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Incumbency Effects in English Local Elections 1974-2010: Assessing the Advantage of Electoral Defence

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Incumbency Effects in English Local Elections 1974-2010:
Assessing the Advantage of Electoral Defence

by

MICHAEL THOMAS EUGENIUSZ TURNER

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The Elections Centre
School of Government

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Abstract
The study of electoral defence and its stated advantages are an integral part of American political science. Post-war, much academic literature has emerged in an attempt to identify and explain rising re-election rates of congressional incumbents and the political consequences of such a phenomenon (Mayhew 1974; Fiorina 1977; Cain, Ferejohn & Fiorina 1987; Gelman & King 1990; King 1991). Conversely, the study of political incumbency in Britain can be attributed to a handful of scholars who tend to consider the repercussions at parliamentary level (Williams 1967, King 1981, Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1984, Norton 1990 & 1994, Norris, Valance & Lovenduski 1992). Consequently, incumbency advantage at the local level remains a relatively under-researched topic in England, confined to the sub-chapters of Rallings & Thrasher (1997). The aim of this thesis is to research and present evidence in support of incumbency effects in English local elections and the extent to which they influence their outcome, in that, incumbent candidates fare better than less experienced candidates, to different degrees across the three major parties. It will do so using survey and electoral data collected by The Elections Centre at Plymouth University, drawing on established methods from the literature and demonstrating via a variety of data and methods, that incumbency advantage is indeed a real phenomenon effecting the outcomes of local elections in England. The research provides substantial evidence for Sophomore Surge and Retirement Slump effects throughout the period examined (1974-2010). These methods of estimation feature alongside a number of others, which are constructed to uncover the significance of defending, rather than challenging for a council seat. A number of influences on the advantage that defending councillors maintain are also presented, including district magnitude, ward size and rural/urban classification. Results reveal a modest advantage for Conservative and Labour incumbent candidates, whilst the effects are shown to be stronger for the Liberal Democrats, a finding that is in step with the existing literature on electoral trends and the local campaign strategy of the party (Dorling et al, 1998; McAllister et al, 2002; Russell & Fieldhouse, 2005; Cutts 2006).
Author’s Declaration

This research is both original and entirely my own. The thesis has not formed part of any other degree at Plymouth University or any other establishment. At no time during the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award. Where necessary, the author has taken it upon himself to attend relevant conferences, academic courses and workshops, whilst presenting key parts of the research for scholarly scrutiny. This study was sponsored with the aid of an Economic and Social Research Council studentship and carried out in collaboration with The Elections Centre. The main body of text is comprised of 79,999 words excluding figures, tables and the bibliography.

Date…..28th February 2014...

Signed. ………………………………
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Preface

The purpose of this thesis is simply stated, to investigate the notion of an incumbency advantage in English local elections. Although there is a now well established set of literature on the various effects of incumbency on American democracy, there remains surprisingly little research on the effects of electoral defence in Britain, particularly for elections to local government. Consequently, the incentive for pursuing this topic is, in part, a result of the great strides that the American research has made in understanding their politics and elections. The American example, especially early works from David Mayhew (1974) and Morris Fiorina (1977), are demonstrative of the value of such research. Both directly and indirectly, the study of ‘the electoral connection’ has furthered our understanding of many themes in political science; such as electoral behaviour, campaigns, mobilization, parties, the media and so forth. Thus, even if the literature on British political science were furthered by just a fraction of that seen across the Atlantic, the exercise would be of substantial worth to the subject.

There are a number of motivations for the study of this subject within English local elections. Foremost is the relative proximity of candidates for local government to their voters. The connection between residents and local government in England is one of the closest in terms of its geography and scale, and in many respects the traditional candidate-orientated perspective of the
local campaign resembles that of candidates for Congress, though undoubtedly there remain as many differences. Other reasons for its study include, the meagre volume of research published on the topic at this order of election, as well as the fortunate position of having access to an extensive and comprehensive set of electoral data that spans almost four decades.

Broadly speaking, the project aims to assess the advantage of electoral defence for councillors in England since the reorganisation of local government, and to do it in a way that provides readers with conclusive evidence of its magnitude, influencing factors and potential explanations. However, in order to examine the concept in any great depth, the reader must first be introduced to the basic structure and development of local governance in England. The English example is clearly different from the American and so, in order to contextualise the literature examined in chapter 2, which is predominantly American, it is right to familiarise readers with key developments within local politics, outlining the role of different councils and the councillors who comprise them. Thus, chapter 1 serves as an introduction to English local elections and aims to give readers a concise overview of its structure and remit in order to understand the nature of its politics. Following this, and a review of the literature, chapter 3 (Data & Methods) sets out in some detail, the hypotheses to be tested and data used to do so. The chapter also describes methodological issues faced throughout this project and how these are managed to provide the research with objective evidence.
Local government remains a key provider of public services in England. Since the Municipal Corporations Act 1835, local democracy has become a nation-wide institution that is built around values of accountability and community. Though administrative and organisational structures have assumed many guises since then, local authorities continue to be charged with the responsibility of service delivery to their residents. This introductory chapter offers a broad overview of local government and details key developments in the powers and organisational structures of local democracy in England, including the role of councillors. The chapter describes fundamental changes to local administrations, how the relationship between residents and local government has changed and how this is relevant to this thesis.

Looking first at the structure of local democracy, sub-chapter 1.1 discusses the impact of local authority reorganisation in the wake of the Local Government Act 1972. The section briefly describes the administrative structures created, as well as how they have altered since. Sub-chapter 1.2 focuses more on the powers of authorities, discussing the position of local government and how it has evolved. The section describes how the responsibilities of local authorities have changed and importantly, how the role of councillors has moved from one of service facilitators, to community leaders. The section also describes the impact of this refocusing on the relationship between councils and their residents. Finally, sub-chapter 1.3 broadly discusses elections to local government. It provides
information about the parties that contest local elections in England and briefly discusses campaign methods used during elections. The section also discusses how the changing nature of local government may be reflected in the agenda of local electoral campaigns. Section 1.3 details an emerging electoral problem for councillors, one where an increasingly complex system of partnerships for the delivery of local services has marginalised the scope of candidates to offer significant ideological change, thus narrowing the criteria for voters to assess them.

1.1 - The Impact of Reorganisation

England’s system of local government is complex and multi-layered. In an attempt to standardise it across the country, a major reorganisation of the structure of local governance across England came about as a result of the Local Government Act 1972. The impact of the act created a two-tier system of local governance across the country, with structures best suited to their population. Each of these authority types has a slightly different set of powers with the intention of reflecting the varied needs of the communities they encompass, as well as their relative rural/urban status.

Before continuing it is important to note that the London Boroughs (LBs) preceded the Local Government Act 1972 being created in 1964 after the 1963 Local Government Act. The two-tier system was introduced to span the Greater London area and what was the Greater London Council (GLC) encompassed 32 LBs that are still functioning today. Also, though the district of the City of London is in Greater London and does hold elections, by tradition it is not included in any
nation-wide electoral analysis as it is a *sui generis* authority and not conventionally contested by the major parties in England. As a result it is not included in any analysis within this thesis. The implementation of a London-wide authority a decade ahead of the rest of the nation is reflective of the unique status of the capital, not only as a major urban environment that has its own distinct needs, but also as an area that requires all-encompassing infrastructure.

Outside London, metropolitan and non-metropolitan authorities were created as a result of the 1972 Act. Metropolitan authorities were created in the six large, urban and densely populated areas of Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne & Wear, the West Midlands and West Yorkshire. These areas formed six Metropolitan Counties (MCs) that were charged with delivering large-scale services such as main roads, public transport, emergency services and civil protection in what are predominantly northern cities. Beneath the MCs there were 36 subdivisions, called Metropolitan Boroughs (MBs). This system was similar to London’s structure of boroughs (LBs), which were within a higher council authority and was reflective of the large communities they represented within those counties listed above.

After the 1983 white paper “*Streamlining the Cities*”, the governing Conservative party abolished the GLC along with the MCs in 1986. Since then, the capital was without a dedicated London-wide authority till 2000, when the Greater London Authority (GLA) was established as a result of the Greater London Authority Act
1999. The act also created a directly elected mayoral position\(^1\). Unlike in London, the removal of the county-tier of the metropolitan authorities has never resulted in a replacement. Their abolition, during the mid-1980s, has had a lasting impact in these regions, particularly as the Labour party controlled the MCs at the time.

As detailed later in this thesis, the Conservative party suffered quite badly at the MB elections during the abolition of the GLC and MCs, and this is thought to have been largely a consequence of accusations that the move was led by party politics. As a result of their ‘administrative decapitation’, the MBs and LBs have assumed a wide range of responsibilities that cover areas from education to social services (these are detailed in section 1.2).

The LBs have a quadrennial electoral cycle, meaning that they elect their entire council every four years. Unlike the LBs, the MBs elect their councils by thirds. This means that for three years out of every four, the MBs elect a third of their council’s members. Previously the fourth year would have seen county-level elections take place, thus completing the electoral cycle. To make things more complicated, in 2004 the MBs were redistricted and so, unusually, held all-out elections in that year. The results from these 3-member district (3MD) all-out elections then went on not only to decide who would sit on the council, but also the length of the first term that each elected candidate would serve. Those who finished in third place served just two years, to 2006, before their seat was again up for election. Those in second place served for three years (2007) and those in

\(^1\) GLA and mayoral elections are not considered in the electoral analysis within this thesis
\(^2\) This figure is for England and includes local elections that were held on the same day as General and European elections. It does not include by-elections.
\(^3\) Data from the 2012 Candidate Survey (2012, n=142, \(\bar{x} = 58.3\))
first place completed a full four years (2008) in order to complete the thirds cycle. All subsequent contests were for four-year terms.

Non-metropolitan authorities, referred to as shires, were also standardised by the Local Government Act 1972. For the Shire Counties (SCs), the top-tier of the non-metropolitan authorities went from a total of 58 county councils in England and Wales to just 47 as a result of the act. Also, within these counties, the patchwork of 1,250 municipal boroughs, urban and rural districts, were all merged into just 333 district councils (Wilson & Game, 2006, pp. 58). The SCs are elected on a quadrennial electoral cycle, meaning that elections take place every four years for the entire council. As they are a top-tier of local government, the counties share some, though not all, functions of the MBs, particularly larger-scale services like education and highways. However, because of the two-tiered nature of the shires, powers are split between county and district councils. The district-level of the non-metropolitan authorities, or Shire Districts (SDs), are located within the counties and today they are responsible for delivering smaller-scale services such as housing, local planning, museums, waste and council tax collection. After the 1972 reorganisation the SDs could choose either to elect their councils by thirds, as the MBs, with the SC elections taking place in the ‘empty’ fourth year of the cycle, or they could elect their council on a quadrennial cycle. The SCs and SDs are mostly situated in less densely populated, rural areas of England.

The introduction of Unitary Authorities (UAs) in England took place in 1995 and served to complicate the ‘simplified’ structure of local government that was
established post-1972. This was another significant change to the political landscape of England as, since 1995, some 55 county and district-level authorities have assumed a single-tier structure. The Local Government Act 1992 established a Local Government commission with the power to oversee:

"the replacement, in any non-metropolitan area, of the two principal tiers of local government with a single tier"

(Local Government Act, 1992, Section 14(1a))

Post 1995 there has been both the abolition of some district councils and the creation of more authorities at the top-tier level. It must be noted then, that these numbers do not balance and the introduction of UAs in England has resulted in the overall number of authorities falling, as have the total number of councillors. Whilst their introduction has meant that the UAs have adopted similar functions to the boroughs, it has also meant that another two sets of local government systems have been introduced. Like the districts, these authorities also had a choice of electoral cycles to select their councillors, choosing between thirds or quadrennials.

Consequently, local government in England today broadly comprises seven different types of electoral system. The LBs, which run on a quadrennial electoral cycle. The MBs, which are on a system of elections by thirds. The SCs, which are on a quadrennial electoral cycle. The SDAs are on quadrennial cycles and SDTs on elections by thirds. And finally, the UAAs and UATs are also on quadrennial and thirds electoral cycles respectively. Section 1.1 has briefly introduced the
basic structure of local government and elections in England after reorganisation. Sub-chapter 1.2 will go on to outline the role of local government and discusses some of the key changes to the remit of councils during the period.

1.2 – The Role of Local Government: Toward Community Leadership

Local authorities are charged with delivering a wide variety of services to residents and the way in which they deliver these services since the 1970s has changed significantly. Through increased collaboration with other actors, almost all the services local authorities provide have experienced some form of major modification. The general trend has been one where councils are moving to a shared, rather than exclusive, set of responsibilities. Broadly speaking, as described in section 1.1, the responsibilities of different types of local authority vary, so naturally it is right to give a brief outline of the differences. A Local Government Association (LGA) list of services by type of English authority is illustrated in figure 1.2.1.
What is clear from figure 1.2.1 is that there are mixed sets of responsibilities for the different types of authority in England, with some delivering more, or different services than others. The information detailed in figure 1.2.1 was correct as of 2009, but whilst the range of services authorities have delivered since the 1970s has changed, traditionally local authorities have had something of a monopoly over their provision, particularly in the earlier years after reorganisation.

![Figure 1.2.1 - Responsibilities of Local Authorities in England (Source: LGA Quick Guide to Local Government, 2009, pp. 7)](image-url)
Local government has always been substantially funded through central government, and as such, the role of local authorities was traditionally seen not only as being the principle agency for the delivery of services, but also as a gatekeeper of central government spending. There was a general consensus within the Conservative government during the 1980s and 1990s, that representation without explicit local taxation had led to councils being rewarded, in terms of electoral support from their residents, for what they could provide, rather than prudently managing their budgets. This can be considered as an erosion of local accountability, a type of pork-barrel politics, akin to that seen in the literature on American congressmen being seen as gatekeepers of U.S. federal spending (Mayhew, 1974; Fiorina 1977). This steady erosion of accountability increased demand on spending for public services and had “rendered local democracy impotent in the eyes of many. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, following an onslaught of Thatcherism against it, many in local government championed the idea of a ‘power of general competence’ as a means to promote it and guard against future erosion” (Stevens, 2006, pp. 69). The system of local government being funded by central spending was thought not to be conducive to responsible budgetary restraints. Stewart (2000) outlines, that if a local authority is seen as the sole provider of a set of services to its citizens, then its relationship with residents becomes defined by the level of service it can provide (pp. 271-272). So, logically, it gradually befits the interest of local government to maximize what it can provide for residents, rather than examining their own spending habits. Naturally this is seen to have led to friction between local and national priorities and as a result a change in the agenda for local government could be said to have been set in motion.
The introduction of the Community Charge in 1990 has played a significant part in altering the way local government operates. The main goal was to improve the accountability of local government by establishing a fiscal incentive to do so. By charging people locally it had the added intention of affecting people’s engagement with local democracy, as well as introducing a culture of residents scrutinizing their local authority's spending habits. There were only minor electoral consequences for introducing the charge. However, as these elections were presented as almost a referendum on national government at the time, one could argue that the elections were demonstrative of the increasingly blurred nature of national and local politics. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the community charge failed in its purpose as a device to improve the accountability of local government (Rallings & Thrasher, 1991, pp. 183) as the elections were increasingly observed in a national, rather than local context.

Long-term however, the introduction of the Community Charge (now Council Tax) marked the point at which the agenda of local government was reframed. Since then a whole raft of other non-elected or indirectly elected bodies have been introduced. Many of these provide services at the expense of, or in collaboration with local authorities. The rise in the number of Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organizations or quangos has changed the way in which local government operates, not only in terms of a reduced level of service facilitation, but also the relationship between authorities and residents. “In the past, local authorities confidently saw themselves as the rightful and undisputed leaders of their communities. Now their position is under challenge
as they find themselves sharing the local ‘turf’ with a whole range of bodies” (Davis, 1996, pp. 1).

Local government has evolved into a new type of institution in British society. As Stewart (2000) suggests, this new institution comprises three distinct roles for councils; one of community leadership, community partnership and community monitoring. This perspective is perhaps epitomized by New Labour's green paper “Modernising Local Government – Local Democracy and Community Leadership” (1998), which was the genesis of the Local Government Act 2000. Because local authorities are increasingly competing with other institutions and have less of a role in the actual facilitation of services, the perspective of a councilor has changed markedly, moving towards one of partnerships, leadership and championing local values. Rather than delivering all services, authorities now tend to hold service providers to account on behalf of residents. They also collect, interpret and distribute important information for government, quangos and other local providers.

This has clear repercussions for the way in which councils operate and the way that local elections are fought. Where previously councillors may have been seen as gatekeepers for services ultimately paid for by central government, today the paradigm is very different. The role of a councillor is broader, moving towards management, engagement with residents, implementing community plans and overseeing initiatives between local government and specialized providers. To summarize, one is drawn to Stoker’s overview of local government transformation during the period:
“There has been a decisive attempt to switch in Britain from a system dominated by elected local government to a system of governance in which a wider range of institutions and actors are involved in local politics and service delivery. It may be that elected authorities are the weakest link in the chain of the new string of institutions of local governance and will eventually be asked to exit, or it may be that they will discover a new role as the lead organization, taking on the challenge of steering a complex set of managerial and democratic processes at the local level”

(Stoker, 2003, pp. 3)

Sub-chapter 1.2 has described some of the key changes in the responsibility of local authorities, explaining how the role of local government, and by extension councillors, has changed from one of service provision to leadership and community engagement. Section 1.3 goes on to outline key details of the parties that contest local government elections in England, as well as the agenda of local electoral campaigns.

1.3 – Local Elections: Parties & Campaigns

Party politics are a central feature of local government in England. Though there is a strong vein of minor party and independent candidate influence at local government elections, however much we examine the role of councillors or notions of localism it must always be viewed through the prism of an English party system. There will inevitably be exceptions to the rule, but since the reorganisation of local government, the broad trend across England is inescapable. “Since 1973, minor parties have been faced with a process of
increased party politicisation, an expansion in competition and more vigorous patterns of election campaigning. The dice are loaded against success for minor parties and independents alike” (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp. 150).

One might believe that the increased politicisation of local politics has led to a blurring of local elections with national politics, and to some extent this is true. For many voters, local elections are simply a referendum on national government, giving little thought to distinguishing between incumbent councillors and their respective national parties. However, regardless of party dominance, for many residents, local elections are still seen to be local affairs and there is clear evidence in the literature to support this (Rallings & Thrasher, 2001, 2003a). Indeed, local voters do respond to local issues but “the influence of those issues varies from place to place and from time to time” (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp. 169).

Section 1.2 describes how the evolving responsibility of local government has altered the role of councillors within communities. Indeed, in making the case for local government, Jones & Stewart argue that “localness should be the basis for responsiveness in local government” (1983, pp. 6), which by implication pertains to the notion that local issues should drive the electoral campaigns of candidates. But in what sense can these elections be fought today, particularly in light of an increased number of actors at the local level? The trend suggests that councils are being restricted more and more in what they can do. When we acknowledge that previous incentives for engagement in local politics relied to some degree on the direct and extensive provision of benefits, which in turn are electorally
‘rewarded’ for their quality and/or quantity, we must also acknowledge that there are now fewer and perhaps less clear cues for voters to respond to. To add, with the restricted remit of local government, the influence of local authorities has been reduced to one that competes alongside other institutions. As a result, councillors may be forced to change the way in which they campaign for elected office. Authorities “cannot raise taxes as they might like to and their influence over their major budget expenditures may be limited to the margins” (Wilson & Game, 2006, pp. 314), so there are clear limitations in the things that councillors can promise to do in order to differentiate themselves from the opposition.

In this sense, the evolving responsibilities of local government have led to the marginalisation of key differences between parties vying for council control. There is an increasing professionalization of campaigns and it could be said that elections are moving, if only slightly, from ideologically-orientated differences, towards a more candidate-centred ‘battle of the bureaucrats’. Campaigning is perhaps becoming more of a skill, or trade, for local parties, particularly with the emergence of the Liberal Democrats as a credible force in local government. Techniques such as canvassing, ‘fetching-up’, leafleting and campaigning online, have increasingly become some of the limited yet principal methods of engagement that local parties have with voters, particularly with the continued decline of party membership. At the same time, as councillors have taken on a reduced role, the ability of voters to assess candidates based on their ideology or political record is diminished. This puts into context the claim that evidence from ‘local elections demonstrate that local voting can become a matter of ‘horse for courses’. Such factors as the nature of party competition, the conduct of
canvassing and campaigning, and the characteristics of the candidates themselves, either real or as portrayed by the local media, would all appear to have a bearing upon voters’ perceptions of electoral context” (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp. 169).

In light of this, it is clear that there are many factors that affect the electoral conditions that incumbent councillors face when seeking re-election. Some of these are national; some local, some structural and so forth. However, though there will always be special instances of beloved councillors serving decades on a council, the reality is that the conditions ensure local elections remain influenced, to some degree, by voters assessments of national government. Any incumbency effect must therefore, be offset against the national/regional trend in order to assess its true value. Subsequently, investigating the electoral fortunes of councillors in English local elections may tell us not only whether incumbents are indeed advantaged, but also how such a phenomenon is nested within local democracy, revealing what conditions are more conducive to electoral defence for instance, and whether candidates can alter their electoral fortunes?

Chapter 1 has given a brief overview of the key developments in local government in England. The chapter has detailed the current system of administrations as well as the evolving role of councillors, local government and campaigns. Chapter 2 goes on to present a review of the relevant literature regarding incumbency advantage.
Chapter 2 – **Incumbency Advantage: A Literature Review**

In *The Victorious Incumbent*, Somit *et al* (1994) describe how the high re-election rate of congressional incumbents in the United States gradually drew the attention of political scholars. Their original concerns centred on the potential impact of incumbency on the health of US democracy, but also examined some of the ways that incumbent candidates are able to connect with local voters and how this may have changed.

“For several decades, it has been axiomatic among both political practitioners and students of government that incumbent members of the United States Congress have a substantial advantage when they seek re-election...the resulting literature, debates and discussions are understandably centred on the American situation. Inevitably, though, they give rise to the obvious question: Is the problem of the ‘victorious legislative incumbent’ unique to the United States or is it one also being experienced by other representative democracies?”

(Somit *et al*, 1994, p.3)

What those early scholars were concerned about is what is termed today as Incumbency Advantage (IA). The phenomenon is expansive and reaches into many areas of psephological research including political efficacy, campaigns, localism and electoral behaviour, to name a few. Broadly speaking, IA can be seen as the electoral advantage gained through standing as an incumbent candidate rather than as a challenger. It is a value that signifies the extent to
which the democratic playing field may favour elected representatives over their challengers and explores the connection between electors and the elected. Gelman & King (2003) offer a simple theoretical definition of IA. They describe IA ($\psi$), as the vote share received by an incumbent ($W_i$), after taking away the share of the vote the incumbent party would have received if the election were an open contest ($W_o$). This serves as a useful starting point to examine the significance of incumbency, not only because of its simplicity, as a distinction is made between the types of candidate standing, but also because incumbency effects are examined within a prism of relativity.

$$\psi = W_i - W_o$$

(Gelman & King, 1990, p.1,143)

What Gelman & King are suggesting is that, political partisanship aside; a candidate's electoral status is an important factor in the relative decision-making of voters. In every election where an incumbent is standing, there will always be votes cast for the candidate, and for the party. In order to ascertain the value of incumbency then ($\psi$), the underlying level of political partisanship must be ascertained ($W_o$).

In isolation incumbency offers little causal explanation. Rather, it is a broad indicator and must therefore be examined as a measure of how well politicians, in this instance local councillors do, when compared to freshmen candidates. It is clear from the American literature that there are many explanations for the advantage, with varying implications and different levels of precision. For
instance, some research offers detailed commentary on various trends associated with incumbency, whilst others attempt to explicitly identify the causal mechanism. Spurred by the vanishing marginal seats in US congressional elections, Mayhew's work on electoral incentives, “Congress. The Electoral Connection” (1974), discusses in some detail, the ability of congressional incumbents to maintain their position through various means at their disposal. Fiorina (1977) and Jacobson & Kernell (1983) build on this commentary discussing other trends of note for candidates of the Washington ‘establishment’. One such vein of discussion is the Personal Vote (PV).

2.1 – The Personal Vote

The literature remains relatively unclear in its examination of personal vote effects. At times the phrase is used interchangeably with incumbency advantage, at others it is concerned specifically with the personal abilities of local candidates to influence the result of elections. Drawing on some of the more precise accounts, the personal vote can be defined as the electoral advantage a candidate holds over their opponent because of a difference in their abilities. As Cain et al (1987) put it, the “personal vote refers to that portion of a candidate’s electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualification, activities and record” (Cain, Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1987, p.9). A candidate recognised as having a strong personal vote would have the ability to acquire votes regardless of their political affiliation. They are charismatic candidates, able to gain support regardless of the national or regional trend through an enduring connection with residents and a central position within the community.
Considering this definition, a candidate’s incumbency is likely to be a product, or at least a consequence in part, of a candidate’s personality, and this is the key distinction between the concepts. Incumbency advantage theory can be thought of as the broad topic of concern, a multi-faceted electoral consequence of various stimuli. The personal vote on the other hand, is just one explanation, not necessarily a fundamental factor, but part of a broad collection of accounts that sometimes overlap and are not always exclusive. Later in this chapter readers may note that this is something of a feature within much of the literature on incumbency effects, as some of the ‘schools of thought’ on IA tend to intersect, at times borrowing facets of the theory from one another. However, in this context, the personal vote literature can be considered a component of IA theory, whilst remaining an important electoral phenomenon in it’s own right. As Cain et al puts it, “congressional elections are local, not national events: in deciding how to cast their ballots, voters are primarily influenced not by the President, the national parties, or the state of the economy, but by the local candidates” (1987, pp. 167). Thus it is perhaps reasonable to assume that there is an inevitability within local elections, that a candidate’s credentials and reputation will have at least some influence on the outcome of the contest. There is no doubt that a greater understanding of personal effects will contribute to a better understanding of local electoral behaviour, but also of the role of incumbency.

A key part of the evidence put forward for personal vote effects was Morris Fiorina’s Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment (1977), which suggested that personal vote seeking behaviour was responsible for a diminishing number of marginal seats in US congressional elections. The premise
was that as a direct result of an emerging ‘breed’ of congressional representatives, incumbents increased their electoral advantage over their competitors and tended to win more often. These representatives were not only more likely to connect with residents by exploiting the growing level of resources available to them, but they also noted that the behaviour and attitudes of congressional candidates were changing. This marked increase in incumbency advantage is well documented by the literature (Ferejohn, 1977; Alford & Hibbing, 1981; Cox & Morgenstern, 1993; Cox & Katz, 1996). For personal vote scholars, the rise came about because congressmen were spending more of their time responding to constituent’s needs. They used the franking system to maintain contact with voters and tended to present themselves more as facilitators of the federal system, rather than principled candidates of the party in order to preserve their elected position. It was seen as an increasing priority for candidates to maximize local support by emphasizing their own personal qualities rather than their party’s. However, there are clear differences between the American and English case and “it remains uncertain the degree to which personal vote seeking strategies actually have an electoral payoff in Westminster type parliamentary systems, where national and partisan factors are so much more important to voters’ choices” (Shugart et al, 2005, pp. 438).

Perhaps the first and most basic quality common to elections in both Britain and America is the concept of electoral accountability. Both countries have adopted a representative style of democracy. As Newton explains, this notion “assumes that politicians are held accountable for their own actions on election day” (Newton, 1976, p.14). The concept of democratic accountability, and in a wider sense, the
ability of voters to respond to the performance of local authorities is already evident in the literature. It has already been demonstrated that voters are able to make performance-related judgements about local administrations (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997; Boyne et al, 2009). However, little evidence exists regarding the assessment of incumbent candidates in England. Democracies are designed to enable citizens the opportunity to evaluate the performance of representatives through use of the ballot box, replacing incumbents with another candidate should they feel it necessary. Seeking a personal vote can be thought of as an attractive electoral strategy for incumbents. Personal vote seeking incumbents look to intervene in the electoral accountability process by convincing voters that they represent the best future for their constituents. Personal vote seeking incumbents are good communicators and frequently engage with voters in order to maintain their position as the credible local candidate, as opposed to the challenging ‘imposter’.

Because re-election is the primary objective for what has been described as a the ‘new breed’, those who employ a personal vote seeking strategy aim to convince constituents that it is their own personal qualities, education, managerial skills, personality and/or local connections that are most beneficial to the prospects of their constituents. In many respects, they put themselves before their party. They ask you to vote for them first and their party second, in order to present an image of themselves as ‘constituency facilitators’. As Fiorina puts it, these representatives “would rather be elected as an errand boy than not re-elected at all” (Fiorina, 1977, p.37). In this knowledge, that the desire of incumbents to preserve their political career is paramount, we can learn which strategy works
best and to which cues voters respond. These ‘cues’, as Shugart et al describe them, can be more important to voters than some of the more behaviour-oriented qualities that have traditionally dominated personal vote research. Behaviour is easily changeable, whereas qualifications, political resumes and where you live are not. For Shugart et al, “a politician either has the right attributes to signal credibility as a local servant or not” (Shugart et al, 2005, pp. 438). Applying Shugart’s model to English local elections, personal vote seeking behaviour can take many forms; from local meetings, to producing regular newsletters, from responding to local residents’ queries, to networking with community groups. There are clear criteria for identifying the emergence of personal vote-seeking incumbents in England. The literature suggests that they spend high levels of contact time with their residents. Campaign materials should inform voters that they live in and have served the area, have held roles within the authority or local party, are responsible upholders of local values, have skills and qualifications of particular relevance to the needs of that area and at times may demonstrate that they have chosen to distance themselves from national party politics. In other words, those who seriously employ a personal vote strategy in local elections will promote their personal and local credentials as the primary focus wherever possible.

Personal vote theory centres on the premise that candidates for political office feel that emphasising their personal qualities will further their chances in an electoral contest. The theory also implies that exploiting local connections may be more advantageous, at times, than explicit political principles and ideology. At
no other electoral contest in England do these concepts have more relevance than elections to local government.

2.2 - Local Politics

Initially, the American literature suggests that candidate behaviour may make a significant contribution to explaining the variance of local election results in England. For some, the significance of personalities in American congressional elections is “unquestioned” (Cain, Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1987, p.167), and although political partisanship is widely agreed to have been stronger in Britain at the time, Cain et al (1987) argues that in British parliamentary elections there was a small but significant personal influence on the electoral support of parliamentarians seeking re-election. As Cain et al (1987) continue “despite the relatively smaller personal vote in Britain, it is more than a trivial matter” (Cain, Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1987, p.181). Though this statement is still something of an admission that parties dominate elections in England, it does not mean that incumbents, as individuals, cannot retain a significant electoral advantage. England elects its local representatives via plurality electoral systems and as a result, councillors being elected with a minority of votes, is a frequent occurrence. In such contests, even a small amount of electoral variance can have a significant consequence on the result. The effect of incumbency therefore, can be exacerbated by the electoral system. Stewart (2000) demonstrates that because of the relative homogeneity of some local authorities, elections by the plurality system can have a greater impact on local authorities than on parliamentary elections. For instance, in the unitary authority of Stoke-on-Trent, the local elections in 1996 returned 60 Labour councillors out of a council of 60,
even though other parties won over a third of the votes cast (Stewart, 2000, p.129). This is not necessarily an example of 60 councillors winning because of their incumbency status, rather a demonstration of how the plurality electoral system in Britain can intensify such effects. In competitive elections, the plurality system decreases the share of the vote required to win and thus, in these conditions, even small advantages can be of enormous electoral value.

There are a number of other facets of local elections that further intensify the value of marginal gains. As these contests are at a local-level, voters are electorally close to their representatives. By definition then, these contests are a more personal affair. In elections where ward sizes are small, an average of just 5,981 voters from 1973 to 2010 ($\sigma = 3,533$) and where turnout is also low just 43.6%\(^2\) during the same period ($\sigma = 13.2$) every vote carries greater weight. Indeed, many local elections are won by the hundreds or even dozens of votes and this level of support does not need press conferences or high profile media appearances in order to sway the result. At this scale the number of people required are easily contactable in person, leafleted, emailed or phoned. In short, at this level of governance, by scale alone personal contact not only matters but, is also a realistic and perhaps crucial goal in the campaign process. Scale matters and for incumbents, smaller is better.

This argument is supported by Lieske (1989) who suggests that the secret to success in American local politics seems to “depend critically on the mobilization

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\(^2\) This figure is for England and includes local elections that were held on the same day as General and European elections. It does not include by-elections.
and nurture of a loyal political following” (Lieske, 1989, p.169). Incumbent candidates can become more reliant on a small but dependable group of voters to secure their position. At the local level voters have more influence than at national elections. This is because, as discussed above, district sizes are much smaller. This influence is magnified again by the poor turnout associated with local elections in both England and the United States. In this instance, election results can be determined simply by a motivated few, those who see themselves as stakeholders in their local community perhaps. This group can be a non-representative pool of voters, well informed, engaged in the community and even politically loyal. So, as turnout falls, so too may the representativeness of that pool of voters compared to the wider population. A motivated group, such as a residents association, school committee, church or sports club can easily mobilise enough voters to tip the scales of a close contest, particularly as these groups are typically engaged with local issues. By implication then local issues must have some credible influence at local elections, particularly in years where turnout is not being ‘propped up’ by simultaneous European or Parliamentary elections. Indeed, “Miller’s provocatively entitled Irrelevant Elections? (1988), found even in the 1980s, when more of the populace identified strongly with political parties than they do today, that a great many voters treated local elections very much as local events” (Wilson & Game, 2004, pp. 241).

- 56% of respondents claimed to be influenced in local elections more by local than national issues
- 39% claimed to vote more for the individual candidate in a local election than for the party
- 20% had local party preferences different from their current national party identification

(Miller, 1988 in Wilson & Game, 2004, pp. 241-2)

Considering this, it is clear not only that local elections are complex, but also that they are very personal affairs. As discussed above the scale of local elections will always ensure the viability of building a personal following, or at least having the opportunity to engage with those likely to vote. Mobilising just a fraction of those likely to turn out, in a small council ward, will take minimal resources most of which cost nothing but personal time and effort. As if to exacerbate the situation, due to financial and regulatory constraints, personal contact, such as ‘door knocking’, newsletters or meetings with community groups, present themselves as more attractive and viable methods through which incumbents can maintain contact with voters. Far from being constraints, these methods are more than enough to make the difference, as local political campaigns remain fiercely contested by all three major parties via traditional means. Even on election day there are many heavily fought contests and activities that go to the edge of legality (Coulson, 2004, pp. 476). What can be drawn from this point is that the conditions of local elections magnify the value of building and nurturing a loyal following, however small.

Although the personal vote described in sub-chapter 2.1 is an important phenomenon within the topic local politics are also a crucial consideration and remain a major component of the discussion in much of the research. Local elections are presented not only as advantageous for incumbents in terms of
their small scale but also in the ability of councillors to set, or at least embrace, the local agenda. Small neighbourhoods often have issues that are central to the objectives of local committees or associations. Ultimately councillors are there to help determine the policies of local councils, that will in turn deliver those policies in the form of local services, and they are also there to assist residents when those services are thought not to be fully met. As such a councillor who engages in local politics and works with local groups stands to make important electoral gains. The chapter now goes on to outline further aspects discussed in the literature, looking at selection effects.

2.3 - Selection Effects

The “selection effect” is a term used by Erikson et al in their efforts to explain the prevalence of incumbency effects in western democracies (Erikson, Wright & McIver, 1993). Selection Effect (SE) scholars argue that the pool of incumbents gradually ends up being ‘better quality’ candidates than their challengers through the intervention of the electoral process. This concept can be thought of as a Darwinian type approach to the election of representatives where more often than not, weaker candidates are eliminated at every election. As John Zaller's title “Politicians as Prize Fighters” (Zaller, 1998) suggests, the most capable candidate should continue to be victorious and as a result, the quality of the pool of incumbents left should, over time, improve.

There are a number of implications from these assertions. First, it is immediately clear that SE scholars feel that there must be criteria for determining what is a ‘strong’ candidate. While it is conceivable that democratic systems will continue
to select ‘strong’ candidates, it remains fairly unclear as to what these credentials are, other than the possession of a set of qualities and abilities that make them more desirable to the electorate (Jacobson & Kernell, 1981). But SE scholars go further than this, arguing that the effect kicks in because of a series of fulfilled circumstances that are somewhat unrelated to candidates’ ability to push their own personal characteristics. The SE scholar’s argument is that the relationship between the electorate and their representatives is irrelevant. As Zaller (1998) states, “most members of Congress never become better known or liked than they were at the time of their first re-election” (Zaller, 1998, p.2), and perhaps we have the same anecdotal impressions of English local representatives. Instead, Zaller and others suggest that it is not what candidates do that explains incumbency effects, “rather it is how well they do it” (Zaller, 1998, p.28), a notion that implies elections are won or lost on the basis of candidates’ bureaucratic ability.

Indeed Richard Fenno points out that most representatives win their first election by narrow margins so most victors aim to firm up their electoral position immediately and decrease their electoral marginality (Fenno, 1978). The term ‘sophomore surge’ is used in American political science to describe the increased relative vote share that a congressional candidate often acquires at their first election as an incumbent. SE scholars suggest that this phenomenon occurs for a number of reasons. As explained above, there is an individual quality effect related to the incumbent's high ability. High ability incumbents will more often have the political skill to get things done within their term forming a good political record come election day. As Zaller puts it, “voters do not need to follow
everything politicians do on a day-to-day basis in order to choose the better politicians; they need only pay attention at election time, to what the incumbent has done and what the challenger promises to do” (Zaller, 1998, p.28).

Second, higher quality candidates are often able to produce something of a “Scare-Off” effect (Carson, Engstrom & Roberts, 2007; Cox & Katz, 2002; Cox & Katz, 1996; Cox & Morgenstern, 1993; Stone, Maisel & Maestas, 2004). This is described by Cox & Katz as “the ability of incumbents to scare off high quality challengers” from standing in their seat (Cox & Katz, 1996, p.478). This type of practice can be, and often is, implemented in English local elections. During the process of selecting its candidates for an up-coming election the local party may, in an attempt to utilize the candidates available to them as effectively as possible, be reluctant to ‘waste’ any high quality candidates in safe opposition seats. Instead, the party often opts to let weaker or shorter serving ‘paper candidates’ earn their service to the local party by accepting the role of cannon fodder this time around. In time, paper candidates may earn the chance to contest more viable seats, their case being made stronger because of their accumulated electoral experience.

The ‘Retirement Slump’ is another measure that some selection effect scholars, as well as others, have used to assess the quality of candidates (Gelman & King, 1990; Norris & Lovenduski, 1994; Stonecash, 2008). Instead of examining the surge in a candidate’s vote, this measure assesses the electoral value that an experienced candidate brings to the local party. It is a sort of experience accumulator that reflects, “how much electoral advantage a party accrues when
it has an experienced rather than inexperienced candidate” running (Cox & Katz, 1996, p.478). That is to say, having high quality and experienced candidates can benefit the party and may also benefit other less experienced candidates. SE scholars argue that having more experience on a local party slate can benefit the whole team running for control of an authority, but most importantly will give the party the best chance of winning the individual candidate’s seat.

Zaller goes on to add that a politician’s career could essentially be explained through identifying their ‘dealt’ measures of skill and luck. “The conception of luck implicit in my simulation of electoral selection is any kind of randomly occurring event that helps or hurts a candidate... National partisan swings are probably the most important form of luck, tides that sweep otherwise weak candidates into office and defeat even strong ones” (Zaller, 1998, p.28). Clearly there are poor local candidates swept to victory based solely on the national tides of partisan support. There are also stronger candidates unfortunate enough to be removed because of the logo beside their name. However, the important point raised by the SE scholars’ approach to explaining incumbency effects is that candidates differ in their abilities and fortune. It recognises the relevance of electoral accountability in the sense that those higher quality incumbents are more able to make the most of their time in office and further their electoral chances come election day because they have an established and respected political record. While it may appear that the bulk of the work towards building an incumbency advantage takes place during the first period of incumbency, ultimately the ‘selection effect’ takes place before this period. It is a combination of the inherent ability of the candidate, the strategic nomination of their
opponent, the experience of the local party and perhaps a little luck that will determine the length of their tenure.

2.4 - Systemic Advantages

This area of the literature on incumbency advantage tends to focus on the resources that incumbents are able to exploit in order to increase their chance of re-election. There are a number of structural segments to incumbency advantage that have been studied in detail. Gerrymandering (Forgette & Platt, 2005) can be discounted from this project’s analysis immediately as “since 1972, an independent national commission has been charged with ensuring that the boundaries of these wards are drawn so that each vote is roughly of equal value” (Rallings & Thrasher, 2004, p.470). However, other areas include greater access to resources, such as franking (Cover & Brumberg, 1982; Jacobson, 1997; Mayhew, 1974), extra media coverage (Prior, 2006) and campaign resources (Abramowitz, 1991; Abramowitz, Alexander & Gunning, 2006). These allow incumbents to reinforce their electoral position through subsidised promotional costs. Mayhew (1974) highlights how much franking privileges have been an intrinsic part of American Congressional representatives’ continued promotional activities, adding: “it should be said that these incumbency advantages cause little displeasure among members” (Mayhew, 1974, p.84).

Literature that I class as systemic are often framed more as catalysts of an incumbency advantage, working in tandem with selection and the more behavioural effects. The ‘effect’ may advantage strong candidates but can also disadvantage or expose weaker ones. For instance, Levitt & Wolfram (1997)
question whether it is systemic or behavioural advantages that hold greater influence over the electoral success of incumbents. Whether or not incumbency advantage is gained from systemic advantages is ultimately determined by the ability of an incumbent to exploit the resources, or perks available to them. However, as with the literature on gerrymandering, it soon becomes clear there are problems when applying this concept in its entirety, to the English local situation.

First, there is a huge difference between the level of resources allocated to US congressional incumbents at the time of Mayhew’s study, and that available to local councillors in England today. Most councillors receive a basic allowance well below £10,000 and even this varies widely. Data collected by the TaxPayers Alliance (TPA) in 2012 shows that allowances in England can range from just £1,500 in the small non-metropolitan district of South Ribble, to £16,267 in the larger and more urban metropolitan authority of Birmingham (TPA, Research Note 116, 2012). Councillors can also receive special responsibility stipends depending on their role within committees, groups, minor travel made, subsistence and any care costs. However, incumbents do not benefit from any franking privileges and have no paid staff dedicated to their political career. Though the TPA argues in its foreword that in some local authorities rising pay and pensions mean that councillors are increasingly treated as professional politicians, they also acknowledge that the majority of councillors receive only modest allowances, which are appropriate for a position representing local communities (TPA, Research Note 116, 2012, pp.1). Essentially the role is an unpaid one where resources available are severely limited. As a result, this is
another area of the (American) systemic advantage literature that can be largely discounted in terms of its relevance to this project. Systemic Advantage (SA) scholars maintain that the emergence and increase in the electoral consequences of incumbency are in part explained through a series of resources and platforms that incumbent candidates have access, or at least greater access, to than their challengers. But because of strict regulations governing English local elections, differences in resources for campaigns are unlikely to have a significant impact. Since 2006 the total spending limit for a candidate in a local election campaign has been £600 +5p per elector (Stevens, 2006, pp. 86; The Electoral Commission, 2012). It is hard therefore, to foresee campaign finance or institutional perks as having any significant effect on the outcome of local elections.

Of all the ‘perks’ available to councillors perhaps regular coverage in the local media may feature as the most likely component of the SA literature to have some tangible application to the English situation. Stewart goes so far as to say that it is through the local media that authorities reach out to the public, and through the media that they may hear the voices of the public, or what may appear to be so (Stewart, 2000, pp. 270-1). However, at the same time other authors would question the principal discourse within the media regarding local electoral contests. For instance, Rallings & Thrasher argue that local elections are increasingly seen within the media as a reflection of national politics. Local authorities had once exercised substantial power over voters’ lives, but after a series of legislative changes, which have restricted the local scope and autonomy of authorities, the administrative importance of local government has declined significantly. Thus, the paradox presented is one where media interest in local
government has risen at the same time as its powers have diminished; leading to the assumption that media interest in local politics is a mere reflection of the fact that local elections have been elevated into national events (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp. 208-9).

Regardless, councillors can and regularly do feature within local media, especially those with special responsibilities. Councillors are much more likely to have greater access to the local media than their potential challengers, particularly throughout the midterm as for many wards no challenger would have yet been selected. This access will not always be positive; perhaps it could be something of a double-edged sword, at times doing greater harm than good. However, in the main, it is incumbents that will have a local platform to grandstand throughout their term, challengers will not.

2.5 – **Candidate Behaviour & Campaigns**

Behavioural scholars examine the actions of incumbents and their challengers. Whereas the sub-chapters above have been concerned with aspects such as the personal qualities of candidates, resources and conditions that favour incumbents, behavioural scholars are primarily concerned with the electoral campaign and the methods used by different types of candidate. Candidates’ behaviour is of great interest to scholars of incumbency advantage because unlike other more commonly researched variables, behavioural factors are much more malleable. Indeed, this area of research is of great interest to political scientists because it “reflects a principal feature of the single-member district plurality electoral system. The distinction between the interests and fortunes of
an individual representative and those of any collectivity; especially party to which he or she may belong” (Cain, Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1984, p.111). Symbolically at least, the growing level of research on candidates’ behaviour represents how important it is to understand the cues voters respond to in local political contests. If incumbency does carry some degree of electoral value, as the American literature suggests, then those councillors who are successful may hold commonly identifiable behaviours and attitudes. That is to say those particular behaviours may be more conducive to electoral success and because these traits can be learned, incumbent councillors, especially those with more experience, will have greater opportunity than their challengers to adopt and execute these methods effectively.

Within the American literature, there is a good deal of research suggesting that a general change in the behaviour of incumbent members of Congress during the 1960’s, aided a gradual increase in their re-election rate. Incumbent candidates began to spend more of their time tending to their constituent’s needs or queries and breaking from their own party on single or locally orientated issues. Gaines states that “what most observers think happened in the U.S. is that incumbents sensed an increased voter receptivity to non-partisan, non-programmatic cues and then wisely put the prerequisites of power to use building war-chests of personal popularity that could withstand party tides. This is why personal vote and incumbency advantage are taken to be bedfellows” (Gaines, 1998, p.188). Since the 1950’s there has been a growing body of evidence to suggest that the general behaviour of political candidates has shifted somewhat. Alford & Brady support the significance of this period in U.S. politics, by stating that it holds “the
key to understanding the rise of the personal vote" (Alford & Brady, 1993, p.152), as has been detailed in section 2.1. It would seem that a new kind of representative has emerged, less concerned with principle, ideology, or forming legislation and more concerned with his or her own job security.

This behavioural shift has been acknowledged in British political science also. Austin Mitchell neatly illustrates a divergence in the attitudes of Members of Parliament, pre and post-1960’s, in Westminster Man, stating “a Labour newcomer in 1945 told of his first visit to the constituency after the election. A top-hatted station master met him to ask whether he would be following the previous Member in paying his annual visit at that time of year” (Mitchell, 1982, p.183). Subsequently, there has been a good deal of scholarly interest focused on the level of attention paid by representatives to their constituencies. For instance, Norton & Wood (1990) argue, “the contrast between the leisurely, largely untroubled (by constituents, that is) days of the 1950’s and the hectic pace of the 1980’s is marked. Of the extensive work undertaken on behalf of constituents, not all is reactive. There is evidence that a significant number of Members adopt a proactive approach, actively soliciting constituency casework” (Norton & Wood, 1990, p.199). The evidence from Norton & Wood is supportive of the suggestion that a career politician may have emerged in British politics, i.e. people who regard politics as their line of business. Indeed, when defining a career politician, Anthony King described them as “hooked. Politics is his life, in the same way that doctoring is the life of most medical doctors, lawyering the life of most lawyers and political science the life of most political scientists” (King, 1981, p.250). The perception of IA behavioural scholars, that increased
constituency service will foster stronger relationships between incumbents and constituents, is now a familiar concept in the study of national politics (Abramowitz, Alexander & Gunning, 2006; Fenno, 1978).

According to the literature, incumbents can undertake ‘constituency service’ in a variety of ways; some explicit, some facilitating and some simply inferred (Alford & Brady, 1993; Cain, Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1987; Fiorina, 1977; Gaines, 1998; Herrera & Yawn, 1999). As Larry Bartels puts it, rational candidates seeking to maximise their electoral prospects must “go hunting where the ducks are”, so incumbents must respond by tailoring their agenda to those prospective voters who are likely to turn out (Bartels, 1998, p.43). Practically then, behavioural scholars maintain that incumbent candidates are successful because during the campaign they are able to emphasize the regular support they give to residents throughout their term. Assistance for residents, as well as advice, raising questions to their local Member of Parliament and help promoting campaigns on local issues are all examples of forms of constituency service. Though many of the requests from residents may appear trivial, this attention is important at the local level, as it is councillors that explain, advise or assist residents, or at least try to be seen to be doing so. Challengers on the other hand are not afforded the same opportunity. In this sense, the entire term of a politician can be seen as the campaign. For behavioural scholars, successful communication and responding to resident’s needs is a key facet of maintaining a well-serviced constituency. High politics doesn’t serve to protect the candidate from inevitable backlashes against his or her party, whereas being seen as a local facilitator, or at least a
local campaigner, empowers candidates and helps to put them in greater control of their own political career.

Rallings & Thrasher substantiate this distancing between local election candidates and the political party with evidence of split ticketing in British elections. They comment, “political parties increasingly need to realise that targeted, localised campaigning is important at all levels. The national campaign sets the scene, but only activity on the ground can maximise effective votes at the ballot box” (Rallings & Thrasher, 2003, pp. 569). The practical benefit of a loyal local following is that it can allow an incumbent to ‘weather the storm’ against his or her party. If a party that is unpopular at the time controls the authority, a candidate can distance themselves from the national party up to and during the campaign, by tailoring their agenda to the concerns of local residents. However, in acknowledging that incumbent candidates must respond to local events by adapting their behaviour, there remain further questions regarding the effect of community on the electoral fortunes of candidates.

2.6 - Community

There is wide array of research suggesting that geography may have a significant impact on the re-election of local councillors (Miller, 1988; Rallings & Thrasher, 1997a; Rallings, Thrasher & Gunter, 1998; Waller, 1980). That is to say that research indicates that those councillors in rural communities may enjoy greater chances of re-election than their counterparts in more densely populated towns and cities where the population is more transient. William Miller (1988) argues that “there is a tendency in rural areas towards a lack of contest because the
incumbent councillor is personally known to his electors who may not wish to give offence by opposing him” (Miller, 1988, p.65). Miller’s summation of the ‘polite British voter’ who wishes not to offend their fellow townsman is perhaps a simplistic explanation of the difference between urban and rural districts. However, in Local Elections in Britain (1997), Rallings & Thrasher support the idea of community effects, providing some evidence in favour of the suggestion that incumbency may have stronger effects in more rural districts. Rallings et al (1998) reiterate their support for this notion stating, “voters in the Shires appeared either more able or more willing to recognise a former councillor than those voting in London authorities. This suggests that individuals from smaller districts in rural areas have a better chance of becoming known as councillors” (Rallings, Thrasher & Gunter, 1998, p.121). This study compared multimember wards from the London Boroughs and English shire councils. While the authors may have positively identified a voting pattern, or simply tendencies differentiated by geographies, there is plenty of scope to investigate the phenomenon further.

One possible explanation may be that the voting population in rural areas is less transient and therefore less inclined to change. This in turn gives a greater impetus towards establishing a political bond between the voter and candidate. Another explanation may be that densely populated areas are perhaps more likely to have greater population mobility, which will result in residents having less of a social investment in their own community. Rallings et al go further, stating that “shire elections can take place in relatively small authorities with a stable population, where scope for candidates to nurture a “personal” vote might
be considered better than in the de-personalised atmosphere of a major city” (Rallings, Thrasher & Gunter, 1998, p.115). Yet another explanation, as detailed by Malcolm Moseley, is that residents of more remote communities are more demanding when it comes to having a say in decisions that are likely to affect them. It would seem that they are more likely to get involved in the support and delivery of local services and are generally more engaged with local politics because they tend to depend on local services more (Moseley, 2007). It would seem then, that from the outset community effects may frame any discussion on the electoral advantage of incumbent candidates.

2.7 – Parties

A key difference between the American and English situation is that traditionally, British elections are often framed in terms of the parties that contest them rather than the individuals. Austin Mitchell has suggested for parliamentary elections that “our party system was strong, and most seats were so safe that MPs could more safely ignore them, a marked contrast with the USA where frequent elections and weaker parties make the constituency all important...our MPs were better at representing classes than constituencies” (Mitchell, 1982, p.182). The fact remains that at both parliamentary and local levels, parties have traditionally been seen as such a strong influence on the result, that many political commentators rate elected representatives as mere pawns. Gaines illustrates this point by arguing that the “conventional accounts of modern British elections emphasize parties and issues and make no mention of individual candidates other than their party leaders. This is true not only of journalistic political analysis in Britain, but also of British political science. The
received wisdom is that local candidates are nothing more than ‘lobby fodder’ (Gaines, 1998, p.168). Norton & Wood go further saying that any “talk of a ‘personal vote’, a candidate attracting votes because of the qualities that are particular to him, is ascribed to wishful thinking on the part of the candidates (justifying their existence) or, in the case of election correspondents, to the need to fill column space or air time” (Norton & Wood, 1990, p.196). And finally, Phillip Williams’ famous quote from the veteran election agent who once said that “no candidate is worth 500 votes” (Williams, 1967, p.13) epitomises a view regularly held about candidates for English local government.

