

SYNOPTIC ELECTIONS

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Introduction

In any system of democracy, elections are likely to have a vital role to play. If Lincoln's “rule of the people, by the people, for the people” is to be achieved, the public must be involved in politics. In a representative democracy this is most likely to be achieved via the use of elections.

Elections serve several vital purposes in a democracy;

1. They encourage **participation** which must be regarded as essential in any democracy.
2. They provide for **representation** of the people's views.
3. They are a means of providing a **government**.
4. They also serve as a means of holding that government to **account** and as means of replacing it.
5. They are a means of **recruitment** of talented and committed people into the political elite who provide the Executive.

The UK and the US whilst both, legitimately, claiming to be liberal democracies have very different arrangements for elections. These differences have a profound impact upon the nature of government and politics in these countries as a consequence.

ELECTION SYSTEMS

Overview

Similarities

The US and the UK both use **First Past The Post** – the Single Member Simple Plurality voting system. This is most obvious in elections to the House of Representatives and the House of Commons, as both are based on single-member districts or constituencies. But Senate elections are similar; although each state has two Senators, in any given election only one Senate seat is voted on, with the whole state forming one big constituency. And both systems create many safe seats for two dominant parties, with elections decided in only a sixth or so of constituencies – “swing” seats or “marginals”. Both systems also regularly see incumbency re-election rates at 90% or so.

FPTP explains why both countries have developed strong **two-party systems**, with a clear ideological split visible to voters at election time. Third parties are marginalised, historically finding it extremely difficult to win seats in proportion to their electoral support. Most of these shared features contrast with European countries using more proportional voting systems, often with multi-member constituencies, that result in more multi-party legislatures. UK devolved assemblies also fit into this pattern, and so are closer to European voting systems than to either UK Westminster or US Congressional elections.

Even the election of the US President via the Electoral College has some similarities to the election of a British Prime Minister. Those who argue that the UK is developing a more “Presidential” politics, and that the House of Commons is becoming marginalised, could point out that the chief role of Westminster elections is now to select an Executive from the party which gains a majority of constituencies – really just a glorified electoral college.

And both countries are prone to **perverse outcomes**, where First Past the Post fails to deliver a majority of seats/Electoral College votes to the party/candidate with the largest share of the popular vote.

- In the UK this was seen in 1951 and in February 1974, in the USA in 2000's Electoral College win for George W Bush despite Al Gore winning half a million more of the popular vote
- And in November 2012, the Republicans held the House of Representatives despite losing the popular vote for the House).
- Even when First Past the Post delivers power to the party with the most support, its disproportionality can give a big Commons/Electoral College win to a party/candidate with less than 50% of the popular vote (all UK elections since 1945; USA 1992, 1996).
 - In the UK Labour won 55% of Commons seats with only 35% of the vote in 2005
 - in the USA Obama beat McCain by only 7% of the popular vote in 2008, but he won the Electoral College by more than 2:1
 - and in 2012, Obama only beat Romney by 3% - 51% to 48% - of the popular vote, but won in the electoral college by 62% to 38%.

Finally, **voting behaviour** also displays some important similarities, with both countries seeing “dealignment” as social structures have ceased to provide as strong an explanation of how people from different backgrounds vote as they did in the 1960s. In both countries short-term factors, such as the state of the economy, perceptions of particular leaders, and the salience of certain issues have become more important to explaining voting behaviour. Nonetheless, both the USA and the UK still see certain social groups, such as ethnic minorities, and whole regions of the country heavily committed to one party rather than the other.

Differences

The direct election of a President in a **Separated constitutional system** is very different from the appointment of a Prime Minister in a **Parliamentary system**. In the UK power comes from the ability to control a majority in the legislature rather than from a personal electoral success. As the handover from Blair to Brown in 2007 showed, when the party leader changes in a Parliamentary system they can automatically become Prime Minister, whereas the Vice President will almost always have been elected on the Presidential “ticket”. This constitutional division explains why British political culture is in many ways more similar to European countries which also have Parliamentary systems than it is to the USA (or to France, with its semi-separated Presidential system).

