

Labour's performance was convincingly 'better' than that of Conservative councils only for public housing construction. Moreover, the impression that construction policies were influenced by electoral considerations is intensified by the resistance of Labour authorities to council house sales,³⁵ by Conservative cities supporting other aspects of housing provision (like repairs) more generously than Labour councils and by local Conservative opposition to higher-tier governmental pressure to build more public housing.³⁶ This does not mean that Conservative and Labour housing commitments were principally provoked by electoral considerations. However, there was an inclination in this direction.

Whether this inclination was 'deliberate' or 'accidental', the principal conclusion of this study contradicts Sharpe and Newton's assumption about party effects. Although their unitary approach offers the potential for a theoretical advance in output investigations, there is scope for refinement in their conceptualization. The validity of Sharpe and Newton's assumption that party ideology is a primary city interest rests on the accuracy of a pluralist theory of the state. This raises some theoretical problems, since Sharpe and Newton's 'central-place' and 'primary economic activity' city interests fall more clearly into an instrumental-Marxist state model. This inconsistency is compounded by the regularity with which bureaucratic effects are seen to be critical in local policy-making.³⁷ The analytical procedures of all local output investigations are inevitably underpinned by specific theories of the state (albeit only implicitly in most studies). Thus, the demographic model accounted for output variations by way of pluralist notions about the responsiveness of policy-makers to the 'demands' (or 'needs') of local electorates. In stressing the insulation of local policy-making from the general population, Sharpe and Newton cast doubt on such pluralist ideals. Yet pluralist overtones are contained in their own assumptions about the effects of party ideology. By challenging the accuracy of this assumption, this investigation implies that other interests – particularly those of business, bureaucracies and politicians – outweigh pluralist concerns. This suggests that a major weakness of local output studies has been their underlying acceptance of an inappropriate theory of the state.

³⁵ K. Hoggart, 'Political Party Control and the Sale of Local Authority Dwellings 1974–1983', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, III (1985), 463–74.

³⁶ For example, K. Young and J. Kramer, *Strategy and Conflict in Metropolitan Housing* (London: Heinemann, 1978).

³⁷ An examination of theoretical issues raised by this inconsistency can be found in K. Hoggart, 'Geography, Political Control and Local Government Policy Outputs', *Progress in Human Geography*, x (1986), 1–23.

The Ideological Position and Electoral Appeal of Labour Party Candidates: An Analysis of Labour's Performance at the 1983 General Election

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There is a generally accepted view among academic observers of British politics that no strong relationship exists between the ideological position of a party's candidate and the vote-winning capacity of his or her party. This is said to be a reflection partly of the elec-

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torate's lack of knowledge of particular candidates and partly of the strength of party allegiance.¹ Political developments in the 1980s, however, suggest that there is an *a priori* case for re-examining this accepted view, at least as far as the Labour party is concerned.

Constitutional changes within the Labour party and the subsequent formation of the SDP in 1981 have served to highlight divisions within the Labour party and to draw public attention to the ideological position of the party's candidates. The new system of candidate selection gives greater prominence to the views of particular candidates while the presence of Alliance contestants for the first time in 1983 gave voters at that election an increased opportunity to reject Labour candidates with a left-wing image. Moreover, the party's leadership made explicit attempts to block the selection of those whom they considered to be undesirable candidates, such as Pat Wall in Bradford North and Peter Tatchell in Bermondsey. Labour's contrasting electoral performance in by-elections in Bermondsey and Darlington in 1983 was attributed to the personalities and political views of the two candidates, Peter Tatchell and Ossie O'Brien, while in Fulham in March 1986 Nick Raynsford's moderate image was considered to be a major element in Labour's victory.

This Note attempts to establish whether there is a systematic empirical relationship between the position of a candidate on Labour's political spectrum and his or her electoral appeal. To pursue such an enquiry we need both a means of placing candidates on a right-left scale and an operational measure of a candidate's political appeal.

The most commonly used measures of a party's success or failure depend on the concept of percentage-point change; this is used in the calculation of 'swing' and is one possible indicator of the change in a party's fortunes between general elections. Alternatively, using census and other data, a model of a party's vote can be built up. The vote implied for the party in each constituency by the model can then be compared with the actual vote received by the party.

