Notes and Comments

Official and Reported Turnout in the British General Election of 1987

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This Note looks afresh at the question of turnout in British general elections, using data gathered in the 1987 British General Election Study, together with information on the electoral behaviour of the sample, collected independently of the BGES survey.[1] The official rate of turnout for Great Britain in 1987 (the number of votes cast over the number of entries on the electoral register) was around 75 per cent; that is to say, according to official figures, about one in four registered electors did not vote.[2] In common with earlier surveys, the BGES indicates a much higher turnout figure than the official one; 86 per cent of respondents to the survey reported that they had voted.

The aims of this Note are, firstly, to explore this discrepancy between the official and the survey-based estimates of turnout; secondly, to assess how representative the survey respondents are of voters and of non-voters; and, thirdly, to reassess survey-based research on the determinants of non-voting.

SOURCES OF DATA

In our analysis of turnout we have drawn on data from the 1987 BGES post-election survey. The BGES issued sample comprised 6,000 names and addresses of persons known to be over the age of 18 on polling day, drawn from the electoral registers of one polling district in each of 250 constituencies in England, Scotland and Wales. The achieved sample

contained 3,826 respondents. While the turnout reported by the achieved sample was about ten points higher than the official record, the distribution of the vote was within sampling error of the actual result: 44 per cent reported voting Conservative, 31 per cent Labour, 24 per cent the Alliance and 1 per cent the other parties. It should be noted that the last of the fieldwork was not completed until September, some three months after the general election.

Because we believed that the nature of the subject made it less than completely accessible by survey methods alone, we also sought information about the sample's turnout that would be more reliable than simply accepting the respondent's reports to our interviewers. This came from the official records showing which electors voted, compiled by the presiding officer at every polling station. These records are held for one year after every parliamentary election in the keeping of the Clerk of the Crown, and they are open to public inspection during this period.[3] They can tell us one of three things: that someone polled in respect of a particular register entry, that no one polled in respect of that entry, or that a postal vote was issued.

We must emphasize that the official records cannot tell us definitively whether members of the issued sample voted, only whether or not they voted *in respect of the register entry* from which their name was drawn. It is always possible that because of double entries in the electoral registers, some members of the issued sample voted in respect of a *different* address from that issued to our interviewers. We had, however, no way of determining this from the official records. In the case of postal voters, as well, there is unfortunately no way of knowing whether the postal vote was returned, although we do know that about 86 per cent of all postal ballot papers that are issued are indeed returned.[4]

We believe that the official records represent a valuable and much-neglected source, and to our knowledge this is the first time they have been used in conjunction with a major post-election survey in Britain.[5] In particular, the official records allow us to talk more authoritatively about the non-respondents in our sample, who are the people we normally know least about.

The official records were successfully checked for 5,847 (all but 153) members of the BGES *issued* sample, and then added to our survey data.[6] According to the official records, 74 per cent of the issued sample voted in respect of the issued addresses and 2 per

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[3] We are very grateful to Enid Smith, Jill Adam and Anthea Peries of the Lord Chancellor's Department for their efficiency and good humour in the mammoth task of locating the records that we wished to see, and we are also grateful to Debs Ghate of Nuffield College for her assistance in checking through them.

[4] *Return of Election Expenses* (London: HMSO, 1988), p. 9.

[5] The only other British study that we know used turnout data in combination with survey material was conducted by Catherine Marsh during the 1983 election. The sample of the pre-election poll conducted in Cambridge was checked against the official record of voting in order to test, amongst other things, the validity of the propensity to vote question as a predictor of turnout. See Marsh, 'Predictions of Voting Behaviour from a Pre-election Survey', *Political Studies*, 33 (1985), 642–8. In the United States various scholars have used official records similar to our own to check the validity of respondents' reports of their turnout. See Michael W. Traugott and John P. Katosh, 'Response Validity in Surveys of Voting Behavior', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 42 (1979), 359–77; Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, 'Measurement and Mismeasurement of the Validity of the Self-Reported Vote', *American Journal of Political Science*, 30 (1986), 771–85.

[6] Some of the missing cases were due to the illegibility of the records, but most were due to the fact that the records for some half dozen whole constituencies were not available.

cent received postal ballots. Whatever assumption one chooses to make about the pro-portion of postal voters returning their ballots, the turnout of our issued sample would appear to accord closely with the 75 per cent figure for Britain as a whole.

THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN OFFICIAL AND SURVEY ESTIMATES

The first problem on which we are able to shed some light is the difference between the official turnout figure of 75 per cent and the figure of 86 per cent obtained in the BGES in answer to the question, 'Did you manage to vote in the general election?' This dis-crepancy has been observed in sample surveys many times in the past.[7]

There are four main reasons that can be given for this discrepancy: misreporting by survey respondents, response bias, failure to trace all movers, and redundancy in the elec-toral register. We consider each of these in turn.

Firstly, survey respondents may misreport their turnout; in particular, some respond-ents may not admit to the interviewers that they did not vote, perhaps out of embarrass-ment at failing in their civic obligations or perhaps genuinely misremembering whether or not they had voted.

Of the 6,000 electors named in the issued sample, 3,826 were located and interviewed. Official turnout records were available for all but 97 of these respondents, leaving 3,729 respondents for whom we have both their reports of turnout and the official records.

TABLE 1   *Official and Reported Turnout of Survey Respondents*

	Reported voted	Reported did not vote
Officially voted	2,987	28
Officially did not vote	159	480
Officially voted by post	69	6

Table 1 describes the relationship between the two measures. We see from it that mis-reporting generally takes the form of respondents claiming to have voted while the official records show that they did not. Twenty-eight respondents wrongly claimed not to have voted, while there were 159 respondents who wrongly claimed that they had voted. The latter amount to no less than a quarter of all the 'true' non-voters in the achieved sample.

These misreports explain about a quarter of the eleven-point discrepancy between the survey and the official estimates of turnout. Thus 86 per cent of the respondents in Table 1 claimed to have voted, whereas (if we take the reports of the respondents issued with postal ballots to be correct) 83 per cent actually did so. The extent of misreporting among respondents is thus substantially less than that found by Traugott and Katosh in the United States. Seventy-two per cent of their respondents claimed to have voted in the 1976 presidential election, whereas the official records showed that only 61 per cent of the respondents had voted.[8]

[7] See Ivor Crewe, Tony Fox and Jim Alt, 'Non-voting in British General Elections, 1966–October 1974' in Colin Crouch, ed., *British Political Sociology Yearbook, Volume 3: Participation in Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 46. In 1983, 83 per cent of BGES respondents claimed to have voted, compared with the official figure of about 73 per cent.

[8] See Traugott and Katosh, 'Response Validity and Voting Behavior', p. 364.

Secondly, response bias may help to explain the discrepancy between the survey and the official estimates of turnout; people who do not agree to be interviewed may be somewhat different in their turnout from those who do agree. They may, for example, be less interested in, or less knowledgeable about, politics and therefore be unwilling to spend time going to the polls or being interviewed about politics.

In 1,608 cases our interviewers were able to locate the elector named in the issued sample, but for various reasons an interview was not achieved. For example, in 127 of these cases the named elector was too ill or too incapacitated to be interviewed, 77 were reported to be away during the interview period, 136 were repeatedly not at home, 72 broke their appointments with the interviewer, 966 personally refused to the interviewed, and in 135 cases someone refused for them.

TABLE 2   *Turnout of Located Individuals*

	Located non-respondents %	Located respondents %	All located individuals %
Officially voted	72	81	78
Officially did not vote	25	17	20
Officially voted by post	3	2	2
Total	100%	100%	100%
(*N*)	(1,608)	(3,729)	(5,337)

Table 2 compares the official turnout of the located non-respondents with that of the respondents. If we include postal voters along with those who voted in person, we find that 75 per cent of the located non-respondents voted compared with 83 per cent of the respondents, confirming the hypothesis of response bias. As might be expected, the bias was greatest in the case of people who were too ill or senile to be interviewed, only 42 per cent of whom actually voted, and was rather less in the case of people who personally refused to be interviewed, of whom 77 per cent voted.

We can estimate the impact of this response bias on the gap between the official and the survey estimates of turnout by adding the located non-respondents to the actual respondents to give the turnout figure for all located members of the issued sample. This is done in the third column of Table 2. If postal voters are again included with those who voted in person, it shows that 80 per cent of located members of the issued sample voted, which suggests that response bias could explain a further three points of the eleven point gap between the official and the reported turnout measures.