The electoral success of the Lib Dems and other minor parties over the last four UK elections has also created a **more multi-party system**. There are a significant number of 3-way marginal constituencies (56 seats in 2010 had less than 20% between the three main parties), and many seats where the Lib Dems are the main challenger to either the Conservatives (83 seats) or Labour (105 seats). This increasingly multi-party system has more similarities to the German Bundestag, Canadian Parliament or Irish Dail than to the almost-perfectly two-party USA, where an election winner typically does get over 50% of the vote in a two-horse race. And unlike the USA, but like Spain, Italy, Canada and India, the UK has successful regional parties (e.g. SNP). By 2010 a UK hung parliament was an obvious possibility; such an outcome is unthinkable for the House of Representatives or Senate.

Even the Electoral College is not comparable to the election of a House of Commons, as 48 states use a winner-takes-all system for allocating their Electoral College votes. And with Parliament increasingly flexing its muscles in legislation, debate and scrutiny, it is today far from the passive rubber-stamp to a dominant Executive that it used to be portrayed as.

The USA also has more and **more frequent elections** than the UK, with 3 sets of national elections to the UK's one. The very short term for the House of Representatives is almost unique internationally, and contributes to a sense of permanent campaign (as does the two-yearly election of 1/3 of the Senate). It should also be noted that federal democracy means that American voters also get to choose local and state politicians with very significant powers, often at the same time as they are casting federal ballots – although this is comparable to devolved regions in the UK, English voters have many fewer chances to cast meaningful votes.

Federalism also means that elections to Congress are much more dominated by local issues and personalities than in the truly national campaigns in the UK. This can be seen in the detailed party manifestos on which all serious parliamentary candidates run in the UK; despite efforts to forge common platforms (e.g. Contract with America, 6 for '06), the USA has nothing equivalent. Often the emphasis in America on the role of the representative in serving local interests means incumbents are safer, but when seats become open they are more competitive than in UK.

US politicians also have a big role in **redistricting**, the periodic redrawing of electoral boundaries. Although this is done by state legislators, national political leaders such as Tom DeLay are often involved in encouraging their party to seek electoral advantage. Like most developed democracies, the UK leaves redistricting to a neutral commission.

Candidate selection is also a huge difference between the two countries. The use of primaries (or caucuses) to select US party candidates limits some of the advantages of safe seats, provides much greater opportunities for political participation, and emphasises personality and individual policy positions over a unified party line. Although the election of all three UK main party leaders is now by a popular ballot of their members, these are paid-up activists, tiny in numbers compared to registered Republicans or Democrats (and Independents) in the USA. And at constituency level, the large majority of UK MPs were chosen as candidates by a select group of the committed party faithful, increasingly after intervention from the national party leadership (e.g. through all women's short-lists, the Conservative A-list, or by "parachuting" when an election is imminent).

Finally, US elections **cost** hugely more than UK ones do – combining all races, the November 2012 elections may have cost \$6 bn! This disparity is obviously true of the Presidential elections for which there is no UK parallel, but it also applies to Congressional races, as well as state elections and referendum campaigns. The 2010 California Senate race cost more than the entire 2010 UK general election! One reason for this is the greater frequency of US elections, but mostly it reflects the strong constitutional protection of free speech, which ensures TV advertising dominates campaigning, and prevents strong limits being placed on either the raising or the spending of campaign funds.

Change?

Although the UK decisively rejected an attempt to change its voting system in May 2011, other changes may affect the comparison between the US and UK.

US **campaign methods** have influenced UK electioneering for decades, with paid American experts advising the main UK parties. From the 1960s the image of the leader was more carefully cultivated, with increasing emphasis on how to perform effectively on television, contributing to accusations that British politics was becoming increasingly "Presidential".

