	1.8
Conservative	Liberal Democrat	3.2	12.2	6.9	1.7
Labour	Liberal Democrat	1.8	17.2	5.6	2.5
Liberal Democrat	Labour	3.1	23.6	12.3	4.1
Non-Voting	Labour	6.4	24.3	16.8	3.7
Non-Voting	Liberal Democrat	4.1	18.8	9.5	2.5
CL/CD		0.2	3.3	1.2	0.5
DL/LD		0.2	13.0	2.9	2.1
NVL/NVD		0.4	5.5	2.0	0.9
<i>Labour-Conservative contests</i>					
Conservative	Liberal Democrat	2.6	9.2	5.0	1.1
Labour	Conservative	0.7	2.8	1.4	0.3
Labour	Liberal Democrat	1.5	4.8	2.7	0.6
Liberal Democrat	Conservative	1.4	5.6	2.7	0.6
Non-Voting	Conservative	4.5	17.5	9.3	2.1
Non-Voting	Liberal Democrat	2.9	9.7	5.3	1.2
CD/DC		0.5	5.6	2.0	0.9
LC/LD		0.2	1.4	0.5	0.2
NVC/NVD		0.8	4.7	1.8	0.5

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who voted Conservative in 1992) are in Table 6.

Across all 639 constituencies, for example, an average of 9.7 per cent of 1992 Conservative voters shifted their support to Labour in 1997, with a range from 2.7 to 14.2, whereas an average of 5.3 shifted their allegiance to the Liberal Democrats (range 2.3–12.2). In Conservative-held seats where Labour was in second place, however, the respective means were 10.4 and 4.3, whereas in those where the Liberal Democrats occupied second place they were 7.3 and 6.9. On average it seems, where Labour had the best chance of defeating the Conservatives more Tory defectors voted Labour in 1992, whereas where the Liberal Democrats had the best chance, fewer defected to Labour and more to the main challenger. Similarly, many fewer 1992 Labour supporters shifted their allegiance to the Liberal Democrats where Labour was second than where the Liberal Democrats were and more 1992 non-voters shifted to Labour in the Conservative-Labour contests than in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat contests.

If tactical voting operated to favour the second-placed candidate, then the relative balance of flows should favour that person. In the Conservative-held seats, therefore, we look at three ratios:

- CL/CD – the ratio of ‘defectors’ from the Conservatives to Labour and to the Liberal Democrats (the larger the ratio, the greater the relative shift to Labour);
- DL/LD – the ratio of Liberal-Democrat-to-Labour movements to Labour-to-Liberal-Democrat flows (the larger the ratio, the greater the relative shift to Labour); and
- NVL/NVD – the ratio of 1992 non-voters moving to Labour to those moving to Liberal Democrat (the larger the ratio, the greater the relative shift to Labour).

In all three cases, Table 6 shows that the ratios were on average much larger in the Conservative–Labour contests than in the Conservative–Liberal Democrat contests: where Labour was in second place it was a much greater net beneficiary of the inter-election flows than was the case where the Liberal Democrats were second in the 1992 estimated result. For the Labour–Conservative contests, where there may have been tactical voting by Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters seeking to prevent a Labour victory, three similar ratios were computed:

- CD/DC;
- LC/LD; and
- NVC/NVD.

We conducted regression analyses to see if there were systematic

variations in the relative volumes of flows, consistent with the general hypothesis that there should be more tactical voting where it has the greatest chance of success – in the more marginal constituencies. Eight independent variables are used: seven are defined above – Margin, LibDem target, LibDem council, By-election, ConSpend, LabSpend and LibDemSpend; the eighth is the ratio between the votes for Labour and Liberal Democrat in 1992 (for the contests against a Conservative incumbent) and that between the 1992 shares of Conservative and Liberal Democrat (where Labour is the incumbent).