Most of the examples described above are directed at British parliamentary elections, but parties are just as important at the local level of government. “Most council candidates contest elections on behalf of registered political parties. Although independents do get elected (10 per cent of all councillors, mostly in rural areas), it remains the case that a party label often assists voters and enables candidates to receive campaigning support in their bid to secure election” (Stevens, 2006, p.89). In this sense we can suppose that the role of the political party at the local level will be similar to that at a parliamentary level, but more importantly, that parties are the principal route through which candidates enter and maintain their career as a local councillor. It is clear that parties dominate elections at all levels in England, so if there are significant incumbency effects, they are unlikely to rival the influence of party affiliation. However, even if incumbency were worth just 100 votes, a fraction of the example described by Williams in 1967, there will have been a substantial number of different electoral outcomes in England since 1972. As noted above
effects do not need to be large in order to have a significant impact on the make-up of local councils. According to data collected by The Elections Centre, some 5,936 incumbent candidates have secured their seat by a margin of 100 votes or less between 1974 and 2010.

The literature also acknowledges that party organisation is a crucial component of the local electoral campaign (Bochel & Denver, 1972; Cutts, 2004 & 2006) and by extension the fortunes of councillors defending their seats. Different parties will no doubt facilitate the performance of their candidates differently and this will be a reflection of how well they are organised. For instance, the efficacy of the local Liberal Democrat campaign (Cutts, 2006) has helped scholars of British political science understand the crucial role of well-established councillors and well-maintained councils in the wider success of a political party (Dorling et al, 2005). Research from local elections in America has also emphasized the importance of local party organisation during the electoral campaign, demonstrating their efficacy in translating contact time with residents into votes. The success with which local door-to-door campaigns has mobilised voters was “especially impressive given the meagre budgets on which these campaigns are operated...experimental results suggest that 12 successful face-to-face contacts translated into one additional vote” (Green et al, 2003, pp. 1,094). So as well as considering campaigns, it is important also to consider parties throughout any investigation into incumbency advantage, as the effect may have subtle variations across the parties due to different organisational structures or practices.
2.8 – Analytical Structure

Considering the literature just outlined the chapters that follow have been divided into themes of contextual relevance. Each chapter aims to clarify propositions raised by the literature regarding the effects of incumbency in the English situation. Each chapter may encompass a number of hypotheses, thus chapters are further divided into sub-chapters with the express intention of assessing a particular premise or general hypothesis within the theme.

Chapter 3 details the methods and data used for the project and goes on to detail various sets of data used, as well as methods employed to make objective assessments. The project is principally a quantitative examination of incumbency effects in England at the local level and where possible its methods are guided by the literature. The chapter also details how the three major sets of data obtained are used. These include; aggregate electoral data provided by The Elections Centre database at Plymouth University, results from annual Local Elections Candidate Surveys as well as 2001 rural/urban information provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It further describes variables used, including those constructed for the specific purpose of the project.

After the data and methods are outlined, the thesis is split into five major results chapters, each based on broad themes concerned with a particular facet of incumbency advantage.

Chapter 4 is titled *Competition & Incumbent Success in English Local Elections.* The objective of this chapter is to present an overview of local elections in
England over the period examined. This is done from a perspective of electoral competitiveness and the relative success of incumbent candidates choosing to stand again. The chapter first examines seat contestation with a view to assessing competition in local elections over time. Data discussed show a gradual growth in the seats contested for local government over the thirty six years examined, this is shown to be principally due to the growth of the Liberal Democrats, independents and minor party candidates. After this the chapter moves on to contestation rates for incumbent candidates, revealing a slight growth in the rate at which incumbent candidates choose to stand again. Finally, the chapter examines trends in the success of incumbent councillors standing for re-election over the period. Overall, chapter 4 is designed to serve as an introduction to local election results in England, setting the electoral scene within which to contextualise data in those chapters that follow.

Chapter 5 is titled *Estimating Incumbency Advantage: Winners, Losers & Experience Effects*. The chapter offers estimations of incumbency effects through the construction of a variety of estimating models, some derived from the theory and others constructed solely for the purpose of this project. It also considers the impact of candidates’ experience on their electoral performance. The following general hypotheses are considered:

- **Incumbents do better than freshmen in English local elections**
- **Incumbent sophomores do better than their freshmen colleagues** (i.e. there is evidence for a Sophomore Surge in English local elections)
- Retiring councillors do better than incoming freshmen (i.e. there is evidence for a Retirement Slump)
- Incumbent losers do better than freshmen losers
- More experienced councillors do better than less experienced councillors

Beginning with an analysis of winning candidates in local elections, the chapter seeks to compare the performances of incumbents and freshmen. Results show a consistent performance gap in favour of councillors seeking re-election. After this two unbiased models are presented with the aim of measuring Sophomore Surge and Retirement Slump effects. Models are derived from the theory, which is well established in the literature. Results from both models indicate a mild advantage for incumbent candidates. Using both these measures, the chapter goes on to assess the effect of candidate experience on electoral performance. Results indicate that a candidate’s experience may, to varying degrees between the parties, add to their electoral performance. Finally, using data for losing candidates in English local elections, two further estimators are constructed to assess any effect of incumbency in situations where councillors lose. Both models are experimental and developed with the express intention of assessing incumbent performance in a comparatively equitable and measurable scenario. Results revealed are similar in magnitude with that discussed for Sophomore Surge and Retirement Slump models detailed earlier, showing a mild advantage for incumbent candidates.

Chapter 6 examines any effects of election structure on incumbency advantage and is titled Administrative Mitigations on Incumbent Performance. The chapter
assesses councillor performance across district magnitudes and electoral cycles, for differences in the relative vote share of councillors and whether these votes are new or come at the expense of others. The chapter addresses the following broad hypotheses:

- Incumbency advantage weakens as the number of vacancies increases
- Incumbents are safer electorally in quadrennial electoral cycles than elections by thirds

The results for the effect of district magnitude show a weakening of any advantage associated with incumbency as district magnitude increases. The incumbent performance measures described in chapter 5 are used to reveal a performance gap between those in two member and three member wards. Also, incumbents are shown to be most likely of success, relatively, in single member wards. Finally, electoral cycles are considered for their effects. The data are largely unclear and fail to lend any significant weight in support of mitigating effects on the performance of incumbent candidates.

Titled *Structural Effects*, chapter 7 looks at the effect of electorates, turnout and rural/urban composition on incumbent performance. The chapter seeks to address the following general hypotheses:

- Smaller geographies will offer more favourable conditions for the re-election of incumbent candidates
- Turnout is lower when incumbent candidates are not contesting
Rural communities will offer more favourable conditions for incumbent candidates.

After examining the literature, the consensus appears to be that smaller geographies are more conducive to cultivating an electoral advantage. This chapter examines electorate size with the intention of comparing small and large electoral communities. The data imply that smaller wards offer more favourable conditions for councillors to retain their seats. Variations in turnout are also considered in chapter 7. As before, data revealed show that turnout rises slightly in wards where sophomore candidates decide to defend their seat. An unbiased model is offered to estimate the average rise for each of the three major parties. Finally, the chapter seeks to assess the effect of a ward’s urban status on incumbency advantage. Urban effects are examined to ascertain whether rural districts offer more favourable conditions for incumbents than do urban ones, as well as estimating any difference between them.

Chapter 8 is titled Candidates’ Attitudes & Behaviour and discusses results from the Election Centre’s Annual Candidate Survey. The chapter presents results primarily from incumbency questions in the 2011 and 2012 candidate surveys, as well as data from existing questions on the behaviour of candidates in local government elections with varying electoral experience. Three broad themes are covered in this chapter:

- Incumbent candidates have greater administrative experience
- Incumbent candidates have a greater public profile than their challengers
- Incumbent candidates are better campaigners than their challengers

The chapter begins by examining experiential effects associated with greater incumbent success. Respondents overwhelmingly felt that incumbent councillors were advantaged, that councillor’s greater experience from working on the council helped them to secure re-election and that local support is more consistent and reliable for incumbent candidates.

The chapter then goes on to discuss data concerned with the public profile of incumbent candidates. Data for all types of respondent imply that councillors defending their seat enjoy a higher local profile than their challengers and are advantaged by this on election day. Respondents tended also to suggest that incumbents benefit from a stronger relationship with the local media.

It then moves on to assess data regarding campaigns. Not only do the results suggest that incumbent candidates put more personal effort into the electoral campaign, though the degree to which respondents agree varies by their candidate type, but respondents also suggest that councillors seeking re-election are able to recruit more volunteers to help them do so. These results are corroborated by other data collected on candidates’ campaigning efforts. These include average weekly hours delivering leaflets and help received throughout the campaign period.

Finally, chapter 9 is the project’s concluding chapter and summarises results discussed throughout the thesis. It details the potential impact incumbency may
have on the electoral fortunes of candidates in local government elections. The chapter also describes observed differences between the parties, paying particular attention to the Liberal Democrats.
Chapter 3 – Data & Methods

As detailed above, this study is predominantly a quantitative examination of the effects of incumbency on local electoral outcomes. As such large and varied sets of high-quality data are required in order to propose any generalizable observations to English local elections. There are three principal sources of data utilised for this thesis. The major sets are; first, the aggregate electoral data provided by The Elections Centre local elections database at Plymouth University. Second, results from the 2011 and 2012 local elections Candidate Survey are also provided by The Elections Centre. Third, neighbourhood Statistics and Census information including data from the 2001 UK Census and estimated population statistics were all provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The project uses these data in a number of ways, principally they are used to assess the broad research hypotheses raised in the literature and discussed in chapter 2 but they are also used to illustrate the state of local elections in England over the period examined by this thesis although, this is largely confined to discussions in chapter 4. This chapter now goes on to provide more detailed information on the sets of data utilised, describing their format and relevance to the project, as well as information on the key dependent and independent variables used.

3.1 – Election Data

The Elections Centre has compiled a comprehensive record of results for local elections across Great Britain. The stated aim of the Centre is to provide a
“comprehensive record of local elections in Britain” (Rallings & Thrasher, 2003) and the database now holds the details of almost every candidate who has contested an election to local government since its reorganisation in the early 1970s. Details such as; candidates’ names, initials, gender, party affiliation, incumbency status, votes cast, turnout and electorate size are collected annually by the Centre. However, for reasons that are explained below, information for initials, gender, incumbency and turnout are extrapolated from the data at times, using methods that are well established by the Centre and the appropriate academic literature. The working file; constructed from the dataset comprise all candidates who stood for election to local government in England between 1973 and 2010 and totals 554,995 cases. This figure includes a number of seats that were unopposed (i.e. where the number of candidates is less than or equal to the number of seats available). The majority of uncontested seats occurred during earlier years of the period. The dataset also fails to consider by-election results due to an inconsistency in the information collected and the format in which the data are stored in the database.

**Independent Variables**

Independent variables are the principle explanatory and divisionary information used throughout the project to examine patterns and interactions of interest. Independent variables are free to be manipulated in order to identify any relationship with dependent variables (detailed later), or general information of interest. The independent variables used within this project are outlined in detail below.
Party - Party affiliation of candidates is collected in its exact form, but has been collapsed for the purposes of this study into a four-category nominal variable. These categories are Conservative (Con), Labour (Lab), Liberal Democrat (LD) and everyone else (Other). Pre-1989 data for the Liberals, Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Liberal/SDP Alliance has been coded together as LD for this study. As such, any references to LD pre-1989 will be referring to these parties. There are obvious issues also about how to interpret results for the Other category, namely the ‘bundling’ of Independent candidates with those candidates standing for national or minor parties, but also within these minor parties. Though Other candidates are considered at times, this study is predominantly concerned with the examination of incumbency effects for the three major parties and does not consider Others for the majority of the thesis.

Gender – The Elections Centre collects gender information of candidates. However, as it is not a requirement to declare gender when standing for local government this information is sometimes extrapolated from candidates’ names. Also, although lists of forenames are consulted names are not an infallible guide to gender, meaning that on occasion it is impossible to determine a candidate’s gender from their name alone. These data are excluded from any gender-based analysis of the data.

Incumbency Status – Incumbency Status is a categorical variable comprising freshmen, incumbents, sophomores and retirees. As for party and gender, incumbency is already available in the data provided by the Elections Centre but in simple binary form. From this information freshmen and incumbents can be
easily distinguished, freshmen are coded simply when incumbency is absent in the candidate data. Coding for sophomores and retirees is a little more complicated. Sophomores are defined as first time incumbents and so they are coded as such only when they appear in the data after having stood as an incumbent for the first time. It must be noted that it is likely that there is a small underestimate in the number of incumbents within the dataset, due to what Rallings & Thrasher describe as the increasing difficulty in “tracking some candidates…because of the apparently growing practice of candidates using preferred names on the ballot paper – Anthonys become Tonys, Elizabeths become Liz/Betty etc.” (Rallings & Thrasher, 2010, p.xx).

Retirees are defined as incumbents who have stood down at or before the next election, not those incumbents who have failed to win. Retirees are coded as such only when they appear in the dataset as a winning incumbent before failing to contest the seat at the next point in the electoral cycle. There are two weaknesses in the coding for retirees within the dataset. The first derives from the failure to combine by-election data with core aggregate data. As previously stated, by-election data have not been considered for this project due to the names of candidates not being collected and stored by the Centre. Bearing this in mind, there may be a handful of cases in which a freshman candidate has won a by-election, the local authority failed to report their incumbency by their sophomore election and thus the win appears as though it was a freshman win in the working file. However, this is likely to be a rare occurrence particularly in more recent elections. Finally, it is likely that retirees during 2007-2010 will be underestimated. Due to the 2010 cut-off point for examination there is a severing
in the line of information required to corroborate whether candidates have failed to stand again.

*Experience* – Perhaps better termed ‘council experience’, the *Experience* variable is derived from incumbency information provided in the data from the Elections Centre. The coding procedure is simple, for every consecutive electoral victory *Experience* is added to the candidate, thus the *Experience* variable is fundamentally a proxy for time spent on the council. As freshmen are defined as a candidate contesting a seat, and not currently on the council, they will continue to retain their freshman status until their first freshman win. After this win and having served a term on the council, if they choose to contest again they are referred to as sophomores. Thereafter, candidates’ level of experience is referred to simply as the number of terms they have served on the council, i.e. ‘Two Termers’ will have contested their second election after winning, Three Termers will have contested their third, and so on. In an attempt to preserve a meaningful number of cases for analysis, at times more experienced groups have been collapsed into either a ”4+ Terms” group, or “3+ Terms” group.

It is important to remember that voluntary resignation is considered to be the biggest factor in councillor turnover (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997a, p.79) and as the average age of incumbent candidates is some 58 years\(^3\) there are relatively few Incumbent winners with *Experience* that span beyond 12 years, as illustrated by figure 3.1.1.

\(^3\) Data from the 2012 Candidate Survey (2012, n=142, \(\bar{x} = 58.3\))
The *Experience* variable was constructed simply by arranging the data into relevant authorities and wards then sorting by name and year to isolate a candidate's change in incumbency status from freshman to sophomore. After sorting there is a simple process of following the chronological order of electoral results for that candidate and adding experience to the candidate if they contested at that point in the electoral cycle.

Before continuing, there are caveats and potential weaknesses in the constructed *Experience* variable that must be discussed in some detail. Firstly, as candidates are predominantly distinguished by name, name changes pose serious problems in tracking candidates (Rallings & Thrasher, 2010, p.xx). There will almost certainly be an under-reporting of candidates who change their names from one
ballot paper to the next. Secondly, as candidates who represent wards that have undergone boundary changes are not considered, *Experience* will not include these candidates after any alteration. The methodological implication of including these data would mean the electoral ‘conditions’ would have changed in a manner that is not directly comparable. Name and boundary changes pose a serious challenge in identifying a greater quantity of longer serving candidates as a break anywhere in the chain of elections will stem the remaining series of results for that candidate, leaving a chain of stagnant candidate data.

A similar consequence arises for candidates whose political career may have emerged from a by-election victory. As discussed earlier due to the way in which data for by-elections are collected and compiled, they lack the required candidate information to code the variable accurately. There are two principal consequences. The first being, that on the rare occasion that an incumbent does stand down to re-contest for another party, this information will be missed. The second and more crucial consequence concerns candidates who enter the council via by-elections. There have been 2,012 by-elections in England between 2004 and 2012, averaging just over one thousand per electoral cycle. Of these the Elections Centre has managed to collect reasons for vacancies for 1,781 cases. Around 43% (766/1,781) are initiated due to death of the incumbent; some 5% (98/1,781) are due to disqualification, failure to attend and other similar reasons, whilst the majority of by-elections 52% (924/1,781) are initiated by the resignation of incumbent councillors. These data are a clear indication that the dropout rate for councillors is high and so it is unlikely that many incumbent
councillors will have re-contested their seat during a by-election, or for that matter contest the seat ever again.

As discussed earlier, rather lengthy timeframes are considered once we examine data for those incumbents who have served for three or more terms on the council. As the numbers of by-elections over an electoral cycle are high and name and boundary changes pose yet further issues in the continuity of the *Experience* variable, the number of cases considered, particularly for more experienced candidates, quickly becomes harder to track. With this in mind, it is likely that the constructed *Experience* variable will both underestimate the overall experience of candidates in local government elections and return a sizeable portion of candidates with no *Experience* information at all. In light of this underestimation, and for the purposes of Retirement Slump analysis (details of which are discussed below), the *Experience* variable has been expanded. *Experience Expanded* is used solely for the Retirement Slump analysis, so as to include a larger portion of these ‘missing data’. To do this an assumption has been made that all incumbents who appear in the dataset for the first time without a corresponding freshman year in the previous electoral cycle are sophomores. Clearly there are potential weaknesses with this expansion of the *Experience* variable adding to pre-existing weaknesses in the variable. However, due to the unfortunate incompatibility between the election and by-election data, and motivations for the expansion the data used for SRS analysis, the assumption is a worthwhile compromise.
FYC – Due to the timeframe considered and for the purpose of many illustrations used throughout the thesis, the ordinal variable ‘Four-Year Cycle’ (FYC) has been constructed. The variable collapses election years into nine four-year electoral cycles (apart from the 1974-1979 category which is a 5 year band). The number of elections varies considerably over a cycle. So collapsing election years into a FYC allows charts to reflect comparably, any significant changes in the data over the period of study. Comparing cycles rather than years, though extending over a longer timeframe, is a better way of making like for like comparisons. The FYC variable is used predominantly, though not exclusively, for illustrative purposes.

Dependent Variables

Where independent variables are predominantly explanatory, dependent variables are measures, or variables of interest, that vary or indeed fail to vary based on independent variable input. They are measures of effect; enabling us to identify whether there are potential causal mechanisms within the data. Many of the dependent variables used in this project have been constructed specifically to identify particular phenomena. Full details of all dependent variables are outlined below.

CVS – Candidate Vote Share (CVS) for Single Member Districts (SMDs) is simple to determine. It is calculated as a candidate's vote count as a proportion of the total number of votes for that election in that ward. However, for multimember districts (MMDs) CVS is calculated as a candidates vote count as a proportion of the ballot papers used. These data are not necessarily supplied and for MMDs where ballot data is missing CVS may be tricky to estimate. Consequently, for the
purposes of this thesis, ballot papers are estimated using the Ware et al
’Weighted Sum of Votes’ method that can be found in ‘A New Algorithm for
Estimating Voter Turnout When the Number of Ballot Papers Issued is Unknown’
(Ware et al., 2006).

Turnout – Calculating the Turnout variable in SMDs is a simple case of summing
all votes against the electorate size reported from the local authority. However,
for MMDs, as for CVS, the calculation of Turnout where ballot paper information
is missing is reliant on the Ware et al (2006) method described above.

SIP – The Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP) measure is a scalar
variable derived from CVS. The objective of the variable is to be able to
accurately measure the relative electoral disparity between winning incumbent
and freshmen candidates of the same Party, who run in the same election and in
the same ward. The variable does this by comparing the CVS of an incumbent
candidate against the average freshmen CVS within the same MMD at the same
election. SIP is not only a relative indicator of the electoral performance of
incumbents against freshmen, but also a measure that eliminates many
opportunities for bias in the result as all electoral conditions aside from
candidate ballot order are controlled for. SIP for party category $p$ can be
expressed as follows:

$$\text{SIP}_p = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{(x_{ij} - \bar{y}_j)}{n}$$
Where $p$ denotes the party category, $x$ represents the CVS of incumbent $i$ in ward $j$ and $\bar{y}$ is equal to the mean CVS of all freshmen in ward $j$. SIP is calculated only for multimember wards where the full slate of candidates for the party $p$ wins. As the measure only considers winners and wards where all the party’s candidates win, this is likely to have a dampening effect on the measure, eliminating extreme cases of lone incumbents surviving large partisan swings.

**SRS** – As for SIP, the Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS) variable is scalar and derived from CVS. The variable is designed to measure any change in CVS that a party experiences when retaining a seat after their incumbent councillor decides not to contest at the next point in the electoral cycle. The variable considers only quadrennial SMDs, examining party election data in the incumbent’s final election year against the freshman win in the following election. In an attempt to mitigate the effects of local party swing on the results, the ‘slump’ is in-effect standardised by considering the change in CVS of other seats for the party within the same authority. SRS compares the seats of interest (those seats retained after the loss of an incumbent candidate) against the average CVS of all non-selected winners from the same party in the same local authority. SRS for party category $p$ can be expressed as follows:

$$SRS_p = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{(x_{ikl} - \mu_{il}) - (y_{jkl} - \mu_{jl})}{n}$$

Where $p$ denotes the party category, $i$ refers to election 1 (the retiring incumbent year) and $j$ to election 2 (the winning freshman year). $x$ equals the CVS of a
retiree in seat $k$ in authority $l$. $y$ refers to the CVS of a winning freshman that follows in election $j$ and also in seat $k$. $\mu$ refers to the average CVS of all non-selected winners from the same party in the same local authority. Any wards that are redistricted or change authority type from election $i$ to election $j$ are not considered.

Also, it is important to note that an assumption of this model is that an average change in local authority partisanship is a proxy indicator for ward-level changes across the whole authority. This has been based on electoral geography arguments about the local dimensions to determinants in the variation of partisanship (Johnston & Pattie, 2006). But it has also been influenced by the Schumpeterian argument that decisions are made at the authority level and therefore, it is rational to assume that residents will respond to the council’s record. However, there appears to-date to be little published academic literature in support of the later hypothesis and the model’s ‘authority swing’ assumption is a potential weakness in the SRS model that must be acknowledged.

**RRILP** – Termed the Role Reversal Method of estimating Incumbent Loser Performance (RRILP), the aim of this model is to examine the disparity in the performance of candidates in seats where more than one party is electorally competitive. Where the SIP and SRS models discussed above consider only wards where one party wins, the RRILP model considers data where incumbent candidates both win and lose in a way that is directly comparable. To do this the model compares data from two different scenarios, in both of which the party manages to secure just one seat in a two-member district (2MD). The first
scenario examined is one where both an incumbent and freshman candidate from the same party contest a ward and only the incumbent is elected. The CVS gap between the winning incumbent candidate and their losing freshman counterpart is measured and averaged. This average is offset against the average CVS difference in the second scenario, where both an incumbent and freshman candidate of the same party stand in a 2MD and the freshman wins whilst the incumbent loses. The former scenario tends to occur much more frequently than the latter, so there is an imbalance in the model where the number of cases in one half far outweighs the number in the other. RRILP for party category \( p \) can be expressed as follows:

\[
RRILP(p) = \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_i} \frac{(\varphi_i - \omega_i)}{n_i} \right) - \left( \sum_{j=1}^{n_j} \frac{(\omega_j - \varphi_j)}{n_j} \right)
\]

Where \( p \) denotes the party category, \( \varphi \) refers to the CVS of an incumbent candidate and \( \omega \) is the CVS for a freshman in the same 2MD ward. \( i \) denotes a ward where the lone winner for the party is an incumbent and \( j \) denotes that the lone winner for the party is a freshman.

**EPILP** – The Experienced Partner Method of estimating Incumbent Loser Performance (EPILP) operates in a similar way to the RRILP model described above, except for one key detail. The latter half of the model, this time denoted the \( k \) segment, compares wards where both the winner and loser for the same party are incumbent candidates. For both the RRILP and EPILP models it is important to ensure that the results are equivalent and comparable. In a purist
sense the RRILP model outlined above is an ideal measure of the disparity between incumbent and freshman losers in wards that are competitive for the party. There is symmetry to the model as opposing scenarios are directly compared. Unfortunately, due to the successes of incumbent candidates, data for the $j$ segment of the RRILP model are far fewer than for $i$, and this imbalance is an inherent weakness. The EPILP model on the other hand aims to examine how incumbent losers fare compared to freshmen losers where an incumbent colleague wins for the party in both scenarios. Thus the model for party $p$ can be expressed as follows:

$$
\text{EPILP}_{(p)} = \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_i} \frac{(\phi_i - \omega_i)}{n_i} \right) - \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n_k} \frac{(\phi_{1k} - \phi_{2k})}{n_k} \right)
$$

Where $p$ refers to the party, $\phi$ refers to the CVS of an incumbent candidate and $\omega$ is the CVS for a freshman. $i$ denotes a 2MD ward where the lone winner is an incumbent and loser a freshman, and $k$ denotes a 2MD ward where both candidates for the party are incumbents but only a lone winner. 1 and 2 refer to the rank of incumbent contestants in ward $k$, where 1 indicates the winning incumbent and 2 the loser.

STS - The Sophomore Turnout Surge (STS) model is simple in design and compares two measures over two consecutive elections. The aim of the model is to assess whether incumbency leads to an increase in Turnout in safely partisan SMDs. The data considered tracks Turnout in a ward where a freshman candidate wins by a margin in excess of 20% and then chooses to defend that seat at the next
election. Data are considered regardless of the result in the second election. Therefore, Turnout at both points in the electoral cycle is compared. However, in an attempt to control for national or local fluctuations in Turnout, a ‘participatory yard-stick’ is used to isolate fluctuations associated solely with the selected ward. The ‘yard-stick’ used is calculated as the average Turnout for all other wards won by the same party, in the same local authority, in the same election year. So, STS is essentially a measure of the relative variation in Turnout within safely partisan seats during a candidate’s change in incumbency status.

STS for party category \( p \) can be expressed as follows:

\[
STS(p) = \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_i} \frac{(\tau_{lki} - \varphi_{ki})}{n_i} \right) - \left( \sum_{j=1}^{n_j} \frac{(\tau_{lkj} - \varphi_{kj})}{n_j} \right)
\]

Where \( \varphi \) refers to the average turnout of all unselected safe seat wards for the party in local authority \( k \) at point \( i \) or \( j \) of the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle. \( \tau \) signifies ward Turnout for candidate \( l \) at either the \( i \) election in the cycle, where the freshman candidate won by a margin in excess of 20% of the vote, or the \( j \) point where the very same candidate returns to defend their seat. There is no pre-requisite for the candidate to win their sophomore election.

The model attempts to ensure comparison of like-with-like wards by considering only wards won in the freshman year by an ‘electorally safe’ margin for the party. In this case an arbitrary figure of 20% has been assigned after careful consultation with Elections Centre academics. Cases are not considered where
average turnout data for the party within the local authority are missing or partially missing. This prerequisite has severely limited the number of cases considered for the Liberal Democrats. Uncontested elections are also not considered. Finally, the model’s attempt to control for variation in Turnout within the local authority is based on a similar principle to that discussed for the constructed SRS variable, and as such, it must be bound by the same potential weaknesses.

Chapter 3.1 has described the information available in the aggregate dataset used for empirical analysis in this thesis, as well as the variables constructed for testing hypotheses discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3.2 will go on to describe and discuss data used from the Local Candidate Survey (2011 & 2012), including questionnaire structure, sampling and response rates. The section will also detail 7 questions that were assigned to the candidate survey for the purpose of this project, as well as the rationale behind their construction.

3.2 – Candidate Survey Data

The Local Candidate Survey, conducted by the Elections Centre at Plymouth University, is an annual survey of candidates for local government. The survey encompasses a number of themes including the electoral experience of candidates, their motivations for contesting a council seat, the election campaign and candidates’ support network. The survey is usually conducted soon after the election to ensure that candidates have some time to reflect on events up to and after polling. Data used for this research were collected over 7 surveys, between 2006 and 2012. Details for candidates are publicly available. These include their
name, address and where applicable, their party affiliation and were obtained from nomination forms published by each local authority. The first five candidate surveys were completed in paper format and the final two were conducted predominantly on the internet. Immediately after their respective May local elections, letters were posted to a stratified sample of candidates inviting them to participate. The number of sampled candidates and response rates are detailed below:

- 2006 – Sample (2,800), Responses (1,183), Response Rate (42.3%)
- 2007 – Sample (2,848), Responses (1,255), Response Rate (44.1%)
- 2008 – Sample (3,142), Responses (1,095), Response Rate (34.9%)
- 2009 – Sample (3,534), Responses (1,105), Response Rate (31.2%)
- 2010 – Sample (5,676), Responses (1,966), Response Rate (34.7%)
- 2011 – Sample (4,503), Responses (899), Response Rate (20.0%)
- 2012 – Sample (6,500), Responses (1,043), Response Rate (16.0%)

As results from the 2011 and 2012 candidate surveys are used expansively in chapter 8 of this thesis, it is appropriate to detail relevant information regarding the surveys and respondents to them.

There were 899 usable replies received by the end of data collection in 2011 and 1,043 by the same point in 2012, meaning that the survey response rates were 20% and 16% respectively. Survey responses are compared with the full range of candidates that contested local elections and the results were found to be largely representative in terms of gender, party and authority type. However, the
data was weighted to more accurately reflect the make up of the candidate population in their respective year. The survey also catalogues candidates by their self-reported electoral experience. There are four broad groups that can be distinguished similar to those described in the aggregate data variables in sub-chapter 3.1. These are; *Incumbent* councillors seeking re-election, first time candidates termed *Freshmen, Serial Freshmen* whom are those candidates having contested more than one election but have never been elected, and finally *Experienced Freshmen* who are candidates that have some previous experience as a local councillor but currently contest as a non-incumbent.

Table 3.2.1 shows the share of candidate responses by self-reported electoral experience. The results show similar proportions of experience across the two years. Some 19.4% (174/897) of respondents to the 2011 candidate survey identified themselves as a incumbent candidate whilst just less than 15% (151/1,014) reported so in 2012. The largest experience group for both surveys were first time freshmen. The results indicated that 38.5% (345/897) and 40.7% (413/1,014) of respondents identified themselves as first time freshmen in the 2011 and 2012 surveys respectively. Experienced freshmen were the smallest experience group in both surveys, with just 8.8% (79/897) and 8.5% (86/1,014) indicating so in 2011 and 2012 respectively. Finally, a sizeable portion of respondents identified themselves as serial freshmen candidates. Serial freshmen made up one third of total responses (33.3%, 299/897) in 2011 and 35.9% (364/1,014) in 2012. The data in table 3.2.1 show continuity of responses over the two years, suggesting that there is unlikely to be any temporal selection effects in the experience groups. Considering this, there are likely to be few
methodological implications when combining the two datasets for the purpose of analysis across the experience groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey respondents by Self-Reported Electoral Experience</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifiable Respondents</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>1,014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 3.2.1 (Survey Response by Candidate Experience %) (Total n) 2011-2012)

Overall, the survey is shown to be fairly representative of candidates’ partisan identities and demographic characteristics as there is little temporal variation in the response portions of all experience groups. However, it must be noted that the surveys do tend to somewhat underrepresent Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) candidates and those candidates who represent wards in deprived areas. There is no evidence from the literature to suggest that the systemic nonresponse of these two groups will prove a significant hindrance in the study of incumbency effects and the candidate survey datasets have not been weighted to account for these shortfalls.

As discussed above the candidate survey provides a comprehensive set of data for the analysis of candidate characteristics, behaviour and opinion. However, the survey also provides an excellent opportunity to ask candidates a tailored set of questions on incumbency effects and whether candidates perceive there to be any electoral advantages. Fortunately the 2011 and 2012 survey allowed space for seven questions to be put to candidates directly for their opinion on the
subject. All questions were asked under the premise of incumbents tending to be successful in their attempts at re-election.

Figure 3.2.2 is an illustration of the seven statements presented to respondents. The incumbency questions block began with the statement that “In local elections many incumbents seeking re-election are successful. Below is a list of possible explanations for why this might be the case”. Candidates were asked to respond to the seven possible explanations on a 5-point Agree/Disagree Likert scale. The scales were selected using ‘Radio Buttons’ that allowed the user to easily select a single response for each statement. In order to eliminate any structural bias in the question block, the statements were randomly ordered for each respondent. The statements for respondents to agree/disagree with are listed as below, in no particular order.

- “Incumbents no longer have an advantage”
- “Incumbents have greater experience gained from working on the council”
- “Support among local voters is consistent and reliable”
- “Incumbents enjoy a higher local profile than their challengers”
- “Incumbents have a stronger relationship with local media”
- “Incumbents put more personal effort into their re-election campaigns”
- “Incumbents are able to recruit more volunteers for their campaigns”
There are numerous benefits in questioning candidates directly on proposed sources of incumbency effects. First, candidates for local government experience these events first hand and remain a largely untapped source of information on the subject. Second, and perhaps more importantly, asking candidates of varied electoral experience allows for a ‘triangulation’ of candidates’ perspectives on the sources of incumbency effects. Because candidates’ experiences will vary, there may at times be a disparity in their attitudes and knowledge. This disparity can be utilised to place particular emphasis on explanations for the differences across experiential groups. This is not to say that the perspective of incumbent candidates trumps that for serial freshmen or others, but rather, that it is important to identify the differences in perspectives and consider candidates’ previous electoral history when placing any emphasis on results. Thus if there is a clear and open admission from incumbents on a particular explanation of incumbency advantage, this may be of greater objective value to the research
than the same opinion from relatively inexperienced candidates at local elections.

Third, structuring the questions as statements to an agree/disagree scale allows for clear testing of various theoretical explanations from the literature, as discussed in chapter 2. Some examples of these explanations are candidate quality, experience, perks and incumbent monopolies on community access. Due to the limited space available within these surveys the seven statements listed above were originally selected from a longer list for their particular relevance to the local electoral situation in England.

Finally, though broad and open to interpretation, structuring the questions in an agree/disagree Likert scale allows for an ordinal codification of the results. This scale is preferred to a numerical scale as it is more intuitive and comparison between the suggested explanations remains testable and collapsible. This method is the most practical way of being able to distinguish between explanations from the literature, is more nuanced than a binary response and more practical than requesting detailed observational evidence of other candidates’ behaviour. Structuring responses to the questions on an agree/disagree Likert scale also allows for a heuristic exploration of the effects of incumbency and a broad comparison of results.

Section 3.2 has detailed the sampling, structure and methods of candidate survey data obtained from the Elections Centre, as well as incumbency questions designed for this project. The section has described the dataset, explained the
rationale behind methods used and how the data may contribute to the examination of the thesis topic. Chapter 3.3 will go on to detail the Rural/Urban dataset obtained from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and how it will be used.

3.3 – Office for National Statistics Data

For the purpose of exploring any urban-related effects on the performance of incumbent candidates, the project utilises data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the rural/urban status of wards in England. There are various definitions of what constitutes an urban or rural area. For instance, Moseley (1999) indicates that the “criteria most commonly used are population density, the proportion of built-up land, remoteness from urban centres, and degree of reliance upon ‘land extensive’ economic activities. But every researcher applies such criteria in a slightly different way” (Moseley, 1999, p.213). However, the established definition that is used for ONS data products was introduced in 2004 by DEFRA and the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) in partnership with the ONS. To give readers a brief outline of the methods employed, there are three broad classifications of ward, one urban and two rural.

Areas with settlements of over ten thousand residents are considered to be *Urban*, and the rest are classified as one of two *Rural* settlement types, either *Town & Fringe* or *Village, Hamlet & Isolated Dwellings* (VHID). Their population density distinguishes the rural types from one another, using detailed postcode data at varying scales. However, the key distinction between the types are that *Town & Fringe* areas tend to be more densely populated over a wider area than
VHID areas, which tend to be smaller, have a smaller overall population and are generally less densely populated. A further discussion of the classifications can be found in Bibby & Shepherd (2004), who offer a detailed explanation of the methodology behind the classifications. Below are the three classifications, the frequency of their occurrence and total share of English wards:

Rural/Urban Classifications (3 Categories)

- Urban (65.8%, 5,253 Wards)
- Rural - Town & Fringe (14.3%, 1,139 Wards)
- Rural - Village, Hamlet & Isolated Dwellings (VHID) (20%, 1,595 Wards)

From the list above it is clear that the vast number of districted wards in England are classed as Urban, almost two thirds (65.8% 5,253/7,987). Around one in five (20%, 1,595/7,987) are classed at VHID wards and 14.3% (1,139/7,987) are considered to be Town & Fringe. But these classifications can also be assigned into either a 'Sparse' or 'Less Sparse' category that distinguishes wards based on the relative density of residential housing.

Sparse wards tend to be comprised predominantly of housing that is less densely spaced. Less Sparse type wards will be composed largely of housing that is more clustered. This division now leaves six broad groupings and their frequency and share of total English wards are listed below:

Rural/Urban Classifications (6Cat)

- Urban – Sparse (65.3%, 5,215 Wards)
• Urban - Less Sparse (0.5%, 38 Wards)
• Rural - Town & Fringe – Sparse (13.4%, 1,068 Wards)
• Rural - Town & Fringe - Less Sparse (0.9%, 71 Wards)
• Rural - Village, Hamlet & Isolated Dwellings – Sparse (17.5%, 1,399 Wards)
• Rural - Village, Hamlet & Isolated Dwellings - Less Sparse (2.5%, 196 Wards)

There are relatively few Less Sparse wards in England in both the Urban and Rural settlements, less than 1 in every 25 (3.8%, 305/7,987) with the majority categorised in the VHID class. But ward count is not necessarily a reflection of population and therefore representation. In many Urban areas wards are multimember and rather large in terms of the population they represent. Table 3.3.1 breaks down the English population by the ward type in which they reside. Less than one fifth (18.5%) of the English population in 2001 were estimated to be living in rurally classified areas, compared to the more than four fifths (81.4%) living in Urban areas. Just 1.4% (less than 690,000) lived in sparsely populated areas at the time of the 2001 census. Considering the relatively small number of sparsely populated wards and the small share of residents they represent, the three-category variable is preferred. The six-category classification has not been considered for analytical purposes in this thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Population by Rural/Urban type (2001)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Less Sparse %</th>
<th>Sparse %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Persons in England</td>
<td>49,139,000</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>98.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>40,490,536</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural - Town &amp; Fringe</td>
<td>4,815,622</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural – VHID</td>
<td>4,275,093</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table – 3.3.1 (English Population shares by Rural/Urban type – CAS Ward Level (Source: UK Census 2001))
Figure 3.3.2 maps the estimated geography of these settlements across England and forms as an illustration of where the urban centres of England are. The London Boroughs (LBs) and the Metropolitan Boroughs (MBs); of the West Midlands, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Tyne & Wear are undoubtedly the major contributors to the total portion of urban wards in England. Conversely, the top tier Shire Counties (SCs) and lower tier Shire Districts (SDs) are the principal local authority type for the more rural communities across England. Alongside the LBs and MBs, many of England’s cities are now organised as Unitary Authorities (UAs) and so many of these will tend, to some degree, to represent a share of more urban English settlements, particularly those district authorities that gained county functions. For instance; Leicester, Swindon, Bristol, Plymouth, Reading, Stoke-on-Trent, Milton Keynes, Southampton and Slough to name a few. Where the reverse is true, i.e. whole counties gaining district functions; such as Cornwall, Wiltshire, Shropshire and the Isle of Wight, these authorities will undoubtedly include a large share of rural settlements. However, it is clear from figure 3.3.2 that the English rural/urban dichotomy will divide principally, though not exclusively, along types of local authority and any analysis by authority type should also take the rural/urban classification into consideration.
Figure 3.3.2 – English Rural/Urban Map (Source: Pateman (2010) Regional Trends, ONS)
Finally, the ONS dataset was merged with the aggregate electoral data supplied by the Elections Centre via a ward reference key. Due to the frequent occurrence of boundary changes and the renaming of wards, particularly in earlier years of the period, urban effects are only examined for the final two decades under examination, 1991-2010. There are two major methodological benefits to the project in doing so.

The first concerns the maximisation of the relative share of matched wards. Due to the way the aggregate election data is collected and compiled, the ONS ward key has to be matched by comparing, county, district and ward names. This is not a faultless exercise however; the benefit is that data for more recent years are more consistent than those for earlier years, with the caveat that there are some wards that remain unmatched.

Second, whilst there are clear epistemological issues concerning the longevity of potentially ‘superior’ 1991 census measures compared to the information derived from 2001 (i.e. at what point do the 2001 census measures become more appropriate to use than those for 1991?); it makes little sense to generalise these data to all years in this study. So the benefit of examining a smaller 20-year window, is that the data are more likely to be meaningful as it is closer to the time originally collected. To add, the new ONS definition was established after the 2001 census and based on these data, so this may mean that the 1991 and 2001 classifications are not directly comparable. It is unlikely that it would be methodologically appropriate to use both measures for the same analysis as they are defined slightly differently.
Chapter 3 has described in detail the data and methods that are used throughout this thesis as well as their relevance to the overall project. The first of five results chapters, chapter 4 goes on to describe broad trends in English local elections with a view to informing the reader of relevant electoral developments over the years. Throughout chapter 4, there is a focus on the contestation of seats, incumbent competition and the trend in how successful incumbents have been since the 1970s.
Chapter 4 – **Competition & Incumbent Success in English Local Elections**

The aim of chapter 4 is to introduce the reader to the relevant electoral trends in English local elections since the reorganisation of local government following the 1972 Act. As discussed in chapter 2, the competitiveness of seats is a crucial component for their turnover in elections at all levels and as “access to public office is open to all citizens” (Economist, 2010, p.34) is considered to be an indicator of the strength of a democracy. Seat contestation is not only an indication of electoral choice (i.e. the number of candidates standing or the ideological range) and is reflective of any structural barriers to standing for local government (i.e. rules for eligibility, election fees, campaign finance regulation, work hours and remuneration), but it is also a symptom of the competitiveness of local elections. It is an indication of whether there is a reasonable opportunity to hold elected officials to account on election day, as the Schumpeterian assertion maintains. Understanding how the level of competition in English local elections has altered over the period and how many incumbents choose to stand again is an important part of examining the extent to which incumbent councillors are advantaged, or not so. If too many incumbents are successful, the system becomes stagnant and resistant to change (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp. 67). Too few and there may be little continuity.
The chapter begins by examining the contestation of council seats over the period of study, aiming to illustrate the growth in contestation over the period and where this growth comes from. The work then goes on to present data for the rate at which incumbents choose to defend their seats, the stand again rates (SARs). This is followed by data on the successes of incumbent candidates over the period examined, hit rates (HRs), and whether there has been any significant variation over time? Finally, the chapter offers some concluding remarks on findings discussed.

4.1 – Seat Contestation

As discussed above, it is important to be aware of any trends in electoral competition when examining the success of incumbent candidates. Seat contestation is an important indicator of competitiveness for elections at all levels and variations can help explain much about the successes of particular groups at that time. For instance, soon after local government reorganisation, competition was not particularly strong in local elections. Rallings & Thrasher comment that “at the initial elections to the post-reorganisation of county councils, held in 1973, no fewer than 500 of the new councillors were elected unopposed” (1997, pp. 65). “It may be, of course, that some local candidates are so popular that no one dares to challenge them in an election. On the other hand, uncontested seats may be interpreted as an indicator of a general lack of interest in, and apathy about, local politics. But, voters can only have their say in local affairs if there is an electoral contest”(Rallings et al, 2005, pp.395). Nevertheless, contestation in English local elections has varied considerably over the period and, as the following data indicate, can also vary across the type of authority.
Table 4.1.1 shows the total number of vacancies, candidates and average seat competition over the period for each type of authority and the most contested seats over the period are shown to be in the capital. Since 1974 there have been almost sixty thousand candidates standing for election in more than eighteen and a half thousand London Borough (LB) seats, a ratio of 3.2 candidates for every vacancy. Closely behind the LBs are the predominantly urban Metropolitan Boroughs (MBs) and Unitary Authorities (UAs). The UAs are the most recent addition to local authority classifications. Over the period there have been almost eighty-seven thousand candidates competing for twenty-eight thousand MB seats. In the UAs, since the first elections in 1995 there have been some thirty-five thousand candidates competing for eleven and a half thousand seats available. The respective ratios for the MBs and UAs are around 3.1 candidates for every vacancy, slightly less than for London.

At a yet smaller ratio of contestation, the Shire Counties (SCs) average a ratio of just 2.9 candidates for every division vacancy, with the almost twenty-seven thousand seats at SC level being contested by more than seventy-eight thousand candidates. Finally, the Shire Districts (SDs) are the least contested type of authority. Though almost three hundred thousand candidates have stood for election to the lower tier shire council structure, there have been some one hundred and twenty four thousand vacancies over the period, which leaves a ratio of less than 2.4 candidates for every seat on district councils.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seat Competition in England</th>
<th>Total Vacancies</th>
<th>Total Candidates</th>
<th>Avg. Seat Competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London Boroughs</td>
<td>18,561</td>
<td>58,777</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Boroughs</td>
<td>28,030</td>
<td>86,829</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire Counties</td>
<td>26,900</td>
<td>78,349</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shire Districts</td>
<td>124,172</td>
<td>295,613</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitary Authorities</td>
<td>11,540</td>
<td>35,427</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Authority Types</strong></td>
<td><strong>209,203</strong></td>
<td><strong>554,995</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.65</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 4.1.1 – Seats, Candidates, Average Seat Competition (n = 554,995)]

The data presented in table 4.1.1 show a clear difference in the level of competition for seats on different types of council, which in turn have different grades of functional power and rural/urban classification. There is greater competition for seats at the county-level of shire authorities than at the district-level, and greater competition in the more urban Boroughs than in the Shires. These data support established notions in the literature that higher tiers of local government and more urban districts report higher ratios of seat competition (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997). However, these data are also presented as a static snapshot of contestation in local government elections in England, but over the period contestation has changed to varying degrees for the different types of authority.

Figure 4.1.2 is the first of a series of charts (figures 4.1.2-4.1.8) designed to illustrate the trend in seat contestation for various authorities over the period. Before going on to describe these trends, some explanation is required as to what the various scales and plots on the charts are indicating. The scales on the left-hand side of all these charts refer to frequency counts of incumbents and all candidates standing for that year’s election are marked in dashed black and dashed grey respectively on the chart. The scale on the right-hand side (red) is a ratio figure, which refers to the average number of candidates standing per
available seat in the election that year (data marked in solid red on chart). These charts illustrate three features of seat competition. Changes in the numbers of candidates standing, the number of incumbent candidates defending their seats and the broad level of contestation for council seats over the period.

Considering first the LBs, London councils are elected on a quadrennial cycle and so every four years all of London's councils are elected in their entirety. There have been ten elections during the period of examination and just 36 of the 18,561 seats during this time were uncontested.

Aside from 1974, when there were just 1,494 seats, the number of vacancies has remained fairly constant at around the 1,900 mark.

At its lowest point for the ten elections, the LB seat competition ratio (marked in red) begins at some 2.86 persons per seat in 1974. Throughout, there is a gradual increase in this ratio, rising to 3.13 in 1986, the year the Greater London Council (GLC) was abolished, before dipping slightly during the 1990’s. The ratio rises more sharply over the following three elections to finish on almost 3.7 candidates per vacancy in 2010. It is perhaps unsurprising that the trend largely mimics the number of candidates contesting LB seats (marked in dashed grey) over the period. This is because the number of candidates contesting has risen, whilst the number of vacancies has remained broadly the same. The number of incumbent candidates defending their seats (marked in dashed black) appears to have little effect on the overall ratio of seat competition for the Boroughs, thus

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we can determine that the rise in seat competition in the LBs may be due to a general rise in interest from candidates.

There are two principal findings from these data. The first is that competition has been gradually intensifying. The rise is almost equivalent to an extra candidate standing at every LB election and the gains have come predominantly in elections after the re-establishment of a London-wide authority, the Greater London Authority (GLA), in 2000. The second relates to the influence of standing incumbents. Though there is little variation, the overall level of candidate contestation appears to be unrelated to the number of incumbent candidates standing.

The MBs offer a slightly different contestation trend. Firstly, the MBs have a more complex electoral cycle than the LBs. While the LBs hold quadrennial elections, the MBs use elections by thirds to select a council. In three years out of four, residents select a third of the council’s members, so MBs are comprised
almost entirely of three-member wards. Unfortunately, due to the reorganisation and redistricting of the MBs the complexity is increased. There have been two major all-out elections in the MBs over the period, where all seats on the council were elected and the length of candidates’ first term in office was decided by their finishing position in the all-out year. The all-out elections were first in 1973 after local government reorganisation, followed by a year of shadowing for many councillors, whilst the second was in 2004, after re-districting as explained in chapter 1. Observing figure 4.1.3, contestation rates for the MBs since 1973 have clearly shown strong signs of growth. Where there were just 2.31 candidates standing for every seat in 1973, by 2010 this ratio had almost doubled, to an average of 4.45 candidates for every MB vacancy.

Unlike for the LBs there appears to have been some event-driven fluctuation in the competition for seats in the MBs. As discussed above, the 1973 and 2004 elections were unusual cases in the sense that all seats were up for election. Demand on the pool of candidates was inevitably much higher in these years. As figure 4.1.3 illustrates, more than five and a half thousand candidates stood for the 2,415 vacancies in 1973 and almost seven and a half thousand stood for the 2,445 vacancies in 2004. If we compare just these two instances, over the thirty-one years that separate them, seat competition has grown by an average of 0.7 persons per seat. Except for two slight ‘spikes’ in seat competition at the 1982-3 and 1992 elections, there has been steady growth throughout. In 1982 there is a marked increase in the number of candidates standing for seats in the MBs that coincides with a dip in incumbent contestation. The rise in candidate contestation is probably down to two national political events, as Rallings and
Thrasher detail. The sudden increase came about because of the newly created Social Democratic Party (SDP) that recognised the electoral value of establishing a purchase in areas traditionally associated with the Labour party. At the same time the Liberals were also driven to flood the MBs with candidates in an attempt to break the domination of the two major parties in the MBs (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp.88-89).

Interestingly, the abolition of the Metropolitan Counties (MCs), the old upper tier of the metropolitan authority, in 1985 appears to have had little effect on the overall contestation of seats. As for the LBs, the major factor in the growth of seat competition in the MBs appears to have been a steady rise in the overall interest of candidates standing rather than the number of incumbents choosing to defend their seats. In addition, though there has been a marked increase in seat competition since 2004, it is also important to recognise that this trend was set well before this election year. It can be quite apparent from figure 4.1.3, and potentially misleading, to observe that nearly all the growth in seat competition has come about since reorganisation. However, there are two key observations to consider.

First, the trend for what can be termed as a ‘second wave’ of contestation growth in the MBs, was in place from elections in 1996. This growth has continued for every MB election, except for those in 2004 where the number of vacancies in effect tripled, placing a major demand on candidates. Gains then continued to be made from 2006 on almost the same trajectory.
Second, the number of incumbent candidates standing remained relatively flat during the same period, again, except for the special case in 2004. These data are broadly in line with those discussed for the LBs and suggest that seat competition is on a steadily rising course in England.

[Figure 4.1.3 – MB Candidates, Seat/Contestant Ratio by Years (n = 86,829)]

As detailed in chapter 1, following the 1972 Act a two-tier structure of county and district councils was implemented in the English Shires. Shire Councils (SCs) have greater functional authority than district councils and are responsible for the delivery of large and prominent local services such as transport, social services, police, fire and education. Whereas the remit of districts tends to encompass housing, waste collection and planning powers. Like for the LBs, SC elections are quadrennial, with the entire council at stake and as for the LBs and the MBs, SC contestation has grown significantly over the period, from just over two candidates per seat in 1973 to just under four in 2010. This rise over the period is similar to the results for the Boroughs and supports an overall narrative of a gradual rise in seat competition in England, particularly in later
years. However, upon a closer examination, it is apparent that the number of candidates and incumbents has altered significantly. Where some six and a half thousand candidates stood for a shire seat in 1973, twenty years later this number had swollen to more than nine thousand. Conversely, aside from the 1981 elections, there has been relatively little change in the number of incumbent candidates standing over the same period (1973-1993), which remains at around the 2,000 mark.

The sharp fall in the overall number of candidates at the 1997 SC elections, from more than nine thousand to less than seven thousand, coincides with the introduction, or the ‘first wave’, of 46 UAs in England & Wales. This was effectively a conversion of many Shire authorities, particularly the more urban SDs, into a new single tier local authority structure. Inevitably, as UAs were introduced since 1995 this means that the number of SC seats, and thus the number of candidates contesting, fell in line with the growth of UAs. The drop was equal to almost eight hundred seats, a fall from 2,998 in 1993 to 2,203 in 1997. Yet seat competition has remained on its relatively steady course of a gradual increase throughout the entire period. After the ‘first wave’ of decline the gradual increase in the number of candidates standing for SC seats continues, whilst the number of incumbent candidates remains relatively constant at around 1,500. In 2009 a ‘second wave’ of authority conversions were made as a further 9 UAs were created. Five of these were from county-level authorities such as Cornwall, County Durham and Shropshire. The change meant a further drop in the overall number of seats, from 2,269 in 2005 elections to 1,858 in 2009, a drop of more than four hundred SC seats. What is most apparent from
this change is that relative seat competition continues to rise, this time at a greater rate than in previous years. A trend that is similar in the Boroughs. The level of seat competition rises from 3.38 candidates per seat in 2005 to 3.94 in 2009.

![Figure 4.1.4 – SC Candidates, Seat/Contestant Ratio by Years (n = 78,349)](image)

Overall, when administrative changes for the SCs are considered, the total number of incumbent candidates choosing to defend their seat has varied little over the period, roughly 70%. Conversely, the total number of candidates contesting SC seats has changed more so. As for the Boroughs, the relative number of candidates has grown considerably and this appears to be the main driving-force behind growth in SC seat competition.

The Shire Districts (SDs) have a more complex electoral history than the counties. The added complexity is due mainly to the different methods used for electing SD councils and different electoral cycles. Some sixty eight SD authorities have been elected by thirds and one hundred and twenty six have
been elected by a quadrennial electoral cycle. A few have also been elected by halves.