In the 1990s the use of detailed **polling and focus groups** on the American model was extremely influential; so were more professional “spin” operations, offering instant rebuttal of opponents charges. In the 2000s targeted direct mail and telephone banks were introduced from the USA, with sophisticated software used to categorise voters and tailor the message that they received. More recently every British party has wanted to emulate Obama’s success in harnessing social media to interact directly with voters, coordinate volunteers, and raise huge amounts of money (although none have yet had any great success).

The defining innovation of the UK 2010 election was the **debates**, borrowed directly from America. The UK parties employed American experts and studied past US debates carefully as part of their preparation (although this may have led the Conservatives and Labour to underestimate how important a three-party dynamic would be in the UK debates, allowing Nick Clegg to exploit the situation very effectively). Debates feed the narrative of “Presidentialism” – for the first time in the UK, in 2010 polling found that the party leaders were more important than their policies to voters. As Cameron has refused similar debates for the 2015 election, 2010 may prove a “high-water mark” in this regard.

The 2010 UK election also featured **online** web ads, on party websites and YouTube. The absence of paid TV and radio advertising has long been one of the biggest points of difference with the US elections, but as the distinction between old and new media becomes increasingly blurred, online ads may become an increasingly important campaign tool in future UK elections. More flexible and capable of being targeted than the traditional Party Political Broadcasts, the UK parties are sure to draw on American experience in political advertising to exploit this new method.

Institutional changes in the UK have also affected its elections. Devolved assemblies mean that at least some parts of the UK have important regional contests similar to state elections in the USA, and referendums have become more frequent. Mayoral elections have for the first time seen UK contests for a single executive position, but there are only a small number of these with voters rejecting an expansion to a dozen other cities in 2012. However, unlike the USA, these new elections use a variety of voting systems, mostly more proportional in outcome.

The Coalition has also fixed the **length of a Parliament** at five years, bringing the UK closer to the American model in which the Executive cannot manipulate the timing of an election (although the loss of a vote of confidence could still trigger an early election, which is not possible in the USA, and the Fixed Term Parliament Act may yet be repealed.).

Candidate selection saw significant innovation ahead of the 2010 election, with the Conservatives holding more open contests to choose candidates in seats without a Tory incumbent. Although these were not very similar to US primaries, they were named for them and clearly inspired by them, especially in the two constituencies where every registered voter was sent a ballot paper to participate in choosing a candidate. The Coalition originally pledged to fund postal primaries in 200 of the safest seats, which would hugely shake up British electoral politics, but after nearly two years no action has been taken and it appears unlikely to be in place for the next general election.

Finally, the Coalition promised major **House of Lords** reform, with a substantial elected element (probably using a proportional system such as STV or Party List). Although this has currently been abandoned following divisions within the Coalition and Cameron’s inability to persuade enough Tory backbenchers to support it, if it were one day to go ahead then

American features such as longer terms with staggered election contests may well be introduced, necessitating a more permanent campaign culture, along with the possibility of divided control in the legislature. Nick Clegg's proposals even envisaged the British upper chamber being called the Senate!

CANDIDATE SELECTION PROCEDURES

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The political parties mostly control the selection of their own candidates although anyone can stand in an election providing they can meet the basic legal requirements.

Requirements for Parliamentary Candidates

1. Be aged over 18 (reduced from 21 in 2006)
2. Be nominated by 10 parliamentary electors in the constituency
3. Deposit £500, which is lost if less than 5% of the vote is obtained.
4. Members of the clergy, judges, civil servants, members of the armed forces and the police force, undischarged bankrupts and people found guilty of electoral malpractice cannot stand.

Independent candidates do not have much electoral success in parliamentary elections.¹

There are two main areas of concern with regard to the selection of candidates in the UK:

1. Given the use of the “first past the post” electoral system and voting behaviour in the UK, a large number of constituencies in the UK are regarded as “safe seats”. These seats do not tend to change hands at elections and return an MP of the same party with

¹ Richard Taylor winning Wyre Forest on a campaign to save Kidderminster Hospital in 2001 was a notable, if not common, exception from the 2001 general election. He was re-elected in 2005, but note that on both occasions the Lib Dems chose not to run a candidate in the constituency to give him a better chance of defeating the Conservatives. When the Lib Dems did run a candidate in Wyre Forest in 2010, Richard Taylor lost his re-election bid to the Conservative candidate.

