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Chasing the vote : developments in the ways political parties conduct election campaigns

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CHASING THE VOTE
Developments in the ways political parties
conduct election campaigns

by

TIMOTHY ANDREW JONES

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in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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Abstract

Chasing The Vote: Developments in the ways political parties conduct election campaigns

By Timothy Andrew Jones

The methods political parties use to engage the electorate during election campaigns undergo a continual process of re-evaluation and modification; this study seeks to further understanding of this process by proposing the concept of a toolkit of techniques from which those who plan campaigns make selections, based on the type of campaign and the resources they have available. Using data gathered from interviews of experienced campaigners, a case study from the 2007 local elections, and the author's own experience as a political campaigner, the development of campaigning is considered from the perspective of the candidate and campaigner 'on the ground'.

Three main drivers of change are considered: increasing levels of partisan dealignment and a decline in party membership, the opportunities that technological innovations have afforded, and regulatory change. The development of new communication channels and the ease of accessibility to sophisticated technology are changing the basic processes of electioneering. Several of the new techniques now gaining favour place less emphasis on the need for face-to-face communication, allowing 'campaigning at a distance'. New data manipulation techniques allow campaigners to target voters in more precise ways, using personalised literature, email and the internet. Greater dependence on technology has led to the role of central party organisations becoming more dominant; many of the new approaches are also more costly than traditional methods, raising concerns about the abilities of minor parties

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and independent candidates to campaign on equal terms. The introduction of on-demand postal voting has introduced a second peak of activity during a campaign, moving the focus of an election away from a single polling day and creating a period of uncertainty in the final days of a campaign.

Chasing the vote: Developments in the ways political parties conduct election campaigns

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Themes and Hypotheses

The periodic opportunity that voters have to express their individual political aspirations, through the selection of a favourite from a choice of candidates, is often held to be the pinnacle of the Western model of democracy. When these events select politicians who will work on the national stage, the campaigns that precede the moment of choice are periods in which intense effort and, increasingly, considerable expenditure are demanded from both the candidates and the political parties they represent. However, while elections are still regarded as *the* fundamental manifestation of the democratic process, across the advanced, industrialised democracies of Europe, North America and Australasia levels of participation are falling. Opinion polling shows that significant proportions of the population, and especially young voters, have disengaged from the party political process over successive elections, although not necessarily from political discourse. Election campaigns are routinely reported by a novelty-hungry media culture as 'dull' 'unexciting' and 'boring' (Brown & Harris 2005, Thomas 2001).

The purpose of this study is to examine the elements that comprise an election campaign from the perspective of the parties and their candidates; in tracing the development of electioneering in the modern period, changes in the ways the political parties approach their electorate and the different techniques they have adopted will be examined. The general hypothesis to be investigated is that the

methods that political parties utilise during election campaigns undergo a continual process of modification, as the parties respond to changes in individual voter behaviour, institutional and structural developments and through the introduction of new technologies. Within this framework, the study will look at the techniques parties employ to encourage the electorate to 'get out and vote'.

The theory that large parts of the electorate formed enduring attachments to specific political parties effectively explained the stability of electoral support at the start of the study period (Campbell, *et al.* 1964, Butler & Stokes 1974). However, electoral stability has significantly reduced over the last sixty years, and at the same time there has been a substantial decline in the active membership of political parties (Clarke, *et al.* 2004). The assumption therefore, that a considerable proportion of the electorate remains consistently loyal to the same party at consecutive elections can no longer be made. The major parties, faced with the challenge of a reducing resource of activists, are forced to employ a range of alternative methods in order to reach their potential supporters (Dalton, *et al.* 2000). For parties that have enjoyed electoral success, the challenge has become one of retaining the support of voters who have favoured them in previous elections while at the same time attracting new supporters.

A complaint that is made by some political commentators is that the British political system is becoming more 'Presidential', with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Official Opposition assuming public personae more familiar to

American voters (Poguntke & Webb 2005; Farrell & Webb 2000: 122; Bevir & Rhodes 2006). The Westminster model, which includes collegial decision-making by the Cabinet, and Parliament providing a scrutiny check against the Executive, appears to be undergoing significant adjustment. This trend is perhaps most evident during election campaigns, as the media's coverage has increasingly concentrated on the respective leaders of the major parties, to the virtual exclusion of other candidates. This study will consider why this shift of focus has occurred and will examine whether one particular aspect of American campaigning has contributed to this trend, that is, the increased influence of professional campaign consultants (Gibson & Römmelle 2001). As the major parties place more emphasis on the strategic planning of campaigns, using co-opted advisers and full-time campaign staff, a tension may arise between a party's central headquarters and their local constituency parties (Ward 2003; Fisher, *et al.* 2006c). This tension is partially reflected in academic debate about the relevance of local party activities to the outcome of national campaigns, for instance in the contrast of views between Butler & Kavanagh in their editorship of the Nuffield studies of British General Elections and the work of Denver and various colleagues (Denver, *et al.* 2003, Fisher, *et al.* 2006a; also Carty & Eagles 1999).

As campaigning becomes technologically more sophisticated, the role of local activists is increasingly being questioned and this study will consider how their contribution has changed over the last five decades. Several of the techniques that are beginning to be widely used place less emphasis on the need for face-to-face communication with electors (Fisher & Denver 2008, Ward 2003, Norris

2003). This has the potential for heightening this tension between centralised party organisations and local constituency parties, as 'campaigning at a distance' becomes a practical reality. However, many of these approaches are more costly than traditional methods and the responses of minor parties and independent candidates to these changes will also be considered (Webb 2005). These campaigners are reliant on more limited resources compared to the mainstream parties, and this lack of resource means they are unable to fully utilise the latest innovations; the degree to which the smaller parties are being disadvantaged, or even excluded from participating in the electoral process will be considered. Is the disparity in resources now sufficiently great that concern should be expressed about the true level of democratic competition?

The development of new communication channels and the ease of accessibility to sophisticated technology have the potential to change the basic processes of electioneering (Fisher & Denver 2008). However, there is a need to define what has occurred so far: has the introduction of computerised systems simply enabled old campaigning methods to be done faster and more thoroughly, or is technology allowing a different type of campaign to take place? This study will consider the implications of changes that have been made to the regulatory framework for elections during the last fifty years. One area that will be examined is the rapid growth in the use of postal ballots following the relaxation in the rules governing their allocation. The increased availability of postal voting has begun to shift the emphasis of an election away from a single polling day, instead creating a period of uncertainty at the end of the campaign, when a significant part of the electorate may have already irreversibly made their

decision, while others remain open to persuasion. Parties with the resources to track who has already voted may choose to direct their efforts to take account of the information they have gathered about those still to vote. In contrast, smaller parties and independent candidates may find themselves wasting their resources communicating with voters who have already made their choice. The increase in postal voting appears, therefore, to have the potential to force parties to conduct their campaigns in significantly different ways.

Political parties are continuously testing new ways to engage the electorate, enhancing their 'toolkit' of campaign techniques. The development of campaigning will therefore be considered in terms of an incremental, or evolutionary process, in which the latest ideas are added to the existing body of knowledge and practice. One of the key drivers creating this relentless pressure to constantly update campaign methodologies is the competitiveness of the electoral market. Every party must assess their own performance at the last election, scrutinising both their successes and failures, matched with a frequent re-evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents. The study will consider whether, in this unremitting climate of attempting to maintain the strategic advantage, keeping one step ahead of opponents, there are also points when the factors driving change combine to produce a moment when a paradigmatic shift occurs and the character of campaigning alters significantly.

Two such shifts will be suggested as having occurred during this period, and an assessment will be made of whether another such transformational point is approaching (Farrell & Webb 2000, Norris 2002). The consequences of the

explosion of communication channels in the 1990s are still being worked through by most campaigners, but it is clear that a variety of new opportunities to talk to the electorate are available (Gibson, *et al.* 2003, Lusoli, *et al.* 2006). Consideration will be given to the ways the major parties are using new techniques to identify and target potential supporters. The trends towards remote participation have affected not only the ways parties communicate with the electorate, but also the opportunities that voters have available to express their perceptions and reactions (Farrell & Webb 2000:123). Techniques that allow direct communication with individual voters, or tightly segmented groups, using email and web-based applications also permit those same voters to immediately feedback their reactions to the messages delivered. Will the nature of campaigning therefore change in the near future as the ability to create these dynamic feedback loops is exploited? In the late 1950s, politicians realised that television allowed them to speak directly to voters in their homes without the need to rely upon a third party, for instance a journalist, to mediate their message, and as a result the nature of campaigning changed (Evans 1981); what will happen when the voter can speak back in an equally direct way? Over the study period, opinion polling has developed from a purely predictive tool, that gave politicians a general indication of how the electorate intended to vote, into a highly sophisticated means of discerning the voters' attitudes, allowing campaign messages to be quickly recast or reinforced. The study will consider who, or what, now shapes an election campaign, and will closely examine the role of candidates, professional advisers, local and national party organisations and the electorate.

The concerns expressed by politicians and media commentators at the increasing levels of abstentionism are rooted in the belief that mass participation in the electoral process remains a foundational element of the Western democratic model (Power Inquiry 2006, Foot 2005:424). With many second-order elections now routinely seeing levels of turnout of less than a third of the eligible electorate, the notion of a mandate to rule claimed by the winners is called into question. It is generally assumed that election campaigns are the specific period when politicians should be both directly speaking and listening to their electorate; however, if the nature of campaigning is changing significantly, are our societal assumptions about the way the political system works, and the role of elections within that system, still valid? If effective campaigning, or more accurately, the ability to win elections, has become the sole preserve of those parties and individuals able to invest major resources into the process, are independent candidates and minor parties increasingly forced into a sideshow, that runs alongside the 'main event'? As a result, are voices no longer being heard that previously had made a valued contribution to the institutions of democracy? If the hypotheses investigated in this study are substantiated, then there are implications for the possible future development of the British political system. Will it remain fit for purpose, and if not, what adjustments need to be introduced, and by whom? While the resolution of those questions lays beyond the scope of this study, it is hoped that the conclusions reached here can make a positive contribution to that debate.

This study will examine the development of campaigning from the perspective of those actually engaged in fighting election contests, and will reflect on the

thoughts and experiences of candidates and activists 'on the ground'. Considerable academic attention is given to elections to primary legislative bodies, which in the UK means elections for the Westminster Parliament (this can be illustrated by noting the number of books now published after each General Election, which for the 2005 Election included Kavanagh & Butler 2005, Geddes & Tonge 2005, Wring, *et al.* 2007, Lilleker, *et al.* 2006, Bartle & King 2005, Norris & Wlezien 2005, and Worcester, *et al.* 2005). It is within this context that the debate about the efficacy of local campaigning is set. Elections to local government have also been studied, (for example, Rallings & Thrasher 2003a); however, while academics largely consider elections in the context of previous elections at the same level, the effect of campaigners being involved in different levels of electoral competition, sometimes concurrently, is less often acknowledged. For instance, Fisher, Denver and Hands (who continue to be strong advocates for giving proper weight to the significance of local constituency campaigning in Westminster elections) in a paper (2006a) examining the relationship between party membership and levels of campaign activity, do not make any reference to other levels of elections and the continuous involvement of local parties in planning and delivering campaigns. In missing this reality of campaigners' activities, and the potential for techniques to be used differently at the various levels of contest, academics seeking to accurately model campaign effects are potentially overlooking a significant additional variable. This study will endeavour to explore the conduct of campaigns in the context of these different levels of governance and will therefore aim to contribute to the wider understanding of current electoral campaign practice.

Hypotheses

The general hypothesis of the study can be summarised as follows:

The ways in which political parties campaign during elections undergo continual modification, as parties respond to changes in individual voter behaviour, institutional and structural developments and the introduction of new technologies.

The wider context of this study will be the six decades beginning in the immediate post-World War II period, covering seventeen General Elections and a great number of elections to local government and the devolved institutions created after 1997; however the primary focus of the study will be on the trends that can be observed in campaigning in the later third of this period.

Within this general framework a number of subsidiary hypotheses will be explored:

Hypothesis One:

During each successive electoral cycle, political parties attempt to innovate and introduce new techniques within their campaigning methodologies, in order to gain an advantage over their opponents and improve their attractiveness to voters. This continual enhancing of the 'toolkit' of campaign techniques is an incremental process; new techniques are 'bolted on' to the existing methods that have been 'tried and tested'. Over time, some techniques have fallen into disuse as alternative methods have replaced them, however, the number and variety of tools available to the campaigner has increased over the study period.

Hypothesis: Campaigners use a 'toolbox' of techniques from which they make selections in order to contest specific campaigns; the choice of tools will vary dependent of factors such as levels of contestation, voting system and availability of resources and as new 'tools' are added.

Hypothesis Two:

Due to the capabilities now available through modern communication technologies, several of the newer techniques being utilised place less emphasis on the need for face-to-face communication with electors. Greater reliance on techniques such as direct mail and call-centre based telephoning, mass email and mobile phone texting (Fisher *et al.* 2008, Gibson, *et al.* 2003), offer the potential for 'campaigning at a distance', that is, methods that can be coordinated and delivered from a central, organising locus but that allow highly individualised voter contact, without the candidate necessarily meeting the voter. This permits parties to maintain apparent high levels of activity in some areas of their election strategy, while depending on much smaller numbers of activists to deliver other parts of the campaign.

Hypothesis: Greater reliance is now placed on techniques that do not require direct face-to-face contact with voters while allowing the appearance of personalised communication.

Hypothesis Three

The infrastructure to deliver campaigns across all the different levels of election has traditionally been located with local activists, who deliver leaflets, knock on doors, and maintain an awareness of the political mood of the electorate in their

area. The result of the growing influence of advisers and full-time professional experts is that a higher proportion of the campaign is conducted 'at a distance', and shifts responsibility for planning the shape and priorities of a campaign away from constituency members and towards the central organisations of the national parties (Fisher *et al.* 2006a). As this trend continues, the rapid development of internet-based communications may further exacerbate the marginalisation of local expressions of the major parties, as expertise, innovation and major resources are increasingly focused around the headquarters staff and the parliamentary representatives of a party.

Consideration of campaigning resources and activity must be set in the context of local parties competing at multiple electoral levels. The electoral cycles for different levels operate over differing time periods, so that at some points more than one type of election is held at the same point, for example, in 1997, 2001 and 2005 the date of the General Election coincided with elections for Shire County councils. In this context, if the local activist base continues to reduce, the ability of national parties to conduct multiple campaigns will be challenged.

Hypothesis: Party activists 'on the ground' are involved in a continual cycle of elections at various levels of governance. However, the organising locus and key resources used in campaigns are increasingly located away from local parties.

Hypothesis Four:

The level of election that a party chooses to contest is a significant variable that shapes the decisions that are made about how to conduct the campaign. The

study will consider the factors that influence the shape of campaign strategies, for instance contrasting what can be expected for a contest for a district council ward compared to contesting a seat in the European Parliament. The varying contributions that local parties make in campaigns to different types of election will be considered in the context of the trend for the mainstream parties to increasingly rely on centralised, 'distance campaigning' techniques, compensating for a decline in local activism.

Hypothesis: The governmental level at which a campaign is fought has a significant influence on the techniques used.

Hypothesis Five:

Minor parties and independent candidates, unless fortunate to receive substantial financial backing, often lack the resources to use the new techniques and are thus put at a greater electoral disadvantage. However, in elections for local government, the newer 'distance' techniques have yet to have a dominant influence, and traditional 'tried and tested' methods remain popular, allowing the minor parties or independent candidates to still compete against the major parties.

Hypothesis: The paucity of resources generally available to minor parties does limit their ability to make use of the newer campaign techniques, and may increasingly marginalise the minor parties and independent candidates.

Hypothesis Six:

The increased use of 'On-Demand' postal voting has shifted the emphasis of an election away from a single polling day, and has forced parties to adjust their campaigns to accommodate more than the single culmination of their efforts. A two-peaked campaign will emerge, with the point when postal ballots are distributed becoming as important as polling day. As the percentage of the electorate voting by post continues to grow, parties will need to introduce more sophisticated techniques that allow them to track who has already voted, in order to target their limited resources onto those who are yet to vote. If the tactics used in the first part of the campaign are different from the latter part, with extra attention given to postal voters at the start of the campaign, a differentiation may also develop between the themes of the pre-postal phase and the messages communicated in the days immediately before Polling Day.

Hypothesis: The growing use of postal votes has created a second peak of activity, materially changing the way campaigns are delivered.

The parameters of this thesis

At this point, it is important to clarify what this study is seeking to examine, and equally, what issues it will not address.

- Firstly, this is a study of party political campaigning and specifically what occurs during election campaigns. It will not look at how campaign practice has been developed by non-party political pressure groups. The activities of parties outside election periods will not be considered except where it has relevance for the preparation of campaigns ; however, the boundary between electioneering during a formal election period and the

year-round campaigning that most parties now engage in is becoming increasingly blurred, as the major parties adopt a position of permanent campaigning. This trend will be noted in terms of the ways permanent campaigning informs and shapes the activities that take place during the election.

- Secondly, in examining how election campaigns are conducted, the study will not pay direct attention to what the parties were campaigning about, that is, the issues and policy themes that were the primary focus of the 'debate' during a campaign. Rather, the goal is to examine the process by which those ideas were communicated, that is, this study will ask how parties 'get out the vote'. This aspect has been developed in elections in the USA into a specific phase of the campaign, with both partisan and non-partisan groups seeking to mobilise their identified supporters. This analysis will go further than merely considering the activities of polling day; it will attempt to define how parties capture votes over the whole period of an election. Campaigning is seen, therefore, as much more than political parties simply seeking to identify their candidates with the electorate, but as a process that engages with voters, both as individuals and groups with specific interests.
- Thirdly, while American political culture is often the source of many of the new trends in campaigning (Newman 1999a, Green & Gerber 2005), the primary focus of this study will be on British politics. Trends observed in comparative settings elsewhere will be noted, where appropriate, for their relevance and applicability to the British political scene (for example, Dalton & Wattenberg 2000).

- Finally, as indicated in the hypotheses above, there will be a need to differentiate between the different levels of election considered.

Campaigns conducted at General Elections can be very different to Parliamentary by-elections, as are elections to the European Parliament compared to those for local government. The reasons why electioneering at the various levels of government differs will be explored in some detail throughout the study, and consideration will be given to a hierarchy of contest types. However, even a cursory assessment indicates that most attention is given to first-order, Parliamentary elections, both by the media and academia. It may also be true that the parties focus their most coordinated effort on the outcome of a General Election, and in consequence, this is when most of the innovation occurs. If this is the case, then what are the implications for second-order elections? Does the knowledge gained from General Elections cascade down to local parties for use when fighting local elections? Or, is there a two-way flow of information with local experience influencing national campaigns?

Methodology

“Somewhat surprisingly, qualitative research has been largely absent in the field of electoral behavior” (Devine 2002).

The study will attempt to present a multi-faceted body of evidence to substantiate the major themes identified. A mixed interpretative approach will be used to investigate the hypotheses described above, drawing on qualitative interviews, quantitative analysis, participant observation, and primary and secondary sources. While it is acknowledged that, traditionally, qualitative and quantitative analytical methods have not been routinely combined in research designs, the nature of the questions this study is attempting to answer suggests adopting a research strategy that draws on a range of techniques in order to produce a more comprehensive analysis.

The Interviews

A series of extended interviews was conducted for this study, which will be used to identify both how campaigning has changed ‘on the ground’ over the study period, and also how local campaigners are responding to the major trends, identified in the hypotheses. Potential interviewees were identified who have extensive campaigning experience, or who are currently engaged in specific areas of innovative campaigning. Using the techniques of elite interviewing, a set of criteria was established to select interviewees and to ensure that a range of experiences from across the political spectrum were considered. Those selected to be interviewed were people with insight gained from their ‘hands-on’ involvement in campaigning; however, these are also individuals whose views

would not necessarily accord with the 'official' view that senior officials within their party structures may want to present. The criteria used were:

- Experience – all those interviewed had served at least two terms as councillors at the District or County Council level. They were either holding that position when interviewed, or had recently left office. Each had therefore been involved in campaigns to get themselves elected and then re-elected; the campaigning methods they discussed were not purely theoretical concepts but ones they had personally experienced, and so, could directly evaluate their effectiveness.
- Additional responsibilities – interviewees were selected who had also coordinated campaigns for other candidates, acting as Election Agents, or employed by their party as campaign organisers, or responsible for planning campaign strategies in a formal, but voluntary capacity within their party's structure. It was also important that they had had exposure to the varying styles of campaigning necessitated by elections to different levels of governance; all had also been involved in several General Election campaigns from the mid-1960s to the present.
- Participants were chosen so that the full spectrum of political allegiances were included; contributions were also sought from candidates who represent minor parties, in order to contrast their experiences with those working with the three major parties.
- It is acknowledged that the majority of those who agreed to give extended interviews are currently based in Cornwall; however, care was taken to select individuals whose experience of campaigning was geographically diverse. Although the current focus of campaigning for

several of the interviewees is in the South West, they were able to speak authoritatively on campaigns in both rural and urban settings across England and Wales, and within the range of local authority types.

Warren defines qualitative interviewing as “a kind of guided conversation” (2001:85), while Devine (2002) provides the following summary of the technique:

“In-depth interviewing is based on an interview guide, open-ended questions and informal probing to facilitate a discussion of issues in a semi-structured or unstructured manner.”

This general pattern was followed in the conduct of the interviews. Once they had agreed to be interviewed, the participants were provided with a two-page briefing note that explained the purpose of the study and suggested the areas of interest that the interview might explore. A series of questions were suggested to aid the interviewees’ preparation, and to provoke their reflections on their own experience. However, it was made clear, both at the time of supplying this briefing note, and at the start of the interview, that this was not a formal list of questions which had to be answered, rather that this acted as a framework to guide the subsequent conversation. All the interviewees were allowed to focus on the issues that they felt were important and about which they had something to say; the interviewer’s role was one of guiding the conversation and drawing out points they were making for further explanation. Accordingly, there was a strong biographical element within each interview, as the subjects reflected on their own experience; one interview was conducted over the telephone, while

the remainder were face-to-face conversations, with each lasting from one to one and a half hours.

In proposing to use elite interviewing techniques for this study, several issues had to be noted in preparing to conduct the interviews. First to be considered was the relationship between the subject and the researcher.

“Success in studying elites is predicated upon the researcher’s overall knowledge of the elite culture under study, in combination with the personal status and institutional affiliation of the interviewer...”
(Odenhal & Shaw 2001:307).

“... elites expect researchers to know something and to have done their homework” (Kvale 1996:132).

The author of this study is a serving District councillor and experienced campaigner. This allowed a rapport to be quickly established, as a common understanding of the experiences of both campaigning and being a councillor were shared; this also allowed the interviewees to express their views without having to explain jargon words, and the ‘insider’s’ experience of the demands of campaigning provided common ground for the discussions.

However, the status of the author as an active member of a political party had also to be considered; it was recognised that this could adversely effect the willingness of some interviewees, particularly those of differing political allegiance, to proffer certain information. One of the issues that will be discussed in establishing the development of campaigns techniques is the need of campaigners to stay one step ahead of their competitors, and there was therefore, a concern that some interviewees would not be willing to divulge their

own party's 'secrets,' and 'tricks of the trade'. The political affiliation of the author was made clear in the invitation to participate, and a commitment given that any information proffered would be used for the purposes of this study alone, and would not be used in any other way. All those approached for an interview agreed to participate, and those of different political persuasions were very open about their experiences, with no indication that they were attempting to obfuscate or dissemble.

The third issue that had to be recognised, was whether the interviews were used to simply provide substantiating evidence for the themes the author had already proposed, or whether the hypotheses could be adequately examined for their veracity and robustness. In interviewing each participant, the author was aware that the framework suggested in the briefing could either release or constrict the interviewees in their reflections about their own experiences. In fact, inviting experienced campaigners to talk about issues to which they have dedicated many hours of work, and about which they share a common passion, meant that during the course of each interview, the author had only to occasionally redirect the interviewee's reflections onto the next point, and there was no shortage of information proffered. The accuracy with which the author has interpreted the meaning of those reflections is also an issue, particularly concerning his ability to be politically detached and academically neutral, and this will be considered in the final chapter.

In addition to the formal interviews, by combining the academic study of campaigning with an active involvement in politics, the author has been able to

draw upon the experiences of many campaigners from his own and other parties, talking to them informally at party conferences and other national events. As noted above, those who are actively involved in political campaigning appear to be always prepared to talk about their experiences, good and bad; this has provided the author with a valuable additional source of views, concerns and best practice.

Quantitative Analysis

A considerable body of data has been established that examines aspects of campaigning and the electorates' responses, especially to door-step canvassing and leaflet distribution (Green & Gerber 2005, Kavanagh 1970, Fisher & Denver 2008); however, this has primarily been originated during General Elections, for instance, in national time-series surveys such as the British Election Study (Clarke 2004). The differences in the approaches to campaigning at lower levels of governance have not been considered in the same detail, although some data do exist. However, much of this research has been focussed on the recipients of campaigning endeavours, that is the voter, rather than directly examining the role and attitudes of those delivering the campaigns; the notable exception to this is the series of studies carried out by the team from Lancaster University who surveyed election agents and organisers in each General Elections from 1992 to 2005 (Fisher, *et al.* 2006c). The gap in the data from participants in local elections has been addressed by a recent series of surveys conducted by the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth. These have questioned a sample of the candidates

standing at the local elections held in 2006 and 2007; data from the 2008 survey were not available in time for this study. The 2006 study was conceived by Mary Shears, a fellow PhD researcher, as part of her investigation into the role of women councillors in local government. "One of the primary objectives of the 2007 candidate survey," conducted by Professors Rallings and Thrasher, "was to measure the nature and level of support for policy measures designed to broaden the social base of elected councillors" (2007b). While the main concerns of neither study included a direct investigation of campaigning techniques, both contained data of relevance to this study; the author is very grateful to the members of the Elections Centre for their willingness to make these data available. Quantitative data analysis methods will be used to interpret the findings of these surveys, which will be used to further illustrate the substantive themes explored by the interviewees.

Participant observation

As already noted, the author of this study has combined academic study of British politics with active involvement in the political process, as both a political party activist and councillor. He was first elected to Restormel Borough Council in Cornwall, in 2003, representing the Liberal Democrats in Mount Charles ward in St Austell, Cornwall. He became Leader of the Council in 2005 and successfully stood for re-election in the same ward in May 2007. As a councillor, Leader of a Council and active campaigner, he has an opportunity to bring to this study a further strand of insight, drawing from his own experiences of current campaign practice. While it is recognised that there are potential disadvantages to participant observation, with an observer who is so fully a part

of the process being investigated, the reflections of the author from within a campaign in the 2007 local elections will, it is hoped, add a perspective not available to those outside the process.

Precedent for this approach is based upon the studies of electoral behaviour in local elections that were conducted during the early 1970s conducted by Bochel & Denver (1971 & 1972) and Pimlott (1972 & 1973), in which all three researchers were participants (although not candidates) in the campaigns they later wrote about. These studies sought to establish that targeted campaigning in specific areas had a measurable, positive effect on turnout. The purpose of the participant observation used in this study will not be to measure the effects of any specific aspects of the campaign on turnout; it will, however, examine current practice in the light of the themes identified during the study.

Other Primary sources

As an active campaigner, the author has benefited from the advice and training produced by the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors. The Association has produced a magazine, *Grassroots Campaigner*, as well as issuing a continual stream of emails and other printed material, containing reminders, advice and tips relevant to forthcoming election campaigns. These, together with articles collected from *Liberal Democrat News*, the party's weekly newspaper, and a separate stream of emails distributed from the Liberal Democrats Campaigns Unit, based at their London headquarters, have provided additional sources of data to inform this study. Much of this information

particularly that contained in the emails, while not secret is only made available to party activists.

In using this multi-faceted methodological approach, it is hoped that the study will make a contribution to a fuller understanding of the developments in campaigning and, as indicated, will reflect on the direction some of the important trends are taking.

Thesis Structure and Overview

Following this introductory chapter, Chapters Two and Three, will set the context and establish the main themes of the study.

Chapter Two contains a review of the academic literature on the subject of campaigning and summarises the current debates that surround the issues which the hypotheses seek to address.

Chapter Three examines typical campaign practice, through consideration of an ideal-type model of an election campaign. It will identify the main factors that, typically, are observed in most British electoral campaigns, and will examine the contributions that the key participants expect to make and how they interact with each other.

The second section, Chapters Four to Six, will attempt to match the theoretical context established in the first section with the experiences of real campaigners. Chapter Four will consider the practice of campaigning 'on the ground', that is, those elements of the campaigner's toolbox that actively seek out the voter, in order to engage in either a face-to-face or telephone conversation.

Chapter Five examines the growing use of indirect methods of approaching the voter through the use of generalised literature, targeted direct mail letters and the new opportunities that internet-based resources provide.

In Chapter Six, a review of Polling Day activities will conclude the comparison of actual practice to the ideal model; additionally, given the decline in the activist base in all parties, attention will be given to the role of different actors in modern campaigns, including 'paper' candidates, and finally the effects of the introduction of on-demand postal voting.

Section Three will apply all of the issues and themes identified to a real election campaign. Chapter Seven will describe the observations of the study's author during the District Council elections held in May 2007. It will consider the saliency of the key themes identified in the study to the practical design and delivery of a campaign.

The final chapter will attempt to assess the speed and direction of the trends identified in the study, and draw conclusions about the future of electioneering in the British political system.

Chapter Two

Setting the Context: Literature Review

Every politician ultimately has the same purpose when engaged in electoral campaigning – to persuade individual voters to place a vote in their favour. For more than one hundred years the essential techniques used by political parties and their supporters to encourage and motivate that support remained largely unaltered. However, since the 1960s significant innovations have resulted in different forms of electioneering being tested and adopted. Political analysts now understand that the simple act of casting a vote conceals a complex process that campaigners must unravel in order to attract voters to their party. This review of the study of campaigning will consider the methods the academic community use to understand these techniques and the major themes that are found in the literature. It will reflect on the ways the historical development of campaigning has been mapped, in particular through the use of the 'three-phases' model and by tracing the 'professionalisation' of campaigning. It will also describe the debate between academics that concentrate on centralised campaigns, organised and directed from party headquarters, and those who place a greater emphasis on the role of local parties. Developments in campaign practice will be shown to be triggered by a range of societal changes, for example, in response to the dealignment of partisan identification amongst the electorate, the trends leading to the consumerisation and individualisation of the electorate, and legislative change that has permitted the growth of voting by post.

In seeking to review the current academic status of the study of campaigning, it is appropriate to note the introductory comment made by David Farrell and Rüdiger Schmidt-Beck in *Do Political Campaigns Matter?*

“while parties, candidates, interest groups, governments, media and (some) voters are apparently strongly convinced of the notion that campaigns do indeed matter, the collective views of the academic community can perhaps best be summarized by the word ‘undecided’” (2002:1).

This is not to suggest, however, that academics do not take this matter seriously, and as will be illustrated, considerable attention is being given to the study of electoral campaigning from a variety of perspectives. In order to adequately understand how campaigning works, and how it is evolving, researchers have to consider the following essential questions:

- Who are the main actors that contribute to a campaign? Which of those actors set the agenda and in what ways do their decisions relate to the activists and volunteers in the constituencies?
- What are the main means of communication employed? Have the mechanics of communication changed over time, and if so, why and in what ways?
- What do the main actors understand a campaign can achieve? What do they see is the purpose of the various activities normally seen in election campaigns? Is their aim to communicate a message, and if so to whom and for what purpose? Alternatively, must they first attempt to divine the voters' thoughts and intentions (Gibson & Römmelle 2001) before shaping responses that appeal to particular segments of the electorate?

The Historical Development of Campaigning

Among those political scientists who are seeking to understand both the present impact of electioneering and its historical development, a three-stage model has become a popular tool for analysing the nature of campaigns. The majority of such studies tend to focus on first-order elections, that is, election campaigns to primary legislative assemblies. Norris (in LeDuc, *et al.* 1996 & 2002), Farrell in collaboration with Webb (in Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000) and with Schmitt-Beck (2002), Gibson & Römmelle (2001) and Swanson & Mancini (1996), have each used and adapted this model, dividing the development of campaigning into three distinct phases (the description below follows Norris' nomenclature).

- Phase One describes the era of 'pre-modern' campaigning, referring to campaigning up to about the mid-1960s. In this phase traditional campaign techniques are identified as being highly labour-intensive with the focus of activity on the candidate's endeavours within their own constituency. The conduct of the campaign was largely a localised event, and there was little emphasis on a 'national' campaign, or central coordination of key messages. The campaign was in the hands of enthusiastic volunteers and activists, the 'foot-soldiers' going from door-to-door, canvassing, delivering leaflets and putting up roadside posters and window stickers. However, the management of such campaigns was often conducted by a full-time professional campaigner, or 'Agent'; at the 1950 election the Conservative party had over 500 full-time agents, in contrast to Labour's 350 paid agents, now seen as the 'high-point' for this type of support for local parties (Fisher, *et al.* 2006c:572). The candidate

sought to maximise their public profile by speaking at public rallies and special events staged by the local party. Predominately, the emphasis was on face-to-face campaigning, in which both the candidate and activists attempted to identify party supporters and to convince them that they needed to vote. While the material costs required to conduct a campaign in this way were relatively low, considerable numbers of workers were necessary to ensure that a sufficiently large proportion of electorate was reached.

- Phase Two, the 'modern phase', is usually considered as beginning in the UK by the mid-1960's and provides the dominant theme for about twenty years. However, the 1959 General Election campaign can be viewed as the starting date for this new period, with the innovations introduced under Harold Macmillan's leadership of the Conservative Party. In his autobiography, Macmillan notes that, "two new forces which had already played a small part in previous Elections now began to assert themselves. The first was the opinion polls, the second was the use of Television" (1972:7); he involved himself in the preparatory process for an election to a far greater degree than previous party leaders, determined to prepare the Conservatives to fight "the first modern, media-age election campaign" (Horne 1989:148-9). For the mainstream parties throughout the modern period, their preparations prior to an election and the strategies they adopted became more structured and carefully planned, as they were increasingly controlled from the centre. Beginning with the Conservatives engagement of the advertising agency, Coleman,

Prentice & Varley in 1957, the expertise of marketers and public relations professionals became progressively more influential to campaign planning; usually this support was provided to a small elite group of senior politicians and workers based at party headquarters. The epitome of this type of relationship is the work Saatchi & Saatchi produced for the Conservative party for a series of General Election campaigns from 1979 and into the 1980s (Kleinman 1987).

The introduction of professional media experts and pollsters came as a consequence of the realisation by senior party managers that developments in the national media network could be utilised when shaping both the message and presentation of political campaigns.

“More than anything else, television has contributed to the nationalization of campaigning, in the sense that everything is focused on one leader, one party, one set of common themes” (Farrell 1996:173).

Television offered new opportunities to campaign strategists: “in [the] television broadcast one is addressing not political correspondents, but people in their homes” (Evans 1981:43).

As the modern campaign saw the introduction of this commercial expertise directing coordinated national campaigns, this implied a move away from the ad-hoc, local campaigns of the pre-modern era. For election analysts such as David Butler this was a natural consequence of a trend he had already noted, that of the local campaign becoming little more than a routine activity that had minimal effect on the final result of

an election. Commenting on the 1959 British General Election, he and Richard Rose wrote,

“In spite of ... advances in campaign technique, the ritual of electioneering was performed in traditional style. Participants and observers alike groped in semi-darkness for evidence of what really moved the electorate, of what influenced their votes and their attitudes to life.”

They concluded that, “if all constituency electioneering were abandoned, the national outcome would probably be little altered” (Butler & Rose 1960:2 & 120). Although this was not a view immediately shared by the parties themselves, change did occur. For example, during the course of the 1959 election, Macmillan travelled 2,500 miles, delivering 74 speeches at public meetings, while Gaitskell made 53 major speeches (Horne; Butler & Rose). In contrast, in 1979, Callaghan delivered 20 major speeches, and Thatcher only 12. Mrs Thatcher, while not making as many speeches as her predecessors, still believed she had to get out into constituencies, but focussed her activity on events that satisfied the demands of the news media.

Due to the level of expertise required to put mediated campaigns together, the financial costs of campaigning in this period increased dramatically. Decisions about how the finances available to a party were spent, and how limited resources were prioritised and allocated, accordingly came to be a significant factor in how campaigns were shaped, increasing the role of those at the centre of the national parties; at the same time, concepts such as targeting resources onto specific,

'winnable' seats were introduced. Greater attention was also paid to polling data which were used to measure the effectiveness of key messages, and thus helped shape the daily agenda throughout the campaign. The centralised nature of the campaign allowed a stronger emphasis on the campaign's homogeneity – a single message could be guaranteed across the country.

It should be noted that the involvement of non-party professionals advising on campaign strategies, initially met with strong resistance from MPs and other politicians. In the late 60s, both senior Conservative and Labour MPs struggled to accept the more influential roles 'outside' professionals were taking. The use of polling data to do anything more than foretell election results was also viewed with considerable scepticism; Gaitskell viewed the idea as "somehow false" (Butler & Rose 1960:20), while others considered it as 'alien' to British democracy. Aneurin Bevan was particularly resistant to the contribution of non-partisan advisers, calling their involvement the "the worst sort of Americanization" (Rose 1967:63). Rose also notes that politicians, schooled in the traditional ways of campaigning, thought that these techniques questioned their innate intuition in judging the most appropriate ways to communicate with their electorate. Richard Crossman succinctly expressed this sentiment, "I am only completely convinced by the findings of the Gallup Poll when they confirm my own impression of what the public is thinking" (Rose 1967:158).

- Phase Three, considers the most recent developments in campaigning under the title 'Postmodern'. Building on the developments of the modern era, from the mid-1980s on, the advances in computing technology allow a range of new techniques to be used by campaigners, both at a national level and in local parties. However, Postmodernism is a label that implies far more than just increased technological efficiency and is used to describe a much wider range of societal changes.

The way candidates interact with voters, and present their message is undergoing significant change. Voters, who traditionally have been treated as the target of the campaigners' activities, as an audience, are now viewed as necessary participants and contributors to a process that involves more than simply voting. In part, this is because "the increasing tendency is less one of [candidates] selling themselves to voters, but rather one of designing an appropriate product to match voter needs" (Farrell & Webb 2000:102). This raises the question of what campaigners aim to achieve through their engagement with voters. In the Pre-modern era candidates presented themselves and their message as a package that voters could accept or reject via the ballot box. Successful politicians, that is, those who were elected, could consider themselves as the most effective *salesmen* in the electoral competition (noting that relatively few women achieved the status of MP in this period). In the Postmodern period, great effort is now devoted to working out what voters think and feel, using a range of tools including opinion polling data and focus groups, and campaigns are tailored accordingly. Technological

innovations, such as computerised mailing lists and advanced direct mail techniques, allow voters to be identified, differentiated and then approached in ways that appear to be highly personalised. However, as Norris notes, there is a paradox,

“the postmodern conceptualization sees politicians as essentially lagging behind technological and economic changes, while running hard to stay in place by adopting new techniques” (2002:141).

The tension noted during the modern era, created by growing central party control of campaigns and the downplaying of the significance of local campaigns, has continued. A criticism from local party organisations in the modern phase was that as campaigns were nationally focussed, they became depersonalised with little effort being made to contact voters individually. The new tools now available to central party machines allow this issue to be addressed with the creation of what appear to be specifically personalised contacts with individual voters that are, in reality, produced *en masse*.

A further theme often identified in the study of Postmodernism is the conflict that has now emerged between market forces that are making communication much easier, unifying the global population, against the multiplication and fragmentation of delivery networks; as Ward notes,

“Television is no longer as pivotal to postmodern because it no longer delivers to a mass audience (2003:587).”

The digital revolution has created a plethora of television outlets, through satellite, cable, and broadband Internet. The advent of 24-hour rolling

news coverage delivered through these media has changed the way voters are able to access information and this presents fresh challenges for candidates and parties in how to communicate efficiently with their target audiences.

Farrell and Webb (2000) use a similar three-stage model to capture the way political parties have developed as campaign organisations. They trace the development of campaigning techniques, noting three inter-related areas of change:

- *technical* – the impact of television, and more recently digital telecommunications on campaigning strategies, which require more detailed preparations in advance of a campaign.
- *resource* – organisational change within parties, with greater emphasis on the role of central headquarters, and increasing use of non-partisan advisors from the commercial sector.
- *thematic* – reflects the more high-profile role of party leaders and the ‘presidentialisation’ of national campaigns. They suggest that the *raison d’être* of campaigning has moved from “selling to marketing” (p. 122).

David Denver and Gordon Hands (in Farrell & Schmitt-Beck, 2002) adapt the three-phase model, by comparing the development of campaigning to changes observed in manufacturing industry: In the Pre-Fordist era, items were hand-made and there was a close connection between manufacturer and consumer. Innovation introduced the techniques of mass production to manufacturing, generically labelled Fordism, and subsequently opened up a gap between producer and end-user. In the Post-Fordist era, advanced technology is now

being used to enable manufacturers to target small niche markets. Lessons from the Fordist era have been noted and the connection between maker and consumer is re-established in new ways. In summing up their view of these developments on campaigning, Denver & Hands write,

“In some ways the use of computers and telephone canvassing simply allows the classic modern campaign to be conducted more effectively but they also bring in new and distinctly post-Fordist features” (2002:124).

It should be noted that not all those studying the development of campaigning accept this typology. Negrine & Lilleker express the concern that in creating a rigid, and perhaps simplistic analysis of the historical development of campaigning, the model masks the variations in campaigning that can be observed across different areas during the same election campaign.

“At the constituency level ... the campaign can take on many forms ranging from the highly organized, heavily resourced campaign through to one where the candidate is left on their own, and offered few resources and a minimum of support” (2002:311).

However, the commentators who use this phased analysis do not suggest that all campaigning at any one point in time exhibits all the characteristics of the dominant phase of that period. Norris accepts that her application of the model should not be taken to imply that all campaigning now follows the postmodern model and in fact there is abundant evidence that many recent campaigns still exhibit the characteristics of Pre-modern campaigns.

“Rather than claiming that all campaigns are inevitably moving into the postmodern category, this view emphasizes that contests can continue to be arrayed from the premodern to the postmodern, due to the influence of a range of intermediary conditions such as the electoral systems, campaign regulations, and organizational resources” (Norris 2002:135).

Farrell & Webb suggest that the factors they describe should be seen as “a continuum along which campaign organisations are moving” (2000:106).

However, there is a clear trend towards more campaigns placing greater reliance on the newer methods (Ward 2003), and as Dinkin suggests, it is appropriate to view developments of campaigning techniques as an evolutionary process:

“changes in electioneering generally have occurred in a gradual fashion without abrupt departures. Old ways often would be employed along with the new until the former were shown to be completely obsolete” (1989:xi).

This issue will be explored in more detail later in the study, noting particularly the distinctions in campaign strategies used between first-order elections and second-order elections for local government. As Fisher and Denver note,

“Norris’s ... focus is primarily on the national campaign and the same is true of Farrell and Webb. Neither provides (or is concerned to provide a comprehensive typology for the study of district-level campaigning alone.” (2008:796).

In following chapters the appropriateness of using the three-phased models to understand campaigning at lower-order elections will be considered, and whether alternative models can explain recent developments more accurately.

Political Marketing and the professionalisation of campaigns

The introduction of commercial expertise into the structure of campaigns has been of considerable interest to academics and it has led to an alternative explanation of the development of campaigning techniques. Insights from the theory of marketing have been applied to the processes of political campaigning, and now, often referring to the professionalisation of campaigning (Plasser

2001; Gibson & Römmele 2001), the approach is generically termed 'Political Communication' or 'Political Marketing'.

"The introduction of marketing concepts and philosophy into political formulation and communication is increasingly seen as a core feature of party electoral strategy" (Lilleker 2005:570; see also Lees-Marshment 2001 & 2004).

'Professionalisation' is frequently used as a shorthand term to describe the increased involvement in elections of experts in public relations, marketing and advertising, opinion polling and media production. However, as will be noted in later chapters, a more appropriate description is perhaps the 'commercialisation' of campaigning, given that the skills being introduced are ones that are routinely used in the business and commercial sector, and Agents as full-time party-employed campaigners were historically a key feature of local campaigning (Fisher, *et al.* 2006c); Lilleker & Negrine (2002; Negrine & Lilleker 2002) suggest that the term 'professionalization' has been used too imprecisely. The *Americanization* of campaigns has also been used synonymously (Kavanagh 1996), in part because elections in the USA are among the most extensively researched in the world, and this research feeds into the considerable literature on the subject. In addition, the large number of elections that take place at all levels of government in the USA allow many innovative ideas and new techniques to be piloted and tested before they are exported to other countries (Baines, *et al.* 2001:1100; Sparrow & Turner 2001). Another example of the trend to follow the American experience is the broad assumption, often made, that as more professionals are engaged the party's role is diminished (Plasser 2001; Clark 2004). Commenting from an American perspective, Dulio and Nelson note,

“Parties are no longer the glue that holds individual candidates’ campaigns together; this task now falls to professional political consultants and campaign managers” (2005:32).

Gibson & Römmelle question the reality of the threat to existing party structures and note that, “when parties are discussed it is generally as the victims of professionalization rather than in any causal sense” (2001:34); they argue that,

“by outsourcing the tasks surrounding image management and campaign strategy, parties are left free to focus more closely on the core tasks of governance. In addition, the opportunities for internal restructuring and communication control strengthens parties’ ability to control their message to members and muzzle those vote-losing voices of extremism” (2001:40).

Norris also acknowledges that the contribution that organised parties make may not yet be over, suggesting that “the role of parties has evolved or adapted since the 1960s in Western democracies, rather than simply weakened” (Norris 2002:145). However, there is little dispute that the structure of parties is changing as,

“parties are now becoming organised on a permanent war footing with a constant marketing orientation co-ordinated by a permanent staff of communications and marketing professionals” (Sparrow & Turner 2001), and,

“the ongoing professionalisation of leading staff members within the parties’ headquarters have transformed campaigning from an amateur activity to a highly professionalized operation” (Plasser 2001).

The Centre/Local Debate

The role of outside-party advisors in campaigns can also be considered as an aspect of the debate on the relationship between party headquarters running national campaigns and the local parties working in constituencies. Using the three-phase model discussed above, this debate can be summarised as follows:

- Pre-modern campaigning was very focused on local communities. Parties with nationwide coverage accepted that the party's senior hierarchy were unable to control the message being delivered 'on the ground'. Hence different members of the same party could campaign on different themes and emphasise issues of personal priority.
- With the advent of mediated campaigns, the small team responsible for developing TV and other media advertising exercised increasing control of the main themes of a campaign. The requirements of a centre-led, highly structured campaign downplayed the significance of local parties, as the media coverage tended to favour the 'big news' stories emerging from the centre.
- In the Postmodern era the contribution of local parties remains uncertain. There appears to have been a continuance of the trend that has seen responsibility for major campaign decisions shifting upward within party hierarchies and outwards with the involvement of non-party professionals. Parties that have the technological ability may now run highly personalised campaigns employing direct mail, email and the strategic use of the media, and this allows the emergence of parties that do not require extensive local party organisations (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000). The United Kingdom Independence Party's performance in the 2004 European Parliamentary Elections is perhaps an example of this new approach, with the party heavily reliant on a media-based campaign to gain a high profile with the electorate (Hencke 2005). The final result far exceeded the party's strength in local organisation, compared to the three largest mainstream parties; however, the beneficial effects of the electoral

system used should not be overlooked – UKIP have failed to make a similar impact in elections to either Westminster or in local elections, although there are signs of growing support in London (Borisjuk, *et al.* 2007). The implication is that the level of election and the electoral system are significant factors in how parties resource their campaigns, an issue that will be considered in more detail later in the study.

David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, as has already been noted, have taken a consistently sceptical view of the value of local campaigns, in their editorship of the Nuffield series of British General Election studies. In their most recent volume, looking at the May 2005 General Election, they note that, “there were those ... who commented wryly that in the end it was the most centralised and coordinated campaign ever.” They conclude,

“Constituency campaigning is changing rapidly, decaying in most places yet becoming more sophisticated and targeted in marginal seats” (2005:173 & 177).

In the introduction to an earlier study by Kavanagh, the statement was made that,

“although many candidates and party workers derive considerable personal psychic satisfaction from the campaign, their efforts have little if any effect on the outcome” (1970:vii).

Other commentators have questioned the credibility of this argument given that all parties, big and small, continue to invest significant proportions of their resources and finances into local campaigns (Johnston & Pattie 2007). Critics have sought to provide empirical evidence establishing the impact of local campaigning on the outcomes of elections (Denver, *et al.* 2002, 2004).

Studies by Bochel & Denver (1971 & 1972) and Pimlott (1972 & 1973), established that measurable increases in turnout could be attributed to well-planned local campaigns. This assertion has been confirmed in subsequent research by others making the same argument (see Denver, *et al.* 2004). To quantify the effects of constituency campaigning, various measures of the intensity of local activity have been developed: Pattie, Johnston & Fieldhouse (1995) measured the level of constituency spending using data extracted from the statements of expenditure that local parties are legally required to complete after each election. Pattie & Johnston later noted that parties are likely to spend less when they are only making a token effort and more when they have assessed that the extra effort may result in a positive result (2003). Whiteley & Seyd (1994 & 2003a) used data from the British Election Survey together with their own surveys of Labour party members to construct a measure of activism. Denver & Hands (2004) again used survey data, sourced from election agents of all parties in post-election questionnaires.

After a period in the 1980s when considerable academic and political attention was given to the impact of centralised campaigns, David Denver and his team suggest that the situation changed in the early 1990s and local activism was accorded a greater focus. This was in part due to innovations in local campaign techniques, following the introduction of new technology, as greater numbers of constituency parties began to use computers, telephones and direct mail. They also concluded that local activity, both during campaigns and on polling day, was changing but was not reducing in scale (2003:550). The trend towards the

professionalisation of national campaigns was also seen as eventually having a positive effect on constituency parties as the lessons learnt were modified and applied at the local level (Denver, *et al.* 2004:290). However, while “the evidence ... strongly supports [the] claim that, when it comes to fighting elections, constituency party organisation and the efforts of party members at the local level do matter” (Denver, *et al.* 2004:303) it is acknowledged that not all the signs are positive for the future role of local parties. Among the factors continuing to force change upon constituency campaigners are the reality that technology allows effective campaigns to be conducted with fewer activists, and that the practice of targeting seats increasingly means that a model for fighting those designated targets is imposed from the centre (Ward 2003).

Drivers of change

The continual development of campaign methodology and the periodic introduction of new techniques prompts the question, why do parties seek to change the way they campaign? If a party has been consistently successful in elections and achieved governmental power what motivates party leaders to try to enhance their campaigning techniques? Clearly, for minor parties the adoption of more successful strategies can lead to a higher profile and the prospect of becoming a major party. For the mainstream parties, Swaddle implies that hubris is a factor:

“Parties will not generally wish to be identified with low-tech or old-fashioned methods, whereas hi-tech is glamorous and gives the appearance of efficiency. Perhaps there is a feeling that the way parties campaign gives voters a glimpse of the way they would govern” (1989:39).

A more robust suggestion is found in the analogy that Farrell & Schmitt-Beck draw with nation-states engaging in competitive arms races (2002). They propose that a major motivation for the mainstream parties to continually invest resources and develop their campaigning strategies is the need to stay one step ahead of their main competitors. For those parties that have a realistic chance of forming a government, there is undoubtedly a clear incentive to ensure that their efficiency is maximised. Military metaphors are frequently used in writing about political campaigning (for example, see Scammell 1998, and Zetter 2007) and Rosenbaum uses another to describe this process of continual change, "In the electoral shooting range the rifle is slowly replacing the blunderbuss" (1997:248).