The fitted regressions produce results consistent with expectations, with one major exception (see Table 7).<sup>7</sup> In the Conservative–Liberal Democrat contests, the closer the margin the larger the ratios, and hence the greater the net flows to Labour, although less so in the Liberal Democrat target seats: Labour benefited most from tactical voting (by dissident Conservatives, by previous non-voters, and by former Liberal Democrat supporters) the closer the contest in a seat. On the face of it, this seems rather counter-intuitive, with Labour doing better in seats where the Liberal Democrats were close behind the Conservative incumbent. However, flows to Labour in Conservative–Liberal Democrat seats were also higher where the ratio of Labour to Liberal Democrat share of the 1992 vote was larger (i.e. where Labour came a close third to the Liberal Democrats' second at the previous election). It seems, therefore, that even though Labour was not the obvious tactical choice, the party still benefited in 1997 where the Conservatives were being challenged strongly by the Liberal Democrats and where the Liberal Democrats themselves were being challenged strongly by Labour. The overall swing to Labour throughout the country was large enough to override the fine calculations of tactical voters in these circumstances. It is likely that, with Labour riding high in the opinion polls for many months before the election, many tactical voters' deliberations would take into account the possibility that Labour would overtake the Liberal Democrats in Conservative–LibDem marginals: in these circumstances, voting Labour in a Conservative–LibDem marginal may still have been a sensible tactical vote!

In the Conservative–Labour contests, on the other hand, margin was not significantly related to all three flow ratios. However, the greater the ratio of Labour's 1992 vote share to that of the Liberal Democrats (and hence the further Labour was ahead of the Liberal Democrats in the seat), the greater the flows of support to Labour in 1997, relative to flows to the Liberal Democrats.

The final block of regressions in Table 7 indicates that there was also tactical voting in Labour-held seats by those opposed to that party. Thus the closer the margin, the smaller the flow of Labour 'defectors' to the Conservatives rather than the Liberal Democrats and the larger the flow of former non-voters in the same direction, and also the smaller the flow from a

REGRES

*Conservative–Labour*

Margin  
Lab/LibDem92  
LibDem target  
By-election  
LibDem council  
ConSpend  
LabSpend  
LibDemSpend  
Constant  
R<sup>2</sup>

*Conservative–Liberal*

Margin  
Lab/LibDem92  
LibDem target  
By-election  
LibDem council  
ConSpend  
LabSpend  
LibDemSpend  
Constant  
R<sup>2</sup>

*Labour–Conservative*

Margin  
Con/LibDem92  
LibDem target  
By-election  
LibDem council  
ConSpend  
LabSpend  
LibDemSpend  
Constant  
R<sup>2</sup>

Note: Coefficients sig

1992 Conservative  
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In all three g  
Liberal Democrat  
is a function of w  
they tended to t

istent with the general where it has the greatest cies. Eight independent margin, LibDem target, and LibDemSpend; the liberal Democrat in 1992 d that between the 1992 where Labour is the

with expectations, with tive–Liberal Democrat d hence the greater the Democrat target seats: dent Conservatives, by e supporters) the closer counter-intuitive, with rats were close behind bour in Conservative- o of Labour to Liberal e Labour came a close as election). It seems, us tactical choice, the vere being challenged e Liberal Democrats

The overall swing to to override the fine It is likely that, with as before the election, unt the possibility that onservative–LibDem onservative–LibDem

and, margin was not e greater the ratio of crats (and hence the e seat), the greater the e Liberal Democrats. that there was also that party. Thus the ‘defectors’ to the e larger the flow of aller the flow from a