A third source of the discrepancy is that movers are in general under-represented in surveys, but are also disproportionately likely not to exercise their right to vote. Some 234 electors who moved locally were traced while a further 75 were traced to another part of the country. But as well as the movers we managed to find, there were some 510 members of the issued sample whom we could not locate: 24 were reported to have emigrated, 301 were reported to have moved to an unknown address and could not therefore be traced, 66 were reported to have died, and there were 115 people 'not known at this address' who may have been movers, but who could not be pursued any further. These non-located non-respondents have rather low levels of turnout, as can be seen from Table 3.

Their absence from our survey has the effect of raising the figure for reported turnout artificially.[9] The highest turnout among the unlocated non-respondents was found among those who were reported 'not known at this address', but we should be cautious here, for it seems rather improbable that all of those who voted in person in respect of the issued address were *really* movers who had returned to exercise their right to vote in the constituency. It might be wise to assume that in some cases a covert refusal to be interviewed was being made either by or on behalf of the respondent.

TABLE 3   *Turnout of Unlocated Individuals*

	Emigrated %	Moved to unknown address %	'Not known at this address' %	All %
Officially voted	13	28	42	29
Officially did not vote	83	68	56	67
Officially voted by post	4	4	2	4
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(*N*)	(24)	(301)	(115)	(510)

We cannot, however, definitively disentangle the untraced non-respondents from our fourth reason for the discrepancy between the official and the survey estimates of turnout, namely redundancy in the electoral register. Some of the movers may have left the issued addresses before the 10 October qualifying date for the new register, but may none the less have had their names carried over by the Electoral Registration Officer, and it is possible that others were legitimately registered elsewhere, and thus eligible both to vote and to be sampled in respect of their other address.

Even when it is new, then, the electoral register contains a lot of redundant or duplicate names. Comparing the 1981 census with the electoral register for that year, Todd and Butcher estimated that by April/May (the time of their study) between 10.4 and 13.5 per cent of names on the register belong to people who no longer live at their registered address. Todd and Butcher further estimated that 3.8 per cent of registered electors move in the six months between the qualifying date and April/May. Making a further allowance for deaths since the qualifying date, they concluded that between 6.1 and 9.4 per cent of names on the register were redundant at the qualifying date.[10]

Our data are broadly in line with Todd and Butcher's. In all, there were 819 (14 per cent) of individuals who were not known to be resident at the issued address at the time of the interviews (which were conducted at a rather later date in the year than Todd and Butcher's). This is a maximum estimate; we suspect that the true figure is rather lower because of the problem of covert refusals discussed above. Of these 819 people, 314 voted in person and 31 were issued with postal ballots. If we assume that these people were all entitled to vote, that is that they were indeed resident at the issued address at the qualifying

[9] As Crewe, Fox and Alt remind us, 'the official turnout level is expressed as a percentage of all those listed as eligible voters in the electoral register [whilst] survey figures ... are calculated as a percentage of those interviewed'. See 'Non-voting in British General Elections', p. 108.

[10] See Jean Todd and B. Butcher, *Electoral Registration in 1981* (London: OPCS, 1982).

date, our maximum estimate for redundancy in the register at the qualifying date becomes 474 names, 8 per cent of the total.[11] Since the true figure is likely to be rather lower (some people will have been resident at the qualifying date but died before the election, for example), we therefore incline towards the lower of Todd and Butcher's estimates, which is no more than 6 per cent redundancy.

If we take 6 per cent as the true redundancy in the electoral register, the true turnout of individuals rises from 75 to 80 per cent, thus closing the remaining gap between the official and the survey reports of turnout. At first sight, this suggests that the failure to trace some movers can be disregarded as a component of the gap. However, we should note that traced movers were included when we analysed misreporting and response bias. Some of these traced movers may have been redundant names on the electoral register, and there may thus be a small element of double counting. The estimates of response bias and misreporting should therefore perhaps be reduced somewhat.

REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE ACHIEVED SAMPLE

We turn now to consider the representativeness of the sample. Table 4 offers us a first look at this question. Of the 4,316 members of the issued sample who, according to official records, voted in person, 70 per cent were interviewed. Of the 140 to whom postal votes were issued, 54 per cent were interviewed. And of the 1,391 who did not vote, only 46 per cent were interviewed. However, a proportion of the non-voters will have been redundant names on the electoral register. If 6 per cent of names on the register were in fact redundant (that is, the lower of Todd and Butcher's estimates), then the number of 'true' non-voters in the issued sample is reduced to around 1,030 and of these some 62 per cent would have been interviewed.