Peter Law was elected as Independent MP for Blaenau Gwent in 2005. He had been a Labour Welsh Assembly member for the area, and hoped to represent this very safe Labour seat at Westminster when the incumbent MP retired in 2005, but when an all-women's shortlist was imposed by the party, Law left and ran successfully as an Independent candidate. He died in April 2006 but the subsequent by-election was won by his election agent, Dai Davies, also standing as an Independent under the Blaenau Gwent People's Voice label. Dai Davies lost his re-election bid to the Labour candidate in 2010.

Several other MPs sat as Independents in the 2005-10 Parliament, but in each case they had been elected under a party label, but either resigned it or had the whip withdrawn. These included Clare Short (MP for Birmingham Ladywood, first elected in 1983 and a former Blair Cabinet minister) who resigned from the Labour party in 2006 to sit as an Independent Labour MP as a result of dissatisfaction with the party's policy direction. She did not stand for election in 2010.

Robert Wareing (Liverpool West Derby, first elected in 1983), a frequent Labour rebel, resigned the whip in 2007 to sit as an Independent, after he was de-selected as Labour candidate for the next election in order to find a seat for the former Minister, Stephen Twigg. He did not stand for election in 2010.

Andrew Pelling (elected for Croydon Central in 2005) was suspended from the Conservative party in 2007 after allegations he had assaulted his wife, and sat as an Independent Conservative until the 2010 election. He ran for re-election but lost to the candidate for his former party.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley & Sidcup, an MP 1983-97, then 2001-2010) had the Conservative whip removed in January 2008 following an expenses scandal. He did not stand for election in 2010.

Bob Spink (Castle Point, 1992-1997, 2001-2010) resigned the Conservative whip in March 2008 following a dispute with his constituency party; the Tories claim to have withdrawn the whip first. In April 2008 he announced that was joining the UK Independence Party but effectively sat as an Independent. He stood for re-election in 2010 but lost to the Conservative candidate.

Following the MPs' expenses scandal, there was an upsurge of interest in independent candidacies in the 2010 general election, especially in constituencies where a scandal-damaged MP was seeking re-election. A group called the Independent Network provided some coordination for these non-party candidates, who included television personality Esther Rantzen, but none had any success on polling day, with many losing their deposits.

large majorities election after election. For example, Labour has many safe seats in South Wales. Consequently the selection of a candidate by the local Labour party in such a constituency, in effect amounts to the selection of the MP as the outcome of the election is almost a foregone conclusion. **In other words, it is the local party that chooses the MP not the electorate at large.**

It is true that the local electorate still have to vote for the candidate, however, most do not know a great deal about candidates and party is far more important in deciding how a person votes. The people involved in the selection process, known as “**the selectorate**” *might* be viewed as wielding disproportionate power and thus reform to the existing system of selection (and the electoral system) might be viewed as necessary in order to enhance democracy.

2. Concern also centres on **the type of candidate selected**. Most candidates tend to share the 3Ms - being male, middle class and middle aged. This raises many questions relating to gender and ethnicity and critical issues regarding representation in general. This can be considered when discussing the role of the legislature (see later) but the role of the selection process will inevitably have a role to play here.

With regard to the first issue; as stated the main problem lies with safe seats and the electoral system. Unless we move toward a system of proportional representation with multi-member constituencies such as under STV or a regional list system, or introduce competitive primaries as in the USA, the power of those involved in the selection process is unlikely to change.

It should be recognised this is not necessarily in itself a negative phenomenon. It should be remembered that one of the main functions of political parties is that of recruitment and the presentation of candidates for electoral purposes. If the electorate vote in large numbers for a candidate in a particular constituency, albeit on the basis of party label rather than the individual merits of the candidate, then democracy would not appear to have too greatly undermined. If the electorate are unhappy with a candidate, they need not vote for them.