TABLE 7  
REGRESSION ANALYSES OF TACTICAL VOTING CROSS-FLOW RATIOS

<i>Conservative–Labour Contests</i>			
	DL/LD	CL/CD	NVL/NVD
Margin	-0.054	-0.010	-0.005
Lab/LibDem92	<b>-0.682</b>	<b>-0.118</b>	<b>-0.122</b>
LibDem target	-4.440	<b>-0.951</b>	<b>-1.011</b>
By-election	-0.646	-0.113	-0.071
LibDem council	-0.007	-0.122	-0.002
ConSpend	0.015	0.003	0.007
LabSpend	<b>0.055</b>	<b>0.012</b>	<b>0.004</b>
LibDemSpend	<b>-0.054</b>	<b>-0.010</b>	<b>-0.011</b>
Constant	<b>6.411</b>	<b>2.036</b>	<b>2.299</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	0.24	0.25	0.23

  

<i>Conservative–Liberal Democrat Contests</i>			
	DL/LD	CL/CD	NVL/NVD
Margin	<b>-0.066</b>	<b>-0.015</b>	<b>-0.024</b>
Lab/LibDem92	<b>1.871</b>	<b>0.546</b>	<b>0.920</b>
LibDem target	<b>-1.373</b>	<b>-0.374</b>	<b>-0.639</b>
By-election	0.545	0.008	0.013
LibDem council	-0.004	-0.002	-0.003
ConSpend	-0.003	-0.001	-0.002
LabSpend	<b>0.025</b>	<b>0.006</b>	<b>0.011</b>
LibDemSpend	<b>-0.058</b>	<b>-0.014</b>	<b>-0.023</b>
Constant	<b>6.056</b>	<b>1.930</b>	<b>3.250</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	0.51	0.57	0.57

  

<i>Labour–Conservative Contests</i>			
	CD/DC	LC/LD	NVC/NVD
Margin	<b>0.022</b>	<b>0.003</b>	<b>-0.012</b>
Con/LibDem92	<b>-0.221</b>	<b>0.043</b>	<b>0.147</b>
LibDem target	<b>2.161</b>	-0.129	-0.435
By-election	-0.203	0.057	0.194
LibDem council	-0.002	-0.009	0.001
ConSpend	0.001	0.003	0.002
LabSpend	0.001	0.001	-0.001
LibDemSpend	<b>0.013</b>	<b>-0.002</b>	<b>-0.007</b>
Constant	<b>1.758</b>	<b>0.539</b>	<b>1.820</b>
R <sup>2</sup>	0.41	0.41	0.41

Note: Coefficients significant at the 0.05 level or better are in bold.

1992 Conservative vote to 1997 support for the Liberal Democrats, relative to flows in the opposite direction. In addition, Conservative candidates benefited more from those flows the more secure their second place relative to the third-placed candidate.

In all three groups of seats, local campaign spending by Labour and the Liberal Democrats helped encourage tactical shifts in their favour. In part, that is a function of whether the Liberal Democrats targeted a seat: where they did, they tended to benefit. But it is also a function of the general level of

campaign spending in each seat. The more Labour spent in its local campaigns, the more votes it won from the Liberal Democrats, the Conservatives and previous non-voters in Conservative–Labour and Conservative–Liberal Democrat contests: Similarly, in all three groups of seats, the more the Liberal Democrats spent on their campaigns, the more votes they won from the Conservatives, Labour and previous non-voters.

Tactical voting was a significant element in the 1997 election, therefore. Where the Liberal Democrats campaigned strongly – in their target Conservative-held seats – they benefited substantially from it, especially if the Labour challenger was in a poor third place, and where Labour had a good chance of unseating the Tory incumbent (whether it was well-placed as the runner-up in 1992 or in third position relative to the Liberal Democrats) it too garnered significant numbers of tactical votes, as did Conservative candidates where they were running second to Labour incumbents.

#### The Final Equation

To explore the relative importance of the regional, inter-constituency and local scale variables, we have conducted final sets of regressions expanding on those in Table 5. After experimentation we included variables relating to:

- the local conditions in each seat;
- the five inter-constituency scale factors; and
- the regions.

Many were excluded as insignificant in all regressions, and Table 8 gives the final versions, showing the significant variables in each and including no variable that was not significant in any of the twelve. Compared to Table 5, most of the  $R^2$  values are very substantially larger, especially for the change in Labour share of the vote.