Farrell, *et al.* (2001) denote the three periods as the Newspaper Age, the Television Age, and the Digital Age. As they imply, campaigning has been heavily influenced by technological change over the study period. In this context, what capacity do parties require in order to respond to, and to cope with, the demands of change and what happens to those parties unable or unwilling to adapt? This issue will be explored further throughout the study; however, apart from the impact of technological innovation, a series of other factors must also be noted as drivers of change, which will be the focus of the discussion in the second half of this chapter. An analysis of the different ways parties are developing their campaigns would be incomplete without also considering the changes that have occurred in the way voters respond to political parties. Within the study of the behaviour of voters, one of the central trends to be noted is the dealignment of partisan identification. However, the individualisation,

consumerisation and personalisation of the political process will also be considered.

Voting behaviour and Party Identification

Among the different theories that attempt to explain the behaviour of individual voters and the aggregated consequences, the concept of partisan identification has proved to be very influential. Originally proposed over fifty years ago by a team from Michigan University in *The American Voter*, the central idea of the theory is that most voters form enduring attachments to a specific political party. Berelson describes partisan identification as “an enduring, inherited, emotive attachment to a political party that would withstand occasional voting deviations” (quoted in Catt 1996:80). Generally, “this tie is a psychological identification, which can persist without legal recognition or evidence of formal membership and even without a consistent record of party support” (Campbell *et al.* 1964:67-68). Using this concept, theorists have attempted to explain why the majority of voters consistently identify with and support one party, while others regularly change their choice of party both over time and at different levels of representation, a phenomena known as ‘split-ticket voting’.

Equally, while those with an established identification may not vote for their party of choice at every opportunity, the theory suggests that such an attachment shapes how the individual sees the political world and that it filters information about politicians and their policy claims. Neil Postman in a discussion about the collapse of what he describes as the “meta-narratives” that act as the scaffolding

for the construction of such filters, notes the following about their use in the political context,

“Every social institution has a kind of theory about what sort of information is worthwhile and what is irrelevant... I will give you an example. I grew up in New York in a standard Democratic, with a large D, household. And we had a theory which helped us manage information, helped us know what information we needed to pay attention to and what information we could ignore. The theory went like this. Anything a Republican says you could ignore. [Laughter] Now that helps enormously, right there. Now then the theory went on. Anything a Democrat says you should pay attention to, except if the Democrat is from the South, because they are racist and you don't have to pay attention to them. So, this made one's political education simplified. All theories tend to simplify. That's the purpose of theories—to help people manage information” (Postman 2004).

Partisan identification has been used as a measure of engagement with the political process, providing information both about the direction of a voter's allegiance and the strength of that attachment. Four essential characteristics of partisanship can be noted:

- firstly, it is lasting commitment, normally enduring over several electoral cycles;
- secondly, parental socialisation is a significant initial factor in setting the direction of a new voter's predisposition; (note the 'home' setting of Postman's description).
- thirdly, this provides “a sense of belonging to a party at an emotional level rather than as a formal paid-up member” (Miller *et al.* 1990:2)
- and, finally, party identification is independent of voting choice (Budge *et al.* 1976:6).

Partisan attachment provides a perceptual screen that shapes a voter's attitudes, opinions and evaluations, disposing them to favour their chosen party at election-time over other rivals, but not necessarily prohibiting a vote for an

alternative candidate (Rosema 2006). As Postman's point illustrates, partisan disposition acts as a framing mechanism that works to create a positive image of the voter's favoured party, filtering out criticisms and negative views, while at the same time, by also filtering out potentially positive views of rival parties, it can create an image of the opposition that allows rival claims to be ignored.

Commenting on his experience of the 1959 General Election campaign, the Head of the BBC's Audience Research Department, recognised the filtering effect of partisan identification:

"Beauty is apparently not the only quality which resides in the eye of the beholder ... A leader who was 'patently sincere' and 'quietly confident' to his supporters was 'glib', and 'weary and dejected' to his opponents. An exposition could appear at once 'frank' and 'evasive' according to the point of view of the listener. A technique which is commended by some as 'professional' and 'easy to follow' is at the same time called by others 'slick' or 'an insult to the elector's intelligence'" (Butler & Rose 1960:95).

In the UK, the theoretical insights developed by the Michigan team were applied and developed by Butler and Stokes and were the central theme of their book *Political Change in Britain* (1974). They used the term 'partisan self-image' rather than 'party identification', although the terms are now used synonymously. Their explanation for why such attachments were formed was founded on the view that during the period immediately following the end of World War II, consciousness of social status, that is, class, was the dominant cleavage within British society. Their general conclusion was that the middle classes predominately voted for the Conservative Party and the working classes broadly supported the Labour Party. Butler and Stokes also noted a much closer relationship between a voter's identification with a particular party and

subsequent voting behaviour than that observed in the USA, describing voting as an expression of a fundamental political identity (1992:132).

Since the mid-1970s, there has been a substantial weakening in the overall strength of allegiance felt by those who still recognise they have an attachment to a particular party. Data from the British Election Study reveals increasing levels of voter dealignment: the first BES study was conducted in 1964 and indicated that 43% of the electorate identified themselves as Labour supporters, 40% identified with the Conservatives, with 12% Liberals and 5% not able to identify with any party. The 2001 BES showed that the total number of supporters of the two main parties had, over this 37-year period, fallen to 68% (44% Labour and 24% Conservative). Identifiers with the Liberals, later the Liberal Democrats, started and finished the period with a similar level of support at just over 10%, but the numbers of voters who hold no partisan attachment had increased to 16% (Clarke, *et al.* 2004:176, 178-179). In the same period “the number with a very strong identity fell from 44 to 13 percent” and “growing numbers (from 11 to 35 percent) ... concede that their partisan identification is ‘not very strong’” (Webb 2002:20). Clarke and his collaborators recognise that “an impressive dealignment of degree” has occurred in the electorate but add the caveat that, “the intensity of partisan attachments and their linkages with social class have always been weaker than the popular image of tribal politics would suggest” (2004:212).

Several explanatory hypotheses have been proposed to explain this decline (Fisher, *et al.* 2006b); Dalton discusses two main theories appropriate at the

individual level in his account of the decline of party identification (Dalton & Wattenberg 2000:29-39). Firstly, among the major contributory factors are the societal changes that have occurred in advanced industrial nations since the 1960s. These have produced higher levels of education within the electorate, which when combined with the availability of new information sources in the mass media, have enabled voters to decide for themselves rather than relying on traditional channels for information about the political situation. In this context, the appropriate response of each party, assuming that all respond in similar ways, is to upgrade and professionalise their marketing and campaigning abilities, so that each party's message can remain distinctive in the electoral market place. Some commentators also suggest that much can be attributed to the consequences of class dealignment and the subsequent demise of institutions that previously had socialised a party's established base of supporters. For evidence they point particularly to the decline in influence of the Trade Union movement as the major British manufacturing industries went into decline (Power 2006:183). Sociologically, these changes have produced an atomisation of society so that the voter is now unlikely to receive strong or consistent indicators from the social groups to which they belong.

The recognition of a decline in partisan attachment carries with it the implication that when voters change their allegiance they do not simply shift to similar levels of support for an alternative party, that is, a realignment of partisanship. Rather, they move to a position of no allegiance and become unattached, floating, or swing voters. Clarke, *et al.* argue for a 'valenced partisanship' to describe this new situation; "By valenced partisanship, we mean that voters' party

identifications can be thought of as a storehouse of accumulated party and party leader performance evaluations” (2004:211), a resource that is drawn upon when needed, again drawing on the concept that partisanship acts as a filtering mechanism, discussed above. In an electorate that is more volatile than was once accepted, political parties must adapt their ‘tried and tested’ techniques to accommodate this different environment. “Although a decline in the general levels of party identification need not automatically lead to changes in electoral behaviour, it is likely to have a profound impact on party behaviour” (Mair, *et al.* 2004:5). Parties now have available to them a larger pool of unattached voters, the majority of whom hold the belief that it is now acceptable to remain uncommitted. Many voters no longer feel obliged to hold even a loose attachment to one of the major parties. This means that every party now has to work hard on two fronts to ensure their share of electoral support does not decline. Firstly, with those voters who continue to retain some level of attachment, the party’s task, both when campaigning and outside elections, is to reinforce that identity and to encourage the voter to express their attachment at each election. Secondly, they have to identify and positively communicate with those undecided voters who will make their decision on how to vote during the course of an election campaign. The practical dilemma the major parties face is how to retain the support of people who habitually vote for them while at the same time attracting new supporters.

The pattern of increased instability combined with a growing weakness of partisan attachment “has constituted one of the most powerful challenges facing the many individual parties that seek support in contemporary electoral markets”

(Mair, *et al.* 2004:1). While partisan identification is still recognised as an important factor in shaping the electoral predisposition of many voters, at the same time there is a growing trend to other forms of political expressions; “what we see here ... is concrete and consistent evidence of widespread disengagement from *party* politics” (emphasis added, Mair & van Biezen 2001:6).

A further, related trend that underscores the consequences of these changes in the electoral marketplace is the significant decline in the membership of political parties (Scarrow 2000). A serious reduction has been noted both in the numbers of people who participate as formal members of political parties and in the percentage of members who are prepared to be active within them (Webb 2002:24, Wattenberg 2000, Whiteley & Seyd 1998). Gauging the precise level of the membership of each party is difficult because the information is closely guarded; this again, can be seen as a manifestation of the arms-race scenario (Scarrow 2000:84). Admitting the loss of significant numbers of members tends to be interpreted by competitors and commentators alike as a sign of weakness; one recent estimate puts the combined membership of the Conservative and Labour parties at 500,000 (Parvin & McHugh 2005), a reflection that since the early 1990s, there has been a marked decline in the absolute numbers in the membership of parties (Fisher & Denver 2008). This process has continued to the point that Russell Dalton and Martin Wattenberg have suggested that we should now consider the possibility of parties existing without a large base of partisan support (2000).

While voters have become detached from parties, party members have also experienced a similar disconnection so that it is now harder to identify what benefits party membership can offer. Lilleker notes that critics of Political Marketing argue that the trend towards the professionalisation of campaigning “has replaced ideology with opportunism and downgraded the role of party members, exacerbating the crisis of support and legitimacy currently facing political parties” (2005:570). Whiteley (2003) notes that these trends both in the decline of numbers of registered members of political parties and in those willing to participate in campaigning activities have occurred across Europe over the past thirty years. Again this reflects wider societal changes, as people have become less attached to institutions and brands and are now more mobile in their allegiances, for example, in the way they access a wide range of services, and freedom to choose is now regarded as an essential right. While dealignment can be portrayed as a reaction against the party political process, a direct consequence of the growth of the consumerist culture is that parts of the electorate look elsewhere for political engagement:

“... people who may be intent on becoming involved in politics now have a wider range of alternative options open to them. Parties are just one of an increasing number of political organizations competing for people’s attention” (Seyd & Whiteley 2004:357-8).

The Implications for Campaigning

Various attempts have been made to explain the consequences of these changes upon the structures of political parties. The Power Inquiry is one recent non-partisan response, that considers the implications for the political system as a whole and proposes a series of recommendations for systemic change. In the

course of the Power Commission's research, they noted that parties have changed how they campaign:

“As it became clear during the 1980s that mobilizing the core vote in the form of a class base would no longer win elections, the main parties have adopted a process known as ‘triangulation’ – this involves throwing a handful of policies at your core vote as an appeasement, stealing the political clothes of your opponent in areas where traditionally your own party has been weak, and concentrating electoral energy on the marginal seats which are subject to swing votes” (Power 2006:108-9).

(The term ‘Triangulation’ or ‘the Political Triangle’ was coined by Robert Worcester of MORI to describe a model that helps parties understand the views of floating voters (Worcester & Baines 2004).)

Parties continue to grapple with the twin problems of declining memberships and increased levels of volatility in the electorate. Their responses to the changes that have occurred in these relationships have been recognised across the political spectrum and in all types of political party.

“The literature on political parties makes it abundantly clear that today's parties, be they catch-all (Kirchheimer, 1966), electoral-professional (Panebianco, 1988), modern cadre (Koole, 1994) or cartel parties (Katz & Mair, 1994), see a fundamentally different relationship between their elites and the electorate and membership. Voters are less tied by ideological identification to specific parties and more likely to switch their votes between elections” (Broughton & Donovan 1999:260).

As parties undergo organisational change to adapt to a more flexible electoral marketplace, three interrelated trends have emerged that now shape the way campaigning is conducted and that are likely to have an important influence on future developments: Individualisation, Consumerisation, and Personalisation.

Individualisation

As already noted in the three-phase model of campaigning, advances in computer hardware and software now available to postmodern campaigners allow for highly targeted campaigns in which the preferences of individual voters can be considered. Newman (1999b) notes that this has led to a significant 'twist' in the process of campaigning: In the premodern phase candidates took the opportunity, through campaign literature and manifestos, to say who they were and to delineate detailed policy proposals. Today, mainly through the use of opinion polling, the opposite occurs – polling carried out by parties, often before the formal election campaign starts, seeks to establish detailed information about individual voters and what their aspirations are, in order to construct campaign themes around those preferences. Swanson & Mancini have noted the same trend,

“When the fortunes of political parties rest on opinion rather than membership and historical allegiances, the means for cultivating and shaping public opinion become crucial to electoral success” (1996:251).

The consequence of this change poses a serious challenge for the act of voting: what does voting now signify? If it is no longer an act of allegiance and support for policy, has it become simply a means of expressing one's opinions? Equally, with so much attention now focussed on establishing and accommodating preferences rather than on politicians shaping opinions, how much does the voter need to be politically aware of essential policy issues? Has the process of gaining votes now been fully divorced from the complexities of governing? And for those sections of the electorate who have become disengaged and are

perhaps apathetic about the political process, what role does campaigning play in enthusing or mobilising them?

The notion of individualised campaigning has been understood as a product of professionalised campaigns.

“The marketing concept focuses on voter wants and needs. The politician then finds (or creates) a part of the campaign that conforms with the needs of the voters” (Grigsby 1996:31).

This appears to be very good news for voters, as this can be viewed as a move that will improve the opportunities of individuals to contribute to the institutions of democracy, and as Grigsby goes on to note, “the new marketing does not deal with consumers as mass or as segments, but creates individual relationships, managing markets of one” (p. 32); this is reflected in some of the latest developments in campaigning that produce targeted messages aimed at specific categories of voters, in what has been described as ‘narrowcasting’ (Farrell & Webb 2000).

Consumerisation

In the postmodern campaign, “the increasing tendency is less one of [candidates] selling themselves to voters, but rather one of designing an appropriate product to match voter needs” (Farrell & Webb 2000:102). This, combined with the trend towards individualisation and the introduction of professional campaigners with marketing experience, has led to the recognition that “voters are seen more as consumers than loyal partisans” (Gibson & Römmelle 2001:32). In fact it may now be more appropriate to consider citizens

as 'voter-consumers'. Loyalty to a particular brand, that is, a party, in the form of a guaranteed vote can no longer be assumed. Such a consumer oriented approach suggests that the 'product' is now a malleable commodity, shaped to fit the desired recipient, and implies a process that accommodates preferences rather than seeking to shape preferences (Farrell & Webb 2000) This marks a significant change from the mid-1960s when Richard Rose concluded,

"Advertising a party is different from and far more difficult than advertising a packet of soap. The actions and nature of the soap can be controlled and predicted by media men, whereas the actions of a political party, especially a party in office, cannot" (1967:59).

An illustration of the nature of the change that has occurred in the intervening period can be found by comparing the parties' engagement with the media. In 1967, Rose described a campaign press conference as a 'pseudo-event', peripheral to the main business of campaigning (1967:25); in the world of 24 hour-a-day, seven day-a-week rolling news coverage, it is hard to conceive of how campaigns would be structured without the use of these events. Blumler, *et al.* (1996) note that most campaigns now are specifically structured around the daily cycle of news broadcasts:

- Early morning press conferences are held in order to set the message for the day; senior party figures host these events, while party strategists work with key journalists to ensure they have all they need to present the party's position on a particular story. This provides the coverage for the breakfast news through to lunchtime news broadcasts.
- Afternoon walkabouts and other publicity events, such as unveiling poster campaigns, are staged to ensure adequate pictures and coverage in the early evening news shows.

- Evenings are given to speeches and weightier policy discussions that will catch later news programmes that tend to give more in-depth coverage of issues.

Despite Richard Rose's doubts, campaigning has now adopted many of principles used by advertisers to sell soap and other products. Presentations to the voter-consumer highlight the 'unique selling points' of the candidate and are often couched in terms that use the previously identified desires of the voter in order to trigger an emotional response (Swanson & Mancini 1996). No longer is the purpose to engage the citizen in debate, rather it is to provoke a positive response from the consumer (Blumler, *et al.* 1996). Not every commentator welcomes this trend; in the report of the Power Inquiry, which seeks to enumerate the challenges facing the current British political system, the authors state:

"We do not believe that the consumer and the citizen are one and the same, as the new market-driven technocracy seems to assume. Consumers act as individuals, making decisions largely on how issues will affect themselves and their families. Citizenship implies membership of a collective where decisions are taken ... as a whole or for a significant part of the collective" (Power 2006:169).

However, the trend to consumerisation has produced a campaign in which "the aim ... is to establish a clear profile for the product, which is the personality of the top candidate" (Plasser, *et al.* 1999:97) which leads to the third main trend, an increasing focus on the party leader.

Personalisation

The emphasis in General Election campaigns on those individuals who would be Prime Minister, that is, the party leaders, is nothing new although there has been a greater level of concern in recent years about the 'presidentialisation' of both government and campaigning (Poguntke & Webb 2005, Farrell & Webb 2000, 122, Bevir & Rhodes 2006). Tony Blair's style of premiership has been described as based on an "aversion to collective decision-making" (Seldon 2005:437; also Rawnsley 2001, Hennessy 2000) and this followed through into his prominence in Labour's election campaigns, compared to his front bench colleagues. During the 2005 campaign, the lack of use of Blair's image in the party's manifesto compared to 1997 and 2001 attracted some media comment (Murphy 2005) and equally, considerable media attention was focussed on Michael Howard (and his photogenic wife), pushing other prominent Conservatives out of the public's gaze. In this context, the role of the party changes, and comparisons are readily made with the American experience – parties become little more than campaign machines that operate primarily in support of the principal candidate(s).

Swanson & Mancini (1996) question whether a heightened candidate-focus has been a consequence *of*, or a contributor *to*, the reduced role of ideology and policy. Concerns about an over-emphasis on leading candidates revolve around the suggestion that image and style now are more important than substantive issues and policy.

"The personality and 'vision' of the party leaders has become more central to general election campaigns giving the impression that Prime Ministers

possess a personal mandate of a Presidential kind” (Power 2005:133-134).

Dinkin suggests that the dominance of TV in forming the views of the electorate means that success is a product of each candidate’s “personal ability to create an aura of competence” (1989:161). The trend also implies that winning can be achieved through “successful impression management” (Plasser, *et al.* 1999:97).

The Response from the Parties

These three trends, Individualisation, Consumerisation and Personalisation, have forced parties to respond in a variety of ways that need to be considered in both the national and local dimensions. At the national level, a major consequence of these trends combined with the identified need of parties to work harder at attracting the floating voter, has been the move towards permanent campaigning. Full-time professional campaigners have become a recognised part of party structures. Gibson & Römmelle (2001) identify nine different campaigning activities and suggest that if at least four are still being used six months *after* a major election campaign then continuous campaigning is occurring. The nine activities they identify are:

- The use of telemarketing for contacting own members and outside target groups,
- The use of direct mail to own members and outside target groups,
- The use of outside public relations/media consultants,
- The use of computerized databases,
- The use of opinion polling,

- Conducting opposition research,
- The presence of an internal Internet communication system,
- E-mail sign-up or subscription list for regular news updates,
- Outside campaign headquarters.

Sparrow and Turner suggest that the internal structure of parties is changing to accommodate the idea of permanent campaigning: “parties are now becoming organised on a permanent war footing with a constant marketing orientation coordinated by a permanent staff of communications and marketing professionals” and that the focus of campaign preparations is now “... less concerned with the needs of core voters, instead concentrating on appeals to target swing voters” (2001: pp. 984, 986).

However, there is some evidence that permanent campaigning has its drawbacks and that parties need to distinguish between the “one-off transaction” that is an election and their relationship with voters “post-‘purchase’” (Needham 2005). Given that the purpose of a formal election campaign is focused on getting individual electors to reach a conclusion about the debate and then actively to engage by voting on a specific day (or use a postal ballot), there is a risk inherent in continual campaigning. It potentially could create an environment where voters become used to a point of decision never being reached, as they are rarely presented with the opportunity to reach a conclusion and to express their views in a decisive way.

As already established, advances in technology have been a major contributor to changes in campaign techniques. The use of email and the Internet opens up new opportunities for two-way communication, both with party members and the electorate. In the context of the permanent campaign, parties are able to gather continuous feedback on the response to new campaigns, whether from specially created focus groups or from individual supporters, and to create a dynamic cycle of adjustment and response (Gibson, *et al.* 2003). The opportunities afforded by the new technology also allow parties and candidates to by-pass conventional media channels. A recurrent challenge for party strategists has been to get the media to report stories without changing the essential message. Historically, considerable time and resources were invested in keeping journalists 'on side'. The relationship between parties and the media is likely to change in the near future as parties can now use email and dedicated websites to communicate their message directly into the home of the voter, without the use of a third party. This facility is still in its early stages and this study will examine the evidence of the initial developments. However, it is clear that increasingly the most valuable piece of information for a party or candidate is a voter's email address, together with other details that help create the unique profile of their preferences. Databases containing this information can then be used to develop active relationships with likely voters and specifically target those identified as 'swing voters' in target constituencies.

Campaigns and the Law

The final area that must be considered when examining what shapes current trends in political campaigning is legislation. The legal framework that governs campaign practice in the UK has been established through eight *Representation of the People Acts* (1884 – 2000). Additionally, the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* created the Electoral Commission, whose role is to regulate political parties and all aspects of elections and to develop policy for the future; (see also Appendix Table A3.1). Since its creation the Commission has published numerous reports on all aspects of the electoral system, discussing possible amendments and enhancements to the current regulatory framework.

The existing legislation covers five broad areas:

- The registration of voters, parties and candidates.
- The control of voting procedures, including absent voting through the use of postal and proxy votes.
- The reporting of the funding and financial arrangements of parties generally and of candidates in election campaigns.
- The regulation of the parties' access to the media, and specifically the interaction of political parties with the TV and Radio broadcast companies during election campaigns.
- The development of alternative methods of voting.

In the context of this study, the registration of voters, parties and candidates does not have direct implications for the conduct of campaigning, except to note two aspects. Firstly, the rules seek to ensure that there is a clear differentiation between parties – this is a consequence of some candidates standing under

labels designed to deliberately confuse the electorate. The law was amended after one notorious case when a 'Literal Democrat' stood for Devon and East Plymouth in the 1994 European Elections, apparently causing the Liberal Democrat candidate a significant loss of votes (Mackie 1995:498). Secondly, there is the issue of people getting their names onto the official Register of Electors. In the USA this is a much more significant issue, because the parties are the primary means through which individuals register to vote. In contrast, in the UK, local authorities are the primary channel of registration. The major parties do at times get involved by conducting voter registration drives, using it as a tactic to ensure that in areas where the party already draws strong support they maximise their possible vote.

However, their attitude to persuading identified supporters to vote by post has been quite different. The means by which voters cast their votes does have a significant consequence for campaigners and recent changes in these regulations are affecting the conduct of campaigns. Until 2000 voters had to provide a substantive reason for needing a postal or proxy vote, but the 2000 *Representation of the People Act* removed that restriction and postal votes on demand became available. This change was primarily a response by Government to the significant decline in electoral turnout at all levels of election, in the belief that making the act of voting more convenient would encourage more of those who had abstained in previous elections to participate. The implications of this change will be examined in more detail in this study but it is of note that the consequences for campaigners are being quickly felt, and perhaps in ways not anticipated in the legislation: "the fact that many people had

already posted their votes before the end of April did effect the tempo of the [2005 General Election] campaign” (Kavanagh & Butler 2005:175). As Qvortrup notes,

“By inviting the voters ‘to vote early’ there is a risk that they only pass verdict on part of the campaign. By voting early, the voter is not able to respond to political developments on the eve of polling day – as many voters did in Spain following the Madrid bombing” (2005:416).

Greater use of postal votes will force parties to re-examine how they approach an election campaign, and it may be that pressure will grow for the timetable for election campaigns to be altered.

“Without a doubt, vote-by-mail directly changes the nature of campaigns. The fact that choices are made at the kitchen table instead of the voting booth is just one of many ways that the mail-ballot process changes an election” (Grigsby 1996:33).

Election campaigns have become a huge cost to political parties and how the parties both raise and spend funds are issues of continued public concern. The controls in force directly shape how campaigns are conducted, as the expenditure of each candidate is closely regulated, with jail sentences threatened for false disclosure or inappropriate expenditure. As already noted the published records of the expenditure of individual candidates are a source of useful data for researchers interested in measuring the intensity of local campaigns (Denver, *et al.* 2004). In addition to the limitations on local campaign expenditure, the overall amounts the parties can spend on campaigns that promote the national party are proscribed. The renewed debate about how parties receive their funding, following the review conducted by Hayden Philips in which he suggests that the state funding for partisan political activities should be considered, may result in the current arrangements being significantly

changed (Philips 2007) although the suspension of inter-party talks indicates that reaching agreement on a way forward will be difficult. While the adoption of such a system may address many of the criticisms of the existing system, such a change will have a direct impact on the parties' ability to campaign and unless carefully considered, may have unintended consequences (Electoral Commission 2004).

Unlike in the USA and a growing number of other countries, in the UK, paid advertising on the broadcast media by political parties is prohibited. However, parties that meet certain criteria are given opportunities to broadcast, free of charge, on both TV and radio through Party Political Broadcasts and during campaigns in Party Election Broadcasts. As the boundaries blur between traditional broadcast formats and new formats available through the Internet and satellite media, the rules will undoubtedly need to be reviewed, in part because campaigners seeking to gain the 'extra edge' will reinterpret existing rules in their favour. As will be noted in a later chapter, the Green Party, in order to qualify for TV access during elections, has adopted an approach that has a direct impact on their choice of candidates at all levels of election.

The final area, the development of new mechanisms to cast a vote, does not bear directly on the focus of this study. However, the trials that have been conducted by the Electoral Commission on all-postal vote elections and extending the voting period will be considered, as both potentially have a significant impact on how parties structure their campaigns (Electoral Commission 2002, 2006b, 2007a & b). While the Government has clearly cooled

in its enthusiasm for extending the use of all-postal ballots, the increase in the percentage of the electorate who choose to vote remotely does present a challenge to campaigners.

The picture that emerges from this review of the academic study of campaigning is one that is highly complex. Different types of campaigning clearly take place at a number of levels: elections that have a national coverage, primarily General Elections, and to a lesser degree European Parliamentary elections, do exhibit many of the latest innovations and the wide-range of techniques that have been discussed. However, many local constituency campaigns in non-target seats appear to look very similar to the traditional pre-1960s model, perhaps because they are limited by the restrictions on financial expenditure. In approaching this study,

“what is needed is a multilayered approach, which explains not only how the campaign has become more centralized but also how this process has affected the campaign at the local and the individual level” (Lilleker & Negrine 2002:101).

Comparisons will be made between elections that take place on the national scale and local or second-order elections. Equally, attention will be paid to the differences that can be observed between how the major parties campaign, compared to the minor parties and the independent candidates who, by definition, lack the resources and skills-base that the major parties rely upon.

Chapter Three

The 'Perfect' Campaign: Modelling Typical Campaign Practice

Anyone who has stood as a candidate in an election for public office is likely to consider the 'perfect campaign' as the one in which they were successfully elected. However, from the preceding chapter it is clear that an increasingly complex process is required to produce a successful result, some parts of which the candidates themselves shape, while other parts occur without their direct involvement. This chapter aims to set out the major elements that are now common to the majority of election campaigns and to establish an 'ideal' type against which past and present practice can be compared.

The first section of this model will assess the impact on campaigning of the different levels of governance within the UK; it will consider how the elections to each level create a different set of challenges for political parties and campaigners. The second section will identify the participants who normally contribute to a campaign and will consider some of the reasons why these individuals take part in campaigning. In the third section, a start will be made at describing the activities normally expected to occur in a formal election period. Throughout the chapter, reference will be made to the legislative framework as it currently exists (in 2007/8), and which sets the parameters of authorised campaigning practice (Appendix Table A3.1 summarises the legislation relevant to elections and campaigning that has been introduced since 1997).

By attempting to define the elements of a typical campaign in this way, it will quickly become apparent that the reality of campaigning often diverges from this model and that the law can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The second half of this thesis will go on to use this typical campaign model as a benchmark; in subsequent chapters, both quantitative and qualitative data will be used to provide evidence of how the parties and their activists are addressing the challenges of modern campaigning.

Types of Election

While political parties and their candidates all aspire to organising the perfect campaign and invest considerable effort and resources into training and preparation, experienced campaigners acknowledge that every campaign is always a fresh challenge. One reason why this is the case is that elections to the different levels of governance in the UK demand different approaches and the toolkit of techniques required has to be adapted accordingly. What follows is a summary of the principal elections held within the UK:

- Elections to the Westminster Parliament (commonly termed a General Election, when every constituency in the UK is contested simultaneously.)
- Elections to the devolved institutions: the Scottish Parliament, Welsh and Northern Irish Assemblies
- Elections to the Greater London Authority
- Local government elections, for
 - Metropolitan Boroughs,
 - London Boroughs,

- Unitary Authorities,
- County Councils,
- District & Borough Councils
- Town and Parish Councils
- Elections for directly elected mayors (in London and 12 other English locations)
- Elections to the European Parliament

In addition to the fixed cycle of elections, parties must be prepared to conduct unscheduled by-election campaigns at most levels.

A General Election remains the most high profile of the elections conducted within the UK. However, with the establishment of devolved government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the balance of significance between these new bodies and Westminster is changing the focus of campaigning within these countries; in part this is a consequence of different electoral systems being adopted (see below). For the campaigner the first issue to note about a General Election is that it is the only regular election where there is uncertainty (accompanied by considerable media speculation) as to the dates of the official start of the campaign and of Polling Day. All other levels of governance work on a fixed cycle with pre-determined dates set for the next election; however, the Government does retain the power to vary the date of scheduled elections when considered appropriate, which it did most recently in 2001, due to the movement restrictions imposed following a major outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease. Polling Day for all elections in the UK is, by convention, scheduled to be on a Thursday; however, this is not prescribed in statute, and alternatives

such as extended polling periods and weekend polling are currently being considered and may change this custom (Electoral Commission 2002, 2006b, 2007a & b).

Responsibility for calling a General Election lies solely with the Prime Minister and he or she may call an election at anytime within the period of five years from the date of the first meeting of Parliament, following the last General Election¹. The decision to call an election is one of fine political judgement, as the Prime Minister tries to choose the most propitious point for the Government to seek re-election, while the opposition parties attempt to ensure that their organisations, candidates and activists are ready to fight. Not every Prime Minister gets this judgement right; in September 1978, James Callaghan, to the surprise of many people both inside and outside his party, announced he was not calling the election that had been anticipated that autumn. A protracted series of strikes, now known as the Winter of Discontent and widespread public dissatisfaction with the Government, reached a point of crisis in March 1979; a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister was lost by one vote, forcing Callaghan to resign and finally call the General Election, which was subsequently lost to the Conservatives.

The overall length of a formal campaign varies significantly, as Table 3.1 illustrates. While the period between dissolution of Parliament and Polling Day is fixed at 18 days (excluding any weekends and public holidays in that period – see Appendix Table A3.2a), the period between making an announcement and

¹ Calculation of the precise date on which the five-year term of a parliament concludes is less than straightforward; however, since 1945, no parliament has run to the full limit of its period.

dissolution varies considerably. The timing of the announcement and the consequent length of the campaign is again an entirely political decision; Callaghan's biographer notes that "a long campaign ... help[s] to remind electors of the achievements of the government and the authority of the Prime Minister" (Morgan 1997:686). The longest campaign in modern times was in 1997 when the gap between John Major's announcement and Dissolution lasted 23 days, leading to an overall election period of 46 days; the shortest Parliamentary campaign, in February 1974, lasted just 22 days.

The timetables for most other elections follow a 25-day model, as illustrated in Appendix Table A3.2b. However, there are exceptions: for example, the timetable for Parliamentary by-elections can vary between 15 and 19 working

Table 3.1: The Length of General Election Campaigns 1945-2005.

Year	Date Election Announced	Parliament Dissolved	Polling Day	Announcement to Dissolution	Campaign Length - Announcement to Polling Day
1945	Wednesday May 23	Jun 15	Jul 5	23	44
1950	Wednesday Jan 11	Feb 3	Feb 23	23	44
1951	Wednesday Sep 19	Oct 5	Oct 25	16	37
1955	Friday Apr 15	May 6	May 26	21	42
1959	Tuesday Sep 8	Sep 18	Oct 8	10	31
1964	Tuesday Sep 15	Sep 25	Oct 15	10	31
1966	Monday Feb 28	Mar 10	Mar 31	10	32
1970	Monday May 18	May 29	Jun 18	11	32
1974	Thursday Feb 7	Feb 8	Feb 28	1	22
1974	Wednesday Sep 18	Sep 20	Oct 10	2	23
1979	Thursday Mar 29	Apr 7	May 3	9	36
1983	Monday May 9	May 13	Jun 9	4	32
1987	Monday May 11	May 18	Jun 11	7	32
1992	Wednesday Mar 11	Mar 16	Apr 9	5	30
1997	Monday Mar 17	Apr 8	May 1	23	46
2001	Tuesday May 8	May 11	Jun 7	3	31
2005	Tuesday Apr 5	Apr 11	May 5	7	31

Source: extracted from HOC 04/38 & 05/33

days. The Electoral Commission addressed the problems resulting from these inconsistencies and has proposed a common timetable (2003a), arguing that this would reduce uncertainty and assist electors, candidates, political parties and election administrators; the Government, however, has not yet chosen to amend the regulations.

In examining elections in terms of levels of governance, the variety of voting systems used in these elections should also be noted; Appendix Table 3.3 shows the voting systems currently used throughout the UK and the choices that voters face. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider in detail the full consequences of the voting systems used at different levels of government, it should be noted that the choice of system significantly influences the way a campaign will be organised.

Whatever the system used, the order of candidates' names as they appear on the ballot paper can also effect how they campaign (Faas & Schoen 2006, Miller & Krosnick 1998). Systems that use multi-member wards will require candidates standing for the same party to work together as a team; when a simple plurality system is used, there is a strong incentive to present a united face to the electorate to encourage the voter to cast all their votes for the parties candidates and not to split their vote (Marsh 2007). However, for candidates in elections using a proportional system, or whose names appear on a top-up list drawn up by their party, an individual's position within the party list has an even greater influence on their chances of success. Those placed towards the bottom of the party's list are unlikely to be successful, and so possibly will not be

motivated to campaign in the same way as will the person at the top of the list.

In elections using a Closed Party List where electors simply select their preferred party, candidates will have to campaign differently to those who need to ensure that voters recognise their name on a ballot paper and not simply their partisan affiliation. The latter will need to maximise the advantages of any personal connections they have with local issues, enabling them to claim identification with the voters' concerns (Shugart, *et al.* 2005).

The challenges facing campaigners are often further complicated when elections for different levels of governance are scheduled at the same time.

From 1997, the three General Elections have coincided with elections to all the English County Shires and a number of Unitary Authorities, and since 2001, there have also been a small number of mayoralty elections on the same day.

While party organisers may find it easier to motivate those activists who only contribute at General Elections, many candidates standing for the 'lower' levels complain that national issues swamp their campaigning and that often the Parliamentary candidates receive all the attention, and overshadow their efforts.

However, holding elections for different levels of governance is seen as advantageous, as the electorate are only asked to make a single visit to the polling station, which can have a positive impact on turnout for lower-order elections (Rallings & Thrasher 2000, Electoral Commission 2005). One further systemic issue should be noted: in some council areas, local parties are in a constant state of preparing for or conducting election campaigns. This is because a third of the members of the Council are elected each year on a

rolling cycle, with elections held three years in every four; accordingly, the next set of elections are rarely more than twelve months away for these activists.

It is apparent from this brief overview of the types of election, that the tri-partite model discussed in Chapter 2 is unlikely to be sufficiently flexible to recognise the interaction of campaigners functioning at several different levels of election. The model takes a longitudinal view across the top layers of governance and primarily considers elections to national parliaments or assemblies. This study will attempt to add to the model, by accounting for the possibility that innovations segue between levels, as campaigners contribute to different elections; it will investigate whether the flow of innovation originates in the top layers and filters downwards, or whether new ideas can emerge at lower levels of campaigning, that are then picked up and used elsewhere. However, two elections types are distinctly different and worthy of note at this point: Parliamentary by-elections and elections to the European Parliament.

One of the hypotheses that this study will seek to test is the growth in dominance of the national headquarters of the major parties over local constituency-based organisations. An example where this trend appears to be very strong is in the conduct of Parliamentary by-elections. It certainly appears that these by-elections are now occasions when the greatest concentration of campaigning effort is most evident and, in effect, a 'nationalisation' of by-elections has occurred. The heightened attention that both the campaign and the outcome of these elections attract suggests that the by-election has a much greater significance than merely the selection of a representative for the local

area, and that the parties consider the result to have ramifications of national significance. This becomes apparent when the differences that occur in by-elections are compared to 'normal' elections.

Firstly, parliamentary by-elections tend to be contested by significantly more candidates than the average number of candidates per constituency in General Elections. In the 2001-2005 Parliament, there were six by-elections, contested by an average of 10.7 candidates, compared to an average 5.5 candidates contesting each seat at the 2005 General Election (HOC 05/33 & 05/34). In the first seven by-elections of the new parliament, four have attracted 10 or more candidates. Higher levels of contestation can be explained largely by the attention given by the national media; many minor candidates are attracted simply by the opportunity to appear in an event that is given such a high national profile. However, the abnormal contestation rates are matched by a second clear difference: the increased activity by the major parties. The extra resources that they put into each by-election suggest that these events are more than just a local event. Each by-election normally sees frequent visits from party leaders and other senior political figures. Their visits are usually carefully pre-arranged appearances, such as High Street walkabouts with their candidates, accompanied by activists providing a portable backdrop of posters in the party's colours; these events are designed as much for national perspective as a means of communicating with local voters. Extra help for the constituency is organised, with party activists often drawn from all over the country, enabling large quantities of literature to be distributed and extensive canvassing conducted. Thirdly, while the selection of candidates will be considered in more detail later in this chapter, the choice of a candidate who is

capable of withstanding the relentless pressure of the media spotlight in this type of event is essential. This means that central party organisations will be closely involved in the selection process and will often provide guidance to the local party on suitable applicants. Not that this can guarantee a positive outcome, as the by-election in Ealing Southall in July 2007 showed; Conservative Central Office advised on the selection of a candidate, a local businessman, whom it subsequently became known had recent links to the Labour party, causing considerable embarrassment (Kite 2007).

The Government and opposition parties will seek to use this electoral opportunity as a test of their readiness for the next General Election. Although, the results are often only a reflection of local political realities, commentators will extrapolate the results as a reflection of the national political climate; this again, can reveal the tension between the needs of the local party and the central organisation, as party strategists seek to maximise the benefits of a good result or minimise a poor showing.

Finally, there are several aspects of the contest for the European Parliament that set it as an 'election apart'. An election that uses a combination of geographically very large multi-member constituencies, the 'Closed Party List' system of proportional representation and the d'Hondt quota system to determine the number of MEPs elected for each party, make this election very different from the others considered. Set these differences within the context of a widespread lack of understanding and scepticism of the value of the European Parliament, and this presents a challenge for most parties used to

traditional forms of campaigning. The voting system means electors do not choose candidates, instead indicating only their preference of party, with the parties pre-selecting their candidates by a variety of internal processes. Given the dissimilarities in the structure of an election to the European Parliament compared to other UK elections, the significant differences in approaches to campaigning for Europe will serve as a useful comparator to the model established in this chapter.

The Main Participants

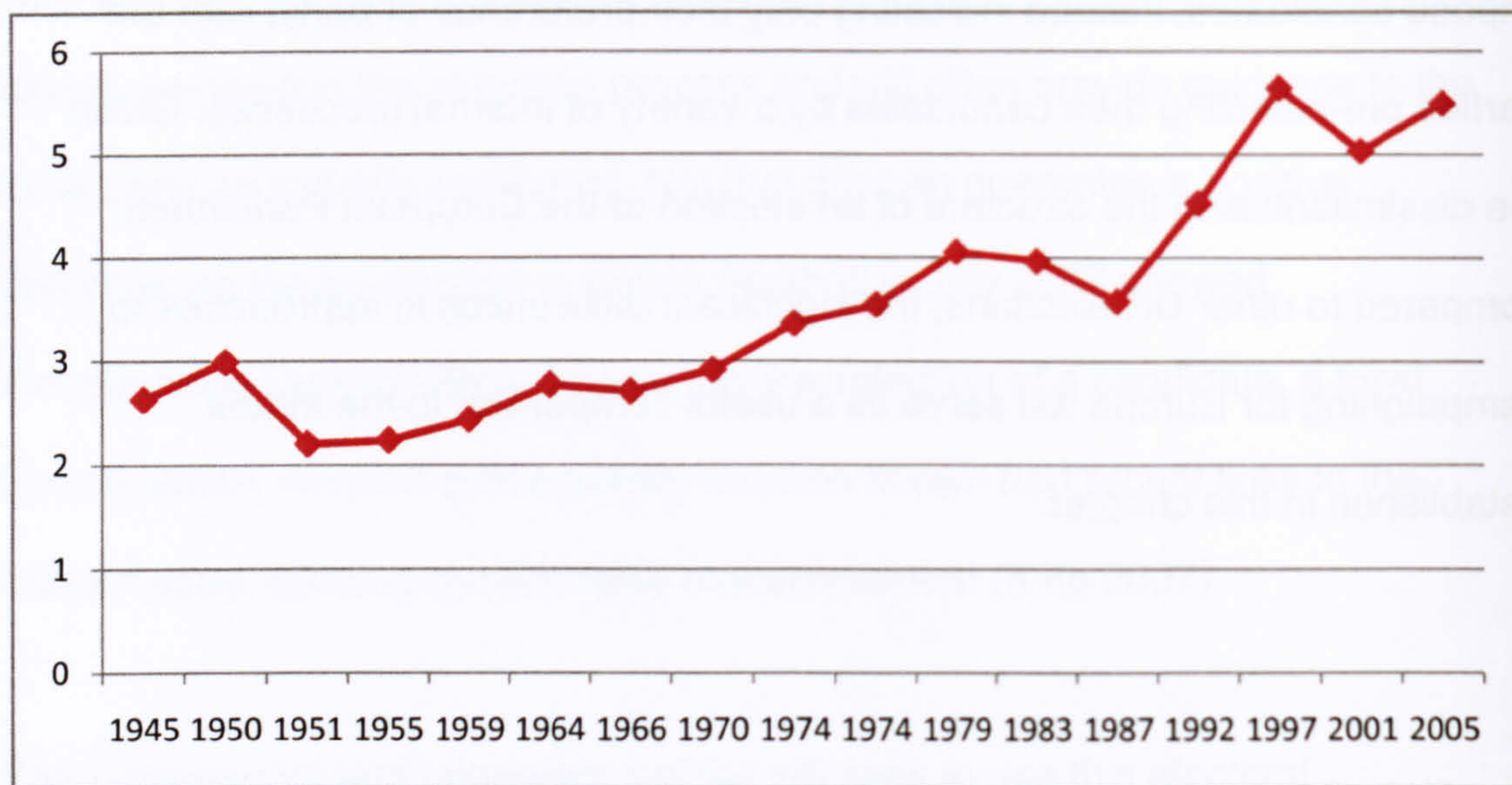
The next section of this chapter seeks to identify the main participants in a campaign. The cast of players changes in response to the demands of the campaign at a particular level of election, but in the ideal model each has a identifiable contribution to the overall campaign.

1. The Candidate

Richard Rose suggested, "The activities of candidates during an election campaign present a puzzle" (1974:61), asserting that there was limited evidence that they make any difference to the outcome. Nevertheless, every election requires a set of candidates and, obviously, more than there are positions to fill. The number of candidates who may contest a seat is unlimited,² and an upward trend in levels of contestation at most elections has been observed. In 2005, 15 candidates contested Prime Minister Blair's constituency of Sedgefield, a record for a General Election; Figure 3.1 illustrates the rise in

² The exception remains in elections to the European Parliament using the Closed Party List voting system. As in all cases, there is no limit on the number of parties able to field candidates.

Figure 3.1: Average number of contestants per seat at General Elections 1945 - 2005



Source: Rallings & Thrasher 2000; HOC Research Papers

the average number of contestants fighting parliamentary constituencies at General Elections over the study period. In local elections, Rallings and Thrasher note two relevant trends: that the numbers of seats where a candidate has been returned unopposed has decreased significantly (2000) and that the overall level of competition for seats continues to rise (2003).

At every level of election where multiple seats are being fought, and particularly in local government elections, the ideal for the major parties is that will they contest every seat. However, the reality of finding sufficient supporters willing and able to stand means that often there will be seats left unchallenged by a particular party. One factor in the calculation made by the major parties on how many seats to contest, is that the overall number of seats in which they put up candidates sends a signal to their competitors about their internal robustness, local standing and ability to attract candidates. It is in this context that "paper

candidates” will be used, that is, party supporters who are nominated for seats, but with little expectation of success and with the intention that a minimal amount of work in support of their candidacy will be done during the election period. Paper candidates achieve two primary goals: Firstly, they help the party to present an image of a large organised team that is ready and able to take on the responsibilities of government. Secondly, following this strategy will keep opposition candidates busy, especially in seats where incumbents are considered to have safe majorities. The presence of a challenger creates enough uncertainty to force the incumbent(s) to focus their efforts on their seat and prevents them from redirecting their campaigning skills to assist colleagues elsewhere. Each party, therefore, seeks to achieve a balance between the signals sent through high levels of contestation against the need to target resources on those seats that will produce the greatest reward for the effort invested; the rationale behind targeting of seats will be discussed later in this chapter. Commentary and survey data gathered from candidates in local government elections will be used to illustrate the prevalence of paper candidates in a later chapter.

To get their name on the ballot paper every candidate must fulfil a number of legislative requirements, while those candidates with partisan affiliations are also likely to have gone through an internal selection process that required them to meet a series of additional conditions. Given the expectations now placed upon elected representatives at all levels of government it should be noted that in the list of requirements there is no minimum educational qualification required to hold office. An experienced Conservative agent commented,

“When I started, our agents had to have at least four ‘O’ levels and give evidence of the ability to communicate in English, but our candidates did not need any qualifications. Why? Because the party was paying the agents, someone else pays the MPs!” (compare with Fisher, *et al.* 2006c:577).

Despite the lack of an educational requirement, surveys of members of both the House of Commons and of local government show that, overall, elected members are, as a group, above the average in terms of educational attainment. 71% of MPs from the three main parties went to university (HOC 05/33) and of local authority members in 2006, 49.8% held a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 4 and above, compared to 30.1% of the adult population (NFER 2007:3). It should also be noted that from the perspective of potential candidates, the levels of governance described in this chapter do not form a hierarchy, in which experience of successful campaigning at a lower level permits access to higher levels.

If a candidate stands as an Independent, without the support of a political party, nothing further is required of them; candidates for political parties will already have fulfilled other obligations. It is here that one of the high-profile points of conflict between the national organisation of a party and its local constituency expression emerges. During the study period, the national leaderships of the three major parties have progressively moved from what was a *laissez-faire*, decentralised approach to candidate selection to a centrally directed (if not controlled) process. More recently, this has been in response to concerns about

the under-representation at all levels of governance of women, people with disabilities and those from non-white ethnic groups, because in local government, elected members are more likely to be male, white, in their mid to late-50s and retired (NFER 2007). While local parties, theoretically, still make the decision of who will represent them, at the higher levels of governance, the list of approved candidates will have been filtered by the central organisation in some way. The controversies over all-women shortlists and David Cameron's 'A-list' of candidates are recent examples of the overall tightening of central party control of candidate selection.

That parties have some form of formal process to consider the selection of individuals wishing to stand in their name is now common across most levels of governance (Wheeler 2006). In preparation for elections to district and county councils, the main parties now routinely conduct some form of approval process with aspiring candidates, which will include a formal interview to test their views of, and commitment to the party. While those in favour of correcting the perceived imbalances argue that methods that enable positive discrimination are the only way to get the overall numbers of elected members more representative of the communities they represent, critics counter that there may be a darker intent (Murray 2007; Katz 2001). Pre-selection of prospective candidates allows those controlling the process to ensure that those selected adhere to the party's policies both during the campaign and afterwards if successful, while potential mavericks and those likely to cause embarrassment to the party can be excluded. This also applies to incumbents who can face a

challenge to their position and de-selection if their performance is considered too out of step with the party's position.

There are numerous reasons why individuals decide to put themselves forward for elected office and it is worth noting at this stage some of the common motivations, as each has an impact on the choices a candidate will make about the conduct of their campaign. Candidates run because,

- They want to serve their community; often, new candidates will have had experience of service in other areas of public life or of leading campaigns on local issues and see this as a natural 'next step' in the continuance of that work (Rallings & Thrasher 2007b:10). They will often use the profile they have gained as a key 'selling' point for their candidacy.
- Others see this as an opportunity to further their political career, and the experience gained both of contesting the seat and, if successful, working as an elected representative, will be of value for later aspirations (Clark, 2004). Often individuals who have parliamentary ambitions will agree to contest seats that are regarded as unwinnable, for the purpose of gaining practical campaign experience and to show key decision makers within the party their abilities, which will be noted when nominations for other more winnable seats are being considered. The account in Seldon's biography of John Major (1997), of the future Prime Minister's struggle to find a suitable seat and to gain the endorsement of senior Conservatives, illustrates that this can be a long, and at times, frustrating process.

- As already discussed, some will stand as 'Paper' candidates, willing to support their party's strategic plan, but with no personal ambition to be elected.
- The Register of Political Parties maintained by the Electoral Commission currently includes over 380 parties (in mid-2007). The primary purpose of most parties on the Register appears to be either to address the concerns of residents in a particular area or to campaign on specific issues of wider interest, such as opposing the renewal of the Trident defence system or calling for the creation of an English Parliament. The media attention that elections attract provides these small, single-issue groups the opportunity to publicise their cause.
- And lastly, there are people whose self-appointed role is to poke fun at the political process and politicians; these are individuals who purposefully bring some humour to campaigns, although perhaps not everyone appreciates the joke. The best known in this category was the late David "Screaming Lord" Sutch and the Official Monster Raving Loony Party who now regard themselves as an intrinsic part of the British electoral process (see their website, www.omrlp.com).

2. The Election Agent

Candidates must specify an individual to act as their Election Agent, whose chief role is to ensure that their campaign is conducted legally (Representation of the People Act 1983, Electoral Commission 2007c). The Agent is responsible for the financial conduct of the campaign, and no one, including the

candidate, may incur expenses without their express permission (Fisher, et al. 2006c). Once the electoral authorities accept an individual's nomination papers, all costs and expenses incurred as part of their campaign must be declared. The Agent has the legal responsibility to ensure that the completed returns of expenses are submitted after the election.

However, their role is often much greater than simply overseeing the expenditure of a campaign. Historically, the Agent has organised and led the campaign, recruiting workers, preparing literature and acting as the main contact for the national and regional party headquarters (Fisher, et al. 2006c). The increasing role that the central headquarters of the main parties together with the use of constituency organisers and specialists has changed the Agent's role in some settings, especially where a seat is a target. The role of Organiser will be considered in the next section.

An Agent may act for an unlimited number of candidates, although the demands of managing several campaigns will create a practical restriction; alternatively, a candidate may act as their own Agent. Appointment of an Election Agent lasts only for the period of the election and so this role should not be confused with full-time constituency organisers who are called Agents within the Conservative Party. However, full-time organisers often take on this additional role, as an extension of their involvement in preparing for the campaign in the months preceding a formal announcement of an election (see Fisher, et al. 2006c for a detailed consideration of the agent's role and significance to the campaign).