The level of seat competition for the SDs has grown over the period, though to a lesser extent than for authorities discussed above. Figure 4.1.5 illustrates the trend in seat contestation over the period. There is a trend of volatility, evident in-part because of the different electoral cycles used across the SDs. The number of candidates and incumbents contesting varies significantly over the years, but in a regular way that reflects the underlying mix of cycles. Every four years the demand for candidates increases sharply as the District councils on quadrennial cycles reach the end of their term. Seat competition also fluctuates significantly depending on the stage in the electoral cycle. For instance, in 1973 districts were contested on average by around 2 contestants per seat and by 2010 this figure had risen to almost 3.5 contestants. At regular intervals throughout the period of examination there have been sharp drops in competition as the electoral cycles and SC elections coincide. These falls are likely to be due to increases in vacancies and thus demand for candidates to stand in Shire elections at both the district and the county level, figure 4.1.5, illustrates this trend. For both candidates and incumbents there are clear ‘peaks’ in contestation that coincide with dips in seat competition.
The volatility within figure 4.1.5 can make it difficult to observe any long-term changes to seat contestation. In recognition of this, figure 4.1.6 collapses the data across the constructed Four Year Cycle (FYC) variable in order to examine the trend in seat competition over the entire period in a way that is more equitable.

The figure 4.1.6 illustrates the trend in seat competition for the SDs during the period over four year cycles (FYCs). These data are much clearer in suggesting that there has been some growth throughout the cycles. There were an average of 2.1 candidates standing for every seat in the 1973-78 cycle and 2.64 candidates standing for every seat by 2007-10.

However, closer inspection reveals that the vast majority of this rise came in earlier years. By 1987-90, seat competition had risen by more than a fifth, to 2.55 candidates per vacancy. Afterwards, seat competition in the SDs remained roughly at this level, climbing slightly in the final two cycles. We can conclude then, that for the majority of the period seat competition in the SDs over an
electoral cycle has remained relatively stable at just above two and a half candidates per vacancy.

When observing the number of candidates standing over the period, it is clear that there has been a gradual decline in the total number of candidates standing for election to the district-level councils. This decline marries neatly with the introduction of UAs in England. The introduction of UAs has led to the effective removal of almost one third of the total number of SDS in England, from around 290 to 200. There were 34,133 candidates contesting SD seats during the 1991-94 electoral cycle. By 1995-98 this figure had dropped by more than 10% to 30,724 candidates and there was a further drop to 27,863 candidates by 2007-10.

Interestingly, unlike for other types of authority, incumbents appear to be bucking the trend set by the total number of candidates contesting vacancies in the SDS. While the number of candidates has fallen, the number of incumbents choosing to defend their seats has increased considerably. In spite of the falling number of SDS, the rise takes the number of incumbents contesting from around two and a half thousand in the first three cycles (around 17% of vacancies), to more than seven and a half thousand in the final cycle (73% of vacancies). This is three times the opening figure. At its highest (1999-02), almost ten thousand incumbent candidates chose to defend their seats, a rate of 75% contestation. The bulk of the increase in incumbent contestation took place after the 1987-90 cycle and has remained broadly around three quarters level since.
There are two points of distinction that can be taken from the SD data above. The first is that although seat competition, in its entirety, has risen for the SDs, this rise has been notably less than for other authority types discussed in this chapter. Second, where the number of incumbent candidates defending their seats has appeared to have had little effect on the overall level of competition for seats in other types of authority, in this instance the rise in the number of incumbents standing has clearly had some role in maintaining seat competition across district-level elections.

As discussed above, Unitary Authorities (UAs) were first introduced in 1995 and there are some 55 UAs in England to date\(^5\). 46 of these were introduced between 1995 and 1998 and a further 9 were added in 2009. As for the SD elections, UA electoral structure has a complexity that is due in-part to a number of authorities opting to elect their councils by a different electoral cycle, some by thirds and others by quadrennials. Figure 4.1.7 reflects the patchwork of cycles across the

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\(^5\) Although the authority reserves the same functional powers, these figures do not include the Isles of Scilly as it is a *sui generis* authority and thus not considered in this project.
UAs, showing large variations in the number of candidates and incumbents standing from year-to-year over the period of examination. At first glance seat competition in the UAs appears to have grown markedly over the 16 years of their existence. Marked in red, the chart shows that average competition has grown from 2.75 candidates per seat in 1995 to 4.1 in 2010, a rise of almost one and a half candidates per seat. The figure 4.1.7 also shows that the number of candidates contesting UA elections has increased, as has the number of incumbent candidates (marked in dashed black). However, for both these groups it is difficult to gauge the rise, as one year is not necessarily comparable with its neighbour. Also, it is likely that the rise will reflect, in part, the addition of newer UAs, particularly those in 2009. However, as average seat competition is shown to gradually rise, it is inevitable that there must have been an increase in the relative number of candidates contesting UA seats, particularly in later years.

![Figure 4.1.7 - UA Candidates, Seat/Contestant Ratio by Years (n = 35,427)](image)

Figure 4.1.8 displays data on seat competition in the UAs across four year cycles (FYCs) illustrating the long term trend in competition for seats. The data show,
contrary to that described for the UAs above, that the long term trend for seat competition in the UAs is growing at a much slower rate. There has been a more gradual increase than illustrated in figure 4.1.7. Seat competition in the UAs averaged just 2.81 candidates per seat during the 1995-98 electoral cycle and rose steadily over the period to 3.43 candidates by 2007-10. The rise, of just 0.62, is less than half the difference between 1995 and 2010 as individual years. As for the Boroughs and the SCs, growth in UA seat competition is strongest in later years and this appears to be driven by the overall number of candidates contesting vacancies, not necessarily a significant change in the overall number of incumbent candidates contesting.

[Figure 4.1.8 – UA Candidates, Seat/Contestant Ratio by Years (n = 35,427)]

Overall, the data discussed above indicate that competition for council seats in England has been on the rise. Where the SDs have had meagre growth in seat contestation since the 1970s, the Boroughs, Counties and Unitary Authorities, have been much more competitive, particularly in later years. The SCs and the MBs show the largest increase in contestation, adding an extra two candidates
per seat by the end of the period, whilst the LBs and UAs begin from a more competitive position and have risen at a slightly slower pace. For all types of authority the rise in seat competition has been driven predominantly by an increase in the total number of candidates contesting, rather than incumbents or a fall in the number of seats.

This finding has a number of implications. Firstly, the data suggest that the growth in contestation is a national trend. However, there may be a case for the rise being associated in part with the level of power that a type of authority holds. The SDs exhibited consistently lower levels of competition than other types of authority with greater functional powers. It may be the case that there is less interest because there is less at stake at these elections.

Secondly, increased seat competition raises further questions regarding who these extra candidates are and what political background they come from. Are the major parties increasing the portion of seats they contest? If so, this may imply that the major parties have failed in the past to contest a large portion of seats at local elections and thus the capacity for further increases may not be sustainable. On the other hand, has there been an increase in the number of independent contestants or those from minor parties? This would have a different set of implications. For instance, if the number of minor party and independent (Other) candidates is on the rise, is this due to a perception that the barriers to standing for local office are falling? Or is it a broader development for instance, i.e. a rejection of nationally established parties perhaps? Also are these candidates successful?
Finally, the early charges of the SDP and Liberals, the Liberal/SDP Alliance and the emergence of the Liberal Democrats has undoubtedly had an effect on the structure of party competition in England and according Rallings & Thrasher (2003) will have had a significant impact on the number of candidates contesting local elections in a variety of authorities. Considering this, the chapter now goes on to examine the temporal trend in seat contestation for the four party categories across all authorities.

Table 4.1.9 displays the overall rates of seat contestation by authority type for each of the three major party categories and Other candidates. As outlined in chapter 3 Others refers to independent and minor party candidates. The data show that far from contesting all the seats available over the period, the two major parties have managed to stand in around four out of every five vacancies. The Conservatives have fielded a candidate in 83.6% of all seats in England and Labour in 79.2%. The Liberal Democrats, a combination of SDP, the Liberals and Liberal/SDP Alliance in earlier years, have contested just less than three out of every five vacancies (59.2%). Finally, Other candidates have contested more than two of every five seats (42.9%) available.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seat Contestation in England</th>
<th>LBs</th>
<th>MBs</th>
<th>SCs</th>
<th>SDs</th>
<th>UAs</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>95.9%</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
<td>92.8%</td>
<td>77.9%</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
<td>83.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrats</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
<td>69.7%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 4.1.9 Seat Contestation by Party by Authority Type (%) (n = 554,995)]
A closer inspection of the data in table 4.1.9 reveals differences between the parties across the authority types. Seats in the LBs are the most contested, particularly by the Conservatives and Labour who have fielded a candidate in 95.9% and 99.1% of all seats respectively. The Liberal Democrats have managed to contest more than three quarters of LB seats (75.7%). Candidates categorised as Other have contested just 45.2% of vacancies.

Contestation for Labour in the MBs is strong, with nearly every seat having been contested since 1973 (99.3%). However, the rate of contestation for Conservative candidates is almost 10% lower at 89.2% of all vacancies. The Liberal Democrats have managed to contest just 71.9% of all seats in the MBs and just 48.7% for Others. Looking to the Shire Counties, whereas Labour has dominated the rather urban Boroughs, the Tories are now the dominant party. At the county level of the Shires, the Conservative party has fielded a candidate in 92.8% of all seats. For the SDs Tory seat contestation is shown to be 77.9%. There is an almost 15% gap between Conservative contestation at the county and district level, a pattern that is repeated for the two other major parties to an even greater extent. For Labour, seat contestation in the SCs is shown to be 87.4% of all vacancies, but just 69.1% at the district level, a fall of more than 18%. The drop between the shires and districts is greatest for the Liberal Democrats. A Lib Dem candidate has contested just 69.7% of seats at the county-level, but the same is true for less than half at the district-level seats (49.7%), a drop of 20%. By comparison, there is little difference in the proportion of seats contested by Other candidates in the counties and districts, though the
proportions of seats contested are rather low in both instances, at just 40.4% and 41.1% respectively.

Finally, in the UAs the level of seat contestation between the parties is much closer, with Conservative and Labour contestation almost identical at 89.1% and 88.9% respectively. The Liberal Democrats show their highest rate of seat contestation across all types of authority, due perhaps in part to the party's formation shortly before the introduction of the UAs in England. Some 78.6% of UA seats were contested by the Lib Dems, around 10% less than for Labour and the Conservatives, the smallest gap for the party across all authority types. The UAs are also the most contested type of authority for Others with the number of candidates amounting to roughly half the seats.

Overall, the data in table 4.1.9 show that the Conservative and Labour parties have fielded by far the most candidates in English local elections. But the data discussed is a cross-sectional snapshot of seat contestation for the parties between 1973 and 2010. The chapter will now go on to discuss temporal variations in party contestation. Focusing once again on different types of authority, the aim is to illustrate the changes in seat competition, within and between the parties, as well as their contribution to the overall change in local election competitiveness in England.

Beginning with London, figure 4.1.10 shows that the Conservative and Labour parties have contested the capital strongly, though this does slip for the Tories in the nineteen seventies and mid-to-late nineties. Perhaps the most striking facet
of the figure 4.1.10 is the variation in the percentage of seats contested by the Liberal Democrats. This variation is probably due to the concerted efforts of the Liberals and SDP in the early 1980s to field as many candidates as possible, as well as the eventual formation of the Liberal Democrats in 1988. What is clear from the London data is that, aside from the early variations for the Lib Dems, seat contestation has remained relatively stable for the three major parties since 1994. Also, there has been an increase in the overall level of contestation for Other candidates since the late 1990s and this appears to have been the principal driver of seat competition in London. By 2010, seat contestation from Other candidates in the LBs surpasses that for the Lib Dems with 85 candidates fielded for every 100 seats.

The MBs present a slightly different picture to the LBs. Examining the figure 4.1.11 it is clear that the Labour party has dominated the MBs with seat contestation rarely dipping below 99% over the entire period. The flat red line is indicative of Labour’s electoral strength in the MBs over the years. Rallings &
Thrasher exemplify this strength by noting that Barnsley and Rotherham Boroughs are based in what came to be known as the ‘Peoples Republic of South Yorkshire’, as the authorities struggled to sustain two-party, let alone three-party competition at times (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp.90).

For the Conservatives however, there has been some variation in the proportion of candidates to seats. The figure 4.1.11 shows that the Tories have fielded candidates in between 80% and 99.8% of MB vacancies over the period. The pattern illustrates the parties’ struggle to remain as competitive as Labour, particularly in the early 1980s and mid-1990s. For the Liberal Democrats too, there has been considerable variation in the number of seats challenged and since the 1990s the party has followed similar levels of contestation to the Tories. The emergence and growth of the Liberal Democrats appears to have had a significant impact on the overall level of competition in English local elections and as Rallings & Thrasher note, “the emergence of the Liberal/SDP Alliance had a significant impact on the level of competition in local elections, particularly in the MBs” (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp.88-89). A closer examination of the data shows that the share of MB seats that featured a Lib Dem candidate on the ballot increased sharply in the 1982 elections, to almost nine of every ten vacancies (88.08%). This is some 7% higher than for the Conservatives at the time. This rise coincides with the concerted efforts of the SDP and Liberals to break two or even single-party competition in the majority of MB authorities. By 2010, the Lib Dems have continued to contest almost nine out of every ten seats (88.21%), 10% behind the Conservatives (98.18%) and Labour (99.88%).
Where there has been little growth in the portion of seats contested by the three major parties since the mid-1990s, there has been a marked increase in the number of candidates categorised as Other standing for election to the MBs. At its lowest, in 1984, fewer than one in six (15.8%) MB seats were contested by a candidate not from the three major parties. By 2010, voters could frequently expect to see more than one candidate on the ballot paper, with seats averaging almost 1.6 Other candidates. Earlier in this chapter seat competition in the MBs was shown to have increased by more than two candidates per seat since the early 1970s (see figure 4.1.3). The data plotted in figure 4.1.11 suggests that this rise can be ascribed first, to the growth in the number of LD candidates in the early 1980s and then, to the number of candidates categorised as Other since the mid-1990s.

![MB Seat Contestation by Party by Years](image)

[Figure 4.1.11 – MB Seat Contestation by Party by Years (n = 86,829)]

Figure 4.1.12 shows the proportion of SC seats contested by the parties over the period. As discussed above, the Tories have tended to stand in Shire seats at greater rates than Labour and the Liberal Democrats, though the party level of
contestation grew steadily over the period, from 80% in 1973 to almost every seat in 2009 (99.78%). Another interesting facet of the data is the widening gap between the Conservatives and other two parties. At both the county and district-level (see tables 4.1.12 and 4.1.13 respectively) Tory contestation appears to slightly outpace that for Labour and the Lib Dems in later years. In the districts, for the majority of the period the gap between Labour and the Conservatives is between 5% & 10%, but during the 2000s this gap widens to between 15% and 20%. In the counties a gap of less than 5% in seat contestation for the majority of the period widens in the 2000s to around 10%.

The figures 4.1.12 and 4.1.13 show significant growth in competition from the Liberal Democrats and Other candidates. In earlier elections examined the number of Liberals and SDP candidates contesting the counties increased markedly, quadrupling from 21.38% in 1973 to 82.79% of vacancies in 1985. This trend is repeated in the districts where there is a more gradual progression in the number of Lib Dem candidates throughout the first 20 years examined, particularly in 1982. These data are broadly in line with those discussed for the MBs and LBs, indicating a ‘first wave’ of rising seat competition in English local elections that was driven by the increased association of the Liberals and SDP, followed by the emergence and growth of the Liberal Democrats as a competitive political party in British local politics.

It is independents and minor party candidates, categorised as Other, that are responsible for the observable ‘second wave’ of seat competition. As figure 4.1.12 illustrates, the sharp rise in the proportion of seats contested by these
candidates is a relatively recent phenomenon in local elections. For the majority of the period, around one third of vacancies could have expected to see an Other candidate. However, between 2001 and 2009 this figure increased dramatically, with the relative share of Other candidates tripling, as it did in the MBs during that time. For the districts too (see figure 4.1.13), seat contestation by Others has increased at a similar rate. The proportion of Other candidates contesting vacancies has risen from some 28.9% of seats in 2002 to more than three quarters (75.8%) in 2010.

[Figure 4.1.12 – SC Seat Contestation by Party by Years (n = 78,349)]

[Figure 4.1.13 – SD Seat Contestation by Party by Years (n = 295,613)]
For the Shires, the overall picture presented by figures 4.1.12 and 4.1.13 implies a number of key findings. First, it is clear that the Conservatives have been steadily strengthening their position at both tiers of local government over the period, with contestation rates of 99.78% and 99.5% by the 2009 county and 2010 district-level elections respectively. Second, it is also clear that since Labour’s peak in the mid-1990s, the party’s relative rate of contestation has fallen by 6 points in the counties and 10 points in the districts. This may have been influenced by the conversion of many Shire authorities to a UA type. Third, as for the London and Metropolitan Boroughs, contestation for the Liberal Democrats has increased significantly throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This increase can be seen as the ‘first wave’ of growth, driven primarily by the efforts of the party and its former component parties, to break into national politics. Fourth, in what can be described as a ‘second wave’ of seat contestation, there has been a significant increase in the number of candidates standing at county and district-level that are categorised as Other, particularly in later years. These findings are also in line with data described for the Boroughs. Finally, for all three major parties, a consistent difference has remained between the contestation of seats at the county-level when compared to the districts. The major parties have tended to contest the upper tier at much higher rates than the lower, whereas contestation in the districts for Other candidates has, on several occasions, been higher than at the county-level during the same years. However, since the 2000s this trend has changed and Others contest county seats at much higher rates than the districts.
Figure 4.1.14 shows party seat contestation over the period for the Unitaries. Contestation in UAs has been relatively strong for the two major parties, with more than four out of every five seats available featuring a Labour and/or Conservative candidate during the 16 years of their existence. For the Liberal Democrats, seat contestation has also been robust, at times exceeding that of the two major parties. In 1998 the party contested 96.12% of all vacancies. The major reason why Liberal Democrat contestation in the UAs has been higher than for other types of authority is due to the party’s relatively late introduction. As described in chapter 1, UAs were introduced in 1995, which was after both the formation of the Liberal Democrats and the drive by the party, and their prior component parties, to increase the number of candidates standing at local elections. However, unlike the Liberal Democrats, the share of candidates categorised as Other, has increased markedly in the UAs, particularly since the elections in 2000. Other candidates are the only group to show significant growth in the UAs, from just 21.09% of seats contested in 2000 to an average of 129.81% in 2010. Growth in the level of contestation from Others alone, has added more than one candidate to the ballot paper on average in the UAs.
Overall, the data described in sub-chapter 4.1 has revealed a trend of rising seat competition for all types of authority in English local elections. From a close examination of contestation data for the parties it is clear that there has been two principal events that have driven this rise. The early growth is due largely to the “spectacular pattern of growth shown in the proportion of seats fought by the Liberal Democrats” (Rallings et al, 2005, pp.396), a determination by the Liberal Democrats to break from the traditional two-party duopoly of English elections. Throughout the period examined, the two major parties have contested council seats to varying degrees, but overall there has been little room for growth in Conservative and Labour contestation, particularly in the Boroughs. In some instances there has even been a slight weakening, for example in the Shires during later years for Labour. These data support notions raised by Rallings et al, who state that competition from “the two main parties has hardly changed and is consistently above 90%. Outside of the urban areas however, the two parties have gradually established more of a presence” (Rallings et al, 2005, pp.396). Thus, the data suggest that it was the rise in the number of Liberal
Democrat candidates during the late 1980s and the early 1990s that was responsible for early growth in the overall number of candidates. Subsequently, the second and perhaps most striking wave is shown to be driven by the sharp growth in candidates categorised as Other. These data are also supported by existing literature. Rallings et al comment that “one of the least noted aspects of local elections in Britain today is the growth in candidates for the catch-all category of ‘Others’. The label includes a wide range of candidates, from national parties, such as the Greens, United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party (SNP), to a host of local parties that have arisen in more recent years. There have always been areas where groups such as resident and ratepayer associations fight elections, but in London and other urban areas, the number of ‘Others’ has increased significantly since 2002” (Rallings, Thrasher & Denver, 2005, p.396-397).

Though these phenomena have had similar effects on the competition for seats in English local elections, it is the Liberal Democrats who have converted the rise into continued success. As Rallings & Thrasher put it, the Lib Dems have managed to bridge the credibility gap since the 1990s, they have proved that they have the capacity to win elections (Rallings & Thrasher, 1996, pp.222). The same cannot be said for minor party and independent candidates. The Liberal Democrats pose a serious challenge and “remain competitive at the local level” (Russell & Fieldhouse, 2005, pp.39). The rise in Lib Dem seat contestation has culminated in serious gains for the party, not only in terms of seats, but also the control of many local authorities. This has given them a standing at the local level that remains a vital springboard for national breakthroughs (Russell &
Fieldhouse, 2005, pp.39). Examining data in table 4.1.15 shows that the first half of the 1990s was prolific for the Liberal Democrats in terms of their local electoral success, reaching a peak in 1996 with the control of 55 British local authorities (12%).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>LD Councillors gain/losses</th>
<th>GB Councillors Controlled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>-63</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>+531</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>+57</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>+371</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>+383</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>+483</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>+150</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the 1996 elections, Lib Dem authority control dips and steadies at around 30 councils. The figure 4.1.16 displays the proportion of councils controlled, or under No Overall Control (NOC), in Britain, by party over the period. Aside from the major exchanges between Labour and the Conservatives, there are three noteworthy features of the data presented.

First, though the Lib Dems have lost ground since the heights of the 1990s, the party now controls three to four times the share of councils that were under the control of the Liberals and SDP pre-alliance. Second, the figure 4.1.16 clearly illustrates a long-term declining trend in the share of authorities controlled by independents and minor parties (Others). The decline appears to have been in-place well before the rise of the Liberal Democrats and could have been accelerated by their success. Unlike data for the Lib Dems, this development runs counter to the rising number of Others standing at elections to local government.
Finally, the trend-line for NOC councils (marked in dashed grey, see figure 4.1.16) implies that the general rise in seat contestation may have had an alternative effect. With the surge in the number of LD candidates since the early 1980s, the share of councils under NOC has steadily risen, from a low of 13% in 1980 to around 35% in 1995. Since 1995 the share of NOC councils remained at roughly a third, before dipping slightly towards the end of the period. These data suggest that the increase in competition, particularly from the Liberal Democrats, will not only have translated into gains of local administrations, but may also have helped to increase the share of councils with no dominant party. The political consequences of such an event will likely have altered the dynamic of local decision-making with a broader spectrum of parties and councillors involved.

![Local Authorities under party control after election GB (%)](image)

Sub-chapter 4.1 has presented an extensive picture of local government seat competition in England since the 1970s, detailing trends over time and for the parties. Building on the notion of contestation, section 4.2 details information on
incumbent contestation. The sub-chapter presents data on how many incumbent candidates choose to defend their seat and how this may have changed over time and for the parties.

4.2 – Incumbent Contestation

Where section 4.1 sought to assess trends in seat competition and contestation, sub-chapter 4.2 intends to examine the trend in incumbent contestation, or Stand Again Rates (SARs) for incumbent candidates over the period. Incumbent contestation is an important indicator of democratic transience. If there are too few incumbents returning to the council the rate of change from one election to the next may become destabilising and can contribute to discontinuity and uncertainty in decision-making, too many and authorities may stagnate and become resistant to change (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997a, p.83).

Assessing the SAR of councillors over the period will help to illustrate continuity across local government, but can also help us understand voter’s choices. There is evidence also to suggest that because the electorate will tend to be more familiar with incumbents, whether councillors choose to stand or retire will have significant effects on voter behaviour. If an incumbent stands voters may judge them by their record, but if they retire on what basis do voters make their choice? Research has shown that “the absence of an incumbent on the ballot tends to place a premium on citizens’ assessments of candidates’ ideologies” (Gershtenson, 2009, p.130), but as detailed in chapter 2 there is also an abundance of literature acknowledging that when incumbents do stand they tend to be quite successful.
The figure 4.2.1 charts the number of incumbents choosing to stand again in England by party and expresses the total SAR as a percentage. The data illustrates a rising trend in the number of incumbents choosing to defend their council seat. The total share of incumbent candidates choosing to stand again (marked in dashed black) has risen over the period, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s. The rise is substantial, taking the total SAR from one in five incumbents to almost four out of five by the final four year cycle (FYC). For all party categories there has been an increase in the number of incumbents deciding to defend their council seats.

Before continuing, it is appropriate to acknowledge some weaknesses in these data and add some qualifications. As detailed in chapter 3, incumbency information is provided by The Elections Centre and after consultation with its staff, it has become clear that there may be a slight underestimation in the number of councillors who stood again in earlier years examined. This underestimation is not due to name changes, the effects of which are likely to be distributed evenly over years rather, the underestimation is likely due to the fact that the Centre has collected data retrospectively prior to 1983. At times there has been some difficulty in obtaining information on incumbency, particularly for years immediately after reorganisation. However, though it is likely that data provided prior to the mid-1980s will underestimate the number of incumbents standing, there will still have been significant growth in the frequency and share of incumbent councillors choosing to defend their seats.
If we examine data since the 1991-94 cycle, the share of incumbent candidates standing again has risen by almost 10%, from 67% to 76% by 2007-10. Over this period, the number of Lib Dem councillors standing has increased in line with their success in local elections, whilst the frequency of Others standing has remained relatively stable at around 1,500 per cycle. At its highest, more than 7,100 Labour incumbents chose to defend their seats in England, this was during the 1999-02 electoral cycle. Though this number almost halves over the next two cycles, the fall is accounted for largely by the success of the Conservatives over the same period. The number of Tory incumbents defending their seats rises from around 4,500 in 1999-02, to roughly 6,400 in 2007-10. The number of incumbents for the Liberal Democrats and Others during the same period has remained relatively stable. Thus, over the final three cycles the SAR has settled at around three quarters of councillors.

What is clear from these data (see figure 4.2.1) is that over long-term, more councillors are choosing to stand again, for all parties. However, when these data
are split over the various types of authority and electoral cycles, as for data on overall seat contestation in sub-chapter 4.1, there are slight discrepancies. Table 4.2.2 shows average incumbent contestation for all parties and for the three major parties individually. Some 68.8% of incumbent candidates have chosen to stand again in English local elections. The Liberal Democrats have been the most likely to stand again, with an average of 72.2% doing so over the period, followed by the Conservatives who average just less than 70%. Finally, just less than two thirds of Labour councillors stood again over the period. For all three major parties, incumbent SARs are highest in the Unitary Authorities (UAs), with 75.9% standing again in the quadrennial UAs (UAAs) and an even higher proportion doing so in the Unitary Authorities elected by thirds (UATs). These high figures are likely to be a result of the late introduction of the UAs, which were created after the sharp rise in incumbent contestation described by figure 4.2.1. The Metropolitan Boroughs (MBs) are the next highly contested type of authority with three quarters of councillors standing again over the entire period, Labour average 72.5%, the Conservatives 75.2% and the Liberal Democrats 78.5%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incumbent Contestation in England</th>
<th>LBs</th>
<th>MBs</th>
<th>SCs</th>
<th>SDAs</th>
<th>SDTs</th>
<th>UAAs</th>
<th>UATs</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>75.2%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrats</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>83.9%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Parties</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>67.2%</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>69.8%</td>
<td>75.9%</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>25,183</td>
<td>20,190</td>
<td>8,373</td>
<td>27,189</td>
<td>8,697</td>
<td>6,448</td>
<td>1,312</td>
<td>97,392</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 4.2.2 –Incumbent Contestation in England (SARs) (%) by Party (n = 97,392)]

Figures 4.2.3-4.2.9 plot incumbent contestation data for each type of authority over the period. A first glance at the data plotted across all charts suggests a trend of increased SARs across most types of authority in England. The
proportion of councillors choosing to stand again for each of the three major parties over the period has, in the Boroughs and the Shires at least, increased considerably.

Examination of the LBs (see figure 4.2.3) shows that, excluding the 1982 and the 1994 elections for the Liberal Democrats, there has been a gradual increase in the percentage of incumbents choosing to stand again. Between the parties, more Conservatives have tended to defend their seats than incumbents of the other two parties. However, the trend of growth for all parties is consistent. At their lowest, in 1986, incumbent SARs were less than 40% for Labour, around 45% for the Liberal Democrats and some 54% for the Conservatives. Since then, the portion of councillors defending their seats swelled markedly, by around 20-30%, depending on the party. By 2002 SARs were some 68%, 71% and 75% for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives respectively. This level of incumbent contestation was sustained for the remaining two LB elections.

[Figure 4.2.3 – LB Incumbents (SARs) (%) by Party by Years (n = 25,183)]
For the MBs, figure 4.2.4 illustrates a trend that is in line with that discussed for the LBs, showing a gradual rise in the portion of incumbent councillors defending their seats. In the 1990 MB elections just 57% of Liberal Democrat incumbents defended their seats on the council, as did 62% of Labour and Conservative councillors. Beyond this point there is a gradual rise in the level of SARs for all the parties, settling at around four out of every five incumbents during the late 2000s before dipping slightly in 2010. Interestingly there appears to be a significant gap in the level of seat contestation between Labour and the two other parties from 1999 to 2003, with proportionally many more Lib Dem and Conservative councillors choosing to defend their seats than Labour. At its widest, in 2002, there is a more than 25 point gap between Labour and the Conservatives, with just 70% of Labour incumbents standing again, whilst the Tories had a SAR of almost 96%.

For the Shires (see figures 4.2.5-4.2.7), growth in the proportion of candidates standing again is generally lower than for the MBs, particularly at the county
level (see figure 4.2.5). At the county-level of the Shires, SARs rise some 5-10% over the period, to roughly 70% in 2009. As for the Boroughs, SARs for all three of the major parties over the period have been broadly similar, excluding 1985 where the Liberal Democrat SAR rose 20-points to almost 88%.

There has been a slow rise in the proportion of incumbent candidates defending their seats in the districts also, with SARs in the quadrennial districts (SDAs, figure 4.2.6) rising from around 40%, for the parties in the mid-1970s, to some 70% of incumbents standing again by 2007. The relatively smooth and gradual increase in incumbent contestation in the SDAs is in contrast to the district level authorities elected by thirds (SDTs, figure 4.2.7). There has been significant variation in the level of incumbent contestation for all parties. At their lowest, SARs for the Conservatives were 56% in 1996, 50% for Labour in 1999 and 44% for the Liberal Democrats in 2000. At their highest, incumbent contestation was 95% and 94% for the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives respectively in 2003, and 92% for Labour in 2004. Though there has been significant variation in the SDTs, by the latter years of the period examined, SARs for all parties are broadly in line with data shown for the SDAs, at around 70%.
There are data limitations for incumbency in earlier years, meaning that the data for SDAs is incomplete. This includes Cornwall, Essex & Gloucestershire up to 1976, Derbyshire prior to 1983 and finally Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Surrey, Warwickshire and Wiltshire prior to 1991.
SAR data for the Unitaries are plotted in figures 4.2.8-4.2.9. As the UAs were introduced in the later stages of the period examined, there are relatively few data points for comparison. The unitary councils elected on a quadrennial cycle (UAAs, figure 4.2.8) show a relatively consistent SAR for all three major parties, with little variation from the average. Around 81.2% of Conservatives stood again in the UAAs, a higher level than the two other parties considered. The Liberal Democrats average an SAR of 74%, whilst Labour average just 71.1%.

For the Unitaries elected by thirds (UATs, figure 4.2.9) there has been more variation in the SARs for the parties, though this may be due to there being fewer authorities included for analysis. There are just 1,312 cases considered for the UATs in total. The SAR for the Conservatives drops from more than four out of every five councillors during 2006 to 2008, to around two out of every three in 2010 (67%), an average of 81% over the period. However, almost nineteen out of every twenty Labour incumbents decided to defend their UAT seats in 2007 (94%), dipping to just less than four out of every five by 2010 (77%). Finally, for the Liberal Democrats, the SAR averaged almost 84% in the UATs. There was considerable growth between 2006 and 2008, before settling to a figure more similar to those of the Conservatives and Labour in 2010, at just over two of every three (71%) councillors.

7 Limited data on incumbency and various redistricting in the dataset mean that the SAR analysis for the SDTs starts from 1988. Included in the analysis are SDAs from Kent, Lancashire, Nottinghamshire, Shropshire, Suffolk and Warwickshire.
The data discussed above provide a number of key findings for the variation in incumbent contestation. Firstly, it is clear that at times, a sizeable share of incumbents have chosen not to defend their seats on the council. Between 20% and 40% of councillors retire depending on the year and type of authority. But it is also apparent that the proportion of incumbents choosing to retire has fallen

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8 Of the 35 UAAAs 11 were excluded from these data including Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Chester, Cornwall, County Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire, Wiltshire as they gained UA status in 2009, Isle Of Wight due to election cycle clashes and Stockton-On-Tees because of redistricting in 2005.

9 Included in the analysis or UAT SARs were the Unitary Authorities of Blackburn with Darwen, Halton, Peterborough, Reading, Slough, Thurrock, Warrington, and Wokingham. They were all redistricted in 2004.
over the period, and this is a national trend, which varies in magnitude across
district types. The decrease is unlikely to be a consequence of any changes in the
level of competition for seats. Data previously discussed in chapter 4 have shown
that council seats have become considerably more competitive over the period,
so if rising SARs were a response to that trend this would run counter to
increased levels of competition. Financial incentives can be ruled out also, as
there have not been any substantial changes in the financial incentives that
councillors are awarded. As outlined in chapters 1 and 2, these are largely
confined to a stipend comprising only meagre annual expenses (Prudam et al.,
2008, p.14-15), though admittedly the value of these expenses does vary by
authority (TPA, 2012). In light of this it remains relatively unclear as to what has
driven the rise.

Finally, the growing trend in incumbent contestation has appeared to settle at
between 70% and 80% of sitting councillors. Though there has been some
natural variation the new level of seat contestation is significantly higher than
that during earlier years of the period examined. Acknowledging this facet of the
data, an assessment of how successful incumbent candidates are in their re-
election attempts will clearly be important. It will help to illustrate the
transience of local government and the time it takes to turn over more
established members of the council. Sub-chapter 4.3 builds on the data
4.3 – Incumbent Success

As summarised in chapter 2 of this thesis, American research into the electoral advantages associated with incumbency has produced extensive evidence on the success of political incumbents in US congressional elections. Though the advantages associated with incumbency are now a well-established part of the literature for federal elections, there is little published on the phenomenon at the local level (Trounstine, 2011), and very little concerning local elections in England (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997). As a guide for readers, congressional re-election rates, or hit rates (HRs), have been shown in recent decades to be high, commonly above 90%. It is important to note that when examining HRs for any one year they will, to some degree, be influenced by temporal fluctuations in political partisanship as well as the number of incumbents who choose to stand again. Also, as the selection procedure and party system is different in the US (i.e. holding primary elections to select candidates and there is a clear two-party system), English local elections pose a very different set of circumstances, which have to be taken into consideration. However, what can be learned from the US example is that the overall trend for a number of decades is one where incumbent candidates are highly successful in their attempts to be re-elected.

Considering this, sub-chapter 4.3 will illustrate and assess the pattern of success for councillors in the broadest terms. Exploring the data across all types of authority for the three major parties, the section identifies similarities and differences between the parties at defending their seats for local government, whilst commenting on councillors’ general level of success across England.
Examining data for the LBs (figure 4.3.1), it is clear that incumbent candidates, for all parties, have been very successful in the capital. More than 86% of major party councillors who chose to stand again were re-elected. When comparing the parties, the Tories and Labour do best. Almost nine out of every ten incumbent Conservatives who stood in the LBs were successfully elected (88.3%, 3,704/4,195) and a similar proportion of Labour incumbents were also able to defend their seats (88.9%, 4,119/4,634). For the Liberal Democrats, average HRs over the period are lower than for the two other parties, at just over three quarters of councillors standing (76.7%, 877/1,143). On closer inspection, it appears that there is significant variation in the HRs of Liberal Democrat incumbents and this is due namely to the relatively small number of LD winners in London during that time. This in turn means that proportional indicators such as percentages are much more susceptible to substantial variation.\(^\text{10}\)

Since the high point of the 1990 elections (96.8%), HRs for Lib Dem incumbents have been on a gradual decline in the LBs, ending some twenty-five points lower by 2010 at 71.7%. By comparison, HRs for the two other parties was reasonably strong over the same period. The data show that HRs rarely dip below 90% for Labour who finish strongly in 2010, with more than 98% of councillors standing winning back their seat. The Labour party’s strength in London is closely followed by that of the Conservatives, whose strong performance throughout the 1970s and early 1980s was not repeated during the next three elections. The party did not quite recover their former strength in the later stages of the period.

\(^\text{10}\)It must be noted that the large variation in LD HRs for the first 3 elections, 1974, 1978 and 1982 was due in part to a small number of incumbent LD cases in the LB dataset \(n = 2, n = 10\) and \(n = 51\) respectively.
examined. Nevertheless, incumbent success is almost 87% in 2010 and is also regularly above 90%. Although incumbent HRs have been shown to vary in the LBs it is clear that for all parties, in every election year, the vast majority of London-based councillors who choose to stand again, win.

![Figure 4.3.1 – LB Incumbent HRs (%) by Party by Years (n = 10,430)](image)

Over sixteen and a half thousand incumbent councillors have decided to re-contest elections in the MBs since 1974 and of these, some fourteen thousand were re-elected, an average of 83.4% (13,863/16,632). These data (figure 4.3.2) are in line with those discussed for London and present a similar pattern with regard to the success of incumbents from the three major parties over the period. However, a glaring example to the contrary is the ‘chasm’ in Tory success during the mid-1990s.

Whilst the Conservatives have been very successful in the MBs post-1998, with HRs frequently above 90%, during the mid-1990s there has at times been a strong disadvantage to being a Conservative councillor, especially when
compared to other parties. At the party’s nadir, less than 30% of Tory incumbents returned to the council in 1995. The 1994, 1995 and 1996 elections are clearly special instances, the repercussion of wide-scale anti-Conservative voting that has not necessarily been replicated to the same magnitude elsewhere.

Illustrated by figure 4.3.2, the chart shows a dramatic drop in Conservative incumbent HRs, between 1994 and 1996. This coincides with a dramatic fall in aggregate vote and seat share for the Tories across the MBs. In 1992, some 97.6% (121/124) of Tory incumbents standing were re-elected and by way of comparison, 23.1% (152/658) of non-incumbents were elected in the same year. Comparatively, in 1994 the HR of Conservative incumbents fell by almost 40-points to 57% (45/79), just three fifths of the Conservative HR in the previous election year. However, there is a much steeper fall for non-incumbents of 18.5-points to just 4.6% (31/676), which is less than one fifth of the non-incumbent HR for 1992. So although the proportion of incumbents winning MB seats dropped dramatically, incumbent Tories performed much better than their non-incumbent colleagues. Therefore, in the 1994 MB elections it was better to be a Tory incumbent than a Tory freshman.

While Labour and Liberal Democrat incumbents average around 88% and 85% respectively over the period, after the crash in Tory HRs in the mid-1990s the three major parties have tended to follow a similar trend, with high rates of success for all incumbents. Overall, the data for incumbent success in the MBs support the narrative outlined for the LBs. For the majority of the period and for
all the parties, high proportions of incumbent councillors standing for re-election are returned to their councils. However, this does not mean that the majority of incumbents are able to escape particularly large swings in partisanship, as demonstrated by the Conservatives in the MBs during the 1990s.

[Figure 4.3.2 – MB Incumbent HRs (%) by Party by Years (n = 8,655)]

For the Shires, incumbent HRs average slightly lower levels than those described for the London & Metropolitan Boroughs. Just over 82.5% of councillors standing at both the county (12,543/15,197) and district-level (45,842/55,440) elections were successful. Figure 4.3.3 illustrates the county-level HR trend for the three major parties. The Conservatives have been the most successful party in the SCs, winning more than half of all seats that incumbents have contested in the eight elections examined. The average HR for Tory councillors in the SCs is more than 87% (6,262/7,186) over the entire period, which is some 7% higher than Labour (80.3%, 3,683/4,585) and 8% higher than the Liberal Democrats (79.1%, 1,955/2,471).
Though there are far more Conservative incumbents in the SCs and they tend to average a higher relative rate of success than other parties, only the 1977 and 2009 elections stand out with substantial differences in HRs. Illustrating the comparative strength of the Tories in these years, the chart below (figure 4.3.3) shows that just 27% (33/121) of LD incumbents were re-elected in 1977 and just 44.5% (307/690) of Labour incumbents. However, in the same year 99.2% (1,038/1,046) of Conservative incumbents were successful. Just eight councillors from more than one thousand failed to defend their seat.

At the other end of the period, in the 2009 elections, more than 94% (714/758) of defending Tory councillors were re-elected. In the same year just 79.4% (220/277) of defending Liberal Democrats were successful and 35.8% (112/313) for Labour. Apart from these two elections, HRs for councillors standing again has been broadly similar for all the parties, mostly above 80%.

[Figure 4.3.3 – SC Incumbent HRs (%) by Party by Years (n = 15,197)]
For the district-level Shire elections, figure 4.3.4 shows similar results. Incumbent HRs for all the parties have been fairly strong, and over the entire period the party averages are within just two and a half points of one another. The Conservatives have averaged more than 84% (18,136/21,530), Labour 83% (12,724/15,383) and the Liberal Democrats almost 82% (8,361/10,212). However, on closer inspection, there appears to be two distinct halves to the district-level elections. Prior to 1992, the trend for all three parties was relatively similar. Though there is some variation, Labour incumbents perform slightly better. Nine out of every ten (4,820/5,364) councillors standing returned to the council, compared to 86% (7,507/8,725) of Conservatives and 84.5% (1,816/2,150) of the Liberal Democrats.

The Tory slump in the early 1990s is evident once more (see figure 4.3.4), though the drop is not quite as deep as that reported for the MBs, it is apparent that the Tories have suffered at the polls with incumbent HRs falling from 94% (442/470) in 1992, to just 59% in 1994 (112/164). In 1995 it falls once more to 57% (1,289/2,251) and finally to 51% in 1996 (218/426). As for the MB data, the drop in success for the Tories is less for councillors than for non-incumbents. In 1992, some 38.1% (463/1,215) of Tory non-incumbents were elected to councils in England, this dropped by four fifths to just 7.6% (98/1,295) in 1994, a significantly larger margin than the drop of one third for incumbent candidates.

In the second half of the period, after the Tory slump, the trend is slightly different. Now Tory councillors do best with more than nine out of every ten (90.9%, 8,958/9,852) returning to the council between 1998 and 2010.
Conversely, Labour incumbents do significantly worse during the same period, with less than three quarters (72.8%, 5,406/7,424) successfully elected. The Lib Dems fare only slightly worse, with almost four out of five (79.1%, 4,913/6,213) incumbents returned. This sudden break between the parties may be due, in part, to the introduction of the Unitaries in 1995. However, as is discussed below, Labour do not perform particularly well there either.

The district-level of the Shires are a source of electoral strength for the Conservatives. Of the 35,988 vacancies since 1998, the Conservatives have fielded the most candidates, more than thirty thousand (30,753, 85.5% of seats) and won more than three out of every five of them at 53.5% (16,447/30,753). In the same period, Labour has contested fewer seats than the Tories, putting up just twenty four and a half thousand candidates (24,597, 68.3% of seats) and winning in less than a third of them (31.4%, 7,714/24,597). The Liberal Democrats do slightly better than Labour, fielding more than twenty three thousand candidates (23,038, 64% of seats) and winning in more than a third at
34.9% (8,038/23,038). The data described show that Conservative councillors have performed relatively well in the districts, particularly since 1998. Since the mid-1990s slump, and the introduction of the UAs from 1995, Conservative incumbents have been returned at even higher rates than those representing the other two parties, solidifying their dominance in the Shires further.

Finally, results for the Unitaries are presented in figure 4.3.5. The data show the lowest HRs for all types of authority over the same period. Tory incumbents are most successful in the UAs, averaging a HR just under 85% throughout (1,999/2,356). This is more than 5% above Labour, with their worst average for all types of authority at just over 79% (2,823/3,557). The Liberal Democrats have averaged a HR of 77% (1,540/2,009), which is only slightly lower than Labour’s. For Labour and the Liberal Democrats the trend in the UAs has been a declining one, especially since 2003, though with a strong recovery in 2010. Conversely, the success of Conservative councillors has been largely maintained over the entire period.

[Figure 4.3.5 – UA Incumbent HRs (%) by Party by Years (n = 8,277)]
Overall, it is clear that incumbents for all parties do well. Though varied, the rate of success for all parties has been consistently high. However, the data do reveal some major ‘events’ where councillors from a party may be at a slight disadvantage when compared to others, namely the Tory slump in the mid-1990s and perhaps Labour’s fall in the 2000s. Considering this, changes in political partisanship will, to some extent, affect the fortunes of incumbent councillors at times. However as detailed above, this is not to the same extent as non-incumbents. Over the entire period, the odds are stacked well in the favour of defending councillors, with more than four out of every five councillors standing returned to the council. Even if we examine the results of individual years, incumbents are more likely than not to return, with HRs rarely dipping below the two thirds level.

4.4 – Concluding Remarks

Chapter 4 has attempted to outline the wider trend of competitiveness in English local elections, illustrating the success of incumbent councillors over the period. Early findings suggest that, for a variety of reasons, local elections have become increasingly competitive since reorganisation. Seat competition has been consistently on the rise, for all types of authority. The rise in competition has been greatest in the MBs and SCs, with increases of 2 and 1.5 candidates per vacancy the in respective authority types. Conversely, the district-level of the Shires has exhibited the lowest level of growth, particularly since the late 1980s. Four year cycle (FYC) seat competition has increased by just 0.5 candidates per seat in the SDs, though there is considerable variation within these cycles also.
Chapter 4 has also discussed trends in the success of incumbent councillors choosing to defend their seat. From the data presented above, it is clear that incumbents have been highly successful in their attempts to return to the council, in the face of a significant increase in seat competition across England. At first glance, this finding is perplexing, as one could expect the success of incumbent councillors to erode in line with any rise in serious opposition. For some authorities, average seat competition has almost doubled. However, it is only when competition is examined more closely that judgements on the quality of the opposition can be speculated about. Data described above, support findings detailed by Rallings et al (2005) when they debunk the conventional wisdom that ‘the decline of Independents’ has run alongside the growth of the parties. This is only really true for elected councillors and not the total number of candidates contesting local elections (Rallings et al, 2005, pp.396). Data revealed in chapter 4 suggest that the marked rise in contestation from Others has had little effect on the HRs of incumbent candidates for the three major parties.

Conversely, the emergence of the Liberal Democrats has undoubtedly had an impact on electoral outcomes. As illustrated by figure 4.1.16 (see sub-chapter 4.1), whilst the share of councils led by Others has been in gradual decline, the emergence of the Liberal Democrats has culminated in the party being well-established in local government. It is also worth noting that the number of councils under no overall control (NOC) has also increased with the rise of the Liberal Democrats. The ambition of the Liberal Democrats at local elections are driven partly because of the party's wider electoral philosophy, which is based
on a ‘where we work, we win’ strategy, and argues that by “winning more seats locally and gaining control of more local councils, the Liberal Democrats are able to build electoral credibility and defuse any electors’ accusations of political inexperience” (Cutts, 2006, pp.221). A national profile has been built around their local presence and successes, and so the strong vein of localism embedded within Liberal Democrat policy has driven the notion that the party’s local success and popularity is vital to securing their political future.

Strong local election performances during the early 1990s are considered a crucial component in the party’s establishment and early gains. Russell & Fieldhouse (2005) highlight the significance of this time for the Liberal Democrats, and how quickly their local successes have translated into national gains. Commenting on the importance of the Cheltenham gain in 1991, Russell & Fieldhouse argue that the party used their “local success as a springboard for national advances. For example, the capture of Cheltenham…may have precipitated the Liberal Democrat success in the general election the following year. By 1995 the Liberal Democrats had more elected councillors than the Conservatives” (2005, pp.38).

Another important trend revealed in chapter 4 is the rising proportion of councillors choosing to defend their seat on the council. Figure 4.2.1 showed that SARs for all parties have increased markedly. From the 1991-94 electoral cycle, SARs have risen by almost 10 points, from 67% to 76% in 2007-10. We know also that HRs for incumbent candidates have remained strong. The combined effect of a rise in the proportion of incumbents standing again, with a rate of
success that is steady, suggests increased stagnation on England’s councils. This is due in no small part to the continued electoral achievements of returning councillors. Even in instances where one party is suffering severely at the polls, data discussed in this chapter suggest that incumbency will significantly increase the chances of winning. However, the direct comparison in the successes of incumbents and freshmen is a problematic indicator of relative performance, particularly in any one year. Geographical differences in political partisanship mean that examining trends in the success of incumbents with freshmen will inevitably be comparing some apples with oranges. The endogenous element of this comparison is that defending councillors by definition have an established and proven base of support, whereas many freshmen contesting will not. Consequently, the geographical disparities in political partisanship mean that the aggregate data discussed in chapter 4 fail to compare electoral scenarios that are similar, or at least close to being so.

Chapter 4 has attempted to describe the significant developments in the competitiveness of English local elections. The chapter has taken a heuristic approach in assessing the performance of incumbent candidates under electoral conditions that have changed significantly over the period. Chapter 5 aims to build on these data, utilising and adapting established methods from the literature to identify and measure incumbency effects.
Chapter 5 – Estimating Incumbency Advantage: Winners, Losers & Experience Effects

Whereas chapter 4 informed readers of the state of competitiveness and incumbent success in English local elections, chapter 5 breaks from the broad-brush approach to examine the relative performance of councillors in some detail. The purpose of this chapter is to assess the electoral value of incumbency. Are councillors better able to secure their seat on the council than their freshmen opponents and party colleagues? Does experience matter and do candidates and their parties benefit from fielding a candidate with previous experience on the council, and if so, to what extent? Using indicators constructed solely for the purposes of this research, as well as models adapted from methods well established in the American literature, chapter 5 assesses the magnitude of any electoral advantage enjoyed by incumbent councillors in England.

Students of congressional elections in the United States will be familiar with the concept of the Sophomore Surge and Retirement Slump as psephological phenomena (Erikson, 1972; Mayhew, 1974; Cover & Mayhew, 1977; Born, 1979; Jacobson, 1987; Alford & Brady, 1989; Gelman & King, 1990; Holbrook & Tidmarch, 1991; Lockerbie, 1994). The electoral significance of incumbency, its associated advantages or otherwise, are well documented across the Atlantic. Conversely, the electoral effects of incumbency in the United Kingdom are largely confined to the subchapters of Rallings & Thrasher (1997) or a handful of
works that tend to sum the advantages, at parliamentary level at least, as small and sporadic (Williams, 1967; Norton & Wood, 1990; Norton 1994a, 1994b; Gaines, 1998). There are obvious differences between the English and American examples, which have been described in some detail in chapter 2. They include themes such as the selection process (Zaller, 1998), electoral campaigns (Abramowitz, 1991; Abramowitz, Alexander & Gunning, 2006) and incumbent resources (Mayhew, 1974; Cover & Brumberg, 1982; Jacobson, 1997). However, perhaps nowhere is the gap wider than that of the roles between the individual and the party.

In English local elections political parties dominate the electoral process from beginning to end. Chapter 4 illustrates the degree to which the success of minor parties and independents (Others) has tumbled. It is evident that the number of councils controlled by Others has fallen consistently over the past four decades and they now make up an increasingly smaller proportion of winning councillors and councils. Parties not only dominate English local elections, but also the electoral process. Respective party committees select their local candidates and the evidence is that the majority of candidates who stand for the first time do so because they were asked to. Two in three candidates say they stood because they were invited to do so, compared to just one in three who took the decision entirely on their own (Rallings et al, 2010, pp.369-370). These candidates are then carried by the party campaign and engage with the public through the prism of their party. It is easy then, to assume that locally elected representatives are mere pawns of the party, swept in and out on the tides of national political partisanship. Bearing in mind the influence of parties in local elections, what
value do incumbent candidates add to the party and their electoral ambitions? Does it matter if relatively inexperienced candidates are fielded instead of councillors? Chapter 5 seeks to ascertain the value of incumbency. Whereas chapter 4 presents data to illustrate the high rate at which defending councillors are returned, this chapter seeks to assess the relative performance of returning councillors. Methods used to compare the performance of councillors at various stages of their incumbency with other candidates. In a crude sense, the chapter explores the gap in vote shares between incumbent and freshmen candidates and describes trends. The work also evaluates the role of experience in local elections. Does experience have any value to voters and do the electorate distinguish candidates of varying electoral experience at the ballot box?

Critically, the chapter examines whether incumbent councillors with greater electoral experience fare better than those who have less. There is some evidence to suggest that they do. Rallings et al (1998, pp. 119-121) use multimember districts to confirm this supposition, though the extent of the differentiation, measured in terms of candidates’ finishing positions and vote shares, varies over time and by party. There appears to be a small, yet significant gap in favour of incumbent candidates. Rallings et al (2009, pp. 10-12) also confirm the presence of electoral variance associated with incumbency, but confine it to a small one, easily influenced by partisan swings and by ballot order. Incumbency can of course prove to be a hindrance on occasion, but nevertheless there is some evidence from the literature that incumbents are likely to be treated slightly differently by the electorate.
When investigating these effects, there are important methodological considerations that narrow the frame of analysis that can be used to establish any estimation of the advantage. For instance, can there be any value in comparing the performance of a Labour councillor defending their seat on the Stoke council, where the party have historically dominated, with a losing freshman party colleague in Cornwall, where the party has struggled at times? To do so is to ignore England’s political geography and ascribe greater warrant to the performance of incumbent candidates than is deserved. The aim of this chapter is to identify the ‘value added’ by incumbent candidates, regardless of how well their party performs. For this reason the chapter offers a variety of measures that consider only winning candidates and two that consider losers. All are designed to offer a less biased or unbiased estimation of incumbency effects under a variety of circumstances.