An example of the latter type of analysis is contained in an account of the 1983 general election by McAllister and Rose.² They describe their analysis as purely 'psephological' and in general they are concerned with the impact of social structure and territorial influences on the pattern of election results. From our point of view, the most interesting part of their work is that in which grouped census data are used to calculate an 'expected' vote for the two major parties in every constituency in Great Britain.³

Using factor analysis, McAllister and Rose list four factors – 'socio-economic status', 'immigrants', 'elderly' and 'agriculture' – which jointly constitute what the authors call a constituency's 'social structure'. If the four factors are treated as predictors in a multiple regression analysis an 'expected' vote on the basis of this 'social structure' can be derived. By subtracting this expected vote from a party's actual vote a 'residual', which is either positive or negative, is obtained. This measures the extent to which a particular candidate

¹ See, for example, David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1971), pp. 509–12.

² Ian McAllister and Richard Rose, *The Nationwide Competition for Votes: The 1983 British Election* (London: Frances Pinter, 1984).

³ A similar multiple regression analysis which provides figures only for the Alliance vote is contained in John Curtice and Michael Steed, *One in Four* (London: Association of Liberal Councillors, 1983).

in a particular constituency performed better or worse than one would have expected from looking at the census characteristics of his or her constituency.⁴

In this Note the mean residual scores of various groups of Labour candidates are compared and tests of statistical significance are applied to the differences in means that appear. As a measure of a candidate's electoral attractiveness, residual scores have a number of advantages. The political hue of the constituency is largely taken into account by the regression on social structure. Moreover, unlike percentage-point changes, they are neutral with respect to the time during which a particular candidate's personal vote has been built up. For example, in the case of Tony Benn, a comparison of the percentage point change in Labour's vote in his former constituency of Bristol East between 1979 and 1983 with that in the country as a whole might, subject to the influences of other factors, reveal something about changes in voters' perceptions of Tony Benn between the two years, but would say nothing about the size of his (positive or negative) personal vote in the base year of 1979. Moreover, in this context and in the specific circumstances of 1983, residual score is preferable to percentage-point change for two important reasons. Firstly, there was no natural 1979 base figure against which to calculate the percentage-point change of Liberal/SDP Alliance candidates. Secondly, the major boundary redistribution of 1983 and the necessity in most cases of using 'best estimates' of the 1979 constituency results reduces the accuracy of the percentage-point change measure.

Although residual scores provide a better measure of electoral attractiveness than percentage-point changes, they have problems of their own that are not fully shared by the percentage-point change alternative. The major problem is that the distribution of residuals can be affected by factors other than the candidate's electoral attractiveness. The most important variables, to which McAllister and Rose draw attention, are regional and national (i.e. whether the constituency is in Scotland or Wales). Turnout and the presence of an incumbent MP, by contrast, are reported to have little impact.⁵ When comparing different categories of Labour candidates, we must be careful to control for nation and region, and other variables excluded from the model, if their values are not fairly evenly distributed among the categories we are considering.

The difficulties involved in placing individual candidates on a right-left scale arise from the widely discussed conceptual problem that right and left cannot be regarded as points on a simple continuum. The political spectrum might be said to contain at least three dimensions: one representing the individual's attitude to state intervention in the economy, a second describing his or her position on questions of civil liberty and a third dealing with matters of nationalism and internationalism. However, we can still make use of indirect measures of candidates' political positions in order to create simple right-wing and left-wing groupings. In particular we can use the recorded vote of Labour MPs in the

⁴ For a full description see McAllister and Rose, *Nationwide Competition for Votes*, Appendix B. The relative importance of each factor is discussed and described as follows: 'The order in which the factors emerged from the analysis does not indicate that one is more important than the other, for example, that socio-economic status is a more important social structural measure than immigrants; on the contrary, it merely reflects the number of variables included in the final solution which loaded on each factor. The first factor, with an eigenvalue of 4.65, explained 29 percent of the variance, while the second, immigrants, had an eigenvalue of 3.73 and explained 23 percent of the variance. The remaining two factors, the elderly and agriculture, had eigenvalues of 3.00 and 1.89 and explained 19 percent and 12 percent of the variance respectively.'

