

Elections in Britain

Also by Dick Leonard

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Elections in Britain

A Voter's Guide

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and

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Fifth Edition



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Appendix 6 reproduces by kind permission a table from Byron Criddle, 'MPs and Candidates', in David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 2001* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). Table 7.2 summarises the same data.

Appendix 8 is largely an updating of the introduction by Dick Leonard in Dick Leonard and Richard Natkiel, *World Atlas of Elections* (London: Economist Publishing Co., 1986), by kind permission of Economist Publishing Co.

Foreword

David Butler

Elections lie at the heart of democracy. But their detailed nature is little understood. Few people know in any detail about the rules and administrative arrangements that govern the franchise, or the casting and counting of ballots, or the way votes are translated into seats or the conduct and financing of campaigns. Fewer still comprehend what goes on in the minds of ordinary people as they decide whether to vote as they did last time or to switch to another party.

What decides elections? What do elections decide? The answers to these questions vary greatly in different countries and even in the same country at different times. Since Dick Leonard produced the first edition of this book in 1968 much has changed and continues to change in the nature of campaigning.

The contests of the 1990s saw a new professionalism in party headquarters in the use of direct mail and e-mail and focus groups, as well as in a 24-hours-a-day spinning of news. And since Labour's victory in 1997, new and different electoral systems have been installed for the Scottish Parliament, for the Welsh Assembly and for the Northern Ireland Assembly, as well as for the Mayor and Assembly in London. Moreover, the 1999 elections to the European Parliament saw the first nationwide use of proportional representation.

Furthermore, before the 2001 election the government set up the independent Electoral Commission, the first full-time professional body charged with supervising the administration of British elections, and also of investigating and recommending future reforms to the system, whether minor or major. Statutory spending limits now apply to parties nationally as well as in the constituencies, and parties must now submit comprehensive accounts of their income and expenditure.

The behaviour of the public is changing, too. Turnout has fallen across a whole range of British elections in recent years, and a smaller proportion of the electorate voted in the 2001 general election than on any previous occasion since the introduction of universal suffrage. Reversing this trend will pose a continuing challenge both to the Electoral Commission and the political parties.

Dick Leonard and Roger Mortimore are uniquely qualified to present a comprehensive, authoritative and down-to-earth guide for voters – and for others – to Elections in Britain.