The nature of the local contest was widely significant, indicating the importance of the local tactics of the two opposition parties in the election: the general pattern replicates that in Table 5. Local campaign spending in particular stands out as an important feature in the local geography of the vote.

But of particular interest are the inter-constituency and regional scale variables, indicating that the outcome had some broader geographical lineaments too. In the Conservative–Labour contests, for example, the pattern of change in the Labour vote was significantly related to three of the five factors. Finally, at the regional scale there was a considerable number of significant coefficients for the regions in two of the three contest types – the exceptions being in the seats defended by Labour (where the only regional patterns were in changes in Conservative vote). In the Conservative–Labour and Labour–Conservative contests, the Conservative vote held up relatively

well (*ceteris paribus*) Labour did relative

#### So Why Was It a

So far, our attention outstanding feature substantial net character the massive majority achieved when they three previous contests terms of seats won

Table 9 illustrates representation that Conservative members every one of the 22 1997 election nine Conservative members seats, including all north-west (Lancashire Merseyside). The conurbations (both the complement of around one-quarter figure more than made to 34 (i.e. by 30 per Labour, as a consequence number of regions – metropolitan county southern England ex

Why was the Labour of seats? The first-past-the-post of seats relative to vote sensitive to the particular template. They come the number of electors (and their success electorate who abstained elections, and particularly Boundary Commission but the 1997 election

Following Brookings which one party would

well (*ceteris paribus*) in a number of the 'northern' and Midlands regions, and Labour did relatively badly in some.

### So Why Was It a Landslide?

So far, our attention has entirely focused on the pattern of voting in 1997. The outstanding features of the election outcome were not only the very substantial net change in support for the two main parties, however, but also the massive majority which Labour won, much greater than the Conservatives achieved when they had a similar percentage of the votes cast at each of the three previous contests. For Labour, the 1997 result produced a landslide in terms of seats won – a new geography.

Table 9 illustrates the extent of that landslide and the new geography of representation that resulted. Especially noteworthy is the changing pattern of Conservative membership of the House of Commons. After the 1992 election every one of the 22 regions returned at least one Conservative MP: after the 1997 election nine regions (including all five in Scotland and Wales) had no Conservative member. Within northern England, the Tories lost 36 of their 53 seats, including all nine in West Yorkshire and 9 of the 13 in the rest of the north-west (Lancashire and Cheshire other than Greater Manchester and Merseyside). The party now has only two MPs from the northern conurbations (both in Greater Manchester). In the three Midlands regions, too, the complement of Conservative MPs fell very sharply, from 62 to 28: it lost around one-quarter of its votes there, but some 55 per cent of its seats – a figure more than matched in Outer London, where its vote share fell from 49 to 34 (i.e. by 30 per cent) but its MPs from 35 to only 9 (a 75 per cent drop). Labour, as a consequence, substantially increased its representation in a number of regions – by over half in the rest of the west Midlands (outside the metropolitan county), the East Midlands, East Anglia and the whole of southern England except Inner London (where it already held 20 of the 27).

Why was the Labour performance in terms of votes so magnified in terms of seats? The first-past-the-post system is notoriously fickle in the allocation of seats relative to votes overall, and the biases within the system are very sensitive to the particular distribution of votes across the constituency template. They come about because of differences between constituencies in the number of electors, the proportion of the votes cast won by 'third' parties (and their success in converting them into seats), the proportion of the electorate who abstain, and the winning party's majority. In most post-war elections, and particularly after the periodic reviews conducted by the Boundary Commissions, these factors have tended to cancel each other out, but the 1997 election saw bias reach an unprecedented level.

