Classifying Elections in Britain

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ISBN 978-3-030-32555-8 ISBN 978-3-030-32556-5 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32556-5

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Preface

The ideas behind this book stemmed from the South Yorkshire 2014 Police and Crime Commissioner by-election. In many ways this election felt different from others. After the media circus over the Rotherham child abuse scandal and the very public resignation of the incumbent PCC, Shaun Wright, the lack of media attention placed upon finding Wright's successor was noticeable for its absence.

Akin to this the campaign felt markedly different. There was a noticeable lack of campaign literature and at the start of the campaign the Liberal Democrats—Britain's third-largest party and the junior coalition partners in national government—publicly denounced the elections and refused to stand a candidate. Such a public denouncement of a policy that the party helped to pass just three years earlier as part of the coalition government seemed remarkable. Yet this did not get the same publicity/attention as other U-turns (for example over tuition fees).

The question "who cares" is one that is often misused to denote anger or frustration at the convergence of the UK's main two parties upon the centre ground. Yet within this election the same question could aptly be asked in a literal sense. In the case of the PCC election it was not just large parts of the electorate that seemed not to care (or to care less than in other elections) but also some political parties and the media. This encouraged me to ask to what extent do different actors engage with (or care about) different elections? And how can we understand or

conceptualise such differences in the levels of salience that are offered to elections? The book offers a methodological approach to answer these questions.

Elements and ideas of this book have developed over the five years since the 2014 by-election. I have been fortunate to receive advice on this project and elements within it from colleagues who have been generous with their time and comments. In particular I would like to thank Justin Fisher, Toby James and Stuart Wilks-Heeg and an anonymous reviewer for their help and advice on the designing and implementation of this study. Whilst these comments helped shape the methodology of the book any errors in its design or implementation are mine alone.

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Contents

1 Introduction 1
Understanding British Elections 1
First- and Second-Order Elections 5
Other Views of British Elections 8
First- and Second-Order Elections in a Comparative Context 13
Conclusions 16
References 18

2 New Approach 21
Elections as Non-static Entities 24
Changing the Nature of Elections 25
Conceptualising Elections 27
Voters 27
Political Parties 30
The Media 32
Conclusion 34
References 36

3 Turnout 39
Voters as Rational Actors 42
Less at Stake 43
Case Study I: The General Election of 2001 47
Case Study II: European Elections 49

Description of Turnout of Different Types of Elections 51
Turnout as Results of Elections 52
References 54

4 Political Parties 57
Defining Political Parties 58
Case Study I: Devolved Elections 60
Case Study II: PCC Elections and By-Elections 64
Measuring Political Party's Salience of Elections 66
Calculating Party Spending 68
Party and Voter Perceptions of Elections 70
Conclusions 72
References 73

5 The Media 75
Case Study I: Police and Crime Commissioner Elections 80
Case Study II: The 2019 Local Elections 82
Media Reporting of Elections 84
References 88

6 Conclusions 93
Beyond First- and Second-Order 93
Further Considerations 98
Conclusions 100
References 101

Correction to: Political Parties C1

Appendix: Elections and Voters 103

Index 105

List of Figures

Fig. 3.1	Turnout in selected elections 1979–2017	41
Fig. 3.2	Turnout in selected UK elections, 2004–2017	52
Fig. 4.1	Political party spending in the 2015 general election	61
Fig. 4.2	SNP spending in various elections	62
Fig. 4.3	Spending in various NI elections	63
Fig. 4.4	Spending in elections by effective number of parties	69
Fig. 4.5	Salience of elections as measured by party spending and turnout	71
Fig. 5.1	Media coverage of selected elections, 2019–2012	85
Fig. 5.2	Newspaper coverage of selected elections, 2010–2019	86
Fig. 6.1	Salience of selected elections, 2010–2017	96