TABLE 4   *Percentage of Voters and Non-voters Interviewed*

	Voted %		Did not vote %		Postal vote %	
Non-respondents	30	(1,301)	54	(752)	46	(65)
Respondents	70	(3,015)	46	(639)	54	(75)
Total sample	100% (4,316)		100% (1,391)		100% (140)	

Because our interviewers were asked to record a number of facts about all the members of the issued sample they managed to locate, regardless of whether an interview was achieved or not, we know a certain amount about our located non-respondents. We know first why it was we failed to get an interview with them, and interviewers were in most cases able to ascertain the named elector's sex and to make an estimate of his or her age. This gives us some further clues about sample representativeness.

[11] The assumption that all people who voted in respect of a given address were resident there at the qualifying date may not be wholly correct. Among the 129 respondents that were traced from the issued address to a new one, but who voted in respect of the issued address, no fewer than 18 said that they had been resident at their new address for a year or more, and thus could not have been resident at the issued address on the qualifying date. But it is not impossible, of course, that this puzzling result is due to coding errors.

TABLE 5   *Percentage of Sample Interviewed, by Age and Turnour*

	Voted	Did not vote	Postal vote
Under 35	78% (1,063)	67% (416)	68% (22)
35–64	77% (2,109)	63% (408)	74% (31)
Over 65	66% (815)	44% (214)	54% (67)

Table 5 reveals some of the bias that is present in the BGES achieved sample with regard to age and turnout. Each cell shows the percentage of interviews achieved in each of nine age and turnout cross-categories; that is to say, the number of respondents over the number of located sample members in each class. The figure in brackets is the percentage base. The table suggests that older non-voters are particularly under-represented in the sample. Interviews were achieved with little more than 44 per cent of these respondents.

A 70 per cent response rate is usually regarded as acceptable in survey research (although one suspects that this level is chosen more on pragmatic than theoretical grounds). Table 5 suggests that, with the exception of the older postal voters and non-voters, this target was quite closely approached, and, in three cells of the table, comfortably exceeded.

THE DETERMINANTS OF TURNOUT

The evidence we have reviewed so far must clearly raise a question mark against previous survey-based research on the determinants of non-voting (or more strictly of the characteristics of non-voters). On the one hand, we have seen that the achieved sample under-represents non-voters, particularly older ones; and on the other hand, many of the non-voters who actually are in the achieved sample failed to admit that they did not vote.

We can, however, make some progress on previous research, first by exploring our data on non-respondents and secondly, in the case of respondents, by using official turnout data in place of the respondents' reports.

In their survey-based study of turnout in 1977, Crewe and his colleagues advanced four major hypotheses:[12]

(1) that a significant proportion of those not voting in any one election fail to do so because the 'costs' of voting rise above a certain 'threshold';
(2) that since increases in voting costs of this kind are often temporary (e.g. illness, holidays, short-term posting abroad, move of house), non-voting is usually temporary too;
(3) that differences between voters and non-voters in social background and political attitudes will be negligible especially between 'once-only' non-voters and regular voters;
(4) that persistent abstainers will consist of either (a) those most isolated from cultural and social pressures to vote; or (b) those who deliberately reject such pressures and spurn the opportunity to vote, i.e. who reject the act of voting out of alienation from the British political system, or an important aspect of it.

[12] Crewe, Fox and Alt, 'Non-voting in British General Elections', p. 46.

We consider the first three of these in turn, but our data are not such as to shed new light on Crewe and his colleagues' fourth hypothesis.

Let us begin then with the costs of voting. As we noted above, we do know something about located non-respondents and the reasons why interviews did not take place. This source of information about the determinants of turnout broadly confirms the hypothesis that turnout is related to the costs of voting. The official turnout of non-respondents, divided according to the reasons for non-response, was as follows:

Too ill or senile to be interviewed	42%	(127)
Away during interview period	61%	(77)
Appointment broken	71%	(72)
Not seen, not at home	71%	(136)
Someone refused for them	74%	(135)
Personally refused	77%	(966)

Illness and absence appear to be major causes of non-voting. Availability and/or the ease with which electors can get out to vote are clearly, and not surprisingly, important in determining the rate at which they actually do turn out. Those electors it was hardest for our interviewers to track down voted in smaller numbers than those they were able to reach and talk to easily.