⁵ McAllister and Rose, *Nationwide Competition for Votes*, p. 176.

1983 Labour party leadership and deputy leadership elections to place sitting MPs into right and left categories. We can also consider fringe-group membership and some survey data in the case of candidates as a whole.

THE RELATIVE PERFORMANCE OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF SITTING LABOUR MPS AT THE 1983 GENERAL ELECTION

In this section the results of the Labour leadership and deputy leadership elections are related to the average residuals obtained by various groups of sitting MPs. Table 1 provides a list of the major voting categories in an approximate right–left order.⁶ The mean residual score of each group of the 209 MPs eligible to vote is listed in Column 3 of the table. There is a clear tendency for the right-wing groupings to score better than their left-wing counterparts. ‘Shore for Leader’, for example, scores 7.1 while MPs in the ‘Heffer for Leader’ category manage only 3.8.

To establish whether or not these differences can be attributed simply to chance factors we need to apply a test of statistical significance to the differences between the means of each grouping and that of the 209 members of the PLP. In this case we standardize the differences by translating them into *Z* scores. The accompanying significance levels are listed in column 5 of Table 1.⁷

The only score that is significant at a level of 95 per cent or above is that of the group who voted Kinnock for leader but neither Hattersley nor Meacher for deputy leader. We cannot, however, attribute this directly to the group’s centrist position on a right–left scale. As one might expect, given that Denzil Davies was a deputy leadership candidate, there is a large number of Welsh constituencies in this group; the high residual score of the Kinnock–Davies voters largely reflects the strength of Labour in Wales, a strength that is by no means wholly accounted for by the social structural characteristics of Welsh constituencies.

In order to concentrate solely on right- and left-wingers, we exclude the two centre groups and ‘others’ listed in Table 1 and re-categorize the remainder into two broad categories, right and left. Together these constitute 135 MPs. The right consists of all MPs who voted for either Shore or Hattersley as leader; the left comprises those who registered a vote either for Heffer as leader or for Meacher as deputy leader (all Campaign Group MPs with the exception of Tam Dalyell were in the left group). In Table 2 we describe the results of applying a difference-of means test to the 3 percentage point difference in residual means between the right-wing and left-wing group. As sample sizes have been increased, a statistically significant result is now considerably easier to obtain. The table reveals that this 3 percentage point difference in residual means would occur by chance only four in a hundred times if there was no real difference in the performance of the two groups.

⁶ The full list is as follows: Shore/Hattersley 11, Shore/Dunwoody 7, Shore/Davies 3, Hattersley/Hattersley 50, Hattersley/Davies 2, Hattersley/Dunwoody 1, Kinnock/Hattersley 50, Kinnock/Davies 15, Kinnock/No vote 3, Kinnock/Meacher 32, Heffer/Meacher 27, Heffer/Davies 1, Heffer/No vote 1, No vote/Davies 1, No vote/Hattersley 1, No vote/No vote 4.

⁷ When the population is normal (or in this case approximately normal) and when the standard deviation of the population is known, it is possible to make use of a simple *Z*-test rather than either the *t*-test that is used in estimation exercises or any of its non-parametric counterparts. The value of *Z* largely depends on two variables, first the size of the difference between the population and sample means, second the size of the sample. It is essentially the difference between the sample mean and the population mean expressed in units of the standard deviation of the population. See H.M. Blalock, *Social Statistics*, revised 2nd edn (Tokyo: McGraw-Hill, 1979), pp. 96–101.