Sub-chapter 5.1 begins with a simple comparison of winners, comparing the performance of winning freshmen and winning incumbent candidates over the period. Trends across the aggregate and party-level data are discussed to more accurately equate the gap between incumbents and their non-incumbent colleagues nationally. Section 5.2 introduces the Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP) estimator and discusses Sophomore Surge effects. Sub-chapter 5.3 considers the Retirement Slump method and assesses the fall in party performance using the constructed Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS) estimator. Section 5.4 explores experience effects. Using the previously constructed estimators, the method determines the cumulative effect of incumbency and the value of council experience to the party on election day.
Finally, Sub-chapter 5.5 introduces two estimators that utilise data from incumbent losers; the Role Reversal and Experienced Partner Incumbent Loser Performance measures (RRILP & EPILP respectively), before offering some concluding remarks in section 5.6.

5.1 – Winners

Rallings et al (1998) present data on the difference between incumbent and freshman electoral performance. Depending on the party, the data show that incumbents perform some 1.2-3.2% better than freshmen in the Shire Council and London Borough elections of the early 1990s. To mitigate the influence of ‘paper candidates’ and compare candidates that are more similar, data for winners is presented in figure 5.1.0. The chart shows aggregate vote shares of both incumbent winners (IW, marked in red) and freshmen winners (NIW, marked in dashed black). There is a consistent gap between the average vote shares of incumbent candidates and their non-incumbent counterparts over the entire period of study. Although there are clear fluctuations in average vote share, the gap in average performance for both groups remains. The two groups follow a similar overall trajectory, with average winning vote share declining for both incumbents and freshmen winners (NIW), particularly since the mid-1990s. For the first 20 years examined, average winning vote shares for both incumbents and freshmen were well above 50%, but by 2010 averages dropped to less than 50% and 45% for incumbents and freshmen respectively.

On closer inspection, figure 5.1.0 shows that the gap between incumbent and freshmen winners has actually widened over the period. To better visualise the
widening gap, figure 5.1.1 plots the variation of the difference in winning incumbent and freshmen vote share over the period. The number of cases used \( (n) \) is marked in dashed grey and refers to the scale on the left-hand side. The average difference is marked in red and refers to the corresponding scale on the right. Overall, the data confirm the growing trend, from a gap of around 3.5% in the mid-1970s to almost 6% by the end of the period. Though there are substantial temporal variations in the data, the polynomial fit (marked in dashed black, see figure 5.1.1) is gradual and upward, showing growth in the region of 2-2.5% over the years observed. The data also show the gap to be particularly small from 1981-1984, with incumbents averaging just 1.1-2.6% more than freshmen over this time.

These results have a number of implications. First, the consistent gap between incumbent and freshmen winners is a broad indication of a difference in circumstance between the two candidates. It does not confirm the presence of an incumbency advantage, merely that incumbents do better on average. Also, interestingly for both incumbent and freshmen winners, average vote share recorded has been in decline, which marries neatly with data discussed in chapter 4 on the rise in seat competition. The introduction of the Liberal Democrats and the rise in the number of Other candidates has drawn some votes, but more importantly has lowered the share of the vote required to win in a plurality system. In this sense the fall in average vote share for both groups does not necessarily hinder an incumbent's chances of success, but can actually improve them, as a divided opposition can serve to enhance the position of the leading candidate.
The rising gap between incumbent and freshmen winners implies that the average winning vote shares of incumbent candidates has been falling at a slower rate than that for freshmen. This widening gap may support a belief that the rise in seat competition will help, rather than hinder the electoral prospects of defending councillors.

(Figure 5.1.0 – Incumbent Winners (IWs) Vs Freshmen Winners (NIW) Vote Share (%) 1974-2010 (n = 182,124))

(Figure 5.1.1 – IWs Vs. NIWs, Vote Share Difference (%) (n) 1974-2010 (n = 182,124))
The data presented above are broad and do not take into consideration the nuanced trends for each of the parties. At times particular parties may suffer at the national polls and so it is of interest to this project to examine how, in general terms, incumbents fare nationally when compared with their freshmen party colleagues over the period. Figures 5.1.2-5.1.5 show the variation in vote share differences for the parties. As for the data discussed above, at times there is large variation, both in the number of cases and incumbent’s superior performance. However, overall the data demonstrate that incumbent winners for all parties tend to outperform their freshmen colleagues.

Figure 5.1.2 details the difference in vote share between Conservative incumbent winners and freshmen winners over the period. The chart illustrates a trend of a widening gap between incumbents and freshmen, though with considerable variation. For instance, in the 1979 local elections, the mean share of the vote for winning freshmen was higher than for incumbents (by 0.5%), as it was in 1986 (by 0.75%). To offer one explanation, I draw on data described in chapter 4. Tory
Hit Rates (HRs) suffered significantly in 1986, particularly in the Boroughs. The case-selection procedure for this analysis requires the examination of winning candidates. Consequently, whilst the typical pool of incumbents examined will have suffered a backlash in both safe and marginal seats alike, the average vote shares for winning freshmen will have remained largely unchanged. Typically these will either have tipped over the required level to win and thus be considered, or fail to do so and not be considered at all. Consequently, in situations where there is a major reaction against any one party, the simple comparison by winners may not illustrate the full extent of an incumbent’s advantage.

Aside from these two years, the overall trend is a growing gap for the Conservatives. The 1980s appear to show the least difference, whilst the 2000s show the largest difference. The difference between incumbent and freshmen winners is 4.7% in favour of incumbents over the entire period, with a standard deviation (σ) of 3.15. Labour results paint a slightly different picture, but conform to the general trend of incumbent winners performing considerably better than their non-incumbent counterparts. Figure 5.1.3 illustrates how the middle of the period exhibited the greatest difference between Labour incumbents and freshmen. However, although Labour incumbents do better than their freshmen colleagues more often than not, the data show that this is not always the case. In 1982 the average vote share of winning Labour freshmen edged that for incumbents, by around 0.3%. As discussed in chapter 4, the introduction of large numbers of LD candidates ahead of the 1983 parliamentary election is likely to have contributed to the 9% drop in Labour's national vote.
share (30.2% in 1986). Gains made by the SDP-Liberal Alliance\textsuperscript{11} were likely to be at the expense of Labour and the Conservatives (Rallings & Thrasher, 2003). Overall, Labour incumbent winners performed 5.1% better than their freshmen counterparts over the period ($\sigma = 2.80$). Though the difference is substantial, like the data discussed for the Conservatives, there appears to be temporal dimensions to these differences, with the gap being widest during the mid-1990s.

\textsuperscript{11} SDP-Liberal Alliance is coded as LD for the purpose of this project
Figure 5.1.4 shows data for Lib Dem incumbent winners against their freshmen counterparts. Similar to data for the Conservatives, there is a slight growth over the period examined, though as the chart illustrates (marked in dashed grey) there are relatively few candidates for comparison pre-1982. This period is also problematic as it pre-dates the SDP-Liberal alliance and so may be comparing competitors as well as colleagues. The 1994 local elections showed the largest difference in vote shares between the LDs, with incumbents averaging some 8% higher candidate vote share (CVS) than freshmen. Since the 1990s the smallest gap has been 1.7% in 1997. Over the period winning Lib Dem incumbents have averaged 3.9% higher vote shares than freshmen. This difference has been fairly consistent over the years examined. Overall, data for the Liberal Democrats provides the strongest evidence in favour of incumbency effects, with more consistent results than the two major parties. Variance in the data is relatively low by comparison with a standard deviation (σ) of just 1.96.

Overall, data for the three major parties suggests that incumbents do better than their freshmen colleagues, though with considerable variance over the period examined. As discussed above, though this method is useful because of its simplicity, there are particular weaknesses with the approach. Accordingly, these are addressed in sub-chapter 5.2.

5.2 – Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP)

Using multimember districts (MMDs), Rallings et al (1998) identify nuances in the preferences of the electorate when presented with a ballot structure that
offers slightly more choice. Where there is more than one candidate from the same party on offer, there are usually differences in the vote counts and these can act as a gentle indicator of voter preference. Without a ranking structure built into the voting process, we are able instead to turn to unused votes and split-ticketing to indicate popular preferences.

Using wards where the same party wins all seats, and there is a mix of incumbents and freshmen elected allows us to identify any inherent value of incumbency. That is to say, if there is a difference and it is statistically significant, we can be reasonably confident that this difference is not due to a random distribution of votes, but instead to two distinct normal distributions. As such a simple comparison of incumbent vote share against average freshmen vote share within these wards is enough to assess whether the electorate have been distinguishing incumbent and freshmen candidates. This approach allows freshmen to act as a rudimentary measure of political partisanship in each ward and any incumbency effect can be gauged or 'standardised' into what has been termed Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP). The process is relatively simple. Incumbents are compared directly against the mean freshmen vote in their ward. As the data consist of both two-member and three-member wards, SIP can be expressed as the following:

\[
SIP = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{(x_i - \bar{y}_i)}{n}
\]
Where $x$ is the incumbent vote share and $y$ is freshmen vote share. The SIP model is explained in greater detail in chapter 3, but the objective of this approach is to eliminate partisan inconsistency across wards. The premise rests on the assumption that a gap in vote share is linked to a gap in candidates’ popular appeal. In their work on assessing incumbency advantage in multimember districts, Hirano & Snyder (2009) identify two potential sources of bias when selecting winners in multimember districts. The incumbent’s tenure needs to be considered and observing winners may result in some form of selection bias (Hirano & Snyder, 2009, p.296-297). Both of these issues are dealt with later in sub-chapters 5.3 and 5.5 respectively.

Results indicate a distinct performance gap between the two groups. Incumbents outperform their freshmen colleagues by an average of 2.7%, and when plotted over the period, the trend is a growing one (see figure 5.2.1). At its lowest, SIP is just over 1.6%, during the 1974-78 electoral cycle. SIP then grows considerably to its highest point of 3.4% during the 1995-98 electoral cycle. After these years SIP dips and settles at around 2.7-2.8% between the 1999-02 and 2007-10. The initial SIP data suggest that incumbents have performed notably better than freshmen colleagues, in the same ward, at the same election and this gap has widened somewhat over the years examined.
When political parties are taken into consideration, it is shown that incumbents for all three major parties perform consistently better than freshmen, though they have done so to varying degrees. Figure 5.2.2 plots SIP data for the three major parties over the period. Tory incumbents average an SIP of 2.1% (\(\sigma = 4.69\)), growing from around 1.5% in the 1974-78 cycle to roughly 2.5% in more recent years. Labour incumbents average an SIP of around 2.5% (\(\sigma = 5.66\)).

Whilst there was considerable growth in the gap between incumbents and freshmen, from around 1.5% in the mid-1970s to 3.3% in the mid-1990s, Labour SIP then falls, settling at around 2% in the final three cycles. For the Liberal Democrats there is a slightly different trend. Though LD incumbents have performed consistently better than freshmen, and to a much greater degree than the two other parties, there has been a declining trend for the Lib Dems. Though SIP is particularly high for the LDs during the 1970s, average SIP over the entire period is just 4% (\(\sigma = 12.11\)). This is probably due to the fact that the majority of cases are clustered towards more recent years (see table 5.2.2). However, even discounting these earlier years, there is a clear gap in performance between
incumbent and freshmen Liberal Democrats, which is almost twice the SIP of the Conservatives and 1.5% higher than for Labour.

By aggregating the data over period we can assess the confidence in these point estimates by testing whether they deviate significantly from zero. One sample t-
tests are performed against the 0% SIP test value for all three parties. Table 5.2.3 displays the results.

For the Conservatives, the mean SIP of 2.1% has a t-statistic well into the tail, at 32.07. With 5,359 degrees of freedom the corresponding p-value is well below the 0.001 level. For Labour the average SIP of 2.5% has a t-statistic of 32.42. With 5,615 degrees of freedom a p-value is also reported well below the 0.001 level. Finally, for the Liberal Democrats the 4% average SIP has a t-statistic of 34.43 and with 2,422 degrees of freedom the p-value is again, well below the 0.001 level. Overall these data suggest that we can be confident that average SIP deviates significantly from zero. Incumbents for all three parties are performing significantly better than their freshmen counterparts.

However, Hirano & Snyder (2009) maintain that in order to eliminate bias in results and isolate any effect solely attributed to incumbency, there is a need to exclude the effect of extended candidate tenure. That is to say that currently, a group of varying experience (i.e. short and long serving councillors) are being measured against a group with similar electoral experience (i.e. recently winning freshmen). In order to better understand the causal mechanism, it will be useful then to examine the results for sophomore candidates alone. For instance, what is the value of serving just one term in office? This has the added benefit of allowing us to compare the data for any relative changes in the measures (i.e. between SIP for all incumbents and SIP just for sophomores) and make a broad judgement as to whether incumbency may potentially have cumulative effects.
Examining SIP data just for sophomores is effectively a different approach to constructing a ‘Sophomore Surge’ model, a method that has been used extensively in the American literature (Holbrook & Tidmarsh, 1991; Lockerbie, 1994). Comparing sophomore and freshmen candidates in the same election allows us to measure any ‘surge’ in vote share as changes in political partisanship are accounted for in the SIP model (refer to chapter 3).

Table 5.2.4 displays the results of SIP t-tests for sophomores. Though average SIP falls by just over 0.55%, the 2.15% estimate reports a t-statistic of 19.156. With 2,817 degrees of freedom this has a p-value well below the 0.001 level. 95% confidence intervals are set at 1.93-2.36%, meaning that we can be confident the sophomore surge is above 1.9%. For Tory sophomores, SIP averages 1.6% (95% U=1.88 L=1.30, σ = 5.06) and though the Tories are the worst performing party, the t-test against zero is statistically significant with a reported t-statistic of 10.698. With 1,164 degrees of freedom the associated p-value is well below the 0.001 level. Labour sophomores do much the same. The average surge for Labour sophomores is 2% (σ = 6.12) and a t-statistic of 11.318 (df = 1,194) has a p-value that is also well below the 0.001 level. Labour confidence intervals range from 1.66% to 2.35% meaning that we cannot be confident that the Labour surge is significantly higher than the Conservatives. As for the data discussed above, Liberal Democrat sophomores perform better than sophomores for the other two parties, with an average SIP of 3.94% (σ = 7.12). The associated t-statistic is 11.832, and with 457 degrees of freedom the resultant p-value is below the 0.001 level. LD confidence intervals range between 3.28% and 4.59%. This is well above the ranges of either Labour or the Conservatives, meaning that we
can confidently assert that the Liberal Democrat surge is significantly higher than that for Labour and the Conservatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>95% L</th>
<th>95% U</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>10.698</td>
<td>1,164</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>1,195</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>11.318</td>
<td>1,194</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>11.832</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>2,818</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>19.156</td>
<td>2,817</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.2.4 – Sophomore SIP (One Sample T-Test) - (n) (µ) (σ) (t) (df) (P) 1974-2010 by Party (n = 2,818)]

The data presented in table 5.2.4 has a number of ramifications for this project. First, the results support the overall narrative described so far in this chapter. It is clear that incumbents tend to attain a higher share of the vote than freshmen, even when compared with their peers at the same election and in the same ward. Second, though the degree to which incumbents have outperformed freshmen has varied, it is clear that there are differences between the parties. Third, Liberal Democrat councillors consistently do best; reporting significantly higher SIPs than either Labour or the Tories in both incumbent and sophomore tests. However, it must also be noted that Labour has tended to do better than the Conservatives. Fourth, for all parties the data suggest that serving just one term is enough to have a significant effect on the relative performance of candidates, with sophomores averaging between 1.59% and 3.94% more in vote share than their colleagues, depending on the party. Finally, because the SIP point estimate is lower in the sophomore surge results (see table 5.2.4) when compared to the all-encompassing incumbent analysis (see table 5.2.3), this suggests that those incumbents with greater electoral experience may attain even higher levels of SIP.
From these data, two pertinent questions arise. *First*, if there is electoral value in incumbency, as has been described above, then political parties have a vested interest in encouraging councillors to defend their seats. Does this mean that on occasions when councillors choose not to stand, there is a measurable difference in the party’s performance? *Second*, if candidates with greater electoral experience do better, then is this effect cumulative? If incumbents accrue further electoral advantage throughout their career is there a marked difference between those with more experience and those with less? Both these questions are explored in greater detail in sections 5.3 and 5.4 respectively.

5.3 – **Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS)**

Section 5.2 identified a gap in the performance of incumbents and freshmen, as well as the prevalence of a sophomore ‘surge’ in English local elections. This section aims to build on the previously discussed findings. It is concerned principally with the notion of corroborating the SIP data, by measuring any ‘slump’ in party support after the retirement of an incumbent councillor. Termed ‘Retirement Slump’ the method compares a party’s vote share in an electoral division from one election to the next (Erikson, 1972; Cover & Mayhew, 1977; Born, 1979; Payne, 1980; Arseneau, 1984; Jacobson, 1987; Gelman & King, 1990; Stonecash, 2008). The fall in vote share, or ‘slump’, is taken as the advantage an incumbent brings to his or her party on election day and is considered to be another estimator of incumbency effects. The established notion is that, notwithstanding significant movements in partisan swing, any electoral ‘slump’ will indicate how the electorate may value the presence of incumbent candidates.
Table 5.3.1 presents aggregate data for retiring incumbents and that for freshmen candidates from the same party who follow in that ward. The data presented relates only to SMD wards where the party has retained a seat after a councillor decides not to contest for re-election. Comparing these data can provide, in the broadest view, a rudimentary measure of performance for these two groups of candidates. When compared, the aggregate data show a significant difference between retirees and freshmen. Retirees average some 57.6% vote share ($\sigma = 11.18$), whilst in the following election freshmen average just 55.9% ($\sigma = 11.13$) in the same seat. The difference is modest, just 1.7%. However, a Levene’s independent t-test shows that the means for both groups are significantly different from one another, with an associated p-value below the 0.001 level when equal variances are assumed ($df = 4,962$, see table 5.3.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>CVS</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retirees</td>
<td>2,482</td>
<td>57.59</td>
<td>11.18</td>
<td>0.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>2,482</td>
<td>55.91</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td>0.223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.3.1 – Ret vs. Fre Winners VS (%) (Group Stats) - (n) ($\mu$) ($\sigma$) (Error) 1974-2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Diff</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>.893</td>
<td>.345</td>
<td>5.300</td>
<td>4,962</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>5.300</td>
<td>4961.868</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.3.2 – Ret vs. Fre Winners VS (%) (Levene’s & Indep T-Test) = (F) (Sig) (t) (df) (Sig) ($\mu$) (Error) 1974-2010)

It is important to remember that these data are broad and there are some methodological concerns with comparing the group data directly. Without accounting for the usual endogenous factors such as political party and changes in partisanship, there is potential for bias in the results. However, these data can tell us something about the incumbency picture more generally, in this instance
that retirees tend to finish on higher levels of CVS than their freshmen colleagues, who follow, achieve.

When the data are examined by party category (see tables 5.3.3-5.3.4) the results are in line with those discussed above. There are moderate differences in the share of candidate votes between retirees and freshmen, in that for all three party categories retirees do significantly better than the freshmen who follow. Table 5.3.3 shows that the Conservatives have the smallest difference, at around 1.2% (Retirees = 56.9%, σ = 11.18; Freshmen = 55.8, σ = 10.80). Labour retirees do slightly better than the Tories, with an almost 1.4% higher average than for freshmen (Retirees = 59.4%, σ = 10.70; Freshmen = 58.1, σ = 11.75). The Liberal Democrats have the largest difference, with retirees averaging more than double the difference of either the Conservatives or Labour, just less than 3% (Retirees = 54.6%, σ = 10.44; Freshmen = 51.7, σ = 9.87). For all three parties, these data suggest that retirees attain a higher level of candidate vote share (CVS) than the freshmen from the same party who follow.

Table 5.3.4 displays results from Levene’s and independent t-tests between the groups for each of the parties. For the Conservatives there is a t-statistic of 2.824 and with 2,682 degrees of freedom has an associated p-value below the 0.005 level when equal variances are assumed. The difference between the Labour groups is also significant. The test reports a t-statistic of 2.249 and a resulting p-value that is below the 0.05 level when equal variances are not assumed (df = 1368.048). Finally, the data for the Liberal Democrats are the most convincing. The reported t-statistic is 3.784, and with 660 degrees of freedom the associated
p-value is below the 0.001 level when equal variances are assumed. These results mean that we can be confident that the group means differ statistically from one another. However, they do not confirm an electoral ‘slump’ that is associated with incumbency as such.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>CVS</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retirees</td>
<td>1,342</td>
<td>56.94</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>0.302</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>1,342</td>
<td>55.75</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>0.295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Retirees</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>59.42</td>
<td>10.70</td>
<td>0.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>58.06</td>
<td>11.75</td>
<td>0.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Retirees</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>54.64</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>0.574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>51.66</td>
<td>9.87</td>
<td>0.542</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Levene's</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Diff</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>1.235</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>2.824</td>
<td>2,682</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>2.824</td>
<td>2680.329</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.422</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>4.538</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>2.249</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>2.249</td>
<td>1368.048</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.604</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>1.584</td>
<td>.209</td>
<td>3.784</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>3.784</td>
<td>657.897</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.790</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data discussed above suggest that these groups have significantly different CVS means, which is critical to the notion of incumbency having electoral value. However, as mooted above, there is a fundamental problem with assessing the ‘slump’ in this way, namely that it is susceptible to partisan bias. Stonecash (2008) notes explicitly the inherent weakness in these types of measure, stating that “the difficulty with the measure is that it does not involve the change in partisan vote from an incumbent to challenger...the retirement slump measure, then, should be viewed with considerable caution” (Stonecash, 2008, pp. 56). Changes in partisanship from one year to the next can influence the results and
though there is no reason to suspect a consistent influence one way or the other over the period, identifying how partisanship has changed locally will benefit the accuracy of estimating any ‘slump’. Thus, though it is important to understand what happens to CVS in a ward after the exit of an experienced incumbent, there is a clear need to create an unbiased estimator that considers relative performance as well as any changes in partisanship from one election to the next. The conditions presented in English local elections provide an ideal opportunity to construct such an estimator.

Full details of the Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS) variable are explained in chapter 3, but the principle behind the model is relatively straightforward. In an attempt to control for any influence of party swing on the ‘slump’, the model uses information from other elections in the same local authority to gauge any local change in support for the party. This information acts as a ‘yardstick’ for electoral performance for both retirees and freshmen in each election. This is an experimental method of partisanship control, where data on the slump is ‘standardised’ by being compared against a ‘local party swing’. The control comprises aggregated vote share for all seats retained by the party, other than those already under examination. It is important to note that there is an explicit assumption in the model, that the average change in authority partisanship can be legitimately used as a proxy indicator for ward-level changes across the whole authority. Clearly there may be benefits in doing so, not least those assertions by electoral geographers that geographical/neighbourhood factors act as determinants in the variation of political partisanship (Johnston & Pattie, 2006). Using electoral data from other wards in the authority is meaningful then,
because many of the issues that influence levels of partisanship have a local
dimension such as; class, jobs, urbanisation, services, community and amenities.

But also, from a purely logical perspective, the Schumpeterian argument must
hold that local decisions are made at the authority-level and therefore, residents
should respond by making an assessment of the controlling party’s record. I offer
the following model as an unbiased estimator of incumbency advantage.

SRS considers only quadrennial SMDs, examining party election data in the
incumbent’s final election year against the freshman win in the following
election. SRS for party category $p$ can be expressed as follows:

$$\text{SRS}_p = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{(x_{ikl} - \mu_{il}) - (y_{jkl} - \mu_{jl})}{n}$$

Where $p$ denotes the party category, $i$ refers to election 1 (retiree final election
year) and $j$ to election 2 (freshman year). $x$ equals the CVS of a retiree in seat $k$ in
authority $l$. $y$ refers to the CVS of a winning freshman that follows in election $j$
and also in seat $k$. $\mu$ refers to the average CVS of all non-selected winners from
the same party in the same local authority.

Table 5.3.5 displays relevant group statistics for the parties individually and
combined. For the 2,297 cases collected, average SRS is just over 2 ($\sigma = 10.81$). A
one sample t-test (table 5.3.6) adds weight to the result. The t-statistic is 9.053,
and with 2,296 degrees of freedom has an associated p-value well below the
0.001 level. This result means that we can be confident that SRS is greater than
zero. The estimate is only slightly higher than the difference between retirees and freshmen reported earlier in this chapter and is in line with sophomore surge estimates detailed in sub-chapter 5.2.

Tables 5.3.5 and 5.3.6 also show results for the three parties considered, and the results largely chime with those revealed earlier. For the 1,274 Tory cases considered, the average SRS of 1.73 ($\sigma = 10.12$) is just 0.19 less than the Tory average under the SIP model. One-sample t-tests (table 5.3.6) return a $t$-statistic of 6.109, and with 1,273 degrees of freedom has an associated $p$-value well below the 0.001 level. For Labour, average SRS is just 1.35 ($\sigma = 9.18$, $n = 640$), which is 0.59 below the average for sophomore SIP data. As for the Conservatives, one-sample t-tests are significant, returning a $t$-statistic of 3.705, that has an associated $p$-value well below the 0.001 level when there are 639 degrees of freedom. Finally, the Liberal Democrats have the highest average SRS at 4.11 ($\sigma = 12.17$, $n = 289$). This figure is 0.55 higher than that for the SIP surge model and yet again more than double that measured for Labour or the
Conservatives. The t-test gives a t-statistic of 5.742 and with 288 degrees of freedom, has an associated p-value below the 0.001 level.

There are a number of ramifications from these results. First, like the SIP data the SRS results also identify an electoral slump. The results imply that local voters may consider the individual candidate over the party at times, with a modest advantage for councillors, who may still remain vulnerable to any significant shifts in political partisanship.

The second key finding is that the inter-party results are in line with the data revealed earlier in chapter 5. The ‘slump’ is far larger for the Liberal Democrats (SRS = 4.11) than either the Conservatives or Labour (SRS = 1.73 & 1.35 respectively). Perhaps more importantly, what the SRS data also show is that fielding an incumbent candidate will improve the chance of the local party retaining the seat. Though there is every chance that some sort of ‘self-deselection’ may have taken place in the data, SRS takes partisan swing into account and eliminates the bias regardless of retirees’ motives for standing down. So, whether due to a personal decision, local party deselection or indeed anticipation of electoral defeat, the data suggests that voters respond positively to a candidate with electoral experience on the ballot paper. The implication is that local parties stand to benefit from encouraging their councillors to defend their seats.

With these conclusions come further questions regarding the effect of experience on incumbent performance. So far, chapter 5 has used two newly constructed
measures to identify an incumbency advantage in English local elections. One centred on short-serving councillors and another on those at the end of their time on the council. Naturally then, the question arises, does experience affect the electoral performance of councillors? Do longer serving incumbents do better than shorter serving ones, and if so by how much? Sub-chapter 5.4 goes on to examine experience effects on incumbent performance.

5.4 – Experience Effects

Sub-chapter 5.3 discussed the notion of a Retirement Slump. Data presented supported the concept of a ‘slump’, suggesting that retiring incumbents may take a small portion of the vote with them as they leave. This in turn raised the question of experience and whether it has any significant effect on the electoral safety of councillors. Rallings & Thrasher (1997) present a case for further research into the effects of candidates’ “longevity in office” (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp. 164), but remain pessimistic about the ability of councillors to weather any substantial shifts in partisanship. However, examining the effects of experience can provide critical information, not only in the assessment of the overall notion of incumbency advantage in English local elections, but also the behavioural patterns of local voters, as well as a more accurate estimation of any incumbency effects (Alford & Hibbing, 1981).

Jeffery Stonecash’s *Reassessing the Incumbency Effect* discusses in some depth, the implications of trends in incumbents’ vote share over their career. Following Stonecash’s chapter on cumulative career changes (Stonecash, 2008, Chap 4, pp. 32-52) it is clear that examining electoral trends associated with experience may
help the project assess sources of advantage. For instance, considering the electoral dynamics of councillors’ careers can help to judge whether advantages associated with incumbency are static and thus linked to their status; whether the effects are linear, suggesting systemic effects; or whether there is a curvilinear trend where the share of votes gathered over a candidate’s tenure wanes in later years. The interpretation of career trends may help to provide some explanation for the phenomenon.

This section aims to examine experiential effects using a variety of measures. As a proxy for candidates’ length of service, a variable is constructed from the dataset. Experience is measured using the number of terms a candidate has already served. The section uses the constructed Experience variable throughout (described in detail in chapter 3) to distinguish between more and less experienced candidates standing and begins by providing broad CVS data for councillors of different experience for the three major parties. The section then goes on to utilise the constructed SIP and SRS measures to assess any effects in greater depth.

Table 5.4.1 displays CVS descriptive statistics for the Experience groups of more than 135,000 winning candidates between 1974 and 2010. The data show that longer serving councillors tend to achieve higher vote shares than shorter serving ones. As discussed earlier in this chapter, examining group averages does not confirm any effect, but helps to illustrate a trend. The results show average CVS for the more than 96,000 winning freshmen to be 52.5% (σ = 11.41). This is more than 4-points below the average for the roughly 26,000 winning
sophomores considered. The mean sophomore CVS is 56.7% ($\sigma = 11.89$).

Continuing the growing trend, data from 8,513 winning candidates identified as having served 2 terms, show an average CVS of 58.5% ($\sigma = 12.03$). This is almost 2 points higher than for sophomores and 6 points higher than for winning freshmen. In addition, the disparity continues for 3 term winners and 4+ term winners, who average 59.9% CVS ($\sigma = 12.48$) and 60.4% CVS ($\sigma = 12.61$) respectively. These are between 7 and 8 points higher than the result for winning freshmen.

Figure 5.4.1 plots these data and the chart serves as an illustration for the potential electoral gains an experienced councillor stands to achieve when directly compared with lesser-experienced candidates. What is immediately apparent is the diminishing rate of returns with every consecutive term of experience. There is a clear curvilinear trend, similar to that described by the existing literature (Alford & Hibbing, 1981, pp. 1,047; Hibbing, 1991, pp. 410).

Though merely an indication, the data suggest that the majority of gains could be made early in a political career, with any further rises plateauing for more experienced councillors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>CVS</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>95% Low</th>
<th>95% Upp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>96,376</td>
<td>52.51</td>
<td>11.41</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>52.43</td>
<td>52.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>25,671</td>
<td>56.69</td>
<td>11.89</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>56.55</td>
<td>56.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>8,513</td>
<td>58.49</td>
<td>12.03</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>58.23</td>
<td>58.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>3,057</td>
<td>59.86</td>
<td>12.48</td>
<td>0.226</td>
<td>59.41</td>
<td>60.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>60.42</td>
<td>12.61</td>
<td>0.333</td>
<td>59.76</td>
<td>61.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.4.1 – Mean CVS (Descriptives) - ($n$) ($\mu$) ($\sigma$) (S.E.) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1974-2010 ($n = 135,049$))
In order to make any meaningful assertions about career patterns from the broad CVS data presented, it will be useful to assess the distinction between the experience groups. Tables 5.4.2-5.4.4 present results from a comparison of mean CVS between the experience groups. Looking at table 5.4.2, a Levene’s homogeneity of variances test reports a Levene’s statistic of 70.46, which is statistically significant and the assumption of equality of variances is rejected.

Table 5.4.3 displays results from an analysis of variance test. The F-statistic between the five experience groups (4 degrees of freedom) is 1370.524 and has an associated p-value that is significant, well below the 0.001 level. The results suggest that there is substantial enough variance between groups to assume some distinction between them. However, a post-hoc Tukey honestly significant difference (HSD) test is performed in conjunction with the Levene's & ANOVA in order to identify which of the experience group means are statistically distinct from one another.
Table 5.4.4 displays results from the Tukey HSD test. The results show that all experience groups are significantly distinct from one another, apart from the 3 Term and 4+ Term experience groups, which are distinct from all others but not from each other. For these two groups the data show that there is a small overlap in the 95% confidence intervals, just under 0.45% CVS. All other groups are statistically distinct from one another, with p-values well below the 0.001 level, but the comparison of 3 Term and 4+ Term groups means has a p-value of 0.552.

The data revealed by the Tukey HSD tests lend weight to the notion of differences in the mean performance of candidates of varying experience. There are clear and significant disparities between groups and a difference of almost 8 points between the least and most experienced councillors. Also, although 3 Term and 4+ Term groups do not show a significant difference, this is not necessarily to the detriment of the overall picture of incumbency effects and the result may fit the overall narrative that has been constructed thus far. That is, large gains are made initially and after that the size of the gains diminish as candidates become more experienced. Perhaps the curvilinear trend is a facet of any career for local government politicians in England.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene Statistic</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70.460</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>135,044</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.2 – Test of Homogeneity of Variances - (Levene Stat) (df1) (df2) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 135,049)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANOVA</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>735494.599</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>183873.650</td>
<td>1370.524</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>18117915.40</td>
<td>135,044</td>
<td>134.163</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18853410.00</td>
<td>135,048</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.3 – ANOVA - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 135,049)]
The impact of eroding support is worth exploring (Stonecash, 2008, pp. 44). In order to clarify the career pattern identified for winning candidates, as illustrated by figure 5.4.1, it may be useful to present data for the best ‘fitted’ career trends. Tables’ 5.4.5-7 present the best fitted logarithmic regression model for Experience on CVS. Although the model reports a very low R square of just 0.039 (table 5.4.5), regression is used in this circumstance with the knowledge that the method is not the Best Linear Unbiased Estimator (BLUE), but instead is used simply to establish which trend fits the data best. Even though the model implies that only 4% of variance of CVS can be attributed to Experience, this is largely irrelevant as Experience in this instance is a discrete variable and lacks the capacity to vary enough to increase the size of the R squared. With this in mind, it is the best fit that is important and so long as the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience (i)</th>
<th>Experience (j)</th>
<th>Diff (i-j)</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>95% L</th>
<th>95% U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freshman</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>-9.08*</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.43</td>
<td>-8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>-8.60*</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.04</td>
<td>-8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sophomore</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>-9.08*</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.43</td>
<td>-8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-8.60*</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.04</td>
<td>-8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Terms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>-9.08*</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.43</td>
<td>-8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-8.60*</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.04</td>
<td>-8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Terms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>-9.08*</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.43</td>
<td>-8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-8.60*</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.04</td>
<td>-8.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4+ Terms</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>-9.08*</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.43</td>
<td>-8.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-8.60*</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.04</td>
<td>-8.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4.4 – Post Hoc Tukey HSD - (Mean Diff) (Std. Error) (P) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1974-2010 (n = 135,049) (*Mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level)
interaction term is significant the model will have some value for this research. ANOVA results give an F-statistic of 5445.815 and an associated p-value below 0.001. Upon examining the coefficients displayed in table 5.4.7 the beta value is 5.543 and both the logarithm of Experience and the constant of 52.5% are significant with p-values below the 0.001 level. These data represent the best fit from a series of different fit attempts and indicate that the career trend for local election winners’ CVS is a logarithmic one where the gains become progressively diminished.

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{R} & \text{R Square} & \text{Adjusted R Square} & \text{S.E.} \\
\text{.197} & \text{.039} & \text{.039} & \text{11.584} \\
\end{array}
\]

[Table 5.4.5 – Model Summary - (R) (R Square) (Adj. R Square) (Std. Error) 1974-2010 (n = 135,049)]

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{ANOVA} & \text{Sum of Squares} & \text{df} & \text{Mean Square} & \text{F} & \text{Sig.} \\
\text{Regression} & 730800.264 & 1 & 730800.264 & 5445.815 & .000 \\
\text{Residual} & 18122609.736 & 135047 & 134.195 & & \\
\text{Total} & 18853410.000 & 135048 & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

[Table 5.4.6 – ANOVA - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 135,049)]

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{Coefficients} & \text{B} & \text{S.E.} & \text{Standardized Beta} & \text{t} & \text{Sig.} \\
\text{ln(Experience)} & 5.543 & 0.075 & .197 & 73.796 & .000 \\
\text{(Constant)} & 52.547 & 0.037 & 1432.955 & .000 \\
\end{array}
\]

[Table 5.4.7 – Logarithmic Model - (B) (Std. Error) (Standardized Beta) (t) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 135,049)]

The implications of these findings to the overall project are slight but notable. Winning CVS rises with experience but plateaus in a logarithmic fashion. Larger gains made early in a politician’s career become smaller. In his analysis of US congressional elections Stonecash (2008) cites similar findings as supportive of members’ ability to exploit the perks of office in order to raise their vote percentages rapidly and create a small ‘buffer’ between them and their competitors. However, as members tire of the job and pay less attention to the
district, their vote shares suffer and round off or even fall (Stonecash, 2008, pp. 44). Though the results from the analysis of the English local election data are far from conclusive, the initial picture is, at least, in line with this view.

At this point it must be acknowledged, that the data discussed above are not an exact estimation of incumbency effects but just a broad indication. It is likely that the data for more experienced incumbents will reflect the electoral strength of respective parties in safer seats. Though the data are spread over a wide timespan, which will dampen the effect of partisanship, it is inevitable that there will be some form of positive selection within these data. Nevertheless, these data remain an important illustration. The methodological concerns of experience estimation are addressed later in this sub-chapter.

Previously discussed results show that the party categories have tended to experience the effects of incumbency slightly differently. Conservative incumbent candidates have been less distinguished from their freshmen counterparts, whereas Labour incumbents have been slightly more so. The Liberal Democrats have been shown to have greatest disparity thus far and considering this, the following discussion is divided into three, briefer, considerations of career CVS trends for the three major parties. Looking first at the Conservatives, this section then moves on to discuss results for Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

**Conservatives** - Data for the different winning Conservative groups are presented in table 5.4.8. The results present a slightly different picture to that revealed
above. For the more than thirty-nine thousand freshmen winners the average CVS is 52.7% (\(\sigma = 11.13\)), which is 4 points lower than the average for sophomores. The ten thousand winning sophomores average a CVS of 56.8% (\(\sigma = 11.74\)). Unexpectedly, data for the more experienced Conservative groups show a slight fall and ‘levelling-off’. 2 Terms, 3 Terms and 4+ Terms groups all average similar CVS at 55.2%, 55.5% and 55.3% respectively (\(\sigma = 10.79, 10.89 & 11.55\) respectively).

Figure 5.4.8 plots these data. The chart illustrates an almost cubic pattern, suggesting that, although there is some growth in CVS between freshmen and sophomore groups, longer serving incumbents fail to build on this and settle at a slightly lower level. As such, it appears that the Tories exhibit a slightly different career pattern, one where further terms of service, beyond the sophomore term, fail to boost councillor’s CVS and may actually result in a slight fall. The average CVS change from winning sophomores to the 2 term incumbents is a drop of around 1.5%, which then holds for 3 Term and 4+ Term winners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>CVS</th>
<th>(\sigma)</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>95% Low</th>
<th>95% Upp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>39,063</td>
<td>52.70</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>52.59</td>
<td>52.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>9,949</td>
<td>56.82</td>
<td>11.74</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>56.59</td>
<td>57.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>3,071</td>
<td>55.23</td>
<td>10.79</td>
<td>0.195</td>
<td>54.85</td>
<td>55.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>1,071</td>
<td>55.46</td>
<td>10.82</td>
<td>0.331</td>
<td>54.81</td>
<td>56.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>55.29</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>0.537</td>
<td>54.23</td>
<td>56.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.8 - Con Mean VS (Descriptives) \cdot (n) (\mu) (\sigma) (Std. Error) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1974-2010 (n = 53,617)]
Tables 5.4.9-10 report results from Levene's and ANOVA tests. The tests suggest we can be confident that some groups are significantly distinguished from one another, though not all groups. The resulting Levene's statistic is 24.005 and has an associated p-value well below the 0.001 level. This means that heterogeneous variances can be assumed. The reported F-statistic is 292.832 and has an associated p-value below the 0.001 level. Table 5.4.11 presents results for a Tukey HSD test for the Conservative Experience groups. The results show that freshmen and sophomore groups are electorally distinct from one another and from all other Experience groups also. The 4.1% difference in means has a p-value below the 0.001 level. These groups are also distinguished from all others. Each interaction between freshmen or sophomores and the more experienced
groups have p-values below the 0.05 level at least. However, as expected, the 2 Terms, 3 Terms and 4+ Terms groups are too similar to one another and a Tukey test fails to distinguish them statistically significantly. The implications of these results are that the Conservative vote share career trend is neither linear nor cumulative. Instead Tory candidates may experience a period of electoral stasis or decline. The early career boost, as described in previous analysis in this chapter, is evident for the Tories and with a degree statistical confidence. However, though there is evidence for an incumbency effect for the Conservatives, overall results suggest that it is likely to be small, with many councillors failing to build on the initial 'surge' in vote share.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience (i)</th>
<th>Experience (j)</th>
<th>Diff (i-j)</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>95% L</th>
<th>95% U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-4.12</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-4.46</td>
<td>-3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>-2.53</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-3.11</td>
<td>-1.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-2.76</td>
<td>0.348</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-3.70</td>
<td>-1.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-2.58</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-4.02</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.361</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>0.534</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-1.59</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-2.22</td>
<td>-0.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.398</td>
<td>.980</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.559</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.348</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-1.36</td>
<td>0.361</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-2.35</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.398</td>
<td>.980</td>
<td>-0.86</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>-1.53</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.525</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-1.54</td>
<td>0.534</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>-2.99</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.559</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-1.47</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>-1.87</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.4.11 – Conservative Post Hoc Tukey HSD - (Mean Diff) (Std. Error) (P) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1974-2010 (n = 53,617) (*Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level))
Tables 5.4.12-14 present results from a regression model, this time cubic, for the winning Conservative CVS career pattern. As expected, the model reports a very small R square, just 0.021 and this is in line with previously discussed data for Conservative candidates, for whom the electoral variance associated with experience has been markedly less than for the other party groups. Table 5.4.13 displays results from an ANOVA test, which yield an F-statistic of 382.055 and has an associated p-value below the 0.001 level.

Table 5.4.14 presents coefficient statistics for the cubic fit of the career curve. All components of the model have significant p-values, below the 0.001 level, and although the model is a poor predictor for the overall variance of Conservative winners’ CVS, the model does act as an indicator for Tory career trends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.145</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>11.224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.12 – Con Model Summary - (R) (R Square) (Adj. R Square) (Std. Error) 1974-2010 (n = 53,617)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANOVA</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>144401.370</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48133.790</td>
<td>382.055</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>6754523.409</td>
<td>53613</td>
<td>125.987</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6898924.779</td>
<td>53616</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.13 – Con ANOVA - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 53,617)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Standardized Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Experience)</td>
<td>18.654</td>
<td>1.065</td>
<td>1.249</td>
<td>17.508</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Experience)^2</td>
<td>-6.470</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td>-2.016</td>
<td>-14.040</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Experience)^3</td>
<td>.677</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.912</td>
<td>11.769</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>39.850</td>
<td>.681</td>
<td></td>
<td>58.552</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.14 – Con Cubic Model - (B) (Std. Error) (Standardized Beta) (t) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 53,617)]

In summary, the data presented for winning Conservative councillors lend some weight to the notion of an incumbency advantage. All incumbent groups are
electorally distinct from their freshmen colleagues, particularly sophomores. However, beyond the sophomore election, Conservatives appear unable to build on any gains made, and CVS stabilises for the more experienced candidates at around 55.5%. It is clear that there is scope for experience to have an effect on the performance of Conservative candidates, but the evidence is meagre.

**Labour** - Labour candidates’ career trends tell a different story to that of the Conservatives, one closer to earlier discussed data for career changes. Table 5.4.15 displays descriptive statistics for the Labour experience groups. They suggest that the period over which Labour incumbents make electoral gains from experience is much longer than for Conservative incumbents. The mean CVS for the thirty-two and a half thousand Labour freshmen is 53.8% (σ = 11.74), around one percentage point higher than average CVS for Conservative freshmen. For the nine and a half thousand sophomore winners the average CVS is 58.2% (σ = 11.97), some 4.5 points higher than Labour freshmen and around 1.5 points higher than Conservative sophomores. The stark rise continues for 2 Terms winners with a mean CVS of 62.66% (σ = 12.01), which is around 4.5 points higher than sophomores and around 7.5 points higher than for Tory 2 Terms winners. 3 Terms Labour winners average 64.8% CVS (σ = 12.28), a rise of more than 2 points. Finally, the average CVS for winning Labour incumbents who have served for four or more terms is more than 11 points higher than that for Labour freshmen, at over 65% (σ = 11.69). Conservative equivalents are almost 10 points lower, averaging 55.3% CVS (see table 5.4.8).
It is important to note that the figures presented in table 5.4.15 will, to some degree, be influenced by the safety of the seats that many long-serving incumbents stand in. As such, the performance of experience groups between the parties may not be directly comparable. Figure 5.4.15 illustrates the career vote share trend for Labour winners. As for the ‘All Party’ data discussed earlier (see figure 5.4.1) the curve is concave, implying that the cumulative electoral gains diminish over time. The plotted means also imply that any curve estimation may be best modelled logarithmically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>CVS</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>95% Low</th>
<th>95% Upp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>32,453</td>
<td>53.75</td>
<td>11.74</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>53.62</td>
<td>53.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>9,376</td>
<td>58.24</td>
<td>11.97</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>58.00</td>
<td>58.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>3,378</td>
<td>62.66</td>
<td>12.01</td>
<td>0.207</td>
<td>62.25</td>
<td>63.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>1,263</td>
<td>64.75</td>
<td>12.28</td>
<td>0.346</td>
<td>64.07</td>
<td>65.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>65.03</td>
<td>11.69</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td>64.13</td>
<td>65.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.4.15 – Lab Mean CVS (Descriptives) - (n) (µ) (σ) (Std. Error) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1974-2010 (n = 47,121))

Before curve estimation, Levene’s and ANOVA test results are displayed in tables 5.4.16-17. The Levene statistic of 6.906 has an associated p-value below the 0.001 level, which leads to an assumption of heterogeneous variances. ANOVA
results are tabulated in table 5.4.17 and show an F-statistic of 909.126, with a p-value below the 0.001 level. The ANOVA results imply that some of Labour’s experience group means differ significantly from one another, and there is significant variation between the experience groups.

![Table 5.4.16 - Lab Test of Homogeneity of Variances - (Levene Stat) (df1) (df2) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 47,121)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene Statistic</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.906</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47,116</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Table 5.4.17 - Lab ANOVA - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 47,121)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience (i)</th>
<th>Experience (j)</th>
<th>Diff (i-j)</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>95% L</th>
<th>95% U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-4.49*</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-4.87</td>
<td>-4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>-8.91*</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-9.49</td>
<td>-8.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-11.00*</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-11.93</td>
<td>-10.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-11.28*</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-12.56</td>
<td>-10.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>4.49*</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>-4.42*</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-5.07</td>
<td>-3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-6.51*</td>
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<td>.000</td>
<td>-7.47</td>
<td>-5.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-6.79*</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-8.10</td>
<td>-5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>8.91*</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>9.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>4.42*</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-2.09*</td>
<td>0.390</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-3.15</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-2.37*</td>
<td>0.506</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-3.75</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>11.00*</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>10.08</td>
<td>11.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>6.51*</td>
<td>0.354</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>7.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>2.09*</td>
<td>0.390</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.570</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>-1.84</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>11.28*</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>10.01</td>
<td>12.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>6.79*</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>8.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>2.37*</td>
<td>0.506</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.570</td>
<td>.988</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Table 5.4.18 - Lab Post Hoc Tukey HSD - (Mean Diff) (Std. Error) (P) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1974-2010 (n = 47,121) (*Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level)]
The Tukey HSD test results for Labour experience groups are tabulated above (see table 5.4.18). Results show that all experience group means are statistically distinct from one another, with the exception of the 3 Terms and 4+ Terms groups, whose means fail to be confidently distinguished. The p-values for all other groups and interactions are below the 0.001 level, whereas a comparison of means between 3 Terms and 4+ Terms experience groups reports a p-value of 0.988. The mean difference between these groups is just 0.28% and thus 95% confidence intervals overlap significantly. These results mirror those for the ‘All Party’ analysis discussed earlier in the chapter, whilst conflicting with career trend results for the Conservatives. There is a much more linear initial trend for Labour winners, that plateaus by the time candidates have acquired four or more terms experience, the equivalent of 16 years service on the council.

For Labour, a logarithmic regression model is the best-fitted career trend. Tables 5.4.19-21 display the model summary, ANOVA and coefficient statistics. Though largely irrelevant, the R square is 0.071 (see table 5.4.19). ANOVA results are displayed in table 5.4.20 and report an F-statistic of 3,585.558, which has an associated p-value below the 0.001 level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.266</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>11.822</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.4.19 – Lab Model Summary - (R) (R Square) (Adj, R Square) (Std. Error) 1974-2010 (n = 47,121))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANOVA</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>501121.085</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>501121.085</td>
<td>3585.558</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>6585396.729</td>
<td>47119</td>
<td>139.761</td>
<td>3585.558</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7086517.813</td>
<td>47120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.4.20 – Lab ANOVA - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 47,121))
Table 5.4.21 displays the coefficient components of the regression model fit. As expected, the model reports a logarithmic beta value of 7.419, which is significant, with a p-value well under the 0.001 level. The model constant of 53.7 is also significant with a p-value below the 0.001 level.

In summary, it must be noted that all Labour incumbent groups are electorally distinct from their freshmen colleagues and there is more than an 11 point gap between the least and most experienced Labour groups. The career trend for Labour appears to be a cumulative one.

Liberal Democrats - Results for the Liberal Democrats (see table 5.4.22) show a similar career trend to Labour candidates, with the experience groups having different CVS means. Although average CVS for the more than fifteen thousand LD freshmen is the lowest of the three parties at 48.5% (σ = 9.23), the data show CVS climbing successively over the experience groups. Average CVS for the almost four and a half thousand LD sophomores is 52.3% (σ = 10.01), some four points higher than for LD freshmen. However, the mean is around 4.5 and 6 points less than that of Tory and Labour sophomores respectively. Average CVS rises again for the one and a half thousand 2 Terms winners, to just over 55% (σ = 10.55), as it does for 3 Terms and 4+ Terms winners, with CVS means of 56.3% and 56.8% respectively (σ = 11.06 & 11.28). The data show more than 8 points
between freshmen and the most experienced LD winners, a large difference; though it must also be noted that only 183 cases were considered for the LD ‘4+ Terms’ group.

Figure 5.4.22 plots the experience group means. The trend illustrated is similar to that for Labour groups, where the electoral gains diminish with the additional experience of winners. Bearing this in mind, it is likely that a logarithmic fitted curve will most accurately reflect the Liberal Democrat CVS career trend. Figure 5.4.22 shows that the LD experience trend is similar to that for Labour, though the curve is less steep. As discussed earlier in this thesis (see chapter 4), it comes as no surprise that Liberal Democrat CVS averages tend to be lower when compared to the two major parties. With the introduction of the Liberal Democrats mid-way through the period examined, competition for seats and votes has risen whilst there has been a decline in the average winning vote share of all three parties. With this in mind, we can expect Labour and the Conservatives to average higher CVS across the experience groups, as for around half the period examined they will have participated under less competitive conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>CVS</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>95% Low</th>
<th>95% Upp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>15,274</td>
<td>48.51</td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>48.36</td>
<td>48.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>4,314</td>
<td>52.29</td>
<td>10.01</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>51.99</td>
<td>52.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>1,402</td>
<td>55.02</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>0.282</td>
<td>54.46</td>
<td>55.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>56.26</td>
<td>11.06</td>
<td>0.495</td>
<td>55.29</td>
<td>57.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>56.82</td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td>55.17</td>
<td>58.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.22 – Lab Mean VS (Descriptives) • (n) (µ) (σ) (Std. Error) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1974-2010 (n = 21,672)]
Tables 5.4.23-24 show results of Levene’s and ANOVA tests for the Liberal Democrat experience groups. The Levene’s statistic is 33.336 and has an associated p-value below the 0.001 level, meaning that homogenous variances can not be assumed (see table 5.4.23). ANOVA results imply that we can be confident that some of the experience groups are statistically distinct from one another, with an F-statistic of 329.280 and an associated p-value below the 0.001 level (see table 5.4.24). A Tukey HSD test was completed to identify which of these groups are statistically distinct and results are tabulated in table 5.4.25.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene Statistic</th>
<th>df1</th>
<th>df2</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33.336</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21,667</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.23 – LD Test of Homogeneity of Variances - (Levene Stat) (df1) (df2) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 21,672)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANOVA</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>119935.749</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29983.937</td>
<td>329.280</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1972974.643</td>
<td>21,667</td>
<td>91.059</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2092910.392</td>
<td>21,671</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.24 – LD ANOVA - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 21,672)]
These data support earlier comments about the electoral trend of the LDs over their tenure. Freshmen and sophomore groups differ significantly from one another and from all other experience groups, recording p-values below the 0.001 level. For 2 Terms incumbents, mean CVS fails to deviate significantly from the 3 Terms group to the 0.05 level, instead reporting a p-value below the 0.1 level. This is significant only if an assumption of direction is placed on the premise of the comparison, i.e. switching from a two-tailed to a one-tailed test. The comparison of means between 4+ Terms and the 2 & 3 Terms groups also fails to meet a significant difference, with p-values of 0.115 and 0.962 respectively. The Tukey HSD data show a similar picture to that for the Labour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience (i)</th>
<th>Experience (j)</th>
<th>Diff (i-j)</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>95% L</th>
<th>95% U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>-3.78*</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-4.23</td>
<td>-3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>-6.51*</td>
<td>0.266</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-7.24</td>
<td>-5.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-7.75*</td>
<td>0.434</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-8.94</td>
<td>-6.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-8.31*</td>
<td>0.710</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-10.25</td>
<td>-6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>3.78*</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>-2.73*</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-3.53</td>
<td>-1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-3.97*</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-5.20</td>
<td>-2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-4.52*</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-6.49</td>
<td>-2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>6.51*</td>
<td>0.266</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>7.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>2.73*</td>
<td>0.293</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>-1.24</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>-2.60</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-1.80</td>
<td>0.750</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>-3.85</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>7.75*</td>
<td>0.434</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>8.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>3.97*</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>5.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.497</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+ Term</td>
<td>-0.56</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td>-2.81</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>8.31*</td>
<td>0.710</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>10.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>4.52*</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>6.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Term</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>0.750</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Term</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td>-1.70</td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.25 – LD Post Hoc Tukey HSD - (Mean Diff) (Std. Error) (P) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1974-2010 (n = 21,672) (*Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level)]
As for Labour, a logarithmic career pattern fits best. Table 5.4.26 reports an R square of just 0.057. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the purpose of the fit is not the R square statistic, but identifying similar or conflicting career trends. Results for an ANOVA test are presented in table 5.4.27 and report an F-statistic of 1,313.699 that has an associated p-value below the 0.001 level.