3. The Local Party

The challenge of organising campaigns for the variety of elections described above, is made more difficult because the boundaries for seats at one level rarely coincide with other levels. In practice, the major parties use parliamentary constituencies as the basis of their organisational structure, and it is here that the term 'local party' is most readily understood. It is, in general, at the constituency level that decisions are made on candidate selection and the style of campaign and key themes. They have the final say on who will represent them as a candidate, a decision that if it goes wrong can be hugely divisive and lead to public rows and resignations. For example, the Conservatives in Falmouth & Camborne, before the 2005 General Election, imploded over the issue of candidate selection and the direct involvement of Conservative Central Office in favouring one candidate (see http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3637596.stm). Elections to the devolved institutions and to Europe necessitate regional level coordination of campaigns, but the constituencies have continued to retain an important role in that planning. While "some argue that local parties are largely irrelevant, particularly since party membership is falling across modern democracies" Clark asserts that local parties have played "a central role in providing political linkage" and potentially can continue to do so (2004: 35-36).

Within a constituency, three groups are significant when considering the conduct of campaigns: the local party executive, paid employees of the party, and active members, including other elected representatives.

The Executive

Although there are differences between the parties on how the executive committee is structured, broadly, this body is responsible for taking the key decisions about a local campaign and for liaising with the national and regional party structures. They are also likely to have an important role before the election in identifying, approving and selecting potential candidates to specific seats. The Chair of this committee is likely to be closely involved in the day-to-day decisions of a campaign, working with the candidates and their Election Agents.

Campaign Organiser

As this chapter is seeking to describe an 'ideal' model of a campaign, the presence of, and contribution from a full-time organiser has been included. In reality, whether a constituency can afford such a resource will depend on its current financial status or whether it has been identified as target seat for the next General Election, in which case additional financial support from the national party may enable the provision of this level of help. Constituencies may group together to work on a citywide or countywide basis in order to access this type of support. Where an Organiser is appointed, this individual is likely to be the only person working on the campaign who has received comprehensive training on campaigning techniques from the central organisation of the party (Fisher, *et al.* 2006c); additionally, they may have gained practical, on-the-ground experience of campaigning in a variety of settings, and thus, they are often regarded as the resident 'expert'. The growing use of full-time paid workers does present some challenges to the local party, given that most

candidates will be working on a voluntary basis and the main team of campaigners will also be volunteers. There is, therefore, the potential for conflict to arise between an individual whose paid role is to deliver the campaign, and activists who voluntarily give up their leisure time to contribute to the campaign.

Activist members and Supporters

Concerns continue to be expressed about the declining memberships of political parties, the increased levels of public disengagement in the political process, and the professionalisation of modern campaigning, to the point that some believe that there is “no place for amateurs in modern campaign headquarters” (Plasser 2001; see also Fisher, *et al.* 2006a). Despite this, there are still members in every local party committed to make things happen. Included in this number may be party members who are also elected to other authorities in the same area. Their contribution to any campaign is invaluable, as they have already established a degree of public recognition for themselves and the party. Having been successful in previous campaigns, they will be able to contribute insights into current issues that will attract electoral support, and those to avoid, as well as providing detailed local knowledge. There are also individuals who are not members of the party but who are willing to give support at election time. The overall number of workers may be decreasing, but every traditional campaign has depended on these ‘foot soldiers’, willing go out to canvass and deliver leaflets, in support of ‘their’ candidate(s) (Wattenberg, 2000:66). It is also often from this pool of activists that potential future candidates are identified, although there will also be a significant number who have no aspirations to

elected office; their primary motivation for working on a campaign is to see their party achieve success.

4. The National Party

Since 1997, there has been a significant increase in legislation relating to electoral affairs, as Appendix Table A3.1 illustrates. One area that has received particular attention is the definition and regulation of political parties. *The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* (PPERA) established the Electoral Commission and gave it the responsibility for the registration of Political Parties. Any party that wishes to nominate candidates must now be registered and supply approved candidate descriptions and emblems to be used on ballot papers. While one of the initial intentions of legislating was to prevent candidates standing with party names very similar to competitors with the intention of confusing voters, the outcome has been that parties have taken advantage of the legislation to register multiple descriptions. Table 3.2 lists the descriptions listed for the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party on the Register of Political Parties, as at April 2008; the listing illustrates how the major parties will constantly review and update their registration as new issues emerge, using variations in name as further opportunities within the campaign. As the alternative names listed illustrate, the purpose of registration as a means to avoid confusing the electorate remains a point of contention.

Table 3.2: Liberal Democrat and Scottish National Party Descriptions on the Official Register of Political Parties

Liberal Democrats	Scottish National Party
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Team • Liberal Democrat • Liberal Democrat Focus Team • Liberal Democrats - for a fairer Britain • Liberal Democrats - for a greener Britain • Nick Clegg's Liberal Democrats • Scottish Liberal Democrat Focus Team • Scottish Liberal Democrats • Welsh Liberal Democrats • Welsh Liberal Democrats - Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru • Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru - Welsh Liberal Democrats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alex Salmond (Leader - Scottish National Party) • Alex Salmond For First Minister • Scottish National Party • Scottish National Party (Leader - Alex Salmond) • Scottish National Party (Scotland's Party) • Scottish National Party (SNP) • SNP Also registered for use during the 2007 Scottish Parliamentary Elections* • Scottish National Party (Dump Student Debt) • Scottish National Party (Keep Healthcare Local) • Scottish National Party (Save Ayr Hospital) • Scottish National Party (Save Monklands Hospital) • SNP It's Time

*Source: Electoral Commission – Register of Political Parties, April 2008 & * August 2007*

In Chapter Two, the trend to focus increased attention on the leader of a party was noted (Farrell & Webb 2000, Poguntke & Webb 2005) and a manifestation of that trend is evident in these descriptions, with both parties in the example specifically including the names of their leader as part of a description. “David Cameron’s Conservatives” is also registered, but as yet, Labour have not seen the need to register their leader’s name in the same way, although subsequent to losing a future General Election that position may change. The leaders of each of the major parties have to be visible in the national media at every election in which the party has candidates; however, in elections to the devolved institutions the profile of the regional party leaders compared to the national leadership can be a source of confusion for parts of the electorate.

The major parties are all structured in ways in which not only the Leader and the Parliamentary Party have campaigning responsibilities; each has some form of standing advisory committee that works with the Leader and other senior politicians to contribute to campaigning strategies. It is often from this resource that controversial decisions on campaigning themes and tactics emerge. The national campaign committee can also be the source of a significant challenge to the independence of local decision-making as the originator of instructions on the approval and selection of candidates and the prioritisation of resources that the targeting of seats requires (Fisher, *et al.* 2006a, Ward 2003).

The targeting of seats has a significant impact on campaigning at every level of election (Denver, *et al.* 2002, Denver & Hands 2004; Fisher, *et al.* 2006a). By definition, a seat that is not targeted will see less campaign activity than one that has been given a higher priority. The reason why seats are targeted and why decisions are made to not contest every available seat is essentially one of limited resources. Parties have learnt to apply their finances and people-resource where it will have most effect on their overall plan to win seats. The careful analysis that leads to a seat being designated a 'target' depends on an increasingly sophisticated data gathering process, using the data collected from recent election campaigns, together with polling information (both internally commissioned and public) and other sources. Every party now routinely lists all the parliamentary constituencies (and increasingly also the seats in some lower-order elections) based on an assessment of whether they are 'safe', 'possible to win', 'unlikely, without considerable resources' or 'unwinnable' (the precise terms differ across the parties). The electoral mathematics employed to

calculate the 'winnability' of a seat are often hotly contested, because of the consequence of such a designation – resources will be redirected to those seats where winning is considered to be more likely, or achievable, at the expense of other seats (Denver & Hands 2002; Whiteley & Seyd 2003). There are at least two issues that this process raises: in the seats that are targeted a significant extra pressure develops to produce a good result, and some participants find themselves unable to cope with the demands of such intense campaigning. Very little is left to chance, as resources are drawn from elsewhere to concentrate the effort on that seat, and full-time trained party workers are brought in to direct local planning. Secondly, candidates and activists in untargeted seats, as a result, can feel abandoned by their colleagues and even embittered, believing that with a similar increase of resource they could do as well; .

The central party now has a greater role in coordinating campaigns, providing campaigning material, advice and training to candidates and local campaign committees. The use of email has enabled an explosion of advice and encouragement to adopt good practice throughout the electoral cycle, which increases in intensification in the immediate pre-election period and up to Polling Day. Dedicated websites for candidates and activists, with pre-designed campaigning material, mean that central resources can be coordinated to a much greater degree than previously (Fisher, *et al.* 2006c). Current practices will be considered in more detail later in the study but it would appear that there are already indicators here as to where the campaign agenda is set, and that new ideas are more likely to be disseminated out from the central party.

5. Non-party professionals

The involvement of professional advisers in the development of campaign strategies is a significant trend to emerge over the study period (Farrell & Webb 2000:105). These advisers predominately work with staff based in national party headquarters and so their lack of relationship with the wider party does raise some concerns. Studies of political consultants indicate that they “have a tendency to disregard or even disdain the role of political parties in modern campaigns” and that “they believe they have replaced the political parties’ central functions in campaigns” (Plasser 2001:46).

The contribution of professional advisers will be considered in more detail, but at this stage, the types of ‘invisible’ contributor need to be identified. Advisers can be categorised in two broad types – those who help shape the themes and issues that a campaign addresses and those who help develop the mechanics of a campaign. The first category will include pollsters and strategists, while the latter includes marketing experts and advertisers, film and TV-programme makers, website designers and image consultants. This categorisation echoes that of Esser, *et al.*:

“[W]e distinguish between media-related and non-media-related tasks. Campaign strategists carrying out media-related tasks can be defined as members of the campaign team who are in direct contact with journalists and try to control the news media’s coverage and interpretation of issues, problems, events and situations... Campaign strategists carrying out non-media-related activities fall into two subgroups: those responsible for improving the party’s own campaign and those responsible for fighting the opposition campaign” (2001:27).

Dividing the contribution of experts in this way helps to clarify the purposes of their input, while remembering that the line distinguishing the two groups is

often arbitrary and such advisers will develop the various strands of a campaign simultaneously as they work together (see also Baines, *et al.* 2001; Farrell, *et al.* 2001).

While at the beginning of the study period polling was used to do little more than predict electoral outcomes, the techniques used to survey public opinion have grown both in sophistication and in importance for strategic campaign planners, so that "Opinion research now plays a pivotal role in helping to shape party campaign strategies" (Sparrow & Turner 2001). The major parties all now employ pollsters as part of their permanent staff, as well as using polling companies to undertake a variety of studies of voting intention and changing attitudes to issues throughout the electoral cycle. The nature of the data gathered has developed from the quantitative data produced by polling at the start of the survey period to routinely now including qualitative information gathered from focus groups and other techniques designed to more completely understand the motivations and feelings of voters (Sparrow & Turner 2001). Philip Gould's account of his work as part of the team that planned New Labour's rise and eventual success at the 1997 General Election remains a vivid insight into the modern role of pollsters and professional campaign advisors at the highest levels of British politics (Gould 1999).

One further group that has grown in significance as legislation has tightened the rules about campaign expenditure are professional fundraisers. Using the expertise described above has dramatically increased the cost of campaigns; the financial consequences for the major parties have required them to involve

experts used to raising large donations from both individuals and companies. Fundraisers can have a significant role in the pre-campaign phase, working with high profile politicians at special events designed to build up the "war-chest" of money (again, note the use of a military analogy) ready for the main campaign. Concern about their growing influence, and the rewards the parties appear to grant for the support of wealthy donors, has contributed to the demands for changes in the ways parties are funded.

6. The media

At the start of the study period, it was common for newspaper journalists to contribute to a campaign. In the fifty years since then, some argue that the media industry has developed to become in itself an identifiable and integral part of the political system.

"The news media fulfill a pivotal political role and are as much a part of the process of governing as are political parties and interest groups" (Esser, *et al.* 2001:21; see also Plasser 2001).

The relationship between politicians and the media has become increasingly complex, perhaps now best described as a symbiotic relationship in which each is reliant on the other; there are at least two aspects of media involvement in election campaigns that should be noted. Firstly, the role of journalists doing their job in reporting and commenting on the campaign and secondly, the way in which the professionalisation of campaign teams has included those with experience and close contact within the media.

The dominant position that the news media has taken in British society over the last fifty years means that journalists from both the newsprint and broadcast media must now be recognised as significant players in an election campaigning. From the high profile role taken by former journalist Alistair Campbell in Tony Blair's first two administrations, and specially staged media events, such as John Humphreys or Jeremy Paxman conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews with party leaders, to the routine coverage of a local election by the local newspaper, campaigns are structured to accommodate the requirements of the media. Campaigners at every level of election now actively seek to engage with journalists in order to get their message to the voter. For the broadcast media in particular, the rules about impartial reporting still shape their coverage, but the development of internet-based broadcasting is creating fresh challenges for regulators, issues that will be considered later in the study.

It is important not to treat the media as a single entity – there are significant differences in the coverage provided by the national, regional and local media channels, both printed and broadcast. Regional media, especially, tend to be less confrontational than the major national news channels, and the parties have recognised that because the messages they carry can be more appropriately tailored to local concerns, this coverage can be more influential (Negrine 2005).

7. Election Officials and Councils

The administrative control of a local authority election is the responsibility of the Returning Officer, usually the Chief Executive or a senior officer of the authority.

Members of the authority's electoral services team carry out the day-to-day management of the election. In fulfilling their duties, it is the Electoral Commission who gives guidance initially when questions or potential problems are identified. In this respect, election administrators are simply facilitators of the electoral process and are not monitors of the conduct of either candidates or campaigners. While officials handle voter registration, distribution of ballot papers and postal votes and for candidates, nomination papers and the returns of election expenses, their role does not include the adjudication of any allegations of electoral malpractice (although concerns may initially be raised with them). It remains the responsibility of the Police to investigate allegations of corrupt practice and if they are likely to change the result of an election an Election Court will be convened (Stewart 2006).

Local councils have the responsibility to administer the registration of voters and to maintain the Register of Electors, but their part in advertising elections is less clear. Beyond displaying official notices reporting the candidates, the only direct communications that are officially distributed from local authorities are papers related to postal and proxy voting and the polling card sent to every voter.

Legislation dictates what should be included on the polling card: the voter's electoral details including their number on the Electoral Roll and which polling station they should use. However, Returning Officers may choose to include additional information that they consider appropriate, for instance a map indicating the location of the polling station. Some have chosen to include even more, which has the potential to be controversial, if it is considered that this extra information guides or directs the way voters should vote. One example of

the concerns that this extra information can arouse is evident in Civitas's response to a four-page polling card produced by the London Borough of Hillingdon for the May 2006 election (see <http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/poll.pdf>).

8. ... and the voter

The subject and target of every campaign is the voter. In the following chapters the consequences for campaigners of the changes that have been identified in the attitudes of voters to elections over the study period will be considered.

However, turnout figures, particularly for local elections, suggest that concerns about apathy and disengagement are well founded. As the primary focus of campaigning activity, the following chapters will consider how candidates and political parties approach individual voters. In attempting to trace the development of campaigning, two key issues will be considered; firstly, have voters become more demanding in what they expect from candidates? How often, and in what forms do they want to receive information about the election, the issues, the candidates and the parties that they represent (assuming that they do)? Secondly, technological innovation has created greater opportunities for voters to directly question candidates and gather relevant information, but as a result, are voters being asked to do more, to find out for themselves, in comparison to earlier elections?

The targeting of seats has already been considered, but the targeting of voters is equally important to note. Parties and candidates need to identify from the wider population those who are the registered voters, and there is continuing unease about what percentage of the population is currently not registered to

vote (Committee on Standards in Public Life 2007). As most canvassing is based on records derived from the Electoral Roll, which by definition does not include unregistered residents, this creates a degree of uncertainty. While in the UK, getting voters to register is not a major activity of the parties, it is a significant part of campaigning in the USA. However, legislative changes in Britain now permit canvassers to be involved in helping any residents they encounter who are not on the Electoral Roll to register in time for the election under way; however, Electoral Registration Officers have yet to work out a consistent approach for achieving this. One aspect of voter registration that has seen significant attention from the parties has come with the advent of on-demand postal voting. The major political parties all actively encourage their supporters to register for postal votes, which is a consequence of the electoral arithmetic that they do as part of their campaign planning. Experience and survey data show that postal voters are more likely to vote than those who go to a Polling Station (Karp & Banducci 2000; Electoral Commission 2005). In a local election, where a large numbers of postal voters have registered and previous elections indicate that a low turnout is likely, directly engaging with this group can make a significant difference to the outcome. The growth of postal voting and its impact on the way parties now structure their campaigns in order to reach postal voters will be considered in more detail later in the study.

The implication of this line of thinking is that not every voter is needed, and candidates are able to make a calculation, based on likely turnout and previous support, on how many voters they need to persuade to ensure they win.

Increasingly, the targeting of specific groups and neighbourhoods is a

significant part of campaign planning. A later chapter will consider the use of tools that can inform this process, such as ACORN and MOSAIC, that produce profiles of the tastes and preferences shared by groups of individuals, and how they can be used to identify potential supporters, or those who are likely to respond to specific messages.

The Common Activities of a Campaign

The following chapters will explore in detail all the activities that are commonly observed during an election campaign period; however, the final section of this chapter will give a brief overview of the key elements of the campaign toolkit and what most organisers include in their 'perfect' campaign. These methods will be considered in three groups: face-to-face contact, indirect contact and polling day activities. Apart from polling day activities, all the elements described are not unique solely to the election period. Some practitioners therefore argue that it is no longer possible to identify, as distinctly different, specific election campaigning because the major political parties now all engage in continual campaigning throughout each electoral cycle. However, while there is an increasing blurring of the boundaries, there remain differences that set a formal election campaign apart from 'everyday' campaigning. This is, firstly, because all efforts are directed towards a specific day when voters have the opportunity to express their opinions through the ballot box, and secondly, that there are strict rules on campaigning expenditure and how it must be declared. Additionally, while those who are fully engaged in the political process would identify with the concept of the permanent campaign, there remains a danger in

overstating the effectiveness of such activity. A common complaint heard by many candidates when out canvassing is "Why should I vote for you? We only see you when you want our vote!"

Before considering the activities that make up a campaign, it is important to set them in the context of the potential outcomes candidates and their supporters expect to achieve. While most candidates when challenged will always say that they want to win, in reality many candidates know that other competitors are better organised or have a higher profile in the community and their own prospects of success are limited. If that is the case, what benefits do these participants derive and what other measures of a campaign's success can be used? As will be noted below, in most elections, candidates tend to distribute considerable amounts of information to potential voters. Is their sole purpose to motivate a voter to cast their ballot? Alternatively, is the campaign an opportunity for education, political debate and persuasion? If so, who are the most likely targets of these efforts? These questions will be explored further in the study but what follows are some initial proposals for the purposes of campaigning (Fisher *et al.* 2006c:582). (The list that follows does not indicate an order of priority.)

- **Identifying supporters**

Perhaps the most significant effect of technological change in this period has been that all the major parties now use computer software packages to record the results of data gathering of individual voting intentions. Ideally, local parties do this over a series of electoral cycles and across different levels of election in

order to establish both those who are the committed supporters of each party, and those who are undecided – the 'soft' or 'doubtful' vote. Such data can then be used to focus future efforts on known supporters and those likely to be susceptible to persuasion, a manifestation of the targeting issues discussed above.

- **Mobilising voters and activists**

Campaigners have a key role in making known the fact that an election is taking place. Clearly, it is to the advantage of candidates that they ensure that the section of the electorate likely to support them is aware of when that support is required; it is dangerous to assume that every elector will be aware of an election, either from information distributed by the electoral authority or via the media. In the USA, "Getting out the Vote" (GOTV) is a significant and separate aspect of campaigning strategy; previously identified supporters are carefully targeted to ensure that they vote. While this is done to some measure as part of UK Polling Day activities the process currently lacks the sophistication seen in the USA. Given the heightened profile that the political parties can achieve through an election campaign, this is also an opportunity for parties to recruit new members, raise funds and identify those willing to help both during the campaign and afterwards (Fisher 2006c).

- **Reinforcing the presence and message of the party**

An increased disengagement from partisan politics within the general population means that an effective campaign must now ensure that it educates and informs the electorate about the values a party stands for, at both a national and local

Figure 3.2: Examples of Conservative re-branding to emphasise environmental concerns



level. In this respect, campaigning has an increasing function in marketing a 'product' and this is the reason why campaigners have increasingly adopted the language and tactics of the marketing industry. Not only does a campaign seek to identify the party's candidate and achieve a high degree of name recognition but also there is an explicit attempt to link the party name and logo with a specific set of values. This aspect of campaigning will be considered in more detail, but a recent example is the re-branding of the Conservative Party, with an emphasis on environmental issues: Go Green, Vote Blue (see Figure 3.2).

- **Listening and Debating**

Most politicians would affirm that an election campaign is an important opportunity to listen to their electorate. While nationally, the media tend to cast a General Election as an opportunity to debate the policy positions of the major parties, it is questionable whether this actually occurs at the level of the doorstep campaign. While literature and doorstep conversations may attempt to encourage a temporary shift of loyalty and to swing those identified as 'doubtful'

towards a particular candidate, to suggest that an election campaign is able to permanently transform the partisan disposition of a voter goes too far. As Bochel & Denver concluded in their study of a ward election in Dundee,

“It is unlikely that canvassing as it is usually practised converts anyone, though it may swing a few doubtfuls” (1971).

- **Arguing policy**

Election addresses and manifestos are full of issues identified as those that concern voters, which will provoke engagement in the election and (hopefully) a vote in favour of the candidate. However, given the limitations of printed material, detailed policy statements rarely appear in campaign literature, which tend to use headlines and brief bulleted statements. In this respect while voters are asked to support a party's entire policy platform, how much of this is deliberately communicated during the course of a campaign is debatable. However, with the advent of the internet and dedicated party web-sites there are greater opportunities for electors to engage in more detailed research of the parties' policy positions.

- **Attacking the opposition**

Although still largely regarded as a phenomenon of American campaigning, negative campaign is a regular feature of campaigns in the UK (Lau, *et al.* 2007). It takes two forms, attacking the record of a candidate's party, especially if they have recently held office, and directly criticising the candidate, while remaining within the rules on defamation of character. However, what is said during a doorstep conversation is much harder to control than what is put into print; for instance, while campaigning in a district council election, the author

encountered an instance of homophobic remarks repeatedly made by a candidate directed against a competitor, questioning his suitability to stand. While this could (and should) have been reported to the police, the target of this negative campaigning considered the attack was a high-risk ploy that, in the event, failed, as electors reacted against the tactic.

Face-to-face Contact

Perhaps the most easily recognised campaign activity is the contact made between a candidate and voter, as they go from door-to-door, canvassing an area. Candidates still place great emphasis on this element of a campaign, at whatever level they are competing; however, given the size of their electorates, even for a District Council ward, personally introducing themselves even a significant proportion of those voters who intend to cast their vote is an unrealistic goal. Despite this, canvassing can be used to do more than merely introduce the candidate, and it is why every party engages in it.

In describing the model of a 'perfect' campaign, a successful canvass will identify the likely voting intentions of every voter in each household and if collected over a series of elections this data can be used to identify areas of strong support for a party. This becomes particularly effective when corresponding information is collected about the actual level of support for the party as individual ballot boxes are opened at the vote count. The information collected will attempt to categorise each voter as definitely voting or probably

voting for a particular party (also described as a 'hard' or 'soft' vote). Depending on the type of election and the range of parties that are likely to put up candidates, information will also be collected about supporters of minor parties, but this tends to be less comprehensive than the data gathered about the main three parties. Canvassing during the election period can also be used to identify whether the key campaign messages are registering with voters, and to note evidence of opposition activity. Experienced canvassers will also collect information about issues that candidates can use in future campaigns, for instance, traffic issues or instances of anti-social behaviour. If a voter identifies themselves as a firm supporter of the party, additional questions will be asked about their willingness to display a window poster or roadside display board, or to provide other help, for example, delivering leaflets or even becoming a party member. (Active member recruitment from among those who make a positive offer to help is often done in a post-election follow-up contact).

While campaign strategists will assert that they plan for a comprehensive canvass of the entire area being contested in every election, the reality is that this is achieved less frequently than admitted. The type of campaign that is being run, the relative strength of opponents, the nature of the locality (whether a predominately urban or rural area) and the limitations imposed by the number of activists willing to do this work all impact on the possibility of completing the canvass. In most local parties, there are two groups of activists – those that relish the opportunity to canvass and those who hate the prospect and must be persuaded. This reticence is often the result of previous unpleasant experiences, as there is a risk of being verbally abused by some residents. The

major parties now all produce suggested scripts to help the nervous and to guide canvassers with techniques to avoid getting into arguments. The point is emphasised that the purpose of canvassing is not to argue or discuss party policy or to make converts; when there is less pressure on time outside the election, a canvasser may consider these as worthwhile options.

The critical challenge about this form of data gathering is the reliability of the data collected. When asked about their voting intentions, do people tell the truth? Some, mainly more elderly, electors consider being asked how they will vote to be impertinent, regarding their preference as a personal matter and not for public discussion. Canvass scripts usually contain options for follow-up questions when receiving this response, in an attempt to tease out their likely position in a more subtle manner. Other electors appear to respond by giving what they perceive to be the required response, that is, to say they will vote for the candidate represented by the canvasser (ALDC 2006b). Some voters may give different answers to each party that calls, while others appear to be uncomfortable admitting that they will not vote, and so, the major problem with much canvassing is the tendency to predict higher levels of turnout than actually occur. These issues will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

While not a direct face-to-face contact, an alternative method increasingly used is telephone canvassing. Arranged by a local party, organised nationally through professional call-centres, or using party-funded facilities, a telephone canvass can potentially reach more people in the equivalent time taken walking from door to door. Telephone canvassing has some clear advantages over

door-to-door calling but there are also disadvantages. Activists who through age or infirmity are unable to walk long distances can still make a valued contribution to a campaign, and poor weather conditions do not put volunteers off. However, while telephone canvassing has become a major element in the campaigners' toolkit, it remains a matter of debate whether voters are more or less likely to tell the truth over the phone. Additionally, some people consider this type of call to be the same as a 'cold call' from a telesales business, trying to sell double-glazing, for example. People who use the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) expect the service to screen out cold calling and so can get upset when a canvasser calls on behalf of a political party. While the rules permit callers from polling companies to ring any number, there is a continuing dispute as to whether calls that are political canvassing should be classified as polling, in which case they are permitted, or whether the TPS scheme prohibits them. During the 2005 General Election, all three main parties routinely ignored this restriction.

Public meetings

An alternative way voters can meet the candidate in person is at public meetings. This is largely a dying tradition in terms of single party events for the wider public and most large meetings held by the parties during General Elections are only attended by the party faithful. However, Hustings, meetings where all the candidates can be questioned together, are still common, again primarily arranged at General Elections by significant community groups such as local churches or the Women's' Institute.

While canvassing may still be regarded as the archetypal campaign activity, techniques that allow the candidate to make contact with voters without the need for doorstep conversations or telephone calls, are being increasingly favoured. The most familiar of these indirect methods are those that use printed literature, but Chapter Five will also consider the growing influence of electronic communications within the campaigners toolkit.

The literature campaign

The first time most electors will register that an election is taking place is when the parties' leaflets appear through the letterbox; for many this will be their only contact with the campaign. At every election, each candidate will attempt to distribute at least one leaflet to every household (excepting paper candidates), containing details about themselves, their past record and their reasons for standing for election. Election literature can be very simple, an A4-sized black and white leaflet, with a single head and shoulders photograph of the candidate, or it can be very sophisticated, a full colour newspaper with lots of photographs showing the candidate with politicians who have a national media profile and visits to key sites in the area.

Every candidate in General Elections and elections to the devolved institutions has the distribution of one leaflet provided free of charge, via the Royal Mail, ensuring that their "Election Address" reaches every household within the constituency; candidates at local elections are not provided with a similar opportunity. It is the responsibility of the local party to distribute any other leaflets, and again the issues of available resources and the need to target key

areas and voters dictate the literature approach. In the ideal campaign, at least one leaflet a week would be distributed, with the first introducing the candidate, and subsequent leaflets highlighting pertinent local issues and responding to points raised by opposition candidates. In the final days of a campaign, it is common for additional literature to be distributed that reflects information gathered from the canvass, and it tends to emphasise the closeness of the race and hence the need for voters to get out and vote on Polling Day.

Most campaigners now have access to computers that ease the production of personalised letters to be sent to voters. Direct mail-shots sent out from either central party organisations or from local parties are becoming a routine part of the literature campaign. While more expensive, personal letters targeted at specific voters who have previously been identified as possible supporters, are thought to be more effective than a general leaflet distributed across the area.

Posters

At the start of the study period the fact that an election was taking place, at either a national or local level, was easily evident with the display of window and roadside posters. In more recent years, there has been a marked decline in the willingness of voters to declare their political allegiance in this way and posters have become a less obvious part of the campaign. However, they still are an important part of a campaign and can be used to great effect – in the 2004 European campaign, UKIP persuaded many farmers in the South West to display large billboards in the party's striking yellow and magenta colours, in

fields alongside major roads, a tactic that helped raise the party's profile significantly. The unveiling of large billboard posters is still a part of the national party leader's election ritual; poster sites across the country have to be booked some time in advance and it is usually only the national party that organises this part of the campaign. The merits of billboards are debatable; the billboards for the 2005 Conservative campaign "Are you thinking what we are thinking?" attracted considerable graffiti, which perhaps obscured the message the party wanted to communicate. In the same election, the Liberal Democrats joined the Conservatives and Labour with their first major nationwide election billboard campaign.

The Manifesto

The Election Manifesto remains a significant piece of literature in General Election campaigns which parties still spend considerable resources on producing. Traditionally, this document sets out the party's key commitments to the electorate and forms the basis of a potential programme of government if the party is successful. Again, while the launch of the manifesto remains a significant part of the ritual of a General Election campaign, at all levels the role of the manifesto is changing. Briefing papers and statements on single issues, with tailored manifestoes aimed at specific interest groups, for instance, for the business sector, are designed to augment the main publication. Due to the costs of production, individual voters who want to see the printed form of manifesto must now purchase it, and is usually distributed through national newsagents. In 2005, the Liberal Democrats' central campaign committee decided not to distribute their manifesto in this way, instead opting to require

those who wanted a copy to contact the party directly, either through their local party offices or via the national headquarters; this decision confused retailers, who ordered copies of *'The Liberal'* magazine thinking it was the manifesto. In correspondence with the author, Matthew Taylor, the MP responsible for the manifesto's production, subsequently acknowledged this tactic was a serious mistake.

Access to manifestos is one element of the campaign that has benefited from the parties using computer technology. Many of the 380-plus parties listed in the Register of Political Parties maintain a dedicated website on which can be found electronic versions of their printed manifesto, or pages with full discussions of the party's policies. Later in the study, the use of new technologies will be considered in more detail, but it is clear that a website has become an important tool for campaigners.

Media contact

The media were earlier identified as a major participant in election campaigns, and at whatever level of election, it is now essential for candidates to communicate with journalists, from the national, regional or local media. While the broadcast media continue to be governed by rules that ensure an even-handed coverage and that candidates are not unfairly discriminated against, print media are able to favour and give open support to particular candidates. Parties at both local and national levels can take out paid-for advertisements in newspapers and magazines, but not on TV or Radio, and if specific candidates are named in those adverts, the cost has to be included in those candidates'

election expenses. Letters to the Editor of newspapers, press releases on specific issues, press conferences and special events, for instance visits to notable groups of voters, can all be used in the attempt to get the attention of the media. National party involvement with the media, including the production of TV and radio Party Election Broadcasts will be discussed later.

Polling Day activities

The focus of the day's activity is to ensure those voters who have indicated their support, get out and cast their vote. In the ideal circumstances, every seat being contested will have a team of workers, able to provide transport for anyone needing a lift to the Polling Station, and to visit identified supporters in order to remind them to vote, a process known as 'knocking up'. Again, the resources available to a candidate dictate the sophistication of this process. Polling Day will start very early for some, if a "Good Morning" leaflet is planned. The message this leaflet contains is a final reminder to voters that it is Polling Day and their vote is important. The aim is to deliver as many as possible before the Polling Stations open at 7.00am, in order to encourage people to vote on their way to work, or as they deliver children to school. Further leaflets may be delivered throughout the day, stressing that every vote can make a difference – it is to every candidate's advantage to portray the contest as being very tight and that the outcome is uncertain, hopefully motivating their supporters to make the effort and vote. The challenge throughout all polling day activity is to do enough to motivate voters to get out and vote, without causing them to view

what is done as undue pressure, and react negatively by staying at home, or worse, voting for a rival candidate.

If the team is large enough to cope with the work generated, a member of the team will be sent to each Polling Station, to act as a "Teller". Standing outside the station, Tellers will simply record the Electoral Roll number of each voter as they go in to vote. Tellers are permitted to wear rosettes or badges indicating their party allegiance, but they are not allowed to attempt to persuade voters in how they should vote. The numbers that are collected are collated with canvass data to produce 'Knocking Up' lists, which activists will then use to identify those supporters who still need a reminder to vote, made either by telephone or a personal visit. A well-run polling day organisation will run several cycles of this process throughout the day. With the close of polling, the campaign ends and all that remains is to attend the Count for the outcome. However, important information can still be gathered at the Count, as the ballot papers are verified. Parties may appoint counting agents to estimate the votes for the party from each ballot box, so that the party's strength in each polling district can be assessed. Information about which polling districts are areas of strength for the party, and which are weaker, can be very useful for subsequent campaigning and recruitment.

A full polling day operation will place a heavy demand on personnel, and while what has been described above is the aspiration of every party organiser, in reality the decline in membership of all parties has made a real difference. For instance, while the ideal is that tellers are present at every polling station, from

7.00am until 10.00pm, the reality is that local parties often struggle to both provide that resource and have enough workers able to make use of the information gathered. Each party therefore concentrates its resources accordingly on the most effective ways it considers will get out the vote, and it is why knocking up by telephone has become very popular. The danger is to avoid aggravating supporters by ringing them several times to ask if they have voted - if they have already done so it is easy to apologise, but repeated requests to vote may cause possible supporters to feel pressurised and be put off from voting. In Chapter Six, the changes caused by the shrinking numbers of party members and supporters on the Polling Day operation will be considered in more detail.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to describe the common features of modern electoral campaigns at all levels of governance and to establish what could be considered as part of a model of the 'ideal' campaign. As has been observed, there are broad similarities between the campaigns at most types of election, as the essential purpose is the same, whoever the candidate and whatever the institution they wish to work within – a sufficient number of the electorate must be identified and then motivated to exercise their vote in favour of the preferred candidate. The precise techniques employed to achieve this do vary between levels of election, and so the campaign toolkit that each political party develops must be adaptable to accommodate the demands of the electoral system and needs of the main participants.

As has been indicated throughout the chapter, the 'perfect campaign' model described and the variations in campaign practice that existing legislation permits, provoke many questions about the differences between the ideal and actual practice. The second half of this study will examine the main themes that have been raised in this and the preceding chapters, and will explore the changes that have occurred in electioneering since the late 1950s through to the present day.

Chapter Four

Developing the Model 1: Direct campaign practices

The preceding chapter began to describe the main elements of a model of ideal campaigning, which is broadly applicable to any election held within the UK in the last twenty years. In effect, what the model attempts to describe are the major parts of a campaign which advisors from the headquarters of any party would want to consider, in order to devise a strategy that adequately contests an election. Three dimensions of the model were considered: firstly, the level of governance at which the election is being held; this sets the context within which a campaign is conducted and starts to shape the resources that parties will need to gather. Secondly, the main contributors to a campaign were identified, starting with the candidates and including party officials, both paid and volunteer, local supporters and activists; the involvement of central party organisations was noted alongside non-party advisors and the media. Thirdly, a brief overview of the methods that campaigners employ during an election period was described. In the next three chapters, the principal techniques that now comprise the modern campaigner's toolbox will be examined in more detail. These can be divided into three distinct categories: firstly, in this chapter, those methods that require a face-to-face encounter or conversation with the voter will be considered; in Chapter Five, techniques that involve an indirect contact, that is, those that allow 'campaigning at a distance', using printed material, electronic communications and the media will be examined. Chapter

Six will look at the conclusion of the campaign and those activities that are commonly associated with Polling Day.

This examination of the ideal campaigning model will primarily focus on its use by candidates standing in elections to local government; as previously noted the majority of the investigations into the efficacy of campaigning have focused their attention on elections for national legislatures. Two recent surveys conducted by the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre have addressed this gap in the survey data, by questioning candidates who stood in the elections held in May 2006 and 2007. The analysis that follows in these three chapters will combine this quantitative data with information gathered from a series of interviews conducted with experienced campaigners from across the political spectrum. Material gathered by the author in the course of his own experiences campaigning to be a Liberal Democrat district councillor will also be used; two main strands of guidance issued from the national party will be referenced, firstly, from the Campaigns Unit based at the Liberal Democrats' London headquarters (located at 4 Cowley Street, SW1) and secondly, from the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors and Campaigners (ALDC).

The context of the surveys in 2006 & 2007

On 4th May 2006, 176 English authorities held elections; a total of 4,414 seats, in 3,123 wards, were contested by 15,230 candidates. Elections were held for all the seats in the London Boroughs, along with one-third of the seats in 36

Metropolitan Boroughs, 20 Unitary Councils and 81 shire district councils; a further 7 districts held elections for half their seats. On 3rd May 2007, there were elections in 312 English councils. Whole council elections took place in 25 Unitary authorities and 153 District Councils, while again, one-third of the seats were contested in 36 Metropolitan boroughs, 20 unitary authorities and in 78 district councils. In total, 10,488 seats, in 6,626 wards were contested by 28,379 candidates (Cole & Jones 2007:32, Rallings & Thrasher 2006 & 2007).

Immediately after the elections in 2006 and 2007 surveys were sent out to random samples of candidates. In 2006, 1,182 responses were received, 7.8% of the total number of candidates, and in 2007, 2,848 replies, 10.0% of the total. In 2006, 81.1% of the responding candidates were affiliated to the three major parties; in 2007, a slightly smaller percentage of responses (79.3%) came from the main three parties (Table 4.1). It should be noted that in 2007 the Conservative candidates make up a third of the total number of candidates and also of the responses, as the party put up over double the number of candidates

Table 4.1: Total percentage of candidates by party, at elections 2006 & 2007 compared with survey responses

	2006			2007		
	Total Candidates	Actual %	Survey Responses %	Total Candidates	Actual %	Survey Responses %
Conservative	4,251	27.9	28.0	9,262	32.6	34.5
Labour	4,177	27.4	26.4	6,343	22.4	22.3
Liberal Democrat	3,601	23.6	26.7	6,673	23.5	22.5
Green	1,290	8.5	9.0	1,414	5.0	5.0
UKIP	323	2.1	2.6	951	3.4	3.0
BNP	364	2.4	1.3	747	2.6	2.7
Others, inc. Independent	1,224	8.0	5.9	2,989	10.5	9.9
	15,230		n=1,182	28,379		n=2,848

Source: Rallings & Thrasher 2006 & 2007a

they had in 2006. Among 'Others', almost four times the number of candidates identifying themselves as Independents stood in 2007 compared to 2006.

These differences can be seen as a product of the levels of governance being contested in these elections.

The general aims of both surveys considered a wide range of issues related to being a candidate – from respondents' experiences of the selection process they went through in order to become a candidate, through to their views on issues relevant to the role of Councillor once elected. The 2007 survey sought "to better understand the reasons for the under-representation of women, younger people and people with Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds in local authorities" (Rallings & Thrasher 2007b). It should be noted therefore, that the purposes of the studies for which the two surveys were designed were not directly researching issues about campaign practice; however, although some caution will be used in making assumptions that respondents understood the questions being asked, both produced data that is relevant to this study.

In both 2006 and 2007, questions were asked about the production of a campaign leaflet, how widely it was distributed and whether the candidate received help in distributing it. The 2006 survey asked about additional forms of campaigning: canvassing by telephone, whether the candidate made household visits (door-to-door canvassing) or held public meetings. In 2007 these questions were not repeated, but questions were asked about the use of websites and also whether the candidates campaigned in wards other than the one they were contesting. An attempt was also made to assess the amount of

time candidates gave to the campaign each week by asking how much time they spent delivering leaflets. Both surveys also tried to identify those individuals who considered themselves to be paper candidates, and the levels of campaigning they participated in.

A cursory assessment of most elections, particularly those for local government, would suggest that while the model may establish an ideal to aspire to, many candidates and campaigners do not conduct the 'perfect' campaign, although that is not to suggest they will necessarily fail in their goal of winning the vote. Limited resources, a strong incumbent, or the targeting of neighbouring seats are all factors that may influence the tactical decisions taken about the contest for a particular seat. It is therefore appropriate to ask whether there are parts of campaigning practice that every candidate always does, that is, elements that are done as a matter of routine, and which aspects are only added when time and resources allow.

The campaigning methods examined in this and the following chapter have been divided into two categories: techniques that require a face-to-face or personal contact with the voter, which usually mean that the candidate or campaigner visits the voter's house or meets them in a public place, and methods that apply less direct means, using literature or computers to contact the voter. For clarity, each individual technique will be treated separately in this analysis; the precedent for this approach has been established by Gerber and Green's studies of elections in the USA, and their attempts to measure the effects of distinct aspects of campaigning including doorstep canvassing, the

use of the telephone, and direct mail, (1999, 2001, 2005b). However, it is important to note that all of the elements described contribute to a complete campaign, and there is a close inter-relationship between different facets of the campaign. Data collected from telephone canvassing will be used to inform mailing lists for personalised letters, and response mechanisms on distributed literature will seek to gather mobile phone numbers and email addresses for further campaigning contacts. The responses of voters gained from one activity help shape decisions about later stages of the present campaign and future campaigning, and so it is important to recognise the connections between different techniques in the analysis that follows.

The Canvass

The prospective politician going from door to door in a neighbourhood, whatever the weather and in the face of diverse challenges, from aggressive dogs to, on occasion, even more unwelcoming householders, appealing for people to vote for them is perhaps the most common image that people hold of what campaigning entails. This is reinforced by senior politicians who when discussing electoral success or failure on radio or TV interviews, frequently use 'meeting people on the doorstep' as the totemic indicator that they have been out 'on the campaign trail'; the popular image, while a caricature, still encapsulates an essential reality of electioneering – anyone aspiring to elected office does need to meet and engage with voters, in order to persuade them that they are worthy of consideration. However, beyond that simple fact, it is important to understand what campaigners seek to achieve through canvassing

and how the tool has been developed over the study period. This section will consider the use of the doorstep canvass and will also include an examination of the growth in telephone canvassing. While political campaigners may visit households at any time in the electoral cycle, the focus here is on activities that occur during the election campaign, and so it is primarily concerned with canvassing that aims to identify voting intentions. Other forms, including canvassing to raise awareness of specific issues or recruitment drives, will not be considered.

Academics Alan Gerber and Donald Green in USA have paid considerable attention to different aspects of 'Get out the Vote' campaigns, both partisan and non-partisan in nature. Among the field experiments they have conducted researching the various facets of electoral engagement, their findings on the use of the non-partisan doorstep canvass are that, "the effect of a personal contact is that turnout probability rises by between 6 and 7%" (1999:10940). This is a significant amount especially in those elections where overall turnout is under 50%, as was the case for the midterm elections they examined; however, are campaigners motivated to canvass for this reason alone or do they hope to derive additional benefit from the activity? One councillor, who has also stood several times as a parliamentary candidate, commented,

"In local elections, door knocking makes a hell of a difference; if you are out there as a candidate and if you work really, really hard knocking on doors and speaking to people, you're going to do well."

Amongst the experienced campaigners interviewed, two reasons were given to explain why they canvassed. Firstly, the voters expect it; an example of how strong that expectation can be, was observed by the author in the 2007 district council elections. At the vote count for his ward, one ballot had been deliberately spoilt by a clearly annoyed voter who had written in large capital letters, across all five names on the ballot, "No-one came to see me. No-one gets my vote." The Count Official commented on the fact that this individual had not just grumbled about this at home, but had made the effort to get to the polling station to express their view. Secondly, in talking about how they campaign, all the interviewees indicated that there is a significant link between data gathered during canvassing and what they do on Polling Day. The Liberal Democrat's Campaign Manual sums this up,

"Think of the campaign as one giant list building exercise. The goal being to compose a big enough list of registered voters so that, if they go out and vote for your candidate on polling day, you will win" (2006:57).

Answering the voters' expectation that a candidate will make the effort to call on them personally, is seen by most activists as very important, and especially in local elections, it benefits their campaigns in ways that alternative techniques do not.

"The fact you are doing it the old fashioned way, you gain, because you have made the effort to walk up to their front door; I think people appreciate that. Some people won't, but more people will think highly of that than getting a phone call. If it is the candidate that actually bothers to

knock on your door, and you see the candidate out campaigning, that benefit is quite considerable ... I think the personal touch is great.”

This view, from the leader of a small, geographically focussed party, was echoed by a former Conservative agent and current Councillor:

“If you go and see the [voter] at the local level, if they see the local candidate, they are more likely to vote for him or her, whatever party they are. ‘That person came to see me and nobody else has been to see me.’ I think if you are a representative of a particular party and you canvass somebody face to face, they are more likely to vote for that party; if they are strong Liberal or Labour they are not going to obviously, but if they are undecided, or they don’t know or they don’t care, the chances are if they see somebody from a particular party, they are more likely to vote for that party because they have seen them.”

He went on to stress the need for a face-to-face encounter,

“I know you can talk to far more people in an hour [on the telephone] than knocking on a door, but you haven’t got that eye contact... [if you haven’t got that] you haven’t got the person.”

For independents and minor parties their reception on the doorstep can be different to that of major party candidates,

“I’ll be totally honest, it is about selling ourselves really, because we don’t have the recognition factor that you have. I mean you turn up, with your Liberal Democrat rosette, and the recognition factor is there, so you get ‘Hello, nice to see you’ or *ker-ching* (indicating a door slam). Whereas our

experience is, [voters say], 'OK, who are you?' I'd like it to be different but that's the reality and I'm not going to pretend it's otherwise."

This minor party campaigner suggested that getting out on the doorsteps was also a way to "close the gap" with the bigger parties:

"We get visibility... where [we have] a strong group ... [we can say] 'Look we're doing well, we've got Town Councillors, we've got District Councillors.' It's good because we have been so active people don't think of us as the fourth party anymore; we're just one of the parties, we've got over this 'the main parties plus them' because in local elections that just doesn't exist."

However, regardless of party affiliation, the interviewees all seemed to agree with the comment of a Liberal Democrat campaigner, "It is the personal touch that helps to solidify the commitment that the voter makes in their head as much as anything else".

The language used to describe the positive gains from canvassing, "the personal touch," "eye contact," "taking the trouble to call" and "showing that you have made the effort", reveal that there is a high value still to be gained from face-to-face conversations with voters. However, those interviewees who got their first experiences of canvassing in the 1970s and earlier, noted that there had been a marked decline in the practice. A senior Labour councillor and activist who was first involved in the two 1974 General Election campaigns in a London borough, emphasised that she had been trained in 'proper' canvassing

that involved more than just delivering leaflets. Now however, even some experienced supporters in her party do not understand the process:

“...the Chair of our branch, who is retired and a long-standing blue-collar trade unionist – it was quite clear when I went out with him that he didn’t get the concept of actually talking to people. It is very weird to see that, coming from my history; so we had the situation that people were simply delivering, just leaflet dropping. I was Election Agent as well and when I suggested the idea that [our workers] might actually talk to voters... they couldn’t get to grips with it!”

The director of the ALDC said he too was aware of this move away from personal engagement with voters and considered it a detrimental trend,

“We [the ALDC] are very much into talking to voters. Doorstep canvassing is still very important and also not sitting at polling stations is just more evidence that we are not engaging with voters. Telephone canvassing is easy but it is nowhere as near as good as a local person knocking on the door for a chat.”

The 2006 survey of local election candidates asked if candidates had made household visits as part of their campaign; however, the question did not ask respondents to clarify that this was for the purposes of voter identification.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the importance placed on the activity by the interviewed campaigners, only 57% of survey respondents confirmed that they had visited households, although that also seems to confirm the perception that less canvassing is being done. Overall, three quarters of Conservative

Table 4.2: Percentage of candidates who conducted household visiting as part of their campaign, 2006 Local Election Survey.

	Metropolitan Borough	District	Unitary	London Borough	Total %
Conservative	43.6	82.3	61.5	78.4	74.7
Labour	70.0	47.8	54.5	69.6	60.2
Liberal Democrat	45.2	59.5	70.6	41.8	51.3
Minor parties *	19.1	32.0	38.2	14.3	25.87
Independents & Others	62.5	62.8	66.7	71.0	65.5
N=1,144					57.2

Minor parties * = Greens, UKIP, BNP

candidates said they had visited homes but that hides a considerable variation between elections in different types of authority (Table 4.2). Conservatives in District Council seats canvassed almost twice as much (82.3%) as their colleagues in Metropolitan authorities (43.6%), apparently adopting an opposite strategy to Labour candidates (47.8% and 70% respectively). (Fisher & Denver, 2008:813, provide evidence for a decline in doorstep canvassing at the last four General Elections.)

For some of the interviewees, their view is that the voters' expectations of a visit remains stronger in rural areas compared to the urban areas. Two Liberal Democrat interviewees, who both have experience of organising campaigns in urban and rural areas, agreed that it was rural voters who held the more traditional view that they wanted a personal visit from the candidate. While in urban areas it is physically easier to canvass, as the housing is denser, their view was that residents in towns seem to be more open to alternative

approaches. One of these campaigners, who has been involved in campaigns since the 1960s, said

“I think we have always taken the view that we would canvass everybody, partly on the basis that some people will vote for you even if they don’t agree with you, because you have taken the trouble to call and I think, especially in rural areas, that is very true.”

However, the results from the survey of candidates in 2006 do not suggest that the relative density of housing greatly effects the decision to doorstep canvass; the percentage of candidates canvassing in district councils, which includes a significant number in rural areas, is only 1% greater than those canvassing in the London Boroughs (Table 4.3). While the London Boroughs and Metropolitan Authorities tend to have greater similarities in terms of their urban layout, less than half of candidates contesting wards in Metropolitan Council areas chose to

Table 4.3: Percentage of candidates who conducted households visits by local authority type, 2006 Local Elections Survey.

	% No visits	% Did visit
Metropolitan	52.5	47.5
District	40.2	59.8
Unitary	44.6	55.4
London Borough	41.3	58.7
Total	42.8	57.2

canvass, 11% fewer than those in the London Boroughs; it would therefore appear that factors other than the density of housing have a greater influence on the decision to canvass.

In addition to meeting voter expectations, the interviewees were all very clear that the purpose of their canvassing efforts was primarily to provide data for use on Polling Day. Liberal Democrat training emphasises that

“canvassers are harvesters of data not evangelists who are there to convert people. The major purpose of ID canvassing is to “harvest” data about how people are intending to vote” (ALDC 2006a:16).

The information gathered from the canvass is used during Polling Day for the ‘knocking-up’ effort; this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six, however, it is worth noting here that, whatever the level of sophistication used to collect data and then apply it, activists of all the main parties use a similar scenario when motivating others to go out canvassing. The interviewees could recount experiences of contests which were won by a small number of votes, and so a strong link was made between collecting canvass data and the ability to win an election. They identified the effort of finding their last few supporters in the minutes before the Polling Stations closed as potentially the difference between winning and losing in a close contest; it was the canvass records that enabled them to do this and allowed activists to be “dragging people to the polls at eight o’clock at night”.

