ELECTIONS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN BRITAIN

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Second Edition

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface to the first edition</i>	ix
<i>Preface to the second edition</i>	xi
I THE STUDY OF ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR	I
Why study elections?	I
Analysing election results	4
Types of data	4
Sample surveys and the analysis of nominal data	6
The analysis of interval-scale data	14
Interpreting correlation coefficients	18
Measuring electoral change	19
Aggregate and survey data compared	23
Notes	25
2 THE ERA OF ALIGNMENT 1950–70	27
Two models of voting behaviour	27
Aligned voting in Britain 1950–70	31
Partisan alignment	32
Class alignment	34
Defining class	35
Other social influences on voting	36
Explaining the ‘deviants’: working-class Tories	44

Conclusion	48
Notes	50
3 PARTISAN AND CLASS DEALIGNMENT AFTER 1970	52
Partisan dealignment	53
Explaining partisan dealignment	55
Class dealignment	60
Explaining class dealignment	62
The debate over class dealignment	67
<i>How Britain Votes</i> : a revisionist view	67
<i>Understanding Political Change</i> : the debate continued	72
The consequences of dealignment: electoral volatility	73
Other social characteristics	78
Conclusion	83
Notes	84
4 ISSUE VOTING	85
Conditions for issue voting	86
Issue voting in the era of alignment	87
Measuring issue voting	89
Evidence of issue voting after 1970	91
Critics of issue voting	97
Judgemental voting	101
The economy and voting	102
Conclusion	105
Notes	106
5 PARTY LEADERS, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND THE MEDIA	107
The impact of party leaders	108
Election campaigns	112
Local campaigns	115
The national campaign	117
The effects of the media	119
Television	121
The press	124
Public opinion polls	129
Conclusion	135
Notes	135

6	TRENDS IN GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS	136
	Turn-out	137
	Patterns of party support 1950–70	144
	Patterns of party support 1970–87	149
	Conclusion	160
	Notes	160
7	THE 1992 GENERAL ELECTION AND THE ELECTORAL OUTLOOK	162
	The 1992 election	162
	Variations in swing	164
	The electoral system	167
	Social groups and party choice	168
	Judgemental voting	169
	The electoral outlook	171
	The Conservatives	172
	Labour	174
	Liberal Democrats	177
	Conclusion	179
	Notes	179
	 <i>Bibliography</i>	 180
	<i>Index</i>	187

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Elections in Britain, as in all liberal democracies, are central to the political process. They involve, to some extent, almost the entire adult population and inform almost every aspect of political life. Not surprisingly, interest in elections is also widespread – from students and teachers of British politics at school or undergraduate level to journalists, members of political parties and many other-wise ‘ordinary’ people. The problem for people like these is that in recent years the specialised literature dealing with elections and voting behaviour in Britain has grown enormously and has become highly technical and statistically complex.

My intention in this book is to introduce readers to this wider literature in a way that is as non-technical as I can make it. I hope that there is enough ‘meat’ in the book to satisfy undergraduates and A-level students but I hope, too, that those whose interest in the subject is more general will find the book rewarding. With this audience in mind, I have had to simplify some rather complicated material and I apologise in advance to any of the authors discussed who may think that I have over-simplified their arguments, theories or conclusions. *Really* serious students of electoral analysis must consult the primary literature themselves.

Talking about, reading about, observing, participating in and even doing research on elections are not just for ‘serious students’, however. If any readers who are not currently students acquire from this book a fuller understanding of trends in British elections

and a keener, more critical interest in the electoral process than it will have served one of its major purposes.

Preparing the book has, of course, involved me in numerous debts. I am grateful to the following for permission to reproduce material: American Enterprise Institute, Butterworth Scientific Ltd, Cambridge University Press, David Butler, Ivor Crewe, Colin Crouch, Patrick Dunleavy, Anthony Heath and William Miller.

Jeremy Mitchell commented helpfully on an early draft of the manuscript and John Bochel also gave me the benefit of his sage advice. Russell Price, with his enviable eye for detail, made numerous useful suggestions on points of style. I am especially grateful to my colleague Gordon Hands who read and re-read numerous drafts and with whom I have had lengthy and profitable discussions at every stage of writing. The general editor of the series, John Benyon, and Philip Cross of Philip Allan Ltd were valued sources of encouragement and advice. Finally, my wife Barbara not only supported and encouraged me and tolerated a good deal, but also mastered a new word processing system to prepare the manuscript.

Despite the best efforts of all of these, there remain, no doubt, errors of interpretation and (just possibly) fact. Responsibility for these is mine.

David Denver
Lancaster, 1989

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The comments that I have received from colleagues about the first edition of the book have been generally encouraging. In this edition, therefore, the structure of the book is broadly the same, although I have taken the opportunity not only to update data and incorporate the most recent literature but also to include some new topics (e.g. volatility) and clarify my ideas on others.

I have received conflicting advice about the introductory statistical material in the first chapter but have decided to retain it as I think that some grasp of the basic ideas presented there is essential for understanding the rest of the book.

Almost anyone writing about British elections owes a debt of gratitude to the British Election Study team. The data from their surveys of the 1992 election have been made available with remarkable rapidity and the fact that I have been able to use these data has made this edition much more valuable than would have been possible otherwise.

Finally, I should like to thank Clare Grist of Simon & Schuster and June Rye for help of various kinds in the preparation of this edition.

David Denver
Lancaster, November 1993