Following Brookes (1960), we define bias as the additional number of seats which one party would have won rather than the other had it obtained the same

TABLE 8  
THE FINAL REGRESSION EQUATIONS ON CHANGE IN PARTY SHARES OF VOTES AND IN  
ABSTENTIONS

	<i>Conservative-Labour seats</i>				<i>Conservative-Liberal Democrat seats</i>			
	C	L	LD	A	C	L	LD	A
Margin	-0.07	-	0.10	-	-0.14	-	0.18	-0.05
By-election	-2.82	-	-	-	-3.97	-	5.64	-
Third/second	2.56	9.01	-14.67	-	-	-	-	-
LibDem council	-	-	-	-	-	-0.04	-	-
LibDem target	-	-7.75	7.80	-	-	-3.65	4.52	-1.08
ConSpend	0.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LabSpend	-0.03	0.06	-0.04	-0.03	-	0.07	-0.05	-0.02
LibDemSpend	-	-	0.04	-0.02	-0.04	-0.09	0.14	-
<i>Factor</i>								
Financial	-	-0.82	1.14	-	-	-2.29	1.73	-1.15
Suburban	-	-0.91	0.62	-	-	-	1.33	-
Retirement	-	-	-0.52	-	-	-	-	-
Urban	-0.53	0.78	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coalfields	-	-	-	-	1.31	-1.60	-	-
<i>Region</i>								
Strathclyde	-	-	-	-3.87	-	-	-	-
EC Scotland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Scotland	-	-	4.01	-4.19	-	-	-	-
Industrial NE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural north	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Merseyside	-	2.98	-	-2.90	-	-8.84	10.59	-
Gtr Manchester	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rest of NW	1.88	-	-	-	4.63	-	-	-
W Yorks	3.09	-3.40	-	-	-	-	-	-
S Yorks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rural Wales	-	-	-	-	-	-11-35	15-73	-
Ind Wales	3.28	-3.36	-	-	-	-10.43	-	-3.66
W Midlands C	2.99	-3.27	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rest W Mids	3.75	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
East Midlands	-	-1.82	-	-	2.61	-3.88	-	-
East Anglia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
South-west	-	-	-	-	-	-2.62	-	-
Wessex	2.54	-	-	-	-	-3.59	-	-
Inner London	3.02	-3.05	-	3.34	2.02	-	-	-0.84
Outer London	-	2.14	-2.04	-	-	-	-	1.61
Outer met	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Constant	-14.02	7.17	6.69	8.06	-9.59	20.46	-16.26	8.91
$R^2$	0.47	0.53	0.59	0.29	0.40	0.59	0.54	0.27

Margin  
By-election

Third/Second  
LibDem Council  
LibDem target

ConSpend  
LabSpend  
LibDemSpend

*Factor*  
Financial  
Suburban  
Retirement  
Urban  
Coalfields

*Region*  
Strathclyde  
EC Scotland  
Rural Scotland  
Industrial NE  
Rural North  
Merseyside  
Gtr Manchester  
Rest of NW  
W Yorks  
S Yorks  
Rural Wales  
Ind Wales  
W Midlands C  
Rest W Mids  
East Midlands  
East Anglia  
South-west  
Wessex  
Inner London  
Outer London  
Outer met

Constant  
 $R^2$



TABLE 9  
THE DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS WON BY PARTY AND REGION

	<i>Conservative</i>		<i>Labour</i>		<i>Liberal Democrat</i>		<i>SNP/PC</i>	
	92	97	92	97	92	97	92	97
Strathclyde	1	0	30	31	0	0	0	0
EC Scotland	2	0	16	17	0	1	0	0
Rural Scotland	7	0	5	8	8	9	3	6
Rural Wales	5	0	7	11	1	2	4	4
South Wales	2	0	21	23	0	0	0	0
Rural North	16	11	11	15	1	2	0	0
Industrial NE	3	0	24	27	0	0	0	0
Merseyside	4	0	12	15	0	1	0	0
Gtr Manchester	7	2	17	22	1	1	0	0
Rest of NW	13	4	15	24	0	0	0	0
W Yorkshire	9	0	14	23	0	0	0	0
S Yorkshire	1	0	14	14	0	1	0	0
W Midlands Con.	11	4	18	25	0	0	0	0
Rest W Midlands	22	10	7	18	0	1	0	0
E Midlands	29	14	14	29	0	0	0	0
East Anglia	19	14	3	8	0	0	0	0
South-west	12	5	1	4	3	7	0	0
Wessex	29	17	3	11	3	7	0	0
Outer south-east	52	31	2	16	0	7	0	0
Outer metropolitan	62	42	1	20	0	1	0	0
Outer London	35	9	12	33	0	5	0	0
Inner London	6	2	20	24	1	1	0	0