There appears to be a significant gap between the aspiration to create a 'big list' of potential supporters that can be contacted on Polling Day and the reality of collecting data through a campaign canvass. Candidates who responded to the 2006 survey were asked to estimate the coverage of any canvassing that was done in their ward during their campaign (it should be noted that this question simply asked for an approximate percentage, nor did it request information about any pre-election canvassing). Again, the responses support the belief that doorstep canvassing is reducing in its importance for a campaign (Table 4.4). 40% of responses said that no canvassing had been done and nearly two thirds indicated that very little canvassing occurred, defined as visiting less than 25% of the houses in the ward. Only one in six of the candidates achieved a canvass that covered more than three quarters of their ward.

Canvassing starts with the Electoral Roll; for each Polling District, the Roll lists every street in alphabetical order and then lists the names of voters separated into the even and odd numbered houses and then, at the end, those whose

Table 4.4: The amount of household canvassing conducted during the campaign, 2006 Local Election Survey.

Percentage of households visited	Percentage of responses
No canvassing (0%)	40%
Very little (0% - 25%)	66%
Attempt at canvassing significant area (26% - 75%)	18%
A comprehensive canvassing (76% - 100%)	16%

homes are named but not numbered. Immediately a difficulty emerges for the canvasser intent on visiting every voter on the Roll, as the physical reality of an area will often be very different from the simple list of names and numbers provided, and some effort is required by the canvassing organiser to arrange routes that make the best use of workers' time and to ensure every house is visited. The introduction of electronic versions of the Electoral Roll has greatly eased the process of converting information from the register into a format that canvassers can use. The major parties have all developed computer software that enables this process – the Liberal Democrat version is called EARS, the Election Agents Record System.

The reformatting also allows the opportunity for additional data to be added from earlier canvassing, such as a voter's previous indication of how they will vote. Figure 4.1 shows an example of a canvass sheet produced from EARS. Assuming that data from previous canvassing exists, the voting intention that was previously indicated, and whether the individual has a postal vote will also be included. Voting intention is recorded in nine categories which will be altered to reflect the candidates who are standing, for instance if there is a UKIP candidate and not a Green. The decision of the canvasser to classify a voter in a particular way can be highly subjective, as the categories are broad and open to differences of interpretation, given that this is a judgement based on a conversation lasting perhaps less than 30 seconds. The categories shown on the right-hand side of the card are as follows:

Figure 4.1: Sample Liberal Democrat Canvass Card, produced using the EARS programme

ALDC 2006a

No Filter				Card 1																				
Printed on	Polling Day	Ward/Division		Polling District				Walk																
31/07/06	03/05/07	ANY WARD		XX3 :				10:XX3/10 - Mill/Ravens Cl																
AGE: Record E- Elderly; P - parent with school age children; Y - under 25																								
Issue: H - Health; C - Crime/police; E - Education; Please note any others																								
				RIDLEY ROAD																				
Pos	Pos	Age	Iss																					
ter	tal		ue																					
				2161	BETTERIDGE, Winifred M				11															
				2162	KNIGHT, Anthony				13															

- LIB DEM – indicates firm support and will definitely vote.
- Pro – probably will vote Liberal Democrat.
- CON / LAB – definitely voting Conservative or Labour.
- Sft CON / LAB – the voter appears undecided but would tend towards support of this party; if either party is not the incumbent, may be open to ‘squeeze’ vote arguments.
- GREEN – voting Green; again, open to ‘squeeze’ vote argument.
- ANTI – voter will not say who they are voting for, so the assumption is made that it will not be for the Liberal Democrats.
- NV – not voting.

On the left hand side of the canvass card additional information can be noted such as if the voter is willing to display a window poster or roadside board, or if they want to receive a postal vote and have not already arranged this; for further campaign purposes, a broad indicator of age and whether they raise any specific issues that concern them during the conversation can also be noted.

Experienced Conservative campaigner Lionel Zetter defines ID canvassing as “the political equivalent of speed dating. The objective is to work out the voter’s intentions in the shortest possible time” (2007:93). As illustrated above there are three broad classes of voting intention: strong party supporter (identifying which party), possible support for a party (variously described as soft, undecided, or probable) and not voting. The two most important groups to be identified are those who will definitely vote for the party and supporters of other parties who may be open to some persuasion. Dependent on the relative strength of the major parties and the presence of smaller parties such as the Greens, UKIP or the BNP, effective canvassers will try to identify supporters of other parties who may be open to persuasion with the “lesser of two evils” approach. Also referred to as the ‘squeeze’ vote, these voters recognize that their preferred choice will not win and may accept the argument, “You don’t normally support us, but voting for us this time will keep X out.” This approach can also be used when the data shows they are a consistent voter for another party at one level of election, but may reconsider their choice at another level; as the director of the ALDC summed up, “it’s a different election, so why not different behaviour?”

The point at which a voter makes the decision on how they will vote has been the subject of considerable academic interest (for example, see Campbell, *et al.* 1964). A Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate suggested that the face-to-face conversation plays a critical part in fixing the voter’s decision.

“It’s the old adage that people don’t make up their minds until they get into the polling booth and they are only ever there with their wallet and not the person who has asked the questions on the doorstep... The trick is to get

them to make the commitment sooner rather than later; you don't want them to be making that commitment in the polling booth because that is just too volatile, too unpredictable..."

The advent of computerised record-keeping makes available to local parties the ability to easily build up databases that show the declared voting intentions of individual households over several elections. Adding information from the marked registers of those who actually cast a ballot allows parties to clearly identify their core base of committed supporters; however, maintaining such records requires both time and expertise and while this is the ideal, the impression created from the interviewees is that there are often gaps in the data. Echoing the sentiments of senior politicians that they do not need professional advisors to inform them what their political intuition already tells them (see Chapter Two), these experienced campaigners all indicated that they knew where their support was located. Using the experience of doorstep campaigning over several cycles of elections, they were able to identify the areas, and even specific streets, where they know they will get a good response and conversely those streets where support is weak. When campaigns are dependent on a shrinking base of activists willing to contribute, this information is essential, as some targeting of effort is required:

"For General elections you want as many votes as possible, and there are areas in the General election that we go into that we wouldn't touch in a District Council election. I'll give you an example, just along this coastline here, some of the villages have got good groupings of Labour voters,

because we have got quite a lot of elderly retired farm workers, they have been agricultural workers and union members, but they would only ever see us in a General election because there isn't any point [at other times]; we are not going to get any seats at County or District around these rural areas."

This is the view of one Labour Election Agent, while a Liberal Democrat in Cornwall explained:

"One of the things I think was very important, we had a very rigid policy of target setting. Because we were in the Truro area, the initial objective was to get involved in Truro City [Council]; we didn't bother about St Austell and we didn't bother about the rural areas,"

Other Gains from the Canvass

In addition to identifying both support and the strength of the opposition in preparation for Polling Day, the doorstep canvass provides other opportunities.

"Canvassing can be thought of not only as a means of getting out votes but also as a vehicle for recruiting campaign volunteers and improving the public visibility of a campaign" (Green & Gerber 2004:25),

This view was echoed by the interviewees. For the retired Conservative agent every canvass helped build upon previous work,

"Obviously we were computerised, we had the Electoral Roll on computer as we had done for years, voting intentions were on it, whether people

were postal voters... whether they would put up posters, whether they would canvass, whether they would leaflet. Anything you can imagine was on the computer, if they gave us the information...”

The campaigners indicated that they did not view each election campaign as a stand-alone event, but the work done and data gathered also contributed to ongoing campaigns at other levels of the local scene (Ward 2003:585). A Liberal Democrat campaigner described the range of information that an experienced canvasser can potentially gather from a doorstep call:

“If you are a proper well trained canvasser you will be able to approach a front door and there is a CND sticker in the window, so that probably means they are probably anti the war in Iraq, or there is a pram in the hallway, they may have a young child. There may be an elderly relative in the front room watching TV, so maybe they are a primary carer and by building up a much more complicated picture... of more than “who are you voting for” allows you then to really target the follow-on communications that you make. It works even better if your local party is already running a number of campaigns that relate to those groups you are trying to find... being able to drop the canvass data into one of those ongoing streams ... you begin to capture increasing numbers of people. I don’t think we can head into a successful election campaign without face-to-face doorstep canvassing.”

During the campaign itself canvass data is used to shape the decision-making process about the key messages to reinforce in leaflets and letters, and how to respond to the opposition. Careful analysis of the data collected will be done every day, especially when the consensus of the activists is that the contest is close. Within Liberal Democrat campaigns the commonly used tool for assessing the strength of each candidate is the Richmond Formula (ALDC 2006b:65) and the other main parties use similar methods of calculation. Developed in the London Borough in the early 80s, the calculation aims to give a rough guide of the level of support each candidate is developing during a campaign. The reliability of such calculations is dependent on the extent and thoroughness of the canvass; to give the best results, canvass data from a high proportion of the ward area must be available. However, useful information on what is happening particularly at the start of a campaign can be gained from a small amount of data; the following was distributed to Liberal Democrat candidates at the beginning of April 2007 and also reproduced in the party's newspaper:

"It's all about the first 50 contacts!"

... Whilst a full canvass is desirable, it is not essential in order to win! Indeed, in a number of areas, historical canvass data is often patchy (if non-existent), but don't be put off, a small sample can still supply you with the information you need... Your canvass data can show:

- The strength of your support in any geographical area – a street, an estate, a polling district, a ward, division, even a constituency.
- The relative strengths of your opponents in each area.
- Any changes in the level of support for each party (even at this early stage in the campaign).
- Comparable figures for previous years which will show whether you (or your opponents) are holding your own, losing or improving support.

- Which wards you need to concentrate on to maximise the number of seats you will win.

... What is as important is what is happening to your Non-voters and Antis. What you need to be looking for is if the canvass is showing more Non-voters than last time, then turnout will be down. If the Antis are up, then people are clearly voting in larger numbers for someone else who is not you! ... Re-examine the data and re-double your efforts. Think about an extra leaflet, some street letters or a target mailing. Whatever you do, don't sit there like Easter bunnies in the headlights waiting to be run over!" (Bridges 2007).

Challenges to data gathering

All the interviewees recognised that there is a gap between their aspirations for a complete canvass and what is achievable given the human resources available to them. Bochel & Denver noted,

"A really comprehensive canvass involves a great deal of work on the part of a great number of people both before and on polling day. Even where manpower is available, party activists often find excuses for not canvassing. It is probably the least popular of election jobs, certainly among those who have never done it" (1971).

Their comment remains true three decades later and is consistent with the low levels of canvassing noted above. If campaign organisers are able to persuade some activists to get out on the doors, their main concern then is that the voting intentions recorded are correct, and that the voter is being truthful.

"No matter how accurate the canvasser is, there will always be a proportion of people who say they are voting for us on the doorstep when actually they aren't. This could be because they are deliberately trying to deceive, don't want to get into a prolonged conversation or often because they are too nice to say "no" to the friendly person who has called on them" (ALDC 2006b)

Zetter identifies a further pitfall:

"For some communities – especially from the Indian subcontinent – saying no (especially to somebody who is in effect a guest at their door) would be

considered very rude. The simplest solution is to pledge their vote to anybody who asks for it.” (2007:100)

A Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate (PPC) expressed the view that when,

“...three different people go down the same street and get different responses, that is not in the voters’ best interest in terms of canvassing. What is in their best interest is to tell it how it is, so [they] only get knocked up on Polling Day once and preferably by the party [they favour]. If he or she says, ‘I am voting for all of you’, come Polling Day they are going to get very irritated.”

This view perhaps assumes that voters are more aware of the campaign process than they actually are. However, he too was aware of the issue of cultural conventions and suggested that from his experience of campaigning in parts of London, when targeting areas in which a high proportion of residents speak a language other than English, canvassers should be selected who are fluent in the dominant language, which again returns to the issue of the limitations imposed by available resources.

An accurate record of a voter’s intention is important both for the current election and for use by later canvassers, but errors do occur; the former Conservative Agent, who currently represents his party as a District Councillor and Town Mayor, said that the national Conservative database had him recorded as only a ‘probable Conservative supporter’. He was mildly affronted that he had not yet reached the ‘definite’ status and commented “It just makes you think; there are a number of people I know who are [Conservative party]

members and are down as 'possibles' and one is down as Labour!"; a Labour Councillor recalled one occasion when out canvassing,

"I had got a canvass sheet and it said whether they were weak Labour, *et cetera*; I knocked at this door and it was clearly marked that they were anti. I wanted to say 'Have you changed your view?', but they said, 'Oh no, we have always been Labour; we know Councillor so and so really well, we drink in the same club, we have been mates for ever. I am a strong Labour supporter.'" I asked how we had got this wrong and he said 'Nobody has been round'. When I suggested we may have phoned, he said 'That is not something we would tell anyone over the phone'".

The thoroughness of a canvass can also come into doubt when it is noted that canvassers often talk to only one voter on the doorstep; while there are techniques recommended to collect more complete information from households with several registered voters, successfully gathering this additional information is dependent on the quality of the training given to canvassers. Among the other factors identified by the interviewees that are shifting the emphasis of campaigning away from canvassing is the growing numbers of people using postal votes; the release of postal ballots midway through an election restrict the time in which useful data can be collected. Equally, the move by the major parties to collect more voter identification data through telephone canvassing, often organised from a national phone bank. Finally, it was also noted that there is now a greater dislike and wariness of uninvited 'cold' callers, so that political canvassers are grouped along with people selling

home improvements or religious beliefs. As a result, alternative techniques are replacing the doorstep visit, with the telephone canvass being the most popular.

Canvassing by telephone

It has already been acknowledged in an earlier chapter that the ubiquity of television, and more latterly the internet, have prompted major societal changes over the period covered by this study, changes that have been reflected in the development of campaigning techniques. Within the sphere of communications technologies the growth of telephone-based systems should also not be overlooked; (while use of the telephone does not provide the face-to-face contact discussed above, it is included here as a tool that still allows the candidate or campaigner to have a direct, personal conversation with the voter). Compared to the adoption of television methods into campaigning from the late 1950s, and computer-based techniques from the 1980s onwards, widespread use of the telephone by local campaigners was a relatively late phenomenon. The retired Conservative agent commenting on the October 1974 General election, noted “there was no telephone canvassing at all; the odd person might have phoned their friend but there was nothing organised.”

To canvass by telephone requires additional work and potentially extra expense by organisers arranging the canvass. The Electoral Roll does not include any telephone numbers and so they must be sourced from elsewhere and then amalgamated with the voter’s information. Telephone numbers, as well as mobile phone numbers and email addresses can be collected by local party workers through non-election canvass work:

“Canvassers were strongly encouraged to ask supporters for their phone numbers – often otherwise unobtainable mobile numbers – to improve our records, maximise our phone knock-up in an often difficult-to-reach urban setting and to allow a follow-up phone canvass of ‘others in household’ who were not at the door when the canvasser called” (Bridges 2008:2).

Alternatively, telephone numbers can be purchased commercially, usually from companies who will also merge the data into appropriate formats.

Advantages of using the telephone

As already noted by the interviewees, perhaps the greatest advantage gained from using the telephone is that of speed. Campaigners from all three main parties were positive about the ease of simply telephoning voters: “As a councillor it is a very good way of having quick contact with people”; “I know you can talk to far more people in an hour [on the telephone] than knocking on a door” “Telephone canvassing is easy” and Zetter notes, “With telephone canvassing you can cover an awful lot of ground very quickly” (2007:102). A canvass conducted by telephone potentially allows more activists to contribute; elderly party supporters unable to door-knock because of poor health, and those who are unwilling to visit from door to door because of previous bad experiences, can get involved. Using the telephone eliminates the impact of the weather – householders and canvassers alike are less willing to talk on the doorstep when it is raining; additionally, the technique permits access to hard to reach households.

“[The telephone] is useful when you have got lots of flats and you can’t get into them, it’s useful again going back to the farm with a very long drive

and they are out when you get there; you have saved yourself ten minutes or whatever it is because you can phone them. It is also useful if it is chucking it down with rain and you don't particularly want to go out and get soaked, but it can't deliver leaflets and it can't pick people up on Polling day, so it has its limitations."

This view from a Conservative campaigner, that using the telephone has to be used in addition to the doorstep canvass was shared by both a Liberal Democrat PPC, "You can't take one away from the other; you can't do the mail drops or the telephone canvassing without having a candidate appear on doorsteps," and a senior Liberal Democrat councillor and activist, "I am probably a Luddite in many respects. I am not a great telephone canvassing fan; I don't think that is quite the same as trudging up somebody's path and knocking on their door." A Labour councillor also agreed that it added to work already done, "I found telephone knocking up to be really good where you have managed to do door to door canvassing. I think generally, if you have got skilled canvassers, you should have a more accurate record and then telephone knocking up can work quite well."

Perhaps the most significant advantage that using telephones for canvassing gives, is that geography is no longer a constraint. The canvasser does not have to be located close to the campaign, and in fact can be anywhere in the country. This allows two different approaches. Firstly, all the major parties now make use of centralised phone-banks/call-centres either run by and for their party, or outsourced to commercial providers. Telephone banks are not only available to campaigns organised centrally but can also be accessed by local parties;

Liberal Democrat News regularly carries advertisements for call-centres offering telephone canvassing services, and the author as a registered Liberal Democrat activist, receives regular emails, especially in the lead-in to major elections, offering commercial call-centre services for local party use.

Secondly, there is an option that moves away from the dependence on centralised resources. Each party has a widespread membership which can often be an under-utilised resource; remote canvassing is now a realistic option, especially for those party members who are not currently involved in contesting a local election and are willing to give some time to a campaign and have a broadband internet connection. As part of the EARS software package, Liberal Democrats members can download 'eCanvass' onto their home computers (see <http://www.earsonline.co.uk/ecan01.php>). This provides a link to a nationally coordinated database of voter information for current by-election campaigns; web-based training is provided and the campaigner is then provided with appropriate scripts and a series of numbers to call. After each call a return is sent to the database of the information gathered. It appears that some dedicated supporters are now regularly contributing to campaigns many miles away from their home and this has the potential to be a phenomenon that will grow, as parties encourage those members who thought they were physically no longer able to 'get out on the doors' to take part; as an email from ALDC in April 2007 suggests, "even old aunt Bertha living 200 miles away could 'phone knock'". In an email readying candidates and campaigners for the May 2008 campaign, the Chair of the Liberal Democrats' Local Elections team, Andrew Stunnell MP made the same request, "ALDC would like to hear from volunteers ready and willing to come and help... Your help could be crucial, so don't hang

back. And if you don't want to leave home, you can do telephone calling and knocking up"; see Appendix Figure A4.1 for an email sent during the Ealing Southall by-election also requesting phone canvassing help.

A distinct advantage of this approach, as opposed to using call-centres is that a volunteer calling from home sounds different to an operative in a call-centre who may have made a great many calls in the course of their shift;

"Having monitored several hours of phone calls, it is our impression that the calls were delivered in a routinized and at times rushed manner. In other words, the calls sounded as though they were made by a professional firm rather than local volunteers or neighbours" (Gerber & Green 2001:77).

Levine & Lopez make a similar point suggesting that for,

"GOTV [Get Out the Vote] quality matters. Face-to-face personal dialogue works much better than automated communications... Canvassers and phone-callers who are enthusiastic, trustworthy, diligent and knowledgeable are more effective than those who are not... High-quality GOTV efforts (that use human beings instead of machines and motivated volunteers instead of paid workers) have increased turnout in a variety of contexts" (2005: 185-6).

Just as geographical constraints have been reduced, so to can the differences created by the level of election be made less relevant. A minor party Councillor came across one instance of Conservative telephone canvassing,

"they wanted to play up how well they were doing ... they were trying to push themselves up in the profile a bit, they were actually doing telephone canvassing for a town council by-election. They [wanted] to get a town councillor elected in order to 'blitz' the media saying Conservatives are on the up."

While his view, as a rival candidate, must be taken as potentially biased, this illustrates that the parties are now recognising the usefulness of their telephone resource.

While the above instances can be seen as simply a modern adaptation of the traditional activity of canvassing, in that the same information is being gathered, albeit perhaps more efficiently, some innovations indicate that new opportunities are also being tested. One technique which is familiar to voters in American campaigns is the use of pre-recorded messages; these tend to be used for information giving rather than for data collection and so are most often used on polling day for knocking up. For instance, the Labour party in Manchester have used automated telephone knocking-up, with a recorded message from the actress who plays Vera Duckworth on Coronation Street, providing a familiar voice not associated with political activity. The ALDC also has anecdotal evidence of another technique familiar in US electioneering, the negative call, "There was a by-election in the north-west recently where the Labour party were ringing up to ask people if they knew the Liberal Democrat policy on drugs, or 'just ringing to check you knew that the Lib Dem candidate was gay'".

One of the clear advantages that telephone canvassing provides is that it becomes much easier to control what is said during the conversation. A significant problem with doorstep canvassing is the inability to ensure consistency in what is said by the canvasser and, as noted above, what they record as their assessment of the voter's response. All the methods of telephone canvassing begin with a carefully prepared script that the caller is

obliged to follow in each call they make. This approach creates greater consistency in voter responses and allows standardisation of the records made and hence more reliable data. For local parties making use of nationally produced scripts this can be a challenge when first using the material, as one Labour activist explained,

“When [telephone canvassing] was first introduced, members had very mixed feelings about it, and that was whether they were people who had done canvassing door to door or not. The reason being it was phoning people up out of the blue, it was the cold calling bit and also in the first versions the scripts were very complicated. For the district council elections we modified [the scripts] slightly to make it easier, but that meant that we couldn't use it in line with the software... You had to use the Labour Party script because you were identifying voters in very specific ways; you were looking at their tendencies and you were asking what they had voted before, so you were looking at whether they were weak Labour, and this thing about segmentation of the market and being able to send specific letters, *et cetera*.”

Staff calling from national call-centres can sometimes find that their script does not fully reflect the local situation. Mebyon Kernow is the party that represents Cornish issues (Deacon, *et al.* 2003, recount the story of Cornish nationalism and the party's electoral history); their current party leader recounts one conversation that went off-script (not verbatim),

“A lady I know had a call last election:

Caller: Hello, Conservative party here. Will you be voting Conservative at the elections?

Voter: No.

Caller: Can we persuade you?

Voter: No.

Caller: Who will you be voting for?

Voter: Mebyon Kernow.

Caller: Sorry? Is that the name of the candidate?

Voter: No, it's a party.

You know the person in the call-centre got totally confused because they didn't have a box to tick."

Of the candidates who responded to the 2006 Local Election survey a significant minority used the telephone for part of their canvass. Labour candidates were the most likely to use the telephone, with 39.3% of their respondents saying they used the telephone, followed by Conservative (27.8%) and Liberal Democrat (21.3%) candidates. Of those who said they had used this method, 77.3% said they had received help making the calls; however, the survey did not ask for any detailed information of the type of help given, so it is not possible to assess whether this came from within their local party, from central party resources or from the wider party membership.

The low take-up of telephone-based techniques is perhaps indicative that the use of the telephone to canvass can be problematic. It should be noted that the preceding discussion has primarily focussed on contacting voters via their fixed 'land line', the number of which is relatively easy to obtain. The rapid growth of mobile telephone usage presents several challenges to campaigners; while

mobile telephones can provide a more direct way to reach an individual voter, given the personal ownership of a mobile compared to the household fixed telephone, the mass collection of mobile numbers is much more difficult, appreciating as well the temporary nature of many of these numbers, given the short-term nature of most contracts. Aspects of telephone-based canvassing do attract criticism and the interviewees, especially those with lots of campaigning experience, expressed some reticence about using the tool. It appears that central party organisations remain more convinced of the benefits than those on the ground. Additionally, there are two distinct concerns that telephone canvassing raises; firstly, again as for doorstep canvassing, the perception is that this is equivalent to cold callers selling double glazing or similar. The former Conservative agent concluded his comments on telephone canvassing by saying,

“I have done telephone canvassing for years and years and I think it has now become less effective than it was because there are so many companies, organisations, phoning people; voters get fed up with people on the phone.”

The second area of concern is the legal questions that are raised by dispersed or remote canvassing, which can be difficult to resolve by those responsible for controlling election expenses. While using a centralised party phone-bank or commercial facility will produce an invoice that can be included in expense returns, if hundreds of supporters make phone calls from their homes, how is this accounted for? One former election agent commented, “We all know how easy it is to have spent £500 on telephone canvassing but who can prove it?”

You can't because nobody knows how many calls were made." Equally, the author has seen on several occasions the suggestion to encourage local party supporters to do their canvassing using the free calls both mobile and landline telephone suppliers include in their service contracts. (The use of phones that communicate over the Internet, using programmes such as Skype, is not widespread yet but will also need to be factored in at some point.) Using contracted free calls appears to be a development that at least pushes the boundaries of the regulations governing what should be included as legitimate expenses. Formal ALDC advice says "People who do some phoning for you during an election should declare something for their calls – even if they are on one of the "free calls" tariffs" (2007b), however, as no direct expense has been incurred for which volunteers will seek reimbursement, the hope that a declaration will be made is perhaps optimistic.

Public Meetings

The final aspect of direct face-to-face contact with voters to be noted here is the use of public meetings and Hustings. However, in considering the ways candidates attempt to engage with their electorate, a distinction will be made between methods that seek a conversation between candidate and voter (in the singular or as a group), and media focussed events in which the main audience is not those people who are immediately present. (Events such as walkabouts and press calls are staged with the purpose of obtaining photos and film coverage, and play an important part in shaping the modern media campaign, which will be noted in the next chapter.) There are two broad types of public

event, pre-arranged public meetings such as Hustings, and secondly, public gatherings at which the candidate makes an unannounced appearance, for instance, making a visit to a local school to meet parents as they are collecting their children and using the opportunity to discuss local concerns.

Hustings are perhaps the most familiar form of public meeting to occur during election campaigns, but they tend now to be only seen during Parliamentary elections and less often there. This opportunity for voters to hear from and assess the merits of all the candidates, is one that appears to be rarely used in local elections. Today, Hustings are most often arranged by non-political groups such as local churches and residents associations, and they are treated with some caution by campaign organisers. In discussing their merits, the current Liberal Democrat Campaigns Manual says, "Only ever allow the candidate to attend if the other main candidates have agreed to go, and each candidate will get equal billing"; the Manual also reveals a doubt about the value gained from such debates,

"In reality very few votes are won at these, as most of those who are motivated enough to attend have already decided how they will be voting" (2006:54).

Among the campaigners who were interviewed, those who had been involved since the 1970s also referred to the significance of 'Adoption' meetings, held at the formal start of the campaign to publicly introduce the candidate, and 'Eve of Poll' rallies. Speaking about one of the 1974 General Election campaigns, the former Conservative Agent described such an event in the North Cornwall constituency,

“We used to have a rally on the eve of the Poll, the Liberals did as well; we used to gather in Crantock, then come into Newquay and gather all the people into a convoy and go right across the county to Launceston. As we started going down the hill [into the town] there were thousands of people there, they filmed all this, there were hundreds of cars and the party would start a firework display in Launceston town centre, it was a massive display; then we would go down into this hall and have a rally, while the Liberals were having a rally somewhere else in the town, and then it was Polling Day.”

Such meetings do still occur (although rarely with such a public impact), but are far less focussed on voters; the interviewees suggested that they were now used primarily as opportunities by the candidate and party officials to galvanise their workers and raise funds and support, but little more. As a senior Liberal Democrat noted,

“Numbers of people going to public meetings have declined, unless you are talking about something controversial. There also started to be a tendency for people from the opposition to come along to ask difficult questions and in fact we did the same sometimes, quite embarrassingly. I remember one meeting I went to when there was a Labour person speaking who was an ex-Liberal candidate and he came to support the Labour candidate; one guy, very involved with us, just shouted “Turncoat, Liar” through the whole meeting.

We did outdoor meetings on the eve of Poll, those attracted big crowds but we stopped the meetings partly because they were taking up time when

we could be doing other, better things. It was also seen as tying the candidate up and in fairness the candidates do get tired ... so we dropped the public meetings.”

Apart from school gate visits, other opportunities to meet and talk with voters in more impromptu settings include visits to Post Offices, pharmacies, hospitals, GP surgeries, railway and bus stations, places of worship and old people's or nursing homes; all of these offer the candidate a chance to discuss issues that may be related to specific themes in their campaign. Setting up stalls at Car Boot sales and Farmers' markets or simply having a table in the High Street displaying literature, with the candidate available to talk to passers-by, are other alternatives that allow the candidate to show that they are engaging with local people. However, while they may provide contact with previously un-reached voters, these events carry a degree of risk. A loud argument in a public place with someone who wants to make a point, and who may not even be a voter in the candidate's ward, can be damaging.

In the context of campaigning for local elections, it appears very few candidates attempted to engage with their electorate using formal public meetings. This is also reflected in the limited space given within campaign training material for advice on staging such events, compared to the alternative methods discussed in this chapter. Responses from the 2006 survey of candidates indicate that very few had held any meetings as part their campaign; among the 1,132 candidates who responded to this question, only 150 (13%) said they had used public meetings, of this number 62 were Labour candidates, compared to 31

Conservatives and 22 Liberal Democrats. However, care should be taken in drawing conclusions from this data as no guidelines were given as to the type of event to include or the number of voters typically engaged.

The next chapter will continue this examination of the tools of campaigning and will move on to consider the alternative methods that candidates now utilise that do not require them to converse directly with the voter.

Chapter Five

Developing the Model 2: campaigning at a distance

“A personal approach to mobilizing voters is generally more effective than an impersonal approach. That is, the more personal the interaction between campaign and potential voter, the more it raises a person’s chances of voting” (emphasis in original, Green & Gerber 2004:9).

Despite this assertion, as will be explored in this chapter, techniques which utilise an indirect approach can bring distinct benefits to the campaign. In this chapter consideration will be given to the various techniques now available to campaigners that allow them to campaign ‘at a distance’. Firstly, leaflets and other printed literature that is not personalised will be examined, including the election address, posters and manifestos. Developments in the technology of print production mean that what is delivered through a voter’s letterbox today is very different in both look and content, from material used in the late 1950s. Equally, following the introduction of tools from the marketing industry, that permit campaigners to classify and segment the electorate, personally addressed communications are now an important part of the literature campaign, and targeted letters and direct mail techniques will be considered. The new alternatives that computer-based campaigning make available will be the focus of the second part of this chapter, while the final section will look at the growth and current uses made of print and broadcast media.

The chief appeal of all the techniques described below, aside from the issue that it is not always possible to obtain a direct contact even if it is sought, is that they allow campaigners to retain much greater control over the message they

are trying to present. Rather than giving unprepared replies to unexpected questions, and subsequently remembering all the points that should have been included after a conversation is concluded, these methods allow the campaigner time to carefully construct a message that is, in theory at least, measured and complete. However, there are also disadvantages, not least that in local elections particularly, there is a significant risk that the campaign becomes invisible; because there are fewer activists 'out, on the streets', giving a visible focus to the campaign for voters and rival candidates alike, a reduced physical presence increases the challenge of raising voter awareness.

The Literature Campaign

All the campaigners interviewed for this study make the same point, that at whatever level the election,

“We have taken the view that once the election is called, [our aim] is to get a leaflet through as many letterboxes, as quickly as possible.”

Anyone involved in preparing for a Liberal Democrat campaign will sooner or later hear a senior councillor or party official refer to what has become the party's campaigning mantra,

“It's a [David] Penhaligon thing. Get it on a bit of paper and stick it through a letterbox” (Russell & Fieldhouse 2005:206).

Penhaligon, MP for Truro and St Austell from 1974 until 1986, popularised a style of 'community politics' that was founded on continual communication with the electorate using printed material, a technique which has since been adopted

in similar forms by most other parties. Liberal Democrats often produce their local leaflets, both within and outside election campaigns, under the banner of 'Focus' (hence the registered name, page 91). The ALDC standard campaign model used to prepare candidates for the 2007 local elections recommended that local parties should distribute one Focus leaflet each month in the year leading up April 2007, then one per week from the official start of the campaign; in the final days before the poll, additional literature was suggested, culminating in a "Good Morning" leaflet delivered early on polling day (ALDC Briefings 2006/7). Even smaller parties, usually working with very limited resources, consider this method of repeated leafleting a key tool,

"If we are running a good campaign we will have two leaflets and we do sometimes have three, so you have got your main leaflet and then your extras, ancillary leaflets".

Parliamentary by-elections, as already noted, can be occasions for highly concentrated campaign behaviour; a Conservative Agent remarked, "In parliamentary by-elections for instance, your lot [the Liberal Democrats] do far more leaflets; you know, it's one o'clock - it is time for another leaflet." One of the most extreme examples of this to-date was the Brent East by-election in September 2003; estimates suggest that over one million pieces of literature were distributed by the Liberal Democrats alone, in a contest with 16 candidates and an electorate of just over 57,000 (Baldwin & Hurst 2003; HOC RP05-34). However, most campaigners are usually realistic about the effectiveness of

what they are distributing; as one interviewee who has campaigned with several minor parties including the Greens and Plaid Cymru commented,

“... putting the leaflet through [a letterbox] is one thing, but you can guarantee that with fifty percent of people it will go straight in the bin and we are all fully aware of that”.

Archie Norman, former Conservative Minister and chairman of the supermarket chain Asda, commenting on the use of direct mail letters in the 2005 General Election, said,

“Political leaflets are junk mail. They are even less likely to be read than the pizza delivery service ad ... When I was designing door drops at Asda, I believed they had to be effective even if their shelf life was the 30 seconds it takes to transfer them from the doormat to the bin ... It is the brand, the feel, the tone that counts. And it must be repeated over and over again” (Bannister 2005).

However, even a single leaflet is seen as a useful contribution to a candidate's campaign, something that is also recognised in the resources that the electoral authorities make available: candidates at every level of election, with the exception of those for local government, are entitled to have one leaflet or campaign address delivered free of charge to every registered household in the electoral area. This can be a significant help to smaller parties and to Independent candidates, as the Leader of a minor party explained,

“It's a cost effective way for us shifting 50,000 leaflets in one constituency. Spend a thousand quid on [printing] leaflets, £500 on your deposit, deliver them to the post office and those 50,000 leaflets get delivered by the postman. In terms of a small party getting that much literature out for that

price, it is good value and it is worth doing regardless of the vote... you get a leaflet everywhere in the constituency, even if you don't door knock."

The 2006 and 2007 surveys indicate that a large percentage of candidates used at least one leaflet as part of their campaign. However, neither survey allowed candidates to indicate if they had produced any further leaflets during the course of their campaigning, and so for the purpose of the surveys, this single leaflet is seen as the equivalent to the election address issued by parliamentary candidates. In 2006 nearly 3 out of 4 candidates had a leaflet produced, while in 2007, the percentage of candidates using leaflets increased to 4 out of 5 (Table 5.1). Comparing this number to the 57% who used doorstep canvassing (Table 4.2, page 130) suggests that the production and delivery of at least one leaflet has become the core element of a campaign around which other activities are designed.

However, as with canvassing there were significant differences in the reliance

Table 5.1: Percentage of candidates who had a leaflet produced for their campaigns, 2006 and 2007 Local Elections Surveys.

	2006	2007
Conservative	89.3%	89.4%
Labour	75.1%	81.1%
Liberal Democrat	64.0%	75.1%
Green	34.9%	42.5%
UKIP	63.3%	68.0%
BNP	93.3%	66.7%
Independent	86.5%	87.2%
Others	90.3%	77.1%
Total all parties	73.2%	80.3%
N=	1170	1206

on this form of literature between the main parties: 9 out of 10 Conservatives in both elections used leaflets, more than Labour candidates (75% in 2006 and 81% in 2007) while only 64% of Liberal Democrats candidates in 2006 distributed leaflets, seemingly at odds with the ALDC advice noted above.

Among the minor parties and Independents, in both years it was Green candidates who chose least often to use a leaflet as a campaign tool and as a party they appear to have conducted their campaigns in a markedly different way to their competitors. A possible explanation for this is that as their candidates are campaigning on issues concerning society's impact on the environment, they may have favoured environmentally neutral campaign techniques by reducing the amount of printed material used and put greater reliance on door-to-door visits or telephone canvassing or the use of electronic media, although the cost of producing material may be the critical factor.

An indication of the ways in which the level of election being contested shapes decision-making about campaigning style becomes evident when this same data is broken down by authority type (Table 5.2). Conservative candidates for district authorities depended on leaflets up to 20% more than their colleagues in other authorities. In both years, Labour candidates for seats in Metropolitan Boroughs made greater use of leaflets than Labour members standing in other elections. The alternative approach taken by the Greens is also more evident, with only 1 in 5 of their candidates contesting seats in Metropolitan Boroughs in 2006 using leaflets, increasing to a third of candidates in similar seats in 2007; it is in the Unitary authorities where they employ the most leaflets and not the Districts, an emphasis shared by both UKIP and the Liberal Democrats in 2006.

Table 5.2: Percentage of candidates who had a leaflet produced for their campaigns in 2006 and 2007 by Authority type, Local Elections Surveys.

	2006				2007		
	Metro. Borough %	District %	Unitary %	London Borough %	Metro. Borough %	District %	Unitary %
Conservative	85.0	96.9	75.0	82.8	70.8	92.9	78.9
Labour	90.4	66.7	72.7	77.4	88.6	80.8	77.6
Liberal Democrat	62.8	74.8	94.1	48.8	50.0	77.8	77.1
Green	20.0	31.9	40.0	48.3	33.3	42.9	50.0
UKIP	62.5	44.4	88.9	50.0	66.7	72.2	50.0
BNP	87.5	100.0	100.0	100.0	45.5	88.9	100.0
Independent	100.0	81.0	83.3	100.0	71.4	94.4	50.0
Others	87.5	90.9	-	91.7	66.7	87.7	93.3
Total	73.8	76.1	76.8	68.1	64.1	84.1	74.9
N=	183	503	95	389	128	851	227

This may be a consequence of Unitary authorities having larger geographical electoral divisions than the other authorities types.

The surveys asked respondents about their prior experience of campaigning, both whether they had been a candidate in a previous election and whether they had been elected before, in order to assess whether these factors had influenced decision making about their campaign tactics. Analysing the responses about leaflet usage allows a contrast to be made between those who had campaigned before and those for whom this was a new experience; over two-thirds of the seasoned campaigners chose to use a leaflet, a figure rising to 85% among the experienced candidates contesting District seats in 2007. In comparison, a surprising number of first-time candidates chose not to use a leaflet – in 2006 around 1 in 4 newcomers said they didn't make use of a leaflet,

while in 2007 the same was true for almost half of those standing in Metropolitan Boroughs and over a third of those contesting Unitary seats (Appendix Table A5.1). The wisdom of using a leaflet, if trying to win a seat, is underlined when noting the results from 2006 where 98% of successful candidates made use of a leaflet (Table 5.3). However, it should also be noted that included in this number are 'paper candidates' who are less likely to use a leaflet; when the same question was asked of this group, of those who were not elected, 64% did not use a leaflet, compared to 36% who did.

As previously noted the surveys in 2006 and 2007 only asked candidates about their use of a *single* campaign leaflet. While this is a useful measure to begin to understand the strategies adopted by candidates, in reality, it only scratches the surface of the use of the many pieces of literature which often form the major element of an extensive 'long campaign' plan, even at the local government level. "Campaigns cannot be started overnight. They require consistent and long term effort. ... In the words of Lynton Crosby, 'You can't fatten a pig on market day'" (Philip 2006:107-108). Accordingly, the use of multiple leaflets

Table 5.3: Comparing the outcomes of the election and the candidates' use of a campaign leaflet, 2006 Local Election Survey.

Result May 2006		Did you produce a campaign leaflet for distribution?		Total
		No	Yes	No
Not elected	Count	308	523	831
	% Elected	37.1%	62.9%	
Elected	Count	6	333	339
	% Elected	1.8%	98.2%	

N=1170

throughout a campaign, allows the candidate to communicate several messages and to develop themes within their main manifesto commitments. The surveys in 2006 and 2007 asked candidates to indicate how important it was to include details about a range of issues, from their personal background and previous political experience through to their party's local and national priorities. The responses were consistent over both elections with personal information, including background and prior involvement in the local community being rated very or quite important by a large majority of candidates. However, the most important issue was to state their party's local priorities (Table 5.4).

ALDC's advice before the 2007 election emphasised the importance of answering three questions within any election literature, and especially within the all-important introductory leaflet:

1. Who are you?
2. What are you offering?
3. Can you win?

Table 5.4: The importance of issues for inclusion on the campaign leaflet, Local Elections Surveys.

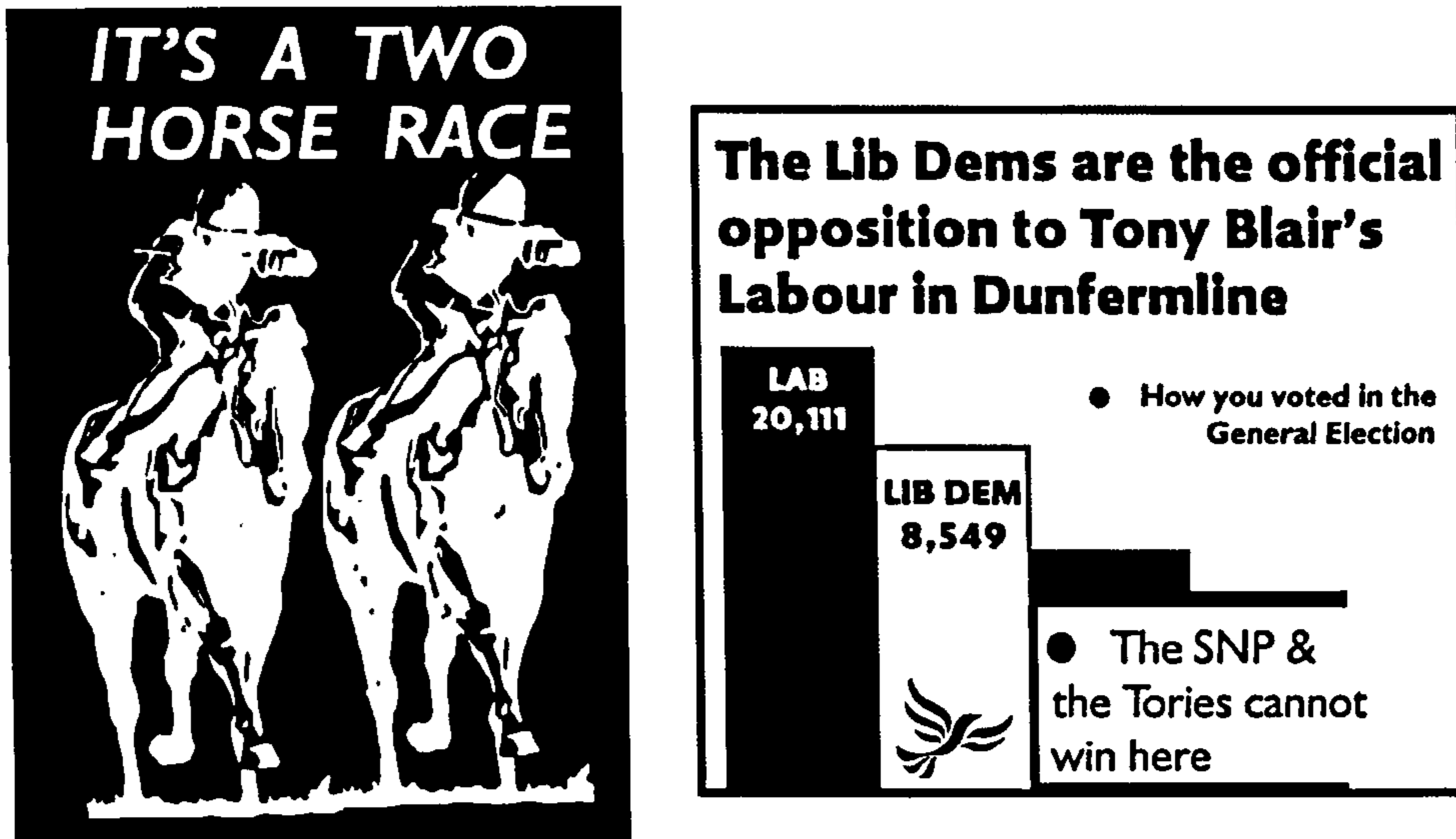
	Very/Quite Important	
	2006 %	2007 %
State your party's local priorities	93.7	94.2
Your personal background	85.0	90.6
Your record of local community involvement	83.8	88.5
Your competency for public office	80.4	84.1
Your previous political experience	61.3	65.2
Comment on the record of other parties / councillors	44.3	38.3
Refer to your party's national policies	48.0	49.7
Political party information to increase membership	45.8	40.2

The first two points reflect the findings of the survey shown above – a leaflet should identify the candidate's name, who they are and what they have achieved and what they will set out to achieve once elected. Just under half of respondents also considered that national party policies were important to include. However, the balance between campaigning on local issues and taking note of wider, national concerns can prove difficult for a candidate to get right. One approach can be to use a photo of the national party leader that relates to a story that can be given a local dimension, for instance, a picture of the Leader in front of an ambulance, or with a group of nurses to illustrate local health care concerns. A Liberal Democrat PPC, recalling a series of local campaigns in a London Borough in the months leading up to the 2005 General Election noted,

“I would say that 75% of the content would be local stuff and then perhaps the bottom half of the front page would reflect some national priority. I remember we did a series of leaflets, one on tuition fees, one on the environmental agenda, there were a couple on Iraq but that was all peppered with action on local issues.”

The final point in the ALDC's guidance above, “Can you win?” is a technique often used by the Liberal Democrats in their position as the third national party. While there may be more than two candidates contesting the seat, the language and imagery of horse racing is used to create the impression that, “it's a two horse race”, and that voters are faced with an either/or choice; similarly, graphs of the results from previous elections are used to the same effect (see Figure 5.1). The technique is used as an appeal to supporters of the third placed candidate to vote tactically and is a further manifestation of the technique of

Figure 5.1: Images used to create the impression that the election is a choice between only two candidates.



squeezing the supporters of opposition candidates unlikely to win. There is considerable academic evidence of the link between the closeness of the race, marginality, and turnout (Rallings & Thrasher 2003b, Pattie & Johnston 2005) and so using this device, stressing that it is a close race, can be effective in motivating supporters to vote as it draws on the psychological pressure that implying every vote matters will create in the mind of the voters, and that 'your vote could make all the difference'. Although Gerber & Green (1999) are careful to qualify their findings, they do suggest that,

“Based on the experimental results, our best guess is that an argument that emphasizes the closeness of the election is most effective.”

Over the study period one important area that has seen considerable change is that of the technology used to produce printed material. Writing in 1985 one

analyst summed up the significant changes that had, to that point, begun to revolutionise much of the printing industry,

“The last decade has given the real test of print’s ability to cope with change. In this period, hot metal typesetting and the letterpress have almost disappeared, except for certain specialist uses. Jobbing printing has moved into the high street with the ‘instant print’ shop. Type can be set (or at least keyboarded) by a typist or journalist ... Perhaps the most noticeable change is that printing has become more accessible to the layman. Printing used only to be practised by those who had a long training ... Now the barriers within the print industry are breaking down ... as journalists, authors, advertisers and so on become involved in various parts of the process” (Bann 1985:8).

More than twenty years later, as the changes have continued, campaigners now have access to a quality of output, both in terms of the design layout and print, undreamt of by campaigners at the start of this period; a simple comparison of leaflets illustrates this point (Figure 5.2). The most obvious change is in the overall level of graphical design, and also the introduction of colour and the reliance on photographs and images in the more recent material.

Leaflets from 1960s and 1970s are very wordy, in part because the technology to produce pages of text was relatively cheap to produce in the quantities required, while the process to reproduce images was far more complex.

Campaigners from this period have similar memories of the considerable effort required; they speak of long hours spent persuading temperamental second-hand duplicating machines to work, and of the physical effort required as these early machines were entirely hand-operated, and also of the risks from the chemicals used in the solvents and inks. A senior Liberal Democrat campaigner, who worked with David Penhaligon, recalls the point when they improved their machinery,

Figure 5.2: Illustrative samples of the development in the design of election leaflets

Promise and Performance

Roy Roebuck was the Labour Candidate of the General Election and is the Labour Candidate Again at this By-Election

Before the General Election Roy Roebuck promised:
 "The Labour Government will show that in matters of personal taxation towards earners—including high earners."
But what has happened since?
 The Labour Government has announced that the standard rate of Income Tax is to go UP by 6d. for all earners—including high earners.

Before the General Election Roy Roebuck promised:
 "Labour plan to help owner occupiers by providing loans at low rates of interest."
 "A Labour Government will introduce lower interest rates for mortgages. Councils will be encouraged to grant more 100% advances."
But what has happened since?
 (a) Mortgage interest rates have been increased to the highest level since the end of the war.
 (b) Both Altrincham and Sale Town Councils have been forced by the Government's measures to stop all new loans to would-be home owners.

Before the General Election Roy Roebuck promised:
 "We in the Labour Party believe that an immediate start should be made on the by-pass scheme for the A56."
But what has happened since?

FOCUS By-election Special

Victory in sight for local man IT'S DAVID AUSTICK TO WIN

Counting and opinion surveys have revealed that local councillor David Austick could win a sensational victory in the forthcoming by-election.

Readers have the opportunity of sending Westminster a message... What a treat, thousands of local people have made it plain that the time has come for people to come before politics, that constituents should be given the opportunity to say what they think should be done before Party loyalty and that individuals should be given the opportunity of a greater say in the running of their affairs.

Mr Austick, who was Mayor of the County Council in 1972, and who has lived in Rushey in Wharfedale for 27 years, said this week that what was wanted was "strong representation."

He said many residents have told him how they object to being taken for granted by the other Parties and how "Government can suddenly step in with what non-resident has described as "instant concepts".

Mr Austick said that intensive canvassing has revealed that the Labour Party has absolutely no chance of getting anywhere near winning the election. The Liberals started off in second place, and every day the gap between Liberals and Conservatives has got closer and closer. "We are now winning," he said. "Many Conservatives have told me that it is necessary to give the Government a jolt. They know that never will justice a Conservative win, but a sensational Liberal victory would be front page news."

VICTORY FOR THE LIBERALS

THE Liberals have won the Rushey by-election. The result announced at 1 a.m. today is a severe setback for Labour who were strongly tipped to retain the seat.

FLASHBACK!
 The Government can't fail to take notice when residents elect a Liberal.

How to stop strikes

There were more Liberal Party...
 controlled by the...
 But now the...
 Liberal Party...
 which would...
 Liberal...
 should be...
 Liberal...
 Liberal...
 Liberal...

Focus Working for Rosyth

Willie Rennie and the Liberal Democrat team working for Rosyth

Clean up our town

Years of Labour neglect means Rosyth needs urgent action to clean up the town. Willie Rennie is working to tackle problems with graffiti, derelict buildings and run-down play areas.



Graffiti action
 Hundreds of Rosyth residents have returned Willie's FOCUS residents survey. Willie is demanding action on the issues raised.

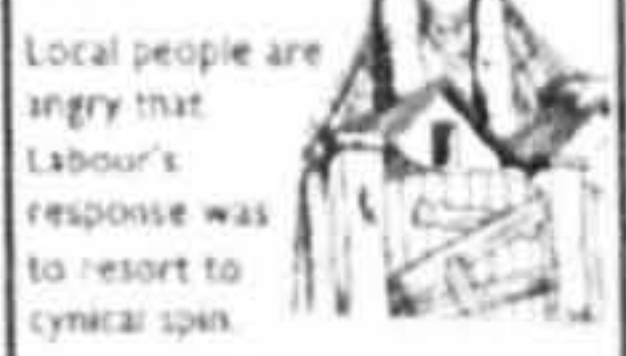
Graffiti problems were spotted on Kings Road and at Whinnyburn Place.

DERELICT BUILDINGS
 Rosyth residents have contacted Willie Rennie about derelict buildings in the town including the Masonic Lodge and the MoD building on Milton Road. Willie is trying to get clean-up action.