The LD Logarithmic career fit model coefficients are presented in table 5.4.28. As expected the logged experience variable has a beta value that is smaller than for Labour at 5.616, but significant, with a p-value below the 0.001 level. The constant coefficient of 48.5 is also smaller and significant with the p-value well below the 0.001 level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.239</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>9.543</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.26 – LD Model Summary - (R) (R Square) (Adj. R Square) (Std. Error) 1974-2010 (n = 21,672)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANOVA</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>119626.256</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>119626.256</td>
<td>1313.699</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>1973284.136</td>
<td>21670</td>
<td>91.061</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2092910.392</td>
<td>21671</td>
<td>91.061</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.27 – LD ANOVA - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 21,672)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Standardized Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ln(Experience)</td>
<td>5.616</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>36.245</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>48.501</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td></td>
<td>639.215</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.28 – LD Logarithmic Model - (B) (Std. Error) (Standardized Beta) (t) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 21,672)]

Overall, the data presented for Liberal Democrat winner’s support the notion of incumbency advantage and experiential-effects on candidate performance. The data for LDs, as for Labour, shows diminishing electoral gains that ‘round off’ at just under 57% CVS for ‘4+ Terms’ incumbent winners. All experience groups
differ significantly from winning freshmen, and from winning sophomores. Unlike data for the Conservatives, the plotted means and fitted curve estimation of the groups illustrate a cumulative career trend where the gains diminish from the outset of their career (see figure 5.4.22). The LDs appear to follow a similar pattern to Labour winners, where experience counts for more in the initial terms of service.

Though Stonecash (2008) uses vote shares effectively to consider the ramifications of incumbents’ career trends, there are clear weaknesses in accepting the results from this method alone. Selection bias is a mild concern, but more pertinent is the direct comparability of the dependent variable data. Beginning with the Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP) measure, described earlier in this chapter and in chapter 3, this section now goes on to measure the effect of experience on candidate performance. Afterwards, the Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS) model is used to measure experience effects in a different way.

Examining the SIP data for the Conservatives, table 5.4.29 displays Experience group descriptive statistics and confidence intervals. The 1,149 considered sophomores averaged an SIP of just 1.59%, with a σ of 5.06 as detailed earlier in this chapter. The sophomore average is lower than the average for 2 Terms incumbents who record an SIP of 2.23%, with a σ of 4.57, implying some growth between the groups. However, for 3 Terms incumbents, there is a slight fall in SIP when compared to the two termers, to 2.03% (σ = 5.02). There is little difference in the performance of two and three term incumbents. For the 4+
Terms incumbents examined, there is again a slight fall in SIP to just 1.80% with a σ of 3.52. This deterioration, near to the original sophomore performance, is in line with CVS data discussed above and is supportive of the cubic career performance trend previously discussed for the Conservatives.

The overall trend for the Tories indicates that the bulk of growth is in the initial two terms, after which the evidence suggests there may be little or no marginal gain. Data for the Tory 4+ Terms Experience category considers councillors who have already served for 16 years (i.e. now contesting their fifth consecutive election) and considering the requirements for the SIP model (detailed in chapter 3), it is unsurprising that there are relatively few cases. As a result, the SIP model will tend to put forward a weaker estimation of the performance of ‘very long-serving’ incumbents. But perhaps more importantly, because the Experience variable has been collapsed, the 4+ Term group will inevitably be comprised of incumbents with varying degrees of experience. So care must be taken in the interpretation of these results, as it may be difficult to compare this group to others with any accuracy. However, a comparison between party categories is perhaps more methodologically sound.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>95% Low</th>
<th>95% Upp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.29 – Con SIP by Exp (Group Stats) - (n) (µ) (σ) (Err) 1979-2010(n=1,717)]

Table 5.4.30 displays results for Labour, and the trend is markedly different to that for the Conservatives. For the 1,195 Labour sophomores considered, an
average SIP of 2% is recorded with a σ of 6.12, as revealed in the SIP results for the surge analysis earlier in this chapter. Like the Conservatives, there is growth between the initial two experience groups, though growth is far greater for Labour. The 396 2 Terms incumbents average an SIP of 3.4% with a σ of 5.86. This is some 1.4% higher than for sophomores and 1.17% higher than Conservative 2 Terms incumbents. This growth continues for the 124 3 Terms cases. The average SIP for 3 Termers is 4.37% with a σ of 7.04, almost 1 point higher than for 2 Terms candidates and 2.34% higher than 3 Terms Conservative incumbents. For the 48 cases examined in Labour’s 4+ Terms Experience category, an average SIP of 5.05% is reported, with a σ of 8.86. This is 0.68% higher than the three termers, though as there are relatively few cases the results for this group must be interpreted carefully. It is worth noting also, that this figure is 3.25% higher than for equivalent Conservatives.

Like the Conservatives, there are far fewer cases in the very experienced groups. However, unlike data for the Conservatives, the results displayed in table 5.4.30 imply that Labour candidates’ career trend is extended and experience may count beyond just two terms of service. These data are supportive of CVS trends for Labour discussed earlier in this section. The different experience groups show a positive, almost linear trend initially, where longer serving incumbents average higher levels of SIP than the less experienced ones and the results support the overall notion of experiential effects in local elections.
Table 5.4.30 displays the data for the Liberal Democrats. Results for the LDs demonstrate a similar trend in ‘experience effects’ to Labour. As for the sophomore surge discussion earlier in this chapter, the 458 LD sophomores average just less than 4% SIP with a σ of 7.12. This figure is markedly higher than those for both Labour and the Conservatives, around twice that recorded for Labour and around two and a half times that for the Conservatives. For the 149 2 Terms incumbents considered for the LDs, the data suggest there is significant growth in SIP between the experience groups. SIP is shown to be 5.1% with a σ of 6.77, which is 1.16% higher than sophomores, 2.87% higher than Conservative two termers and 1.7% higher than Labour. Unexpectedly, the data for LD 3 Terms incumbents shows no growth. Average SIP falls slightly to 4.95% (σ = 7.53), which is still higher than for the two other parties but does not follow the expected career trend of continued cumulative growth. For the selected 4+ Terms incumbents, SIP rises by more than 4 points to an average of 9.23% (σ = 5.11). However, it must be noted that there are just 12 cases considered for the LDs 4+ Termers and acknowledging the notes of caution made above, careful consideration must be made when generalising from these data alone. When compared with the two other parties, the average is significantly higher, by 4.18% when compared to Labour incumbents and 7.43% higher than for Conservative incumbents.
Data discussed from table 5.4.31 provides evidence in favour of experience effects for the Liberal Democrats in local elections, but also supports the observed inter-party trend evident throughout the data discussed in this thesis in that the Liberal Democrats prove particularly susceptible to incumbency effects, compared with Labour and the Conservatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>95% Low</th>
<th>95% Upp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophomores</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>6.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Terms</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>7.53</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>6.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ Terms</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.23</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>12.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.4.31 – LD SIP by Exp (Group Stats) - (n) (µ) (σ) (Err) 1979-2010(n=672)]

Figure 5.4.32 illustrates these experience-related career trends for all three parties. From the outset there are clear differences between the parties, and the effect of candidates’ careers exacerbate these. For the Conservatives there remains a case for candidate experience influencing the relative performance of incumbent candidates. In the short term the gap is greatest and it drops in later years, but in reality there is little difference between the groups. When the results are compared to those for Labour and the LDs, any gains made by the Conservatives appear minor by comparison. For Labour, SIP gains are almost linear initially, with the most experienced councillors averaging an SIP significantly higher than their sophomore counterparts, these gains then ‘round-off’ for 4+ Terms incumbents. As for the Conservatives the largest gains in SIP between the Experience groups are during earlier years, but overall the data show that candidate experience has greater electoral value for Labour councillors than for the Conservatives.
For the Liberal Democrats the results suggest that there are large gains made over the entire *Experience* range. Regardless of the unexpected results for 3 Terms candidates, the Liberal Democrats appear to be most susceptible to experience effects. Initially, at least, the gains are comparable with Labour. Principally however, the data for the Liberal Democrats support an inter-party trend that has been described on a number of occasions throughout this thesis, in that Liberal Democrats are most likely to benefit from the relative effect of incumbency. Their experience group averages have been consistently higher than those for the two major parties.

![Figure 5.4.32 – SIP by Experience by Party](image)

Empirical evidence discussed thus far suggests that experience affects the electoral performance of candidates. However, in the same way that the SIP model of incumbency advantage estimation has been utilised to assess experience effects, the Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS) model can also be applied to make estimates. As previously described, the SRS model gauges the relative fall in a party's share of the vote after an incumbent decides to retire. So,
if an incumbent’s career trend is cumulative, we could expect wards that contain longer serving councillors, to experience greater relative falls in party vote share when they retire, than those with shorter serving councillors. Considering this, we should expect to see higher SRS in wards with more experienced retirees.

As for the SIP model, the Experience variable has been collapsed, though this time into three groups, due to fewer cases being available for analysis. These groups are sophomores, 2 Terms and 3+ Terms incumbents. Tables 5.4.32-34, display one-sample t-tests of mean SRS deviance from zero by Experience group, for each of the three major parties.

For the Conservatives, table 5.4.32 reports similar results to those for the SIP model. For the 879 wards where Conservative sophomores retired in the previous election, an average SRS of 1.83% (σ = 10.75) is recorded. The calculated t-value for this figure is 5.293 and with 878 degrees of freedom this has a p-value below the 0.001 level. This strongly suggests that the party may stand to benefit electorally from councillors defending their seats, even those who have served just one term on the council. For wards retained after 2 Terms retirees, there is little to no growth, with the 194 considered wards averaging an SRS of just 1.91 (σ = 9.57). This Experience group's t-value is 2.794 and with 193 degrees of freedom the group mean is also significantly deviant from zero, with a p-value that is below the 0.01 level. For 3+ Terms wards the average SRS falls to just 0.79% (σ = 8.15). The t-statistic is 1.019 and with 109 degrees of freedom we cannot be 95% confident that the mean deviates significantly from zero. The t-statistic has an associated p-value of 0.31. Overall, the evidence for the
Conservatives suggests that the gap in the performance of incumbents and freshmen is at its height in the earlier years of incumbency. These data are in step with CVS and SIP data described earlier, describing a candidate career trend that has initial gains before rounding-off or falling away.

Table 5.4.33 reports SRS data for Labour wards. The *Experience* trend for Labour wards is markedly different to that discussed for the Conservatives. For the 408 wards that have been retained after a retiring Labour sophomore, an average SRS of just 0.8% is displayed ($\sigma = 9.38$). This figure is small, and has a t-statistic of just 1.733 that, with 407 degrees of freedom, has an associated p-value of 0.084, which is below the 0.1 level. Unlike data discussed for the Conservatives, this implies that we can be 95% confident of inferring that SRS deviates significantly from zero, only if we are assume that SRS should be higher than zero (i.e. if we perform a single-tailed rather than two-tailed test). As a result, there remains a case for wards that are retained after sophomores stand down, experiencing a significant decline in the party's share of the vote. For the 133 considered wards with 2 Terms retirees, there is significant growth in average SRS, up by almost 1% to 1.71% ($\sigma = 8.54$). The group’s t-statistic is 2.308 and with 132 degrees of freedom the group mean does significantly deviate from zero, with a p-value that is below the 0.05 level. For 3+ Terms wards, average SRS rises again, this time by more than 1% to 2.82% ($\sigma = 8.01$). The associated t-
statistic is 3.008 and with 72 degrees of freedom the p-value is below the 0.005 level indicating that we can be confident that the group mean deviates significantly from zero.

Overall, the evidence for Labour wards by *Experience* groups follows a similar trend to previous findings discussed for Labour experience effects. For Labour, the electoral slump in seats held after the departure of longer serving retirees is considerably higher than in those held after shorter serving incumbents. There is more than a 2% difference in slump between wards where sophomores have retired when compared to wards where retirees who have served for three or more terms. This implies that for Labour, councillors who are more experienced have more electoral ‘value’ for the party. The trend also supports data revealed by SIP estimation discussed earlier in this sub-chapter, with results at a roughly similar level. The overall narrative, of a difference in incumbency’s value between the parties, is also maintained by these data, with Labour wards tending to be more susceptible to incumbency and experience effects when compared to the Conservatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms Served</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SRS</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>9.38</td>
<td>0.464</td>
<td>1.733</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>8.54</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>2.308</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ Terms</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>3.008</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.4.33 – Lab - SRS by Exp (One Sample t-test) - (n) (µ) (σ) (t) (df) (p) 1974-2010*

As expected, data for the Liberal Democrats provide the most striking evidence in support of the notion of experience effects. Table 5.4.34 presents one-sample t-test results for the SRS deviance of LD experience group’s from zero. The
results far exceed those for Labour and the Conservatives, following what is an emerging inter-party trend. Seats held by the LDs after sophomore retirees have stood down are shown to average an SRS of 3.39% ($\sigma = 12.31$), the highest for the three parties considered. The t-statistic of 3.834 is significant with 194 degrees of freedom, and a p-value well below the 0.001 level. For seats held after 2 Terms councillors have retired, a mean SRS of 4.3% is recorded ($\sigma = 11.82$). The associated t-statistic is shown as 2.695 and with 55 degrees of freedom the p-value is below the 0.01 level. It is perhaps worth highlighting at this point, that average SRS for LD 2 Terms incumbent wards is more than twice that of either the Conservatives or Labour wards. Finally, for the 3+ Terms Experience group an average SRS of 5.87% is found ($\sigma = 10.97$), again far higher than for the other two party categories, and with a reported p-value below the 0.01 level. Though there are just 27 cases studied for this group, and caution clearly must be exercised in generalising from such data, for the purposes of this study the data provide some evidence in support of larger experience effects for the Liberal Democrats.

Across the experience groups the results suggest there are similar overall gains to Labour incumbents, roughly 2.5% SRS between wards retained after sophomores and those retained after 3+ Terms incumbents. Results from the SRS model demonstrate that both incumbency status and experience are likely to have a significant effect on a Lib Dem candidate's chance of electoral success.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms Served</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SRS</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>12.31</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td>3.834</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Terms</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td>1.594</td>
<td>2.695</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ Terms</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>10.97</td>
<td>2.111</td>
<td>2.780</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.4.34 - LD - SRS by Exp (One Sample t-test) - (n) (µ) (σ) (t) (df) (p) 1974-2010)

Figure 5.4.35 illustrates the *Experience* trends for all three parties, using the SRS model of incumbency advantage estimation. The chart highlights the disparity between the parties. For the Conservatives the chart makes a case for initial effects, where the candidates’ initial experience influences their relative performance. However, this advantage goes on to fall for more experienced Tory candidates. The trend is indicative of change; perhaps a waning of the attention paid towards voters. When results for the Conservatives are compared to those of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, this ‘falling’ trend is exacerbated and suggests that there may be wider behavioural difference between candidates from the three parties. For instance, the gains for Labour are much clearer. More experienced councillors average an SRS that is more than three times their sophomore counterparts, as it does for the SIP model discussed above. Overall the data suggest that experience may be of more electoral value for Labour councillors than for the Conservatives, particularly for councillors with three or more terms experience. Where Conservative gains come earlier, then fade away, for Labour wards the gains appear to be cumulative, akin to the data discussed for SIP and CVS trends earlier in this thesis.

Finally, figure 5.4.35 also illustrates the clear difference between the Liberal Democrats and the two major parties. As for Labour, the gains are substantial, some 2.5%, and there is a clear difference between wards retained after the exit
of a sophomore and after the retirement of a councillor who has served for 12 or more years. Overall, the SRS results for the Liberal Democrats has consistently exceeded that for the two major parties and suggest that incumbency and electoral experience are of great value to Liberal Democrat candidates.

![Figure 5.4.35 – SRS by Experience by Party](image)

In summary, the analysis in section 5.4 provides clear evidence in support of experience effects in English local elections. For all three parties, candidate experience appears to play a minor, yet significant part in the relative performance of their candidates, though there is significant variation between the parties. For all parties sophomores do better than freshman, but beyond this each party appears to have its own candidate career trend. The cubic trend for the Conservatives and the cumulative one for Labour and the Liberal Democrats imply that there may be different overall strategies, which are central to each party. The results for the Liberal Democrats stand out in particular, with significant developments across all three measures used thus far in this chapter. Experience effects for the Liberal Democrats are consistently greater than those
for the two other parties, with the Conservatives having the smallest. Data shown for the career trends only serves to amply the differences between the parties.

So far, data described in chapter 5 has, in an attempt to compare candidates that are similar, considered only winners. Sub-chapter 5.5 expands this remit by including data for losing councillors. The section outlines two alternative methods of incumbency estimation, comparing the electoral performance of incumbents who lose.

5.5 – Incumbent Loser Performance (ILP)

Analysis thus far has not been able to utilise data for those incumbents who have failed to win. Information on how incumbent losers perform is a potentially rich resource that can help contribute to the techniques and results already discussed in this thesis. Two methods to estimate the effects of incumbency advantage are proposed. However, there are two major problems that need to be considered when comparing losers. First, the prevalence of the ‘paper candidate’ is a common occurrence throughout English local elections. When analysing data that includes losers, it is important to attempt to distinguish candidates fielded for reasons of electoral principle, with little expectation of actually winning a seat, from more competitive candidates. It is for this reason that the two models proposed consider data only from two-member wards (2MDs) where both candidates from the same party compete, but only one wins.
The second problem when comparing losers concerns observations and relativity. As discussed earlier, incumbents are much more likely to win rather than lose, should they choose to stand again. Whilst reporting data from a scenario where a freshman wins but their incumbent party colleague loses is a crucial criteria of the first model proposed in this chapter, inevitably the number of observations for this scenario will be smaller than when the roles are reversed. So, reporting data from this type of scenario can be problematic, as it is a relatively rare occurrence. Also, the fact that these scenarios happen infrequently tells us something about incumbent performance on its own. Regardless, the models can’t be too ‘imbalanced’ in terms of the number of cases used to calculate each scenario, as this will limit the extent to which we can make any generalisations. Finally, adding to the list of concerns is partisan swing. For this reason two different methods, rather than one, have been constructed.

As for previous models, mediating changes in partisanship is necessary to ensure an accurate measurement of incumbency advantage. Previously discussed data indicate that any advantage is likely to be small, so accurate control structures need to be included in models to eliminate any effect. For this reason both models use data collected from 2MDs, which allows the comparison of candidates from the same party at the same election. The model includes only data from wards in which parties field both the required candidates and where one is elected. This is an important component of the model that acts as a yardstick against which the results can be compared.
The Role Reversal method of estimating Incumbent Loser Performance (RRILP) compares data from two circumstances. The first part of the model averages the Candidate Vote Share (CVS) difference between the two candidates fielded by a party in wards where the incumbent candidate won a seat and the freshman candidate did not win. Next, this average is offset against the average CVS difference between candidates of the same party in wards where the freshman candidate wins and the incumbent candidate loses. Previous analysis has shown that the former scenario tends to occur much more frequently than the latter, so the number of cases we can expect for the $i$ scenario of the model will probably be more than for the latter $j$ scenario. RRILP for party category $p$ can be expressed as follows:

$$RRILP_p = \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_i} \frac{(\varphi_i - \omega_i)}{n_i} \right) - \left( \sum_{j=1}^{n_j} \frac{(\omega_j - \varphi_j)}{n_j} \right)$$

Where $\varphi$ refers to the CVS of an incumbent candidate and $\omega$ the CVS for a freshman in ward $i$ where the lone winner is an incumbent or in ward $j$ where the lone winner is a freshman. Chapter 3 provides greater detail.

Table 5.5.1 shows the mean differences for each scenario. For the 1,332 cases of scenario $i$ the mean CVS difference is 13.25%, compared to just 6.63% for the 178 cases considered for scenario $j$. The reported standard deviation ($\sigma$) for $i$ and $j$ is 11.85 and 7.38 respectively. Table 5.5.2 displays results for a Levene’s tests and independent t-test for the two scenarios. The table reports an F-statistic of 31.958. This figure means we can reject the null hypothesis of
homogeneity of variances, assuming instead that variances are not equal. The t-test for the reported RRILP of 6.62% has a t-statistic of 10.324. With 315.076 degrees of freedom the associated p-value is below the 0.001 level. The results suggest that the scenario means deviate significantly from one another, and provide substantial evidence in support of the idea that losing incumbents do better than losing freshmen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>CVS Diff</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inc(W)-Fre(L) i</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>13.25</td>
<td>11.85</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fre(W)-Inc(L) j</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>0.553</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table – 5.5.1 RRILP (Group Stats) - (n) (Mean CVS Diff) (σ) (Error) 1974-2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>RRILP</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>31.958</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>7.267</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>0.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>10.324</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>315.076</td>
<td></td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>0.641</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table – 5.5.2 RRILP (Levene’s & Indep T-Test) – (F) (Sig) (t) (df) (Sig) (ILP) (Error) 1974-2010)

Table 5.5.3 displays mean differences for each scenario by political party. As data for candidates categorised as Other are not considered, there is a slight drop in the total number of cases involved. Data for the Conservatives shows a mean difference for the 398 cases of scenario i of 9.26% (σ = 7.32). In comparison, the mean difference for the 62 cases of scenario j is just 5.11% (σ = 5.28). As with the results described above, these data suggest that when incumbents lose, they tend to lose by less. For Labour the differences are slightly larger for both scenarios, but broadly similar. For the 341 cases of scenario i the difference is 10.77% (σ = 9.37), whilst the 51 cases of scenario j have a difference of just 6.98% (σ = 7.43). The results for Labour imply also, that incumbents lose by less than freshmen. For the Liberal Democrats the difference recorded for scenario i is the largest of all three major parties, with the 351 cases having a mean of 12.27% (σ = 9.18).
These data are in line with data described for the Liberal Democrats earlier in this thesis, incumbent candidates do markedly better than their freshman counterparts. Conversely, the mean difference for Lib Dem scenario $j$ has the smallest difference of the three parties, just 4.22% ($\sigma = 3.11$), which also signals the strong relative performance of Lib Dem incumbent candidates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>CVS Diff %</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Inc(W)-Fre(L) $i$</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>9.26</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>0.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fre(W)-Inc(L) $j$</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>0.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Inc(W)-Fre(L) $i$</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>9.37</td>
<td>0.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fre(W)-Inc(L) $j$</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>7.43</td>
<td>1.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Inc(W)-Fre(L) $i$</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>12.27</td>
<td>9.18</td>
<td>0.490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fre(W)-Inc(L) $j$</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.486</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5.5.3 RRILP by Party (Group Stats) - (n) (Mean CVS Diffs) (σ) (Error) 1974-2010)

Table 5.5.4 displays results from Levene's, and independent t-tests between the scenarios for all three major parties. The data reveal a familiar trend. The Conservative scenarios report an RRILP of 4.15%, with a t-statistic of 5.435 and a p-value below the 0.001 level when equal variances are not assumed (df = 101.597). The RRILP estimate is higher than previous assessments of incumbency advantage for the Conservatives. These data are similar for Labour, where the scenarios differ by some 3.78%. The associated t-statistic of 2.757 has a p-value below the 0.01 level when equal variances are assumed (df = 390). Comparing this with previous results, the RRILP estimation is similar to Tory results, though slightly lower in this instance. As expected, results for the Liberal Democrats reveal the greatest disparity between the two scenarios. Table 5.5.4, reports an RRILP of 8.04% for the Liberal Democrats, which is around double that for either the Conservatives or Labour. The t-statistic is 11.645 and has an associated p-value below the 0.001 level when equal variances are not assumed.
The RRILP estimate for the Liberal Democrats is supportive of those described earlier in this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Levene's</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>RRILP</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>6.695</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>4.297</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>5.435</td>
<td>101.597</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>.624</td>
<td>.430</td>
<td>2.757</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>3.271</td>
<td>76.010</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.157</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>18.933</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>5.563</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>1.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>11.645</td>
<td>145.474</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>0.690</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results imply that, even when losing, incumbents perform significantly better than their freshmen colleagues. Estimates range from 3.8-8% and maintain previously discussed trends, with incumbency having greater electoral value for Lib Dem candidates than either Labour or the Conservatives. The estimates, though similar in proportion between the parties, are roughly double those estimated using SIP and SRS measures.

The RRILP model has effectively compared two opposing scenarios; one where an incumbent candidate wins, whilst a freshman colleague loses, and another scenario where an incumbent candidate loses, whilst a freshman colleague wins. These scenarios are mutually comparable because of their requirements for a single winning candidate and because they only compare the relative difference between winning and losing candidates. As such, if incumbency were to have no effect on candidate performance, we could expect the differences between the two candidates in each scenario to be similar and balance. In this instance the
model would report no difference. Nevertheless, for all the three major parties, the data reveals deviations that are statistically significant.

However, the model’s inherent weakness is its lop-sidedness. As outlined above, there are far fewer instances of incumbents losing whilst their freshman colleague wins. Although independent t-tests take this imbalance into consideration, readers must be reminded that the model is essentially selecting random rare events and thus may be over representing a small number of cases in the \( j \) scenario of the model. The number of cases for these scenarios is just 62 for the Conservatives, 51 for Labour and just 41 for the Liberal Democrats. The number of cases used to calculate these figures is not sufficient for widespread generalisation. Consequently, though the results from the RRILP method are interesting and important in their own right, particularly as they support the narrative established earlier in chapter 5, the results are not definitive on their own. For this reason, as well as others detailed below, I offer a second estimator.

The Experienced Partner Method of estimating Incumbent Loser Performance (EPILP) operates in a similar way to the RRILP model, except for one key detail. The latter half of the model, this time denoted as the \( k \) half, compares wards where both the winner and loser for the party are incumbents. EPILP for party category \( p \) can be expressed as follows:

\[
\text{EPILP}_{(p)} = \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_i} \frac{\varphi_i - \omega_i}{n_i} \right) - \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n_k} \frac{\varphi_{1k} - \varphi_{2k}}{n_k} \right)
\]
Where \( \varphi \) refers to the CVS of an incumbent candidate and \( \omega \) the CVS for a freshman in ward \( i \) where the lone winner is an incumbent or in ward \( k \) where the lone winner is also an incumbent, but ran with an incumbent colleague. Chapter 3 provides greater detail.

The EPILP model is slightly different to the RRILP in that it does not compare two opposing scenarios; rather it compares two different types of loser. Scenario \( i \) of this model is the same scenario \( i \) from the RRILP method, where the incumbent candidate wins whilst a freshman colleague loses. But the \( k \) scenario also includes a winning incumbent, but to compare against an incumbent candidate who fails to win. The model uses incumbent candidates as the winning benchmark in both segments and takes the difference in an attempt to control for variations in winner performance. As before, if incumbency were to have no effect on candidate performance then the differences between the two scenarios would balance and the model would report no difference.

Table 5.5.5, shows group statistics for \( i \) and \( k \) scenarios in the EPILP model. The \( i \) scenario statistics remain unchanged from the RRILP model, with a mean CVS difference of 13.25\% and \( (\sigma = 11.85) \). The 425 cases considered for the \( k \) scenario have a mean CVS difference of 6.9\%(\( \sigma = 6.77 \)), which is similar to the result for scenario \( j \) reported in the RRILP model, just 0.3\% larger. Table 5.5.6 shows data from Levene’s and independent t-tests for the scenarios. The results report an EPILP of 6.35\% with an F-statistic of 88.985, which is significant. The associated t-statistic is 13.748 and resulting p-value is below the 0.001 level when equal variances are not assumed (\( df = 1,270.257 \)). The EPILP results are
similar to those reported for the RRILP model, and further support the claim that incumbents do better than their freshmen colleagues, even when they lose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>CVS Diff</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inc(W)-Fre(L)  i</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>13.25</td>
<td>11.85</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inc(W)-Inc(L)   k</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>0.329</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table – 5.5.5 EPILP (Group Stats) - (n) (Mean CVS Diff) (σ) (Error) 1974-2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>EPIPLP</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>88.985</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>10.514</td>
<td>1755</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>0.604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>13.748</td>
<td>1270.257</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>0.462</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table – 5.5.6 EPILP (Levene’s & Indep T-Test) - (F) (Sig) (t) (df) (Sig) (ILP) (Error) 1974-2010)

Table 5.5.7, shows group statistics for i and j scenarios by party. Again the i scenario statistics remain unchanged from the RRILP model, and the total number of cases drop slightly as candidates categorised as Other are now not considered. For the k scenarios the number of useable cases is more than double that for any of the j scenarios in the RRILP model.

For the 159 Conservative cases collated for scenario k, the mean difference is 6.41% (σ = 6.72), which is slightly higher than reported under the RRILP model. For Labour this time the mean difference is slightly less at 6.05% (σ = 5.63). As expected the Liberal Democrats registered the lowest difference for scenario k, 5.90% (σ = 4.29), though the difference appears to be slightly larger than under the RRILP model. Though there are slight differences between the k scenarios under the EPILP model and j scenarios under the RRILP model, overall the results are similar enough to suggest that they tell the same story.
Table 5.5.8 shows results from Levene’s and independent t-tests for the \( i \) and \( k \) scenarios and as for RRILP results, the EPILP data confirms previously discussed analysis in this chapter. For the Conservatives the Levene’s test reports an F-statistic of 5.348, that is below the 0.05 level and therefore significant. For the Tories, EPILP is the smallest of the three major parties, at just 2.85%. This result is 1.3% less than for the Tories under the RRILP method. However, the 2.85% figure is much more comparable with the SIP and SRS data discussed earlier in chapter 5. The scenario point estimates deviate significantly from one another, with a t-statistic of 4.411 and a corresponding p-value below the 0.001 level when equal variances are not assumed.

For Labour candidates, the Levene’s results show an F-statistic of 16.658, which is below the 0.001 level and significant. Interestingly, for Labour candidates the EPILP method gives a greater difference than under the RRILP method, by almost 1%. These data place estimations of the magnitude of incumbency advantage more in line with the SIP and SRS data described earlier. For the Liberal Democrats, as for the RRILP method, Liberal Democrat incumbents score the highest EPILP. Levene’s test results show an F-statistic of 23.313 that is significant, as it is below the 0.001 level. The EPILP figure of 6.37% has an associated t-statistic of 9.191 and a p-value that is below the 0.001 level when
equal variances are not assumed. Though the EPILP figure is 1.67% less than
under the RRILP method, the results indicate yet again, that Lib Dem incumbent
losers do best relatively. Also of interest is that the results for the EPILP method
are within a reasonable range of those described for previous estimations of
incumbency effects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Levene's F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>EPI LP</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Var</td>
<td>5.348</td>
<td>.021</td>
<td>4.253</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Var</td>
<td>4.411</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>315.105</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Var</td>
<td>16.658</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>5.621</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Var</td>
<td>6.821</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>427.456</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Var</td>
<td>23.313</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>5.940</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Var</td>
<td>9.191</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>250.107</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 5.5.8 EPILP by Party (Levene's & Indep T-Test) – (F) (Sig) (t) (df) (Sig) (ILP) (Error) 1974-2010]

Overall, the data reported in table 5.5.8 is encouraging and corresponds with
results described under the RRILP method earlier in this chapter. The key
differences between the EPILP and RRILP models are the \( k \) and \( j \) scenarios. These
scenarios are different methods of measuring the relative performance of
councillors who lose. A second glance at the differences between the models can
help to explain why there is an observed lower figure in the EPILP model
compared to the RRILP method.

Changing the yardstick will, to some extent, change the output; so in changing
half the model from a freshmen winner vs. incumbent loser scenario (\( j \)) to an
incumbent winner vs. incumbent loser scenario (\( k \)) it is likely that there will be
consequences for the results. If the general hypothesis is that incumbents
perform better than freshmen, then the second half of the model will inherently
be larger in the EPILP than the RRILP method. It is already known from data described so far in this chapter, that incumbent winners perform better than freshmen winners, and so in scenario \( j \) the prerequisite of a freshmen winner, being measured against an incumbent loser, means that the gap will probably be smaller when compared to the \( k \) scenario; where an incumbent winner, is measured against an incumbent loser. We can confirm this supposition by comparing data in tables 5.5.3 and 5.5.7.

For the Conservatives the scenario \( j \) estimation in the RRILP method was 5.11%. This is less than the 6.41% reported for scenario \( k \) in the EPILP method. For the Liberal Democrats, the scenario \( j \) estimation in the RRILP method was 4.22%, which is also less than the 5.90% recorded for the Liberal Democrats for scenario \( k \) in the EPILP method. Unexpectedly, for Labour the score for scenario \( j \) in the RRILP method was almost 1% higher than reported for \( k \) in the EPILP model, with 6.98% and 6.05% respectively.

Though there is no sign of bias within either model, care should be taken in making any wide-ranging generalisations from these results in isolation, particularly as there are relatively few cases considered at times. Nevertheless, the results for both these models show that incumbent councillors perform better than their freshmen colleagues in a variety of circumstances. This sub-chapter has a number of key findings. First, the section has been a successful exercise of data utilisation; ensuring that a valuable resource has been exploited and providing the project with two alternative models of estimating the performance of incumbents. Second, the analyses in sub-chapter 5.5 have
supported the overall premise of an incumbency advantage and those assertions made earlier in chapter 5 about its magnitude and inter-party comparison. These data corroborate results discussed under SIP and SRS models, though there are some slight differences in the magnitude of estimations.

5.6 – Concluding Remarks

Chapter 5 has sought to establish the presence and magnitude of any electoral advantage associated with being an incumbent councillor in English local elections. The evidence presented supports the existence of an incumbency advantage that is small yet significant. The chapter began by examining disparities in the vote shares of incumbent and freshmen winners, showing that incumbents do better than their freshmen counterparts throughout the period examined in this thesis.

Building on these data, sub-chapter 5.2 went on use the constructed Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP) measure to show that incumbent candidates consistently outperform their freshmen colleagues. The SIP method used in this chapter is able to control for a variety of external effects, including partisan swing. The results show not only that incumbent candidates are electorally distinguished from their freshman colleagues, but also that many councillors acquire a small electoral buffer on election day, that serves to prolong their political career. Average SIP for incumbent winners between 1974 and 2010 is 2.7%, with some variation between the parties.
This result suggests that thousands of incumbent candidates will have retained their seats on the council because of their incumbency. For the Conservatives, average SIP over the period is 2.05%, meaning that some 1,166 Conservative councillors will have returned to their respective councils over the period as a result of their incumbency status. Likewise, the 2.45% average SIP for Labour suggests that 1,271 Labour councillors may have returned to the council because of the advantage associated with their incumbency status. And for the Liberal Democrats, an average SIP of 3.97% means that 986 LD incumbents may have retained their seat on the council, also because of incumbency effects.

Sub-chapter 5.2 has also described SIP data for incumbent sophomores, estimating the ‘surge’. These data proved supportive of the existence of a Sophomore Surge, the notion of a substantial rise in relative candidate performance between a candidate’s freshman victory and their first election as a councillor. The analyses showed that incumbent sophomores experience a minor electoral surge after just a single term of service, though its size differs between the three parties. The major implication from this finding is that incumbent effects are likely to have an immediate impact, and this impact is the principal contribution to the overall magnitude of incumbency advantage for all parties. Whether the effect is determined by candidate behaviour or status, for all three parties the SIP measure estimates the ‘surge’ to be a moderate but significant influence on defending candidates’ electoral performance, helping them to retain their seats.
Subchapter 5.3 focused on the opposite end of a councillor’s career, comparing retirees with freshmen candidates. The chapter presented an adaptation of the Retirement Slump method of estimation, the Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS). The results showed that in seats retained after an incumbent retires, the party experienced a relative electoral ‘slump’. This drop, in relative party vote share, is attributed to the retiring councillor’s personal contribution to the party’s overall vote share. The SRS model is another way of assessing the electoral value of incumbency, but instead, estimating at the point where the incumbent chooses to stand down from the council. Although the data are not directly comparable, the results substantiate those trends observed under the SIP method described in subchapter 5.2. Overall, the SRS results are supportive of the inter-party trends established by the SIP data, the slump being smallest for the Tories, slightly larger for Labour and significantly larger for the Liberal Democrats. This inter-party configuration is an increasingly recognised feature of all results throughout chapter 5. Notably, the Liberal Democrats can, once more, be singled out as the party that is particularly susceptible to the effects of incumbency.

Subchapter 5.4 utilised previously discussed SIP and SRS measures of incumbency advantage to described data on the effects of experience on incumbent performance. The analyses not only supported the premise of an incumbency advantage in English local elections, but also demonstrated that candidates’ level of experience may have significant effects. Using vote share data, the subchapter established candidate career trends whilst discussing
results that revealed familiar differences between the parties. The chapter also presented SIP and SRS results for the experience groups, which indicated that, for Labour and the Liberal Democrats at least, longer serving incumbents performed better than shorter serving ones. Interestingly, of the three parties, longer serving Conservative incumbents performed worst and often did worse than shorter serving Tories. Although, experience had a significant effect on Labour candidates’ performance, at times showing drastically greater sensitivity to electoral experience than for the Conservatives, data for the Liberal Democrats showed the greatest gaps between experience groups. These differing trends for the parties are illustrated in figures 5.4.32 and 5.4.35.

Sub-chapter 5.5 was principally an exercise in data utilisation, ensuring that an unused resource has been exploited, but also ensuring that previous estimates are corroborated by a different set of data. The models provided the project with two alternative ways of estimating the performance of defending councillors. The section presented two different methods of estimating any electoral advantage in situations where incumbents were unsuccessful. Data for both the RRILP and EPIILP methods implied that incumbents significantly outperformed freshmen under different circumstances, by between 2.9% and 8%, depending on the party and model used. The findings from sub-chapter 5.5 support assertions made earlier in the chapter, following previously described observations for the magnitude of the effect and inter-party trend.

On a final note, results for the Liberal Democrats have been striking throughout this chapter, particularly when compared with results for the two other parties.
The difference is marked and consistent. Results for the Liberal Democrats have suggested that incumbency and experience may be of significant value to the party’s electoral fortune. These data are in tune with some established research on the Liberal Democrat’s electoral strategy and progress throughout the United Kingdom (Johnston & Pattie, 1997; Dorling et al, 1998; McAllister et al, 2002 & Cutts, 2006), namely, the attempts to bridge the parliamentary ‘credibility gap’ through the establishment of strong and successful local government leadership. Targeted and effective local government campaigns are key to the party’s wider success. Successfully identifying, campaigning and developing a positive reputation in and around the so-called ‘Liberal Heartlands’ are the key components to the “where we work we win” perspective, as is neatly summed in the title for Cutts’ (2006) research into the efficacy of local Liberal Democrat campaigns. In light of this, it is clear that the notion of incumbency effects is central to the party’s ability to grow, utilising popular personalities in local politics to attract and retain parliamentary support. This is a facet of the data that will certainly require further investigation.

Chapter 5 has taken a candidate-centred approach to testing for the presence of an incumbency advantage in English local elections. The chapter has presented a significant body of evidence to suggest that incumbency advantage is a very real phenomenon, estimating it as a small effect that varies for the three major parties. Chapter 6 takes a slightly different approach. Focusing on administrative differences, the chapter examines the consequences of district magnitude and electoral cycles. The primary aim of the chapter is to identify whether
incumbency effects are in any way moderated, or facilitated by, the administrative conditions that councillors compete within.
Chapter 6 - Administrative Influences on Incumbent Performance

Chapter 5 discussed data that assessed the magnitude of local election incumbency advantage and compared the different status of candidates who stand for local elections. Looking to identify whether incumbency holds any electoral value, the chapter went on to compare incumbents, sophomores and retirees against the performance of freshmen by various methods. The chapter presented substantial evidence in favour of incumbent and experience effects on candidate performance.

Chapter 6 has the principal objective of assessing any administrative effects on incumbent performance in local elections. There are two sub-sections within the chapter covering components of local elections that may influence how incumbents perform. These components are district magnitude and the electoral cycle. First, sub-chapter 6.1 discusses data on for the effect of district magnitude on incumbent performance. Duverger's well-established law on the influence of district magnitude on party systems implies that district magnitude affects choice. American research by Cox & Morgenstern (1995) suggests that it may. They say that although incumbency advantage has increased in states “with multimember districts, it has done so at a substantially lower average rate than in states with single-member districts” (Cox & Morgenstern, 1995, pp. 344). Therefore, it would seem that assessing how the choice structure affects the
success of incumbent candidates is an important feature worth investigating in more detail, especially in a national arrangement of local authorities that contain different district magnitudes. The question is, do incumbents fare better in single member districts or multimember districts?

After this, sub-chapter 6.2 goes on to examine the effect of electoral cycles on the performance of incumbents. The section seeks to identify any discrepancy between the performances of incumbent candidates in the different types of electoral structure. Two types of electoral cycle are compared, quadrennial and elections by thirds. The section aims to compare, in a like-with-like manner, the differences in the relative performance of incumbents in both these electoral structures. Do incumbents fare better in the all out quadrennial elections or in elections by thirds? Finally, section 6.3 will offer a summary and some concluding remarks.

6.1 – District Magnitude

This section introduces the examination of differences in incumbent performance under different district magnitudes. It begins by introducing SIP data for 2MD and 3MD elections across the period and then for each party. After this, the chapter moves on to present cross-tabulated data on incumbent finishing positions, discussing the inter-party trends for lone-incumbent finishing positions across the district magnitudes. The section then presents cross-tabulations that control for variation associated with the three major parties, plotting trends to demonstrate these differences.
SIP results plotted by figure 5.2.1 in chapter 5, show a slight growth in SIP over the period, from below 2% to around 3%. However, delving deeper into the data, discrepancies are revealed between the district magnitudes. Figure 6.1.1 illustrates the gap between incumbent performance in both 2MDs and 3MDs. Table 6.1.1 displays one-sample t-tests for the average SIP of different magnitude groups. The results show that average SIP for 3MDs over the period to be 2.23% (σ = 5.16), which is some 1.4% lower than average SIP for 2MDs over the period (3.65%, σ = 7.11). The one sample t-test results also show that we can be confident that both these figures deviate significantly from zero. The t-statistics for the 3MDs and 2MDs are 42.29 and 34.84 respectively. As a result both have associated p-values well below the 0.001 level.

For both magnitudes incumbents have, in general, experienced a growth in the SIP estimate over the period, but it is clear that the 2MDs have had consistently higher levels of SIP. It is also clear that the 2MDs have experienced a greater rise in SIP over the period. Consequently, the gap between the magnitudes has been widening, from around 0.5% in the 1974-1978 cycle to more than 1.5% by the 2007-2010 cycle. The implication of these results is that district magnitude may have an inverse effect on incumbent performance. If a councillor defends a seat in a 3MD, they are less likely to be significantly distinguished from their colleagues than if they were standing in a 2MD. Unfortunately there is no comparative measure to estimate any disparity between single member districts (SMDs) and MMDs and therefore we are unable to compare SIP data for candidates who stand in SMDs. However, these data are to some extent
supported by the existing literature on the effects of district magnitude on incumbent performance (Cox & Morgenstern, 1995).

![Figure 6.1.1 – SIP by FYC by District Magnitude]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dist Mag</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2MDs</td>
<td>4,597</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>4,596</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3MDs</td>
<td>9,519</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>42.29</td>
<td>9,518</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Table 6.1.1 – SIP (2MD & 3MD One Sample T-Test) - (n) (µ) (σ) (t) (df) (P) 1974-2010 (n = 14,116)]

Tables 6.1.2 and 6.1.3 display SIP data for the parties by district magnitude. The results show that differences described above are consistent throughout all parties. For all three parties SIP is higher in the 2MDs than the 3MDs.

For the Conservatives, SIP is 1.73% in the 3MDs (σ = 4.05). These data have a t-statistic of 25.5 (df = 3,562) and an associated p-value well below the 0.001 level. In the 2MDs Tory SIP is almost 1 point higher than the 3MDs, at 2.69% (σ = 5.69). The t-statistic for these districts is 20.06 and with 1,796 degrees of freedom the p-value is well below the 0.001 level. Figure 6.1.2 illustrates the data for the Conservatives over the entire period, for the majority of which there has been a distinct gap between the magnitudes. For Labour the results are similar.
Average SIP for Labour in the 3MDs is 2.11% ($\sigma = 5.25$). The t-statistic is 25.48 (df = 4,021) and has an associated p-value well below the 0.001 level. Average Labour SIP in the 2MDs is 1.2% higher than for the 3MDs, at 3.31% ($\sigma = 6.52$). The t-statistic is 20.72 (df = 1,593) and has a p-value below the 0.001 level. Like the Conservatives, these data are plotted over the period by figure 6.1.3. Finally, for the Liberal Democrats the SIP data show a noteworthy gap between the party’s SIP averages over the magnitudes. The results show that the difference is larger than that reported for both Labour and the Conservatives. Average SIP for the Lib Dems in the 3MDs is 3.44% ($\sigma = 5.11$) and has a t-statistic of 26.34 (df = 1,533) and an associated p-value below the 0.001 level. The score for the 2MDs is almost 1.5% higher than for the 3MDs, at 4.88% ($\sigma = 6.43$). This figure has a t-statistic of 22.63 (df = 888) and an associated p-value below the 0.001 level. These data not only support the notion of incumbency effects, but also show that the effect is significantly greater in 2MDs than the 3MDs. The results are consistent with existing literature on the topic (Cox & Morgenstern, 1995). Interestingly, the difference between the magnitudes was broadly similar for the parties, between 1% and 1.5%. However, though these results were similar, the inter-party trend that has emerged from data discussed earlier in this thesis has arisen once more. One more, the Tory difference is the smallest; with Labour slightly larger while the Liberal Democrats have the largest difference between the magnitudes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>1,797</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>20.06</td>
<td>1,796</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>1,594</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>6.52</td>
<td>20.72</td>
<td>1,593</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>22.63</td>
<td>888</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 6.1.2 – SIP (2MD One Sample T-Test) - (n) (µ) (σ) (t) (df) (P) 1974-2010 by Party (n = 4,281)]
When SIP data for the different magnitudes are plotted across the period, again significant differences in the temporal trend of SIP between the magnitudes emerges for the parties. Data for the Conservatives are plotted in figure 6.1.2. The chart shows a widening trend, similar to that described by figure 6.1.1. For both magnitudes SIP has risen over the period, but SIP has risen most in the 2MDs, from 1.5% in the first cycle to around 3.5% in the final one. For the 3MDs it has risen from roughly 1.5% in the years immediately after reorganisation, to around 2% by the 2007-10 cycle, a rise of more than 0.5%. This growth suggests not only that incumbency effects are not static, but also that they change over time, and change differently for the different parties.

Results for the Labour party are plotted in figure 6.1.3 and it is immediately clear that there are differences when compared to the Tories. At times there is very little difference in SIP between the different district magnitudes. At other times there is a large difference, particularly during the 1990s. For Labour 3MDs, figure 6.1.3 shows that average SIP varies between 1.5% and 3%. At its lowest, SIP is around 1.5% in the 1974-1978 cycle, whilst at its highest Labour SIP in the 3MDs is around 2.9%, during the 1995-1998 cycle. For the majority of the period Labour's 2MD SIP average varies significantly from the 3MDs, reaching their peak during the 1990's at around 4.1%, before slumping considerably during later cycles.
[Figure 6.1.2 – Con SIP by FYC by District Magnitude]

[Figure 6.1.3 – Lab SIP by FYC by District Magnitude]

[Figure 6.1.4 – LD SIP by FYC by District Magnitude]
Results for the Liberal Democrats are plotted in figure 6.1.4. The plot illustrates that average SIP for Lib Dem incumbents is consistently different across the district magnitudes. The data also show that average SIP has fallen for the Lib Dems over the period, in both the 2MDs and 3MDs. Whereas average SIP is some 5.5% in the 2MDs during the 1991-1994 cycle, there is a steady fall throughout and by 2007-2010 it had fallen by around 1 point to 4.4%. The pattern is remarkably similar to that for the 3MDs, though the drop is larger by three quarters of a point over the same time frame, so that there has been a slight widening in the gap between the magnitudes. Average SIP for the Lib Dems is 4.5% in the 1991-1994 cycle, but just 2.7% during by 2007-2010.

Overall, the SIP data across the magnitudes raises a number of interesting points about developments in the effect of incumbency, for all the parties. First, the gradual fall in SIP for the Liberal Democrats since the 1991-1994 cycle suggests that incumbency effects are not on the rise for all parties. Instead, the effects of incumbency appear to be more fluid, and to some extent dependent on a candidate’s party. Lib Dem SIP averaged some 5.5% in 1991-1994, around 1.5% more than for Labour (4.1%) and more than 3% higher than the Conservatives (2.4%). By the end of the period this gap had been severely reduced when compared to the rising Tories but was largely unchanged when compared to Labour. During the 2007-2010 cycle, average SIP for the Liberal Democrats was around 4.4%, some 1.5% higher than for Labour incumbents (2.9%), but only 1.2% higher than the average SIP for the Tories (3.2%). The data described above, for the Liberal Democrats and for the two major parties show that
incumbency effects change over time and that the change varies across parties differently. This notion, of a growing incumbency advantage, is established in the American literature (Alford & Hibbing, 1981; Gelman & King, 1990; Cox & Katz, 1996; Stonecash, 2008) and part of the discussion was presented in chapter 2 of this thesis.

The second implication from these data concerns the effect of district magnitude on incumbent performance. For all parties there is clear difference between the average SIP of candidates in the 2MDs and 3MDs, suggesting that magnitude may dampen the relative advantage of being an incumbent candidate. This gap appears to have widened for all parties over the period. One explanation for this may be shared campaigning. During a campaign in a multimember district where there are multiple vacancies, candidates often pool their resources and campaign together, leaving voters less able to distinguish between candidates. As Rallings et al note, “research has shown that more women are elected under PR systems with larger district magnitudes than in those which employ single member systems” (Rallings et al, 1998, pp. 122). Perhaps the same could be said too for freshmen candidates of both genders. In-effect, these results could be the consequence of freshmen candidates sharing their ballot with incumbent candidates, something akin to a coattails effect that has been described in the American literature.

Third, the data discussed above remains supportive of differences between the parties described earlier in this thesis, advancing the discussion by adding a temporal dimension to those assertions. The impression that Tory councillors
have the smallest electoral advantage, may hold true in the context of the entire period (i.e. 1974-2010), but may be invalid for any one cycle. For instance, Conservative SIP is slightly higher than SIP for Labour in the 2007-2010 cycle and in the same cycle there is less difference between the Tories and Lib Dems than there was in 1991-1994.

Another way to assess the relative performance of incumbents across different district magnitudes is by examining their finishing position, or rank. An analysis of finishing position data, though less powerful, can also help assess the extent to which councillors’ electoral advantage influences their finishing positions. Table 6.1.5 presents finishing position data for all wards where only one incumbent stood for re-election. Data tabulated are lone incumbent finishing positions for the entire 1974 to 2010 period, by district magnitude. From these data the ‘spread’ of incumbent performance across the magnitudes can be easily assessed. Also, the data illustrate a more equitable comparison of performance by reporting a ‘Not-Elected’ (NE) percentage in the final column. Therefore, comparing the NE rate allows us to equate the relative performance of incumbents in an absolute fashion.

The table shows that the spread of finishing positions differs for each of the magnitudes, with just 16.3% of the 57,293 incumbents who sought re-election in the SMDs, failing to take the top spot, and nearly all the rest finishing in second place (14.6%). Only 1.6% of incumbents finished in third or below over the entire period examined. For the 2MDs the spread widens when compared to the SMDs. The number of incumbents finishing in first drops dramatically, by almost
25 points (from 83.7% to 59%), and even when district magnitude is accounted for (by examining the NE figure), the portion of lone incumbents who were not elected decreases, though only slightly. The number of second placers increases by over 10 percentage points from 14.6% to 25.3%. Whereas third or lower finishers make up only 1.6% of incumbents running in the SMDs, for 2MDs this portion is almost 15.7%. For the 3MDs the results follow the trend. Only 45% of lone incumbents finish in first place, whilst 22.1% finish in second. These aren’t necessarily directly comparable however, as third place candidates win a seat in the 3MDs. Almost one in three lone incumbents finished in third place or lower. The NE portion of lone incumbents is the largest of the three district magnitudes considered, at 18.1%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Magnitude</th>
<th>1 st</th>
<th>2 nd</th>
<th>3 rd</th>
<th>4 th</th>
<th>5 th +</th>
<th>n / NE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>8,366</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>1,510</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>59.0</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>576</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>207</td>
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<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>10,452</td>
<td>1,861</td>
<td>1,861</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 6.1.5 (Finishing Position by n & % & NE by District Magnitude) 1974-2010]

There are obvious consequences when comparing different district magnitudes, such as, the number of vacancies and the total number of candidates standing. Both of these influence the different options voters face in their respective electoral circumstances. However, taking these into consideration, the data described above has a couple of implications for this project.
First, though the effect of incumbency is evident, it is clear from the data presented in table 6.1.5 that it is weak. If political incumbents had a great deal of control over their electoral fate, then it is unlikely that the data would have shown such a major widening in the distribution of lone incumbent finishing positions. If incumbents were always clear favourites i.e. if the effect was strong, it is unlikely that so many incumbents would have finished in second and third.