TABLE 1 *Labour Leadership Vote 1983 (Major Categories) in Right-Left Order*

Major category	Frequency	Residual mean	Z value	Significance level
Shore for leader (right)	21	7.1	+0.97	67%
Hattersley for leader (right)	53	6.5	+1.05	71%
Kinnock/Hattersley (centre)	50	3.2	-1.57	88%
Kinnock for leader but neither Hattersley nor Meacher for deputy leader (centre)	18	9.8	+2.17	97%
Kinnock/Meacher (left)	32	3.7	-0.94	65%
Heffer for leader (left)	29	3.8	-0.84	60%
Others	6	3.4		
Population of all Labour MPs elected at 1983 general election	209	5.2	(Standard deviation of population residuals = 9.0)	

TABLE 2 *Difference in Performance between Left and Right MPs at the 1983 General Election*

Right or left	Major categories (frequency)	Frequency	Residual mean	Variance	Z value	Significance level
Right	Shore for leader (21) Hattersley for leader (53)	74	6.7	68.8	2.07	96%
Left	Kinnock/Meacher (32) Heffer for leader (29)	61	3.7	70.9		

At this point, however, we must ask whether this difference can be attributed to some factor other than candidates' positions on a right-left scale. From McAllister and Rose's own analysis of the residuals, we know that nation and region are important, and it can also be supposed that competition from SDP defectors from Labour might distort the right-left comparison we are trying to make. Nine left-wing Labour MPs were opposed by SDP defectors while none of the right-wingers was affected.⁸

⁸ Further control variables could, of course, be introduced but examination of the revised data suggests nothing of quantitative importance. Deselected Labour MPs opposed Labour as Independent Labour candidates in only two of the sixty-one seats won by Labour left-wingers. In general Labour right-wingers have served in Parliament longer than left-wingers, 54 per cent of whom were first elected at or after the 1979 general election.

TABLE 3 *Residual Means of Right-wing and Left-wing MPs*

Right or left	Uncontrolled	Controlling for region	Controlling for region and SDP defectors	Z value (after controls)*	Significance level (after controls)
Right	6.7	3.3	3.1		
Left	3.7	1.4	1.8	1.29	80%
Difference	3.0	1.9	1.3		

* Variance: right = 53.1; left = 61.8.

To control for the effect of these variables and at the same time make use of all 135 cases in our sample, we need to construct the distribution of residuals that would have resulted if all sitting MPs had been exposed to the same national, regional and competitive influences. First, we can adjust for region (and thereby also for nation) by applying McAllister and Rose's regional averages (for all candidates) to the individual residuals. This means, for example, adding 8.6 to the scores of all the Labour MPs who come from the North of Scotland and subtracting 4.7 from those whose seats are in the North of England.⁹

The impact of nationalist candidates is reflected in the distribution of residuals by region. Having taken into account regional variation, we find that the twenty-seven SDP defectors managed on average to reduce Labour's natural vote by 3.9 per cent. In order to spread the influence of this variable over the population of right-wing and left-wing MPs as a whole, we need to adjust the scores of both the nine MPs (all left-wingers) who were in competition with SDP defectors and the remaining 126 who were not.¹⁰ The effect of controls on region and the competition of SDP defectors is summarized in Table 3.

The introduction of the two control variables substantially reduces the difference in means between right and left. The final controlled difference of 1.3 per cent is no longer statistically significant, even when using a one-tailed test. As we would expect, the variance of both groups is reduced. The difference between the performance of sitting Labour MPs and Labour candidates as a whole is also substantially reduced.

We now have three possible point estimates of the difference in performance between right- and left-wing MPs: 3 per cent, without introducing control variables; 1.9 per cent, controlling for region; and 1.3 per cent, controlling for both region and the competition of SDP defectors. Which estimate is to be preferred depends largely on the causal

⁹ The regional figures come from McAllister and Rose, *Nationwide Competition for Votes*, Appendix A. The residual mean for Labour candidates nationwide was 0.4 which compares with a figure of -8.2 for the North of Scotland and +5.1 for the North of England. The adjustment equalizes the residual means of all ten British regions (McAllister and Rose definition). The principle involved is the same as that which underlies the analysis of variance. It constructs the distribution of residuals that would have occurred if all candidates had been exposed to the same regional influences. See Blalock, *Social Statistics*, pp. 354-5.