proportion of the national vote, assuming a uniform swing between the two main parties across all constituencies and no change in the performance of other parties or in the level of abstentions (Rossiter *et al.*, 1997b). At the time of the 1992 election there was a consistent and significant bias favouring the Labour party, when with a lead of some 7.6 per cent over Labour there was a net disadvantage to the Conservatives of 26 seats. Furthermore, the closer the parties came together – towards an equal share of the vote with 39 per cent each – the greater Labour's advantage; if a uniform swing across all constituencies had led to each party having 39 per cent of the votes cast, then Labour would have had a 38-seat advantage over its main opponent.

The redrawing of the constituency map in the Boundary Commissions' fourth periodic review changed the situation somewhat, and we have calculated the likely biases if the 1992 general election had been held in the new constituencies (using the estimation procedure described in Rossiter *et al.*, 1997a). Redistricting in Britain tends to favour the Conservative Party, primarily because it provides the opportunity to minimize that part of the bias arising from inequalities in constituency electorates, which reflect migration patterns away from the less affluent parts of the country. The fourth review

was no exception around 15 seats 38 to 21 assumi

Bias on this situation: if L following a uni have won 68 fe if the two part assuming a unif Labour would h

We can decc show why Labc

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England, the pa more seats for th is in England.

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- *Abstentions* – smaller its effec the party which

- *Minor party v* for other 'third constituency.

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- *Efficiency* – a does not win, or it does win, ten than one which votes are more

Table 10 sho results had the actual 1997 elec what would hav same percentag Labour has gair benefit from th

REGION

Actual 1997	SNP/PC	
	92	97
0	0	0
1	0	0
9	3	6
2	4	4
0	0	0
2	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
7	0	0
7	0	0
7	0	0
1	0	0
5	0	0
1	0	0

was no exception and the pro-Labour bias in the system was reduced by around 15 seats (from 26 to 13 on a 7.6 percent Conservative lead and from 38 to 21 assuming equal vote shares).

Bias on this scale is commonplace, but the 1997 election transformed the situation: if Labour and Conservative vote shares had been reversed, following a uniform swing across all constituencies, then the latter would have won 68 fewer seats. Labour's advantage would have been even greater if the two parties had been closer together in the distribution of votes, again assuming a uniform swing: indeed, if they had obtained the same vote share Labour would have won 82 more seats than the Conservatives.

We can decompose these biases, in a modification of Brookes' method, to show why Labour benefited so much. We identify six main sources of bias:

- *Variations in constituency electorate size due to national quotas* – because constituencies are on average much smaller in Scotland and Wales than in England, the party that does better in the two former countries is likely to win more seats for the same number of votes than the one whose best performance is in England.
- *Variations in constituency electorate size within countries* – constituencies vary in size within each of the three countries, and the party which performs better in the smaller constituencies will again tend to win more seats for the same number of votes.
- *Abstentions* – the larger the number of abstentions in a constituency the smaller its effective size, thereby conferring an apparent advantage in seats on the party which wins where turnout is lower.
- *Minor party votes* – for similar reasons, the larger the number of votes cast for other 'third' parties, the lower the number of votes needed to win a constituency.
- *Minor party victories* – however, if minor parties succeed in polling enough votes to deprive a party of the seat, then the bias operates in the other direction.
- *Efficiency* – a party which has large numbers of 'wasted' votes in seats it does not win, or 'piles up' votes by amassing large majorities in the seats that it does win, tends to gain fewer seats relative to its proportion of the votes cast than one which wins by relatively small majorities in most cases – the latter's votes are more efficiently distributed.