LITTER
 Willie has asked the Council to clean up litter reported on Camdean Crescent, on the grass areas of Whinnyburn Place and on the walk way at Cunningham Road.

LEXMARK Labour spin, Lib Dem action

The closure of the Lexmark factory was a massive blow to Rosyth.



Local people are angry that Labour's response was to resort to cynical spin.


Willie Rennie has welcomed Liberal Democrat action.

"As a Rifer born and bred, I know that for many families living here there is nothing more important than the battle to find and keep a job. And that was before last week's terrible news from Lexmark."

Willie says that in the long term Rosyth must be able to compete on skills, through education and training.

"In the short term I was pleased that Liberal Democrat minister Nicol Stephen acted quickly to set up a task force of Scottish agencies to help those at Lexmark," added Willie.


More local news and action - overleaf



LEADERSHIP
 The biggest benefit this Government has given the country is Leadership. Under Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister, Britain's voice is listened to around the conference tables of the world.
 This Government has not flinched from making the harsh decisions necessary to make Britain more competitive. We are now leading the world along the road to Economic Recovery.
 Neither did this Government lack the courage to show resolution in defending Britain's Sovereignty against unwarranted armed aggression in the Falklands.

DEFENCE
 This country is proud to be a nation of free people with the right to say whatever they wish. This right has to be defended.
 Without freedom from the fear of oppression or invasion, all other policies are meaningless. Conservatives will negotiate to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world by balanced, multilateral disarmament as soon as possible and will uphold the strength of NATO.

JOBS
 Financial incentive by Conservatives has made Wales most attractive to industrialists.
 We have broadened the industrial base so that a mixed economy now includes jobs in the new High Tech Industries.
 Millions of pounds have been invested in Wrexham by the Government through the Welsh Development Agency and by means of funding from the EEC.
 Britain's membership of the EEC is the major reason why so many overseas companies are located in Wales.
 Companies have made it clear that they would close their plants if Britain were to leave, costing Wrexham and Wales nearly 60,000 jobs.



Published by P.O.H. Llanfair, 11 High Street, Brynha, Wrexham.
 Printed by Edephs Jirras Ltd, West Side House, Bridge Street, Wrexham.

PLEASE DISPLAY THIS POSTER

Top left: Conservative handbill from 1965 Parliamentary by-election; printed in single colour, no graphics used.

Top right: Conservative General Election Address, 1983; printed in single colour, early use of a party logo and simple b&w photos

Middle left: Liberal Focus leaflet 1973 Parliamentary by-election; 'cut and paste' layout, printed in single colour, no photos but elementary graphics

Bottom left: Liberal Democrat Focus - good practice sample distributed by Liberal Democrat Campaigns Dept. Full colour photos, and graphics. Printed in single colour.

“It was fortuitous that [David] was an engineer; we actually drove up to London to buy a printing machine, (you just remember silly things, we bought it from somebody who couldn’t spell the word Liberal, a demonstration of how much influence the Liberals had made in West Ham), we put it in the back of the car and drove back again [to Cornwall] the same day ... So we had this printing machine which was quite a revolutionary thing, we were the first people down here to use this; earlier we had a duplicator, literally turning the handle, but then we got this proper off-set machine which was really old but OK.”

For the organisers of campaigns within local parties, the decisions they make about the print resources they can call upon are governed by two drivers, firstly, the need to keep costs to an absolute minimum and secondly, access to speedy and flexible production. This is why many local parties prefer to have some form of in-house production capability, rather than rely on local commercial facilities, and reflects the comment from the Liberal Democrat Campaigns Department, “Most Liberal Democrat campaigning is unashamedly cheap and cheerful” (2006:24). However, David Penhaligon’s investment in an improved printing machine allowed him to produce material at a higher quality and more cost effectively whenever he needed it, and perhaps most importantly, without the need to fit into commercial printing schedules. However, this option brings with it the problem of expertise; as an engineer, Penhaligon was able to service the more complex machinery himself, but not every local party has access to similar resources. This remains the case whatever the level of technological sophistication, people with the appropriate skills to make use of it are essential.

A senior Labour councillor and campaign co-ordinator, commented on a recent campaign and the party's new 'web-to-print' service,

"At last general election there was a system on-line, there were templates and you could input into those templates; but ... it was a very frustrating system, it took for ever and you needed a degree of expertise using publishing software to do that."

She went on to note the danger in this trend within the wider campaign resources,

"Our youth officer was also our IT officer and basically did all of that but he has moved away so now we are totally stuck. I could do it but I can't spend hours and hours. That is interesting in terms of membership of the party relying on young people and people who have got time to do it and with the skills. When I started there were lots of people who helped by stuffing envelopes and now there are lots of older people and there is nothing they can do" (note Fisher, *et al.* 2006c:580).

Leaflets can be produced in a range of formats: printed in differing sizes, A3, A4, A5, sometimes in full colour, more often black and white, with a single 'spot' colour used across the heading. Developments in newspaper printing technology also allow full colour tabloids to be produced although, because of the cost per copy, these tend to be used outside formal campaigns and

primarily for building parliamentary campaigns (Figure 5.3; note the use of imagery that emphasises a team of elected members across several levels of governance, with the implication that supporting this party is not a wasted vote; note also the use of graphics suggesting an either/or race). Folding a leaflet in different ways and using a range of different quality papers means that every leaflet can be made to look different. The reason for this is an attempt to counter the comments noted above that most political material which is delivered unaddressed and unsolicited is either immediately thrown away or left unread; by varying the presentation more voters may be encouraged to note the contents.

Some local parties now have in-house resources such as Risograph machines or high quality photocopiers which when linked to a computer can very quickly generate simple single or two-colour leaflets in the large volumes required. For Liberal Democrat activists, the national party's extranet (an online resource with restricted access for approved campaigners only) contains a wide range of templates for local campaigns (templates similar to the examples shown in Figure 5.2 & 5.3 can be obtained from this source). Technological advances are allowing this method to be developed further, moving on from downloadable templates that can be self-generated to examples like Labour's web-to-print service referred to above. For local parties the incentive to use these resources is being able to gain access to professionally designed, but relatively cheap, high quality print. When the systems work well, this reduces the expertise required and all that is required locally is the text for the stories and some digital

photographs. There is also an important incentive for the major parties to provide this type of resource; they can achieve a much higher degree of unity in the overall look of their literature, turning hundreds of individual campaigns into a united national campaign (Denver, *et al.* 2003, Fisher, *et al.* 2006a).

However, there are doubts about the limitations of this approach; the Labour campaigner who had used the party's web-to-print service expressed a concern about the central control that this method allows,

“We wondered if they would stop us saying certain things. Is anybody looking at [the leaflets we produce]? It has become much easier to [use the system], but we did think it was quite simplistic, it would have to be the lowest common denominator ... in the nature of the design.”

A senior officer within the Liberal Democrats also noted that within the re-branding of Conservative party (see Figure 3.2, page 104) there appeared to be a paradox,

“The Conservatives' green image rolled out nationally and everything has got a good feel and coordinated look, a trend that is likely to continue, but interestingly, that is contradictory to the thing all three main parties are trying to do around being local.”

Web-based solutions are clearly an area where candidates for the major parties can benefit from a centralised resource, but the trends identified above raise the issue of how the minor parties can continue to compete, and how they respond within their own campaigning structures. If the big parties are routinely able to access high-quality printing for their general campaign leaflets, and also have

available significant locally-based printing resources, are the minor parties and Independent candidates seriously disadvantaged from the outset in their campaign? Additionally, by reviewing the changes in leaflet design over the study period, while there is undoubtedly an improvement in the look and finish of campaign material, has this been at the cost of the content? The very wordy, but content-rich leaflets familiar to campaigners in the 1950s and 60s have been replaced with material that predominantly relies on the use of photographs and bullet points. It may be that the options available through web-based campaigning offer ways to counter this with the ability for far more detail about policy commitments to be included on websites; an issue that will be addressed later in the chapter.

Posters

Also included in the arsenal of literature options are posters, either paper versions for display in household windows or printed on plastic for the roadside or garden gate. The widespread use of posters does seem to be reducing from past practice, perhaps as voters are less willing to identify themselves as supporters of a particular party; a Liberal Democrat councillor said,

“There was a great effort to get [poster] up, and in those days it was easy... in fact, you could find council estates where we had got them up on more houses than we didn't, it was that degree of penetration. We wanted a visual show of strength to encourage everybody that they needed to go out and vote.”

A Conservative councillor added,

“You’ve got the difficulty of getting posters up, in some towns you would see lamp posts that had got posters from three or four parties on the same lamp post, a complete waste of time. Our people [Conservative supporters] don’t like putting posters up anyway, but in the rural area you have got Conservative fields, Conservative cows, Conservative hedges, Conservative trees that you can put posters on! You get streets or roads where every 100 yards there is a Conservative party poster.”

The Manifesto

One further format of generalised campaign material should be briefly noted, the party manifesto; the study of manifestos has been an area of significant academic interest, most notably by the Manifesto Research Group, later reformed as the Comparative Manifestos Project. The presentation of each party’s policies in the form of a manifesto containing a complete statement of their programme of action is usually only seen in General Election campaigns. Separate national manifestos for local election campaigns are not produced by the major parties, and most local campaign teams tend not to publish their programme of policies and commitments as a separate document. However, the additional space that websites provide, allow for more extensive coverage of policy commitments to be made available and formal manifestos may reappear in this new format.

Before considering the further uses of literature in a campaign, specifically the use of letter writing and direct mail techniques, the tools that allow a move from leaflets that are generalised and impersonal to more targeted campaigning will be considered. A trend observed as part of the tri-partite model discussed in Chapter Two was that post-modern campaigning utilises technologies that permit the targeting of more precise communications between the candidate and a specific voter. In the same way that developments in the field of printing technology have changed the nature of some of the tools in the campaigner's toolkit, perhaps analogous to the introduction of powered tools for the carpenter and DIYer, developments in the field of marketing have also introduced a new set of tools.

Yoghurt and the categorisation of voters

At its heart, the principle of doorstep canvassing aims to identify that section of the electorate willing to consider voting for a particular candidate, and so the concept of differentiating between voters is not new to campaigners. The tools that the marketing industry has developed do the same, albeit in a more sophisticated fashion, and allow demographic and socio-economic information to be combined with data collected from ID canvassing in order to build up profiles of different types of voter. Two insights from behavioural science underpin the process as it has been developed for use by the political parties: firstly, it is assumed that the shared behaviour patterns within a group can be used as an indicator of their propensity to support a particular political party, when matched against the behaviour patterns of known supporters; put crudely,

if existing Conservatives supporters are found to drink red wine and drive a certain class of car, then perhaps others who share these behaviours will also respond positively to invitations to support the party. The second principle is that people who live in similar housing tend to share the same attitudes and values and, again, can be more amenable to give support if they receive messages structured to reflect those values.

The campaigners interviewed for the study identified two specific tools that they had used or were now available to them called ACORN and MOSAIC. In its most up-to-date form ACORN (A Classification Of Residential Neighbourhoods) divides the population into 5 main categories, which are subdivided into 56 types, from '01 – Affluent mature professionals, large houses' to '56 – Multi-ethnic, crowded flats,' (see website <http://www.caci.co.uk/acorn/acornmap.asp> for the full list). MOSAIC classifies households in the United Kingdom by allocating them to one of 61 types, gathered in 11 groups

“painting a rich picture of UK consumers in terms of their socio-demographics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour. Consumers are classified by household or by postcode, thereby enabling quite specific targeting of mailshots” (EARS website).

Appendix Table A5.2 lists the descriptions for the 61 MOSAIC types; however, it should be noted that with both systems, these classification titles are merely the headlines, behind which lies much more detailed analysis of behaviour.

One experienced Liberal Democrat campaigner admitted that the use of these categorisation methods within the political sphere was a relatively new concept to him,

“... the first time I became aware of this was only a few months ago at a regional party conference where a new system that marketers use was introduced to us. I think it groups the average person into 42 different categories by post code and shopping habits, whether they eat ‘Ski’ yogurt, *et cetera*; if they eat Ski yogurt that’s great apparently.”

While this comment may cause professionals in the marketing sector some concern at what messages are being communicated about these tools, all three main parties have introduced similar resources into the software they use for voter identification. Before the 2005 General Election the Conservative party acquired a copy of the ‘Voter Vault’ software developed by the Republican Party in the USA, and the then Party Chairman, Liam Fox, explained its use in an interview for the Daily Telegraph:

“The programme takes detailed information from ... the 2001 census, consumer credit activity, council tax information, magazine subscriptions, supermarket loyalty cards, favourite television programmes and catalogues to define the 23 million households in Britain under 11 categories. Everything about them from their favourite yoghurt brand to their preferred newspaper is fed into the computer. This is added to information gathered by local party activists and canvassers, and marked against an individual's voting history. The party soon builds up a picture of the kind of person who might vote Conservative.”

The article went on to suggest that,

“More than 90 per cent of Conservative members are in just four of the 11 categories. But the other seven groups have not previously been considered natural allies. Four of them are potential winners for the Tories. These are Happy Families, Take-A-Break Couples, Urban Intelligence and Caravanners. They make up about 900,000 potential votes in the marginal seats; winning them over is crucial” (Thomson 2005).

The use of this approach and the acquisition of software programmes to enable parties to manipulate data in this way is a good example of the 'Arms Race' competition referred to in Chapter Two; the Labour Party's equivalent to Voter Vault is 'Labour.contact', while the Liberal Democrats have an add-in module to their EARS software that allows the integration of the MOSAIC system with existing voter ID data.

In the quote above, Fox includes supermarket loyalty cards in the sources of data they will acquire; these cards are used by the major stores to monitor and respond to the retail habits of their customers. At a briefing on new campaigning techniques which the author attended given by a senior Liberal Democrat MP, the claim was made that the Conservative Party had indeed purchased a copy of the dataset generated from Tesco's Clubcard scheme for this purpose.

Although it has not been possible to verify the accuracy of this assertion, it does suggest that shopping habits are now considered to be a valuable indicator of wider behaviour. Richard Rose, writing about developments in campaigning in the first two decades of the study period, took the view that, "Advertising a party is different from and far more difficult than advertising a packet of soap" (1967:59); it appears that techniques have progressed to the point that they have become a single process.

For local campaigners equipped with computers and some basic training in using the software, several options for applying segmentation techniques now present themselves as additions to their toolbox.

- A former Conservative Agent, who had used an earlier form of this tool called ACORN 30, said, “You also used the computer for different sorts of statistics: when you were doing a by-election you could work out how many pledges you had got, what streets the propensity [sic] of voters were, where your safe areas were, where your marginals were ... You could also analyse all your fund-raising as to where the money came from and how much the average was; it makes it easier to target people because you have got the Electoral Roll, and you know who to avoid as well as who to go for.”
- A Labour Councillor noted, “Obviously we used ‘segmentation’, so there were specific leaflets for different people, as well as direct mail letters ... The last time I did a piece of training on using that software was about 4 years ago ... it has got even more sophisticated so that you could record [Councillor’s] casework on it and petitions. You can build up a profile of individuals and their interests; if you have really got it up and running you can send a letter to somebody that takes into account their contact over a period of time: “You signed our petition for the free leisure card, and you have been in contact with us about litter in your street”, these sorts of things. Once you follow that logic through, you get a highly sophisticated picture of a voter, which you could have gained by being a really good local member over a period of time and having continuing contact ... Some of us can be a little sceptical about putting things in place that perhaps a councillor should provide anyway – good local representation and community engagement – but councillors change and people move and our patterns of living are affecting that too.”

While the view of the ALDC is that use of these techniques will become more widespread and further innovations will use the information in new ways, the level of sophisticated analysis these segmentation techniques provide does introduce a further set of complications that some of the interviewed campaigners treated with caution. Nationally run campaigns are able to access the necessary expertise to accurately interpret the data, expertise that can be expensive. For a local party to utilise these tools, they have either to rely on infrequent input from trainers and professionals who use the system regularly, or only use it in a relatively unsophisticated way. The Labour Councillor above, although positive about the theoretical benefits, continued,

“I would say that we are not a good example because we have not really used the Labour party’s own software. In fact, in the last election we set up our own and we used the electronic data that the Council provides to you, the electronic registers, and we set up our own recording system because a) it is very expensive to use the Labour software, and b) there is a particular date you have to get the base data to them, and it had already been missed. You have to make a decision and commit quite a lot of money, *et cetera*, so we used our own, just simply to record what we needed.”

The Conservative Agent expressed some scepticism about the reliance on these systems, “I think you can be too clever, being flooded with information and you can't actually use it”, while an experienced Liberal Democrat campaigner noted one danger that the segmented approach to voter contact also contains,

“If you are presenting an argument to a voter, [based on] one aspect of party policy only, because you think that is the one that most concerns her, firstly you might have misread it – the CND sticker in the window might belong to someone else or be 20 years old – and secondly, you might be simplifying things to such a point that she is not actually getting a fully representative picture of all the party stands for.”

Whatever the concerns, all these campaigners acknowledged that the ability to classify voters in different ways was useful and that it enabled them to make use of both direct mail techniques and the new opportunities that internet-based campaigning offers.

Targeted Letter Writing

The segmentation of the electorate into groups of voters with distinct characteristics has one very direct application for campaigners; it allows them to produce, quickly and easily, large volumes of personalised letters. Again, reviewing developments in the field of marketing, the use of Direct Mail has grown over the study period to be a major tool for all sectors of commercial marketing, aided especially by the dramatic growth in office computing in the same period. While many recipients may still class such correspondence as unsolicited ‘junk mail’, proponents of the method claim that a personally addressed letter is proven to be far more effective than alternative forms of advertising. An estimated 67% of direct mail letters are opened, 45% are read and further, positive response rates (where one is requested, for instance, by

using a return coupon) are higher than from other types of direct advertising, and rates can be boosted to even greater levels when followed-up with a phone call (Direct Mail Information Service 2007; Liberal Democrats Campaigns Department 2006).

Apart from the ease with which letters can be produced, targeting certain voters is also based upon a highly rational and mathematical approach to campaigning. Similar to material issued by the other main parties, the Liberal Democrats campaigning advice frequently contains the following model calculation:

- Ward Electorate = 8,000
- Likely turnout = 45% = 3,600 votes
- Vote share needed to win = 42%
- Therefore 1,512 votes needed
- Assume one vote per household (to be on the safe side), therefore a minimum of 1550 letters per mail run is required

Identifying which are the appropriate households to include in mailings, from the total number of electors, is the real skill and is where segmentation techniques can be very beneficial.

Gerber and Green consider that "Direct mail is expensive, and its capacity to mobilize voters is typically rather limited", but they also note that,

"Direct mail has the further advantage of allowing centralized control of very large campaigns, which explains why national organizations turn to

direct mail when targeting hundreds of thousands of voters” (Green & Gerber 2004:62).

While the reality remains that this is a mass communication technique, a letter which is addressed to the voter and signed by the candidate allows the impression to be created that a personal interaction is being attempted. Several distinct groups within the electorate can be targeted using a selection of letters, and although the outcome is the same – a positive decision on the ballot paper – the message used to provoke that action can be specifically tailored to the target audience. Among the groups that are most often targeted with letters are,

- Supporters – using canvass data of those definitely indicating support and those probable to vote.
- Opinion formers – the retired conservative agent said that he had regularly used letters to approach ‘key’ individuals in a constituency: “Vicars, doctors and so on and so forth, and teachers, though they don’t tend to be very Conservative.”

He went on to explain another variation on the tactic: “We used to do commuter letters, [handing out] letters to people waiting on the station on their way to work.” They were not personally addressed, but in his experience, handing the letter to a commuter at the same time as having a brief conversation, was equally effective.

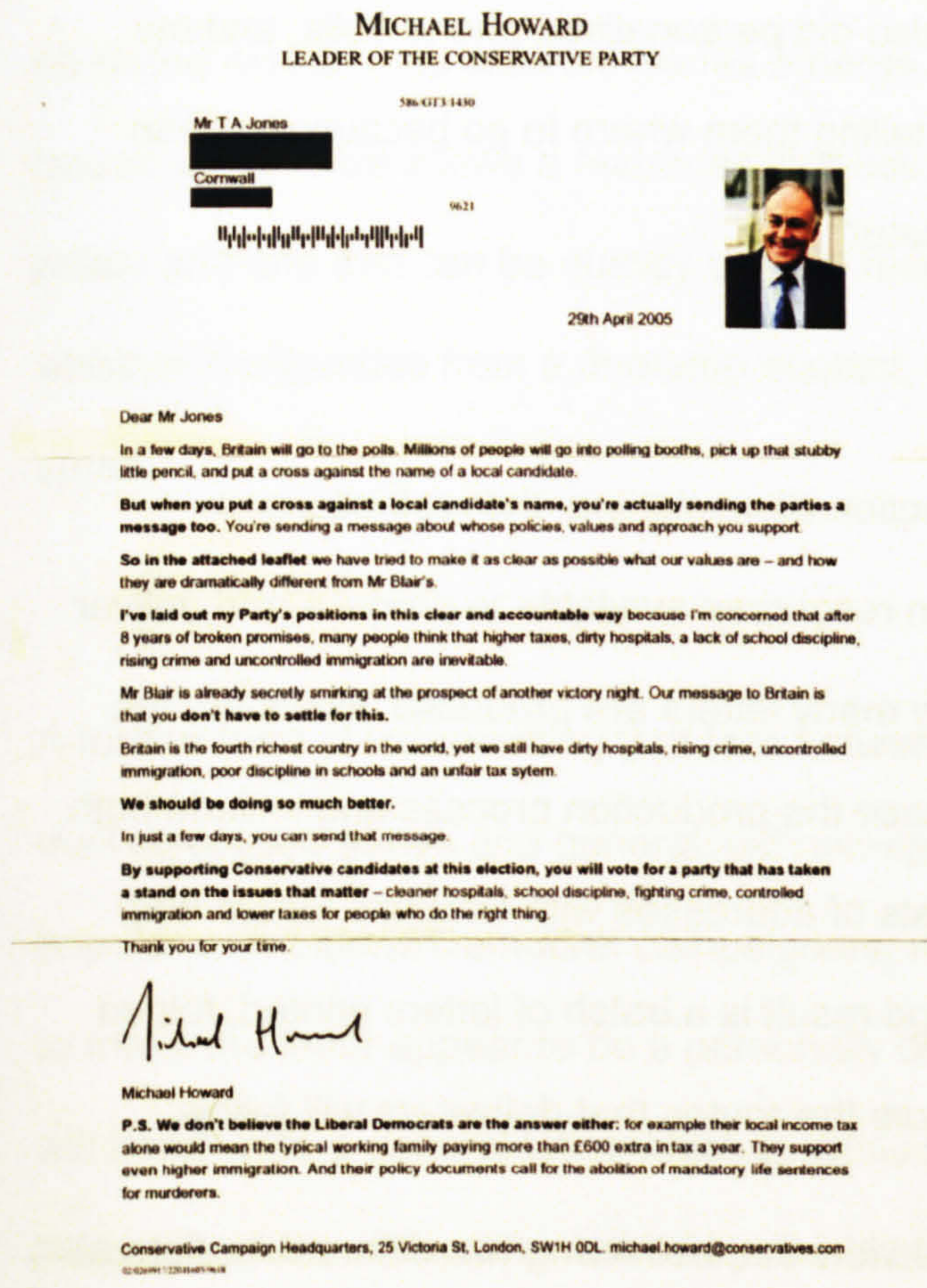
- Postal voters.
- Specific age groups; for instance, the elderly, taking the opportunity to raise health-related or fear-of-crime issues. As the Electoral Roll contains the date of the 18th birthday of new electors this group is also easy to identify and target.

Within the industry-standard advice about maximising the effect of Direct Mail, the repeated use of letters is strongly recommended; a minimum of four contacts in any 12 month period is considered necessary in order to reinforce the messages the sender wishes to establish. This device has been recognised by all the parties who make use of targeted mail, although the timeframe for delivery is reduced to fit the campaign,

“Remember the Labour and the Conservatives election campaigns say to deliver at least FOUR Letters. We recommend that you do at least **Four Letters along with your leaflets.” (ALDC email, April 2007).**

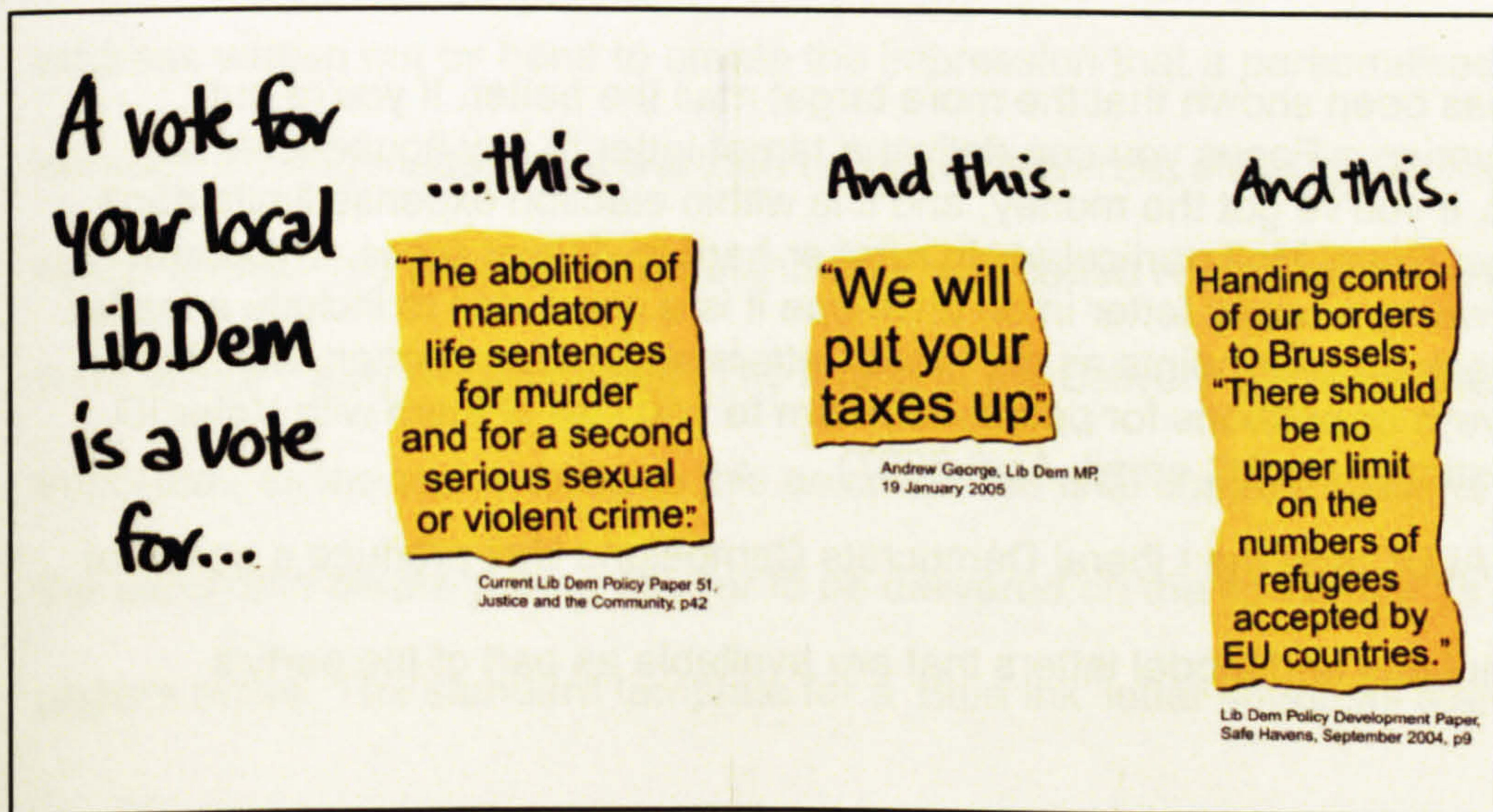
During the 2005 General Election the author was living in a constituency that was a Conservative target seat with a Liberal Democrat incumbent and, despite also being a serving Liberal Democrat councillor at the time, he received several mailings from Conservative Leader Michael Howard (which perhaps raises a doubt about the quality of the filtering process used to generate the mailing list). The main text of each letter focussed on a different aspect of the Conservative campaign with an accompanying leaflet developing on the themes raised in the letter, and with the supporting graphics the same as those used in the party’s manifesto and billboard poster campaign. The final letter and leaflet contained a strong attack on Liberal Democrat policies and statements (Figure 5.4) which suggested that the target group for this batch of letters were likely Liberal Democrat voters. Nowhere in this series of correspondence was the name of the local Conservative candidate included – the letters asked for general support for the Conservatives, in order not to breach local spending limits; leaflets were received from the local Conservative party in separate mailings. The leader of Mebyon Kernow also noted the same approach in the constituency where he stood as a candidate,

Figure 5.4: Sample of Conservative Direct Mail, General Election 2005



Above: The final letter in the series; included on the reverse was an 0845 telephone number to arrange help to get to the polling station

Below: Extract from the accompanying leaflet



“The Conservatives were doing direct mail drops all over the shop, I know people who had two or three mail-drops; there were very few people who didn't have mail-drops. They also did personalised phone-calls, and my mother took great pleasure in telling them where to go because her son was a Mebyon Kernow candidate!”

The two limitations of most local election campaigning, the restrictions on financial expenditure and the human resources available to produce and deliver the overall campaign, will effect how many letters are produced. However, the campaign software packages can ease the production process and include both a mail merge function to combine lists of addresses with template letters and also a sorting function so that the end result is a batch of letters printed, folded and enveloped in an order that mirrors the routes that deliverers will follow.

While most campaigners tend to the view that delivering two different leaflets at the same time halves their effectiveness and so avoid this whenever possible, it is agreed that if deliverers are going out with the latest leaflet, adding it to a personal letter improves the chance that both will be read.

“It has been shown that the more target mail the better. If you're out delivering a Focus you can deliver a target letter to key households as well. If you've got the money, and it is within election expense limits don't forget Royal Mail particularly in rural or hard to deliver areas. If you are delivering a target letter in an envelope it is a good idea to include a leaflet to back up your points as the model letters show. Even better, include surveys or petitions for people to return to you - all of them with Voter ID questions” (ALDC email, April 2007).

Both the ALDC and the Liberal Democrats Campaigns Unit produce a series of letter-templates and model letters that are available as part of the party's

extranet resource. During a major election numerous template-letters can be emailed out to registered campaigners and candidates, providing a constantly up-dated resource as different issues emerge. Providing a template on as many issues as possible allows a response that both accords with national party policy and one that can be quickly used in response to a voter's question, whether it originates from a doorstep contact, telephone canvass, letter or email.

A further form of letter-writing that falls between the precisely targeted direct mail discussed above and generalised non-specific leaflets is an alternative now popular with Liberal Democrat campaigners, the 'Blue Ink Letter'. In an attempt to make the letter appear to be a personally directed to a voter, the candidate will hand-write a general letter which is printed in dark-blue ink on blue A5 paper; the letter summarises the key points of the campaign and reminds voters to participate, but its aim is to look "just like your grandmother would write a thank you for her Christmas present" (Liberal Democrats Campaigns Department 2007:31). A matching blue envelope will have the recipient's address written out by hand to create the impression that a personalised contact is being made; most will then be hand-delivered, although for harder to reach areas – old peoples' homes and flats with coded entry doors and more rural areas – they will be mailed. The timing of the delivery of these letters is important, as the aim is to leave this as one of the final communications from the candidate before polling day, or to be delivered on the same day as ballot papers arrive. The standard template for a 'Blue Ink' letter suggests starting with

thanks from the candidate for the warm welcome they have received in recent days as they have been out knocking on doors – subconsciously, this suggests to the reader that if they have not spoken to, or seen the candidate, it was because they were out when the candidate called and not because the candidate failed to make an effort to contact them.

The emphasis that campaigners now place on the use of printed material does suggest that within toolbox of techniques, literature has replaced door-to-door visitation and personal contact as the primary method of campaigning, around which the other elements of the campaign are constructed. This is a notable change that has occurred over the period of the study, driven by both advances in and the wider availability of the technologies for producing printed material; these developments have also allowed parties to compensate for the effect of declining memberships and a smaller number of activists willing to knock on doors. The next section will move on to consider the introduction of web-based and e-enabled campaign techniques that have become available in the latter part of the study period. While printed literature has grown to dominate campaigning methods compared to traditional face-to-face techniques, electronic campaigning provides additional tools that will further change the way campaigns are conducted.

e-Campaigning

The availability and rapid popularisation of PC-based and mobile communications technology, in terms of the equipment available and the applications that run on them, mean that an ever-expanding range of options are available to the campaigner. The fast-changing nature of some applications, for instance the growth of web-based social networking sites, or the interactions between campaigning and the online gaming community, mean that every election is an opportunity for new ideas to be tested. However, while e-campaigning techniques have started to make a big impact, it is perhaps still too early to assess the full significance of specific tools, and whether they will become permanent additions to the campaigners' toolkit. This section will continue to concentrate primarily on how these techniques are used in local election campaigning, but it will also note important innovations that are being introduced at other levels of election. Firstly, the use of email in campaigning will be examined, then websites, blogging and social networking, and finally, methods utilising mobile phones and other mobile technologies.

Emails

The impact of email on campaigning has so far been most apparent within the organisation and administration of campaigns. As the PC with an Internet connection became a common piece of equipment in the home, agents and campaign organisers quickly saw the benefits of electronic methods of keeping candidates and activists informed of what is happening during the campaign. The appeal of email over other forms of communication is that of speed – instead of having to repeat the same message to each activist, one at a time,

after an initial effort setting up a group of email addresses, one email can then very quickly be distributed to an unlimited number of activists, at minimal cost.

Emails can be used to keep campaigners in touch with both the local campaign and national events (Ward 2003:592). A Labour campaigner noted, “The biggest change with our activists is how many people we can email ... Certainly in the last election I used it all the while as the election agent, telling people where we were meeting”. The national party headquarters also see email as a major tool in the way they can communicate with both activists and candidates (Fisher, *et al.* 2006a). One interviewee has seen this from both ends of the process:

“In the 2001 election I was working in Cowley Street. My role was to prepare a daily briefing for candidates which included the issues of the day that the national party would be leading on; so we would produce a ‘crib sheet’ on health, education, the environment, policing, or whatever. We would include rebuttals against what [the opposition had said about] the lead issues from the previous day, so that our candidates were able to say “No, what the Tories said about our policy isn’t true for x, y, z reasons” – there was a huge emphasis put on this function. I was one of people pulling all this together overnight; we had to make sure that the candidates had this information in their in-boxes for first thing in the morning.

Four years later I saw it from the other side. I was working in a key seat where we had a real chance of winning; overall, my impression was that more information goes out from, than is pulled into the centre. Apart from the ‘Lines of the day’ document I’ve just mentioned, there is all sorts of

stuff that goes out: campaigning tips, how to design your leaflets for the final week, which pictures are working across the rest of the country, which particular graphics we have had positive feedback on. All that information was being shoved out from the centre down to the local parties in 2001. In 2005 the impression that I got was that we were sending very little information to the centre but we were soaking up all this information and advice that was coming from the centre.”

A Conservative local councillor noted the ease with which email allows advice to be disseminated,

“It is very easy just to write something and press a button and it goes to everybody in seconds, whereas before you had to fill up envelopes and bugger around, you needed a large staff to do it. So I can see that that makes sense because it’s cheaper and it’s quicker.”

Implicit in that comment is the suggestion that not all the advice is appreciated; several of the older campaigners expressed the view that it is too easy to send emails, with the result that they often felt swamped as it took too long to filter out information of immediate use to their campaign. The councillor above continued,

“I stopped them sending me emails as I got so fed up with them ... Apart from anything else, they tend to send me all the stuff do to with policy, which I didn’t have a lot of use for ... it is big city, national stuff”.

A Liberal Democrat councillor echoed this view,

“There has always been advice about issues sent out, but then again, the technology was different in those days – you used to get a mailing in the

post every day during the General Election which you might bother to open, only if you felt like it; it wasn't high priority and we often didn't really look at it, it didn't seem particularly relevant to us."

It should perhaps be noted that both these councillors now work in market towns in a rural locations and have been actively campaigning since the 1970s; young activists living in the urban environments and using email as a routine part of their working lives are likely to have a different view. However, there may also be a tension here between serving councillors, who tend to be older (NEFR 2007) and take a more pragmatic view about what is needed to get themselves re-elected, and staff working in party headquarters who more closely follow the ideal model.

Using emails to contact voters has been slower to develop mainly due to the difficulty gathering email addresses, and their more ephemeral nature; as with mobile telephone numbers voters may change their email address frequently, and have also several addresses for different uses, work, home, and family. Therefore, more work is required to ensure that an address list is accurate. There are however a number of distinct advantages for using emails over other methods.

- "It's quicker than your fastest deliverer
- It's cheaper than your Riso
- You can send it at any time (of the night or day)
- There are no dogs" (Pack & Dollimore 2006)

While some campaigners expressed concern that voters may react in the same way to unsolicited email as other forms of political communication, deleting it

without reading it, to be able to send an email letter as carefully targeted as the Direct Mail mailings discussed above at minimal cost is very appealing.

Accordingly, there is now a greater emphasis being put on asking for email addresses particularly in non-election surveying, petitions, and other material that encourages a response from voters.

The benefits of mobilising party supporters who live many miles away from a contest discussed in remote telephone canvassing can also be applied to email.

During the 2008 London mayoral campaign, an email was sent from Simon Hughes MP, asking members to 'email a Londoner' with a prepared message asking for support and giving details of how to contact the Paddick campaign (see Appendix Figure A5.1).

Creating a presence on the Web

(To avoid cluttering the text with numerous web addresses, the full addresses of all the sites noted in italics in this section are included in the Bibliography. It should also be noted that websites by their nature can quickly change or disappear in response to circumstances; the references to sites in the text below were correct at time of writing, but some sites may subsequently be closed down.)

Use of the Internet has become such an embedded part of the conduct of public communications that having a website is now an integral part of a political party's public image. The 1997 General Elections was the first at which all three main parties used a basic website (Coleman 2001), but every national party

now maintains at least one major site and many individual local parties also are developing a separate e-identity (for example, note the website references in the tabloid newspaper illustrated in Figure 5.3, page 174). Such an online presence provides an essential public point of contact without necessarily incurring the expense of a running an office in the High Street;

“... the Internet offers unmediated communication and potentially enables an MP to speak directly to their intended recipient” (Jackson & Lilleker 2004).

In the same way that communication by email can provide campaigners with both improved administrative tools and new ways of contacting voters, websites allow them to do the same. There is, however, a clear demarcation between what information is available to the public and that which is for internal party use alone; most campaigning resources are available only to registered party members on password-restricted parts of a website. On the Labour Party's site the log-in page for their '*Membersnet*' indicates the broad range of services available to those with access:

- “Manage your membership details online
- Access Print Creator, Web Creator and the Campaign Shop
- Contact other members with the live chat and messaging
- Share your ideas or read about others in hundreds of blogs by party members
- Create your own blog for members only - or publish it on the web
- Discuss policies across all areas in members' forums
- Find people with the skills you need for campaigning, and share your own
- Use the campaigns map to find campaigns that need your help and find vounteers [sic] for your own campaigns”

The growth and widening use of the Internet over the past fifteen years now offers campaigners a wealth of opportunities to experiment with new ways of communicating with the electorate (Farrell & Webb 2000:112); however, with all

of the options that are considered below, a fundamental shift in the methodology of campaigning should be appreciated. Traditionally, it has been the candidate who has taken the responsibility to initiate the contact and to make the effort to reach out to voters by knocking on their door, delivering a leaflet or making a telephone call. Web-based campaigning is different because it moves the initiative to the voter, and it is the voter who must make the effort to go looking for information they want and to find the relevant web page. While campaigners will attempt to make that process as easy as possible, the onus to take action lies with the voter.

“Television advertisements reach an audience involuntary while voters on the Internet receive political messages only if they want them. This difference will force a change in the way campaigns are waged” (Chadwick 2006:150).

Several choices face the campaigner when deciding what to include in their website. The first is the address (or domain name) of the site itself; there is no standardised approach to the use of domain names, which can be a disadvantage for some voters, as the precise address must be used to access a site. Many candidates choose to register their own names as the address, for example www.timjones.org, rather than using one that refers to their party, or to use a subsidiary page of an established site. The prominence of the candidate's name in relation to that of the party they represent on campaign literature has been a long-standing debate, however, it is not just the name of the site in which this balance can be difficult to maintain. On some sites it is not always immediately apparent which party is involved: the homepages of four of the candidates for the 2008 London mayoral campaign are reproduced in Appendix

Figure A5.2, all used their own names in some form within their address and only two, the Conservative and Green candidates, have used their registered party logo in prominent position in top half of the page. Using the candidate's name as part of the address, and displaying that prominently on other election literature can reinforce the message of the campaign, strongly identifying who is standing and it can reap positive benefits; a Labour County councillor said,

“We first had a website in 2003 ... but I really noticed it for the general election, because we had a website in the name of the candidate and we got quite a lot of email messages and queries coming in, finding out how you stood on things.”

The significant advantage that a website gives is that there are very few limitations to the amount of text that can be included, aside from voters' willingness to read it. In the discussion above concerning the changes that have occurred in what is printed in election literature, the trend was noted towards the inclusion of more photographs and graphics at the expense of content.

Websites provide the means by which this can be rebalanced; the examples included in Appendix Figure A5.2 all have links on the homepage to more in-depth information elsewhere on the site detailing the key policies that concern the candidate. Also, websites do not exist in isolation and links to other sites, for instance to the main party website, allow for the inclusion of links to full details of manifesto commitments and specific policies for special interest groups, all available to the voter prepared to make the effort to find the information.

As a site is not static in the way printed material is, it can be updated easily and regularly at minimal cost, allowing the candidate to reflect issues being raised during the campaign. The Chief Executive of the ALDC noted,

“The Conservatives have really embraced community websites. I am not sure anyone is looking at them yet, but they are definitely ahead of the game. They use a central template that allows local party content to be included. I have just found one today which is obviously a local ward somewhere in the Wirral, done to this template and to a very high quality (see link to *Ian Lewis*)... I’m worried that we are behind the game there.”

However, he also pointed to innovations the Liberal Democrats are developing,

“We have an off-the-shelf campaign website toolkit ... you get a local issue – a ‘save our school’ campaign – and can use the website kit; it includes a petition generator and things like that – it’s the same old idea of a petition but instead of a cut-off on a Focus leaflet, its online.”

Related to the single-issue *website generator* is another tool, *LibertyResearch*, developed for Liberal Democrat activists, that creates an online survey, again a convenient method of gathering the views of local residents to help inform campaigns while also collecting important email addresses from respondents.

Blogs

A further distinct tool now seen within many websites that elected politicians, potential candidates and political commentators alike, have quickly adopted is

the blog. A blog (short for web log) is, in essence, the modern equivalent of a personal diary made public; it is a space for an individual to record and publish virtually anything, thoughts, feelings, opinions, commentary on events and also add pictures and video. The political blog emerged as a significant trend very early in the development of this concept, as an adjunct to the op-ed commentary in printed media. Blogs are primarily used as a channel to express opinion (and gossip) but do not necessarily encourage a two-way conversation or the debate of policy issues, although some candidates do attempt to do this. The leader of a Labour council group said,

“We have actually had the county councillors suggesting that we have a blog and I have certainly thought about it, not in a party political sense but as a councillor’s blog. One of our older female county councillors was really interested in doing that; she is also town mayor this year and she has a very strong interest in young people so she’s used it as a good way of connecting, despite her technical phobias. She doesn’t like the internet and has never used a website but she thought she could do a blog.”

One Liberal Democrat activist who worked with Lynne Featherstone in her campaign to become an MP said,

“Lynne ... has got a place on her blog for people to send in comments and to respond to what is there. She does entertain a two-way debate and she will refer to other peoples’ comments on postings on her blog ... I think that almost every campaigner should try to blog [because of] the feedback you get from the public” (see *Lynne Featherstone*).

All three major parties now have sites that collate the blogs of their activists and supporters (see Bibliography listing for addresses). These sites are run independently from the main party organisation, allowing for a wide variety of views to be expressed that need not accord with the formally agreed party view.

An additional recent trend, microblogging, was evident in the London mayoral campaign. A microblog is a very short message, up to a maximum of 140 characters per message, for instance a response to the question "What are you doing?" Both Boris Johnson and the Liberal Democrat candidate Brian Paddick invited voters to register as 'followers' on *Twitter* and receive regular updates, or 'tweets', during each day of the campaign, distributed by SMS text or email.

While the take-up was relatively small, this idea is in its early development emerging in California in late 2006, and is one that may prove useful to campaigners and activists, although again, how much notice voters will take is debateable.

Alongside the development of their own websites, whether a site especially created for an election campaign, or one for general use outside the election period, another significant opportunity that campaigners are beginning to use is the space available on other, non-political sites. Three main options have been identified: *YouTube*, a video sharing website, *Flickr* which does the same for photos, and social networking sites.

While webcasting, putting video clips onto individual websites, has been available for sometime, the growth of broadband in providing much quicker internet connections has allowed sites like YouTube to flourish. Campaigners have been quick to recognise this as a useful tool; *WebCameron*, the Conservative party leader's video blog has attracted significant media attention, but all the parties are experimenting with the format. The Labour and Liberal Democrats have developed their own dedicated channels on *YouTube* while the Conservatives do a similar thing through *Conservatives.tv*, located on their own main party website. The formal channels include professionally produced video and the parties' party political and party election broadcasts; but, campaigners are also adding their own locally produced films to the sites, producing a mixture of everything from professionally scripted films to short clips made using mobile phones. Additionally, with the increasing use of portable media players, audio and video podcasts of speeches and other events are also being made available.

Two developments are worthy of note, that reflect on the demise of public meetings noted in the previous chapter. Firstly the technology that allows live online conversations, known as 'instant messaging' has been utilised by some campaigners; the author took part in a "*I'm a Councillor, Get me Out of Here*" event in 2004, a youth engagement exercise that is organised as part of the annual Local Democracy Week (see website). As part of the week-long programme of events, children from two secondary schools in his area were encouraged to participate in a daily online discussion for an hour at the start of their school day; their questions were moderated to filter out inappropriate comments, but covered a very wide range of subjects, from local issues such as

rubbish collection and graffiti, to attitudes to the war in Iraq. For some of the councillors who took part it was a technical challenge, but a worthwhile opportunity to converse with young people. The skills of instant messaging are perhaps still the preserve of younger internet users, but allied to the growth of social networking sites, this is a tool that campaigners will need to familiarise themselves with. Secondly of note is the online Hustings that was broadcast through their YouTube channel for the Liberal Democrat leadership contest in December 2007. Party members were invited by email to film themselves asking a question and submit it to a special *YouTubeHustings* site set up for the event; these clips were then used to question the two candidates and their videoed responses were collated as a virtual-Hustings which was then broadcast over several days on the party's main site and on YouTube.

Flickr allows a similar dissemination of photographs to YouTube's use of video clips, and this facility is especially useful in the production of printed literature. The Liberal Democrats *Flickr gallery* includes material that was previously available only on the party's extranet but allows the photographs to be arranged in thematic sets and provides a setting for other campaigners to easily add images they have found useful, thus potentially, significantly broadening the pool of resources available for campaigners.

The latest major element of web campaigning that should be noted is the use that can be made by campaigners of those sites that are focussed on social networking. Again a relatively new phenomenon, so far, they have tended to be used mostly by younger people, and for politicians wanting to engage and

recapture the 'youth vote', a presence on *Myspace*, *Facebook*, or *Bebo* is essential. As with many of these emerging tools there is considerable overlap in the applications they support, for instance, Facebook pages will hold a blog, allow email, instant messaging and links to a candidate's Flickr gallery. The Liberal Democrats offer an application that members can place on their personal Facebook page that provides a link to the party's main website and to its YouTube pages. A further variation on the networking theme is *Flock Together*, a site developed by the Liberal Democrats to coordinate and advertise meetings and events.

For the campaigner, these sites provide an opportunity to involve supporters, party members and others who are interested in what they are doing, in a less overtly political way. The interactions that social networking sites engender allow a more personal (but not necessarily private) conversation to take place, which may help persuade voters to consider voting for the candidate. The semi-public setting that is created should force campaigners to think carefully about what personal information to include; some things, however minor, can provide fuel to opponents. For instance, an important issue for some voters is that candidates originate from, or live close to the location they want to represent. Despite being careful in her printed literature to emphasise a strong connection with the area she has been selected for, the information on the *Facebook* page of one PPC for a Cornish constituency indicated that she regarded her home-base to be much closer to London, a fact that was quickly picked up by her opponents.

While the range of web-based tools campaigners have available to them are multiplying very quickly, and the full-time staff within party headquarters are keen to embrace them, what is the reality on the ground? With many of the tools described above, the expertise within a local party to develop even a basic webpage remains in limited supply, despite the willingness to embrace innovation. The author has taken part in numerous local party meetings where the desire to develop a website, or to produce some video clips on key local campaign issues has been acknowledged, but the demands of getting the latest leaflet distributed or a residents' survey completed has taken priority. In the 2007 survey of local election candidates, two questions were asked about website usage: do candidates maintain a personal website, and was it used as part of their ward campaign? Candidates were also asked to reflect on the difference this made in certain areas of the campaign. One in eight of those who responded said they did maintain a personal site (n=1228); although it is not possible to assess what political or campaigning uses they make of their sites only a small number, 63, said they used them as part of their campaign.

For some campaigners, particularly those from minor parties with limited resources to maximise their use of these new options, there remains some considerable caution of the benefits. The leader of Mebyon Kernow in discussing his party's e-campaigning said,

“Our records are computerised, so we have our membership database and all the rest of it [on there]. We have a straightforward website and we have a quarterly magazine that goes to members, so we will select articles from

that to be put up and press releases are updated on it – it's OK, but it could be better ... but at the same time I think, in the British context, that it is overrated just how effective internet campaigning is. The reason I say that is you get stuff in the [local newspaper], everybody buys it and they may go to the sports pages or car adverts, but they do actually flick through the paper and [our news is] there – they may not read it, but it is at least there, it's in their eye span. On a website, people have to look for it to find it.”

Web-based techniques potentially allow small parties an equal footing with the major parties in the e-campaign, as once information is published into cyberspace it is available to anyone who has the address of the website.

However, as with most other areas of the campaign, the reality is that not all websites are equal, and the major parties employ professional teams to develop their sites; the result is that the quality and accessibility of both the content and the presentation of that information varies as much as the differences between printed material.

“In the UK, however, whereas previously a gap existed between the larger group of parties with parliamentary representation and those truly on the fringe, in 2001 the big three clearly pulled ahead, outperforming all others in terms of both function and delivery” (Gibson, *et al.*, 2003).

Mobile Phones

To conclude this overview of the impact of new communication technologies on campaigning, mobile phones techniques will be noted. Like email, the ability to

send one text message to lots of people at the same time does make this an attractive method. For campaigners working at the local level, creating text messages for groups of activists is a useful addition for campaign coordination.

“It is fairly easy to send a group text, you just stitch your group together on your mobile phone then you can ping it off, we use it for membership and supporters to say come along to this event or don’t forget this. We would also use it within the [Council] group to keep them informed of key decisions that have been taken.”

This ease of use is also a reason to use it as a means to reach voters. Labour’s use of mass text messages in the 1997 General Election campaign has been well documented, especially the controversial “Cldnt gve a XXXX 4 1st ordrs? Thn vte Labr on thrsday 4 extra time” text sent to an estimated 100,000 young voters, and transmitted at 10.45 pm, just before closing time on the Friday before polling day (ESRC 2005; Coleman 2001). A Labour campaigner working in a rural location also noted that,

“This is a very poor town and trying to get people to release their postcode is hard. We wouldn’t expect people to have email but they would be more likely to have a mobile phone; in fact, a lot of people I have come across have only got a mobile phone, no land line.”