¹⁰ As before, the adjustment equalizes the means of the relevant different groupings - in this case the candidates who were opposed by SDP defectors and the candidates who did not face such opposition. We add 3.7 per cent to the (already regionally adjusted) residual scores of all members of the former group and subtract 0.2 per cent from the scores of the latter.

relations that are assumed to exist between the variables contained in the model. The validity of our lowest estimate of the difference (1.3 per cent) depends on the assumption that social structure, region and SDP competition are independent variables which operate equally on both right-wingers and left-wingers. We have not, for example, considered the possibility that it is the ideological position of candidates which itself determines part (or, in principle, even all) of the regional variation, although the argument that the Labour party has a more right-wing image in some areas than others and the fact that the far-left tends to predominate in certain cities suggests that this is a possible line of inquiry. Nor have we considered other variables that might lead us to reconsider the causal assumptions. Length of parliamentary service, for example, explains a large proportion of the difference between right and left residual means using the unadjusted residuals but virtually none of it after the control variables have been introduced.¹¹ Clearly evidence from previous elections and from other sources could be assembled to build up a theoretically-based and more sophisticated model of Labour's vote.

THE RELATIVE PERFORMANCE OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF LABOUR CANDIDATES AT THE 1983 GENERAL ELECTION

In this section we use, in general, the same statistical techniques as in the previous section. Less information is available on the ideological positions of unsuccessful Labour candidates than for incumbent MPs and we shall confine ourselves to two groups: a small group of far-left candidates and a larger group of respondents to a 1983 BBC questionnaire. The data are summarized in Table 4.

The far-left group consists of five candidates who were allegedly Militant and nine who were associated with a range of left-wing newspapers.¹² In general this far-left group, five of whom were elected as MPs, did 3.1 percentage-points worse in terms of residual score than Labour candidates as a whole. As the sample size is only fourteen the difference is not, however, statistically significant. Moreover, in three of the seats concerned the Labour party candidate was opposed by a former Labour MP standing as an Independent Labour candidate.¹³ Although none of the three Independent Labour candidates made any dramatic impact on Labour's natural vote, as we have measured it, their intervention probably cost Labour one seat (Bradford North) and, in terms of our analysis, was sufficient to affect significantly the residual mean of our small sample. If we assume that all votes cast for Independent Labour candidates were at the expense of Labour we can control for this effect by adding roughly 30 percentage-points to the far-left's sum of residual means. This nearly eliminates the difference between the sample and population

¹¹ If we turn length of parliamentary service into a dichotomized nominal scale and compare the mean residual scores of MPs elected before the 1979 General Election with those elected at or after it, we find a difference of 2.2 on the unadjusted residuals but one of only 0.1 on the adjusted scores. 'Time first-elected' clearly correlates with 'region'.

¹² These were: *Militant* – Pat Wall (Bradford North); Terry Fields (Liverpool Broadgreen); Rod Fitch (Brighton Kemptown); Dave Nellist (Coventry South East); Cathy Wilson (Isle of Wight); *loosely associated with Socialist Organizer Alliance* – Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North); Valerie Veness (Hornsey and Wood Green); Paul Boateng (Hertfordshire West); Harry Cohen (Leyton); Chris Smith (Islington South and Finsbury); Audrey Wise (Woolwich); Tony Banks (Newham NW); John Denham (Southampton Itchen); Alan Whitehead (Southampton Test).

¹³ Ben Ford (Ind. Lab.) fought Bradford North against Pat Wall. Arthur Lewis (Ind. Lab.) contested Newham North West against Tony Banks. Michael O'Halloran (Ind. Lab.) and ex-SDP stood against Jeremy Corbyn in Islington North.

TABLE 4 *Residual Scores of Groups of Labour Candidates Compared with Scores of All Labour Candidates*

Group	Frequency	Residual mean	Difference from population mean	Z value	Significance level
Far left (pre-1983 election newspaper reports)	14	-2.7	-3.1	1.38	83%
Supporters of Benn, Skinner or Heffer for Labour leader in answer to hypothetical question in BBC questionnaire	38	-3.4	-3.8	2.79	99.5%
Population of all Labour candidates	633	0.4	(standard deviation of population residuals = 8.4)		

means. There is no conclusive evidence that these far-left candidates were an electoral liability to the party in the seats where they stood.