Table 10 shows these biases for the actual 1992 election results, the 1992 results had the election been fought with the same seats as 1997, and the actual 1997 election results, comparing the biases under the actual result with what would have happened if the Conservatives and Labour had achieved the same percentage of the votes cast. The clear message from these data is that Labour has gained very substantially between 1992 and 1997. It continues to benefit from the smaller seats in Scotland and Wales and, although the

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TABLE 10  
DECOMPOSING THE SOURCES OF BIAS IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

	1992 result	1992 in 1997 constituencies	1997 result
Actual result			
<i>Type of bias</i>			
National quotas	12	13	11
Intra-national variations	28	4	13
Abstentions	19	21	25
Minor party votes	-28	-28	-33
Minor party victories	12	10	20
Efficiency	-12	-3	42
Total	26	13	68
Result if Conservative and Labour had equal vote shares			
<i>Type of bias</i>			
National quotas	12	13	11
Intra-national variations	29	4	13
Abstentions	19	21	24
Minor party votes	-30	-30	-36
Minor party victories	20	18	33
Efficiency	-7	0	48
Total	38	21	82

*Note:* A positive value indicates a bias towards Labour; a negative value indicates a bias towards Conservative. Total bias does not simply equal the sum of the individual elements because of interactions between them.

substantial advantage from being strong in the smaller (mainly inner city) constituencies was largely removed by the Boundary Commissions' redistricting exercise (Johnston *et al.*, 1996), this has been partially reversed by subsequent population movements. Labour also continues to benefit from differential rates of turnout, while the historic advantage accruing to the Conservatives from the large number of 'wasted' minor party votes has been significantly reduced by the greater success of those parties in securing enough votes to achieve victory. The big shift, however, is in the efficiency factor. A slight Conservative bias of three seats in 1992 has been transformed into a pro-Labour bias of 42 in 1997. Labour did not continue to build up large majorities in its safe seats, nor did it win lots of votes in Conservative safe seats. Rather, Labour increased its vote enough to win seats in the places where it mattered most.

The implication of these calculations is that the electoral system is now massively biased in Labour's favour. But the calculations assume uniform

swing, an assumption 1997. Clearly, if the C each constituency, th eliminated. Neverthe interpretations are p indeed suffered a lon seats. Under this scen and it may take mar Basildon, now appare revert to the Conserv attention paid to tar electorates. Under thi reflects a change in th campaign in 1997 (p Establishing the corr elections – but what is success in 1997 was c but also winning man city ghettos into whic 1980s. It has now fe suburbia and rural are: to escape from those a

### Conclusions

The 1997 general elec century British politic country's electoral g underlying patterns at relative topography of baseline did. To that e behind, the same elect

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## D PARTIES REVIEW

## SYSTEM

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swing, an assumption which, as we have already seen, was not realized in 1997. Clearly, if the Conservatives were able exactly to reverse the swing in each constituency, then the efficiency element of bias would all but be eliminated. Nevertheless these figures are extremely significant and two interpretations are possible. First, it may be that the Conservatives have indeed suffered a long-term reverse in a large number of hitherto marginal seats. Under this scenario, the pro-Labour bias in the electoral system is real and it may take many years before seats such as Brighton Pavilion and Basildon, now apparently 'safe' Labour seats with majorities over 25 per cent, revert to the Conservative fold. Alternatively, it may be that the increasing attention paid to target seats has produced a greater volatility in their electorates. Under this interpretation the unprecedented scale of bias largely reflects a change in the 'rules of the game' resulting from Labour's targeted campaign in 1997 (plus the parallel campaign by the Liberal Democrats). Establishing the correct interpretation is a task for future research – and elections – but what is clear is that the local geography of Labour's campaign success in 1997 was crucial to its overall goal of not only winning more votes but also winning many more seats and escaping from its northern and inner-city ghettos into which it had retreated in the face of Thatcherism during the 1980s. It has now forced the Tories into a similar ghetto, in England's suburbia and rural areas, and it will take a substantial targeted campaign for it to escape from those areas in 2002 and 2007.