Rather encouragingly, the same conclusions emerge from an analysis of the self-confessed non-voters in the survey. Respondents who reported that they had not voted were asked why, and their answers were distributed as follows:

Deliberately abstained	4%
Not interested	13%
Could not decide who to vote for	5%
Said voting wouldn't affect outcome	5%
Prevented by work	10%
Prevented by sickness	9%
Away on polling day	26%
Prevented by other commitments	7%
Because they had moved	8%
Other reasons	12%

The most striking thing about these figures is how few electors claim either to have deliberately abstained or to have failed to vote because they were not interested in the election. Whether their reasons for not voting are genuine or not, a substantial majority of the 480 self-confessed non-voters offered us what might be termed a 'circumstantial' explanation for their behaviour.

It would seem, then, that voting is so much a part of acceptable civic behaviour that most people are ashamed to admit not having done it without having some good cause. For the respondents, at least, we are able to draw the conclusion that a large proportion of non-voters have a 'circumstantial' reason for not voting, and, by implication, that most would have voted if this reason were removed.

Crewe and his colleagues' second hypothesis follows naturally from the first. If non-voting in a particular election is for 'circumstantial' reasons, we would expect that it is not always the same people who are unavailable to vote, and that from one election to the next the non-voters are a shifting population; we would also expect to find that the hard core of persistent non-voters is a relatively small proportion of our respondents.

Taking our official record of respondents' behaviour in 1987, together with their

recalled behaviour in the 1983 and 1979 elections, we are able to produce a measure of turnout regularity. Note, however, that the following percentages are just of those respondents eligible to have voted at each of the last three general elections.[13]

Voted three times	2,093	74%
Voted twice	468	16%
Voted once	168	6%
Did not vote	106	4%

These figures would appear to confirm our expectations about the link between availability and turnout. Although about one respondent in five failed to vote in 1987, non-voting is for most people a temporary thing, related to rises in the cost of voting, such as sickness, holidays or a change of address, which are also usually of a temporary nature. Less than one respondent in ten reported failing to vote in at least two of the last three general elections, and less than one in 25 reported that they did not vote in any of them.

These findings are broadly in line with the assumptions made by Crewe, Fox and Alt in their 1977 paper on turnout. Voting, they said, is both culturally valued, and is usually a relatively costless act. Although the act confers no tangible rewards, and the chance of any one individual's vote affecting the outcome of the election is infinitesimally small, a very large proportion of electors will vote if the costs of voting remain low. That is to say, most electors will vote so long as they are available to vote, have nothing better to do with the time it will' take, are well enough for voting not to impair their health, and mobile enough to get to the polling station easily. Once the cost of voting rises beyond a certain threshold, however, cost–benefit calculations come into play, and at each election a significant minority of electors fails to vote because the costs of voting are too high.

We move on now to consider Crewe, Fox and Alt's third hypothesis, which was that 'differences between voters and non-voters in social background and political attitudes will be negligible, especially between "once-only" non-voters and regular voters'. This hypothesis was broadly supported by their analysis of the reports made by respondents in the 1974 British Election study, although they did find a greater attitudinal difference between voters and non-voters than they had expected.[14]

We do not feel that our data allow us to add anything useful to what Crewe and his colleagues have said about persistent non-voting, in which analysis they used panel respondents' claims to produce their measure of turnout regularity over the four general elections between 1966 and October 1974. It is of some interest, however, to check their other findings using the official records of turnout in place of respondents' reports. In line with their expectations, they found that 'the common belief that those in the highest income and status brackets participate most in politics does not apply to general elections in Britain'.[15] But they did find some significant discriminators. The strongest that they

[13] We would urge some caution in using turnout regularity as an analytical tool, however. Firstly, our check on electoral behaviour in 1987 indicates that even for the most recent election, respondents' reports are often incorrect, and, when several elections are being looked at, errors will accumulate. Secondly, because it only takes account of electors eligible to vote on every occasion, the measure excludes a significant number of respondents, especially the young. And thirdly, if a panel is not used, it forces us to rely on respondents' recollections of their past behaviour, which we know from other studies is also often unreliable. For instance, see H. T. Himmelweit, J. Biberian and J. Stockdale, 'Memory for Past Vote: Implications of a Study of Bias in Recall', *British Journal of Political Science*, 8 (1978), 365–75.

[14] Crewe, Fox and Alt, 'Non-voting in British General Elections', p. 64.

[15] Crewe, Fox and Alt, 'Non-voting in British General Elections', p. 59.

found in the single election of October 1974 were length of residence, housing tenure and age; the only other variable that they found to have a significant relationship with turnout, once controls for age were included, was marital status. We shall consider each of these variables individually, using both official and reported turnout data, before bringing them together in a multivariate analysis.