With regard to the actual selection of the candidates there is further debate with regard to where power actually lies **within** the party. Concern has been expressed over the power wielded by the leadership over local parties. If it is the case that the local party cannot select a local candidate for local people, due to interference from on high, then local democracy will have been challenged.

Labour Party Selection

Within the **Labour party** this has been an area of considerable activity in recent decades. Some of the key developments are discussed below;

- Candidates are usually nominated by a section of the party such as the trade unions, the local party (hereafter referred to as the Constituency Labour Party, CLP), Co-operative Society or Women's section. A CLP committee draws up a short-list of applicants, who may be any Labour Party members, but the national Party encourages them to select from its pre-approved national parliamentary panel of candidates. Once a short-list has been drawn up, all the members of the local party then vote for the candidate of their choice. However, the winner of this ballot cannot become the candidate until they have been approved by the National Executive Committee (NEC) which is generally controlled by the leadership (see later).
- In particular circumstances, the NEC can also impose a candidate on a CLP – “**parachuting**” them in. This typically happens when an election is looming, such as

for a by-election or when a sitting MP decides just before a general election that they do not wish to stand again. Such situations often lead to friction between the national and local parties, who object to the imposition of candidates close to the leadership but lacking in local ties. The selections for safe seats of Sean Woodward (a millionaire former Tory MP who defected to Labour in 1999), David Milliband, Ed Balls and Tristan Hunt all occurred in this way. In some cases it has been alleged that aging Labour incumbents were persuaded by the party, including by offers of a life peerage, to stand down at the last minute in order to allow “favoured sons” to be parachuted in by the NEC.

- Prior to 1992 and the introduction of **one member one vote (OMOV)**, candidates were selected by an electoral college which gave an equal share of the vote to trade unions, the CLP and affiliated organisations. The reforms of **John Smith**, the Labour leader from 1992 – 1994, helped “democratise” the party and reduced the power of the trade unions. Hence they were a key part of the “modernisation” programme which Labour had embarked upon following the near-death experience of the 1983 General Election. The ending of trade union influence ensured power was distributed more democratically and they could not impose their own candidates.
- In a similar fashion, the role of the NEC has also been of pivotal importance in recent decades. The ability of a small number of zealous left-wingers to control the local selection process posed problems in the 1980s, and under the leadership of Neil Kinnock the Party fought to impose its own control upon selection. This included ending mandatory reselection contests for sitting MPs, which had been introduced in the early 1980s. On the surface mandatory reselection would seem to have enhanced democracy as MPs would have to take note of local constituency needs in order to ensure reselection. The MP under this arrangement would come closer to the idea of being an instructed delegate rather than a representative who was able to exercise his or her own judgement in Parliament. In practice it was a means by which left-wing CLPs could deselect right-wing MPs. Mandatory reselection resulted in 10 deselections in 1983 and 6 in 1987. It was ended by 1990 although it can be requested by the CLP if they so desire.
- In the 1990s the Labour Party also sought to actively ensure that more women became MPs. This is in part done by requiring that a CLP’s shortlist be 50% female, but also by allowing the NEC to designate some winnable constituencies (either ones where Labour MPs are retiring, or key target seats) for **all-women short-lists**. This produced a large increase in female Labour MPs in 1997 (from 14% in 1992 to 24%), but was subsequently found to be in breach of discrimination legislation. This legislation was specifically amended by Blair’s Labour government to allow political parties to positively discriminate in favour of women, and all-women shortlists remain an important aspect of Labour party selection, although they continue to be controversial in some areas. Currently 31% of Labour MPs are women; the party has a target of at least 40% female representation.
- Despite the greater proportion of women (81 out of 258 MPs– 31%) and ethnic minority (16 MPs) Labour

Conservative Party Selection

- Perhaps surprisingly given the orthodox text book descriptions of the parties as Labour being “bottom-up” and the Conservatives “top-down”, Central Office has traditionally played slightly less of a role than the leadership in the Labour party. This might be explained by the different political and historical circumstances of the parties as the previous section explained. However, while Conservative constituency parties enjoy

marginally more freedom in the selection of candidates than in the Labour party, the party hierarchy can and do exercise a great degree of control.