The Liberal Democrats supply ‘e-txt’ software which makes sending mass text messages very easy. Similar to the Twitter application discussed above, brief messages can then be sent to supporters on polling day reminding them to vote, or to ‘soft’ supporters from other parties with a ‘squeeze’ message.

Campaigners are also aware that these technologies are becoming increasingly interlinked, so they are able to send a single short message by text and email to simultaneously reach targeted mobile phones, Blackberries and PDAs as well as computer email in-boxes.

The role of media

In Chapter Two the tripartite model identified three distinct periods within the development of electioneering in the post-war period; these stages of development were also described in terms that reflect the predominant media channel of each phase: “the Newspaper Age, the Television Age, and the Digital Age” (Farrell, *et al.* 2001:12). This division, although perhaps simplistic, serves as a useful pointer to the way campaigners have responded to changes in the media industry, with the General Election of 1959 serving as a convenient point to mark the first paradigmatic shift.

The key factor that distinguishes the ‘Modern’ campaign from the ‘Pre-modern’ is the growing significance of the broadcast media within national campaigns, compared to the previous reliance on newspaper coverage. In this respect, the 1959 campaign can be seen as the transitional point, as Prime Minister Macmillan noted, “two new forces which had already played a small part in previous Elections now began to assert themselves. The first was the opinion polls, the second was the use of Television” (1972:7). Television offered new opportunities, which for campaign strategists were of a significantly different nature from previous experience: “in [the] television broadcast one is addressing not political correspondents, but people in their homes.” (Evans 1981:43).

Campaigning via the broadcast media created a new set of demands for the major parties, both in the production of special programming (Party Political Broadcasts and Party Election Broadcasts), and in the supply of material and speakers for news coverage. The structural changes that ensued are a major focus in the debate about the 'professionalisation' of campaigning noted in Chapter Two, as the parties increasingly relied upon non-partisan advisors with specialised expertise in these areas to help deliver this aspect of their campaigns (Farrell & Webb 2000:122). However, the structure of campaigning was also rapidly changing; although he was writing about the growing influence of radio in the 1945 General Election, R.B. McCullum, in the first of the Nuffield General Election studies, made a prescient comment that equally applies to the impact of television on campaigns,

"It may well be that this method of ... campaigning has revolutionized the nature of British elections. It is bound to shift interest from the local fight to national issues. And from the local candidate to the leading champions of the parties" (1945:154).

The advent of campaigning techniques which make use of television, in effect, created a division within central party structures, with different emphases emerging between the national campaign focused on party leaders, and the localised efforts of traditional campaigning. Butler and Rose's summary of this difference held true through most of the modern era:

"The party leaders may set the tone of the battle and, through broadcasting and the press, reach into the electors' homes with fresh arguments day by day. But what they say has little relation to the main activities of candidates, agents, and party workers, busy carrying out their plans for canvassing, distributing addresses, holding meetings, and completing polling-day arrangements" (1960:119).

Among the principal innovations in this period that have now become a familiar part of the national campaign was the introduction (in 1959) of daily early morning press briefings held at the parties' London headquarters and hosted by the Leader or senior members of the Parliamentary party. Their role in the 1979 campaign was noted by Butler and Kavanagh,

“All three press conferences were set up for television ... The Leader was neatly placed in front of an appropriate party slogan and opened with a message which offered the television bulletins the one- to two-minute item which they needed for the lunchtime news” (1980:171).

Thatcher and her advisers identified the need to accommodate the press as a priority and carefully planned walkabouts and events that would provide news editors with the images they required. Her team focused on creating opportunities that put Mrs Thatcher into settings that were telegenic; in this respect, it was the image rather than any message which became the dominant factor.

“The media event – that is to say, a campaign stunt performed because it will attract attention in the newspapers and on television, and not because it has any connection with the issues of the campaign – became a principal element of the Thatcher campaign... Mrs Thatcher's appearances were carefully orchestrated and designed to encourage the maximum possible television coverage. Before the campaign began she got advice on her voice, her movements, her timing, and her facial expression.” (Penniman 1981:143).

Tim Rathbone MP, a former head of publicity at Conservative Central Office, suggested that “the real election battle was fought through leadership projection on television” (Worcester 1982:45), although not everyone involved in this type of campaigning was happy with this emphasis: Tony Benn notes in his diary for 3rd May 1979, “the media were utterly corrupt in this Election, trying to make it a media event” (1990:494).

The transition between the 'Newspaper Age' and the 'Television Age' is perhaps clearer than the second transition identified by Farrell, *et al.*; a 'Digital Age' has undoubtedly emerged and is changing the way campaigns are conducted as the previous section on e-campaigning has illustrated. The news media has been impacted in fundamental ways by digital technology, not least by the fragmentation seen in the number of TV channels now available through satellite, cable and internet broadcasting, together with the introduction of 24-hour rolling coverage. At the start of the study period major speeches by party leaders were often delivered earlier than had previously been the case, in order that film could be developed and transported to studios in time for late-night TV programmes; today, live coverage of press conferences and events is the expected norm. The plethora of channels offer the opportunity for more targeted programming, and the idea of very locally focussed channels has been proposed using cable and satellite channels; for instance, the Director of the ALDC suggests that,

"There is no reason why BBC news has to be broadcast on a South-west England basis, it could be made on a Cornwall basis and that could make TV a lot more accessible to local parties."

While the reality of that remains some way off, local parties have consistently exploited the opportunities that the regional news media provide. The Election Agent for David Penhaligon's campaigns in mid-Cornwall through the 1970s reflected on how they used the media:

"In those days the Western Morning News had a lobby correspondent who ... did a daily profile of every constituency, and what he said was

absolutely critical. If he thought you were going to win, you probably were going to win. He wrote a story about us and it got some national interest, the Guardian came along and so did one of the Sunday papers ... There were some fantastic quotes that people gave the national newspapers, they said, "There are only two people who come to us, the postman and the Liberals", which we were then able to use in our literature ... We also did a survey on tourism and got a massive response, pretty negative. BBC SW decided to do a TV programme on tourism and this was unusual; they did a half-hour programme which included filming an audience discussion down in Penzance, and both [the Conservative candidate] and David Penhaligon were invited to be on it ... David hadn't had much in the way of TV experience in those days but he just came across fantastically ... don't forget in those days there weren't many TV channels and loads of people watched local TV, there was no Radio Cornwall and if you got a spot, you would die for it, and David did really well and gave us all a great boost.

As for the local newspapers, he recalled,

"We did make some effort to get press releases published but the local papers were not particularly helpful or interested. They weren't hostile; certainly compared with the press nowadays, they were wonderful, but they were very pro-Tory so we thought literature was the only chance to get across our messages...

The power of newspapers during elections, especially local newspapers, shouldn't be underestimated. Some people, especially Councillors, think that you should stop generating news stories during the campaign, but if

anything you should do it more. If you get 500 people out protesting against a planning issue, that would do more to get you elected than knocking on lots of doors; we have got to be more aware about the importance of identifying issues that will resonate with people.”

While some aspects of this description have not changed markedly in the last thirty years, as he notes the growth of local radio has made a significant difference for campaigners in terms of their media contacts outside the election period. The restrictions imposed on the broadcast media on fairness and balance in their reporting during the election period may perhaps also explain the reason why some campaigners do less media work during an election.

Creating opportunities for good ‘action photos’ of the candidate, and writing press releases to support these pictures and generating relevant news stories that will appeal to news editors have become a routine part of the campaign organiser’s task. Some candidates are able to do press work themselves, but many leave it to a nominated person within the local party, who acts as the press spokesperson (often this will be the MP or parliamentary candidate if one has been appointed). Today, dealing with the media has become a vital part of the training all the major parties encourage candidates to undertake, together with interviewing techniques for both radio and TV. The campaign advice published by the Liberal Democrats Campaign Unit sets this all in the context of the importance of developing long-term relationships with local journalists.

During the campaign itself, draft press releases on a wide range of issues are now routinely included as part of the daily email packages issued from the

central party, which can easily be adapted for use with the local media. Some care and coordination is required with these templates however as news editors, while generally willing to print stories provided by candidates, are not so accommodating if the same press release is sent from several candidates in their area (Negrine & Lilleker 2003).

Whatever the methods used during a campaign, whether face-to-face or indirect, the ultimate aim of any campaign is to motivate voters to physically go to the polling station, or to complete their postal ballot. The next chapter will examine the methods campaigners employ on Polling Day itself, and consider how the parties ensure that all the effort that has been expended, using the techniques described in this and the preceding chapter, converts into voters going out to vote.

Chapter Six

Developing the model 3: Polling Day, Participants & Postal Votes

The series of technological innovations that have occurred over the last five decades have changed the contents of the campaigner's toolbox, as has been illustrated in the preceding chapters. The result has been that the variety of methods that are now available has been expanded, and while many traditional techniques are still carried out, in some cases more efficiently, a new set of tools have been introduced. The iterative development of campaigning outlined in Chapter Two, which the tri-partite model seeks to capture is useful to identify the main drivers of this change process; however, the evidence presented so far suggests that a precise differentiation between phases is far from obvious in the actual delivery of campaigns and that at the level of local government elections an alternative model, techniques selected from a 'toolbox', is more relevant. To complete this review of campaigning as it is currently practiced, this chapter will consider how campaigners ensure that all their hard work chasing the vote bears fruit and how they bring the campaign to a conclusion on Polling Day. In reflecting on the additional pressures that drive change within campaign methodologies, the second part of this chapter will consider in more detail the role of some of the participants in the campaign identified in Chapter Three, and in particular explore why parties make use of 'paper' candidates. In the final section, the consequences of a major revision of the regulatory controls which saw the introduction of on-demand postal voting will be examined.

The climax of all this effort, Polling Day

All of the techniques and tools described in this and the preceding chapters have ultimately a simple purpose – to identify that part of the electorate who will place their vote in favour of a party’s candidate and on polling day to remind them to do so. The activities that campaigners engage in on the day of the poll are shaped and enabled by the work that has been done in the preceding weeks. As with many of the techniques described so far, changes in what is done on the day itself mean that an election in 2008 is different from a Polling Day in 1958.

The ideal model of a polling day operation has two major elements, the collection of the polling numbers of those who have voted, an activity known as ‘telling’, and reminding identified supporters to get out and vote, either through the distribution of more leaflets, or by ‘knocking up’. In the ideal model, throughout the day of the vote, a record is made of every voter who visits a polling station; this information is then collated with the voter identification data that has been gathered from doorstep and telephone canvassing, in order to track which of the party’s supporters still need further encouragement to get out and vote.

“Election day itself for the party activist, and particularly the candidate, is an ecstasy of pain and pleasure, a tumult of emotion and energy ... candidates can be a nuisance on election day because they get worried, emotions run high” (Copus, 2004).

Telling

Traditionally, on a typical polling day, as they entered or left the polling station, voters would be approached by supporters from each party and asked for their polling number; this is the unique number allocated to each registered voter, which appears on the Electoral Roll and on their official notification of the election, the polling card. The job of 'Tellers' is to do nothing more than record the Roll numbers; legally, they are prohibited from entering the polling station itself, and although they may wear rosettes or badges showing the approved symbols of the party they support, tellers may not make any attempt to persuade voters to cast their ballot for a particular candidate. A long-standing Labour councillor recalled her first experiences of polling day,

"In the general election year, [the goal] was to have tellers on all of the urban polling stations; I was very impressed by the number of people who came along to help, we had quite a lot of tellers. They can do that without needing to know policy, they were not members, they were supporters, and they came out of the woodwork."

An experienced Conservative councillor also described polling day,

"We had some cars, we had a committee room and we had tellers on all the polling stations ... We had lists of people who wanted lifts, the elderly, the infirm and so on, we had lists of people to try and call out. We didn't have NCR (No Carbon Required) at that time or anything like that. I am not quite sure how we did it, I think the cards that said 'Conservative' were put

to one side and somehow put in road order, and then they were picked up as the numbers came back from the tellers.”

The cards he refers to are also called ‘Reading’ or ‘Mikardo’ lists by some Labour campaigners and ‘Shuttleworths’ by older Liberal Democrats. They are used to combine the telling numbers with the voter identification data previously gathered, to produce a list of names and addresses for an activist to knock-up. Whatever form they used to appear in (NCR cards simply allowed two or three copies to be handwritten at once), the campaigning software now used by all the major parties has largely replaced the paper-based techniques.

While the ideal model assumes a steady flow of information from the tellers, the reality is now, usually, very different. To mount a complete telling operation poses a significant resource challenge for campaign organisers; polling stations are open from 7.00 am until 10.00 pm, and dependent on the number of seats being contested on the day, it is rare that there will be enough helpers to spare more than a few, if any, to spend a large part of polling day simply waiting outside polling stations for voters to appear, especially when turnout will be low and they could be more profitably engaged in other activities. All the parties know they are likely to have fewer helpers available at each successive election, and so they are looking for ways to achieve the same results with a smaller base of activists. Perhaps the decline in telling is the most visible evidence of this wider trend, especially in the context of local elections. All of the sources used to inform this study are agreed that telling is now, at best, an optional extra; if it does take place, it tends to be targeted into key areas where

there is a higher likelihood of winning the seat, but the general pattern is to run a polling day operation without the feedback that telling data provides.

“A polling day without tellers is something Labour has already woken up to. They call it the ‘WARP’ system. So if you don’t see Labour tellers on polling stations on May 3rd don’t assume they’re doing nothing – they may be doing something more productive than telling” (Liberal Democrat News, 27 April 2007).

The director of the ALDC amplified on this comment,

“[Labour] are inventing ways of campaigning that involve less people; [they] are doing polling day without sitting on polling stations – you identify who your voters are, using data from a previous election; if you haven’t got enough, you use MOSAIC to identify possible Labour voters in strong Labour areas until you have enough to win that election. You start at 8.00 am, going round to get those [people] to vote, continuously calling and telephoning. It’s simple maths – 10,000 voters in ward, with turnout at 40% – that means you need 2,000 people to win, 1,600 to win in a three-way; get them to vote Labour and you have done it!”

While this trend is a practical response to the challenge of limited resources, it is a further example of campaigning becoming less visible than was previously the case. While there remains some advantage to be gained from having a public presence at the polling stations, the standard Liberal Democrat advice is now, do it only if the helpers used are not able to knock up or deliver leaflets. A related polling day technique that has also fallen into abeyance is the use of loudspeaker cars. At the start of the study period, one method frequently used to remind voters that it was polling day was to install a public address system in a car and send the candidate out to tour their strong neighbourhoods, and

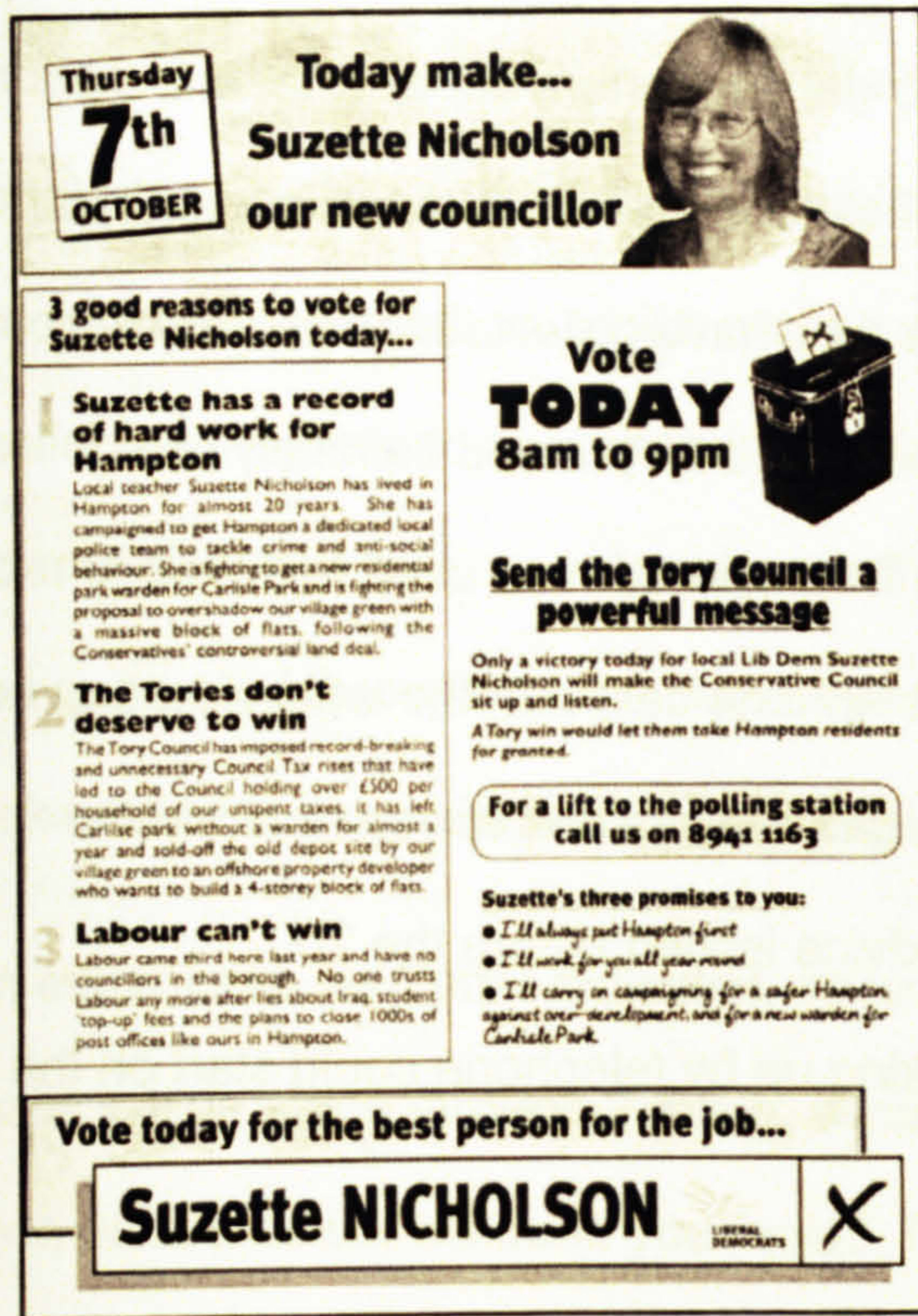
literally call people out to vote. The 'Loudspeaker' approach is no longer favoured, partly because while wanting to encourage supporters to vote, it is counter-productive to also remind people who are likely to vote for opposition candidates; approaches that are targeted onto producing only positive votes are favoured, and again, the current ALDC view on using loudspeaker cars is, "these are a waste of both time and a car" (2006a).

Leaflets, from dawn 'til dusk

"Not every member of the general public shares your obsession with politics or your belief that polling day is so vital that sleep has to be forfeited in the pursuit of victory" (Zetter 2007).

Despite all the work that has gone into the campaign, it is still very likely that a high percentage of the electorate is unaware that polling day is imminent. For campaigns that have enough leaflet deliverers to do the work, several types of leaflet can be used in the closing hours of the campaign; as described in the previous chapter, a 'Blue Ink' letter may be distributed in the final two to three days of campaigning. Then, either an eve-of-poll leaflet, "Tomorrow is Polling Day" delivered late in the day or, very popular with Liberal Democrat campaigners, a 'Good Morning' leaflet delivered in the early hours of the day itself, (a 5.00 am start is recommended); Figure 6.1 illustrates what are regarded as the ideal Liberal Democrat Polling Day leaflets. The aim of these leaflets is to act as a reminder that arrives before voters leave their house for work or to take the children to school. Once the polling stations are opened at

Figure 6.1: Sample Polling Day and Good Morning leaflets



Left: Inside full A4 leaflet

Below: A4 folded in half lengthways, design shown repeated front and back, with text inside



7.00 am, a series of knock up leaflets may also be distributed; depending on the scale of the operation and the perceived closeness of the contest up to three or four different leaflets may be used during the day. A Conservative Agent indicated he preferred an alternative tactic,

“We took out on advert on the day before polling day in the [local paper], because it is more cost effective than producing a leaflet and also it meant we didn’t have to deliver the damn thing.”

Knocking up

The primary focus of the day is the drive to get supporters out to vote, and this is where all the information on voter identification gathered through the course of the campaign is applied. Using the data they have collected, each party will endeavour to make sure that the people who said they would definitely or probably vote for the party actually do so. Two methods are used to do this, either knocking on the door or making a telephone call, with the latter now the preferred method, because of the advantages of ease and speed noted in the discussion on telephone canvassing. In advice issued before the 2007 elections, the ALDC suggested that knocking up by telephone could start on the evening prior to polling;

“Eve of Poll phone knock up

On the eve of poll why not use your candidate and key campaigners and do some pre poll phone knocking. This can spread the load of the polling day task. Messages can be left. Any information on when our supporters are planning to vote e.g. when they come home from work can be put into EARS so we don't waste knocking up time before they are likely to be home.” (ALDC ‘Election Briefing’ email 1 May 2007)

Zetter describes an alternative method that he describes as a ‘rolling knock’:

“... we put together small teams of highly mobile, self-sufficient knocking up teams. These teams consisted of between two and four members, with one car per team, and they only went to our best wards and polling districts. They went out with just one list of supporters (firm pledges and possibles) and their job was to knock on doors from 9.30a.m. ... until 9.45p.m. ... those who were in and had voted were crossed off. Once they had reached the end of their allocated streets they simply started again, working their way through the addresses of all known supporters, excluding those who said they had voted ... Where there was no answer a knocking up leaflet was left with polling details and a strong encouragement to vote.” (2007:120).

The above approach relies on lists which are generated before the start of polling; it is a method that is gaining favour because once the lists have been printed, no further administrative work is required from a central source. The more traditional method, which makes use of any telling data that is being collected, requires the numbers of those who have voted to be crossed off the lists of identified supporters, or entered on to the computer database, and fresh lists to be generated throughout the day for each round of knocking up; a process that takes time and people, who, again, could be better employed knocking up.

In either case, as Zetter indicates, several cycles of door knocking or telephone calls will be made through the day, simply to ask voters "Have you voted yet? If not, please do so; we need your vote." The standard model of Liberal Democrat campaigning suggests three time periods that are the optimum for targeting voters: from mid-morning to lunchtime particularly targeting elderly citizens who are more likely to leave their homes at this time of day; from mid-afternoon, targeting parents collecting their children from school; and from 6.00 pm, when workers have returned home, and as previously indicated, the expectation is that this will continue right through the evening until the close of polling.

Ideally, those voters who have already made their decision will be discounted from further contact and the effort focussed on those still to vote. In the discussion about canvassing in Chapter Four, it was noted that not all the responses given by voters are necessarily truthful. This equally applies for knocking up, an issue that Bochel & Denver (1971) raised in the context of their study, in which the polling day operation made full use of telling; in their experiment some voters said they had voted, when the teller's records indicated

they had not. While most campaigners would take the view that the number of voters who do not tell the truth is so small as to not make a difference, the knocking up programmes described above, that do not make use of telling, are entirely dependent on the honesty of the voters they contact. There is an additional note of caution which most organisers emphasise: any knocking up effort must avoid annoying people by repeated reminders – if they have already voted, this is not a problem because their vote cannot be altered, but if they have not voted yet and perceive the contact as nagging on the part of the candidate, it can be a disincentive and counter-productive. Priority will be given to reminding voters categorised as “definites and probables”; however, if these are not sufficient to ensure a win, other categories of votes have to be considered, for instance, those identified previously as undecided but favouring the third placed candidate. A telephone call with a squeeze message, “This is a very close race between the two top candidates and every vote will count; so if you don't want X to win, will you vote for us?” may be effective, although the reminder may also risk provoking a vote in the ‘wrong’ direction.

Before the advent of the widespread use of postal votes, a major challenge for campaign organisers was to ensure elderly and infirm supporters got to the polling station, and so pre-arranged lifts were common, as referred to in the former Conservative Agent's description on page 219 above. He also noted that,

“Years and years ago, if it was a wet day, it was perceived that the Conservatives did better because we had more cars; these days it doesn't make any difference because everybody has got cars, in fact, you are

probably better off walking because you wouldn't get to the polling station because of the traffic jams.”

At the start of the study period any car used to transport voters to the polling station had to be registered with the election authorities, as it was considered close to the legal boundary on 'treating', that is, the offering of gifts and inducements to voters in order to influence their vote. While the restrictions on this use of cars have been lifted, the ability to register for a permanent postal vote now means the major parties all take the line that if someone needs a lift it will be provided, but it is better to also encourage them to sign up for a postal vote for the next election, in order to remain focussed on the priority activity, the knock up.

The effects of the introduction of on-demand postal votes will be considered in more detail in the final section of this chapter, but it should be noted here that all the activities described in this section are increasingly being duplicated as campaigners have to treat the day that postal ballots are sent out as a second polling day. This is because, in addition to postal voters being more likely to vote, the assumption is made that most ballots will be completed on the day they are received or in the following two or three days; it is critical, therefore, to contact those voters as quickly as possible once they have received their ballot papers. The author, when out doorstep canvassing after postal ballots have been sent out, has on several occasions met voters who have said, “we have already voted”; fortunately most added, “don't worry, we voted for you.”

The close of polling stations at 10 pm may signal the official end of a campaign, but the campaigner's task is not over. At the count of votes, information can be gathered about which polling districts have proved the most fruitful, simply by making a rough tally of votes from each ballot box as they are sorted and verified. This can be very important for the on-going campaign, both in terms of deciding which areas in a neighbourhood should be targeted, and, irrespective of the result, to start building for the next election. Important information in the post-election phase also can be gained from a scrutiny of the marked register; the copy of the official register of voters, on which polling station staff have recorded those voters who have cast their ballot.

“If you get the marked registers over several elections you can identify the hard-core people who always vote. Regular voters are not necessarily hard-core partisans for another party – so you can win converts among this group of people” (Liberal Democrat News, 8 June 2007).

Additionally, the marked register will reveal those voters who were identified as supporters but who chose not to vote; subsequent contact may establish the reasons why they did not vote, perhaps accompanied with an encouragement to register for a postal vote for future elections. As yet, and a source of concern to some activists, the marked register are released without a record of which postal voters have used their vote.

Who plans the campaign?

Within the hypotheses being explored in this study is the proposal that the structures of the major parties have changed over the last five decades to

accommodate the new campaigning methods that have been explored in the preceding chapters. Aside from the impetus for change that technological developments have produced, both internal and external pressures on the parties' structures can also be seen to have driven innovation. Externally, legislative change has been significant, particularly in the last decade, and the final section of this chapter will consider an aspect of this in the introduction of on-demand postal voting. Internally, the effects of two drivers were noted in Chapter Two, firstly through the involvement and growing influence of non-partisan advisors, particularly at the top of party organisations, and secondly as a result of the decline in membership numbers. This section will consider aspects of both trends.

The increased reliance upon television in national campaigning has necessitated the use of expertise from the commercial world in the form of programme makers and media consultants; equally, the introduction of mass advertising techniques has been dependent on specialist advice provided by companies such as Coleman, Prentice and Varley and Saatchi & Saatchi. The debate concerning the involvement of non-partisan consultants and advisors has largely focussed on the relative dominance of these advisers compared to the traditional functions of political parties (for example, see Plasser 2001, Clark 2004, and Negrine & Lilleker 2002). However, a more complete understanding of the changes that have, and are occurring in British political parties must also take into account several other trends, including the professionalisation of politicians, that is, the growing number of individuals whose expectation is that their only career will be in elected office. Additionally, there is a need to

distinguish between the respective roles played by the central party headquarters, the parliamentary party, and particularly the 'Leader's office'.

The relationships that exist between the 'centre', that is, the staff located in a party's headquarters, and the expressions of the party 'out in the country' is important in this debate. An alternate way of portraying this is to consider the division between the volunteers and full-time, paid campaigners. The influence of central party organisations within local campaigning is often most evident when a seat is targeted, and additional resources are made available. However, whatever the status of those workers who are 'imported' into a campaign, there is always potential for discord to arise between the experienced volunteers who form the backbone of local parties, often with many years of on-the-ground experience and who know their area intimately, and paid party workers who regard themselves as campaign 'experts' because of the specialist training they have received and the wider party contacts they maintain (note comment about central 'interference' in Fisher, *et al.* 2006a:675; also Denver, *et al.* 2003, Ward 2003). All the major party activists interviewed recognised this as a source of conflict they had experienced, and described it various ways:

A Conservative activist's view,

"The trouble with central office is, and it is the same with any organisation, it's "Them" and "Us". We are supposed to be on the same side, but it doesn't always work like that, or at least that's the perception. [For example] when 'they' have deliberately put someone on the 'A-list' in, the local association has deliberately gone against them. It's the "them and us" and we are not being told what to do."

From a Liberal Democrat perspective,

“While the regional party was helpful, the national party were bloody useless. It is one reason why I have always regarded the national party with contempt; in fact, we said we only won because we ignored what they told us. We were not regarded as a target seat, we were not regarded as a potential win and again, the national party didn't think [our candidate] was the right sort of person.

And from a Labour councillor, who also works with the Improvement and Development Agency on behalf of the party,

“For us it is the regional party that is important; I hear across the country a particularly ambivalent feeling about the regional party, and sometimes quite negative about the people who are almost like apparatchiks, the ones who make sure things stay in line. We don't get anything from region really, we don't get any funding from them and you only get support if you are a target seat. If you are a target seat you get ministers, *et cetera*, and you might get extra help with one of the officers of the party spending some time with you.”

The retired Conservative agent has experienced this divide from both sides of the argument as a paid employee of the central party and now as a volunteer,

“Some people within the organisation say, ‘I am a voluntary worker. Why can't he be? Why should we pay him X amount of money, when I am not paid anything?’ Unfortunately, the agent, or whoever it is, has to pay the mortgage and of course they have got expertise, although sometimes

voluntary workers think they know best... most Conservatives agents years ago used to be ex-military types, and they worked for pin money, but then of course it changed.

If it is a new agent in a new area, the local people know the area better than the agent does. But it is surprising when you go round to branch meetings and functions, and so on, how quickly you get to know the constituency. In fact, you end up knowing more about the whole area, where they only know about their village or whatever.”

Recruiting volunteers to help in the campaign was an important part of his job, but during the course of his career there have been noticeable changes,

“In the first campaign I did, we just started with two people and we ended with a full campaigning team and a full committee room on the day... I didn't deliver a leaflet after the first one, people were just volunteering, somebody said “I'll do this road,” and so it went on and it built up itself; all I did after the initial delivery was canvassing, we had the leaflets covered and they just got on with it.

People don't have the time now, for whatever reason, compared with 1974. The volunteers back in the 70's were predominantly women or retired men, or young Conservatives. [Since then] the number of volunteers has dropped and the style of campaigning has changed completely; people, whether it's the Boy Scouts or Girl Guides, Rotary Club or whatever, they are all short of voluntary people. In my last

campaigns, basically we didn't have the people, we had lots of members, but nobody wanted to do anything."

The Director of the ALDC commented on similar trends and then raised an additional issue in the context of the resources available to campaigners,

"The central party employs a team of campaign officers who are managed centrally; they are there to run campaigns in our target seats. Apparently the Tories are now recruiting low waged East Europeans from their sister parties in the EU, to come and help at election time; there are also a lot of interns around as well. MPs always seem to have a couple of interns; I am not quite sure about the ethics of not paying a person, but people seem to insist that they have to do it for three months to have it on their CV.

Here is a resource disparity between the parties; this money, the resource that comes from having an MP and from having lots of councillors, compared to a party who doesn't have that resource. Where I live we have got a Labour MP, who has three staff working there and a printing machine, *et cetera*. Us and the Conservatives haven't got that, but we have got to campaign against them. There are lots of examples of parties where they lost councillors wholesale and lost their infrastructure. There are places, say in Manchester at the start of the '80s, where the Conservatives had always had councillors and lost and crucially lost their infrastructure, and the party effectively collapsed and there is nothing there, no capacity to do anything because it all just collapsed (Fisher, *et al.* 2006b:506). I don't know whether that will happen with the Labour party, it is an interesting thing to think about, they are going through a dreadful

period in local government and whether or not their infrastructure will collapse we will have to wait to see”

This moves into the on-going debate about the merits of the state funding of political parties, which lies beyond the scope of this study (Philips 2007, Fisher 2000); however, it remains a relevant issue for campaigning resources, and minor party candidates are especially aware of the disparities that exist, creating a permanent state of disadvantage. The leader of Mebyon Kernow expressed some very forthright views on this subject when interviewed, which can be summarised as follows, and which were also raised as concerns by some of the other interviewees. Councillors are asked to make contributions to their local party organisations from the allowances they receive for holding public office, which are then used to finance and build up campaigning infrastructure; being aware that all the major parties do this, from his perspective this is a form of state funding for these parties, ‘by the back door’. Certainly, the author’s own experience is of a firm expectation from within his own local party, for all sitting councillors to make regular payments from their allowances. Liberal Democrat candidates willing to stand for District or County Council seats have been asked to sign an agreement, at the point of being approved as a candidate, that should they be successful they will agree to make such payments. This approach is justified by the parties because unlike independent candidates, the costs of their campaigns are met by the party. The author has also been involved in discussions with activists from elsewhere in the country who have indicated that their local parties

expect serving members to agree to a sliding percentage of contributions from their allowances, increasing if they receive extra responsibility allowances for holding executive posts within their council. For those parties, whatever their national size, who adopt this approach and then fail to retain seats, the consequence can be a significant disadvantage for their future campaigning capacity (Fisher, *et al.* 2006b). Unless they can access funds from elsewhere to subsidize campaigning efforts, they could get trapped into a reinforcing cycle of failure.

Not only have political parties had to adjust to shrinking membership numbers, it is also clear that there has been a steady decline in the activism of members, reflected in the comments on volunteerism above. One Liberal Democrat with experience of campaigning in the London Boroughs, commented,

“I think it’s almost a gloomier picture than that; not only are the number of activists shrinking, but the duration they are active for is decreasing as well.”

One area where this trend is evident is in parties identifying suitable candidates to represent them, and is partly why the selection processes that the parties use have become a controversial issue; however, two contradictory trends are evident. For those seats that are designated as targets, and especially for seats for Westminster and the devolved institutions, decisions about who is involved in the process of choosing a candidate, what process of selection is used,

whether the candidates have gone through some prior filtering process to assess their suitability and the timing of the process, all have material consequences for the subsequent election campaign; all the elements of this process can be the source of considerable stress. However, in local elections the shortage of people willing to stand as a local councillor can often lead to some candidates being identified and persuaded to stand in the few hours before the official close of nominations. Not only can this be a frantic process, which the author has had first-hand experience of and will note again in the next chapter, the suitability of some last minute candidates can be doubtful. Being unable to identify sufficient numbers of party members who are willing to actively seek elected office has also led to the use of 'paper' candidates', that is, candidates appearing to contest a seat but not expecting to win and not actively campaigning.

Paper candidates

In Chapter Three, note was made of the need for sufficient candidates willing to contest a seat in order for an election to be held. With the exception of parish and town councils, the number of unopposed elections has declined at all levels over the study period. However, it is incorrect to assume that every candidate in each contest is actively trying to win the seat; this section will explore some of the reasons why parties put up candidates but then do not actively fight to win the election. It should be noted that from the perspective of the voter, they are unlikely to be able to differentiate between those who seriously want to win the seat and paper candidates, and the number of people who will openly

acknowledge that they are standing in this way is relatively small but significant. In the 2007 survey, 253 (8.9%) of the survey respondents admitted that being a paper candidate was the reason why they stood (see Appendix Table 6.1); however, others may have also been paper candidates, but gave other reasons for their contesting seats in their responses to the survey.

In some cases a paper candidate will arrange for the distribution of a single leaflet and take no more part in the campaign, but more usually they will not even do this; so what are the advantages that the parties gain from using paper candidates? Formally, the response parties give to this question will emphasise their part in giving voters a choice and that the electorate has a right to democratically decide who their representatives will be, and so need to be allowed an election. However, for the major parties, even if they do no work during a campaign, their candidates will inevitably attract some votes by having the party name and logo on the ballot paper. The size of this vote is an indicator of the minimum support the party can expect to attract in a particular ward, information that can be useful in planning future campaigns and will inform any judgement about whether a seat is worth targeting. Additionally, standing a candidate reminds the voter of the party's continuing presence; as the leader of Mebyon Kernow noted,

“We have those seats that we fight really hard and make a difference, and at the same time there are other areas where we are weak ... and we know we are not going to win, and to be perfectly honest we stand to fly the flag. It is to say, ‘here is an alternative; we are giving [the voter] the option to vote for someone different... You put up to raise the profile, and

the idea is that you get a leaflet everywhere in the constituency even if you don't door knock."

In a subsequent conversation with the author, he bemoaned the limited supply of supporters willing to stand,

"We do have a struggle to find candidates and people prepared to get involved. Even you Liberal Democrats, with your bigger resources, have to trawl around to find possible candidates. I think you must find it easier than us, as at least with you it must be easier to persuade people, as the odds are greater that they may win."

While within the ideal model of election campaigning, the assumption may be made that the electoral competition is the selection of the best among a field of quality candidates. The reality at the local government level is different; a more accurate image is of local parties struggling to find suitable candidates and at times pressurising someone with a sufficient local profile to stand under their badge. As the interviewee above noted, "There isn't a queue at the door." This is an issue that must be taken into account when responding to the concerns about the gender and race imbalance that can be seen in the parties' representation on local authorities.

There is also an important benefit in using paper candidates that relates to the 'arms race' analogy used in Chapter Two. When elections are fought across multiple seats in a council area, important signals can be sent out to rival parties about the credibility of a local organisation. Ensuring that as many seats as

possible are contested can be seen as a measure of a party's current strength and vigour, and helps to create "the impression of the party being a strong and effective voice" (Pilling, 2004). In part, this is about the national standing of a party; the *Liberal Democrats News*, the party's weekly newspaper, frequently includes encouragement from the ALDC to stand candidates in local by-elections. Their analysis of council by-elections from July to December 2007 (see Table 6.1) was used to underline their appeal to 'always stand a candidate', noting that both the Conservatives and Labour do better at persuading people to stand for them, and that "the proportion of by-elections being fought by the Greens and BNP has roughly doubled since 2006", whereas the number of those fought by the Liberal Democrats has fallen since 2003 (Bridges, 2008a).

Again, in the context of the national campaign, there is a further reason why some minor parties will arrange for paper candidates which relates to the rules about party election broadcasts on TV and radio. Currently, the regulations give

Table 6.1: Contestation of Council By-Elections July – December 2007

	Seats contested	% contested
Lib Dems	88	77.9
Conservatives	104	92.0
Labour	94	83.2
Greens	33	29.2
BNP	31	27.4
UKIP	29	25.7
Other	51	45.1
SNP/PC	5	4.1
Total Contests	113	

Source: *Liberal Democrat News*, 25 January 2008

the major parties automatic broadcasting rights (the major parties are defined as Labour, the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats, in Scotland the SNP, and in Wales, Plaid Cymru). For all other parties, they have to qualify for broadcasting rights on the basis of contesting one sixth or more of the seats up for election (see *Ofcom* website); for parties such as the Greens, there is, therefore, an added incentive to contest sufficient seats in order to qualify for TV time, and while they may not have the resources to properly contest every seat they can identify a candidate for, by using the formal candidate nomination process in this way, their national campaign can be boosted by a presence in the cycle of election broadcasts. One activist commented about the Greens,

“They are very mechanised towards the idea that they want to get airtime on TV... and to get the threshold figure they put names on ballot papers.”

The results of the 2007 candidates' survey appear to confirm this assertion; while only 8.9% of the survey respondents identified themselves as paper candidates, among the Green candidates, 29.4% indicated that this was their role (almost double the percentage of the party with the next highest level of paper candidacy, the BNP).

The most direct benefit that standing a candidate brings is that the opposition parties must make a response, especially if they hold the seat:

“... even if the party knows it has no hope of winning, then the tactic is to enter a 'paper candidate'... with the simple intention of tying down the opposing party so they divert resources into their own safe seats. A simple straightforward tactic that is always successful; no candidate worth his or her salt, no matter how safe the seat, will leave it completely undefended, even to a paper candidate.” (Copus 2004:63).

The limited resources that parties have available in terms of activists able to contribute to a campaign has already been discussed, but for the campaign strategist this remains a significant dilemma. In targeting the resources of a local party, an assessment has to be made about how real the threat is from opposition candidates, especially in those seats that are held and regarded as 'safe'. While local parties redirect their resources towards the seats they regard as most likely wins, and give what the Conservatives describe as 'mutual aid' to neighbouring parties organisations, this assessment has to be done at every election once the opposition's candidates are known and the strength of their challenge can be gauged.

For the party that puts up a paper candidate, and for those candidates who stand with no expectation that they will win a seat, there always remains the chance that circumstances will produce a surprise result. The difficulty of predicting an election outcome remains the reason why experienced campaigners will never assume that a paper candidate is not a threat; a low turnout and a poor performance from the incumbent may produce an unexpected outcome, much to the shock of the winner.

Postal Voting

Election campaigns are shaped by the legal framework within which political parties and their activists work. For example, the controls exercised through the limitations on campaign expenditure and the rules governing balance in the reportage by the broadcast media, materially influence the decisions

campaigners and candidates make about their day-to-day activities throughout a campaign. The impact of the changes contained in the 2000 *Representation of the People Act* (RPA) will be considered in this final section, and in particular the consequences for campaigners of the introduction of on-demand postal ballots.

For those voters unable to attend a polling station in person, the use of a ballot paper sent and returned through the postal system has been available since 1918. However, prior to the RPA 2000, anyone wishing to make use of this facility had to meet certain criteria and provide supporting evidence in order to qualify for a postal or proxy ballot, a process that had to be repeated for each election. As a result, the number of postal ballots issued at each election was a very small percentage of the total vote cast. In the three General Elections during the 1950s, postal voting was noted at 2.6% of the total vote in 1951, 2.1% in 1955 and 2.5% in 1959 (Butler & King, 1965) and until 1997 there was little variation in this percentage, with 2.1% of the electorate receiving a postal ballot in that election (Electoral Commission, 2004c); similar levels were seen in local government elections.

The RPA 2000 established the right for voters to register for a permanent postal ballot, with no need to make a fresh application at subsequent elections, or to provide a valid justification of extenuating circumstances; combined with the introduction of the 'rolling' registration of voters, that is, being able to register at any point in the year, this created the 'on-demand' postal ballot. Voters quickly made use of this facility with the number of postal ballots issued doubling to 3.9% in the 2001 General Election and rising to 12.1% issued in 2005, with

postal votes being 5% and 15% of the total valid votes cast respectively (Kavanagh & Butler, 2005); similar large increases have been seen in elections to the devolved institutions, and in some local government areas over a third of voters are now registered to vote by post (Electoral Commission, 2005:42). Alongside the introduction of on-demand postal ballots, the government also indicated that it intended to introduce all-postal ballots, that is, elections where postal voting was the only means by which a vote could be cast. This would become the preferred option for all elections, although at least initially General Elections were excluded. The newly created Electoral Commission conducted a series of pilots from 2000 to 2003 designed to assess the implications of this proposal and to ensure that the administration systems were robust in the local authority areas that were selected for the trials. In 2004, pilots were also held in four regions for the elections to the European Parliament and in a number of local government elections held at the same time, the biggest use of postal ballots to date. During this programme of trials, including those in 2004, significant problems were identified across most parts of the system, from the registration of voters to the processes used by the Royal Mail to ensure timely delivery; the Electoral Commission's report (2004c) of these pilots led to the continued roll-out of all-postal ballots being called into doubt. Later that year, an all-postal ballot was used for a referendum in the North East of England, in which the government sought support for the establishment of a directly elected Regional Assembly. Following the overwhelming rejection of this proposal, the Government's plans for devolving greater powers to the regions stalled, and along with it, the further extension of the use of all-postal ballots fell from the agenda.

The arguments used in support of postal ballots and other alternative voting methods tend to emphasise the convenience for voters of such systems, on the basis that easier voting methods will encourage greater public participation in the political process; the key piece of evidence used to support this perspective is the general fall in turnout and the very low levels of participation in some local elections, while the use of postal ballots appear to improve the levels of turnout. Both of the Electoral Commission's reports, *The Shape of Elections to Come* (2003d) and *Delivering Democracy: the Future of Postal Voting* (2004c) set their argument in this context: "Local election turnout between 1990-99 was 36% and since 2000 has been only slightly above 30%". The trials of all-postal voting indicate that that turnout rates can be substantially improved: "The average turnout of approximately 49% for all-postal pilots was significantly higher than the turnout across England as a whole on 1 May, where 34.9% of the electorate voted" (2003d). However, the underlying arguments about participation and convenience remain contested by some academics;

"There seems to be an element of *naïveté* about this. Nowhere in the political science literature is there evidence to suggest that inconvenience is the chief cause of non-voting" (Qvortrup, 2005:415);

"Our evidence suggests that VOBM [Vote only by mail] elections increase turnout especially among those groups *already likely to vote* in high stimulus elections" (emphasis added, Karp & Banducci, 2000).

This point can be easily overlooked, those people using postal votes may be those who already have a higher propensity to vote, and the relaxation of the regulations has simply made easier something that they would do anyway.. The challenge remains as to whether such an alteration in the system can encourage those who habitually do not vote to change their behaviour. The reasons why sections of the electorate choose to abstain from voting and

whether changing the mechanics of voting will contribute to long-lasting solutions to this problem are issues that fall beyond the scope of this study; (the application of Rational Choice theory to voting behaviour indicates that turnout will increase as the costs of the act of voting are reduced; Gronke, *et al.*, 2007 discuss this in the context of 'convenience' voting methods including higher levels of postal balloting). Equally, the issues surrounding the security of the system and the prevention of attempts to fraudulently influence the outcome of elections are not relevant to the present discussion. However, Qvortrup suggests that these are particularly British concerns, "... much of the debate about postal voting in Britain has revolved around questions of fraud and abuse of the system. These issues have not been at the centre of the debate elsewhere" (2005:414). Despite the halt in all-postal ballots, since 2004, the growth in numbers of voters using permanent postal votes has continued, producing consequences that are of relevance for campaigners, but which other studies tend to overlook; for example, in the report of the Independent Commission on Alternative Voting Methods, only one paragraph briefly noted the implications of increased postal voting on the conduct of campaigns (2002:34). The Electoral Commission's reports also tend to only note the consequences for campaigners in passing, as their main concerns have focussed on security and the impact of change on voters.

For the campaigners interviewed for this study, the increased levels of postal voting are viewed as both positive and negative challenges. Positively, postal voters, as an easily identifiable section of the electorate, are recognised as

more likely to vote and so are more worthwhile attempting to contact, both in the period leading up to an election and in the opening half of the campaign.

However, there are distinct disadvantages as well, firstly in terms of the changes in the structure of the campaign forced by a significant proportion of the electorate voting earlier than the rest, and secondly in the uncertainty that is created once postal ballots are sent out.

Registering Postal Voters

Even before the rule changes of 2000, the parties had recognised that the increased participation rate among postal voters was something they could utilise, and since the introduction of permanent registration this has become a critical issue. If postal voters are more likely to vote than other voters, then it is important for the parties to persuade as many of their identified supporters as possible to register for postal votes. While campaigners have to assume that every voter will vote, that is, a 100% turnout, they are realists and recognise that more than half of the people they are talking to during a campaign regularly do not participate in local elections; encouraging their own supporters to join the group that is known to be more likely to vote has obvious benefits for their overall campaign. Historically, the Conservatives were regarded as the most proficient at doing this, but now all the main parties strongly encourage their local campaigners to actively persuade known supporters to register for postal votes, and then to keep in regular contact with them throughout the year.

The leader of a Labour group on a council that covers a predominately rural area commented,

“We brought this change in as Labour, and [locally] we were very keen for it; but, we discovered that although the Conservatives had opposed it, the party nationally had put funding in and they took out advertisements to encourage older people to register for postal votes... I think it was skewed in rural areas like this, as the Conservatives advertised in national periodicals that were likely to be read by that demographic, country magazines, and Saga, and whatever ... and so we saw an amazing upsurge in our rural areas of postal votes which went against us. It has been a very interesting lesson, personally.

Ever since postal voting became easier, even before the pilots, the Labour party was urging us to sign up postal voters, because our voters are notoriously difficult to get out on the day, if it is raining, *et cetera* ... What we now do with our canvassers, which we never used to do to this extent, is give people in their canvassing packs a lot of postal voting application forms and tell them to find voters and to get them registered before the deadline.”

The former Conservative agent provided the countering view, but also agreed that targeting elderly voters has been a long-established strategy,

“You have to ask yourself the question why Labour wanted postal voting. The reason they wanted to expand it was because a lot of Conservatives tend to be older and because of their values and everything they are more likely to vote. I think that is the truth of the matter. Also years and years

ago, if it was a wet day it was perceived that Conservatives did better because we had more cars [to take people to the polling stations]...

We always did try to do what we could with the postal voters ... [signing up people] in Nursing Homes and places like that, where you have got a large concentration of older voters.”

However, it is not now just older people, who because of frailty or illness cannot get to their polling station and are attracted to using a postal vote. The Director of the ALDC said, from experience in his own council area and from reports he has received from other councillors, that busy young professionals and students are also a fruitful group for registration campaigns, a view also shared by the Labour councillor above,

“I also found going round that young men in particular, who had never voted before, were saying that they were intending to use a postal vote.”

The leader of a Liberal Democrat controlled council admitted that in his own electoral division, deliberately targeting known supporters and getting them to register as postal voters was a key contributor to his successful re-election campaign, while a Liberal Democrat councillor in London said,

“People think the Conservative party are much better at going out to the sheltered homes, *et cetera*, and capturing a whole bunch of postal voters; in the inner cities or the Midlands it is something the Labour is great at.”

“You have TWO polling days”

The combination of a high postal vote in a low turnout local election can be significant, as the following news report reflects:

“51 per cent of the votes cast were postal votes, which the Tories clearly won. By polling day we were playing catch up on a cold day, on an old register and competing with the football.” (Liberal Democrat News, 16 November 2007)

This illustrates what has become the most significant challenge created by higher levels of postal voting. As indicated in the discussion of polling day above, traditional campaigning has been structured so that all the work within the campaign builds to a single day when voters go out to vote. However, with postal ballot papers being distributed mid-way through the campaign period, the single point of focus at the end of the campaign is lost and campaigners now speak about accommodating two peaks of effort within the formal campaign.

“Postal voters are nearly twice as likely to vote as other voters, postal voter turnouts of 70% are not unusual. In most of our wards up and down the country the postal vote is larger than the majority of the incumbent candidate. Whether you are defending or attacking, talking to postal voters is vital.

Yet more often than not, postal voters cast their vote before they have seen most of our election campaign! Check with the Council when postal votes are to be dispatched. This can and does vary and is likely to be in more than one tranche - and write it into your campaign calendar.

For most postal voters, their polling day is the day their postal votes arrive. Ignore this at your peril!”

(Emphasis in the original, extract from an ALDC email, also repeated in Liberal Democrat News 13 April 2007).

This email indicates that the main reason why a high postal vote is a challenge for campaigners is that a large percentage of postal voters tend to complete

their ballot as soon as it arrives. In their report on the North East referendum in 2004, Rallings and Thrasher noted,

“Over a quarter (26.3%) of all votes that would be cast had been registered by two weeks before the close of poll, and more than two-thirds (68.4%) by seven days before” (2005).

For the campaigner this means that they have a much reduced period in which to make the contacts that could influence a voter’s decision, and they now need to structure their campaigns to work to an initial peak when the ballots arrive in the letterbox and then continue through to the scheduled close of polling. A senior Labour councillor was involved in one of the all-postal pilots in 2003, and described what this meant for their campaign:

“First of all, the change in the timetable was the biggest thing for people to get their heads around; you had to bring everything forward – your main election leaflet, your election address, had to be out the week before the postal votes went out. We have since discovered through the research that the majority of people will fill them in within the first two days, so you have to remind people after that; this was the biggest change for us... basically what you are doing then is the sort of campaign that you used to do anyway, but you are also going around reminding people, knocking on peoples’ doors that you know have a postal vote.