Table 6, below, shows the turnout of our respondents according to the length of time they have lived at their present address. When Crewe and his colleagues looked at this variable they found a significant difference, with respect to turnout, between respondents who had lived at their present address for more than and for less than three years. The longer respondents had lived at their present address, the higher their turnout seemed to be, and they postulated an explanation for this phenomenon in terms of community ties and social networks.[16] Table 6, however, shows that the main difference is between those people who have lived at their present address for less than one year and those who have lived there for one or more years. This is true regardless of whether we use respondents' reported turnout or the official records.

TABLE 6   *Reported and Official Turnout by Length of Time at Present Address*

	Under one year %	One year %	Two years %	Three years %	Four years %	Five to ten years %	Over years %	All %
Reported voted	74	87	89	86	89	86	87	86
Reported did not vote	26	13	11	14	11	14	13	14
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Officially voted	61	81	82	82	81	82	83	81
Officially did not vote	35	18	17	17	17	15	14	17
Officially voted by post	4	1	1	1	2	1	3	2
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	297	234	275	240	201	830	1,611	3,729

We categorized the 297 respondents who had been at their present address for less than a year, according to where our interviewers found them living; either at the address for which they were registered, at another local address they had moved to, or at a new address in another part of the country. One hundred and nine were found resident at the address for which they were registered, 145 had moved locally, and 43 had moved to another part of the country. Assuming postal voters to have returned their ballot papers, their official rates of turnout were 70 per cent, 68 per cent, and 47 per cent respectively. It is interesting that new residents who were at their present address in October 1986 (when the register was compiled) seem only a little more likely to vote than more recent local movers.

[16] Crewe, Fox and Alt, 'Non-voting in British General Elections', p. 63.

TABLE 7   *Reported and Official Turnout by Age*

	18–24 %	25–44 %	45–64 %	Over 65 %
Reported voted	77	85	91	87
Reported did not vote	24	15	9	13
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Officially voted	64	81	88	81
Officially did not vote	34	18	11	14
Officially voted by post	2	1	1	5
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
(*N*)	472	1,394	1,160	672

Table 7 shows the reported and official turnout of our respondents by age. Of the four variables considered, age was the one that Crewe and his colleagues found to be most important, and there does indeed seem to be a very marked relationship between youth and non-voting. Moreover, younger respondents seem much more likely to mis-report about their failure to vote than older respondents, with the result that the relationship between age and turnout is much more pronounced when we use the official records instead of the interview data.

Table 8 shows the reported and official turnout of our respondents according to the nature of their housing. When Crewe and his colleagues looked at this variable, they found no significant difference between the turnout of owner occupiers and local authority tenants; the difference they did find was between private tenants and the rest. When housing is looked at on its own, our data also show the turnout of private tenants to be less than that of other groups, but the turnout of local authority tenants also seems to be significantly less than that of the owner occupiers – especially using the official data. The low turnout of private tenants may in part be an attribute of age, but, as we note below, all effects of housing type disappear when controls for social class are introduced.

TABLE 8   *Reported and Official Turnout by Housing*

	Owner occupier %	Local authority %	Private tenant %
Reported voted	88	83	82
Reported did not vote	12	17	18
Total	100%	100%	100%
Officially voted	83	77	73
Officially did not vote	15	21	23
Officially voted by post	2	2	4
Total	100%	100%	100%
(*N*)	2,617	779	257

TABLE 9   *Reported and Official Turnout by Marital Status*

	Married %	As if married %	Widowed %	Divorced %	Not married %
Reported voted	89	74	84	83	79
Reported did not vote	11	26	16	17	21
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Officially voted	85	66	75	81	70
Officially did not vote	13	34	18	19	27
Officially voted by post	1	—	7	—	3
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	2,433	105	340	182	667

The reported and official turnout of our respondents according to their marital status is shown in Table 9. Crewe and his colleagues found that when they controlled for age there was a significant relationship between marital status and turnout *regularity*. It may just be a consequence of the fact that unmarried people are more likely to be young, but looking at all age groups in the one election of 1987, there does indeed appear to be a relationship between non-voting and the state of being unmarried. The relationship is especially marked when we use the official turnout data. When we control for age, we find that the voting behaviour of young respondents who are married is more similar to that of older respondents than it is to that of young unmarried respondents.