- It is still the case that all candidates have to be approved by Central office, who may then propose one or two candidates to a constituency party via the National Union's Standing Advisory Committee. The constituency party draw up a short list and all members can vote. Several ballots might be held in order to ensure that the winning candidate has 50% of the vote. Compared to Labour and the Lib Dems, Conservative candidates are much less likely to have a strong prior local connection (in 2005 18% had a direct connection to their local constituency, compared to 56% of Labour candidates and 69% of Lib Dems), perhaps because local associations are keener to produce MPs who may obtain the status of high ministerial office, and so favour high-flying party insiders.
- The profile of Conservative candidates has traditionally been white, male and upper or upper-middle class. By 2005 this was perceived to be a problem, with only 14 female Tory MPs out of 166 in the 2001-05 Parliament, and only 17 out of 198 in the 2005-10 Parliament (plus two men from ethnic minority backgrounds). It was pointed out that the Conservatives had more MPs called David! Unfavourable comparisons were also made with the Labour Party with its much more diverse parliamentary representation; under Blair Labour had gained a 3-4% polling advantage among female voters, in addition to its big leader with British Minority Ethnic voters.
- Traditionally Central Office had a long list of c500 approved potential candidates, but under the leadership of David Cameron from late 2005 efforts were made to diversify the types of candidates being selected, while imposing more control over the process. The result was the **A-list**, of 100-150 candidates who had been through a more rigorous approval process; 50% of these were female, a number were from ethnic minority backgrounds, and others had only recently discovered an affinity with the Conservative Party. Local parties were encouraged, and sometimes obliged to choose from the A-list – about 48 of the A-list were selected as constituency candidates, with about 40 of these becoming MPs in the 2010 Parliament. Despite grumbles from some local associations, as a method of achieving greater diversity the A-list appears to have been successful, the number of female Conservative MPs rose from 17 to 49, and ethnic minority Tory MPs rose from 2 to 11 at the 2010 election. It has been noted, however, that the educational and professional profile of Conservative candidates has not become more diverse as a result of these changes.
- The Conservatives also experimented with more open selection methods in the run-up to the 2010 election, with “**Open Primary meetings**” in about 100 seats where no incumbent Tory MP was running for re-election (e.g. Salisbury). A short-list of candidates was produced in the usual way, but the actual selection was done at a large open meeting (similar to a US caucus) to which non-party members were also invited. Typically between 100 and 500² people heard the candidates speak and answer questions (often in interview with someone possessing media expertise), before voting. Although such Open Primaries generated positive publicity for the party, they diluted the influence of local members and so led to some dissatisfaction among activists. They were also expensive, costing on average about £10 000 in publicity and hire of a big venue. Nor did they necessarily advance Cameron's diversity agenda, as primaries where A-list selection was not mandatory chose male candidates 85% of the time. There is some evidence primaries favoured candidates with a local connection more than was typical in Conservative selection.

² In Salisbury, the Open Primary was held at the Playhouse Theatre. 473 people attended, just under half of whom were non-Conservative party members (some of these were A2 Politics students from BWS or S Wilts).

- In two constituencies, the Conservatives undertook a more radical initiative; Gosport and Totnes both held **all-postal primaries**, in which ballot papers and electoral materials were sent to every voter in the constituency. In Totnes 25%, and in Gosport 18% of all voters returned a completed ballot paper in order to select the Conservative candidate. In terms of turnout this was impressive, but it should be noted that each postal-primary was estimated to cost the party c£40 000. Postal-primaries have also been criticised as being expensive for would-be candidates to participate in, as they require a much bigger and time-consuming publicity campaign that may reward the wealthier or those able to draw on resources from outside groups.