Second, when considering the shares of those lone incumbents who were elected in the 2MDs and 3MDs, many more finished in 1st than the other elected positions. In a scenario where incumbency would have no effect on the electoral performance of candidates there would be an even distribution of incumbents finishing across all the elected positions. If voters were not distinguishing incumbents from freshmen, then we would expect to see no difference in the finishing positions of elected candidates, incumbent or otherwise. Evidently this isn’t the case, and the distributions are clearly skewed in favour of incumbents, no matter the magnitude. For both the 2MDs and the 3MDs the distribution is skewed towards first place, meaning that lone incumbents are more likely to finish in the higher elected positions than lower ones. Interestingly the data show that lone incumbents fare best, by a slight margin, in the 2MDs. Not Elected (NE) rates in the 2MDs are lowest at 15.7%, some 0.6% lower than in the SMDs. However, in the 3MDs, 18.1% of lone incumbents failed to secure their seat on the council.

As described earlier in this chapter, it is important to consider the differences between the parties when assessing incumbency effects. Tables 6.1.6-6.1.8 and
figures 6.1.6-6.1.11 compare and illustrate finishing position data for the parties across the magnitudes for the entire period. Table 6.1.6 presents finishing position data for lone Conservative incumbents. Of the 21,713 Conservative incumbents who stood for re-election in SMDs throughout the 1974-2010 period, fewer than 15% failed to win, the vast majority of whom finished in second place. Only 0.7% finished in third place or lower. For the 2,150 lone incumbents in the 2MDs just 57.2% of incumbents finished in first place, whilst 28.1% finished second and 14.7 % finished third or lower. For the 882 lone Conservative incumbents standing in 3MDs, the trend continues. 41.4% finished first, 24.1% finished second, whilst 34.5% finished third or lower.

Comparing tables 6.1.5 and 6.1.6 it appears that Conservative incumbents in the SMDs have finished first in higher proportions than the average throughout the period, with almost 1.5% more incumbents being elected. For the 2MDs and 3MDs the picture is slightly different. Though 1% more than the average were elected, Conservative incumbents tended to finish in slightly lower than average positions, with almost 2% fewer lone incumbents finishing in first. For the 3MDs the results are similar. Lone Conservative incumbents tend to finish in lower positions, with 3.6% fewer finishing in first. The pattern for lone Conservative incumbents is broadly similar to the data for all parties, but the Conservatives tend to do slightly better than average in SMDs, and slightly worse than average in 2MDs and 3MDs.
Figure 6.1.6 plots lone incumbent finishing position distributions for the Conservatives across the different district magnitudes. The chart illustrates how the figures change as the number of vacancies increase. Where the line for incumbent finishing positions in the SMDs falls sharply, for 2MDs the decline is less steep, and the curve for 3MDs is even shallower. This trend indicates that incumbency may have an influence on the success of Conservative candidates, but it is likely to be weak. The first place spread across the magnitudes, which is the difference in the proportion of candidates finishing first in the SMDs and finishing first in the 3MDs, is 43.7%. The large spread suggests that, although incumbency clearly has an effect on the finishing position of lone Conservative
incumbents, the influence is slight and lone incumbents in 3MDs are only half as likely to finish first as they would do in SMDs.

Table 6.1.7 shows finishing position distributions for lone Labour incumbents. As for Conservative incumbents, of those standing in the SMDs around 85% were successfully re-elected. However, for the 2MDs almost three in five lone Labour incumbents finished in first place, 2.6% more than for the Conservatives. The pattern is similar in the 3MDs where Labour incumbents finish more frequently in first place than the Conservatives. 45.4% of lone Labour incumbents finish in the top spot. But more striking perhaps is the comparison between Labour and Conservative election rates in the 3MDs. 3.5% more lone Labour incumbents were elected in the 3MDs than were Conservatives, with NEs for both parties of 15.1% and 18.6% respectively. This may be a symptom of Labour’s dominance in the Metropolitan Boroughs, as described in chapter 4. Interestingly like the Conservatives, the NE figure is lowest in the 2MDs at 14.3%. Overall, the analysis of Labour incumbent finishing positions across the different district magnitudes supports the notion of an incumbency advantage, suggesting that Labour incumbents perform slightly better than the Conservatives in the MMDs. Slightly more Labour incumbents tend to finish in first place and more Labour incumbents are successfully re-elected in the 3MDs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Magnitude</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th+</th>
<th>n / NE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Count</td>
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<td>518</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Count</td>
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<td>70</td>
</tr>
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<td>23.6</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
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<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 6.1.7 (Labour Finishing Position by n & % & NE by District Magnitude) 1974-10]

Figure 6.1.7 charts the distribution of lone incumbent finishing positions for Labour across the different district magnitudes. The chart illustrates not only how the finishing positions change, but also how Labour incumbents perform slightly better the Conservatives. Finishing positions for Labour incumbents in the SMDs fall fairly sharply when compared to the 2MDs and even more so in the 3MDs. As for the Conservatives, this pattern indicates not only that incumbency has some influence on the success of Labour candidates, be it a weak one, but also that incumbency is worth slightly more to Labour incumbents electorally. The first place spread across the magnitudes for Labour is 39.5%. Though this is still a large spread, the difference is about 4% smaller than that for the Conservatives. Like the Conservatives, although incumbency clearly has an effect on the finishing position of lone Labour incumbents, the influence also appears to be small.
Table 6.1.8 shows the finishing position distributions for lone Liberal Democrat incumbents across the different district magnitudes. The pattern for the Lib Dems is slightly different to those for Labour and the Conservatives. Of the 9,485 incumbents standing for re-election in the SMDs, just under 82% of incumbents were successfully re-elected, some 3% less than the two other parties. For the 2MDs the Lib Dems again perform slightly differently to the other two parties. In the 2MDs, almost 64% of lone Lib Dem incumbents finished in first place, 4% more than Labour and 6.6% more than the Conservatives. Just fewer than 20% of incumbents finished in second, this is around 8% lower than the Conservatives and 6% less than Labour. Interestingly, in the 2MDs some 16.3% of lone Lib Dem incumbents failed to be re-elected, 1.6% and 2% more than Conservative and Labour incumbents respectively. For the 3MDs the distribution observed for the two other parties is repeated. More Lib Dem incumbents tend to finish in first place, 52.9%, which is 7.5% more than Labour and 11.5% more than the Conservatives. However, as with the other magnitudes, the proportion of lone incumbents who were unsuccessful in their attempt to be re-elected is
higher for the Lib Dems than for the other parties, at 19.5%. This is almost 1% higher than the Conservatives and 4.5% higher than for Labour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Magnitude</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>n / NE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>168</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>711</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>133</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Count</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
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<td>1,842</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 6.1.8 (Liberal Democrat Finishing Positions by n & % & NE by District Mag) 1974-10]

Figure 6.1.8 illustrates the distribution of lone Liberal Democrat incumbent finishing positions across the district magnitudes. As for Labour and the Conservatives, the distribution is less steep as district magnitude increases, though it is clear that this happens to a lesser extent for the Lib Dems than the other parties. Figure 6.1.8 shows that the distribution of finishing positions is skewed much more toward first place than either Labour or the Conservatives. The first place spread across the magnitudes, which is the difference between the proportion of lone incumbents finishing in first place in the SMDs and the
3MDs, is much smaller for the Lib Dems than for the other parties, at just 28.8%. This is compared to 39.5% for Labour and 43.7% for the Conservatives.

There are a number of implications from these data. The first is that district magnitude clearly has less of an effect on lone Lib Dem incumbent’s finishing position than for the other parties. From this we can infer that incumbency may have a stronger effect for the Lib Dems. Across all district magnitudes, lone Lib Dem incumbents are more likely than not to finish in first place. The same cannot be said for the other two parties. Second, the notion of greater incumbency effects for the Lib Dems has been demonstrated in previous chapters. Whilst the Liberal Democrats show the highest NE for all magnitudes, the first place spread for the Lib Dems is far lower than for the other two parties and this only serves to support inter-party differences discussed throughout the thesis thus far.

Figures 6.1.9-6.1.11 chart the same data, but this time for each magnitude by party. The charts have been reconfigured in this way to highlight the differences between the parties across respective SMD, 2MD and 3MD incumbent finishing positions. Whilst data for the SMDs shows little disparity between the parties, in the 2MDs and 3MDs there is a ‘distancing’ between the Liberal Democrats and the two other parties. Figure 6.1.10 shows data for the SMDs and there are only slight differences between the parties, Labour and Tories following a broadly similar pattern whilst the Lib Dems have slightly more incumbents finishing first and fewer in second. Figure 6.1.11 shows the distributions for the 3MDs, where the difference between Lib Dems and the other parties is more pronounced.
Labour and Tory distributions are shallower, whilst the Liberal Democrats retain a greater elevation.
Figures 6.1.9-6.1.11 are snapshots of the effect that district magnitude has on incumbent performance for the parties. The more influence incumbency has on a candidate's performance, the more the distribution will be positively skewed towards first place. Or, put another way, the distribution will 'deteriorate' less as magnitude increases. Looking through figures 6.1.9-6.1.11 allows us to compare the value of incumbency for each party. While it is difficult to separate the distributions of the three major parties in the SMDs (see figure 6.1.9) the difference between the Liberal Democrats and the other two other parties becomes more pronounced for the 2MDs (figure 6.1.10) and even more so for the 3MDs (figure 6.1.11). It appears not only that district magnitude has inverse effects on incumbent performance for all parties, but also that the figures corroborate previously discussed results in this thesis, as there is an observed difference between Liberal Democrats and the two major parties.

When analysing finishing positions, it is clear that standing in an SMD may mask nuances that are revealed in multimember district (MMD) conditions.
Interestingly, for all parties, 2MDs appear to be the optimum magnitude for lone incumbents to win, having the lowest NE rate of all the magnitudes for all three parties.

Section 6.1 has presented data for the effects of district magnitude on the performance of incumbents in local elections. The analyses support the notion of incumbency effects, showing that lone incumbents tend to finish in higher positions than their competitors. Data discussed also support previously presented results on the effects of incumbency and district magnitude with SIP and finishing position data broadly in line. The advantages associated with incumbency tend to be more pronounced for the lower magnitudes, acting as a catalyst for incumbency effects. Results indicate that SMDs are most conducive for incumbents, whilst 2MDs and 3MDs offer progressively less favourable conditions. The data have shown that if an incumbent is defending an SMD or 2MD ward, they fared better than if they were to stand in a 3MD. Clearly elections to SMDs are more likely to be focused on the individual rather than the party, so special consideration may be needed when generalising from these findings. The analyses demonstrate how a slight change to the electoral system can alter the competitiveness of elections and perhaps the fortunes of candidates. Considering these explanations, it is clear that the gap between incumbent and freshmen is mitigated by district magnitude, though to varying degrees. Nonetheless, lone incumbents are most likely to finish first across all magnitudes and for all parties.
As well as the influence of district magnitude on relative incumbent performance, another aspect of the data discussed in sub-chapter 6.1 is the difference between the three major parties. A familiar order has emerged. For Conservatives, incumbency appears to be rewarded least, whilst Labour incumbents tend to perform slightly better. Perhaps most striking is the data for the Liberal Democrats, whose incumbents appear to do better when compared with the other two parties, both in terms of SIP estimations and finishing positions. Continuing to assess the structural mitigations of incumbent performance, sub-chapter 6.2 will go on to discuss data for the different electoral cycles used in English local elections.

6.2 – Electoral Cycle

Section 6.1 used SIP and finishing position data to measure the influence of district magnitude on incumbency effects. Sub-chapter 6.2 takes a slightly different approach in examining administrative procedures, focusing on the electoral cycle and how it may effect councillors’ chances of re-election. Under section 7 paragraphs 3, 8 and 9 of the 1972 Local Government Act, Metropolitan Boroughs (MBs) and non-metropolitan districts (SDs) were allowed to choose between two methods of electing their council, these are quadrennial elections or election by thirds. The Act states that:

“where such an order is in force, one-third of the whole number of councillors in each ward returning a number of councillors which is divisible by three and, as nearly as may be, one-third of the whole number of the councillors in the other wards, being those who have been councillors of the district for the longest time without re-election, shall retire in every
ordinary year of election of such councillors on the fourth day after the ordinary day of
election of such councillors, and in every such year the newly elected councillors shall come
into office on the day on which their predecessors retire”

(Local Government Act 1972, part 1, sub-section 7, paragraph 9c)

Although the number has changed over the years, especially after the
introduction of Unitary Authorities in 1995, today there are 201 Shire Districts,
67 of which are elected by thirds and 7 by halves. Also, there are 55 Unitary
Authorities, where 19 are elected by Thirds. Using data from the Unitary
Authorities (UAs) and Shire Districts (SDs), this sub-chapter goes on to compare
vote shares of incumbent and freshmen candidates for single vacancy wards,
where the electoral cycles are quadrennials and elections by thirds. The section
presents vote share data for incumbent and freshmen winners in the different
cycles, before making a comparison between the three major parties. Finally the
sub-chapter will offer some concluding remarks before moving on to summarise
chapter 6.

In both quadrennial and thirds electoral cycles, incumbent winners tend to
average a higher CVS than freshmen. Table 6.2.1 presents average CVS for
winning incumbents and freshmen in the different electoral cycles. For the
quadrennials, freshmen winners average a CVS of just over 58.5%, with a σ of
12.06. Incumbents in the same cycle average a CVS of 62.31%, with a σ of 12.11,
some 3.78% higher than for freshmen.
The thirds present a slightly different picture than that detailed for the quadrennials, with winning freshmen averaging just over 54% of the vote with a σ of 11.44. This average is some four and a half points less than for freshmen in the quadrennials. For incumbents in the thirds there is a similar pattern, incumbent winners average 58.47% with a σ of 11.83, which is almost four points lower than incumbents in the quadrennials. For the thirds the difference between winning incumbent and freshmen vote shares is 4.42% in favour of incumbents. This is slightly larger than in the quadrennials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UA &amp; SD SMDs</th>
<th>Incumbent Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Avg CVS%</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>Inc Vs. Fre (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quadrennials</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>9,936</td>
<td>58.52</td>
<td>12.06</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>6,079</td>
<td>62.31</td>
<td>12.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thirds</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>18,873</td>
<td>54.05</td>
<td>11.44</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>16,071</td>
<td>58.47</td>
<td>11.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 6.2.1 - Vacancy Inc & Fre Winners in UA & SD 1974-2010 by Electoral Cycle (n = 50,959)]

Two interesting facets of the data presented in table 6.2.1 are, first, the data displayed support the notion of incumbent performance surpassing freshmen. For both the quadrennials and thirds cycles, there are marked differences in the vote shares of the two sets of winners, around 4%. Second, vote shares between the two electoral cycles differ markedly. The average incumbent winner in the quadrennials could expect to attain a vote share 8.25% higher than freshmen in the thirds, and though there are fundamental differences between the districts, these data tell us that incumbents do well in both types of electoral cycle. The data suggest that both freshmen and incumbent winners average a higher CVS in quadrennials than their counterparts that are elected by thirds. When incumbents are compared to freshmen in their respective election cycle, the data show that incumbents do only slightly better in the thirds than the quadrennials.
Incumbents average a 4.35% higher CVS in the thirds, and a 3.05% higher CVS in the quadrennials, a difference of 1.3% between the electoral arrangements.

Table 6.2.2 presents average vote shares for Conservative winning incumbents and freshmen in the different electoral cycles. As for data presented above, incumbent winners perform better than winning freshmen from the same party. For the quadrennials, incumbents averaged 63.16% of the vote with a σ of 11.55. This is 3.05% higher than freshmen, who averaged 60.11%, with an σ of 11.92.

For the thirds electoral cycle, incumbents performed relatively better again. Incumbent winners averaged 59.44% of the vote with a σ of 11.45, which is 4.35% higher than winning freshmen who averaged just 55.09% CVS, with a σ of 11.42.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UA &amp; SD SMDs</th>
<th>Incumbent Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Avg CVS %</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>Inc Vs. Fre (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quadrennials</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>4,666</td>
<td>60.11</td>
<td>11.92</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>63.16</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thirds</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>7,797</td>
<td>55.09</td>
<td>11.42</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>6,269</td>
<td>59.44</td>
<td>11.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 6.2.2 – Conservative 1Vacancy Inc & Fre Winners in UA & SD 1974-2010 by Electoral Cycle (n = 21,732)]

The data presented in table 6.2.2 are in line with those revealed in table 6.2.1, where incumbent winners perform roughly 4% better than freshmen for both types of electoral cycle. Winners for the quadrennials average a higher share of the vote than winners from the thirds. For the Conservatives, incumbent winners in the quadrennials perform relatively worse when compared to their counterparts in the thirds.
Table 6.2.3 presents average vote shares for Labour winning incumbents and freshmen in the different types of electoral cycle. As for the Conservatives, incumbent winners do better than freshmen from the same party for both types. For the quadrennials, Labour incumbents averaged 59.97% of the vote with a $\sigma$ of 12.06. This is 5.63% higher than freshmen, who averaged 54.34% with a $\sigma$ of 11.07.

For the thirds electoral cycle, incumbents and freshmen performed almost identically to the Conservatives. Incumbent winners averaged 59.42% of the vote with a $\sigma$ of 12.68, some 4.36% higher than the 2,757 winning freshmen, who averaged just 55.06% with a $\sigma$ of 11.79.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UA &amp; SD SMDs</th>
<th>Incumbent Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Avg CVS %</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
<th>Inc Vs. Fre (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quadrennials</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>54.34</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>59.97</td>
<td>12.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thirds</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>5,962</td>
<td>55.06</td>
<td>11.79</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>5,547</td>
<td>59.42</td>
<td>12.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data presented in table 6.2.3 support the results discussed from tables 6.2.1 and 6.2.2, in that incumbent winners perform better than freshmen for both the quadrennials and thirds electoral arrangements. Labour winners perform similarly across the different cycles, freshmen at around 55% and incumbents around 60% of the vote. Also, unlike the Conservatives, Labour incumbents do better relatively in the quadrennials, averaging a higher share of the vote than winners in the thirds, 5.63% and 4.36% respectively. Data shown for Labour
The data presented in table 6.2.4 show average vote shares for Liberal Democrat incumbents and freshmen across the cycles. As for the Conservatives and Labour, incumbents do significantly better than freshmen for both types of cycle. For the quadrennials, Lib Dem winners performed similarly to Labour winners. Incumbents averaged 59.17% of the vote with a σ of 11.13. This is 5.09% higher than for freshmen, who averaged 54.08% with an σ of 9.79. For the thirds, Lib Dem winners averaged 5% fewer votes than Labour and the Conservatives. Incumbent winners averaged 54.77% of the vote, with a σ of 9.63. This is 4.91% higher than winning freshmen, who averaged just 49.86%, with a σ of 8.64.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UA &amp; SD SMDs</th>
<th>Incumbent Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Avg CVS %</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>Inc Vs. Fre (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quadrennials</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>1,390</td>
<td>54.08</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>1,116</td>
<td>59.17</td>
<td>11.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thirds</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>3,533</td>
<td>49.86</td>
<td>8.64</td>
<td>4.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>3,232</td>
<td>54.77</td>
<td>9.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 6.2.4 – Liberal Democrat 1Vacancy Inc & Fre Winners in UA & SD 1974-2010 by Electoral Cycle (n = 9,263))

The data presented in table 6.2.4 support previous data described from tables 6.2.1, 6.2.2 and 6.2.3. Incumbent winners continue to attain higher shares of the vote than freshmen in both the quadrennial and thirds electoral arrangements. Unlike for Labour and the Conservatives, incumbent Lib Dems perform similarly
in both cycles, some 5.09% to 4.91% better than freshmen in the quadrennial and thirds cycles respectively. This suggests, as for the Conservatives, that Lib Dem performance may be less susceptible any difference in the electoral cycle. The data does imply, however, that Liberal Democrat winners do better in the quadrennials than the thirds, averaging some 5% higher CVS.

So far, results for the effect of electoral cycles on incumbent performance for the major parties have produced a rather mixed picture. For all parties, incumbents continue to do better than freshmen, but no conclusive pattern has emerged to suggest that quadrennial cycles are any safer for councillors looking to defend their seat, or for that matter, election by thirds.

Another interesting aspect of the data are the different winning vote shares for the parties. One potential explanation for this facet of the data could be electoral contestation. Not every ward is contested by candidates for all three of the major parties and as such, winning candidates in single vacancy wards, where only one or two of the major parties are contesting, are likely to drag the average up somewhat. In light of this, sub-chapter 6.2 now considers single vacancy elections in the different electoral cycles, but this time where all three major parties are contesting.

Table 6.2.5 presents average vote shares for winning incumbents and freshmen in the different electoral cycles, where all three major parties are contesting. A first note on the data is that the total number of cases has been severely reduced; halving to 25,760 cases. For the 2,235 freshmen winners in the quadrennials, the
average share of the vote is 51.25%, with a $\sigma$ of 9.94. The 1,754 incumbents in the same cycle average 55.76%, with a $\sigma$ of 10.92. This is some 4.5% higher than for freshmen. Both freshmen and incumbent winners average around 7% less CVS than equivalent data presented in table 6.2.1. These figures have no doubt dropped due to the new criteria of three-party contestation being imposed.

For the thirds, winning freshmen average just over just 50.75% of the vote with a $\sigma$ of 9.72. This average is half a point less than for freshmen in the quadrennials. For incumbents there is a similar pattern. Incumbent winners average just 55.14% with a $\sigma$ of 10.37, which is again just half a point lower than incumbents in the quadrennials. Incumbents in the thirds average 4.38% higher CVS than winning freshmen, a result that is similar to the difference in the quadrennials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UA &amp; SD SMDs</th>
<th>Incumbent Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Avg CVS %</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
<th>Inc Vs. Fre (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quadrennials</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>2,235</td>
<td>51.25</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>1,754</td>
<td>55.76</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thirds</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>11,380</td>
<td>50.75</td>
<td>9.72</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>10,391</td>
<td>55.14</td>
<td>10.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data presented in table 6.2.5 have two major implications for consideration. First, average vote share for both cycles and incumbent statuses has fallen, more so for the quadrennials, but relatively evenly for incumbents and freshmen. These data imply that the original method used for measuring cycle effects, may be biased, particularly in the quadrennials. Second, relative incumbent performance is largely unchanged for both types of electoral cycle. There is a small growth of 0.72% in the quadrennials and almost no change in the thirds,
but the results, 4.5% and 4.38% respectively, indicate that there is little to no effect on relative incumbent performance.

Table 6.2.6 presents average vote shares for Conservative winning incumbents and freshmen in the different electoral cycles, where all three major parties are contesting. As for the data presented in table 6.2.5, incumbent winners perform better than winning freshmen from the same party for both the quadrennials and thirds. For the quadrennials, the 1,229 freshmen included, average 53.05% of the vote with a σ of 10.10. The 918 winning incumbents average 57.07% with a σ of 10.99. This is 4% higher than winning freshmen in the same cycle. Average CVS for the Conservatives in the Quadrennials is lower than the results shown in table 6.2.2, around 7% lower for winning freshmen and 6% lower for winning incumbents.

For the thirds electoral cycle, incumbents performed better still. The 3,996 incumbent winners averaged 56.33% of the vote with a σ of 10.48. This is 4.52% higher than the average for the 4,688 winning freshmen, who had a mean CVS of 51.81%, with a σ of 9.89. Average vote shares for the Conservatives in the Thirds are lower than the results shown in table 6.2.2, some 3% lower for both winning freshmen and incumbents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UA &amp; SD SMDs</th>
<th>Incumbent Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Avg CVS %</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>Inc Vs. Fre (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quadrennials</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>1,229</td>
<td>53.05</td>
<td>10.10</td>
<td>4.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>57.07</td>
<td>10.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thirds</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>4,688</td>
<td>51.81</td>
<td>9.89</td>
<td>4.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>3,996</td>
<td>56.33</td>
<td>10.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 6.2.6 – Conservative 1Vacancy 3PartyContested Inc & Fre Winners in UA & SD 1974-2010 by Electoral Cycle (n = 10,831)]
It is clear that three party contestation data revealed for the Conservatives has provided the project with a couple of points to discuss. First, vote shares have dropped for both freshmen and incumbents. Freshmen differ by less than 1.25% across the cycles, and incumbents less than 0.75%. This has removed any of the perceived performance gaps across the electoral cycles, which was evident in data described earlier in this sub-chapter. Second, the data also show that incumbent performance is not meaningfully different across the cycles. Earlier in this section, data had indicated that Conservative incumbents performed better when compared to their counterparts in the Thirds electoral cycle. The new three-party contestation requirement has now shown that this is not the case.

Table 6.2.7 presents three-party contestation data for Labour in the different electoral cycles. Incumbents perform better than freshmen for both cycles. For the quadrennials, the 389 freshmen averaged 48.50% of the vote, with a $\sigma$ of 9.47. However, the 242 incumbents averaged 57.07% with, a $\sigma$ of 10.99. This is 6.12% higher than winning freshmen in the same cycle. The mean vote shares for the quadrennial cycles are much lower than the results described in table 6.2.3, roughly 6.25% lower for both freshmen and incumbents.

The change in average vote shares is similar for the thirds cycle, though incumbents still do better. The 3,562 incumbents average 55.65% of the vote, with a $\sigma$ of 11.11. This is some 3.84% higher than the average for the 3,613 freshmen, who have a mean CVS of 51.81%, with a $\sigma$ of 10.42. Like the data for
the quadrennials, the mean vote shares for Labour candidates in the thirds are lower than the results describe in table 6.2.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UA &amp; SD SMDs</th>
<th>Incumbent Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Avg CVS %</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>Inc Vs. Fre (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quadrennials</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>48.50</td>
<td>9.47</td>
<td>6.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>54.62</td>
<td>11.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirds</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>3,613</td>
<td>51.81</td>
<td>10.42</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>3,562</td>
<td>55.65</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 6.2.7 – Labour 1Vacancy 3PartyContested Inc & Fre Winners in UA & SD 1974-2010 by Electoral Cycle (n = 7,806))

For Labour, three-party contestation results have had similar implications to those discussed for the Conservatives. Vote shares for both the quadrennials and the thirds dropped for freshmen and incumbents, balancing out to levels that were barely distinguishable. Freshmen differ by around 1.3% across the cycles, and incumbents by around 1%, which as before removes any of the perceived performance gaps across the cycle types. Unlike data for the Conservatives, the difference in incumbent performance has become more pronounced. The data shown in table 6.2.7 suggest that the relative performance for Labour incumbents, when compared to freshmen, is better in the quadrennials. The three-party data has widened the gap, from 1.27% in table 6.2.3 to 2.28% in table 6.2.7. However, a measure of scepticism should remain about this figure as the number of cases used for the quadrennial estimations is much smaller than for the two other parties, particularly when compared to the Tories (see tables 6.2.3 and 6.2.7).

Table 6.2.8 presents three-party contestation data for winning Liberal Democrat candidates in the different electoral cycles. As for the data presented for the
Conservatives and Labour (tables 6.2.6 and 6.2.7), incumbent winners perform better than winning freshmen from the same party across both cycles. For the quadrennials, the 559 freshmen selected averaged 49.92% of the vote, with a $\sigma$ of 8.33 whereas; the 536 winning incumbents averaged 55.17% with a $\sigma$ of 9.92. This result is 5.25% higher than winning freshmen in the same cycle. The mean vote shares for the quadrennials are significantly lower than the results that were discussed for the Liberal Democrats in table 6.2.4, roughly 4% lower for both freshmen and incumbent winners.

For the thirds, incumbents perform better than freshmen too; with the 2,836 freshmen winners selected averaging 48.24% of the vote and with a $\sigma$ of 7.63. This result is some 4.75% lower than the 2,637 winning incumbents whose mean CVS is 52.99%, with a $\sigma$ of 8.49. The mean vote share for Lib Dem candidates in the thirds is lower than the results described in table 6.2.4, by just over 1% for both incumbents and freshmen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UA &amp; SD SMDs</th>
<th>Incumbent Status</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Avg CVS %</th>
<th>$\sigma$</th>
<th>Inc Vs. Fre (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quadrennials</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>49.92</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>55.17</td>
<td>9.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thirds</strong></td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>2,836</td>
<td>48.24</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incumbents</td>
<td>2,637</td>
<td>52.99</td>
<td>8.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 6.2.8 – Liberal Democrat 1Vacancy 3PartyContested Inc & Fre Winners in UA & SD 1974-2010 by Electoral Cycle (n = 6,568)]

Though three-party contestation data for Liberal Democrat candidates support the notion of incumbents performing better than freshmen, earlier in this subchapter, data for the Liberal Democrats suggested that incumbents performed about the same across the different cycles (see table 6.2.4). As for Labour, the
three party results in table 6.2.8 show that the relative performance of incumbents compared to freshmen is greater in the quadrennials than the thirds, though this time only slightly at 0.5%. However, when comparing data for freshmen and incumbents across the cycles, the gap in performance discussed earlier in this sub-chapter has been greatly reduced due to the added requirement of only examining wards that were contested by the three major parties. Freshmen differ by around 1.5% across the cycles, 48.24% in the thirds and 49.92% in the quadrennials. Incumbents differ by around 2.25%, 52.99% in the thirds and 55.17% in the quadrennials. As for the other two parties, using the three-party contestation data removes most of the perceived performance gaps that was evident in data presented earlier in this section.

Section 6.2 has discussed data on the effect of the electoral cycle on the performance of incumbent candidates in local elections and the initial results show three key features. First, the results support the earlier discussed notions of incumbents performing better than freshmen, for all parties and for both electoral cycles. Second, results discussed in the first half of sub-chapter 6.2 implied, at first glance, that freshmen and incumbents in the quadrennials performed significantly better than their counterparts in the thirds. However, when the analyses narrowed to include only wards that were contested by all three major parties; nearly all of the difference was eliminated. Third, as for trends previously discussed in this thesis, Conservative incumbents tended to perform least well when compared to their freshmen counterparts. The gap between incumbents and freshmen for Labour and the Liberal Democrats was significantly wider than that for the Conservatives.
Overall, the evidence for the electoral cycle having any significant effect on the performance of incumbents remains unclear. Conservative incumbents appear to perform slightly better in the thirds, by 0.5%, whereas the Lib Dems do slightly better in the quadrennials, again by 0.5%. Labour incumbents also do better in the quadrennials, though more so at 2.28%. However, the evidence is not convincing and there appears to be no substantiated explanation from the literature as to why the electoral cycle should affect the three major parties any differently from one another. A more likely explanation perhaps, resides in the consequence of what Rallings and Thrasher describe as the cycle choice bestowed to authorities following the 1972 Local Government Act (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997a). The difference between incumbent performances in the cycles, between the different parties, is perhaps more plausibly accounted for by assessing the underlying support for the party in authorities with those cycles. It is possible that the Conservatives have tended to dominate single vacancy elections, thus the underlying party support and resulting freshmen performance may be higher on average than for the other two parties, cancelling out any difference.

Sub-chapter 6.2 has failed to provide sufficient evidence in favour of electoral cycle effects on incumbent performance. For all parties, there is little to no difference in the relative performance of councillors defending their seats and thus no firm conclusion has emerged from the data.
6.3 – Concluding Remarks

Chapter 6 has focused on two aspects of aggregate data for English Local Elections. Sub-chapter 6.1 was concerned with district magnitude. The section discussed tests for the effects of district magnitude on average SIP and the finishing positions of incumbent councillors. Data were presented that supports the notion of incumbency influencing electoral performance, but one where district magnitude has moderating effects. For all parties there was a clear difference between the performance of incumbents across the district magnitudes and this finding is supported by the American literature (Cox & Morgenstern, 1995). The evidence also suggests that lone incumbents contesting a ward will tend to achieve higher finishing positions at the ballot.

The results indicate that district magnitude mitigates the effect of incumbency advantage. Following previously described trends, the Lib Dems did best across all the magnitudes however, the SIP results also suggested that the Lib Dem advantage has been in decline in both the 2MDs and 3MDs, whilst at the same time it has been on the rise for the Conservatives. Incumbency advantage appears to be inversely related to district magnitude, with the lower magnitudes showing higher rates of success. It may be the case that SMDs foster better conditions for electoral defence, whilst 2MDs and 3MDs offer progressively less favourable conditions.

Finally, chapter 6.2 discussed data on the impact that the electoral cycle may have on relative level of incumbent performance. Though incumbents consistently outperform their freshmen counterparts in all three major parties,
the evidence for electoral cycles having any noteworthy effect on the performance of incumbents did not manifest itself. There was no discernible difference in incumbent performance between the cycles. Only Unitary Authorities (UAs) and Shire Districts (SDs) were selected for the analyses to help eliminate any underlying support for any one party in the different electoral arrangements. As only two of the five types of authority were included in the sample, technically the sample may not have been sufficient in its breadth to detect any significant effect. Consequently, there remains scope for an effect, though narrowed. However, for now these comments remain speculative and require further investigation to substantiate them.

Where chapter 6 has examined the more administrative effects on advantages associated with incumbency, chapter 7 widens the breadth of the investigation, going on to examine the structural influences on incumbent performance.
Chapter 7 – Structural Effects

Chapter 6 discussed analyses that compared the administrative effects on the performance of incumbent councillors in England. Chapter 7 goes on to consider the more structural factors that affect incumbent performance; such as turnout, ward size and the rural/urban classification of the ward. Beginning with turnout, the section assesses the impact of councillors standing again on ward-level turnout. The aim of section 7.1 is to assess whether fielding a councillor draws ‘extra votes’ on election day. Following Hansford & Gomez’s (2010) anti-incumbent hypothesis, which links higher turnout to the relative performance of an incumbent party’s candidate, this section presents a model to estimate the relative change in turnout as a result of the change in incumbency status of a candidate. The method examines the freshmen-sophomore electoral cycle to assess whether districts with first time incumbents encourage an increase in the number of voters participating. Following this, sub-chapter 7.2 looks to identify the effect of ward size on the re-election rate of councillors. There have been numerous studies showing that ward size is an important factor in elections, that a sense of community is usually felt to greater extent in relatively small geographical areas (Foladare, 1968; O'Loughlin, 1981; Eagles & Erfle, 1989). This section assesses the notion that smaller wards foster more favourable conditions for councillors to defend their elected position. Fewer voters mean that the task may also be smaller. It would be more manageable for councillors to maintain some personal contact with their residents over their term of office. But also, these conditions may assist a candidate in the so-called ‘scare-off effect’ that has
been detailed in chapter 2. Next, section 7.3 goes on to investigate the notion of urban-effects on the performance of incumbents for all the parties. Employing the Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP) model detailed in chapter 5, the section assesses relative incumbent performance in different geographies throughout England. The SIP data are compared across Office for National Statistics (ONS) rural/urban classifications to see if there are any noteworthy differences. Finally, some concluding remarks are made regarding the implications of results discussed throughout chapter 7, whilst offering some explanations from the literature.

7.1 – Turnout

Turnout in in sub-national elections tends to be lower than at the national level. For English local elections turnout varies, but there is evidence to suggest that turnout can be greatly influenced by exogenous factors, such as national elections or economic crises. The obvious example is the 1979 general election called by the then Prime Minister James Callaghan for the same day as the local elections. At almost 74%, turnout was far higher than usual as the general election was perceived to be more salient. Rallings and Thrasher (1997) also suggest that the proximity of a general election also has an effect on local election turnout; tending to be above average for years just before an anticipated general election, then falling sharply the year after. To illustrate this point Rallings & Thrasher remind us that, “in both 1983 and 1987 Mrs Thatcher used the local elections as a test of her government’s popularity before calling a general election and in 1991 John Major made it clear he too was contemplating a summer general election and turnout rose once again, although on this
occasion the results were such that the Conservatives put back the election for another year” (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, p.50).

As well as the perceived salience of elections, particular groups in society are more likely than others to vote. Using survey data between 1966 and 1974, Crewe et al (1977) show that age; residential mobility and housing tenure are important factors in estimating the likelihood of participating in elections in Britain. The more transient the population of an electoral constituency or ward, the less likely that residents will participate in elections. Abstention is greatest among newcomers and there are a few potential explanations. Newcomers have fewer vested interests in an area and as such, are less likely to participate in shaping its future. But also, as Rallings and Thrasher put it, “the costs of voting, in applying for postal votes or returning to a former ward to vote were greater for such electors and may have outweighed the perceived benefits of voting” (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, p. 48). Both of these themes fit in with the Downsian perspective of turnout estimation; one where the likelihood of public participation rests heavily on the perceived costs and benefits of doing so. Rallings et al’s ‘Seasonal factors, voter fatigue and the costs of voting’ (Rallings, Thrasher & Borisyuk, 2003) is an article that neatly illustrates the very real cost of physically being at the ballot box in local elections. But it is not only the perceived costs and benefits that are important factors in determining whether citizens will turn up to vote. The perceived closeness of elections or marginality also has a significant impact (Downs, 1957; Cox & Munger, 1982; Rallings & Thrasher, 1990; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Funk, 2008).
Drawing on data previously discussed in this project, it is certainly a possibility that the type of candidates standing will have some effect on turnout. This premise relies on the assumption that there is some recognition of candidates. Incumbents have already been shown to accrue a greater share of the vote than freshmen, but it is unclear whether these votes are at the expense of other candidates, or are instead ‘extra votes’ with voters turning out on election day who would not have done so, if the incumbent had not stood. Assessing wards where freshmen win and then go on to defend their seat at the next election may allow us to identify where incumbents get their electoral advantage from. If there is significant growth in turnout, relative to other wards won by the same party in that authority, it is possible that some, if not all, of those extra votes are ‘new’ votes and not at the expense of other candidates standing.

In order to test for this phenomenon, it is important that the data are controlled for a number of potential biases on results. As previously discussed, there are many exogenous influences on turnout, which will fluctuate from year-to-year. Considering this, a local ‘yard-stick’ needs to be created in order to offset measurements of fluctuations associated with the candidate’s change in incumbency status. The Sophomore Turnout Surge (STS) model for estimating incumbency related changes in turnout is detailed below.

The model operates in a similar way to the EPILP and RRILP models, which are detailed in chapter 3 and implemented in chapter 5. However, rather than comparing two different scenarios, the model aims to assess any relative impact, during the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle, on ward-level turnout. The
model compares two measures over two consecutive elections. Concentrating on the first half of the model, denoted by i, this segment concerns data recorded in the freshman year of the candidate’s electoral career. The first measure consists simply of turnout in a ward won by a freshman, in a safe seat, which in this instance is defined as a seat that is won by more than 20% of the vote. Denoted by τ, the measure is simply the recorded turnout of an electorally safe ward where a freshman wins and chooses to defend their seat at the next election. The other measure required is the ‘participatory yard-stick’, which in this case is defined as the average turnout of all wards won for that same party, that haven’t been considered already, in the same authority and in the same election year. This average measure of local turnout for the party is compared with the selected freshman ward to return a relative measure of ward-level turnout. The latter half of the model, this time denoted j, compares the same ward measures, though at the sophomore point of the cycle where the candidate chooses to defend the seat. STS for party category \( p \) can be expressed as follows:

\[
\text{STS}(p) = \left( \sum_{i=1}^{n_i} \frac{(\tau_{lki} - \varphi_{ki})}{n_i} \right) - \left( \sum_{j=1}^{n_j} \frac{(\tau_{lkj} - \varphi_{kj})}{n_j} \right)
\]

Where \( \varphi \) refers to the average turnout of all unselected safe seat wards in local authority \( k \) at the \( i \) point of the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle or point \( j \). \( \tau \) signifies turnout of the ward for the selected candidate \( l \) at either the \( i \) or \( j \) elections where the candidate is a winning freshman. In an attempt to compare like-with-like wards, the model only considers wards that were won by an
electorally ‘safe’ margin for the party, which in this instance is set as in excess of 20% of the vote in the freshman year of election. There is no pre-requisite for the candidate to go on and win their sophomore election. The model controls for variation of turnout within the local authority. Cases are not considered where average turnout data for the party within the local authority is missing or partially missing, a factor that has severely limited the number of cases considered for the Liberal Democrats. Uncontested elections are also not considered.

Table 7.1.1 displays the ward-level turnout group statistics for the different incumbent’s status by party. The data displayed indicate the average difference in turnout between the selected ward and the average for that party in the rest of the authority. For the 1,124 Conservative wards considered, the freshmen year of the cycle averaged some 0.94% below the average for the local authority, with a σ of 6.08. For the same wards, turnout was only marginally lower than the average for the rest of the authority in the respective sophomore years, recording -0.17% with a σ of 5.98. As a result, STS is 0.77%, a small increase in turnout over the cycle. The rise is roughly equivalent to 1.7% of the variation of average Conservative turnout, or 38 voters in wards considered (average electorate in the 2,248 Conservative wards considered = 4,910).

For Labour, ward turnout appears to be slightly more susceptible to the candidate’s status than for the Conservatives. A glance at table 7.1.1 shows that of the 2,008 wards considered, the freshmen years averaged some 0.04% above the average turnout for Labour within respective local authorities, with a σ of
5.23. In the sophomore year of the cycle, turnout has been increased, to 0.88% (with a σ of 4.85). Consequently, STS for Labour is equal to a 0.84% increase in turnout over the cycle. This is in turn is equivalent to some 2.4% of the variation of average Labour turnout or roughly 65 extra voters (average electorate in the 3,988 Labour wards considered = 7,738).

For the Liberal Democrats the number of cases considered is much smaller when compared to Labour and the Conservatives. Table 7.1.1 shows that just 246 wards (and thus 492 data points) are available for consideration after the requirements stipulated above are imposed on the data. For wards considered in the freshman year of the electoral cycle, turnout averaged 0.59% below the mean for respective local authorities, with a σ of 6.91. Like the data for the Conservatives and Labour, the sophomore year of the cycle averaged a higher relative turnout, though not to the same extent. Mean turnout in incumbent wards was 0.02% lower than the average for respective local authorities, with a σ of 7.43. STS is 0.62% for the Liberal Democrats. The relative value of the STS estimation for the Lib Dems puts it equivalent to 1.4% of the variation of average Lib Dem turnout, or 31 extra voters (average electorate in the 492 Lib Dem elections considered = 4,996).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Cycle Point</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Turnout Diff %</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>(τ-φ)/n (i)</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>0.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(τ-φ)/n (j)</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>0.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>(τ-φ)/n (i)</td>
<td>1,994</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>0.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(τ-φ)/n (j)</td>
<td>1,994</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>(τ-φ)/n (i)</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>0.441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(τ-φ)/n (j)</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>7.43</td>
<td>0.473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table 7.1.1 (%)(STS Group Stats) - (n)(Mean Turnout Diff %)(σ)(Error) 1974-2010 (n = 6,478)]
For all parties, relative turnout has been shown to rise to some degree over the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle. The increases are less than one percentage point of turnout, but between 1.4% and 2.4% of the variation of average turnout for respective parties. This variation accounts for the rough equivalent of between 31 and 65 extra voters in a ward, depending on the party. The variation in turnout over the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle can help explain some of the results previously discussed for data on the electoral effects of incumbency. The STS model suggests that the increase in turnout may account for a good deal of the rise in votes accrued by winning sophomores, though not all. However, in order to assess whether this rise is statistically significant for each of the parties, a comparison of means for the two points of the electoral cycle is required.

Table 7.1.2 displays results from Levene’s tests and t-tests for the two points of the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle in the STS model. For the Conservatives the Levene’s test results suggest that equality of variances can be assumed reporting an F-statistic of 0.38 with a significance of 0.538. The 0.77% increase in Sophomore Turnout Surge (STS) for the Tories reports a t-statistic of 3.018 that is significant and below the 0.005 level, when equal variances are assumed. For Labour wards there are slightly different results. Levene’s test results suggest that equality of variances cannot be assumed and has an F-statistic of 7.68 with a significance of 0.006, well below the 0.05 level required to reject the null hypothesis of equality of variance. The 0.84% increase in STS has a t-statistic of 5.228 that is significant and below the 0.001 level, when equal variances are not assumed. Table 7.1.2 also details results for Liberal Democrat wards. A Levene’s test suggests that equality of variances can be assumed, giving an F-
statistic of 0.488 with a significance of 0.485. The 0.62% increase in STS has a t-statistic of 0.952 and a p-value of 0.342. The test fails to report a p-value below the required level to be statistically confident that the means differ significantly.

![Table with statistical data]

Though small, for both Labour and the Conservative wards, turnout has been shown to increase significantly over the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle. For the Liberal Democrats this rise is not statistically significant, though this could be due to the relatively small number of cases that met the criteria to be considered for analysis. At this point it is worth noting that trying to maintain a sufficient number of Liberal Democrat cases was one of the motivations for including local election turnout data in General Election (GE) years. Local Election turnout has been shown to increase markedly in GE years (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997; Rallings et al, 2003). However, because of the way the model has been designed, fluctuations in turnout across the cycle are accounted for and these movements should not affect the results. As detailed above, the model takes relative turnout into consideration, so including GE year data in the model, does not in theory, alter any of the broad inferences made from the results.

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12 In order to test the strength of the model, the procedure was run again, this time excluding data where either the freshman or sophomore years fell on a General Election year. This severely reduced the number of cases, but the results, though slightly different, told a similar
There are two major implications from the results discussed. The first, relates to where incumbents accrue their ‘extra’ votes. The data revealed suggest that fielding incumbents may encourage some residents to turn out who wouldn’t have done so otherwise. Even though the numbers are relatively small, the results imply that incumbents are net contributors to turnout and this has a number of ramifications for the overall picture of how they manage to do better than both their colleagues and competitors. If turnout increases marginally over the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle in what are considered to be electorally safe seats, one explanation could be that incumbents are able to encourage voters to turn up and vote for them. However, it must be stressed that the evidence presented here does not confirm that those ‘extra voters’ are turning out in support of the incumbent councillor.

The second implication refers to the perceived marginality of wards contested by incumbents. According to literature on the effect of marginality on turnout (Downs, 1957; Cox & Munger, 1982; Rallings & Thrasher, 1990; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Funk, 2008), any influence on the perceived closeness of an election result is likely to depress turnout as it reduces the chance of voters being pivotal to the outcome. Considering this, could it be the case that when a well-known and popular incumbent candidate stands, it deters voters from turning out? Results discussed in this chapter do not imply that incumbency
reduces turnout, to the contrary, turnout increases relatively over the freshman-sophomore cycle.

This may be the case for a couple of reasons. First, as local elections are traditionally considered to be low information elections (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997), the change in a candidate’s status, from a freshman to an incumbent sophomore, may not have affected the perceived marginality of the ward. Second, as only safe seats are considered for the STS measure, the likelihood is that these elections would never have been electorally competitive for the opposition anyway.

Finally, section 7.1 has discussed data that support the notion of incumbency having an effect on turnout at local elections in England. Inferences that can be drawn from the results range from voter mobilization to electoral strategy. The data shown suggest that, for Labour and the Conservatives at least, sophomores seeking re-election are more likely than freshmen to encourage voters to turn out. They are net contributors to turnout, which leaves scope for the view that sophomores are better at ‘getting out the vote’ on election day.

7.2 – Ward Size

Ward size is another important feature in the study of incumbency advantage. Given that local democracy goes hand in hand with a sense of community identity, the ability of councillors to drum up support requires an ability to contact potential voters. How engaged and/or transient the local electorate is will clearly affect the efficacy of their efforts. However, the size of an electoral
ward is a very real and practical influence on the ability of councillors to contact residents they wish to represent. Larger wards will require greater effort to contact the same proportion of voters.

There have been numerous studies showing that ward size is important, that a sense of identity is usually felt to greater extent in relatively small geographical areas. In the United States Cutright & Rossi (1958) found that candidates performed better in their home precincts than elsewhere in a district, which indicates that voters may be more inclined to support someone that they know, or are likely to have met, by recognising their name on the ballot paper or meeting them during the campaign. Drawing on this research, we can imagine that wards with smaller electorates may, bar some exceptionally sparse wards, be easier for incumbents to ‘manage’ in terms of contact time with residents and the likelihood of knowing voters. Building on this, Foladare (1968), O’Loughlin (1981) and Eagles & Erfle (1989) have all pointed out the importance of community cohesion, or what is termed a ‘friends and neighbours effect’ on turnout and voting patterns. Indeed, Herbert Tingsten referred to the phenomenon as ‘the law of the social centre of gravity’ (Tingsten, 1938, pp.126-127), suggesting that the level of political engagement is influenced by the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the neighbourhood where candidates live. Put another way, the level of community cohesion, or lack of it, can have a marked influence. We can expect therefore, that smaller electorates are by definition more likely to ‘capture’ a homogenous group that may interact with one another to a greater degree than larger and more transient wards, “living in a neighbourhood with high concentrations of people of the same status will
accentuate the effect of that status as a source of political behaviour” (Foladare, 1968, pp.529).

We might expect then, that smaller wards are more likely to exhibit greater levels of electoral engagement and participation in local politics. Kevin Cox’s assessment of different environments’ effects on voting behaviour supports this claim, suggesting that different urban sizes are a factor that moderates the ‘neighbourhood effect’. This implies that smaller rural spaces may exhibit greater levels of engagement than larger and more urban ones (Cox, 1971). For instance, Malcolm Moseley (2007) goes on to explain that residents of small and more remote communities (i.e. towns and villages) tend to be more demanding when it comes to having a say in decisions that are likely to affect them. They are also more likely to be involved in the support and delivery of local services and are, proportionally at least, more engaged with local politics than their counterparts in larger and more urban city environments. There are various explanations for this difference, but perhaps one of the more compelling is the notion of mutual benefits. Local authorities in these areas frequently encourage a high degree of civic engagement and community delivery of services because of the ‘relief’ such resources offer to an authority’s budgetary constraints. Explanations from the literature suggest that there is a quid pro quo for authorities and residents to engage with one another and that small towns and villages are more likely to exhibit forms of community spirit and civic engagement. Verba & Nie (1972) claim that as local authorities grow in size and lose the sense of a close-knit community, interest in local elections dwindles. But Rallings & Thrasher also note that ‘it can be the case that small communities discourage competition’
(Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp.59), which is in line with Zaller’s (1998) assertions of incumbency working as a deterrent or ‘scare-off’ to any serious opposition candidates, giving rise to a greater electoral advantage.

Using data from 3MD quadrennial wards for the London Boroughs (LBs), Shire Districts (SDs) and Unitary Authorities (UAs), the Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP) model, as described in chapter 3, can be used to indicate relative incumbent performance across the ward sizes. The expectation is that relative SIP will decline as the size of the ward increases. As it is unlikely that ward size will be evenly distributed, in order to accurately test the assertion, electorate groups must be established for comparison.

Below is a histogram of electorate sizes for wards considered for analysis (see figure 7.2.1). There is a clear bimodal distribution along the electorate size variable and as indicated in the histogram below (see figure 7.2.1) this is entirely due to the different ranges of the ward types. The London Boroughs and Unitary Authorities average an electorate of 8,354 and 7,973 respectively, whilst the Shire Districts average a ward size of just 4,850. Rallings & Thrasher (1997) assess turnout and electoral behaviour across all ward types in England using four electorate groups within each type. However, as this analysis combines wards with a similar electoral cycle and number of vacancies, and the variance of the electorate for these wards are small, the electorate groups have been roughly divided into quartiles.
Table 7.2.1 displays the number of cases included and electorate sizes. The first quartile group comprises wards with electorate sizes of less than 4,492 and totals 1,976 cases. The second includes ward sizes between 4,492 and 6,111 and is made up of 2,232 cases. The third quartile group includes electorate sizes from 6,111 to below 8,111 and has 2,357 cases. Finally, the fourth quartile has the

![Histogram Electorate for LBs SDAs UAAs 1979-2010 (n = 9,854)](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartile</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Electorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>1,976</td>
<td>&lt; 4,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>2,232</td>
<td>&gt;= 4,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>2,357</td>
<td>&gt;= 6,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>2,397</td>
<td>&gt;= 8,111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
most cases, at 2,397. This group includes electorate sizes of 8,111 and above. When the data are controlled by party, again there are differences in the number of cases within each group. This is because the parties are spread slightly differently across types of authority in England (i.e. the Conservatives in the Shires and Labour in the Metropolitan Boroughs). Also, as figure 7.2.1 details, the authority types tend to have different electorate sizes. However, as table 7.2.2 shows, the imbalance is not severe. Table 7.2.2 also displays the mean SIP and σ for the quartiles by party. The data show a decline in SIP as the size of electorate increases, for all the parties. Figure 7.2.2 illustrates these results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Ward Size</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>σ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>7.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>5.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>8.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>1,094</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>9.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>7.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table -7.2.2 (Group Stats) - (n) (Mean SIP) (σ) 1979-2010 (n = 8,816))
For the Conservatives, there is a gradual decline in SIP over the quartiles. The results report SIP at 2.97%, with a σ of 7.54, for the first quartile. This then drops to 1.82%, with a σ of 5.42, for the second quartile. For the Tories, SIP ends up as low as 0.98%, with a σ of 3.21, in the fourth quartile, an overall drop of 2% across the groups. For Labour the pattern is similar. Average SIP for Labour’s first quartile group is 2.99%, with a σ of 8.62. This drops only slightly in the second quartile group to 2.82%, with a σ of 5.66. For the third quartile there is a much larger drop in SIP, to 1.56% with a σ 4.61. Again there is a small drop of around 0.11% to 1.45% SIP in the fourth quartile. Overall the fall between the first and fourth quartile groups for Labour and the Conservatives are similar, but the major distinction between the Conservatives and Labour is where the largest share in SIP falls. For Labour, most of the fall comes between the second and third quartile, whereas there appears to be a more consistent fall throughout the groups for the Conservatives.
For the Liberal Democrats, consistent with previously discussed data, SIP tends to be higher, though a similar trend to Labour and the Conservatives, of declining SIP is revealed. For the first quartile, SIP is reported as 5.84%, with a σ of 9.38. For the second quartile group there is a fall of 1.8%, to 4.04% with a σ of 7.09. The rate of fall continues in the third quartile, this time dropping 1.47% to 2.47% SIP, with a σ of 3.93. Finally, the fourth quartile has the smallest decline in SIP reporting 2.11% SIP, with a σ of 3.83. This is just 0.36% less than that reported for the third quartile group.