TABLE 10   *Logit Model including Age, Length of Residence, Marital Status and Tenure*

	Official	Reported
Constant	0.54 (0.04)	0.72 (0.04)
18–24	−0.25 (0.04)	−0.17 (0.05)
25–44	−0.01 (0.03)	−0.04 (0.04)
45–64 ·	0.26 (0.03)	0.21 (0.04)
New resident	−0.17 (0.04)	−0.14 (0.04)
Married	0.11 (0.03)	0.12 (0.03)
Owner	0.08 (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)
Local authority tenant	−0.07 (0.05)	−0.07 (0.05)
Other tenure	0.01 (0.05)	0.00 (0.05)

Table 10 shows the results when a multivariate analysis is carried out using the four variables age, length of residence, housing tenure and marital status. Since our dependent variables are binary, we have used logit models rather than linear regression for the

multivariate analysis.[17] The assumptions on which linear regression is based are not met when the dependent variable is binary, and the violations are particularly serious when the variable is highly skewed, as is the case with turnout. In particular, there are likely to be 'floor' and 'ceiling' effects: successive increments in the independent variable will tend to have smaller and smaller effects as the dependent variable approaches the ceiling of 100 per cent turnout, for example. We thus need to postulate a non-linear rather than a linear relationship between independent and dependent variable, and this is what logit analysis offers (the relationship it assumes being a logistic one). However, the broad interpretation of logit analysis is similar to that of multiple regression: each parameter shows the strength of association between the dependent and the independent variable in question, net of the other relationships specified in the model, and a parameter needs to be twice its standard error to be significant.[18] In both Tables 10 and 11 the figures in brackets are the standard errors.

The first column of Table 10 shows the parameters (and their standard errors) when the dependent variable is official turnout; the second column gives the parameters when reported turnout is the dependent variable. Following our earlier findings given in Table 5 about the representativeness of the sample, we have restricted our analysis to respondents aged under 65.

TABLE 11   *Logit Model Including Age, Length of Residence, Marital Status, Social Class and Income*

	Official	Reported
Constant	0.51 (0.05)	0.73 (0.05)
18–24	−0.25 (0.05)	−0.15 (0.06)
25–44	−0.05 (0.04)	−0.11 (0.04)
45–64	0.30 (0.05)	0.26 (0.05)
New resident	−0.18 (0.04)	−0.17 (0.04)
Married	0.12 (0.03)	0.13 (0.03)
White collar	0.18 (0.04)	0.13 (0.05)
Petty bourgeois	−0.17 (0.06)	−0.05 (0.07)
Blue collar	−0.01 (0.04)	−0.07 (0.05)
Income under £8,000	−0.07 (0.03)	−0.08 (0.03)

[17] Our dependent variable thus becomes the log odds of voting or not voting. We therefore fit the following model, which uses the notation of Fienberg. See S. E. Fienberg, *The Analysis of Cross-Classified Data*, 2nd edn (Boston, Mass: MIT Press, 1987), chap. 6.

$$\ln(m_{ijkl1}/m_{ijkl2}) = w + w_{A(i)} + w_{R(j)} + w_{M(k)} + w_{T(l)}$$

A represents age (three categories), *R* represents length of residence (a binary variable scored 1 if the respondent had been resident at the address for less than one year, 2 otherwise), *M* represents marital status (a binary variable scored 1 if the respondent was married, 2 otherwise) and *T* represents housing tenure (three categories). We use the SPSSx paramaterization in which the parameters for the categories of a given variable sum to zero. When the dependent variable is official turnout, the model yields a satisfactory fit (maximum likelihood chi square = 24.3, 27 degrees of freedom, p = 0.612); the fit is less satisfactory when reported turnout is the dependent variable (chi square = 46.8, 27 df, p = 0.01).

[18] See J. H. Aldrich and F. D. Nelson, *Linear Probability, Logit and Probit Models* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1984).