Liberal Democrat Party Selection

- Lib Dems greatly value both localism and meritocracy, and so there is less central influence on the selection of candidates than with Labour and Conservatives. Would-be candidates do have to go through a central approval process, and there is a requirement in the party constitution that at least one woman must be included on a short list, but otherwise selection is up to the local constituency party. As mentioned above, candidates with local roots are commonly selected (69% in 2005).
- Unlike the other main parties, the Lib Dems have no method of promoting women (other than requiring that a short-list contains at least one woman). At the Liberal Democrat Conference in 2001 all-women short lists were rejected, and although the issue has been debated in the decade since, the party continues to reject positive discrimination. Just 7 of the 57 Lib Dem MPs following the 2010 election are women, a figure that has only increased by 2 since 2001. The party has no MPs from ethnic minorities (and there have been accusations that it only selects ethnic minority candidates in seats where it has no chance of winning).
- In 2011 the Lib Dems announced that it would create a “leadership programme” to promote female and ethnic minority candidates for selection in its safest seats. Without an element of compulsion (impossible under the Lib Dem constitution), it is unclear whether this programme will be effective in producing a more diverse selection of candidates in winnable seats.

Future Change?

- In May 2010 the new Coalition Government’s programme of Government said:
We will fund 200 all-postal primaries over this Parliament, targeted at seats which have not changed hands for many years. These funds will be allocated to all political parties with seats in Parliament that they take up, in proportion to their share of the total vote in the last general election.

This was clearly intended to build on the Tories’ Totnes and Gosport experiments. It would, if implemented, not only shake up candidate selection but also increase meaningful popular participation in the selection of MPs in safe seats where at present nomination by the dominant party effectively secures a candidate a seat in the House of Commons. However, by the end of the Coalition government’s term in 2015 there was no move to make such a policy reality (one of the few Coalition Agreement promises to be entirely abandoned), and it appears highly unlikely that it will happen in the foreseeable future. This may be because the parties feel that giving £20 million or so of taxpayers’ money to political parties in a period of austerity will be too

unpopular (and proposed reforms to party funding that would have involved more taxpayer support have also gone nowhere recently). The rejection of the Alternative Vote in May 2011 may also have reduced appetites for electoral reform generally. But unhappiness by constituency activists at losing influence over candidate selection (one of the few benefits of membership), is likely to have played a part. So too may criticisms of the time and expense of campaigning for selection in such a race, with some arguing that this will benefit independently wealthy candidates and those with support from interest groups³. It should also be noted that Sarah Wollaston, the Conservative MP for Totnes who was selected as candidate through an all-postal primary, has sometimes been outspoken in criticism of her own government and has specifically pointed to the enhanced mandate she believes she has from the people; this is unlikely to have made government whips enthusiastic supporters of more postal primaries.

- For more on candidate selection issues following the 2010 general election see this Institute of Government paper, *What Works in Candidate Selection* (Sept 2011) – <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/what-works-candidate-selection>

THE UNITED STATES

In the United States candidates for elected office are usually selected via the primary system which, depending upon the variant used, will lead to greater public involvement in the selection process.

This immediately highlights the key difference between the US and UK in this area, in that the primary system is more democratic.

This discussion will focus on presidential elections although it should be realised that primaries are also used for Congressional and local elections. On the whole incumbents seeking renomination to contest their current seats are rarely defeated in primaries (and may often be unopposed within their own party), so primary contests are usually only competitive when a seat has no incumbent (either because the party's incumbent is retiring, or because the seat is held by the other party). However, in 2010 several members of Congress lost to primary challenges, especially those launched by Tea Party Republicans against those members of their own party whom they deemed too moderate. Most notably Utah Senator Bob Bennett and Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski lost to Tea Party-backed challengers, along with two members of the House of Representatives (Parker Griffith, Alabama 5, and Bob Inglis, South Carolina 4). For the Democrats, Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania lost his renomination battle (although he had been originally elected a Republican, defecting to the Democrats in 2009), along with two members of the House of Representatives (Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick, Michigan 13, and Alan Mollohan, West Virginia 1).