Since that time, I think the higher level of postal votes have actually helped reinforce and strengthen the voting in an area where there is already a prevalence towards one party; it actually makes it stronger for them. So what happened for us was that it strengthened a lot of Conservative voters particularly in the rural area, but it also boosted turnout in the urban wards

for us. In the ward that is half of my County Council division, I think the figures previously had been 22% turnout, and in the year when the pilot took place, it went up to 36%.”

An experienced campaigner for a minor party described the changes in campaigning he had seen:

“In the good old-fashioned days, the postal vote was limited; you knew when it was going out, you knew who the postal voters were from an early stage and for 95% of the people it was traditional campaigning. Now, they are getting their ballot papers so early ... and you are thinking that this person is going to get his postal vote on the Saturday say, and polling day is nearly a fortnight away... You have got to get a lot of literature to a lot of places in front of that day, and it curtails your ability to speak to them during a long campaign.

After the postal votes are out, you're still trying to campaign in the knowledge that the people who have got a postal vote are more likely to vote than those who haven't; therefore, as you are going around you are thinking “am I actually wasting my time?” because half the people aren't going to vote anyway and half of those who are going to vote have already voted. [That means] in only one house in four have you got anything to play for. I think that really damages the campaign if you are a smaller party; it really does cut down on what you can do, and if you are in a larger constituency you are going to struggle to actually get your literature out in advance of postal voting.”

As noted above, the Liberal Democrats now talk about a campaign with ‘two polling days’; activists are strongly encouraged to repeat all the normal polling day activities described above for postal voters, timed for the days around when the ballots are sent out – this includes ‘Good Morning’ leaflets and knocking up on the door or by telephone, and if expenses permit, a mailed or hand-delivered ‘blue-ink’ letter to arrive on same day. The Director of the ALDC suggested that the same campaign messages would be relayed to all voters but would be delivered to different people at different times,

“It is no use peaking the day before polling day; you have got to peak as postal votes go out as well. All the evidence is that postal voters are far more likely to vote than other voters, and theoretically, if you can persuade ten known Lib Dem supporters to have postal votes, then you are going to get more votes, because eight of them will vote rather than six.”

He also suggested that the time when postal voters complete their ballots may change dependent on the type of election; in contrast to the low media profile of most local elections, during General Elections the early voting behaviour may be delayed because with “so much media around, some people may decide to wait and see what happens in the next week.” Qvortrup notes the same issue of timing,

“... there is a risk that they only pass verdict on part of the campaign. By voting early, the voter is not able to respond to political developments on the eve of polling day – as many voters did in Spain following the Madrid bombing” (2005:416).

In the trials of all-postal ballots, while the structure of the campaign had to be adjusted, from the perspective of the campaigner those adjustments applied to the whole electorate. However, in a mixed ballot, once the postal ballots have been sent out, the remainder of the campaign becomes much more complicated for campaigners because three different types of voter exist:

- Postal voters who have voted and returned their ballot. For them the election is over apart from an announcement of the result.
- Postal voters who have yet to vote, but can do so at any point. Additional information about candidates and a reminder to vote is appropriate.
- Ordinary voters who will vote on polling day and may still be unaware that the election is imminent.

The uncertainty that this introduces into the campaign was noted by all the activists interviewed. One Liberal Democrat expressed his frustration,

“When is polling day now? It could be any day from when the postal votes go out and whilst you are able to identify who has a postal vote from the registers, you have to assume a good proportion of those people are going to post their vote back the next day. To assume they are going to hang on to it for the remainder of the campaign, and therefore, they will also see the leaflet you are still planning to put through the letter box, is a dangerous assumption to make. You have to assume that they get their postal vote, and know who they are going to vote for. Your campaign has to be almost in its final week when the postal votes hit the deck.

After the postal votes have gone out you can pretty much stop counting those people ... there is no point in sending them the targeted mailings, so

all that has to be stripped out from any mailing list. It is good practice not to drop leaflets through their door when you are working their street because it is just going to irritate them. "I voted weeks ago, I don't want to read any more of your nonsense leaflets". From the party's perspective planning the logistics of campaign in a street where 20 or 30 people vote by post and the rest don't, it adds time into the process, time which is the crucial thing.

You certainly would never ignore people on the street if they come and talk to you, but from a practical perspective you have to assume that a number of these people have already voted, those votes have gone, so let's move on. The blunt reality of it is, in that five-week window you are trying to win an election by getting as many votes as possible. It doesn't matter about the outreach work you have done in the previous years, you want that to work for you, but the simple thing is you want one more vote than the other guy so you haven't got the time to be hanging round people who have already voted."

Another experienced Conservative campaigner and councillor, echoed those remarks,

"It doesn't make the job of the campaigners any easier and I don't think it necessarily aids democracy, because [voters] are losing the information that they should be getting; if they are getting it too late, it is absolutely useless, it will annoy them, as well as wasting our time. You are talking about trying to conduct two campaigns at the same time, you are looking at a postal polling day which is very early and you are looking at your

normal polling day. It disrupts our plan, the electors get in the way of the plan – it is like the old saying ‘hospitals work better if there are no patients!’”

These comments indicate that additional resources are needed to run a mixed campaign that involves dealing with high numbers of postal voters as well as those who will vote at the polling station. In this respect the move away from all-postal ballots appears to have created a situation in which only those parties who have sophisticated resources that can track and respond to the actions of individual voters can compete effectively; while this may be overstating actual practice, in this context are independent candidates and smaller parties put at a disadvantage that further marginalises them? Compared to the larger parties, they are more likely to be unable to manage a double-peaked campaign and one activist did suggest that some minor parties now simply run their campaigns on the assumption that no-one has voted, because they do not have capacity to distinguish the different types of voter, especially in the latter part of a campaign.

Whatever the size of the local activist base, identifying those voters who have already voted is the key problem that all the parties are still struggling to resolve; one activist did propose a practical solution:

“One thing I suggested but it wasn’t implemented was that people actually had a leaflet that they could put in their window if they had a postal vote and they had voted. It would say “I have voted Labour,” so they then

wouldn't be bothered by us, and they would also advertise for us. It wasn't done because we just didn't have the time to fit it in... it was an extra task, but we did think that would help us as well, and it would encourage other people to go out and vote. But we also thought there was a downside – we might provoke other people to think they had better go and vote Conservative! So, it probably would only work in our core areas.”

An issue that some interviewees raised as a serious concern was the timing of postal votes being sent out, and the disparity that can occur between published schedules from the Electoral Registration Officers and what actually happens:

“The districts don't help when they say the postal votes are going out on Friday and then send the bloody things out on Thursday. We were pretty pissed off – we were told postal votes were going to be sent out on Friday, and so they were going to hit the floor on Saturday; we had planned to blitz everywhere we could on the Saturday, and OK, they may get the postal vote before our leaflet arrives but they were going to get it at least the same day. That was how we'd planned it, then, one of our candidates phoned me up on the Friday night and said, “This hasn't worked too well, postal votes arrived this morning”. What can you do?”

The lack of certainty caused by the way the system operates remains an on-going concern, as the following illustrates,

“Remember Returning Officers often use contracting companies to issue their postal votes. They will have been promised a deadline for issuing postal votes, which is likely to be the one the council returning officer passes on to you. However the company will be eager to get the postal

votes issued before this deadline and will have given themselves some leeway to do so, so beware the issue of postal votes earlier than the council have promised!" (Liberal Democrat News, 13 April 2007).

The changes that higher levels of postal voting force also have consequences for other rules governing the conduct of campaigns. A London-based councillor noted,

"The regulations on election expenses have not yet caught up with the regulations on campaigning. If parties are naturally going to fall into this two peaked process, where you have essentially got two polling days, the beginning bit of the campaign [will be] stretched before the official kick off, and that effects the spending rules."

Higher levels of postal voting have changed the way local campaigning is conducted and is perhaps the most significant change that has occurred to effect campaigners in the latter part of the study period. The plans and conduct of the overall campaign are being altered, as the introduction of a second peak of activity earlier in the campaign has forced a greater emphasis on to the launch of a campaign and the initial days of the programme; once postal ballots have been distributed, the differences in status of voter have brought some confusion to what campaigners are aiming to do. In this respect the description of door-to-door canvassing and telephone contacts in the preceding chapters are simplistic because they have assumed that every voter will be going to the polling station; now, in the later stages of the campaign, a doorstep canvasser

could as easily meet a voter who needs knocking-up as someone who has already voted.

While the move to widespread use of all-postal ballots appears to have halted, the Electoral Commission is still considering other ways to encourage participation. Advance voting (also known as extended or early voting), that is, allowing voting to take place over several days before the formal close of polls has seen several pilots, for example in Camden in 2002, in ten authorities in 2006 and again five authorities in 2007. The summary report from Camden included the following paragraph:

“Impact on campaigns

There is no evidence that the pilot had any impact on campaigning. There was in general little or no activity in the vicinities of the early polling stations. Indeed, on one occasion one party campaign car passed by one of the early polling stations when it was open, exhorting voters by loudspeaker to vote on Thursday for their candidate, apparently oblivious to the early voting arrangements.”

There are no references at all in their reports on the more recent pilots (2006b, 2007a, 2007b) to the responses of the political parties and their candidates to extended voting periods and the consequences these have had on their campaigns. However, in the light of the above discussion it must be considered likely that the experience of local activists in the pilot areas was for a greater level of uncertainty in identifying who has voted and which voters still needed to be targeted.

The overarching hypothesis of this study is that parties have changed the way they conduct campaigns in response to technological innovation, institutional

change and differences in voter behaviour; Chapters Four, Five and Six have described the ways in which the actual practice of election campaigning has developed over the study period. Hypothesis One proposes that these changes have been incremental, as new techniques have been bolted on to the existing toolkit. The examination of the elements of campaigning contained in these chapters has shown that significant changes have occurred in the ways activists make contact with voters, whether this is using methods that rely on a face-to-face conversation or those that are less direct. While the expectation of many voters may still be for a candidate to knock on their door, willing to debate their policy commitments, a direct contact is now equally likely to be in the form of a telephone call, with the caller using a script, designed only to extract information about voting intention. Alongside less doorstep canvassing and greater use of the telephone, fewer public meetings, combined with a difference emphasis on Polling Day which has removed Tellers from Polling Stations, points to election campaigning becoming a far less visible activity.

As the evidence presented in Chapter Five indicates, it is clear that the ability to campaign at a distance, without the need to make face-to-face contact with voters, has become an important part of campaigning strategies, at all levels of election, although this does not mean campaigning has become impersonal. Initially, this was a danger most evident in General Elections when the major parties placed greater emphasis on their ability to access television and the national media to communicate their main messages, however, the advent of the new computer-based technologies has enabled new forms of personalised contact. Advances in literature production have allowed local parties to use generalised leaflets printed in full-colour and using a very high quality of graphic

design; additionally, segmentation techniques adapted from the marketing industry, mean that far more literature is now sent out that is personalised and targeted onto those voters considered most likely to respond positively. Equally important has been the effect that computerisation has had on the administration of campaigns, with the transformation of the record-keeping and data manipulation that local parties are now able to undertake, and the more efficient management of activists through email and mobile phones. Aside from the advances in computer technology, a significant driver for the incorporation of these techniques into the toolkit has been the decreasing numbers of people willing to contribute to campaigns, which has forced local parties to find more efficient methods to deliver their campaigns.

A number of themes from Chapter Two, the commercialisation and professionalisation of campaigns, the role of the media and non-partisan advisors, and alterations to the legislative framework in which campaigners work, particularly the introduction of on-demand postal voting have also influenced the shape of campaigns. Before concluding this study, the next chapter will use the model of campaigning that has been developed, to analyse what occurred in one election campaign that took place during the local elections in 2007.

Chapter Seven

The Local Government Elections 2007: observational participation

There are many options and choices that a campaigner has to make in the course of an election, which ensure that every campaign is a fresh challenge even for those with many years of experience. The model that has been constructed in this study has been, by definition, one that has reflected on general practice, and the preceding chapters have illustrated that the changes in campaigning techniques have occurred in an incremental and additive fashion. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the realities of campaign practice during a local election through this framework by considering what occurred during all-out elections in one district council, Restormel Borough Council, during the 2007 election, in which the author took an active role, both as a candidate and experienced campaigner within his local party.

The precedent for this approach was established by a number of studies of electoral behaviour in local elections that were conducted during the early 1970s: Bochel & Denver (1971) conducted an experiment in an unspecified ward in Dundee in the municipal election in May 1970; their aim was to explore the effects of canvassing on turnout within a safe Labour ward. They developed their hypotheses in two experiments the following year, in Craigie ward in Dundee and in Scotforth ward, Lancaster, and concluded that

“... election campaigns are not simply rituals or means of increasing expressive solidarity among party workers; they can have a decisive effect upon election results” (1972:244).

Pimlott was also interested in the effects of campaigning by local party organisations and examined the consequences of work done by Labour activists in two wards, Walkergate and Heaton in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1972 & 1973). Bochel, Denver and Pimlott all took participatory roles in the campaigns they later wrote about. Bruce & Lee (1982) carried out a detailed study of ward campaigns during the district elections of May 1978, focussing on three wards in Manchester, Salford and Stockport; their examination of the traditional aspects of campaigning – literature, canvassing and polling day activities – was conducted from a more detached perspective than these earlier studies, collecting their data from both conversations and formal questionnaires with party agents and candidates, and from a survey of electors conducted shortly before polling day. More recent studies that have considered the efficacy of local campaigns by David Denver and Gordon Hands and their colleagues (see 2004; also Pattie, Johnston & Fieldhouse 1995, and Whiteley & Seyd 1994 & 2003) have, by the nature of their argument, considered these effects at the aggregate level. Also of note are the Nuffield British General Election studies, which although the authors have been consistently sceptical of the contribution local campaigns make to the overall result, have included campaign profiles from a small selection of constituencies in their overall analyses. While these earlier studies used an experimental method to measure campaign intensity and its effects on turnout, concentrating on the outcome of the campaigns, this chapter will focus on the overall structure of this set of local campaigns, and the decisions that were taken both before and during the election period, which shaped the way they were delivered.

Restormel Borough Council is a 45 member council divided into 19 wards covering an area of mid-Cornwall that includes the south coast communities of Fowey and Mevagissey, St Austell and the China Clay mining area, and across to Newquay on the north coast. St Austell, which is the largest town in Cornwall, consists of four wards, the three-member wards of Mount Charles and Bethel, and the two-member wards of Poltair and Gover, with a combined electorate in the town of 16,704 in 2007. This analysis will examine the campaigns that were run by Liberal Democrat candidates in the Mount Charles and Gover wards, but will also note issues of relevance that occurred across the Borough and the discussions that took place within the local party as the campaign developed.

To appreciate the reasons for some of the decisions that were made in preparation for the campaign in April 2007, a brief summary of the status of the Liberal Democrats in Cornwall follows. In 2005, Liberal Democrat candidates won all five Cornish constituencies at the General Election, with three MPs retaining their seats, one seat held with a new MP, and one seat won from Labour; at the same time, the party took control of the County Council with a majority of 14 seats. In many ways, this can be seen as a pinnacle of Liberal Democrat representation across the county, building on the positive results of the 2003 district elections when the party stood 145 candidates and took 100 seats across the six local authorities (during 1993-95 the number of seats held at district and county level was slightly higher, but at that time only two parliamentary seats were held).

At the recommendation of the Boundary Commission, an additional sixth constituency in the county has been proposed, due to be created at the next

General Election. While most of the electorate remain unaware of the Boundary Review and its consequences, the major political parties in the county all adjusted their internal structures in advance of the start of campaigning for the 2007 local elections; the existing five Liberal Democrat constituency organisations were reshaped at the end of 2006 into six, a reorganisation that also acted as the first step of preparations for the General Election, which speculation at that time suggested would be called within twelve months. The new constituency in mid-Cornwall is coterminous with the boundaries of the Borough Council, with the exception of one ward, separating Truro from St Austell and bringing in Newquay from North Cornwall and Par and Fowey from South East Cornwall (see Appendix 7.1-3 for explanatory maps). Strong branch committees in the two main population centres of St Austell and Newquay are dominant in the new organisation.

The result of the 2003 district election for Restormel was a council containing 22 Liberal Democrats, 12 Independents, 10 Conservatives and 1 member of Mebyon Kernow; being one short of an overall majority the Liberal Democrats agreed to form an all-party administration. A long-serving Independent councillor died shortly after the election and a by-election in July returned a Liberal Democrat, notionally giving them control; however, as the leading group, the Liberal Democrats decided that it was politically beneficial to maintain the all-party agreement throughout the life of the council.

In the previous chapter the benefit was noted of the material advantages that large numbers of members in elected office at the different levels of government in an area can provide. The direct consequence of contributions made from

members' allowances has been that the infrastructure of the Cornish Liberal Democrat campaign 'machine' has grown significantly in this period, in terms of both equipment and personnel. Between 2003 and 2007 all five constituencies had a full-time organiser, with their funding split between the local organisations and the MPs; an additional organiser was also appointed to coordinate county-wide activities. Equipment such as computers, photocopiers and a Risograph duplicator were all available very quickly for the new constituency organisation; perhaps the biggest challenge for the campaign in Restormel was a shortage of helpers and volunteers, as the majority of the active party members in the old constituency lived in the Truro area. Additionally, a number of the more active members in both Newquay and St Austell had been elected as members of the council in 2003, and although a successful campaign in this respect, their commitments as councillors led to a decline in year-round campaigning from 2003-2007. Discussions the author has taken part in with other councillors indicate that this is a common problem elsewhere in the country. Local parties face a real challenge to maintain their campaigning strength when keen activists get elected and their time commitments change; this is an inevitable consequence of the declining base of membership.

Planning for the 2007 campaign started in mid-2006 with the constituency organisations agreeing the format of questions used when interviewing and approving potential candidates. Party rules state that every individual seeking to stand for the party must go through a formal approval interview, regardless of whether they are an existing councillor or newcomer. Approval panels started in late September with the stated aim that everyone intending to stand would know which ward they were standing for by the start of February 2007; this plan was

conceived in order that newcomers and those councillors who wanted to move seats, could start canvassing and raising their profile through pre-election leaflets, well before the official start of the campaign. In reality, identifying potential candidates for some seats continued into the new year, and the author was still involved sitting on interview panels in the last week of March, with nominations closing on the 4th April.

Candidates

At the close of nominations in the Mount Charles ward, the three seats were contested by five people, three representing the Liberal Democrats, one Conservative and one for Labour. The three Liberal Democrat candidates were all serving councillors; Jones, elected for the first time in 2003, became Leader of the Council in 2005 and went into the campaign holding that office. Polmounter had first been elected to the ward in 1999 standing as a Conservative, she was re-elected in 2003 as an Independent, and in 2007 joined the Liberal Democrats; she too, was a member of the council's Cabinet. Rawlins was also a serving member of the council, but wanted to move from the ward he had represented in the previous council term, as since 2001, he had been the County Councillor for the Mount Charles electoral division. The Cabinet responsibilities held by Jones and Polmounter on Restormel became an issue for their campaigning, as the demands of their executive roles continued although reduced because of the election period, and they were unable to concentrate solely on their attempts to be re-elected. The remaining candidates nominated for Mount Charles were Derry, the Labour & Cooperative

candidate, who had stood in the ward at several previous elections, at both the district and county level, and Arthur standing for the Conservatives. It was noted in an earlier chapter, that if a candidate lives outside of the area he or she is contesting, it can be seen as an impediment by some voters. Of those standing in this ward, two of the Liberal Democrats and the Labour candidate were residents in the ward and the third Liberal Democrat lived less than 50 metres outside the ward boundary; Arthur's address was some four miles away, which gave an early indication that he may have been standing as a paper candidate.

In Gover ward, the incumbent Independent Heyward stood for re-election, but her Liberal Democrat colleague chose to not seek re-election. The Liberal Democrats nominated an existing councillor, Mathews (moving from Mount Charles ward) and a newcomer, Ralph, who although new to Cornwall had previously been an experienced councillor and campaigner for the party in Chester. They were challenged by two Conservatives, Mason and Bennett, who had both lost their seats on the council in 2003 and were eager to get back (neither had previously stood in this ward). A sixth candidate, Bradford, was one of two Green candidates standing in the Borough. Again, both Conservative candidates gave home addresses outside the ward but within the town, while the other four all lived within the ward's boundaries.

Across the Borough a total of 90 candidates stood for the 45 seats available, with 34 councillors standing again for their seats.

- In the discussion about paper candidates in the previous chapter, note was made of the signals sent to rival parties by the number of candidates a party is able stand; in this case, with 24 candidates standing across the

Borough, compared to 15 in 2003, the Conservatives created a strong impression of a party bidding for a greater influence in the Council's decision-making, if not enough to challenge for outright control.

In the north of the Borough, the party's stronger area, they were unable find a candidate to contest the seat of a retiring Conservative member in one ward, but fielded 10 candidates for 14 seats, the same number as 2003. South of the Borough, they put up one candidate in each ward, including all those that the Liberal Democrats would normally expect to do well in except for the ward which they challenged more strongly, that is, Gover.

- The Liberal Democrats stood a team of 37 candidates (two more than 2003) across 18 of the 19 wards; 16 were councillors standing for re-election, and nine others were people already serving on Parish and Town councils in their locality.

The late appointment of some candidates noted above, is an indication that the party struggled to find enough people willing to stand. The rationale of putting up as many candidates as possible is driven by the need to portray a strong local organisation; for both the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives, who will be the main contenders in the race to win control of the new constituency, this election campaign was conducted with preparations for the General Election in mind. Three wards had Liberal Democrat standing as paper candidates, two who were standing against well-known incumbent Independents, and one in a ward with an established Conservative, in which the aim was explicitly to 'keep him occupied,' the same strategy that Copus suggests (page 240).

- While Labour has never been a large electoral force in Cornwall, their capacity to contest elections appeared to have virtually collapsed with only 3 candidates in Restormel, compared to 11 in 2003; a picture that was repeated elsewhere in the county.
- 19 independents stood across the Borough, of whom 12 were existing councillors and two were endeavouring to return to the council.
- Of the minor parties, the Greens put up two candidates and Mebyon Kernow three, including one in a Newquay ward. In conversation with the author after the election, their party leader admitted that Newquay is not “a natural area for MK.” The majority of residents in the town are people who have moved into Cornwall, “from England, but we had someone local willing to stand and do the work, and I wasn’t going to stop him raising our profile.”

The BNP attracted some comment in the local media, with two candidates in the county, one of whom stood in St Austell, in Bethel ward. The presence of this candidate caused a considerable debate within the Liberal Democrat team on how best to campaign in the ward; the conclusion reached was that he was not a credible threat and was unlikely to attract much support. Protests in the media about the values of the BNP were considered likely only to draw greater attention to his presence and thus be counter-productive; criticism of his participation would be kept until after the campaign had ended. Not everyone in the local party was happy with this strategy, preferring to emphasise the illiberal nature of the BNP’s policies whenever possible, but the final decision was left to the three ward

candidates, one of whom suggested, "When canvassing I am using their standing as an argument for people to vote."

The Campaign

The 19 wards in the Borough fall naturally into three groups:

Area 1: the nine wards that cover St Austell, Par and the south coast (21 seats),

Area 2: the five wards covering Newquay and the north coast (12 seats), and

Area 3: the five wards in the middle which represent the China Clay mining area (12 seats).

The Liberal Democrat campaign was organised along these lines, with the constituency's organiser working with the candidates in each area, together with a sub-organiser appointed for both the Clay area and for Newquay; the organiser also acted as Election Agent for all the party's candidates in the Borough, partly to simplify the administrative burden and to make dealing with Restormel's ERO straightforward. Throughout the campaign a weekly meeting was held for the candidates in each area. Its purpose was to allow the candidates to feedback specific issues of concern, to note what their competitors were doing, and to discuss common points that were being raised from canvassing; it also allowed the organiser to ensure that all aspects of the individual campaigns were going as planned. The individual candidates, working as a team within their ward, took responsibility for generating issues to include in their leaflets and for planning leaflet delivery and canvassing, but all other aspects of their campaigns were coordinated by the organiser. He arranged the design and printing of leaflets, produced canvass sheets and

processed the data that was subsequently gathered; coordinating arrangements in this way allowed one campaign model to be used across the Borough, but had the flexibility to let the ward teams adapt the material to their own circumstances.

The Liberal Democrat campaign relied heavily on the distribution of literature, although the recommendations in the ALDC standard model, of preparing the ground with monthly Focus leaflets from January to March was not followed. Certainly, in Mount Charles ward, the candidates' strategy was highly dependent on the leaflets they distributed, which is perhaps the biggest difference with the campaign conducted in Gover ward. A 'Flying Start' leaflet was planned for every ward, with distribution to be completed within the first week from the close of nominations on 4th April. It was an A3-sized handbill, with the contents of the back common for all the wards in Areas 1 & 3, and a different back for Area 2 wards. Planning the first leaflet in this way allowed an economy of scale to be achieved and the ability to contract with a local printer for the production of 40,000 copies of the reverse side, together with an orange panel printed across the top of the front side, allowing a two colour effect when finished. The 'fronts' were then produced using the Risograph in the constituency office, all designed with a similar layout but unique to each ward, introducing the candidates with photographs and brief biography.

The Conservatives also produced an A3-sized leaflet, using a similar template layout method, with the front specific to a ward and the reverse containing more generalised material; however, their leaflet was in full colour on both sides and included a reference to their national campaign in the form of a photograph and

quote from David Cameron. They did appear to be more selective about which ward campaigns they used leaflets in, which may have been related to a practical decision about marshalling their limited resource of deliverers. In Mount Charles ward the supposition that Arthur was not actively challenging the seat was confirmed by the lack of a leaflet publicising his candidacy appearing anywhere in the ward. The Labour candidate distributed a single colour A4 leaflet, with a very simple layout; it included a single head and shoulders portrait photograph, but did not use any other graphics or the party's logo. One voter commented that the impression of Derry's leaflet was that he did not wish to be associated with his national party and so deliberately down-played his partisan affiliation.

The Liberal Democrats were the only party in any ward to produce a second leaflet, timed for the middle of the campaign, with the majority delivered prior to the distribution of postal ballots, which were sent out around 20th April. This was an A4-sized leaflet, printed in black on yellow paper-stock, and in Mount Charles the back page was mainly taken up with a personal letter from Matthew Taylor MP, reassuring voters of his continued efforts on their behalf and supporting the ward candidates; this was included in response to a significant number of comments received on the doors that, following his announcement that he would stand down at the next General Election, voters thought he had already retired and was no longer functioning as their MP. This letter was included on several other ward leaflets within his constituency, while the two other MPs also took the opportunity to endorse the candidates in their areas. A range of issues were covered on the front responding to the major themes that were emerging from canvassing. For Mount Charles and Gover wards the

primary focus was comment on the delayed regeneration of St Austell town centre, the over-riding issue that voters raised on the doors. Other issues that were raised included concerns over the impact of job losses resulting from a major restructure announced in July 2006 by Imerys, the major employer in the china clay industry and scheduled for implementation later in 2007.

In addition to the two leaflets, window posters and calling cards (used when canvassing) were produced for each ward team. For four wards, Gover, Fowey & Tywardreath in the south and Rialton and Gannel in Newquay, target letters from the relevant local MP were also arranged. Aimed at definite and probable Liberal Democrat supporters and all identified Labour supporters, based on canvass data collected up to 20th April, they were produced by the Regional campaigns organiser. The letters were printed on full colour letterheads, put into envelopes by local volunteers and then hand-delivered over the last weekend before polling day. In Chapter Five the use of Blue Ink letters was described; in every ward these letters were produced in two batches, firstly for postal voters and then for a selection of other voters dependent on the number of letters candidates considered deliverable. In Mount Charles, the ward with the highest level of voters registered for postal ballots (13.8% of the electorate), an effort was made to ensure 'Blue' letters got to as many of this number, as possible. The three candidates divided the list of postal voters equally between them, hand-wrote the envelopes and then personally delivered the letters. An extra letter was produced for one street in which Jones and Polmounter had been attempting to resolve a long standing issue. Every house on the street received a personally addressed letter from the candidates expressing their collective frustration that the council had not taken the action needed. The effectiveness

of the primary purpose of this letter, that is the generation of votes, has to be doubted when examining the marked register after the election – of those without postal votes, only two houses in the street voted, one of which was the home of a Liberal Democrat councillor who represents another ward in the area.

Canvass cards were prepared by the organiser for every ward before the start of the campaign, and included any data that had been collected from earlier elections and was available; however, a change of personnel in the constituency office after the 2005 elections, together with a change of computers and the loss of data in the intervening period, meant that this information was fairly limited and needed treating with some caution. There was therefore, something of a gap between the ideal model of canvassing and the reality; this was compounded further by another factor. As already noted, the three Liberal Democrat candidates in Mount Charles were all serving councillors, two with continuing executive responsibilities on Restormel and the third with a senior role on the County Council. This meant that the time that each was able to commit to doorstep canvassing was limited and rarely coincided with the others. They were also delivering most of the literature themselves; each candidate, had one or two additional people they could call on to help, but this was limited to only one leaflet delivery by each person. Ensuring that the first leaflet was delivered promptly at the start of the campaign meant striking a balance between using this help, which could not be guaranteed to make a quick delivery, and the candidates taking on extra work to be in no doubt that their leaflets got to voters on time. Given that Polmounter was standing as a Liberal Democrat in this election, (she topped the poll in 1999 ahead of two Liberal Democrats, and pushed the third Liberal Democrat into

fourth place in 2003) Mount Charles was considered a safe Liberal Democrat ward, especially noting the lack of activity from the opposing candidates; the view of the candidates was therefore that, providing the leaflets were all delivered on time, there was less pressure on ensuring other aspects of the campaign being used in other wards were repeated here.

In Chapter Five an example was given of the way in which the calculation of votes can shape campaigning decisions (page 186); a similar calculation was used in discussing the best tactics for this campaign:

- Mount Charles Ward Electorate = 4,900 (rounded up)
- Turnout in 2003 & 1999 = 25% = 1225 votes
- Winning Vote share in 2003 = 45.9%
- Therefore 562 votes needed to win – for the sake of the discussion this was rounded up to 600

The canvassing that the three Liberal Democrats did was therefore targeted into those areas considered to be the most productive in encouraging votes. One large estate with a high proportion of elderly voters, many with postal votes, was identified as the priority area; however, an estimated 20-25% of the ward was canvassed during the campaign. A small amount of telephone canvassing was also done by Polmounter, who targeted residential homes with coded-entry that made personal visits difficult; an estimated 220 voters in the ward fell into this category. Only one Liberal Democrat was identified as doing any extensive telephone canvassing, a member in Newquay who is both District and County councillor; he is well-known in his ward and routinely keeps in touch with his residents with newsletters. Over a series of campaigns he has developed his own technique for telephoning, using the contacts he has established outside campaigning; when he was asked if he used a script to ensure that the

information he was gathering was consistent his response was laughter, implying he saw no need to use one; he embodies the utilitarian approach that many experienced councillors adopt when seeking re-election, which is based on knowing what they need to do to win again and then doing just that, and nothing more.

The canvassing that was done in Mount Charles, did confirm that there was no evidence of Conservative activity in the ward, with neither doorstep nor telephone canvassing apparently being done for Arthur (a random selection of voters, when they were canvassed, were asked if they had received any contact); the Labour candidate, who in previous campaigns had been seen doing a lot of doorstep canvassing, was not seen at all. In summary, in Mount Charles the campaign was largely conducted through literature distribution and although some doorstep canvassing was completed by the Liberal Democrat candidates, its main purpose was to raise awareness of the forthcoming election rather than data collection. The author's experience of canvassing in this election, partly given his high profile role on the council, was that most voters were happy to talk, but their sole interest was to ask questions concerning the redevelopment of the town centre; voters appeared to be unconcerned about 'political' issues, and simply wanted to be reassured that action was being taken to see the building programme completed quickly. The levels of frustration felt by voters about this issue has to be seen in the context that it was a major issue in the 2003 campaign, when some of the major buildings in the redevelopment area had already been demolished, and while

the entire site had been cleared in the intervening period, little other progress was visible.

In contrast, in Gover, the two Conservative candidates were observed visiting homes and holding impromptu street meetings throughout the campaign. Ralph, the Liberal Democrat candidate who had come from Chester, wanted to run what is described as the 'full ALDC' campaign. He put much greater emphasis on the canvass to provide the voter identification data discussed in previous chapters and had started a systematic effort knocking on doors to collect this as soon as he was confirmed as a candidate at the end of February; he also installed a copy of the EARS software onto his home computer in order to input his canvass returns at the end of each day of the main campaign. This gave him a constant assessment of his campaign, using the EARS variation of the Richmond Formula discussed in Chapter Four. All other canvass returns from across Area 1 & 3 were returned to the central office for input into the main constituency database in order to produce a single set of knock up lists immediately before polling day; canvassing in Newquay was processed by one of their campaign team in the town. Ralph's use of data to predict the possible result in his ward (which confirmed his impression from speaking to voters that the Conservatives were leading the race) was not replicated in ward campaigns elsewhere in the south of the Borough. His colleague Mathews had work commitments that meant that he was unavailable for large parts of the campaign, and with a more *laissez faire* attitude, relied on personal contacts and his reputation in the local community. In contrast, Ralph, a relative newcomer to the ward and so unknown, was able to commit unlimited time to the campaign being self-employed, and he was also helped by his wife, who

stood as a paper candidate elsewhere in the town, and other family members; once the level of activity of the two Conservative candidates was appreciated additional help was also arranged from within the constituency and at least two visits from the MP were also arranged.

There was very limited evidence of e-campaigning from any candidates in the campaign. The Conservative's main campaign leaflet directed voters to www.cornwallconservatives.com, the permanent home website maintained for all the party's candidates in the county. Email addresses were specially set-up for each Liberal Democrat candidate and were included in the contact details on all their literature, in the format: tim.jones@staustell-libdems.org.uk; a link to the local party's website was also mentioned. In making enquiries after the election, the author was unable to identify any Liberal Democrat candidates who had been contacted by voters using these email addresses during the campaign. However, as noted in Chapter Five, email is an extremely useful tool for the coordination of candidates and campaigners, and it was used to the full during the campaign, both in terms of practical arrangements, for example, getting copy for leaflets agreed and proofed, and it also allowed an extended discussions of certain issues, for example, the debate about the BNP candidate in St Austell was conducted largely by email, without causing a distraction when the candidates met together. The two Liberal Democrats in Poltair ward set up their own campaign website, the only candidates in the Borough to do this, using the domain name www.vote07.org. This unusual address highlights one peculiarity of internet campaigning – www.vote04.org was used by Howard Dean's team, early in his campaign in the 2004 US Democratic party's primary race. A very small difference in these two addresses marks a huge difference in the scale of

the campaigns; no real indication of the type of election the site is promoting can be gained from the address. The Poltair team posted video clips of the two candidates visiting key sites in the town and their ward, and of them discussing in more detail issues that they had included in their campaign leaflets.

Two local weekly newspapers cover the Borough, each producing a separate edition for the north and south coasts. They reported the campaigns in similar ways, featuring photos and brief descriptions of all the candidates at the start of the campaign. The Liberal Democrats issued a series of press releases some of which were picked up by both newspapers, and by the two local commercial radio stations, but not by the BBC. The first commented on the number of candidates the party was standing, and highlighted the weakness of Labour in the county. Throughout the campaign, daily emails were sent out from the Campaigns Unit at Cowley Street, which included several that had draft press releases attached. One that focussed on the programme of rural Post Office closures was identified by the author as relevant to the campaigns that were being run by the candidates in the Clay area. The result was a press release, sent in the names of the candidates in three wards who, in their second leaflet, were raising the issue of the continued pressures on local services in their villages (Post Office, branch railway station); a similar email and draft press release from the Campaigns Unit, on the subject of mobile phone masts, was forwarded to the Bethel team, who were working with a small group protesting the siting of a mast close to their homes. The 11 candidates standing in the Newquay wards worked closely together and out of their weekly campaign

meetings drafted a series of letters which they hoped would be printed in the Letter's page of their newspapers, at least one of which was successful.

The relationship that exists between the national party headquarters and local constituency parties has been a theme throughout this study (Denver & Hands 2004; Fisher, *et al.* 2006a) . As noted in this commentary the Campaigns Unit at Cowley Street, the Regional Campaigns Organiser and the three local MPs all provided helpful support to ward candidates. However, the email material sent by the Campaigns Unit was not used as extensively as it could have been and the author was the only serving councillor who noted its contents regularly. Most of the candidates remained focussed on issues arising in their ward and took little notice of the national campaign; indeed, the only issue that was noted that could be considered as 'outside' Restormel, was some limited discussion about the proposal to reorganise local government in Cornwall and create a Unitary Council. This can also be seen as a reflection of the differences in motivation that existed among the 37 candidates standing as Liberal Democrats; less than half of them would describe themselves as 'political' and had not actively engaged with the national party by, for instance, attending national or regional party conferences. In their campaigning, their emphasis tended to be about their personal suitability to represent their community, rather than on overtly partisan issues; this may be a consequence of the unusual political climate in Cornwall in which many voters still regard the Independent politician as preferable, and still believe that partisan politics is inappropriate except in General Election campaigns.

Postal voting

The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) at Restormel faced two issues concerning postal votes in preparing for this election. New legislation came into force in January 2007, which required every voter with a permanent postal vote to supply a fresh copy of their signature and their date of birth as personal identifiers, in an attempt to address the perceived susceptibility of the existing system to fraud; the process of re-registration started in early January and once completed forms were returned, a voter's details and signature were then scanned into the council's election database. The request for voters to renew their details had a significant effect on the number of registered postal votes, reducing them from 11,000 at the start of 2007 to just under 8,000 at the election, 10.4% of the total electorate; given the low rates of voting at local elections, officers expect the number of postal votes to return again at least to the previous level in the run-up to the next General Election. The new regulations also required electoral officers to check a minimum of 20% of the personal identifiers on the statements that are returned with completed postal ballot papers, against those held on the council's records; there was no previous requirement to perform this check, but the expectation is that by the next General Election a complete check of all postal votes will be required. Restormel's senior ERO later confirmed that approximately two thirds of councils who held elections in May performed 100% checks, using new software that allowed an automated checking process to be used; unfortunately, problems with many of these new systems were discovered and some counts took longer than planned as a result. Restormel opted to only check the mandatory 20% and did this manually as the postal votes were opened.

The involvement of the political parties in the registration of voters for postal ballots was noted in the previous chapter. Since 2000 the local Liberal Democrat party has discussed on several occasions with Restormel's ERO what he considered to be acceptable behaviour, especially during elections. As part of the information packs that all candidates received upon nomination, the ERO included a 'Code of Conduct ... on the handling of postal vote applications and postal ballot papers.' It emphasised that

“there is a need to ensure that traditional standards of political propriety observed at polling stations are carried through to the postal voting context.”

The detailed advice that followed about encouraging voters to apply for a postal vote was interpreted by the Liberal Democrats into a decision not to create a bespoke application form; canvassers would only distribute the council's own form, together with a freepost return envelope, addressed to the ERO. This has been done for all election campaigns since 2003.

The level of registrations for postal votes varies significantly between the wards; (all figures shown are taken from figures released by the ERO at the end of March, although re-registrations and new applications were being processed up until the 18th April). At the start of the campaign, Mount Charles ward had the largest number of postal voters in Restormel, with 673 voters registered (13.8%), over 100 more than the next highest ward (Rialton in Newquay); two of the 'Clay' wards, St Stephen and Rock, had the lowest postal vote levels, with 8.6% and 8.00% respectively. The difference in levels of postal vote registrations may be partly explained by examining the demographic profile of the wards; certainly, both Mount Charles and Rialton have high levels of those

groups regarded as more likely to use a postal vote: 23% of people in Mount Charles live in 'lone pensioner households' and 25% are identified as having long-term limiting illnesses; for comparison, the Cornish averages are 16% and 21% respectively (figures sourced from the *LINC* website). From past experience of campaigning in the ward, both these factors have shaped the approach the candidates have adopted to canvassing, in that calling during the daytime is more effective and after 6.00 pm to be avoided. Rialton scores highly on the MOSAIC classification of 'Small Town Seniors' with 21% of residents in this category. Postal ballots were sent out on Friday 20th April, thirteen days before the main polling day; in Mount Charles a combined canvass and postal knock up was arranged for that weekend, concentrating in the area already identified as the most profitable area for activity. However, the postal knock up was not focussed on identified Liberal Democrat supporters, but on all those voters issued with a ballot.

For Polling Day itself, a Good Morning leaflet was distributed by most Liberal Democrat candidates, with the exception of those wards with paper candidates. The quantity used varied dependent on the resources available to each candidate, which in Mount Charles meant about 800 were used; again, no targeting of identified supporters was attempted, with the delivery focussed around the immediate areas surrounding three of the four polling stations in the ward. Some wards used an alternative 'Eve of poll' leaflet, choosing to distribute it on the evening prior to the vote; in both Mount Charles and Gover distribution started about 6.00 am. During the day, further knock up leaflets were used; two types were used in Mount Charles, both were A5 single sided printed on different coloured paper, so two could be delivered to the same house at

different points in the day; in practice, however, in Mount Charles ward and noting previous low turnout, these leaflets were used as a general reminder to vote rather than targeted at known Liberal Democrats. The first contained a "Don't forget to vote" message and was used until the early afternoon, when the second version, saying "Time is running out" was used; about five hundred copies were distributed through the course of the day.

As with much of the campaign, polling day was a very low key affair in Mount Charles and no telling at any of the polling stations was attempted by any of the candidates. Concerns about access to polling stations for voters with restricted mobility, and the regulations contained in the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1995, have limited the number of public spaces that can now be used for polling stations. The five polling districts in Mount Charles ward were served by three stations in the ward and one in the neighbouring Gover ward; there was some initial concern that this would be a disincentive for the voters having to go out of the ward, together with questions about limited parking. A bad traffic accident closed the road outside this station for part of the day, much to the consternation of Ralph who suggested that it prevented voters from the polling districts in his ward also using this station from accessing it, but given the overall levels of turnout, none of these concerns were possible to confirm. A small number of lifts were provided for elderly voters during the course of the day, most of which had been prearranged and the result of offers made when talking to people on their doorstep; a very few were also made from phone calls to the Liberal Democrats' office during the day.

As noted above, the campaign by the Liberal Democrats in Mount Charles mainly depended on the distribution of literature; with nearly 2,700 homes in the ward, most of which are arranged in residential estates, it was comparatively easy, if time-consuming, to cover the whole ward twice with the main leaflets, and to then reinforce these with blue letters and the material distributed on polling day.

The results

In Mount Charles ward, all three Liberal Democrat candidates were successful, with Polmounter topping the poll, with a 46% share of the vote (Table 7.1). From an electorate of 4,878, 1,371 votes were cast, giving a turnout of 28.1%, an increase of 2.3% on the 2003 vote; (turnout across the Borough averaged 33.1%). The results did bear out the electoral calculation that was made during the course of the campaign, which set a minimum of 562 votes needed to ensure winning the seat; whether the outcome justifies the style of campaign is another matter, particularly if the Conservative candidate had taken a more active role.

Table 7.1: Election results for the Mount Charles ward, 3 May 2007

Name	Party	Vote	% Share	Vote 2003
Arthur	Con	543	35.0	–
Derry	Lab	287	18.6	225
Jones	LD	680	–	570
Polmounter	LD	712	46.0	511
Rawlins	LD	596	–	481

From subsequent analysis of the Marked Register, the following can be noted:

- 885 votes were cast at the polling stations,
- Therefore, 486 valid postal votes were received; 35.5% of the total votes cast.
- The total number of postal votes shown on the marked register is 687, and therefore, 70.7% postal voters used their vote.

In Gover ward, 1,202 votes were cast from an electorate of 3,348, giving a turnout of 35.9%, an increase of 1.9% from 2003. While Heyward increased her share of the vote by 1.2%, she was pushed into third place and lost her seat (Table 7.2). The two Liberal Democrats took 4th and 5th places, a disappointing result given that the party topped the poll in 2003, with their second candidate then in 3rd place, 49 votes behind Heyward; after the election Ralph attributed his poor showing to lack of preparation, and the absence of Focus leaflets and other 'normal' Liberal Democrat campaigning in the ward during 2006.

Table 7.2: Election results for Gover ward, 3 May 2007

Name	Party	Vote	% Share
Bennett	Con	467	-
Bradford	Green	123	8.9
Heyward	Ind	419	30.3
Mason	Con	478	34.6
Mathews	LD	362	26.2
Ralph	LD	290	-

Analysis of the Marked Register for Gover showed a similar pattern of postal votes compared to Mount Charles:

- 911 votes were made at the polling station, indicating that 291 postal votes were also used.
- Postal votes comprised 24.2% of the total votes cast.
- With 369 postal ballots issued, 78.9% were used; in both wards these figures reinforce the significance of this group of voters within elections with low levels of turnout.

One of the benefits derived from paper candidates noted in the previous chapter, was that their results can be used to provide an indication of the latent vote for a party. In Mount Charles, with no leaflet distributed and no other activity detected during the campaign, Arthur attracted a 35% share of the vote, and was 53 votes short of taking the third seat, (he also failed to make an appearance at the count). Elsewhere, the Conservatives derived some satisfaction from the fact that in four other wards in the Borough, two in the South and two in Newquay, they came within 50 votes of taking seats. Overall, although they only made a net gain of one seat, their share of the vote increased by nearly 8.0%, while the Liberal Democrats share reduced by 5.4%, with the loss of two seats.

The ideal model of election campaigning that has been described in this study accords with much of the material that is delivered in campaigning training

sessions at the major party conferences. Within this 'perfect' campaign, it is easy to imagine a candidate who commits themselves to a minimum of five or six weeks of intense activity, building to the climax of polling day. The reality is often different, although that is not to suggest that many campaigners do not work very long hours endeavouring to get their candidate elected. However, the limitations of the resources that are available, dictate what is achievable and most campaigners will adjust their activities to match reality. In a set of campaigns such as those that have been described, the expectation of a low turnout can mean that campaigners conclude that there is little point in making great effort; as a result, voters are unaware of the campaign and few bother to vote, resulting in a low-turnout – a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even in Gover, in which all the candidates were working hard to persuade voters to support them, less than 4 in 10 did so. Ironically, the highest turnout in Restormel, 49.3% occurred in a single seat ward in which the Liberal Democrats put up a paper candidate, and made no attempt to challenge the incumbent, who was the only other candidate.

Changing the mechanics of casting a ballot fails to adequately address the issues that underlie the decline of participation in the political process; the author, both during the course of this election and in his other campaigning experience has regularly spoken to people, whose response to the invitation to vote has been, "What's the point, voting will not make any difference," "I can't be bothered," "You are all the same, you are only in it for what you can get;" he has yet to meet a potential voter who has complained that it was the inconvenience involved in making a vote that was stopping them participating.

This chapter has considered a set of local campaigns, which can be described as 'very ordinary'; they are likely to be similar to the great majority of campaigns that took place before 3rd May 2007. Among the Liberal Democrat campaigners in Restormel, the most active were those who saw this campaign as the means to achieve ends other than that of gaining elected office on this council; this campaign was seen as a step in preparing for the next election and throughout this campaign the shadow of the General Election loomed large. Regardless of their personal result, after a brief pause to physically recharge themselves, the planning for the long campaign into the next election started again.

The Liberal Democrat's campaign in Restormel, particularly in the south of the Borough was lacklustre, and their result was more a consequence of the weakness of the opposition parties, than because of a clear, election winning effort; it was very different from the ideal model described in the preceding chapters, or that recommended by the ALDC. In contrast, in the neighbouring council of Caradon, in south east Cornwall, the party ran a much stronger campaign, deliberately targeting their effort onto a number of seats they considered winnable, and as a result took control of the council. However, the metaphor of the campaigner's toolkit has been helpful to understand the variations in the campaigns examined. While only the tools that were deemed necessary were used in Mount Charles, it can be seen that a strategy that relies on doing just enough to satisfy the electoral mathematics contains a high risk, and misreading the mood of the electorate, or misjudging the strength of a competitor's campaign can result in the loss of seats.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions: The Future of Election Campaigning

The British electorate's attitude to elections, and the campaigns that precede them, presents a curious paradox for political scientists and other commentators. Throughout 2008, headlines in the news media have been dominated by events connected with elections in Zimbabwe, Kenya and Russia, and the long build-up to the US Presidential Election. The reports from correspondents covering these elections act as reminder that in some parts of the world people still die, or are imprisoned, for the right to express their preference on who governs them. It appears that the principle of holding elections is still valued by a significant part of the British population, and that they remain concerned that any election is conducted in a way that is seen to be free, fair and open, regardless of the cultural distinctiveness of the setting. However, the campaigns that attract the greatest attention tend to be those for the pre-eminent position of political power within a nation-state; elections to other, lower offices of governmental responsibility appear to hold less fascination, as the continuing high levels of non-participation indicate, and hence the paradox.

Cognisant of this wider context, this study has sought to provide a snapshot of electioneering at the beginning of the twenty-first century, particularly as it is practiced in lower order elections in Britain. An attempt has been made to trace the development of campaign techniques and to describe election campaigning in its entirety, in order to appreciate the motivations of those who take part. This

final chapter will reflect on the key changes that have taken place in the period under review, and will consider the contribution this study can make to academic understanding of the campaigning process. The evidence presented and the trends identified will be assessed against the hypotheses established in the introductory chapter. Issues concerning the methodological approach adopted for this research project will also be considered.

The primary focus of Chapter Two was an examination of the ways in which academics have sought to explain the conduct and development of election campaigns in the second half of the Twentieth century. This review identified three over-arching themes that can be seen as the major drivers for change in electioneering during this period, encapsulated in the general hypothesis:

The ways in which political parties campaign during elections undergo continual modification, as they respond to changes in individual voter behaviour, institutional and structural developments and the introduction of new technologies.

The increased numbers of uncommitted or 'floating' voters mean that political parties have the opportunity to appeal to a greater pool of potential supporters; at the same time, however, the memberships of all the major parties have declined sharply, with the resultant shrinkage in the number of activists that can be called upon to exploit these new opportunities. Parties have reorganised themselves internally and responded to external pressures and in consequence the shape and nature of electioneering has altered. As illustrated, professional advisers have gained an increasingly prominent role in both the design and delivery of campaigns; this has led to an increase in the quantity of instructions

issued from national party headquarters to local parties, coordinating the themes and appearance of their campaigns. Equally, external pressures have come as the regulations governing elections have changed, most recently as a result of the introduction of on-demand postal voting, forcing parties to substantially revise the structure of their campaign timetables. The third main theme considers the impact of technological advance. Desk-top computers have revolutionised record-keeping and the accessibility to high-quality design and print for literature production, while television, digital media and the Internet have all created new opportunities for politicians to interact with their electorate.

Central to the argument in Chapter Two was consideration of models that attempt to organize the development of campaigning into three phases: the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern (Norris 2002); stages of development that have also been described as “the Newspaper Age, the Television Age, and the Digital Age” (Farrell, *et al.* 2001). These models attempt to systematise the organisational development of the national parties, changes in the dominant media channels at different points in the study period, and changes in the regulation of elections. This study has sought to examine election campaigns from the perspective of its practitioners and what has become apparent is that the partisan activists who deliver the campaigns ‘on the ground’ are routinely involved in elections for every level of government. In this respect, the three-phase models have proven inadequate to capture the full diversity of campaigning practice as the models concentrate on a single layer of electoral activity and do not reflect the reality of the interaction of elections at different levels of governance. This study has proposed an alternative framework to more comprehensively understand the choices campaigners make, using the

metaphor of a 'toolbox', containing a variety of techniques which can be selected dependent on the level of campaign and the specific demands of the electoral environment.