As we can see, both analyses confirm the conclusions reached by Crewe and his colleagues. Turnout, whether measured by the official records or by respondents' reports, does have statistically significant relationships with age, marital status, length of residence and housing tenure. In general, however, relationships are rather weaker when respondents' reports of their turnout are the dependent variable. As our next step we added variables to the model which Crewe and his colleagues had found not to have significant relationships with regularity of turnout, namely sex, class and income. Our analysis confirms theirs with respect to sex but not with respect to class and income. Both class and income have significant relationships with turnout (net of the other variables in the model). Furthermore, when they are included, the net effect of tenure becomes non-significant. The common belief 'that those in the highest income and status brackets participate most in politics' is thus shown to be true after all, at least for voting in the 1987 general election.[19]

Of course, there are several reasons why our results might be different in this respect from those of Crewe and his colleagues. Firstly, electors' behaviour may have changed between 1974 and 1987. Secondly, we have a larger sample which makes it easier to find statistically significant results. Thirdly, our classification of the independent variables is slightly different. Fourthly, our dependent variable is different. And fifthly, we have excluded respondents aged 65 and over from the analysis because of doubts about their representativeness.

CONCLUSIONS

However, it must be emphasized how similar our results are to those of Crewe and his colleagues based on data obtained thirteen years earlier than ours. We wish to endorse their general conclusions that turnout appears to be quite high in almost all social groups and that a substantial majority of registered electors will turn out to vote if the costs of voting are not too high.

Although the use of official turnout records generally confirmed those of Crewe and his colleagues using respondents' reports, with the exceptions noted above, it is worth noting that the relationships between turnout and the various independent variables (age, length of residence and so on) are generally rather stronger when the official records are used. This can be seen both from the parameters in Tables 10 and 11 and from the cross-tabulations in Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9. In effect, the groups with the lowest turnout are the ones who are most likely to exaggerate their turnout.

This finding could be due to the presence of 'ceiling' effects: there is less room for groups with high turnout to exaggerate. However, the logit analysis takes account of the ceiling effects, but continues to show stronger relationships with officially recorded turnout. One possible explanation is that the groups with low turnout may be ones for whom the 'circumstantial' reasons described above particularly apply. The costs of getting to the polls may be particularly high for them; for example, young or unmarried people may be particularly likely to be away from home on polling day whereas older or married people may lead a more settled existence. And people who are prevented by circumstantial

[19] Table 11 gives the results of our final logit model, which drops tenure and adds respondent's class (three categories – a collapsed version of that used by Heath, Jowell and Curtice) and household income (two categories). The fit is acceptable both when official turnout is the dependent variable (chi square = 71.8, 56 df, $p = 0.08$) and when reported turnout is the dependent variable (chi square = 64.8, 56 df, $p = 0.20$).

reasons from voting may be particularly likely to misremember their turnout. Paradoxically, then, it may be that the survey-based estimates of turnout give a better indication than the official ones of the desire to conform with the civic obligation to participate.

Overall, then, our results are rather comforting, both to the survey researcher and to the political theorist. We have found that misrepresenting of turnout by our survey respondents is relatively low, certainly by American standards, and that our survey has reasonable coverage both of voters and of non-voters, apart from the elderly. We have generally confirmed the conclusions of previous research on the determinants of turnout, and have shown that when better quality data are used (namely the official records of turnout) stronger relationships are found, not different relationships. For the survey researcher, who must always be concerned about the validity of data, these are comforting findings.

Our data have also tended to indicate that the level of redundancy in the electoral register is towards the lower of Todd and Butcher's estimates and yields an estimate of 80 per cent for the 'true' level of turnout. This is likely to be still some way short of the record turnout recorded in 1950; official turnout then was 84 per cent, and while the redundancy in the register was also probably somewhat lower then, the true turnout was probably around 87 per cent.[20] However, once one takes account of the extension of the franchise to 18-year-olds in 1969, the increased redundancy in the register, and the age of the register at the time of the election, it is unlikely that there has been much decline in turnout over the last quarter century. This suggests that alarmist fears about the collapse of the political culture, increasing alienation from the political system and so on, are rather wide of the mark.

[20] Todd and Butcher, *Electoral Registration in 1981*. While there have been earlier studies of electoral registration, their focus has been on under-registration rather than on the redundancy in the register. See, for instance, P. G. Gray, T. Corlett and P. Frankland, *The Register of Electors as a Sampling Frame* (London: Central Office of Information, 1950). It appears from these sources that under-registration was rather lower in 1950 than it is today, and we have therefore assumed that registration was more efficient then with respect to redundancy too.

National Elections and Political Attitudes: The Case of Political Efficacy

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Elections constitute a principal avenue of citizen involvement in political life, and knowledge of their effects on public attitudes towards the polity and the role of the individual therein has important implications for theories of democratic governance. One such attitude is political efficacy, 'the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process'.[1] Although many studies have documented that

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[1] Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin and Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1954).