For all parties there is a clear decline in the average SIP as the size of a ward’s electorate increases. The greatest fall in SIP over the quartiles is experienced by the Liberal Democrats. However, for all party categories the decline in SIP is fairly flat between the third and fourth quartiles suggesting that any effect is likely to be greater in the smaller wards and ‘tail-off’ somewhat, as wards get larger. To assess the effect in more detail, a fixed effects ANOVA procedure was run for the quartile groups on SIP.

Table 7.2.3 displays the results for the 3,516 Conservative cases. The data show an F-statistic of 23.236 with significance below the 0.001 level. ANOVA data show that grouping the data in such a way does affect the average SIP variable to a significant degree, as SIP varies considerably. However, as discussed above, differences between the third and fourth quartiles for all parties are minimal when compared to the other groups, and so in an attempt to clearly assess whether the electorate’s effect plateaus for larger groups, a post hoc Tukey Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test is performed.
Table 7.2.4 displays results from a post hoc Tukey HSD test for the assigned Conservative electorate groups. The data suggest that all groups are significantly distinct from one another, having p-values below the 0.05 level, aside from the third and fourth quartiles that have a p-value of 0.820. The data shown in this table support the idea of a ‘plateauing’ of the interaction between ward size and average SIP. One of the implications from these data is that the effect of incumbency may be exacerbated in wards with smaller electorate sizes, particularly for the Conservatives. That is to say that Conservative incumbents may perform particularly well in smaller wards when compared to their freshmen colleagues.
For Labour, the overall thrust of the data tells a similar story. Table 7.2.5 displays results from a fixed effects ANOVA for the effect of the assigned electorate quartiles on SIP variance. The data indicate that the groups are significantly distinct, with an F-statistic of 16.660 and a p-value below the 0.001 level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1735.077</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>578.359</td>
<td>16.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>123377.233</td>
<td>3554</td>
<td>34.715</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125112.310</td>
<td>3557</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 7.2.5 (ANOVA) - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (Sig) 1979-2010 (n = 3,558))

Table 7.2.6 displays results from a post hoc Tukey HSD for the assigned Labour quartile groups. The results show that all groups are significantly distinct from one another having p-values below the 0.001 level, apart from the first quartile to the second, and the third quartile to the fourth, which have p-values of 0.993 and 0.973 respectively. There are a few implications from these results. Firstly, unlike the Conservative results, the major fall in SIP comes between the second and third quartile groups, suggesting that Labour incumbents are able to outperform their freshman counterparts, to a higher degree, in wards that are slightly larger. Also, as for the Conservatives, there is no significant difference between the third and fourth quartile groups, again implying that there is a natural point at which ward size effects plateau. It may be the case that smaller electorates are better suited to a particular electoral strategy than larger ones.
Although SIP is larger on average for the Liberal Democrats, analysis reveals a similar pattern to that for Labour and the Conservatives. Table 7.2.7 displays results from a fixed effects ANOVA test for the variance of SIP in and between the Lib Dem quartiles. The data tabulated indicates that some of the groups are significantly distinct from one another, with an F-statistic of 25.835 and a p-value below the 0.001 level. However, as for the results for the Conservatives and Labour, the ANOVA test only examines if there is group dispersion and not if all groups are statistically distinct from one another. So, in order to better assess the spread of any effect that ward size may have on incumbent performance, a post hoc Tukey HSD test was undertaken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartile (i)</th>
<th>Quartile (j)</th>
<th>Avg SIP</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>95% Low</th>
<th>95% Upp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>.993</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>1.39*</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>1.50*</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>.993</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>1.30*</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>1.42*</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>-1.39*</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-2.10</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>-1.30*</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-2.08</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>-1.50*</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-2.19</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>-1.42*</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
<td>-0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>-0.78</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 7.2.6 – Labour Post Hoc Tukey HSD - (Mean SIP) (Std. Error) (P) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1979-2010 (n = 3,558) (*Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1118.971</td>
<td>25.835</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1738</td>
<td>43.312</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1741</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 7.2.7 (ANOVA) - (Sum of Squares) (df) (Mean Square) (F) (Sig) 1979-2010 (n = 1,742))
Table 7.2.8 shows results from a post hoc Tukey HSD test for the Liberal Democrat quartile groups. The data suggest that, as for the Conservatives, all quartile groups are significantly distinct from one another, with p-values below the 0.005 level, aside from the third and the fourth quartiles which have a p-value of 0.872 between one another. The implications from these result are, firstly, as for the Conservatives the major fall in SIP comes between the first and second quartile groups, a fall of 1.82% SIP. However, there is also a large fall between the second and third, dropping some 1.52% SIP. Second, as for Labour and the Conservatives, there is no significant difference between the third and fourth quartile groups. These data support assertions previously made that there may be a ‘natural’ threshold where any effect the electorate size has on relative incumbent performance falls away entirely. This could suggest either a general change in the strategy of incumbent councillors (and perhaps candidates) when wards reach this size, or simply that wards of this size or above become impractical for councillors to attain higher levels of electoral distinction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quartile (i)</th>
<th>Quartile (j)</th>
<th>Avg SIP</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>95% Low</th>
<th>95% Upp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>1.82*</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>3.33*</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>3.70*</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>-1.82*</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-2.92</td>
<td>-0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>1.51*</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>1.88*</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>-3.33*</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-4.48</td>
<td>-2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>-1.51*</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-2.57</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>-3.70*</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-4.97</td>
<td>-2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>-1.88*</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-3.08</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>.872</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 7.2.8 – Liberal Democrat Post Hoc Tukey HSD - (Mean SIP) (Std. Error) (P) (95% Confidence Intervals, Upper & Lower) 1979-2010 (n = 1,742) (*Mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level))
The data reported above support the idea that relative incumbent performance is moderated by ward size. There is a pattern for all three major parties that suggests that smaller wards, in particular wards that contain less than around 4,500 voters, foster better conditions for incumbents to retain their seat. Also, the data imply that there may be a natural threshold, at around 6,000 electors, where the relative performance of incumbents bottoms out, at between 1% and 2.5% SIP. Although SIP falls initially for all parties and then flattens in the third and fourth quartile groups (~>6,000), for Labour the major drop comes between the second and third quartiles. As for other data on incumbent performance discussed in this thesis, the Liberal Democrats perform better that both Labour and the Conservatives across all quartiles.

The size of a ward’s electorate is a simplistic indicator of the task that faces incumbents who seek re-election, and fails to consider more nuanced information about the local electoral conditions successful and unsuccessful incumbent’s experience, such as community and the rural/urban ward classification. However, for incumbents who seek to preserve their elected status either on the doorstep or through their role as a councillor, it is undeniable that the scale of that task increases as the number of potential voters within the ward rises and, although there are likely to be many confounding variables with a simple comparison of groups, as used in this analysis, the data discussed in this chapter appear to be at least in line with the theory.

All the analysis above has ignored a simple yet interesting facet of electorate size; that due to the discrete nature of a vote (i.e. they come in 1’s), each counts
for a greater share in smaller wards than in larger ones. Table 7.2.9 displays the mean SIP based on votes cast rather than vote share. The data show that the number of votes advantage an incumbent achieves remains fairly constant for both Labour and the Conservatives, varying by only a few votes either side of 30 and 25 respectively. The effect appears only to have been dampened for the Liberal Democrats and some variation remains. The Lib Dems average almost 60 votes in the first quartile group, falling to around 40 in the third, which follows differences established between the parties earlier in this thesis. These data present an interesting set of implications. Not only do the data suggest that there is little variation in the number of votes an incumbent receives, when compared to freshmen, but also that the Lib Dems are the only party to make any considerable gain in the number of votes in smaller wards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Ward Size</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP (Votes)</th>
<th>σ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>29.86</td>
<td>72.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>24.39</td>
<td>69.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>20.42</td>
<td>59.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>25.31</td>
<td>85.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,516</td>
<td>24.60</td>
<td>72.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>32.27</td>
<td>75.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>34.61</td>
<td>65.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>25.41</td>
<td>66.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>1,094</td>
<td>30.23</td>
<td>84.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,558</td>
<td>30.17</td>
<td>74.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1st Quartile</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>59.10</td>
<td>93.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>2nd Quartile</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>47.91</td>
<td>79.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3rd Quartile</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>40.09</td>
<td>63.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4th Quartile</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>42.73</td>
<td>80.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,742</td>
<td>47.47</td>
<td>79.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 7.2.9(Group Stats) - (n) (Mean SIP Votes) (σ) 1979-2010 (n = 8,816))
Where the SIP measure varied considerably, the data presented in figure 7.2.9 suggest that there may be an optimum number of voters that incumbent councillors reach. The frequency of votes do vary for the Liberal Democrats, though not to the same extent as it does for the original SIP measure. In this instance the data suggest that the size of the electorate may have little to no effect on incumbent performance. What the data do suggest is that there may be an optimal number of extra voters that councillors are able to recruit and this has progressively greater electoral value as the electorate size of a ward falls. As the data suggest that incumbents perform only proportionally better in smaller wards, no evidence presented in this section has suggested that smaller electorates actually foster an environment that encourages more voters to turnout and vote, apart from data shown for the Liberal Democrats, which shows some growth in the number of voters in smaller wards. Overall the evidence suggests that it is scale alone that inflates the value of every vote.
Where the analyses presented in this section discuss the effect of ward size, sub-
chapter 7.3 goes on to describe the effect of Rural/Urban classification on the
performance of incumbent councillors.

7.3 – Rural/Urban Classification

Section 7.2 introduced the examination of ward characteristics as an influence
on the performance of incumbent councillors by presenting Standardised
Incumbent Performance (SIP) data by variations in the size of ward electorates.
The results indicated that councillors in wards with smaller electorates tended
to perform, relatively better than their colleagues in wards with larger
electorates. This led to the assertion that scale may have an impact on incumbent
success, but only to a minor degree as effects were largely eroded when
compared to the absolute values. To build on these data, section 7.3 introduces
evidence from some of the literature concerned with geographical influences on
elections in Britain. Using standard Rural/Urban classifications, determined by
the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the sub-chapter goes on to assess
whether incumbents, for all the parties, are better suited for re-election in wards
of differing urban class. The section then uses SIP data to assess any urban-
effects on the performance of incumbents for the three major parties.

It is clear that geography matters in English local elections. It is well established
in the literature that geographical effects lead to the parties dominating different
areas of England, or at least being electorally competitive to different extents
across the country (Johnston & Pattie, 2006; Gardiner & Matthews, 2007). The
effect is such that some communities have a history of one-party control,
effectively eliminating any serious opposition in their authority. For instance the Labour party has dominated the London Borough of Newham since the 1970s, occupying at least 90% of seats and frequently all of them. Geographical effects can also reduce the contest to a two horse race, as in the Unitary Authority of Plymouth, where Labour and the Conservatives regularly exchange control of the council, but the Liberal Democrats have not managed to secure more than two or three seats since 1990, and often fail to win any.

Even looking more broadly, by comparing types of authority, we can observe slight differences in party competitiveness. For instance, in the North of England, the MBs have traditionally been dominated by the Labour party, which is a result in part, of Britain’s industrial heritage. These niches are the equivalent of home and away turf for the parties, illustrating how the local economic, cultural and community environment has an effect on the political geography of the nation. Far from a simplistic North-South divide, the geography of England is nuanced, and it is important to emphasise that there are strong local patterns in voting behaviour that follow as a result. What we observe nationally is the sum of a large number of interacting processes locally, and because of this, similar sorts of places tend to have similar electoral outcomes. There are geographies of voting that are built from the bottom-up (Johnston & Pattie, 2006, pp.42). This is an important concept when assessing local electoral outcomes, that there is a complexity to local politics, part of which is explained by where people live. It is clear not only that geography matters in shaping people’s partisan perspectives, but also that engagement in a community and local politics has an ‘environmental’ dimension. That is, a number of local conditions can influence
residents’ political behaviour and ultimately electoral outcomes; the Rural/Urban classification is one of these dimensions.

In terms of the lifestyles and values of residents, distinctions have become blurred, but differences between rural and urban dwellers still persist (Herbert, 2006, pp.194). In their research on the attitudes of rural residents, ‘Living Lives in Different Ways? Deprivation, Marginalization & Changing Lifestyles in Rural England; Cloke et al (1997) found that rural inhabitants, particularly long-term residents, felt as though they belonged to a rural community. They also found that long-term residents are more likely to engage in a local dialogue, which can at times, exhibit mildly hostile attitudes towards newcomers who are deemed not to contribute to the local community. Demographically also, rural Britain is different to the cities. Residents tend to be older, are more likely to own their homes, to be middle class and less ethnically mixed (Moseley, 2007, pp.214). So it is apparent then, that there are clear divides between the broad definitions of rural and urban life. The implications for this research are that rural communities can be considered more likely to offer a suitable ‘environment’ for councillors to join or build networks between engaged residents who participate in local politics and their elections.

Drawing on this theme, I propose an ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ distinction in local political behaviour. Not simply in terms of party success, but also in how well incumbents of all parties perform. The literature has presented strong evidence in support of a rural/urban dimension for electoral outcomes, and so this chapter aims to build on the established research, asking whether the
characteristics of rural areas permeate partisan preferences and offer a better outcome for incumbent councillors. If rural communities are more engaged in local politics, then incumbent councillors, for all the parties, would stand to benefit. The analysis begins by presenting re-election rates for the different parties throughout the three classifications.

Table 7.3.1 shows average success rates for incumbents in the different rural/urban classes. There is a clear difference in the number of cases for each party category within the classifications and this is for a number of reasons, which will be briefly outlined. First, the classifications are derived from the 2001 census, which restricts the temporal frame within which the analysis can operate. As such, 2001 has arbitrarily been taken as the mid-point to which the classifications are generalized. The analysis only considers cases between 1991 and 2010. Second, as well as missing classification data for the Metropolitan Boroughs, due to redistricting in 2004, linking classifications to all wards throughout the 20 year period has proven difficult, and so there is a significant skew in the number of cases towards the later rather than earlier years. This isn’t too problematic, but must be considered when interpreting data discussed later in this section. A further discussion of the rationale behind the construction of the rural/urban dataset can be found in chapter 3. Nevertheless there is a sufficient number of cases to draw broad inferences on the fortunes of defending councillors within the various classifications.

For the Conservatives, incumbents who choose to stand again are successful to differing degrees across the classifications. Urban wards exhibit an 86.3% re-
election rate for the almost seven and a half thousand incumbents considered. This figure rises almost three points in the Town & Fringe wards, to 89.2% for the more than two thousand cases considered. In the Village, Hamlet & Isolated Dwellings (VHID) wards, some nineteen out of every twenty councillors who stood for re-election were successful, more than 5% higher than for the Town & Fringe wards. For the Conservatives there was a more than 8% increase in the probability of success between the classes considered.

For the almost eight thousand Labour incumbents in urban wards, a 76.6% hit rate (HR) is reported. Although this figure appears low, especially compared to Conservatives for the same class, we must note that the missing MB data, discussed above, are mostly dense urban areas. In the MBs Labour have a 86.7% HR for the almost seven thousand Labour incumbents who have sought re-election. This is compared to just 79.2% for the more than two thousand Conservatives and 86.1% for a similar number of Liberal Democrats. So Labour HR figures for urban wards are almost certainly an underestimate. For Labour incumbents contesting Town & Fringe wards this figure drops slightly to 74.3% and then goes on to drop significantly in the VHID wards to just 51.3%, though the number of cases drop dramatically also, to just 189. This suggests that there may be an overwhelming natural selection bias to consider. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that the overall pattern for Labour incumbents is opposite to that of the Tories, showing that Labour councillors tend to win more in urban wards than in rural ones.
The results for the Liberal Democrats fall squarely between the two other, and ideologically opposed parties. For the LDs, urban wards report a HR of 80.9% for the more than five thousand incumbent councillors considered, whilst this rate dips by more than three points for the just over one thousand Town & Fringe wards considered, to just 77.8%. For the VHID wards, just over 71% of the more than seven hundred incumbents were successful in their electoral defence, roughly six and a half points lower than for Town & Fringe wards. For the Liberal Democrats, variation between the urban classifications appears similar to that for Conservatives, at just under 10-points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Rural/Urban Class</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Inc. HR %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Village, Hamlet &amp; Isolated Dwellings</td>
<td>2,561</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town &amp; Fringe</td>
<td>2,027</td>
<td>89.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7,496</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Village, Hamlet &amp; Isolated Dwellings</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town &amp; Fringe</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7,916</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Village, Hamlet &amp; Isolated Dwellings</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town &amp; Fringe</td>
<td>1,066</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5,014</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table -7.3.1 (Group Stats) - (n) (Incumbent HRs %) All District Types Excl. MBs 1991-2010 (n = 27,906))

Whilst table 7.3.1 shows variation in the re-election rates of incumbent councillors in England, it is worth noting that these percentages are statistically distinct from one another, as the Chi-Squared tests in table 7.3.2 detail. For all three major parties considered, Pearson Chi-Squared tests have a p-value below the 0.001 level with two degrees of freedom, an indication that the re-election rates are likely to be relatively distinct from one another. However, although an indicator of sorts, in this instance the Chi-Squared test is not the best tool for electoral analysis without an illustration of the directional effect for each of the
parties. The test reveals merely the statistical deviance between the subgroups.

To assist, figure 7.3.1 shows the figures for each party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Rural/Urban Class</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>123.524</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>139.587</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n of valid cases</td>
<td>12,084</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>65.452</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>56.654</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n of valid cases</td>
<td>9,026</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>38.352</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>36.046</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n of valid cases</td>
<td>6,796</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 7.3.2 Rural/Urban groups by Party (Chi-Square Tests) - (Value & n) (df) (Asymp. Sig 2-Sided 1991-2010 (n = 27,906))

As anticipated by the literature and discussed in minor detail above, for Conservative and Labour councillors who choose to stand again, they experience different rates of success in the typified VHID wards. Conservatives fare demonstrably well, whilst Labour incumbents’ fate is roughly even at 51%. This difference narrows in the more urban wards. However, perhaps more interesting than the differences between the two parties, is the results for the Lib Dems,
which fall squarely and consistently between them. Before proceeding a note of caution must be made. As previously indicated, re-election rates can be a biased indicator of performance, particularly over small time frames. The SIP measure developed and discussed earlier in this thesis is a more objective measure of incumbent performance. Table 7.3.3 shows SIP group statistics for the classifications for the three major parties.

As explained in previous chapters, the SIP model is an unbiased estimator of relative incumbent performance in elections and indicates the disparity between incumbent and freshman performance. Data presented in table 7.3.3 show that the rural classes of wards have a higher average SIP. In turn, rural conditions may be more favourable for incumbents of all parties. For the Conservatives, urban classified wards average a SIP of just 1.88%, whilst Town & Fringe and VHID wards average markedly higher SIP, at 3.85% and 4.11% respectively. Although there is little difference between the more rural ward classifications it is clear that there is a large difference between urban wards and the more rural ones, in the region of 2% SIP.

For Labour the results are similar. Average SIP in urban classified wards is 1.84%, whereas SIP is significantly higher in more rural wards at 4.93% and 5.63% for the Town & Fringe and VHID classifications respectively. Like data for the Conservatives, there is a substantial gap between the SIP of urban wards and the SIP of more rural ones, in this instance around 3%. However, it must be noted that there are few cases considered for Labour VHID wards. So, in this
instance the SIP result for Town & Fringe wards can support a more general estimation for VHID wards.

For the Liberal Democrats the results are similar to those for the Conservatives and Labour, though as expected SIP is higher for all ONS classifications. For the Urban class, the Liberal Democrats report an average SIP of 3.15%, which is around 1.3% higher than for Labour and the Conservatives. This difference is in line with the SIP findings discussed earlier. For the Town & Fringe and the VHID classifications, as for the two major parties, SIP is markedly higher at 6.61% and 5.83% respectively, a gap of around 2.7-3.5% SIP although, as for Labour results, a note of caution is required due to the low number of cases for the VHID wards considered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Rural/Urban Class</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>σ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Village, Hamlet &amp; Isolated Dwellings</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>6.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town &amp; Fringe</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>6.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1,766</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Village, Hamlet &amp; Isolated Dwellings</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>8.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town &amp; Fringe</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>8.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Village, Hamlet &amp; Isolated Dwellings</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>8.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Town &amp; Fringe</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>7.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table – 7.3.3 (Group Stats) - (n) (SIP) (σ) 1991-2010 (n = 5,485))
Nevertheless, for all parties there is a clear SIP gap between the ward classifications. As expected, the results show that incumbency has greater electoral value in rural communities. Figure 7.3.3 illustrates the pattern for the three parties across the classifications. It is clear that for all parties SIP varies similarly. For the Conservatives the difference between Town & Fringe and VHID wards is smallest, followed for Labour, which exhibits a slightly larger gap between the classifications. For the Liberal Democrats there is actually a slight drop in SIP between these types of ward. However, in reality there is no significant and therefore meaningful difference between the Town & Fringe and VHID classifications for all parties.

Overall it is clear that the difference is not as nuanced as the number of ONS classifications, but instead shows a more modest effect, one simply between rural and urban areas. As a result, the three classifications can be collapsed into two groups; Rural, comprising VHID and Town & Fringe wards, and the previously described Urban class.
Table 7.3.4 displays group statistics for the new Rural and Urban classified ward groups for the parties. Though the Urban classified statistics are familiar, Rural SIP averages for the parties are 3.95% for the Conservatives, 5% for Labour and 6.44% for the Liberal Democrats. This follows previous patterns for the parties, though standard deviations have widened slightly. The new table (7.3.4) indicates that there is an almost 2.06% gap in SIP between the classifications for the Conservatives, which is less than the reported 3.15% for Labour incumbents and also less than the 3.29% reported for the Liberal Democrats also. These estimates can now be compared using independent t-tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural - Urban</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>0.272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1,766</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>0.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>0.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>0.597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1,053</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>0.152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.3.5 displays the results from Levene's tests and independent t-tests for SIP between the reclassified Rural and Urban groups for the parties. For the Conservatives a Levene’s test reports an F-statistic of 133.117, which has a corresponding p-value well below the 0.001 level, the assumption of equal variances can be rejected. The resulting t-value is high at 7.073 and with 823.328 degrees of freedom the 2.06 difference in means is statistically significant, with a p-value well below the 0.001 level. For Labour the Levene's test reports an F-statistic of 62.306 with an associated p-value below the 0.001 level, meaning that
the null hypothesis can also be rejected. So, the t-statistic of 4.476 has a corresponding p-value well below the 0.001 level, with 150.783 degrees of freedom. As for the Conservatives, the group means are statistically distinct from one another when equal variances are not assumed. The data show a similar story for the Liberal Democrats. The Levene's test returns an F-statistic of 74.682 and corresponding a p-value that is below the 0.001, meaning that equal variances for the groups cannot be assumed. Considering this, the t-test reports a t-statistic of 5.340, and with 206.089 degrees of freedom a p-value less than the 0.001 level. Similar to results described for the Conservatives and for Labour, these data also show that the group averages are statistically distinct from one another and support the hypothesis of urban-effects on the relative performance of incumbents for all parties. Independent t-tests show significant distinctions between the classifications, by between 2.1% and 3.3% SIP.

Before discussing the implications, it is best to clarify their limitations and the rationale for doing so. First, as previously discussed analyses for the SIP and SRS constructed measures have consistently revealed, the Liberal Democrats have tended to exhibit greater levels of relative incumbent performance than Labour, as they both have over the Conservatives. This suggests, not that the Conservatives do worse than Labour or the Liberal Democrats, but rather that incumbency has less electoral value for Conservative incumbents when compared to the other parties. But as table 7.3.5 shows, the gap in SIP between the classifications is far less for the Conservatives than for Labour and the Lib Dems. This does not automatically imply that urban-effects are weakest for the Conservatives and greatest for the Liberal Democrats. We know from previous
examinations that Conservative SIP is less ‘elastic’ than it is for the other parties, and as such when considering any effect, it is the relative change in SIP that we are interested in reporting (i.e. the pattern). As the vast majority of cases considered are from wards classified as Urban, the difference in performance across the classifications can be compared in another way. This time by measuring the change in SIP as a ratio of the party’s urban average, what can be termed as the ‘Urban-Effects Coefficient’. The results reveal that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives exhibit the least relative growth in SIP between the rural/urban classes. ‘Urban-Effects Coefficients’ for the Lib Dems and the Conservatives are 1.04 and 1.10 respectively. Labour’s is greatest, with an ‘Urban-Effects Coefficient’ of 1.71. These coefficients are a more accurate reflection of the relative effect that the rural/urban conditions have on the average SIP for each party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Levene’s</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>133.117</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>8.621</td>
<td>2394</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>0.239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>7.073</td>
<td>823.328</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>0.292</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>62.306</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>6.788</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>4.476</td>
<td>150.783</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>74.682</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>7.467</td>
<td>1234</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>5.340</td>
<td>206.089</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.616</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table - 7.3.5 (Levene’s & Indep t-test): (F) (Sig) (t) (df) (Sig) (SIP) (Error) 1991-2010 (n = 5,485)]

The objective of this section has been to reveal the effect that a ward’s rural/urban classification has on the relative performance of incumbents for all the parties. It has tested whether councillors from more rural communities do better than those in cities and more densely populated areas. It is clear that the Conservatives dominate the countryside, where almost nineteen out of every twenty councillors who stood again, in the VHID classified wards, were re-
elected. For the Liberal Democrats, incumbents do less well in the VHIDs though in the Town & Fringe districts the HR improves. Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats do considerably better than Labour for whom just over half are re-elected in the VHIDs and less than three quarters are successful in Town & Fringe wards. Though it must be noted that fewer Labour candidates win in the first place in order to be able to stand for re-election (see figure 7.3.1). While tory incumbent candidates tend to experience higher re-election rates in the countryside, Labour do comparatively better in the cities. The Liberal Democrats have been ascribed their own established areas, the so-called Liberal ‘heartlands’ (Dorling et al, 1998; MacAllister et al, 2002). Once described as the Celtic fringe, these areas comprise; north west Scotland, central Wales and the south west of England. These data are simply a reflection of English electoral geography, supporting the already well-established literature on the success of the parties in different areas across the country.

However, what is most striking is that relative incumbent performance (SIP), for all parties, is considerably better in rural wards when compared to more urban ones. For all the parties, rural wards exhibit higher levels of SIP, with t-tests confirming the differences are significant. The data are consistent with those discussed earlier in the thesis. SIP averages for the Liberal Democrats in both rural and urban districts exceed that for Labour and the Conservatives. Estimated urban-effects coefficients indicate that Labour candidates are affected most by the classifications, but the most notable facet of the results is that the effect is clearly relevant to all parties. Regardless of a party's overall success across the classifications, the analyses have provided strong evidence in support
of the notion that rural communities offer more favourable conditions for councillors to defend their seats.

7.4 – Concluding Remarks

Chapter 7 has discussed what can be considered, the structural factors that affect an incumbent’s performance in local elections; turnout, ward size and rural/urban classification. Beginning with turnout, the chapter introduced the Sophomore Turnout Surge (STS) constructed model. The estimator was used to assess the impact of incumbency on ward-level turnout. Although small, for Labour and the Conservatives turnout has been shown to increase statistically significantly over the freshman-sophomore electoral cycle. For the Liberal Democrats this rise is not statistically significant, though this could be due to the small number of cases that met the model's criteria. Implications of these results include understanding where incumbency advantage comes from, where incumbents accrue their ‘extra votes’. The analyses suggest that incumbents may be able to encourage a small number of people to turnout, in which case incumbents are net contributors to turnout. When a councillor stands for re-election, between 30 and 65 extra voters to turn out.

Chapter 7 then went on to identify the effect that ward size may have on incumbent performance. Using multimember wards the chapter assessed the hypothesis that smaller wards exhibited more favourable conditions for councillors to defend their position. Section 7.2 showed that SIP varied according to the size of the electorate. For all three major parties, smaller wards, in particular wards that contain less than 4,500 voters, appeared to exhibit the
highest SIP. Also, there appeared to be a threshold at roughly the 6,000 mark where the performance of incumbents levelled out for all the parties. Results also revealed that the Liberal Democrats performed better than Labour and Conservative incumbents across all electorate sizes. However, when assessing the effect of electorate size using absolute votes, the difference across the electorate groups was almost entirely eliminated, except for the Lib Dems where the effect was only dampened.

Finally, sub-chapter 7.3 considered urban-effects on councillors’ performance. Results revealed that SIP varies considerably over the ONS classifications, by roughly 2.1% to 3.3%, depending on the party. There is extensive evidence in the literature to support these results, that rural wards have significantly higher levels of SIP than urban ones. Labour incumbents were most susceptible to urban-effects, reporting an ‘Urban-Effects Coefficient’ of 1.71, compared to just 1.1 for the Conservatives and 1.04 for the Liberal Democrats. The concept of a rural ‘community’ in the countryside fits neatly with potential explanations for these results. Such as, differences in the local environment may affect and possibly homogenise the behaviour of those groups within different geographies.

The overall narrative of chapter 7 suggests that there are structural effects on the performance of councillors defending their seats. Incumbent performance has been shown to vary alongside changes in the ward-level environment. This is important as it suggests that councillors have a connection with their wards’ characteristics, and their electoral fortunes are shaped by them. Analyses in this chapter suggest that incumbency not only encourages participation, but also that
some environments offer improved electoral conditions for candidates. Chapter 8 develops these discussions, presenting results from candidate-level survey data, on their methods of campaigning and perceptions of incumbency effects in local elections.
Chapter 8 – Candidates’ Attitudes & Behaviour

Chapter 7 discussed some of the structural influences on councillors’ re-election prospects in England. The chapter revealed a sophomore effect on turnout, how incumbents fare in smaller wards and how well they perform in communities of varying rural/urban classification. The results suggest that small, rural communities demonstrate better conditions for incumbent councillors to mount a successful electoral defence. In summary, chapter 7 proposed that a councillor’s social environment has a significant impact on their electoral fortune.

Chapter 8 aims to paint a broad picture of the electoral value of incumbency from the perspective of those who actually contest local elections. Moving away from the utilisation of aggregate local election data, used throughout this thesis, the chapter presents results from a set of seven questions asked in the 2011 and 2012 Annual Local Election Candidate Survey, conducted by The Election Centre at Plymouth University. Data are compared across groups of candidates with varying levels of experience in order to ‘triangulate’ perspectives. Questions asked were based on a number of existing explanations for incumbency advantage detailed in the literature. This allowed us to categorise chapter 8 into three consistent themes; Experience, Connectivity and Campaigns. For the surveys, a statement about the electoral fortunes of incumbent councillors precedes the seven questions:
“Incumbents seeking re-election are often successful. Below is a list of possible explanations for why this might be the case”

(Annual Candidate Survey, 2011-2012)

The statement is followed by several explanations, which quiz respondents for their perspective. They are asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Further information regarding the survey and methodology can be found in chapter 3. This chapter aims to reveal candidates’ perceptions of incumbency, with the aim of informing the general discussion of possible explanations of the electoral advantage, as well as any behavioural differences that may arise. It has become clear, from evidence presented thus far in this thesis that councillors defending seats do better than their challengers. As such, questions directed at those competing with one another for local government may offer an ‘insider’s view’ as to why this is the case and help to direct further research on the topic.

The dataset used for this chapter’s investigation is comprised of responses from candidates in England & Wales, split roughly evenly over 2011 and 2012. A close examination of survey responses has revealed little to no variation of results over both years and over all the parties, for all seven questions. As there is little variation there are likely to be few methodological implications when combining the two datasets. However, data have been broken down by respondents’ experience status in order to identify any meaningful differences between them. This should allow the scrutiny and comparison of opinions between those
groups and distinguish those with a relevant perspective from those without. These experience groups are as follows:

- **Incumbent** (a councilor defending their seat)
- **Freshman** (first time candidate, no previous experience as a councilor)
- **Experienced Freshman** (candidate, previous experience as a councilor)
- **Serial Freshman** (candidate, stood previously, no councilor experience)

More importantly, as the survey is conducted post-election, the possibility that candidates’ responses may be affected by the election result must also be considered. For all statements, and categories of candidate, the vast majority of response proportions were broadly even suggesting that whether a respondent won or lost in the election had little effect on their answer. The exceptions to this finding are the responses of Incumbents for two questions; one regarding incumbency advantage, and the other local support. These discrepancies are discussed in sub-chapter 8.1. Other than these, the post-election outcome is presumed to have little to no effect on the results.

Regarding an explanation for the advantages associated with incumbency, what has become clear from the literature is that the investigation of differences in the electoral performance of candidates may be greatly informed by an analysis of candidates’ status and behaviour. In previous surveys, researchers demonstrated that there is little difference in the social characteristics of candidates and councillors. Even if every incumbent councillor were defeated at the polls the councillor demographic would change little (Rallings *et al*, 2010, pp. 376-377).
Considering this, utilising candidate survey data to identify differences in the behaviour of candidates and whether incumbency status might be electorally advantageous, offers this project a potentially rich vein of investigation into the potential explanations for an advantage in local elections.

Table 8.0.1 displays the number of candidates who responded to the 2011 and 2012 candidate surveys and their Hit Rate (HR %), broken down by party and electoral experience before their respective elections. What is immediately clear is that electoral experience matters. Almost three quarters of Incumbent respondents to the survey returned to the council (72.4%, 234/323), which is more than three times the likelihood of a Freshman survey respondent winning (23.6%, 177/750). Experienced Freshman have a HR of 31.1%, (51/164), which is seven and a half points higher than Freshmen, and roughly 18% higher than Serial Freshmen (12.4%, 82/662).

Incumbent respondents have a greater chance of winning than their counterparts. Even when we consider the different parties, incumbency appears to offer more favourable odds of success. For instance, 84.6% (99/117) of Conservative Incumbent survey respondents were re-elected, more than twice that for Tory Experienced Freshmen (39.4%, 13/33). This figure is two and a half times the share of Conservative Freshmen (33.9%, 64/189) and over five times the portion of Serial Freshmen for the Conservatives (16.7%, 20/120). The results for Labour candidates are almost identical. Four of every five Incumbent Labour respondents were successfully re-elected (79.7%, 55/69). As for the Conservatives, this share is more than twice that for Experienced Freshmen
(36.1%, 22/61), two and a half times the proportion of Labour Freshmen (31.6%, 68/215), and more than three and a half times the success rate of Serial Freshmen (21.9%, 40/183).

Finally, for the Liberal Democrats the results suggest that three out of every five Incumbent survey respondents successfully defended their seat (59.5%, 50/84). Although this success rate is worse than for the two major parties, relative to other types of Liberal Democrat candidate it is far higher. For instance, the re-election rate of Lib Dem Incumbents is around four and a half times that for Freshmen and Experienced Freshmen (13.3%, 16/120 & 12.8%, 5/39 respectively). Also, the success of Lib Dem Incumbents far exceeds that for Serial Freshmen, by a factor of six (9.7%, 13/134). In this sense, even though the Liberal Democrats appear to do worse than the two major parties, a circumstance that may have been shaped by the party’s relatively poor national performance in the 2011 and 2012 elections, relatively speaking, incumbency appears to be worth more to Lib Dem respondents than the two other parties.

The most interesting aspect of the data revealed in table 8.0.1 is that, of all non-incumbent respondents, Experienced Freshmen tended to do better. This signals that electoral experience may be a factor to consider in the estimation of electoral success between the different types of candidate. At a glance we can see that those Freshmen respondents with previous experience on the council were almost one and a half times more likely to win (31.1%, 51/164) than Freshmen candidates (23.6%, 177/750), and two and a half times more likely than Serial Freshmen (12.4%, 82/662). This pattern continues when we take the different
party categories into account. For the Conservatives table 8.0.1 shows that 39.4% (13/33) of Experienced Freshmen respondents were elected at the 2011 and 2012 elections. This is almost one and a quarter times the HR of Tory Freshmen candidates (33.9%, 64/189), and again almost two and a half times the HR of Serial Freshmen (16.7%, 20/120).

The pattern is again similar for Labour respondents, with 36.1% (22/61) of Experienced Freshmen winning their electoral contests, compared to just 31.6% (68/215) for Labour’s Freshmen. As for the Conservatives, the gap is wider between Experienced Freshmen and Serial Freshmen. Those who have served some time on the council have a success rate one and a half times that of those who have stood on multiple occasions but never won (21.9%, 40/183). For the Liberal Democrats the evidence is less clear. Experienced Freshmen and Freshmen have largely similar results (12.8%, 5/39 and 13.3%, 16/120 respectively), though Experienced Freshmen still outperform their Serial Freshmen counterparts by a factor of almost one and a half (9.7%, 13/134).

As a note of caution, at times the number of cases considered for comparison of these subgroups is rather small (see table 8.0.1) and therefore these data must be interpreted with a wider margin of error. As such, the most that can be said about the findings discussed is that they are supportive of the notion of experience-effects. Incumbents clearly do best, and Experienced Freshmen consistently do better than both types of non-experienced Freshmen. However, further research will be required to clarify the extent of these findings.
Sub-chapter 8.1 discusses results from three of the seven questions put to respondents. These are concerned with the experience gained from working on a council, whether incumbents have more reliable support from local voters and whether they believe incumbents still have an electoral advantage over their challengers. Section 8.2 is concerned with the profile of incumbents amongst local residents as well as their relationship with the local media. Sub-chapter 8.3 deals with local election campaigning, seeking to identify candidates’ views on any differences in the level of effort and support between types of candidate. Finally, section 8.4 will offer some concluding remarks, accompanied by relevant explanations from the literature.

8.1 – Experiential Advantage

The experience that incumbents accrue is one of the predominant and often cited explanations for electoral advantages associated with incumbency (Levitt & Wolfram, 1997; Zaller, 1998). The theory suggests that incumbency offers candidates the opportunity to accrue a number of skills; including public speaking, dealing with bureaucracy and campaigning, and that these skills are transferable to the electoral context. Table 8.1.1 displays results from the statement put to candidates; “Incumbents have greater experience, gained from working on the council”. Of the 1,774 respondents, more than three quarters
(1,377) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This is more than ten times the share of those who either disagreed or strongly disagreed (7.4%, 132 respondents). Some 15% of respondents (266) reported a neutral position. The response from candidates to this question gives a clear indication from candidates that they feel incumbents are successful in local elections because, incumbency bestows greater experience to the candidate. Of those surveyed, it was Incumbents themselves who felt most strongly that experience plays a significant role in their high success rate. In total 87% of incumbents (268) either agreed or strongly agreed, which is almost eighteen times the share of those who felt otherwise (4.9%, 15). Over a third of incumbents questioned indicated that they strongly agreed with the suggestion that greater experience gained from working on the council contributes to the advantage associated with incumbency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...have greater experience gained from working on the council</th>
<th>Str. Agr</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Str. Dis</th>
<th>Total n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1,774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 8.1.1 (% 5pt Likert Scale Agr/Dis) (n) 2011-2012]
Table 8.1.1 shows results for all experience groups. The figures show that all groups strongly support the statement. 68.6% of Experienced Freshmen (103) agreed to some extent (agreed or strongly agreed) with the statement, some eight and a half times the number who disagreed (disagreed or strongly disagreed, 8%, 12). This is still a convincing margin in favour of the notion of experiential effects, though the smallest of all types of candidate. The response from all types of candidate is a strong indication that all candidates perceive experience on the council to have some electoral value.

Figure 8.1.1 illustrates these results, showing how the vast proportion of candidates think that experience is a factor that contributes to incumbent success. Though these results are convincing, it must also be acknowledged, as for all the survey results in this chapter, that they are based on candidate’s views. So although it cannot be guaranteed that these views match reality, they can tell us something about how different candidates perceive the statements put to them. These differences are important, as they allow the comparison of results...
between those candidates who may have a self-serving interest in responding a particular way, with those who may not.

Another interesting facet of the survey data is how candidates' assessments of incumbency advantage differ across the experience groups. The top-line results for responses to the statement “incumbents no longer have an advantage” indicate that candidates mostly disagreed. Table 8.1.2 shows that of the 1,746 respondents to the question, 64% (1,117) disagreed or strongly disagreed; which is almost five and a half times more than those who either agreed or strongly agreed (11.7%, 204). Figure 8.1.2 illustrates these results. A substantial number, almost one quarter (23.4%) of respondents (409) left a neutral response in this case. This is possibly an indication that the question could have been framed differently, or an indication of an artefact of underlying uncertainty amongst candidates. Delving deeper into the data does reveal differences in the level of disagreement. Serial Freshmen disagreed most strongly with the statement. Table 8.1.2 shows that almost 70% of Serial Freshmen either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, which is seven times more than those who expressed the opposite opinion (9.9%, 61). Interestingly, this percentage falls for Freshmen and for Experienced Freshmen, and again for Incumbents (see table 8.1.2).
Table 8.1.2, shows that 61.7% of Freshmen respondents (424) disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, almost five times the number who agreed or strongly agreed (12.7%, 87). Freshmen candidates exhibit the largest share of neutral respondents, at more than one quarter (25.6%, 176). This is a possible reflection of their unfamiliarity with local elections compared with other groups.

When compared to other groups, fewer Experienced Freshmen expressed some level of disagreement with the statement (62.9%, 93), four times the number who disagree or strongly disagree (15.6%, 23).

It is Incumbents who report the least disagreement (58.4%, 174). The number of Incumbents who disagreed is three and a half times the number who expressed the opinion that Incumbents no longer have an advantage (16.7%, 50).
Compared to Serial Freshmen, the data for Incumbent respondents suggest that the perception of incumbency advantage is stronger for those candidates who have no, or less immediate experience on the council. However, for all types of candidate, the vast majority of respondents believe there is an electoral advantage to being a defending councillor. Though the data in table 8.1.2 show that respondents’ experiential group does affect their responses to some degree.

Table 8.1.3 displays responses to the statement that Incumbents seeking re-election are successful because "support among local voters is consistent and reliable", essentially framing the incumbency advantage statement in a different way. The question is designed to crosscheck responses to the statement in table 8.1.2, whilst gauging candidates’ opinions of the relationship councillors have with resident voters and how it translates into votes on election day. Clearly, any advantage incumbents are perceived to have in local elections must ultimately be supported by voters. As such, the statement represents a slightly different way of asking the same question. Although we could expect some variation in responses due to the way it is framed, broadly, results should support those already revealed.

Of the 1,787 respondents surveyed, 65.2% (1,165) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This is almost five times the number who either disagreed or strongly disagreed (13.1%, 234). 22% of candidates responding had a neutral position on the statement. The results almost mirror those described in table 8.1.2, with similar proportions for the inverse of all responses. These results are
a strong indication that candidates do believe that incumbents are supported well by voters.

Looking at the data across the experience groups, unsurprisingly Serial Freshmen felt most strongly that Incumbents are supported well by local voters, with almost two thirds of these respondents (416) indicating that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This is nearly six times the proportion who thought the opposite (11.4%, 70). Serial Freshmen are closely followed by Freshmen of whom, around two thirds (473) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This is five and a half times the number of Freshmen who felt otherwise (12.3%, 86). It is clear from the data in table 8.1.3 that respondents with no council experience feel most strongly that voters support incumbents well, and this is in line with data shown in table 8.1.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...support among local voters is consistent and reliable</th>
<th>Str. Agr</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Str. Dis</th>
<th>Total n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 8.1.3 (% 5pt Likert Scale Agr/Dis) (n) 2011-2012]
For Incumbents table 8.1.3 shows that the vast proportion of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement, around 65% (200). However, slightly more disagree or strongly disagree than was recorded for Freshmen or Serial Freshmen, some 15.6% (48). As a result, proportionally the number of Incumbent’s who agree outnumbers those who feel otherwise by roughly four to one. This proportion is less than proportions described for either Freshmen or Serial Freshmen, but remains substantial.

An interesting result concerns responses from Experienced Freshmen. Though the data clearly indicate that Experienced Freshmen mostly agree with the statement, with 50.7% (77) indicating that they either strongly agree or agree, more than 18% (28) felt otherwise. It must be noted that there are comparatively fewer respondents considered for Experienced Freshmen. Although the share of respondents who left a neutral response is high, 30.9% (47), proportionally, Experienced Freshmen show least agreement of the respondent groups, with those who agreed or strongly agreed outnumbering...
those who felt the opposite by almost three to one. Nevertheless, the results are still a convincing indication that Experienced Freshmen tend to support the premise that incumbents do better because they are supported well by local voters.

Overall, sub-chapter 8.1 has considered two themes that underpin explanations for an incumbency advantage in local elections; experience and local support. For all types of candidate the responses suggest that the vast number think that incumbents are indeed advantaged and that their experience and strong support from local voters are key factors in preserving it.

The data have also shown that different types of respondent have conflicting opinions, they agree and disagree to different extents. To some degree these differences appear to be a product of their electoral experience. Freshmen and Serial Freshmen tended to support statements that implied Incumbents were advantaged strongly. However, Incumbents and Experienced Freshmen were more likely to play these assertions down, though only slightly. There remained a consensus across all experience groups, that having some council experience is an important factor in a candidate’s chance of electoral success.

The survey results provide evidence in support of the overall narrative within this thesis; that incumbents are advantaged because voters appear to value their experience. So by extension, this suggests that candidates think that voters see experience as an indicator of candidate quality. There is a large body of established literature on candidate quality and scare-off effects as detailed in
chapter 2 (Cox & Katz, 1996; Levitt & Wolfram, 1997; Ansolabehere et al, 2007; Carson, Engstrom & Roberts, 2007; Hirano & Snyder, 2009). Considering that those candidates with no experience serving on the council were most likely to play up the support incumbents have locally, the data above suggest that scare-off may have a role in English local elections.

Sub-chapter 8.2 moves on from notions of experience and local support, to explore candidates’ perceptions of how incumbency may elevate a candidate’s local profile and their relationship with the media.

8.2 – Councillors’ Profile & the Media

In section 8.1 respondent’s attitudes towards statements of experience and local support as a source of incumbency advantage, were discussed. The results showed that all types of candidate strongly supported the idea that these two explanations help councillors defend their seats successfully, though to varying degrees. This sub-chapter considers respondents’ perceptions of the role of incumbency in enhancing a candidate’s relative ‘profile’, as well as councillors’ relationship with the local media. Candidates were asked for their insight into whether a councillor’s experience elevated their profile and whether that in turn helped them to defend their seat.

Table 8.2.1 displays responses to the statement that incumbents do better because they “enjoy a higher local profile than their challengers”. The overwhelming majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the assertion, some 90.4% (1,618). This number is almost 30 times the number who
disagreed or strongly disagreed (3.1%, 55). Nearly four out of every ten respondents strongly agreed that incumbents enjoyed a higher local profile than their challengers. Only a small portion of respondents left a neutral response, some 6.6% (118), indicating that respondents were generally more confident in making their response to this question. Figure 8.2.1 illustrates the extent to which respondents supported the statement.

![Table 8.2.1 (% 5pt Likert Scale Agr/Dis) (n) 2011-2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...enjoy a higher local profile than their challengers</th>
<th>Str. Agr</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Str. Dis</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>629</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another striking facet of the data (see table 8.2.1) is that the proportions of responses alter little across the types of respondent. The data reveal a consensus among respondents. All types strongly indicate that the advantage councillors have in the defence of their seat can be explained, in part at least, because of the elevated local profile councillors assume. Even for incumbent respondents the
results are overwhelming. Incumbents think, more than other types of candidate, that their higher local profile helps them against opposition candidates. One explanation is that voters may be more likely to know them as a councillor, as for the previous four years they have been the official representative of that community, whereas the opposition candidate may not even be known for the majority of that period. More than nine of every ten incumbents surveyed felt that their higher profile advantaged them (91%, 283), this is more than 22 times the number who felt the opposite (4.1%, 13). Few incumbents left a neutral response, just 4.8% (15), implying once more that there is consensus on this issue. For all other types of candidate the response is similar. The data suggests that all types of candidate overwhelmingly support the statement with 90.4% (630), 88.2% (135) and 90.5% (570) either agreeing or strongly agreeing for Freshmen, Experienced Freshmen and Serial Freshmen respectively.

Two implications from the findings need to be discussed. First, there is a clear indication from all experience groups, that incumbency raises the profile of a candidate and as such, any electoral advantage can be considered a systemic one, a perk or consequence of having had experience and responsibility as a serving council official. It is rare for challengers to elections, to have a familiar and extended political ‘platform’ from which to campaign on issues that concern their community. As such, only councillors have had the vested authority to help residents with their concerns and raise issues on behalf of the community to the council for the entirety of their term. It is councillors whom are endowed with a legitimate motive to communicate with residents on the specifics of their duties, perhaps with a newsletter detailing their efforts and their contact information.
Local issues and concerns can often influence the vote over either the entire area of a council or in individual wards (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp. 168). In that sense, councillors may be repositioning themselves, from ‘facilitators’ of services, to incumbent ‘lobbyists’ during elections, on behalf of locals and local interests. This can be an effective electoral strategy as Rallings & Thrasher clarify, “some local electorates resolutely refuse to follow the pattern set elsewhere because for them the saliency of a local issue overshadows all other considerations. In some ways the task of identifying such opportunities for voting locally are aided by the media. As coverage of the issue graduates from the local to the national level so many more people begin to follow the story” (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp.164). These comments lead us neatly to the second implication of these results, which concern the practical consequence of an elevated profile, media attention.

The local media can easily have an impact on the manner in which candidates are portrayed to residents (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997, pp.169). Coming across positively in material produced by various outlets; like newspapers, parish or community newsletters, radio or television programmes, could prove crucial in helping to connect voters with candidates and can even determine electoral outcomes. These outlets can provide, coverage of and support for, candidates’ leadership on salient local issues, to which voters frequently respond. So identifying the relationship that candidates have with the local media could prove an insightful exercise, perhaps explaining why it is, that candidates perceive incumbents to have a raised local profile.
Table 8.2.2 shows the proportion of candidates’ responses to the statement that incumbents are so successful because they “have a stronger relationship with the local media”. Almost two thirds of respondents (1,157) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This is more than seven times the number who disagreed or strongly disagreed (9.3%, 165). It is worth noting that unlike results for the statement on a candidates’ local profile, discussed above, a large proportion of respondents left a neutral response, more than one quarter (25.6%, 454). These data could be a symptom of genuine uncertainty amongst candidates, as it may be difficult to quantify or gauge any relationship. Another explanation could be that the results may be an artefact of poor question construction. A large proportion of candidates may be failing to understand what the question is asking them. Either way, a large proportion of respondents gave no indication as to whether councillors benefit from the attention focused on their activities. The large number of neutral responses is evident for all types of candidate, with proportions ranging between 23% and 35%. Interestingly, Incumbent respondents felt least strong on the issue, with just 47.8% (146) either agreeing or strongly agreeing; the lowest share of all respondents. Correspondingly, some 17.1% (52) of Incumbents disagreed to some extent with the statement, which is the largest share of all respondents. Incumbents were most likely to give a neutral response, with more than one third doing so (35.1%, 107). Though these data suggest that incumbents are less inclined than others to feel that they have a stronger relationship with the local media, it must be reiterated that the majority of incumbent respondents still suggest that they do. This is in effect an admission from incumbent candidates that they do feel that they benefit from a privileged electoral position.
For all other types of candidate the results suggest, as previously, that a candidate's experience may influence on their perceptions. As expected, Serial Freshmen were the most likely to agree with the notion of incumbent candidates making significant gains from their elevated profile, with seven out of every ten doing so (70.5%, 442). This is more than ten times the number who felt otherwise (6.5%, 41). Clearly a good number of Serial Freshmen will be familiar with the campaign process, yet have no experience with the duties of councillors. Freshmen were slightly less in agreement, with just over two thirds (68.6%, 474) agreeing that incumbent candidates have a stronger relationship with the local media. This is more than eight times the number who disagreed to some extent (8.1%, 56). Finally, though still strongly in agreement, Experienced Freshmen report a slightly weaker-still response than either Freshmen or Serial Freshmen. Three fifths of Experienced Freshmen respondents (61.9%, 94) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, which is around six times those who felt otherwise (10.5%, 16). Their time spent as a councillor would have influenced their view.

For all types of candidate, the results indicate that there is a strong sense that incumbent candidates are able to benefit from their position in the way they are portrayed in the media. An interesting facet of the data in table 8.2.2 is the difference between Incumbent and non-incumbent respondents. Non-incumbents feel most strongly that councillors’ relationship with the local media facilitates their electoral strength. One explanation for this derives from comments made earlier in this chapter (section 8.1) on the sincerity of responses
to this questionnaire in general. But another may be that the reality of this relationship is a double-edged sword. Incumbents may feel that although they do have a stronger relationship with the local media, it may not necessarily help them in their re-election attempts. It may not necessarily be a wholly positive influence or may simply be difficult to quantify.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Str. Agr</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Str. Dis</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1,775</td>
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<td>Incumbent</td>
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<td>37.0</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table - 8.2.2 (% 5pt Likert Scale Agr/Dis) (n) 2011-2012]

[Figure - 8.2.2 (% 5pt Likert Scale Agr/Dis) 2011-2012 (n = 1,775)]

Chapter 8.2 has discussed data on whether incumbency elevates candidates’ local profile putting them in better standing with the local media. Though they vary, the results give a clear indication that incumbency matters in both these areas. The results for the statement regarding a candidate’s’ higher profile is overwhelming. There is a clear consensus among all types of respondent that a candidate is more recognisable and more attention is paid to their actions once
elected as councillor. To lend greater support to the results there appears to be little deviation in the proportions across the type of respondent and very few respondents leave neutral responses.

The data concerning incumbent candidates’ relationship with the media are less strong, though still supportive of the overall claim. Although one quarter of respondents left a neutral response, two out of three felt that a position on the council would better a candidates’ relationship with the media and by inference their electoral safety. Though Incumbents do not disagree, their responses are not as convincing as those of less experience, suggesting that the benefits may not be that clear cut. Incumbents may also be more pessimistic about the benefits their relationship with the media brings. Interestingly, Experienced Freshmen are much more likely than Incumbents to support the view that incumbents have a stronger relationship with the media, though not to the same extent as Freshmen and Experienced Freshmen.