### Conclusions

The 1997 general election produced one of the largest landslides in twentieth-century British politics. But it was built on the existing foundations of the country's electoral geography. Labour's success did not change basic underlying patterns at either the regional or the inter-constituency scale. The relative topography of the national electoral map did not change, though the baseline did. To that extent, the 1997 general election was fought on, and left behind, the same electoral terrain as previous contests.

Clearly, however, while the relative topography of the electoral map remained as before, the absolute topography changed substantially. Our analyses show that local scale variations in how the parties campaigned and in how voters responded to particular electoral conditions played an important part in creating the detail of the new electoral map. The Liberal Democrats' seat-targeting efforts paid off handsomely, for instance, giving them their best ever representation in Parliament (and the best representation for a third party since before the Second World War), even though their overall share of the vote fell slightly. But even where seats were not targeted, effective local campaigns (especially by Labour and the Liberal Democrats where they were the challengers) brought dividends in 1997.

Part of the impact of local campaigns by opposition parties seems to have been to encourage another source of local scale variations, tactical voting. Many voters in 1997 clearly wanted to unseat members of the governing Conservative party, and were willing to vote for the opposition candidate best placed to do so – with sometimes spectacular effect (as in the defeat of Michael Portillo, Secretary of State for Defence, in Enfield Southgate). To reiterate, the local geography of the election (both in terms of the opposition parties' campaigns and of voters' actions to unseat Conservative MPs) was crucial to the scale of New Labour's victory, and to the depth of the Conservatives' defeat.

The hill that the Conservative party needs to climb in order to win next time is high and steep. As our analysis of electoral bias shows, Labour now enjoys a large advantage as a result of the workings of the first-past-the-post system. It remains the case, however, that the New Labour landslide was built on the same old electoral geography.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

1. All of our analyses exclude two constituencies: Tatton, where the Labour and Liberal Democrat candidates withdrew and the incumbent Conservative lost to an independent fighting on an 'anti-sleaze' ticket; and West Bromwich West, where the incumbent Speaker was not opposed by any major-party candidate. The boundaries of most constituencies were changed between 1992 and 1997 as a result of the Boundary Commissions' fourth periodic reviews. To measure change between the two elections, therefore, we have estimated what the result would have been in the new constituencies if they had been used for the 1992 contest, using a regression-based model incorporating regional-, inter-constituency- and local-scale variables (Rossiter *et al.*, 1997a). Though different from those produced for BBC/ITN/PA (Rallings and Thrasher, 1995), they are at least as reliable as a basis for assessing inter-election change (see Curtice and Steed, 1997).
2. Because the Census is only taken on a decennial basis, we have to assume that the relative values of the 12 independent variables remain constant across the 639 constituencies.
3. At the time of writing, we had data on campaign spending for 572 constituencies: the following analyses are restricted to this set unless stated otherwise.
4. Labour's targets included most of the marginal seats in which the party was the challenger. Hence we have not included a dummy variable for Labour target (since it would be strongly related to marginality).
5. Where there were two tiers of local government in a locality, we used the smaller scale.
6. The constituency flow-of-the-vote matrices were estimated using the well-tried entropy-maximizing procedure (see Johnston, 1985; for more details on the 1992–97 matrix, see Johnston *et al.*, 1997).
7. Because we are using data on campaign spending, our analyses are restricted to the 572 constituencies for which these are currently available.

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