A larger, although by no means complete, group of left-wing candidates can be identified by looking at the results of a survey carried out by BBC Television's Political Research Unit of all major party candidates in the weeks preceding the 1983 election. Out of the 633 Labour candidates, 356 returned the questionnaire they were sent.¹⁴ Among a range of questions, they were asked who they would vote for as the next leader of their party if the current leader were to resign. Although this question produced a high refusal rate, thirty-six respondents named Tony Benn, one named Dennis Skinner and one Eric Heffer. These candidates, none of whom were elected, constitute the group of thirty-eight whose mean residual score, at -3.1, was significantly lower than that of candidates as a whole (see Table 4).

As before, however, we have to be careful to check that the apparently poor performance of this group of candidates was not in fact a reflection of the influence of another characteristic of the sample. In this case a very high proportion of the respondents came from the south of England, an area in which Labour's average residual mean was -4.3, 1.2 percentage-points lower than our left-wing sample mean of -3.1. Whether the bias in the sample reflects a differential incidence of left-wing candidatures or, alternatively, a differential rate of response to the questionnaire, we must clearly control for the regional variable. Adjustment of scores to take the regional bias in the sample into account exactly halves the difference between the sample and population means (from 3.8 to 1.9 percentage-points). The difference is no longer statistically significant.

CONCLUSION

We have found fairly strong statistical evidence that left-wing Labour candidates perform worse in electoral terms than right-wing ones; we estimate the magnitude of the difference

¹⁴ My thanks to Linda Anderson at the Political Research Unit for allowing me to use the results of this survey.

in performance to be between 1 and 3 percentage-points. This magnitude of difference is not sufficient to refute the accepted view that the electoral impact of a candidate's ideological position is small; nor is it sufficient, at least on a constituency level, to explain the Labour party's concern over the selection of particular candidates. If, however, the strength of party allegiance continues to decline and public attention continues to be drawn to intra-party ideological differences, there is a case for examining the question once more, and for other political parties, as well as Labour. The next general election will provide another set of data to which the same methods of analysis could be applied, while survey questions could be devised to approach some aspects of the question more directly.

A Note on Reece's Proportional-Loss Model

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In a recent publication Reece proposes to substitute for the 'swing' method what he labels a *proportional-loss* model.¹ Although his argument against the logic of the swing method is perfectly valid, this short Note will demonstrate that what he offers as a substitute is just as unsound intellectually.

Reece presents two major arguments in support of his proposals, namely his claim to be good at predicting the results of general elections and a so-called verification exercise based on an analysis of the 1955 and 1959 results in 290 Labour-held seats. As regards the former, his publication features a selection of newspaper articles in support of this contention. In the *Daily Telegraph* of 17 May 1983, he predicts quite correctly a Conservative landslide. His actual prediction was 395 Conservative seats, 225 Labour, eleven for the Alliance and one each for the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists. These are indeed surprisingly close to the eventual outcome – but they are based on a prediction of the popular vote of 45 per cent Conservative, 33 per cent Labour and 20 per cent Alliance! In what sense these two sets of figures taken together could be seen to validate the approach is difficult to see.

Turning now to the so-called verification exercise, the results of this are reproduced in Figure 1. Reece bases his claim on the fact that the regression line through these points comes close to that corresponding to his proportional-loss model. This calls into further disrepute the already tarnished name of regression analysis. The R^2 value must be only marginally greater than zero and the associated standard error of the estimates of the parameters correspondingly so large as to cause any respectable researcher to bury the results forever. Associated with this virtually random scatter diagram is a quite bizarre statement: 'The figure is probably the superposition of a number of groups of seats, with each group arranged along its own best fit lines. This would give us a pattern like the one in the figure'. This statement is simply nonsense.

The proportional-loss model is best characterized by reference to a transition matrix but, before introducing that matrix, let us consider the proposal in numerical terms. In

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¹ See G. Reece, *Voter Representation: A Study of the British Electoral System and Its Consequences* (London: Conservative Action for Electoral Reform, 1985).