Overall, the data presented in chapter 8.2 is supportive of the claim that incumbency may have systemic advantages for candidates. As an elected member of the council the incumbent councillor is a ‘legitimate’ authority on local issues. As such, it may be in both incumbents’ and the media’s interest to have a ‘cordial’ working relationship for the majority of the term in order to maintain a sufficiently high profile in their neighbourhood. Sub-chapter 8.3 will look at the more practical explanations of incumbency advantage, investigating whether respondents think an incumbent’s electoral strength can be explained, to some degree, by differences in their behaviour during the campaign.
8.3 – The Campaign

Section 8.2 presented data on respondents’ perceptions of the role of incumbency in enhancing a candidate’s relative ‘profile’, as well as councillors’ relationship with the local media. Chapter 8.3 moves on from this discussion, to consider candidates’ perceptions of the campaign. Johnston & Pattie insist that “local activity matters” (Johnston & Pattie, 2003, pp.272), and though there will always be voters whose party choice is already made, there are a large number of ‘floating voters’ who want to be convinced to vote for a candidate based on their ideas for the local area. For voters to make these decisions, it is necessary for information to be distributed to them, in one way or another. Some may seek it out, but many will not bother, particularly in local elections. This group of voters rely on the material to reach them and so the efficacy of the campaign may be crucial in order to engage with and mobilise voters. As Johnston & Pattie reiterate, where the parties campaign hardest, they tend to perform best and at the individual level parties perform best with those voters who are exposed to campaign information and other resources (Johnston & Pattie, 2003, pp.271-272). The following discussion is based on results from two statements put to candidates on the local campaign.

In an attempt to garner detail on any difference between the behaviour of incumbent councillors and their challengers, table 8.3.1 displays responses to the statement that incumbents are so successful because they “put more personal effort into their re-election campaigns”. Clearly the likelihood is that many candidates, regardless of their electoral experience, will feel they have put in
great personal effort into their campaigns. It is surprising then, to observe that the largest share of all respondents (46.7%, 833) agree or strongly agree, with the statement, that incumbents are advantaged because they work harder than their competitors. Unsurprisingly, a sizeable proportion of respondents disagreed, some 24.9% (444), which is around half the number who felt otherwise. More than one quarter of respondents gave a neutral response (28.4%, 506). Figure 8.3.1 illustrates the distribution of aggregated candidate responses and the extent to which the total proportion of respondents who agree, outweighs those who disagree. On the face of it, the results suggest that respondents are in some agreement that councillors defending their seat tend to put in greater personal effort into their re-election campaigns than those who challenge them. However, a closer inspection of the results in table 8.3.1 shows that there are differences in the strength of these assertions across types of respondent. As expected, differences are linked to the experiential ‘perspective’ of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...put more personal effort into their re-election campaigns</th>
<th>Str. Agr</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Str. Dis</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial freshmen</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>624</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 8.3.1 (% 5pt Likert Scale Agr/Dis) (n) 2011-2012]
For Incumbent respondents, the data presented in table 8.3.1 are strongly in favour of the suggestion that they put in a greater level of personal effort to their campaigns than their challengers. Two thirds of Incumbent respondents (65.5%, 201) agree with this statement. Almost half of those who agreed did so strongly (see table 8.3.2). This is in contrast with the relatively small proportion of Incumbents, just 10.1% (31), who disagreed to some degree with the statement. It must also be noted that around one quarter of Incumbents gave a neutral response (24.4%, 75), though this figure is roughly in line with results for other candidate types. For Incumbent respondents overall, the data showed that they feel that their electoral success is due to the higher level of effort they put into the re-election campaign than their opponents. When compared to other experience groups, the results indicate a conviction amongst Incumbent respondents that is largely expected given that the question could be interpreted as an assessment of their character.
For Experienced Freshmen the results tell a similar story to Incumbents, though they have less conviction. Half of respondents (49%, 75) agreed, to some degree, with the suggestion of a difference between the level of effort that Incumbents and Freshmen put into their respective campaigns. This is more than twice the number who disagreed with this proposition (24.2%, 37). Just over one quarter of Experienced Freshmen gave a neutral response (26.8%, 41). Though the data for Experienced Freshmen show that they tend to feel less strongly in support of the issue, it is clear that they do support the view that incumbents work harder for the win than Freshmen. There are two key differences between responses for Incumbents and Experienced Freshmen. First, from an empirical perspective, fewer respondents are convinced enough to agree strongly with the statement, only 18.3% (28) compared to 30% (92) for Incumbents (see table 8.3.1). Second, these results are a curious insight because of the ‘privileged’ position Experienced Freshmen hold. Even though Experienced Freshmen have previously sat on the council, at the time of being surveyed they are contesting the ward as a non-incumbent, and in this instance what could be considered a more informed position than other types of candidate. The responses from Experienced Freshmen may therefore, be more meaningful for this particular topic than other types of respondent, given their unique circumstance, having previous experience defending as an Incumbent and before that challenging as a Freshman. Surveying this group certainly has potential for further research, particularly as this group is the smallest of those surveyed, with a total of just 153 respondents, making up only 8.6% of the total sample.
Both Freshmen and Serial Freshmen types of respondent agree that Incumbents work harder. For Freshmen, just 40.1% (280) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, which is higher than the 30.8% (215) who either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Of the Serial Freshmen who responded, 44.4% (277) agreed to some degree, compared to the 25.8% (161) who reported they didn’t. These results are less definite than for other candidates. As for all types of respondent, both these groups report a sizeable proportion of neutral responses, 29.2% (204) and 29.8% (186) for Freshmen and Serial Freshmen respectively.

Overall the data implies that respondents agree with the suggestion that Incumbents work harder during the campaign, though to varying degrees across experience groups. To bolster these results, self-reported data on the behaviour of candidates during the campaign can be used. These data allow us to quantify any difference between experience groups and substantiate those attitudinal data discussed above.

Table 8.3.2 shows replies to the question "Did you have a campaign leaflet for distribution?", put to candidates in the 2012 survey. It is apparent from the results that Incumbents are more likely to have produced a leaflet for distribution than others. More than nineteen out of every twenty (95.3%, 142/149) Incumbent respondents indicated that they did so, compared to just three quarters of Freshmen (74.7%, 304/407) and less than three out of every five Serial Freshmen (59.7%, 216/362). Interestingly, the data also shows that Experienced Freshmen, those candidates who have some experience on the council, are more likely than both Freshmen and Serial Freshmen to produce a
leaflet for the campaign, with more than four out of every five indicating that they did so (81.2%, 69/85). These data show that there are substantial differences in the behaviour of different types of candidate, even with something as basic as producing a leaflet to inform voters about their campaign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...have a campaign leaflet?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>74.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>59.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 8.3.2 (Did you have a campaign leaflet for distribution?) - (n) (% Yes) 2012]

As a follow up question, those respondents who did produce a leaflet were also asked “Did you deliver your own leaflets in your ward?” and table 8.3.3 displays the results. For all types of candidate the vast majority delivered their leaflets if they had one. Almost nineteen out of every twenty Incumbents reported that they did deliver their own leaflets (94.2%, 131/139), whilst slightly fewer Freshmen indicated that they did so at 92% (276/300). As many Experienced Freshmen and Serial Freshmen, 88.1% (59/67) and 88.8% (190/214), indicated that they delivered their leaflets if they had produced one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...deliver your own leaflets?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>94.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 8.3.3 (Did you deliver your own leaflets in your ward?) - (n) (% Yes) 2012]

Results in table 8.3.3 show that when candidates display intent to campaign, they are all likely to follow this through. However, delving deeper into the data reveals further differences between respondents, particularly in the efficacy of
respective campaigns. Those candidates who indicated that they did produce a leaflet for the campaign were also asked "Was the leaflet delivered to all of the addresses in your ward?" (See table 8.3.4). Once again large differences between the responses of different candidates re-emerge. Around nineteen out of every twenty of Incumbent respondents delivered their leaflets to all addresses in the (94.2%, 129/137). Experienced Freshmen are the next most likely to do so, with four out of every five (80.3%, 53/66) reporting that they reached every address. This is almost 14% less than Incumbent candidates. Fewer than three quarters of Freshmen candidates (71.7%, 213/297) stated that they delivered their campaign leaflet to all the addresses in their ward, which is more than 20% less than Incumbents. Serial Freshmen were the least likely to do so, with less than two thirds of respondents (65.6%, 137/209) indicating that they delivered their campaign leaflet to all ward addresses, which is almost 30% less than for Incumbent candidates. These data support the narrative of Incumbents being more likely than others to work harder during the campaign.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...delivered to all addresses?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>94.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 8.3.4 (Was the leaflet delivered to all of the addresses in your ward?) - (n) (% Yes) 2012]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...approx. % of ward leafleted?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Ward %</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>18.73</td>
<td>6.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>30.08</td>
<td>3.385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>15.98</td>
<td>4.613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>27.17</td>
<td>3.247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 8.3.5 (Approximately what % of addresses was leafleted?) - (n) (Mean Hours) (σ) (Error) 2012]
Even for candidates who indicated that they didn't manage to deliver their leaflet to all ward addresses, the results suggest that Incumbents tended to get round more of the ward than others. Those who didn't manage to deliver to all addresses were asked a follow up question “Approximately what % of addresses was leafleted?” Table 8.3.5 displays the responses to this question. Examining the table shows that the number of cases observed has fallen substantially, this is because the question was only asked of those candidates who indicated that they didn’t manage to get their leaflet to all ward addresses, and as most did, particularly for Incumbent and Experienced Freshmen candidates, the number of candidates surveyed reflect this.

Even in this circumstance, Incumbents leaflet a greater proportion of the ward, averaging 80.9% (σ = 18.73) ward coverage. Experienced Freshmen respondents averaged slightly less, just over three quarters of their respective wards (76.6%, σ = 15.98), and Freshmen and Serial Freshmen reported the lowest average ward coverage at just 56.7% (σ = 30.08) and 58.1% respectively (σ = 27.17).

Table 8.3.6 displays Levene’s, and independent t-tests, comparing reported ward coverage between Incumbents and other types of respondent. For Freshmen and Serial Freshmen, Levene’s tests indicate that equal variances cannot be assumed,
with F-statistics of 6.909 and 4.367 respectively and corresponding p-values below the 0.05 level. For the independent t-tests, the 24.1% and 22.8% difference in coverage between Incumbents and these candidates have t-values of 3.241 (df = 85) and 3.090 (df = 76) for Freshmen and Serial Freshmen respectively. Both tests have corresponding p-values below the desired 0.05 level. Results for the 4.3% difference in the means of Incumbents and Experienced Freshmen shown in table 8.3.6 are less conclusive and fail to confirm any statistically significant difference between the two groups. The results mean that we can be confident in asserting the difference in ward coverage only between Incumbents and those freshmen with no previous experience on the council.

Data considered for the production of candidate campaign leaflets and the efficacy of their distribution show that more experienced candidates are not only more likely to produce a leaflet, but also to distribute it and distribute it more widely. Incumbents tend to be the most active, more likely to produce a leaflet, to deliver it themselves and to cover most if not all of their ward. Interestingly, data for Experienced Freshmen suggest that they tend to do more than Freshmen and Serial Freshmen also, perhaps an indication that a candidate’s experience may alter their behaviour. Whether or not these results are a symptom of experiential effects, or whether experience is a product of their behaviour, these data do lend support to the notion of Incumbents working harder than their rivals during the campaign.
Further data are available to test the behavioural differences between the different candidates. Using self-reported data, again from the 2012 Candidate Survey, table 8.3.7 displays responses to the question “Approximately how many hours a week in total did you spend campaigning?” This question was asked to those candidates that produced and delivered a campaign leaflet in their own ward. The results show a similar pattern to that discussed above. Incumbents tend put in the most hours, with an average of 19.05 per week ($\sigma = 9.47$). They are followed by Experienced Freshmen who put in almost 18 hours a week during the campaign ($17.95\%$, $\sigma = 10.41$), an average of an hour less a week than Incumbents. Freshmen and Serial Freshmen on the other hand, are shown to put in the fewest hours. The figures show that Freshmen and Serial Freshmen campaign two and a half, and three and a half fewer hours per week than Incumbent candidates respectively (Freshmen $= 16.35$, $\sigma = 10.26$; Serial Freshmen $15.42$, $\sigma = 10.07$).

Table 8.3.8 displays results from Levene’s, and independent t-tests between the reported campaign hours of Incumbent respondents and the other types of candidate. Results suggest that for Freshmen and Serial Freshmen we can be confident that the average campaign hours differ significantly from that for Incumbent candidates. A Levene’s test for the 2.69 hours difference between Freshmen and Incumbent candidates gives an F-statistic of 1.878, which has an associated p-value above the 0.05 level. The t-statistic of 2.521 with 398 degrees of freedom has a p-value below the desired 0.05 level when equal variances are assumed. Similarly, for the 3.63 hours per week gap between Incumbents and Serial Freshmen, a Levene’s test produces an F-statistic of just 0.925 and thus a
corresponding p-value above the 0.05 level. So when equal variances are assumed, the resulting t-value of 3.223 with 313 degrees of freedom has a p-value below the desired 0.05 level. As for ward coverage data (see table 8.3.6), results for the 1.1 hours per week difference in the means of Incumbents and Experienced Freshmen fail to confirm any statistically significant difference at the 0.05 confidence level (see table 8.3.8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candid. Campaign Hours p/week</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>19.05</td>
<td>9.47</td>
<td>0.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>16.35</td>
<td>10.26</td>
<td>0.624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>17.95</td>
<td>10.41</td>
<td>1.404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>15.42</td>
<td>10.07</td>
<td>0.740</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table – 8.3.7 (Approximately how many hours a week in total did you spend campaigning? Hours p/week) - (n) (Mean Hours) (σ) (Error) 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inc campaign hours p/week Vs.</th>
<th>Levene’s</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>1.878</td>
<td>.171</td>
<td>2.521</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>2.593</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>273.994</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.039</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>.337</td>
<td>3.223</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>3.258</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>287.900</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>Equal Var Ass</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>.484</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal Var Not</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>.502</td>
<td>93.605</td>
<td>.502</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.632</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table – 8.3.8 (Cand. Vs. Avg. Inc. Hours p/week Levene’s & Indep T-Test) – (F) (Sig) (t) (df) (Sig) (ILP) (Error) 2012)

The survey results regarding the efforts of different candidates during the campaign have been principally in support of the hypothesis that, ‘incumbent candidates work harder during campaigns’. The results show that Incumbents do put greater effort into campaigning and take it more seriously than other types of candidate. On average Incumbents reported that they campaign for more than three and a half hours longer a week than Serial Freshmen and more than two and a half hours longer than Freshmen. When compared to Experienced
Freshmen, Incumbents average just over an hour a week longer, though t-tests do not allow us to be confident that the difference is statistically significant.

Overall, there is strong evidence in favour of the suggestion that Incumbents as Zaller (1998) suggests, are better campaigners and tend to be more motivated. But although this argument is compelling, there is another sizeable facet of the campaign that is yet to be considered, which again addresses the more systemic advantages of incumbency. Volunteers are an integral part of the local campaign and any additional help can be a great contribution to its efficacy. This is not just in terms of the logistics in ensuring the delivery of campaign material, but also, with regard to candidate morale and the all-important telephone and door-to-door canvassing. Though there are bound to be variations in the organisational strength of local parties, the ability of Incumbent candidates to recruit volunteers to their campaign could prove vital, and so the following discussion examines the idea that Incumbents may find it easier to recruit help during the campaign.

Table 8.3.9 displays responses to the statement that Incumbents are successful because they “are able to recruit more volunteers for their campaigns”. The top-line results reveal that respondents are inclined to agree that Incumbents do find it easier to recruit volunteers for their electoral defence. In total 58.2% (1,032) of respondents either agreed, or strongly agreed that councillors are able to mobilise greater support for their campaign than their challengers. This proportion is more than four and a half times the number who disagreed (12.7%, 226). Even those who strongly agreed with the statement outnumbered the total
number who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Some 31.5% of respondents gave a neutral response (555). Though the number of neutral respondents is high, we can say with some confidence that the results are indicative of feelings that incumbents recruit more volunteers. This general agreement is illustrated by figure 8.3.9.

However, if it is the case that most candidates agree that the ‘perks’ of incumbency may extend into the more organisational elements of local elections, then the breakdown of results by respondents’ electoral experience will be of some interest. For Serial Freshmen the results are manifest. Table 8.3.9 shows that of the 626 responses collected, almost two thirds (62.8%, 393) agreed to some extent with the premise that electoral defence is easier because councillors are able to recruit more volunteers to the campaign than their rivals. Those who agree outnumber those who disagree by a factor of six (10.4%, 65). However, it must be noted that a good number of those Serial Freshmen are likely to be independent candidates, with little access to the campaign infrastructures that candidates for the three major parties may utilise, including volunteers from the local party. With this in mind, it is easier to understand why such a large proportion of Serial Freshmen tend to agree with the statement.

Also evident from the data presented in table 8.3.9 is the difference between Incumbents and Experienced Freshmen. Some 39.3% (120) of Incumbent respondents agreed or agreed strongly with this statement, almost twice the number who felt otherwise (21.2%, 65). However, Experienced Freshmen tended to agree to a greater extent, with 45.6% (68) either agreeing or agreeing
strongly. This is more than three times the number who disagreed or disagreed strongly (14.1%, 21). The response from Experienced Freshmen perhaps qualifies that revealed for Incumbents, allowing for their previous experience as a councillor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...are able to recruit more volunteers for their campaigns</th>
<th>Str. Agr</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Str. Dis</th>
<th>Total n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>626</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Table – 8.3.9 (% 5pt Likert Scale Agr/Dis) (n) 2011-2012]

As for the data on the efforts of candidates during the campaign, the 2012 survey allows us to corroborate these data with self-reported information on the help that candidates received. In response to the question “Did you have any help delivering these leaflets?” table 8.3.10 reports the frequency of responses and the percentage who responded yes. It is clear that for all types of candidate, a large number of respondents had some help in the delivery of their campaign material. Experienced Freshmen have the highest share at 97% (65/67), though there are
few cases considered for this group. 93% (130/140) of Incumbents reported that they had some help delivering their leaflets during the campaign. Freshmen and Serial Freshmen have the lowest levels, with just 86.9% (259/298) and 90.6% (192/212) respectively indicating that they had some help delivering leaflets.

To help signify the potential impact of volunteered assistance during the campaign, we can delve a little deeper into the data, to identify differences between successful and unsuccessful candidates. As discussed above, data in table 8.3.10 show that Freshmen and Serial Freshmen not only exhibited the lowest level of support during the campaign, but these groups also had the worst rate of election of the four candidates types (see table 8.0.1). When we take their electoral success in 2012 into consideration we can observe differences in the likelihood of help within these groups. For instance, nineteen out of every twenty Freshmen winners in 2012 (95.5%, 85/89) indicated that they had some help delivering their leaflets during the campaign, whereas just over four out of five Freshmen losers (83.1%, 172/207) indicated the same. The associated Chi-Square value is 8.384, and with 1 degree of freedom the p-value is well below the desired 0.05 level. For Serial Freshmen there is a similar set of results. All of those elected (100%, 40/40) reported that they had some help during the campaign, compared to less than nine out of ten for those who lost (88.3%, 151/171). The Chi-Squared value in this instance is 5.168, which has a p-value below the 0.05 level with 1 degree of freedom. For both Freshmen and Serial Freshmen respondents, winners were around 12% more likely to have had some help in the delivery of their campaign material and Chi-Squared tests suggest that we can be reasonably confident of these differences. However, the data...
show that, whether they win or lose, there is no statistically significant difference in the chance of having had help during the campaign, for both Incumbents and Experienced Freshmen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>...help delivering these leaflets?</th>
<th>Total n</th>
<th>Total Yes %</th>
<th>Win n</th>
<th>Win Yes %</th>
<th>Lose n</th>
<th>Lose Yes %</th>
<th>Chi-Square df Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>0.962 1 .327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>8.384 1 .004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>0.129 1 .720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>5.168 1 .023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

([Table 8.3.10 (Did you have any help delivering these leaflets?) - (n) (% Yes) (n Winners) (Winners % Yes) (Losers n) (Losers % Yes) (x²) (df) (Sig) 2012])

Unfortunately no data were collected regarding the number of volunteers each candidate managed to recruit to their campaign. However, we can utilise self-reported information on the average number of hours of assistance that candidates received per week. Table 8.3.11 shows the average number of hours that volunteers delivered leaflets during each week of the campaign. Freshmen and Serial Freshmen candidates appear to receive the least help, with an average of 9.15 hours (σ = 8.00) and 9.12 hours (σ = 8.34) respectively. Experienced Freshmen on the other hand report a slightly higher weekly time from helpers, at 9.81 hours (σ = 7.62). But it is Incumbent candidates who report the highest level of support from helpers, with an average contribution of 12.19 hours (σ = 9.92). This is almost two and a half hours a week more than Experienced Freshmen and more than three hours a week greater than reported for Freshmen and Serial Freshmen.
### Table 8.3.11
(Approximately how many hours a week was the average time spent by others delivering your campaign leaflet?) - (n) (Mean Hours) (σ) (Error) 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helper campaign hours p/week</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>σ</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>12.19</td>
<td>9.92</td>
<td>0.873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>9.15</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>0.508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Freshmen</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9.81</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>0.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial Freshmen</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>0.608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.3.12 displays results from Levene’s and independent t-tests between the average weekly helper hours for Incumbent respondents’ and the weekly helper hours of other candidate types. The results suggest that we can be confident that Incumbents have more help. Average campaign hours that helpers dedicate to candidates’ campaigns are significantly less for non-incumbents. A Levene’s test for the 3.05 hours difference between Freshmen and Incumbent candidate helpers has an F-statistic of 8.256. This has an associated p-value below the 0.05 level. The t-statistic of 3.017 with 216.431 degrees of freedom has a p-value that is below the 0.05 level when equal variances are not assumed. Similarly, for the 3.07 hours per week gap between Incumbent helpers and those for Serial Freshmen, a Levene’s test gives the F-statistic of just 4.978 and so the corresponding p-value is below the 0.05 level. When equal variances are not assumed, the resulting t-value of 2.886 with 243.117 degrees of freedom has a p-value below the desired 0.05 level.
Finally, Levene's results for the 2.38 hours per week difference in the means between Incumbent helper hours and Experienced Freshmen helper hours show an F-statistic of 3.101, with a p-value above the 0.05 level. The resulting t-value of 1.635 with 186 degrees of freedom means that Experienced Freshmen helper hours fail to confirm any statistically significant difference from Incumbent helper hours at the 0.05 level. Though in a one-tailed test, because of the directional nature of the hypothesis between incumbents and non-incumbent helper hours, the p-value would meet the required 0.1 level required for significance.

8.4 – Concluding Remarks

Chapter 8 has provided a variety of evidence in support of incumbency effects in English local elections. The findings imply that incumbent councillors are advantaged, with respondents from all categories of experience expressing this view, though to varying degrees. Using data from local elections candidates surveys, provided by The Elections Centre at Plymouth University, the chapter detailed responses to seven questions on the effects of incumbency, as well as corroborating these results with some behavioural measures also put to respondents.

Section 8.1 described data from three of the questions put to candidates concerning the effect of incumbents’ superior experience on their electoral fortune. Responses were overwhelmingly in favour of experience effects. Some 77.6% (1,377) of respondents indicated that they supported the statement. That incumbents are more successful because they “have greater experience gained
from working on the council”, ten times the number who disagreed to some extent. Responses were broadly similar in magnitude for the statement; incumbents “no longer have an advantage”, with almost two thirds (64%, 1,117) of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Most candidates felt that support for councillors was consistent and reliable, though Experienced Freshmen, did so to a lesser extent than the other experience groups, which is hardly surprising given the likelihood that they will have experienced some electoral failure in the past. Overall the data described in sub-chapter 8.1 lend some weight to the existing literature on the effects of candidate quality. As detailed in chapter 2, these include the notion that candidate experience might be a desired cue for voters and second, that there is a “scare-off” effect in the candidate selection procedure, that prevents strong candidates competing with incumbents due to the perception of strong and reliable support for the incumbent. For instance, Carson et al argue that “modern incumbents rarely find themselves facing strong challengers” (2007, pp. 300). There may be many reasons for this, but the effect could also be fuelling itself. By not opposing incumbent candidates with candidates of a similar quality, the scare-off effect can arise based on nothing more than the perception of incumbents as strong candidates. If “incumbents succeed in deterring strong challengers, a large and growing incumbency advantage can become a self-fulfilling prophecy driven by the strategic behaviour of politicians” (Levitt & Wolfram, 1997, pp.57).

13 There is the possibility that the candidate may have stood down/resigned in the past rather than have been defeated, though this is the primary reason for initiating roughly 52% of by-elections, as detailed in chapter 3, there is currently no evidence on how many return to contest a council seat
Sub-chapter 8.2 discussed data on the profile of incumbent candidates and their relationship with the local media. Respondents felt overwhelmingly that incumbent candidates were advantaged because they enjoyed “a higher local profile than their challengers”. More than 90% (1,618) of respondents supported this statement, which is more than those who opposed it by a factor of 30 (3.1%, 55). Two interesting facets of the responses to this question were the conviction of respondents, and the consensus among different types of respondent. Very few candidates gave a neutral response, just 6.6% (118), with similar proportions across the experience groups. The small number of neutral responses is indicative of a stronger belief amongst respondents, that candidates felt more confident in their assertion that incumbents have a higher profile than others. The similarities in the proportion of responses across the experience groups suggest that we can have greater confidence in the result. Results on the notion of incumbents having an improved relationship with the local media was mixed. All respondents felt that incumbents were in some way advantaged because of “a stronger relationship with local media”, but this varied across types of respondent. Results for Freshmen showed that relative proximity to experience on the council moderated responses, with Serial Freshmen strongly convinced, whilst incumbents tended to play down its significance. Overall, the results described in sub-chapter 8.2 suggest that incumbent candidates do, to some extent, benefit from their position on the council.

Finally, sub-chapter 8.3 was concerned primarily with the efficacy of incumbent campaigns. There are two fundamental themes that can be derived from the results in this section. The first is that incumbents are better campaigners and
the second is that they tend to have more help. Overall, the attitudinal data shows that incumbents put more effort into their electoral campaigns, though the extent to which this was felt varied across types of respondent. Surprisingly, all experience groups were more likely than not to agree, and thus these results indicate something of an admission from freshmen groups that incumbents campaign harder. There is evidence in the literature to support the notion of incumbents as skilled campaigners. As Zaller puts it, “incumbents are simply better politicians than most of their opponents and are therefore usually able to best them in electoral combat” (Zaller, 1998, pp. 2). The behavioural data seem also to support this claim. Data discussed in section 8.3 showed that incumbents are more likely than others to produce a campaign leaflet for distribution (95.3%, 149), and when they do, were more likely than others to deliver it to all addresses in their ward (94.2%, 137). But perhaps most telling are the results for time spent campaigning. These showed that incumbents put in significantly more hours on average, when compared to others, particularly those freshmen with no previous experience as a councillor.

Sub‑chapter 8.3 also provided substantial evidence showing that incumbents have considerably more help than non-incumbents during the campaign. The attitudinal data indicate that all respondent groups were more likely than not to agree that incumbents “are able to recruit more volunteers for their campaigns” (58.2%, 1,032). Supporting this finding are the data for the level of help candidates had delivering leaflets. Of those candidates that did have some help, incumbents had significantly more weekly hours of help. There are a number of potential explanations for these results. The first is that volunteer hours could be
merely a reflection of both the electoral and organisational strength of the local party. It is reasonable to assume that incumbent candidates will be able to encourage volunteers to help campaign in areas where the party has already had electoral success. Another possible explanation for the difference in volunteer hours is that respondents may be including fellow members from the council in these figures. This would mean that the result is to some extent inevitable, because they are more likely to have access to a set of experienced campaigners, especially if they have mid-term party colleagues on the council.

Finally, another interesting feature of the behavioural data discussed, is the difference between Experienced Freshmen and other freshmen categories. Similar to the data for Incumbent respondents, results throughout the chapter have implied that Experienced Freshmen tend to campaign harder than their less experienced counterparts. Experienced Freshmen are more likely to deliver leaflets, to deliver those leaflets to all addresses and to campaign for more hours on average than either Freshmen or Serial Freshmen.
Chapter 9 – Conclusion

This thesis began with the objective of identifying and measuring the value of electoral defence in English local elections since it was reorganised in the early 1970s. Examining a range of data between 1974 and 2010, the project has discussed trends in effects on an assortment of features within local elections. After a short introduction to the key developments in local government, and a consideration of the relevant literature on incumbency advantage theory, data was analysed to determine the relative electoral success of incumbent candidates over the period. The data was presented in a variety of ways to assess the size of any effect and influences as to its magnitude. The thesis has drawn on three major sets of data throughout; these were aggregate electoral data, candidate survey results and ONS population statistics.

Before describing the major findings of this thesis, it is best to give an abridged discussion on some of the methodological weaknesses and issues encountered during the project.

Chapter 3 introduced a number of variables constructed for the purpose of this investigation. Two of these were derived from the literature but adapted to fit the English electoral administration (SIP & SRS), whilst three others were designs developed specifically with the intention of measuring effects (RRILP, EPILP, STS). Both the Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP) and
Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS) measures have provided invaluable evidence in favour of incumbency effects throughout this project.

However, it must be noted that there may be a case for suggesting that both these models produce slight underestimations of incumbency advantage (IA). For SIP, it remains unclear from the literature as to whether there is a case for the pooling of support among candidates in multimember elections. Although the literature remains silent on the effect of campaigning in groups, candidates standing in wards with multiple vacancies frequently do campaign together and as a result there is a possibility that the electoral fortunes of junior campaign partners may be elevated simply by campaigning alongside a more experienced candidate. Considering this, a greater understanding of the behavioural patterns of candidates standing in different district magnitudes may be required. For this reason we can remain slightly sceptical about the SIP measure and follow up these results with further research into the effect of campaigning in groups. As there are few examples in the literature of the effect of campaigning in multimember as opposed to single member districts, one could turn to the research on women’s electoral fortunes in multimember districts as a framework for further investigation. Though most authors discount any notion of multimember campaigns improving women’s chances of electoral success (Studlar & Welch, 1991), these studies may help to establish the model’s accuracy by assessing if there are any ‘coattails’ effects dampening the magnitude of the SIP measure.
SRS has also been an important indicator of the advantage associated with electoral defence, particularly as the data are directly comparable across the electoral cycle. However, the results may not be a wholly accurate estimation as the controlling element of the model (denominated by \( j \), see chapter 3 for detail) is composed of freshman-to-freshman, incumbent-to-incumbent and freshman-to-incumbent electoral cycles for comparison. As has already been demonstrated in this thesis, incumbents are likely to accrue votes over their tenure. Considering this, the output for the controlling element of the model may indicate a higher relative vote share if there is a large proportion of incumbent-to-incumbent cycles, ultimately giving an inaccurate value of the slump.

Regarding incumbency data; as noted in chapter 4, a small portion of the incumbency information for candidates in the earliest years of the period was missing from the data provided. As such, this has given a misleading, though not entirely false, impression of a major increase in the number of incumbent candidates choosing to stand again. Although this has posed no real methodological problems for the analysis in this project, and this weakness has been discussed in the main body of text, it has limited the extent to which comments could be made about changes to stand again rates (SARs) in earlier years of the period examined.

Finally, though data are considered throughout chapter 4 and sporadically throughout the thesis on a chronological basis, little attention has been paid to the temporal variation of incumbency effects (i.e. most analysis has been cross-sectional). There are two main reasons for this. The first is due to a simple lack of
cases. Most of the methods used require a number of data points to create a single case and once the data are then subdivided just a couple of times, the number of cases for comparison can easily end up in the dozens rather than hundreds or thousands as they are in total. The second and perhaps most important motive is that examining the data in a cross-sectional manner has the additional benefit of eliminating most of the cyclical variations within the data. Though neither of the methodological issues described above has posed any serious problems for the results discussed, it is important to note that they have been taken into consideration where relevant.

Overall the findings from this thesis are clear. Incumbent candidates have a moderate yet significant advantage in English local elections. Different methods used have reached a consensus in their results and were supportive of much of the existing literature. Sub-chapter 9.1 goes on to review those noteworthy findings, detailing their relevance and offering suggestions for further research where appropriate. The section includes not only figures in the results chapters of this thesis, but also their broad implications to the field.

9.1 – Findings & Further Research

Section 9.1 describes some of the major findings from the results chapters (chapters 4 – 8). The discussions are divided into a collection of broad themes, which encompass noteworthy electoral consequences and detail how they fit into the narrative outlined by pre-existing literature. Suggestions for further research are detailed where appropriate.
Trends - Chapter 4 has outlined broad trends in English local elections and how successful incumbent candidates have been since reorganisation. Local elections have become increasingly competitive over the period. Seat competition has been on the rise, for all types of authority and this has altered the climate in which councillors go on to defend their seats. A major consequence has been a reduction in the share of the vote required to win a seat under a plurality electoral system. The emergence of the Liberal Democrats has undoubtedly had an impact on English local elections. However, the rise in the number of independent and minor party candidates (classified as Others throughout this thesis) will also have contributed to the reduction in the average vote share of winners, particularly in recent years.

From chapter 4 it is clear that incumbents have been very successful in their attempts to return to the council, and this level of success has been maintained over the entire period, despite the rise in competition for seats. The data in chapter 4 indicate that the growth in the number of Other candidates standing has had little effect on the overall success of councillors wishing to return. It showed that the number choosing to defend their seat on the council (SAR) has risen. When we couple these findings with the continued success of returning councillors, the results illustrate a picture of stagnation within local government. Considering this, it is hardly surprising that the demographic of councils in England may have changed little over the period (Rallings & Thrasher, 1997). This can be viewed in either a positive or negative light. On the one hand, there is a degree of continuity in the governance of local communities. On the other hand, there is little opportunity to alter what Rallings & Thrasher describe as the
“male, pale and stale” composition of English local councils (Thrasher et al, 2013, p. 286).

Overall, the results suggest that incumbents do well, particularly when compared to freshmen, but there are issues with the nature of many of the comparisons described that limit the scope for generalisation from data in this chapter. There are, for instance, differences in political partisanship within and across many of the aggregations presented. These prove problematic for the inference of a distinct advantage for incumbents, rather than partisan differences. There are dangers of endogenous influences on the performance of incumbents that limit the scope for speculation. For instance, the improved performance of incumbent candidates may be due, in part, to the established success of the party that the incumbent candidate belongs to, i.e. the candidate has already demonstrated a significant base of electoral support simply by challenging as an incumbent, compared to the many other candidates who will not have the same level of established support. However, as a scene-setting chapter, the data discussed has provided sufficient information to give readers a comprehensive overview of local election trends in England since its reorganisation.

*Measures of Incumbency Advantage* - The objective of chapter 5 was to establish the presence and magnitude of any electoral advantage associated with standing as an incumbent candidate in England, and so the chapter presented five methods enabling us to estimate any effect. The results from all these measures provided strong evidence for the notion of advantaged incumbents. The chapter began by examining simple differences in the share of votes for incumbent and
freshmen winners. The data show that incumbents do better consistently throughout the period. For all parties, incumbent candidates received markedly higher vote shares than their freshmen counterparts. Noting some of the methodological issues of measuring incumbency advantage in this way, the chapter then went on to present constructed models for the estimation of the effects.

The Standardised Incumbent Performance (SIP) measure showed that incumbents significantly outperformed their freshmen colleagues. As discussed in chapter 3, the selection criteria for the model ensures an unbiased estimation of incumbency effects, results are not biased by partisan swing. SIP for incumbent winners between 1974 and 2010 was estimated to be moderate yet significant, averaging 2.7%, with some differences between the parties. In an attempt to implement some of the relevant theory, chapter 5 discussed estimates of a ‘surge’ in English local elections. The results support the existence of a Sophomore Surge, estimating it at around 2.2%, with some variation between the parties. The major implication from these findings is that the advantage associated with incumbency is likely to have an immediate impact on candidate performance. In addition, this impact appears to be the major contribution to the overall effect for all parties. Thus, for all three parties the ‘surge’ appears to be an important point in the electoral trajectory of a councillors’ political career. Data analysis also revealed that more than 3,400 councillors (for the three major parties) may have been elected due to the electoral advantage associated with their incumbency over the period examined (Con = 1,166, Lab = 1,271, LD= 986, see chapter 5).
Another model presented in chapter 5 was the Standardised Retirement Slump (SRS) estimator, which focused on comparing retirees with freshmen candidates in safe partisan seats. Drawing on and adapting methods from the literature on the retirement slump methods of estimating incumbency advantage (established in chapter 2), section 5.3 presented an unbiased model to estimate the advantage of incumbency to local parties. The results showed that safe seats held by the party after a councillor decides to retire, experience an electoral 'slump'. Average SRS was 2% over the period, with similar variations in results between the parties. As for SIP estimates, the results for the SRS model have a couple of implications for notions of incumbency advantage. First, the data for SRS corroborated the results for the SIP model, which serves to strengthen conclusions from both. Confidence should come from the knowledge that data inputted into these models differ both in terms of the selection criteria and the way they are used in the model. Second, the SIP measure examines differences in the share of votes in multimember districts (MMDs), whereas the SRS method measures incumbency advantage in single member districts (SMDs), a task that has proved methodologically difficult in the past.

This thesis presented two further models for the measurement of incumbency effects. Sub-chapter 5.5 focused primarily on estimating the effect of incumbency in scenarios where incumbents are unsuccessful. The models not only provided the project with two alternative ways of estimating the performance of defending councillors, but also an opportunity to utilise data previously discounted. The two different methods, Role Reversal Incumbent Loser
Performance (RRILP) and Experienced Partner Incumbent Loser Performance (EPILP), represent two slightly different conditions, and although these estimations were larger than those described by SIP and SRS methods, results remain broadly in line. Estimations of incumbency advantage in scenarios of electoral loss are 6.6% and 6.4% for RRILP and EPILP models respectively. The difference between the SIP and SRS estimations and these models may also tell us something more about the effects of incumbency, namely that the gap between incumbents and freshmen is even wider in scenarios of loss. Again, as for previous models there are variations in average RRILP and EPILP estimates between the parties, and these differences follow previously established trends using both SIP and SRS estimations.

*Experience effects* - Also analysed in chapter 5, was the effect of a candidate’s experience. The section showed that as incumbent candidates’ experience increases, so too does their electoral performance. After describing candidate career trends, a method borrowed from Stonecash (2008), sub-chapter 5.4 utilised the SIP and SRS measures modelled earlier in the chapter. For both measures, results showed a gradual increase in the average advantage of candidates, broadly in line with their length of service on the council. Longer serving incumbents tended do better than shorter serving ones. As previously established in the chapter, there were notable differences in the results for the parties. The trend for the Conservatives showed that in some instances longer serving Tories performed worse than relatively shorter serving ones. For Labour and the Lib Dems on the other hand, experience was shown to have a significant
effect on candidates’ performance, with longer serving incumbents averaging a higher advantage than shorter serving ones.

Another interesting facet of the results was the survey data presented in chapter 8, which supported the notion of experience effects. It presented data from candidates in response to the statement; incumbents are more successful because they “have greater experience gained from working on the council”. The results for this question showed that all types of respondent were in favour of the notion of an incumbent’s experience affecting their chance of re-election. 77.6% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, roughly ten times the number who disagreed or strongly disagreed. In addition there were differences in responses between Experienced Freshmen and Freshmen/Serial Freshmen. Experienced Freshmen showed noticeable differences in both their attitude and behaviour.

Results in this chapter also showed that there was a difference in the level of effort that Experienced Freshmen put into the electoral campaign when compared with to the other non-incumbent categories. Experienced Freshmen were more likely to produce a campaign leaflet, more likely to deliver it to all addresses in the ward and campaigned for more hours a week on average than either Freshmen or Serial Freshmen. It is also worth noting that the attitudinal results from Experienced Freshmen tended to lean towards, though remain distinct from, Incumbents. Responses to statements concerned with the effect of incumbency showed that Experienced Freshmen were perhaps more candid than Incumbents about any advantages associated with electoral defence. Even
though both groups will have had some previous experience serving as a councillor, Experienced Freshmen were more likely than Incumbents to play up the advantages. Consequently, their views may offer some crucial insight, as the reality is that in another electoral circumstance, Experienced Freshmen could have been answering the survey as an Incumbent.

The results for the performance of incumbent candidates by their categorised experience have a number of implications for this thesis, namely that the effects of incumbency advantage may be cumulative. Consequently, it is in the interest of local parties, where possible, to retain more experienced candidates as they offer a greater opportunity to retain seats. On top of this the evidence suggests that in situations where a party is competing for a seat without an incumbent candidate, fielding a candidate with some previous experience as a councillor may give the party an improved chance of success. In light of the results for experience effects, further research into the performance of candidates of different electoral experience would throw light on the findings discussed in this thesis. Merging the electoral data and candidate survey data would enable a more detailed analysis of the effects and allow the assessment of whether candidates’ attitudes and behaviour may be influenced in some way by their electoral environment.

**Administrative Effects** – As discussed in chapter 6, the differences in the administration of local elections (i.e. the number of candidates standing and the electoral cycle), provided mixed results for their influence on incumbency effects. Sub-chapter 6.1 examined the effect of district magnitude on relative
incumbent performance, and the findings show that there are differences in the level of advantage that incumbent candidates have over their competitors across the district magnitudes. The effect is measured in two ways; incumbent finishing positions and change in SIP.

When examining districts contested by a lone incumbent, the evidence suggests that they will tend to finish in higher positions as district magnitude decreases. The chapter also discussed data for the effects of district magnitude on average SIP. The results showed that SIP was larger in 2MDs than 3MDs. There was a clear 1.5% difference in SIP between the district magnitudes, though this estimate varies between each party. This result suggests that there is scope for administrative aspects of local elections influencing the advantage of incumbents. Incumbents may find it easier to be re-elected in smaller magnitudes, and this assertion is supported by existing literature on incumbency advantage (Cox & Morgenstern, 1995). However, this may be worthy of further research. As previously discussed, a potential explanation for this phenomenon could be the practicalities of campaigning in groups. For example, we know from chapter 8 that Incumbents are more likely to have help than freshmen and when they do have help, they have help for longer. Therefore, one can easily imagine that in single member districts, challengers may often find themselves campaigning with limited help, if not alone. Also the familiar face of an incumbent candidate may provide an advantage over less well known freshmen challengers. Conversely, in multimember districts, campaigning in groups provides freshmen challengers with a degree of psychological support, as well as an opportunity to pool their resources, such as sharing campaign leaflets and
posters. Campaigning in groups can also lessen the burden of other campaign activities, such as door and telephone canvassing. Also, for those freshmen who campaign alongside a familiar councillor, there may be the added advantage of an accelerated rate of profile elevation, i.e. it may be easier to get to know voters that recognise your colleague, rather than campaigning as a relatively unknown personality.

Finally, sub-chapter 6.2 assessed the impact, or lack of impact, of electoral cycles on incumbent performance. It was hypothesised that the electoral cycle of a local government administration might influence the magnitude of an incumbent’s advantage, due to varying degrees of scrutiny of candidates in the different cycles. An assumption was made that incumbents may find it easier to defend their seat in an administrative cycle of elections by thirds, where according to Rallings, Thrasher & Borisuyk (2003), turnout is known to be lower than in quadrennial elections. The results from chapter 6 failed to support this assumption. Although incumbents consistently outperformed their freshmen counterparts for all three major parties, the evidence did not lend itself in support of an effect from the electoral cycle, whether thirds or quadrennial.

Structural Effects - The structural factors affecting incumbent performance were discussed in chapter 7. These factors included turnout, ward size and the urban classification of wards in England between 1991 and 2010. The performance of incumbent candidates varied with changes in the structure of wards and this finding is critical as it implies that the connection incumbents have with voters will influence the advantage they have over their competitors. Incumbent
candidates are net contributors to turnout, and small rural environments offer improved conditions for councillors to defend their seat on the council.

Chapter 7 introduced another model for estimating incumbent effects, the Sophomore Turnout Surge (STS). This estimator is designed to assess the impact of incumbency on ward-level turnout. STS data showed an increase in turnout that was statistically significant over the freshmen-sophomore electoral cycle. Though data for the Liberal Democrats also showed growth, these results did not meet the required level of significance to be confident that there is a difference. The principal implication of these data is concerned with where incumbents accrue their ‘extra votes’. The data suggests that fielding incumbent candidates will contribute to the overall level of turnout, encouraging a small, yet significant number of people to vote who wouldn’t have otherwise. The STS model provides estimations of between 30 and 65 extra voters, depending on the party that the incumbent candidate stood for.

Ward-size effects were also described in chapter 7. Using SIP data in multimember wards sub-chapter 7.2 assesses the notion that smaller wards offer more favourable conditions for councillors to maintain their elected position. Dividing a broad spectrum of wards into groups based on the size of their electorate, the section provided evidence to show that SIP varied accordingly. The smaller the electorate, the greater an incumbent’s electoral advantage. For all three parties the data suggested that smaller wards averaged a significantly higher SIP, particularly wards that had an electorate below 4,500 voters. However, the extent to which the electorate mattered, differed between the
parties. Tukey HSD tests confirmed that there was significant variation between
groups for all the parties. These results were then qualified by assessing the
difference in advantage in terms of votes cast rather than vote share. This
produced a curious finding. For Labour and the Conservatives, almost all the
difference across the electorate groups was eliminated, meaning that the
advantage of 25 and 30 votes respectively, was more or less consistent
throughout the electorate groups. For the Liberal Democrats the effect remained,
but was dampened. The implication of these results was that wards with smaller
electorates offered more favourable conditions. Not because incumbents knew
or recruited more voters, but because the voter advantage they retained was
worth more proportionally in smaller wards.

Finally, urban-effects were also detailed in chapter 7. The analysis of urban-
effects supported previous assertions that rural communities foster better
conditions for extended careers on councils. The data showed SIP to vary
considerably over the ONS urban classifications. Though the Liberal Democrats
showed the greatest effect from incumbency, in both urban and rural areas, there
was a clear difference in urban and rural SIP, between 2.1% and 3.3% depending
on the party. The data also showed that Labour incumbents were most
susceptible to the urban-effect, with an Urban-Effects Coefficient of 1.71,
compared to just 1.1 for the Conservatives and 1.04 for the Liberal Democrats.
These results not only suggested that incumbency effects were stronger in rural
areas, but that there was something about rural elections that strengthened the
effect for all three parties examined. Rural voters were perhaps more likely to
know the incumbent candidate, or there may have been something different
about the way rural campaigns were conducted that inhibited any ‘coattails’ effect for incoming freshmen.

**Attitudinal & Behavioural Evidence** - In chapter 8, evidence was used to illustrate the attitudes of candidates towards a set of statements on the potential sources of incumbency advantage. The chapter also utilised information on candidate’s behaviour during electoral campaigns. Results from both these sets of data suggested that all candidates, including councillors themselves, felt not only that incumbents were advantaged for a variety of reasons, but also that councillors were better campaigners, putting more effort into the campaign period than their competitors.

Respondents from all four experience categories (Incumbents, Freshmen, Experienced Freshmen & Serial Freshmen) expressed agreement with the notion of an incumbency effect. In section 8.1, data from three of the questions put to candidates concerning the effect of incumbency were presented. For all types of candidate, the response was considerably in favour of the notion of advantaged incumbents (64%), as were the results for incumbents having greater experience (77.6%) and having consistent and reliable support from residents (65.2%). The data in sub-chapter 8.1 was supportive of existing literature on the effects of candidate quality in elections. The results implied that a candidate’s experience may have been a cue for voters and provided meagre evidence in support of a ‘scare-off’ effect (Levitt & Wolfram, 1997; Carson et al, 2007).
Also discussed in chapter 8, were data on the profile of incumbent candidates and their relationship with the local media. Results in sub-chapter 8.2 implied that respondents felt incumbent candidates enjoyed “a higher local profile than their challengers”, with over 90% of respondents supporting the statement to some degree. For this question in particular there was a sense of conviction amongst all types of respondent, as the number of neutral responses was small. The similarity of responses across all respondent experience groups, also suggested that we could be confident in the result. In addition, the majority of respondents felt that incumbents were in some way advantaged because of a “stronger relationship with the local media“ (65.2%). The implication of these findings was that candidates felt that there was a clear systemic advantage to incumbency. As detailed in chapter 2 of this thesis, councillors can and did regularly feature in local media, especially those with special responsibilities. Councillors were much more likely to have had greater access to the local media than their potential challengers, particularly during the midterm. However, there were significant methodological issues to consider in measuring such an effect.

The data described in sub-chapter 8.3 also supported incumbency effects, describing results on the efficacy of incumbent electoral campaigns. Two sets of data from the statements put to survey respondents were discussed in this section, as well as a variety of data on the behaviour of survey respondents. Results from all experience groups suggested that they were more likely than not to agree that incumbents “put more effort into their re-election campaigns” (46.7%). This was almost twice the number who disagreed. The result was surprising as it was in effect an admission from non-incumbents that they did
not measure up to incumbents in terms of their campaign efforts. The results were then corroborated by behavioural data in sub-chapter 8.3, which indicated that incumbents were indeed harder workers. Incumbents were more likely than others to produce a campaign leaflet for distribution (95.3%). When they did produce a campaign leaflet they were more likely than other groups to deliver it to all addresses in their ward (94.2%). Results in section 8.3 also showed that incumbents put in significantly more weekly campaign hours, particularly when compared to those freshmen with no previous experience as a councillor. Evidence was also presented to show that incumbent candidates had considerably more help than non-incumbents during the campaign, both from the attitudinal and the behavioural data. There was evidence in the literature to support the notion of incumbents as skilled campaigners (Zaller, 1998).

This is another potentially interesting area for further research. The survey data obtained from The Elections Centre contains a wide variety of information on the behaviour of candidates’ during the campaign. This information would be an excellent resource for further detailed investigation into the effectiveness of electoral campaigns.

*The Liberal Democrats* – The reoccurrence of party differences was a consistent theme throughout the results presented in this thesis. The arrival of the Liberal Democrats has culminated in the party being a well-established force in local government, and although the Liberal Democrats reached their peak, in terms of local authority control, in the mid-1990s, the effect of their advance coincided with an increase in the number of ‘hung councils’ in England. The consequence of
this is that the Liberal Democrats quickly found themselves thrust into key decision-making roles and responsibilities. Even with just a few councillors, the Liberal Democrats have had plenty of scope to establish a proven record on the council through coalition and cooperation. Thus the impact of the establishment of the Liberal Democrats has been more pervasive than first meets the eye.

Building on the general trends established for the party in chapter 4, estimations of incumbency advantage for all five methods used in chapter 5 showed that the results for the Liberal Democrats far exceeded those for the Conservatives and Labour. The results for the classified experience groups also implied that incumbency was of greater relative value for the Liberal Democrats. The data in chapter 6 showed that district magnitude reduced SIP estimations, but it also showed the Liberal Democrats continued to do best between the parties, despite SIP results in both the 2MDS and 3MDs being in decline. Chapter 7 showed that Liberal Democrat incumbents tended to do best, relatively, across all sizes of ward, both in terms of vote share and the number of votes cast.

There is an abundance of literature on the success of the Liberal Democrats in local elections helping to secure the party's political future. As Russell & Fieldhouse (2005) confirm, strong local election performances during the early 1990s have proved a crucial component in the party's progress and how quickly their local successes have been converted into national gains. Rallings & Thrasher also note that the party has employed a sophisticated electoral strategy since their emergence.
“From the beginning the party became more selective about which local wards were contested. In the early years the pattern of contestation had less to do with a definable electoral strategy and rather more to do with scarce resources in terms of both finance and members. In recent years the party appears to have made a conscious decision to focus its campaigning strength in areas where other parties, chiefly but not exclusively the Conservatives have shown vulnerability”

(Rallings & Thrasher in MacIver, 1996, pp. 214)

For the Liberal Democrats, the ambition for success in local government elections has been driven in part by the party’s overall electoral philosophy, what David Cutts defines as a ‘where we work, we win’ strategy. When the party wins more seats in these targeted areas and gains control, or at least partial control of local councils, the party can build an electoral credibility that extends both the political future of the party and its reputation (Cutts, 2006, pp.221). This reputation has been critical in establishing their national presence, much of which has been built around their local electoral successes. The results presented in this thesis are in line with the established research on the Liberal Democrats’, confirming an electoral strategy that depends on the success of its councillors (Johnston & Pattie, 1997; Dorling et al, 1998; McAllister et al, 2002 & Cutts, 2006).

It is clear that localism is an embedded part of the Liberal Democrat campaign as it has driven the notion that the party’s success and popularity in local government is crucial in making national gains. Successfully identifying the so-called ‘Liberal Heartlands’ (McAllister et al, 2002), strong campaigning and
developing a positive reputation for successful local governance are the key components in the efficacy of the Liberal Democrat local campaign. In light of this, it is clear that the notion of an incumbency effect is central to the party's ability to grow, utilising popular personalities or strong campaigners in local politics to retain and build support. This is a facet of the data that will certainly require further investigation.

The findings from this project are clear. Incumbent councillors have a modest yet significant advantage in local elections. A variety of methods used throughout this thesis have formed a consensus in their results and provides the project with convincing evidence in support of both a number of influences on the effect of incumbency, and prospective explanations for the phenomenon. The findings are supportive of much of the existing literature, though it must be said that very little research is concerned with the English case, particularly at the local level. For all parties considered, the data show that electoral defence is a relatively advantageous position, particularly for more experienced candidates and especially for the Liberal Democrats. The results for the Liberal Democrats are striking, partly because they fit well with established research on the campaign strategy of the party at local elections, but also because they imply that different electoral strategies may yield different results. In its entirety, this thesis serves as a useful foundation on which to explore various avenues for further research into the electoral connection between voters and candidates.
Bibliography