The first of the six subsidiary hypotheses that explore the ideas contained within the general hypothesis, proposes that during each successive electoral cycle political parties attempt to improve their campaign methodologies based on a review of their own and their competitors' achievements (and failures) at the last election; this iterative process allows a continual updating of the toolkit, in which tried and tested methods are not jettisoned from the campaigning model, but new ideas or tactics can be added to the range of available options. Over time, some methods fall into disuse as alternatives become more popular, but overall, the variety of tools available to the campaigner has increased over the study period. However, some of the more recent additions to the toolkit are significantly more sophisticated than earlier techniques, requiring greater levels of expertise within campaign teams to make full use of them, for example, in the appropriate application of the intelligence provided by segmentation techniques. The consequence is that some new tools require trained party employees to use them, limiting their use to those campaigns which warrant the additional effort and expense.

The use of the toolkit metaphor also illustrates a basic truth that most campaigners are keenly aware of: there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all, 'perfect' campaign strategy. Every campaign is different, presenting a fresh set of challenges that must be understood from the outset, and the choice of tactics

that strategists and organisers adopt should always reflect this initial assessment. The toolkit approach provides a selection of methods that can be put together in light of the prevailing political circumstances and the level of contestation for a seat; it also enables activists to approach specific sections of the electorate them in ways that will maximize their support. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the options and combination of tactics that are available can produce very different campaigns in neighbouring wards, even where the candidates share the same resources and political affiliation.

The flexibility that this 'pick-and-mix' model permits also accommodates one of the most important factors that shape individual campaigns, that is, the amount of resources, both financial and human, that are available. Campaigners tend to take a very utilitarian approach to their activities during an election period; their decisions are taken with the purpose of directing their resources into maximising the number of votes their candidate will receive, with a single-minded focus on only those activities that will produce positive support. As one of the experienced campaigners noted about this focus in his own activities,

“... [the voters] don't care two hoots that you are presenting ... a manifesto ... as part of a platform that is philosophically sound and academically coherent... I don't think this is of any concern to the voters – they want to know what you are going to do about the issues that they are worried about, and be able to have a belief that you are going to do [something about them]. The platform that I try to present is one of action and delivery.”

The second hypothesis suggests that as a consequence of the capabilities now available via modern communication technologies, many of the techniques that have been introduced in recent campaigns place less emphasis on the need for face-to-face communication with electors. These techniques offer the potential for 'campaigning at a distance', that is, methods that can be coordinated and delivered from a central, organising locus, without the candidate necessarily meeting the voter, but which enable highly individualised contacts to be made. The introduction of direct mail marketing techniques, alongside targeted telephone-calling, email- and internet-based applications, allows mass communication messages to appear to be personally presented. The discussion about the incorporation of marketing methodologies into the software packages used by the major parties, using tools like MOSAIC to segment and group voters according their lifestyle preferences, indicates that this methodology is becoming an increasingly important part of campaigning. The critical advantage this gives parties is that they are able to maintain apparently high levels of activity, while being dependent on a much smaller numbers of activists to deliver the remainder of the campaign.

However, a direct consequence of the ability to campaign at a distance has been that, for many electors, active campaigning has disappeared from their streets. In the description of modern campaigning that this study has constructed several methods familiar to a voter in the late 1950s are now rarely seen: very few, if any, public meetings are held, much less doorstep canvassing is carried out, far fewer posters are displayed, and on polling day loudspeaker cars are not used and no telling is rarely arranged at the polling stations (Fisher & Denver 2008) – with such low visibility campaigns, voters can

be forgiven if they are not aware that an election is imminent and they assume that the parties are not interested in their vote. An equal contribution to the reduced visibility of campaigns has been the greater levels of the targeting of both seats and voters, in which the main parties concentrate their efforts onto only those voters who are deemed most likely to give their support. Again, this appears to present a contradiction: while the reality is that in many electoral divisions there is little physical presence of candidates and their campaigns to be observed, the language used by leading politicians when defending their party's electoral performance invariably remains couched in terms of the traditional techniques. While the images of John Major in 1997 standing on a wooden fruit box to address crowds in town squares, or of Michael Howard in 2005 running from door to door canvassing may make good images for television reportage, the campaigner who spends long hours photocopying leaflets, or putting letters into envelopes is perhaps a more accurate, if less photogenic, reflection of the modern campaign.

The third hypothesis considers the infrastructure used to deliver campaigns, in the context of national and local parties working with limited resources, and the tensions that can arise about who decides on the allocation of those resources. This is especially pertinent when noting that campaigns became increasingly costly as more sophisticated methods were introduced that were reliant on commercial expertise; for instance, as television was recognised as a critical tool for the national parties to communicate their messages to mass audiences, the introduction of advisers and consultants experienced in the media shifted

the emphasis of campaign planning away from local parties and towards small groups working with headquarters staff and senior members of the parliamentary parties.

The tensions that arise around the decision-making processes of campaigns, such as who sets the priorities within a campaign, or around the identification and selection of candidates, or about which seats will be targeted, can also be used as an indicator of how the mainstream parties have developed over the study period. There is a complex, dynamic interaction between several of the trends that have been identified: declining memberships have weakened local parties and their ability to deliver thorough campaigns; the increase in the number of professional politicians, together with the introduction of commercial expertise into many aspects of campaigning, has strengthened the role of the headquarters of parties; a major decline in the numbers of people willing to volunteer for political activities has forced parties to consider giving responsibility for campaign organisation to full-time, trained employees, when their funding allows (Fisher & Denver 2008; Fisher, *et al.* 2006a). It is not clear that a single trend has triggered change in the others, a domino effect; rather, each trend has had a reinforcing effect on the whole, leading to a move away from the volunteer-led, local campaigns typical of the pre-modern period, to strategies that rely upon technologically sophisticated solutions largely delivered by party employees.

The new technologies that have been introduced, especially those that make use of the personal computer, also raise questions about the types of tool still to be found in the toolbox. In considering the tools that campaigners now use,

has technology simply allowed the established methods to be performed more efficiently and effectively, or have completely new techniques been introduced? The evidence presented here indicates that computerisation has made a significant difference for campaigners at every level, and that both effects can be seen. Data about voter identification, gathered from canvassing records is no longer used for just polling day activities; while the processes used for knocking up have been made simpler, canvassing data can now be used to inform other parts of both the present and future campaigns, as it is combined with other data, and filtering techniques such as MOSAIC are then applied to better identify and target activities onto potential supporters. The relative ease with which well-designed literature can be produced is, again, a direct consequence of the computer revolution, allowing local parties greater flexibility in their literature campaigns. However, it is the Internet that now opens up the most opportunities for the campaigner, as Chapter Five indicated. Traditional activities that had fallen into disuse, for instance, the public meeting, are being reshaped into online chats and bulletin boards, which also allow a more direct conversation between candidate and individual voters. Additionally, websites allow detailed presentations about a party's entire policy platform, enhancing the amount of information available. While printed literature has increasingly been shaped and presented in a style which assumes that most readers will only consider it for a few seconds before throwing it in the rubbish bin, web-based options can accommodate both the voter who is only looking for the headlines and those wanting more detail. Use of blogs and social networking sites like Facebook, allow for increased personal interactions between the candidate and the voter; however, the common practice appears to be

discussion of issues which are to do with personality, and to comment reactively to national events, rather than to debate matters of policy. These are contacts that will be established over a longer period than just the formal campaign and so the permanent campaign has become a reality for many campaigners. In many ways the distinctiveness of the concentrated effort within an election period has become blurred by these longer-term patterns of behaviour. However, the essential challenge that internet-based campaigning presents has also been noted – this type of campaigning is fundamentally different, in that, the initiative to make the first move is now with voter, and not the candidate. Traditional methods have been based upon the campaigner taking the message to the voter; in contrast, many e-campaigning techniques, accessing party websites, online surveys, and taking part in social networking sites, now require the voter to make the initial contact themselves.

The study has sought to comprehend the sources of campaign innovations and how they are subsequently disseminated to the wider party. As the headquarters of the main political parties have grown in influence, it is clear that new techniques and ideas will now most frequently be fed into the parties' central Campaigns Units, and then distributed out through training sessions and updates to their full-time campaign workers, and then onto their local parties. In terms of enabling the dissemination of new thinking to the activists who can make most use of this information, the introduction of email and dedicated websites has certainly been one of the major advances in the last decade. The use of the Internet has also aided the development of a greater coordination in campaigning tactics, for example, with a single source for suggested artwork

and templates for letters, encouraging a greater uniformity in the appearance of campaigns.

Hypothesis Four suggests that while a set of campaign techniques may be effective in one electoral environment, the same combination may not achieve equivalent results across the full range of elections. The regulatory framework at each level of election is an important variable in understanding the decisions parties make about their campaigns. By viewing campaigning from the perspective of the activists, one contribution this thesis can make to the wider study of elections is to highlight the interaction that takes place between electoral levels. In recognising that many activists are continually involved in planning and delivering campaigns at different levels, an area that requires further investigation is, given their familiarity with particular tools, how much do they reassess those tools' efficacy for each contest, or are techniques simply used because they are familiar? A further subject of future study will be the impact on campaigns of the coincidence of the elections, for instance in 2009 local elections in England being moved to the same day as elections to the European Parliament, potentially mixing two very different electoral settings.

Much of the focus of academic study has been on developments in the campaigning strategies of the mainstream parties; however, as the fifth subsidiary hypothesis notes, the impact of developments in campaigning on the minor parties and independent candidates must also be considered. The

limitations they work within suggest that they will be unable to access many of these new techniques, and are likely to be put at a greater electoral disadvantage than candidates for the main parties. The evidence drawn from the interviews and other data, suggests that in elections for local government, candidates who represent minor parties or who stand as Independents are still able to compete and attract some support. Although they may be unable to produce large quantities of literature, or employ an agency to provide telephone canvassing services, with enough dedicated volunteers, minor party candidates can still seriously challenge and win seats at the local authority level. However, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the financial resources that a candidate has available to put into a campaign are the most significant indicator of likely success.

The genesis of this research project started with a question about the impact of postal voting on campaigning; at that time, the Government were moving towards the introduction of all-postal ballots for most elections, and activists were beginning to seriously consider how they would run their General Election campaigns in these circumstances. Although there were no problems with the conduct of the all-postal ballot for the North East Regional Assembly referendum in 2004, this can be seen as the point at which the further extension of this proposal stalled; however, the preparatory moves the Government had already made, particularly in introducing on-demand, permanent postal vote registration were retained. Higher levels of postal voting at all levels of election have shifted the emphasis of a campaign away from a

single polling day, and are forcing parties to introduce a second peak of activity, around the point that postal ballots are distributed. The final hypothesis suggests that in addition to changing the structure of campaigns, if levels of postal voting continue to rise without the introduction of all-postal ballots, parties will also need to introduce more sophisticated techniques, in order to allow them to track the behaviour of a mixed electorate in which some voters have already cast their ballot, and to target those who are yet to vote.

The evidence presented by the interviewed campaigners suggests that a two-peaked campaign is now recognisable in most elections. Postal voters are acknowledged to be more likely to vote and tend to complete their ballot soon after receiving it, and so, additional efforts are now made to ensure this section of the electorate receives literature and where possible other contacts, before the day ballots are distributed. This is creating a significant pressure on campaign timetables, particularly for parties with small numbers of volunteers able to deliver leaflets in the first week or so of a campaign, and literature distribution is taking priority over canvassing and voter identification. As noted in Chapter Six, the major concern campaigners have about postal voting is the uncertainty about the status of voters that emerges in the later stages of the campaign – their task is complicated when some voters have cast their ballots, and others need reminding to use their vote, while yet others will vote on polling day and so need persuasion to do so.

Methodological issues

The evidence used to support the arguments that have been put forward in this study has been based largely upon the observations of practising campaigners and their reflections upon their own experiences, combined with the participant observations of the author, and his selection from primary and secondary sources. Therefore, although some quantitative data from the surveys of candidates in recent local elections has also been used, much of the argument in this study rests on subjective views and not on experimentally verifiable data. While this form of qualitative research is familiar in other areas of the social sciences, quantitative techniques have been, and continue to be preferred within the field of electoral studies. The disadvantages of this research method can be seen when questions are raised about verification, measuring the robustness of the arguments posited, and about the interpretation of the evidence. It is therefore important to provide some justification for the choice of this approach and to explain why this study can contribute to the wider study of campaigning.

Firstly, using this research method has allowed the experiences of campaigners to be heard in more detail than survey data tends to permit; a number of the issues that currently concern activists, for example, the consequences of high postal vote usage have not been identified in this detail in other literature. The approach adopted for this research project has been an attempt to add to the overall understanding of election campaigning, by allowing campaigners to discuss in more detail what they do and their motivations, in order to build up a complete portrait of their activities. While much of the product of quantitative

analysis focuses on the outcome of elections, this research model has also sought to complement that data by exploring the processes that the individuals who become candidates go through.

Much of the understanding that political campaigners hold about what they do has been developed on the basis of anecdotal evidence, often put together in a haphazard fashion; many campaigners appear to work on the assumption that as the outcome they were working towards was positive, their candidate was elected or their vote share increased, those elements of the toolkit that were used must be effective. While academically, it is important to query the veracity of many of the claims made about campaigning methods, the dominant paradigm among campaigners appears to be “If we won, the end justifies the means, and if we lost, we need to work harder and do more of the same; if we can find smarter ways we will, if we can afford them”. There remains a reluctance to completely review existing methodologies, or to make radical changes, partly because of the risks inherent in choosing an untried method; electoral ground could be recklessly conceded to competitors if a new approach failed. It could also be assumed that candidates for the minor parties would be prepared to take greater risks with innovations, because they are more desperate to breakthrough from their secondary position. However, what has been shown is that it is the major parties that remain the trend-setters, primarily because major innovations tend to be financially costly, and the larger parties are the only ones with sufficient resources to purchase the necessary software or expertise.

A further concern about the approach adopted was that the political allegiance of the author would distort the interpretation of the interviews. Impartiality of analysis allows the conclusions of the study to be more generally applicable; in this case, while the evidence has relied largely upon Liberal Democrat practice, the shared experience of all the interviewees has allowed conclusions to be drawn that are valid regardless of the partisan setting. Equally, the problem of geography was acknowledged at the start, in the bias towards Cornwall in the current experience of the interviewees. Given its peripheral location and rurality, Cornwall could be seen as untypical and not connected with the major innovations; however, the contributors' experiences have covered a sufficiently varied range of electoral settings that a reasonably accurate assessment of local election campaigning has been achieved.

The future of election campaigning

The development of election campaigning has been shown to be an iterative process that is still continuing; indeed, since the beginning of the new millennium, some areas are changing very quickly and it is clear that the drivers of change will continue to exert their influence on the political parties and their activists. In concluding, a number of suggestions can be made about the future direction of its development.

Over the study period, there has been a significant multiplication in the number of elections held. In addition to the devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the introduction of several different organisational structures

for local government, including directly-elected mayors, has produced a multi-layered system, added to which, the variety of voting systems used in them have further complicated the process, both for aspiring politicians and their electorates. While the concept of the elections at the level of the English regions appears to have been abandoned, proposals for an increase in the number of directly-elected mayors, and even direct elections for Executive members of some local authorities, suggest that the number of elections in which the British voter will be asked to express their preferences, will multiply still further. If this is indeed what occurs, the models that academics use to understand election campaigns need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the interactions between campaigners working across even more levels of governance. In this respect, the toolkit model may prove to be useful addition in allowing the perspective of the campaigner to be adequately captured.

Distance campaigning techniques will continue to be refined, and new ways of making contact with voters that do not require face-to-face contact will certainly be introduced. Noting the way that unsolicited, 'cold-calling' communications are generally seen as a negative imposition, techniques that allow some form of continuing interaction to be established will inevitably be preferred. The common guideline used for direct mail campaigns is that a regular contact at least four times each year is necessary to be certain that the recipient recognises the sender and will attend to their message. This suggests that permanent campaigning tactics will increasingly be adopted by campaigners, who will seek to build up their databases of potential electors and maintain contact with them regardless of where in the electoral cycle they are; the formal election campaigns therefore, may become more focused on motivating voters

to act on these longer-term relationship, rather than the election being an occasion when the candidate makes contact for the first time. As noted in preceding chapters, the costs of the infrastructure needed to deliver permanent campaigning have significant implications for minor parties and Independents.

There remains a significant risk inherent in abandoning those techniques that allowed a contact to be made on the voters' doorstep; the visible presence of an 'old-fashioned' campaign not only allowed a link between the party and individual voters, but also gave communities a wider awareness of citizens engaged in the political process, concerning themselves with local issues. The further development of local television channels and radio stations may be one way this is achieved; these new opportunities offer a plurality of approaches to the electorate which local parties may be able to embrace, if they have the necessary skills among their membership. However, many of these methods put the onus of initiative onto the voter, and while some voters will be sufficiently engaged to seek out the information, the challenge remains on how to motivate those who ignore the prompts that are provided or are apathetic to the electoral process. The change from voters as an audience to whom a campaign is presented, to voter/consumers who go into the electoral marketplace and choose the products they want, may be the most significant challenge facing all campaigners and could lead to another paradigmatic shift in campaigning methodologies.

The proposal by some senior party activists and academics that, in the light of the significant structural changes that have already occurred in the mainstream parties, there will, in future, be a much reduced role for local expressions of the

parties, is contentious. The trend towards distance campaigns has reinforced the role of coordination taken up by the central organisations of parties, and is reducing the responsibilities carried by the local expressions of the party. As campaign expertise, innovation and resources are increasingly focused at the centre, the infrastructure needed to deliver campaigns across different levels of election is changing. Traditionally, the critical resource has been located with local activists, delivering leaflets, knocking on doors, and maintaining an awareness of the political mood of the electorate in their area; as the activist base continues to reduce, the ability of national parties to conduct effective campaigns at every level may perhaps be challenged, as the examples of infrastructure collapse noted in Chapter Six illustrate.

However the role the mainstream parties have in local government must not be overlooked; their local parties make a notable contribution to election campaigns that result in hundreds of elected representatives across the country, controlling authorities that have significant budgets; in some cases members of these councils exercise greater control over issues that effect the day-to-day experience of their electorate than many MPs. To discount the role of local activists, and to predict the demise of local parties, fails to adequately appreciate how important they remain to the electoral process at all levels. The ability to conduct campaigns at a distance, detached from the geography of the seat being contested, allows parties to centralise their main resources and to draw more upon the wider resources of their national membership than previously was the case. Although most attention has been focussed on the decline of party memberships, the technological advances that allow the greater involvement of the dispersed membership of parties is a positive sign;

developments in the use of email and telephone techniques allow activists based anywhere in the country to contribute to campaigns remotely. As this facility is developed, it will enable the main parties to involve their members more directly and more frequently in their campaigns, which in addition to expanding the resources they can apply to a particular campaign, whether a by-election or part of the normal election cycle, means that some members may stay more active, over a longer period.

This study has attempted to make a contribution to the current understanding of election campaigning and has highlighted a number of areas of relevance to the discipline:

- While the academic study of elections tends to focus on only one area of governance, for instance, concentrating on first-order elections to Parliament while overlooking elections to local authorities, the perspective of campaigners, on the ground, is different. For many activists in the course of one Parliamentary cycle, they will be involved in several elections, and if in area where the authority elects by thirds, are likely to never be more than twelve months away from the next election. This reality has both beneficial and detrimental consequences – positively, campaigners become used to being on a permanent campaign and so structure the local party accordingly, but conversely they constantly face the challenge of finding sufficient resources to adequately contest each election. The additional opportunities that technological advances have introduced, for example, for remote

telephone canvassing, have extended the range of elections activists can participate in.

- Existing academic studies that have sought to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of constituency campaigns have not recognised the added dimension that a party's involvement in multiple governance layers brings to their campaigns. They have not fully appreciated the consequences for campaigns of infrastructure resources that can be financed from MPs' or Councillors' allowances, or of having individuals involved who have successfully competed at other levels in the locality.
- In examining campaigns from the viewpoint of the practitioners, the image of a toolkit of techniques, from which campaigners can make different selections dependent on the electoral environment, has proved more flexible to encompass the reality of modern campaigning, than alternative models of campaign practice.

In conclusion, a number of issues have been raised that offer opportunities for further study; additionally, two specific areas should be noted that require the closer attention of policy-makers.

- In focussing attention onto the reality that many activists are continually involved in planning and delivering campaigns at many different levels of governance, further investigation is needed to explore how they make use of their toolkit. Given their familiarity with particular tools, how much do they reassess those tools' efficacy for each contest, or are techniques simply used because they are familiar?

- Further study would be beneficial to better understand the impact on campaigning of the coincidence of the elections. For instance, it is likely that in 2009 most local elections in England will be moved to the same day as elections to the European Parliament, potentially mixing two very different electoral settings. How will campaigners manage this electoral challenge and will certain techniques, for example, widespread use of targeted direct mail, favour some parties over others?
- While considerable attention has been given in this study to the campaigning that goes on at the local government level, the presence of directly elected mayors has not been fully explored in the literature, with the exception of the Mayoral campaign in London. Elections for named individuals to specific posts is common in elections in the USA and elsewhere but is a relatively new phenomenon in the UK. Consideration of the mayoral campaigns may contribute to a better understanding of second order elections.

The primary focus of the study has been on the candidates and activists, but questions concerning other participants have not been considered. For instance, in terms of the electorate, does weakened partisan identification reduce the voters' sensitivity to campaigning activity, especially at the level of second order elections? From the perspective of the voter, tried and tested campaigning methods may be favoured because they are familiar, even if they are no longer considered the most productive for the campaigner. However, as the newer techniques become more widely used will some voters be confused by a plethora of campaign messages arriving through multiple, and perhaps unexpected, channels of communication, and disengage further? Will a 'digital

divide' emerge with established techniques used to reach older voters, and the newer methods targeted at younger voters? If the latter occurs, this may prove beneficial in improving participation rates, as the new tools reach and stimulate voters who have yet to take part in elections.

The study has identified at least two issues of concern that require the attention of the regulatory authorities; firstly, the consequences of allowing increased levels of on-demand postal balloting while also not moving to all-postal ballot elections, and secondly, the robustness of the expenses rules surrounding dispersed, or remote telephone canvassing.

The uncertainty that is created after postal ballots have been distributed should be a matter of concern for legislators. If the proportion of the electorate with postal ballots continues to rise, campaigners will be forced to further structure their campaigns to ensure that they have reached a large proportion of the electorate before the postal ballot date, thus moving away from a primary focal point of Polling Day. The consequences of this move will be that pressure to extend the formal campaign period is likely to grow, and the number of infringements of the expenditure rules will increase as parties start their campaigning before the formal beginning of a campaign period.

This is a situation which clearly favours parties with sufficient resources to actively track postal voters and target them before the rest of the electorate.

This implies that candidates representing minority interests will be increasingly

marginalised which must be seen as detrimental to the health of the political system.

The other area of concern surrounds the use of party members to conduct telephone canvassing who do not live close to the campaign area. While the ability for activists to participate in canvassing many miles away from their homes can be seen as a positive move, the regulatory system was designed on the assumption that those campaigning live in, or close to, the contested area, and expenditure could be clearly identified and declared. Again, this innovation favours those parties with a large dispersed membership, and minor parties and independent candidates could consider that they are being disadvantaged, and that this technique contravenes the principle of fair elections.

Election campaigning has changed over the study period, as political parties of all sizes adapted their strategies to the changing electoral environment and it is clear that they will continue to do so, as they respond to the drivers of change. While those parties with adequate financial and human resources will continue to innovate and introduce new techniques to their toolkit, the ability of minor parties to continue to compete as equals is less certain.

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Table A3.1: A Summary of the Principle Acts of Parliament and Statutory Instruments, introduced 1997 – 2006.

Year	Title
1998	Scotland Act
1998	Government of Wales Act
1998	Northern Ireland Act
1998	Representation of the Political Parties Act
1999	Greater London Authority Act
1999	European Parliamentary Elections Act
2000	Representation of the People Act
2000	Local Government Act
2000	Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act
2001	Representation of the People (Variation of limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order
2001	Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations
2002	Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act
2002	Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act
2004	European Parliamentary and Local Elections (Pilots) Act
2006	Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations
2006	Local Elections (Principal Areas) Rules (No. 2) 2006 (including Schedules)
2006	Electoral Administration Act
2006	Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act
2006	Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act
2006	Northern Ireland Act

Sources: Watt (2006); Electoral Commission

Table A3.2a: Model Election Timetable – General Election

General Election	
Day 0	Proclamation summoning new Parliament/ dissolution of old Parliament/ issue of writ
Day 1	Receipt of writ
Day 3	Last day for publication of notice of election (4pm)
Day 6	Last day for delivery of nomination papers/ withdrawals of candidature/ appointment of election agents (4pm)
	Statement of persons nominated published at close of time for making objections to nomination papers (5 pm on Day 6) or as soon afterwards as any objections are disposed of
	Last day for receipt of absent voting applications
	Last day to apply to register to vote
Day 15	Last day for appointment of polling and counting agents
Day 17	Polling Day (7 am – 10 pm)
	Last day to apply for a replacement for spoilt or lost postal ballot papers (5pm)

Note: For the purposes of the timetable, Saturday, Sunday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Good Friday, a bank holiday and any day appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning are disregarded.

Source: HOC 07/31 p8

Table A3.2b: Model Election Timetable, Local Authority Elections

Local Authority Elections	
Day 1	Latest date for publication of notice of election
Day 7	Delivery of nomination papers (noon)
Day 9	Publication of statement of persons nominated (noon)
Day 10	Delivery of notices of withdrawals of candidature (noon) Last day for appointment of election agents (noon)
Day 15	Deadline for applications to be included on the register of electors to be used at the election. Last day for requests for a new postal vote or to change or cancel an existing postal vote or proxy appointment (5pm).
Day 20	Last day for publication of notice of poll. Last day for new applications to vote by proxy (except for medical emergencies).
Day 25	Polling Day (7am – 10pm) Last day to issue replacements for spoilt or lost postal ballot papers (5pm) Last day for new applications to vote by proxy on grounds of a medical emergency (5pm) Last day to make alterations to the register to correct a clerical error or to implement a court (registration appeal) decision (9pm)

Source: HOC 07/31 p19-20

(...continued)

Voting Systems currently used in the UK and the choices voters make

Election to:	Voting System	Choice for Voter
Local Councils <i>in Northern Ireland</i>	Single Transferable Vote Multi-member districts	Rank candidates in preference order 1, 2, 3...
Unitary Authorities <i>in Scotland</i> (from May 2007)	Single Transferable Vote Multi-member districts	Rank candidates in preference order 1, 2, 3...
European Parliament <i>In England, Scotland, Wales</i>	Closed Party List Multi-member districts 5 year fixed term	1 vote: Select preferred Political Party
European Parliament <i>In Northern Ireland</i>	Single Transferable Vote Multi-member districts	Rank candidates in preference order 1, 2, 3...

Table A5.1: Previous campaign experience and a candidate's decision to use a campaign leaflet, by local authority type; Local Elections Surveys 2006 & 2007

Had you previously stood as a candidate?			Did you produce a campaign leaflet?			
			2006		2007	
			No	Yes	No	Yes
Metropolitan Borough	No	Count	8	26	11	13
		%	23.50%	76.50%	45.80%	54.20%
	Yes	Count	37	108	35	69
		%	25.50%	74.50%	33.70%	66.30%
District	No	Count	35	97	46	223
		%	26.50%	73.50%	17.10%	82.90%
	Yes	Count	83	278	88	489
		%	23.00%	77.00%	15.30%	84.70%
Unitary	No	Count	9	28	26	46
		%	24.30%	75.70%	36.10%	63.90%
	Yes	Count	12	43	31	122
		%	21.80%	78.20%	20.30%	79.70%
London Borough	No	Count	51	113		
		%	31.10%	66.80%		
	Yes	Count	73	147		
		%	32.30%	67.70%		

Table A5.2: Mosaic Public Sector Groups and Types

Mosaic classifies households in the United Kingdom by locating them to one of 61 types and 11 groups

Group	Group Description	Type	Type Description
A	Career professionals living in sought-after locations	A01	Financially successful people living in smart flats in cosmopolitan inner city locations
		A02	Highly educated senior professionals, many working in the media, politics and law
		A03	Successful managers living in very large houses in outer suburban locations
		A04	Financially secure couples, many close to retirement, living in sought-after suburbs
		A05	Senior professionals and managers living in the suburbs of major regional centres
		A06	Successful, high-earning couples with new jobs in areas of growing high-tech employment
		A07	Well paid executives living in individually-designed homes in rural environments
B	Younger families living in newer homes	B08	Families and singles living in developments built since 2001
		B09	Well-qualified couples typically starting a family on a recently built private estate
		B10	Financially better off families living in relatively spacious modern private estates
		B11	Dual income families on intermediate incomes living on modern estates
		B12	Middle income families with children living in estates of modern private homes
		B13	First generation owner-occupiers, many with large amounts of consumer debt
		B14	Military personnel living in purpose-built accommodation
C	Older families living in suburbia	C15	Senior white collar workers, many on the verge of a financially secure retirement
		C16	Low density private estates, now with self-reliant couples approaching retirement
		C17	Small business proprietors living in low density estates in smaller communities
		C18	Inter-war suburbs, many with less strong cohesion than they originally had
		C19	Attractive older suburbs, typically occupied by families but with increasing singles and childless couples
		C20	Suburbs sought-after by the more successful members of the Asian community
D	Close-knit, inner city and manufacturing town communities	D21	Mixed communities of urban residents living in well-built, early 20th century housing
		D22	Comfortably off manual workers living in spacious but inexpensive private houses
		D23	Owners of affordable terraces built to house 19th century heavy industrial workers
		D24	Low income families living in cramped Victorian terraced housing in inner city locations
		D25	Centres of small market towns and resorts containing many hostels and refuges
		D26	Communities of lowly paid factory workers, many of them of South Asian descent
		D27	Multi-cultural inner city terraces attracting second generation settlers from diverse communities
E	Educated, young, single people living in areas of transient populations	E28	Neighbourhoods with transient singles living in multiply occupied large old houses
		E29	Economically successful singles, many living in privately rented inner city flats
		E30	Young professionals and their families who have 'gentrified' terraces in pre-1914 suburbs
		E31	Well-educated singles and childless couples colonising inner areas of provincial cities
		E32	Singles and childless couples in small units in newly-built private estates
		E33	Older neighbourhoods increasingly taken over by short term student renters
		E34	Halls of residence and other buildings occupied mostly by students

continued ...

F	People living in social housing with uncertain employment in deprived areas	F35	Young people renting hard to let social housing, often in disadvantaged inner city locations
		F36	High density social housing, mostly in inner London, with high levels of diversity
		F37	Young families living in upper floors of social housing
		F38	Singles, childless couples and older people living in high rise social housing
		F39	Older people living in crowded apartments in high density social housing
		F40	Older tenements of small private flats often occupied by highly disadvantaged individuals
G	Low income families living in estate-based social housing	G41	Families, many single parents, in deprived social housing on the edge of regional centres
		G42	Families with school age children living in very large social housing estates on the outskirts of provincial cities
		G43	Older people, many in poor health from work in heavy industry, in low rise social housing
H	Upwardly mobile families living in homes bought from social landlords	H44	Manual workers, many close to retirement, in low rise houses in ex-manufacturing towns
		H45	Older couples, mostly in small towns, who now own houses once rented from the council
		H46	Residents in 1930s and 1950s council estates, typically in London, now mostly owner-occupiers
		H47	Social housing, typically in 'new towns', with good job opportunities for the poorly qualified
I	Older people living in social housing with high care needs	I48	Older people living in small council and housing association flats
		I49	Low income older couples renting low rise social housing in industrial regions
		I50	Older people receiving care in homes or sheltered accommodation
J	Independent older people with relatively active lifestyles	J51	Very elderly people, many financially secure, living in privately-owned retirement flats
		J52	Better off older people, singles and childless couples in developments of private flats
		J53	Financially secure and physically active older people, many retired to semi-rural locations
		J54	Older couples, independent but on limited incomes, living in bungalows by the sea
		J55	Older people preferring to live in familiar surroundings in small market towns
		J56	Neighbourhoods with retired people and transient singles working in the holiday industry
K	People living in rural areas far from urbanisation	K57	Communities of retired people and second homers in areas of high environmental quality
		K58	Well off commuters and retired people living in attractive country villages
		K59	Country people living in still agriculturally active villages, mostly in lowland locations
		K60	Smallholders and self-employed farmers, living beyond the reach of urban commuters
		K61	Low income farmers struggling on thin soils in isolated upland locations

Source: Mosaic Public Sector 2007

Table A6.1: Respondents who identified themselves as paper candidates, Local Elections Survey 2007

Party	No. of survey respondents	%	Gave paper candidacy as reason for standing	% of party's candidates
Conservative	978	34.5%	48	4.9%
Labour	634	22.4%	73	11.5%
LD	638	22.5%	68	10.7%
Green	143	5.0%	42	29.4%
UKIP	86	3.0%	13	15.1%
BNP	77	2.7%	4	5.2%
Other	281	9.9%	5	1.9%
N =	2837		253	

FIGURES

Figure A4.1: Email encouraging distance telephone canvassing

Can you make ONE phone call for me?

Nigel Bakhai - Liberal Democrats [nigel@ealinglibdems.org.uk]

To: ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Dear Cllr Jones

Many people have already done so much to help my election campaign in Ealing Southall.

But I am emailing you directly now to ask if you can make ONE phone call to help in our final push for Thursday.

The phone number I'd like you to ring before 9:30pm on Wednesday night is: ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

The people on the electoral register at that phone number are: ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

All you need say is:

I am calling on behalf of Nigel Bakhai and the local Liberal Democrats about the by-election that is coming up on Thursday. Can I ask, which party you will be supporting in the election?

Once you have rung them, please record the results of your call at your unique page:

<http://login.libdems.org.uk/e/N1OYGJ21080>

(If clicking on the above link doesn't work, you can copy and paste it into your web browser instead).

Don't worry if you have never phoned someone for a campaign before. It's just a short and simple question - but collectively all this extra data will give my campaign a huge boost. If someone has a particular issue or query they wish to raise, you can give them my HQ contact details - 020 8574 8826 or nigel@ealinglibdems.org.uk

With very best wishes

Nigel

Ealing Southall by-election candidate

PS As you can imagine, I'm working flat out between now and 10pm on Thursday. So please don't reply to this email, but visit the weblink above to record your results. Many thanks.

PPS We still also need lots of people on the ground in the last few days. My HQ details are at

<http://ealinglibdems.org.uk/pages/southallcampaignhq.html>

Figure A5.1: Sample email – “Can you email a Londoner?”**Tim Jones**

From: Simon Hughes MP - Liberal Democrats
[ecampaignteam@libdems.org.uk]
Sent: 02 February 2008 19:46
To: tim.jones@xxxx
Subject: Can you send an email to a Londoner?

Dear Cllr Jones,

Brian Paddick's campaign for London Mayor is going really well. Already this year he's picked up endorsements from two newspaper columnists - in The Independent and The Evening Standard. As someone who was our candidate last time - trust me when I say I know just how very tough it is to get even one!

The London Mayor contest is attracting increasing amounts of media coverage across the whole UK so, whether we live in London or not, the success of our campaign will have a big impact on the Liberal Democrats' media coverage wherever we are.

That's why I'm writing to ask you to do one simple thing to help Brian's campaign. Can you forward the message below to any Londoners that you know (preferably not people who are already party members!)?

Your personal recommendation is the most powerful way of conveying Brian's message to Londoners whom you know.

You can find out more about Brian and his campaign at www.brianpaddick.org

Please help Brian's campaign reach out to more Londoners by forwarding the message below.

Many thanks,
Simon Hughes
London Mayor candidate, 2004

PLEASE FORWARD THIS MESSAGE:

+++++

London needs a Mayor who can tackle the serious issues ahead of us, improving transport, safeguarding our environment and tackling crime.

Brian Paddick, the Liberal Democrat candidate, has a track record as one of London's top policemen which shows he's got the ability to deliver what London really needs - improved and value-for-money public services.

Being good for a laugh on a Friday night TV show is one talent. But being Mayor of all of London is something else.

Please sign up to support Brian's campaign at www.brianpaddick.org or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pages/Brian-Paddick/18639339800

Best wishes

[Your name]

+++++

Published, promoted and dispatched (printed) by Liberal Democrats, London, SW1P 3NB; 020 7222 7999.

Figure A5.2: 2008 London Mayoral Candidates – the homepages of four candidates

www.kenlivingstone.com

The screenshot shows the homepage of Ken Livingstone's campaign website. At the top left is a portrait of Ken Livingstone with the name 'LIVINGSTONE' below it. A large vertical 'KEN' logo is on the left side. The main headline reads: "This election is about ensuring that every Londoner shares in this city's continuing success. That's what's at stake on May 1st." Below this is a navigation menu: Home / Ken's policies / Be involved / Your London / Media Centre / Donate / About Ken. The 'Latest' section features an article titled 'Vote for the Freedom Pass' with a photo of Ken Livingstone holding a sign that says 'The new 24 hour freedom pass.' To the right of the main content are three boxes: 'Sign Up' with email and postcode fields, 'Donate' with a 'DONATE NOW' button, and 'Londoners for Ken' with a video player. Below the main content is a section titled 'Building on London's success' with a list of priorities: London's economy, investing in better transport, keeping Londoners safe, housing for Londoners, environment and climate change, and a city to enjoy. Below this is a 'Campaign team blog' with three entries dated Wed 30.04.2008, Tue 29.04.2008, and Mon 28.04.2008. At the bottom right is a 'Ken's priorities' section with the heading 'Extend student travel discount'. The footer contains a small logo and text: 'Text only version Contact Privacy Policy Promoted by Ken Clark on behalf of Ken Livingstone, both at 39 Victoria Street London, SW1H 0HA'.

www.backboris.com

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'Conservatives BACK BORIS for a greater London' website. The layout is organized into several columns and sections:

- Header:** Features the Conservative Party logo, the 'BACK BORIS' slogan, a photo of Boris Johnson, and a navigation menu with links: home, get in touch, how you can help, constituency info, how to vote, candidates, downloads, and register your support here.
- Navigation Bar:** Four main sections: The Issues (blue), The Boroughs (green), Campaign News (orange), and About Boris (red).
- The Issues (Left Column):**
 - PRESSING issue:** Features a photo of Boris Johnson and a headline 'Honesty and competence' from the Evening Standard.
 - HONESTY AND COMPETENCE:** A text block stating these are the two 'overriding issues in tomorrow's mayoral election'.
 - Policy areas:** A list of topics including 'Keeping you safe', 'Getting London moving', 'Our Environment', 'Backing London Business', 'Affording a home', 'An age-friendly London', 'The Olympic legacy', 'A healthier London', and 'The Mayor's job'.
- The Boroughs (Middle Column):**
 - Your London:** A text block offering a borough-by-borough guide to local issues and campaigns.
 - Borough of the day:** Features a photo of a building and a section for 'Havering', describing its history as a modern borough formed in 1965.
- Campaign News (Right Column):**
 - Election countdown to May 1:** A digital timer showing 0 days, 13 hours, 13 minutes, and 07 seconds.
 - April 30th, 2008:** A section titled 'Campaigning at Waterloo and in Seven Sisters' with a text block about Boris Johnson's campaign efforts.
 - Latest video diary:** A video player showing Boris Johnson.
 - Latest press release:** A section for 'April 30th, 2008' with a PDF document link (19.74 kb).
- About Boris (Far Right Column):**
 - Biography:** A text block describing Boris Johnson's background as a 'one man melting-pot'.
 - Photo gallery:** A photo of Boris Johnson on a red double-decker bus.
 - Team Boris members:** A large red box with the number '10694' and the text 'Join Team Boris'.
 - Social media:** Links for Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

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Brian Paddick in the Evening Standard
 Londoners face a real dilemma on Thursday. Ken Livingstone has proved he is not fit to be our Mayor any longer. Boris Johnson has never done anything to prove that he is fit to be Mayor, and Brian Paddick does not stand a chance - or does he?
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Paddick Pledges to Wi-Fi London
 Liberal Democrat Mayoral Candidate Brian Paddick today pledged to turn London into the world's first Wi-Fi capital in the world if he is elected Mayor on 1 May.
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London needs a change.
 Ken Livingstone has had 8 years in charge of London. He has broken his promise to Londoners to cut crime by 50% and violent crime has soared.
 I have over 30 years' experience tackling crime in London as a police officer. I have seen the devastating effect that crime has on our communities. As Mayor I will take action to get guns and knives off London's streets.
 If you believe, as I do, that London needs a Mayor with the experience to tackle crime head on then please join my campaign.
 Brian Paddick

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How to elect more Greens, including Siân, to the Assembly
Siân and the Giant Peach explain: Vote Green on the peach ballot paper.

27 Apr 2008
Siân endorsed by The Observer!
Siân 1, Ken 2 recommendation is the Greens first ever national newspaper endorsement.

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07 Apr 2008
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Siân urges London's voters to send out a strong message over green issues by voting for her first, Livingstone second on 1 May - and don't forget the assembly

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Figure A7.1 : Map of Cornwall showing parliamentary boundaries 2003

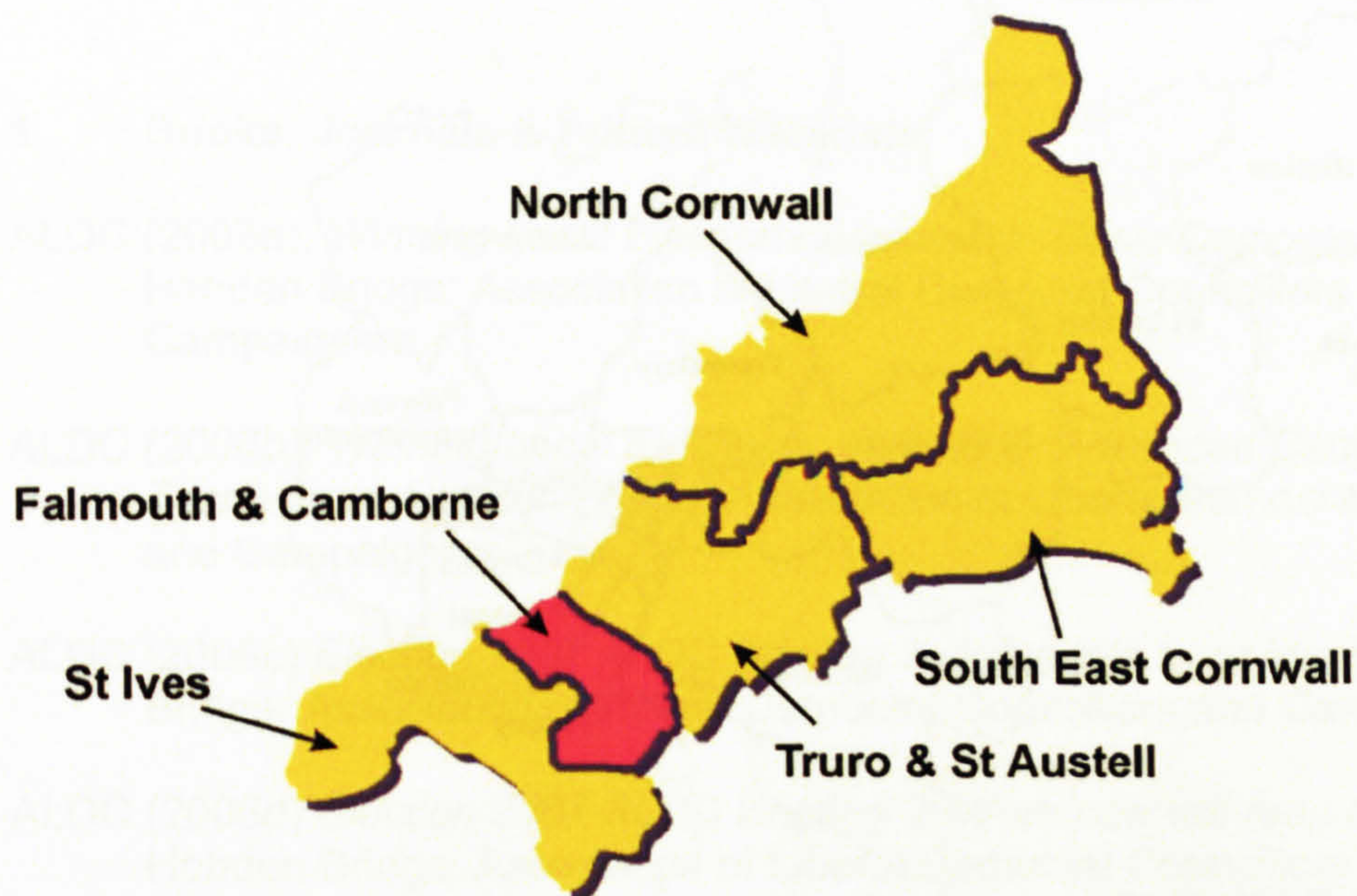
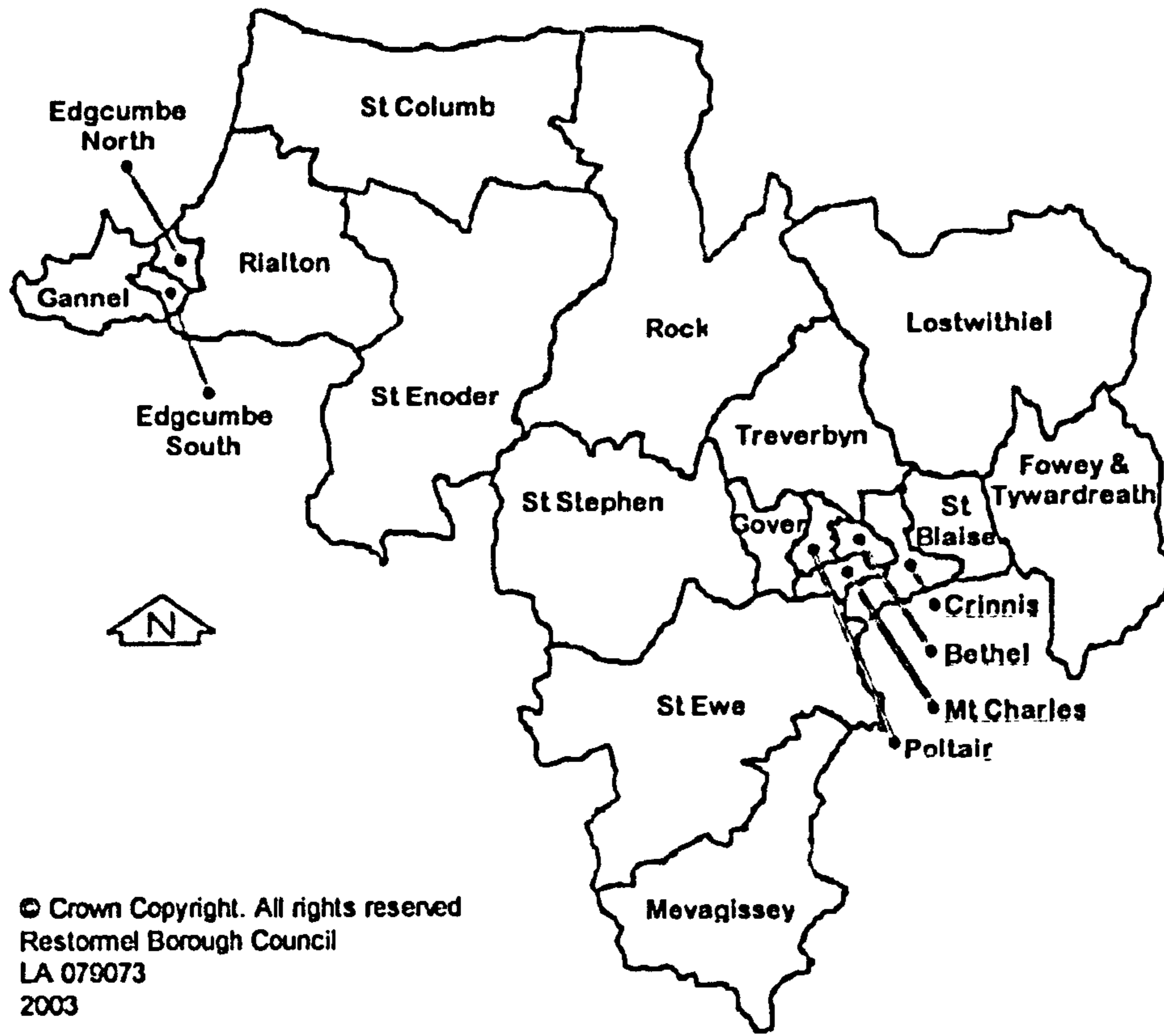


Figure A7.2: Map of Cornwall showing district boundaries as at May 2007



Figure A7.3: Map of Restormel Borough Council showing ward boundaries, May 2007



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2003

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HOC 99/46 *Local Elections – Proposals for Reform*

HOC 99/50 *Scottish Parliament Elections: 6 May 1999*

HOC 99/51 *Welsh Assembly Elections: 6 May 1999*

HOC 00/01 *The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Bill – Electoral aspects*

HOC 00/03 *The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Bill – Referendums and Broadcasting*

HOC 01/14 *Parliamentary Election Timetables*

HOC 01/40 *Election Publications Bill*

HOC 01/44 *The Elections Bill*

HOC 04/38 *Election Timetables*

HOC 05/06 *The Electoral Administration Bill 2005-06*

HOC 05/33 *General Election 2005*

HOC 05/34 *By-election results 2001-05*

HOC 05/93 *Local and Mayoral Elections 2005*

HOC 06/26 *Local Elections 2006*

HOC 07/31 *Election Timetables*

SN/SG/3779 *Electoral Administration Bill: changing the election deposit threshold*

SN/PC2923 *The length of a Parliament and the timing of a general election*

3. Websites

ACORN (demographic segmentation tool):
<http://www.caci.co.uk/acorn/acornmap.asp>

Bebo: www.bebo.com

Blogs

www.ConservativesHome.com
www.Bloggers4Labour.org
www.LibDemVoice.org

Conservative Party main site: www.conservative.org.uk
WebCameron: www.webcameron.org.uk

Direct Mail Information Service: www.dmis.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/
Boris Johnston's Facebook page:
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Boris-Johnson/7972991316>
Liberal Democrats Facebook group
<http://www.facebook.com/groups.php?gid=2209376493>

Flickr : www.flickr.com/
Liberal Democrats Flickr group: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/libdems>

I'm a Councillor, Get me Out of Here: www.bigvote.org.uk

Labour Party main site: www.labour.org.uk
Labour's membersnet: www.members.labour.org.uk/

Liberal Democrats (main website): www.libdems.org.uk
Elections Agents Record System: <http://www.earsonline.co.uk>
Flock Together: www.flocktogether.org.uk
Mycouncillor website generator: www,mycouncillor.org.uk
Online survey site: www.libertyresearch.org.uk
Website Generator tool: <http://campaigns.libdems.org.uk>

Leadership Elections Hustings site: www.youtubehustings.notlong.com

LINC – Local Intelligence Network Cornwall: www.cornwallstatistics.org.uk

London 2008 Mayoral Candidates' sites:
www.kenlivingstone.com
www.backboris.com
www.brianpaddick.org
www.sianformayor.org.uk

Lynne Featherstone's Blog: <http://www.lynnfeatherstone.org/blog.htm>

Ofcom:

Party Broadcast rules: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/ifi/guidance/ppbrules/>

MOSAIC (demographic segmentation tool):

<http://www.business-strategies.co.uk/sitecore/content/Products%20and%20services/Micromarketing%20data/Consumer%20segmentation/Mosaic.aspx>

Myspace: www.myspace.com/

Lib Dems myspace group: <http://groups.myspace.com/libdems>

Second Life: www.secondlife.com

Twitter: www.twitter.com

Brian Paddick's Twitter page: www.twitter.com/brianpaddick

YouTube: www.youtube.com

Labour.vision page: <http://www.youtube.com/user/theuklabourparty>

Liberal Democrat's LDTV: <http://www.youtube.com/user/LibDem>

Wordpress: www.wordpress.org

Ian Lewis Wordpress site: www.ianlewis2007.wordpress.com/