In 2012 the long-serving Indiana Senator Dick Lugar lost in the GOP primary to Richard Mourdock, a Tea Party-backed challenger who proceeded to lose the general election following comments over "legitimate rape". 2012 also saw 13 primary defeats for incumbent Representatives (7 Democrats and 6 Republicans), but nine of these were the result of redistricting forcing two sitting members to fight for a newly-defined district. Silvestre

³ Oona King, the former Labour MP, ran up tens of thousands of pounds in personal debts while running unsuccessfully in Labour's 2010 primary election for their London Mayoral candidate. Although London is exceptional within the UK in terms both of its size and political arrangements, other big cities are due to get their own mayors in the course of 2012, so primary elections and increasing candidate costs may become more common features of the UK political landscape.

Reyes, Dem of Texas' 16th District, Tim Holden, Dem of Pennsylvania 17th, John Sullivan, Republican of Oklahoma's 1st District, and Jean Schmidt, Republican of Ohio's 2nd District being the four exceptions to this.⁴

In 2014 there was only one notable victim of the primaries, but that was a very high-profile case as Eric Cantor, the House Majority Leader, lost his Virginia district primary to an unknown conservative College professor. Otherwise the GOP establishment rallied round its candidates, appearing to learn the lessons of 2010 and 2012 when inexperienced Tea-Party replacements for more moderate Republicans cost the party a number of seats it should probably have won.

Discussion will also centre on the main arguments for and against the Presidential primaries rather than outlining their mechanics in detail. Students could refer to their existing material on presidential elections before reading this section if they harbour any uncertainties relating to primaries, conventions and the Electoral College.

“The Money Primary”

Perhaps the most striking difference between the two systems is the time and money involved. The primary season officially runs from January to June, but the “**invisible primary**”, the period before the voting for candidates actually begins, is likely to start at least a year or more before the presidential election.

Candidates need money and lots of it. In the 2008 race the candidates had raised the following sums by the end of 2007:⁵

Democrat Candidates	Total Receipts to end 2007	Republican Candidates	Total Receipts to end 2007
Hillary Clinton	\$118,275,135	Mitt Romney	\$90,076,401
Barack Obama	\$103,782,430	Rudy Giuliani	\$61,645,421
John Edwards	\$44,229,773	John McCain	\$42,094,077
Bill Richardson	\$23,671,031	Ron Paul	\$28,219,742
Joe Biden	\$11,405,861	Fred Thompson	\$21,812,644
Dennis Kucinich	\$3,869,116	Mike Huckabee	\$8,997,754
		Sam Brownback	\$4,372,277
		Tommy Thompson	\$63,722

And in 2011 the Republican candidates raised and spent the following:⁶

Candidate	Total Receipts to end 2011	Total spending to end 2011	Cash On Hand
Mitt Romney	\$56,884,330	\$36,968,828	\$19,916,126
Ron Paul	\$26,109,606	\$24,198,106	\$1,904,915
Rick Perry	\$20,109,798	\$16,347,912	\$3,761,886
Herman Cain	\$16,874,813	\$15,894,177	\$986,430
Newt Gingrich	\$12,733,254	\$10,624,423	\$2,108,831
Michele Bachmann	\$9,259,624	\$8,900,899	\$358,725
Jon Huntsman	\$5,918,425	\$5,807,460	\$110,965

⁴ http://ballotpedia.org/wiki/index.php/United_States_House_of_Representatives_elections,_2012#Primary_2 accessed March 26 2013

⁵ Federal Election Commission - <http://query.nictusa.com/pres/2007/YE/> accessed April 3 2013

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundraising_for_the_2012_United_States_presidential_election accessed March 26 2013

Tim Pawlenty	\$5,890,445	\$5,844,177	\$46,268
Rick Santorum	\$2,206,975	\$1,928,040	\$278,935
Fred Karger	\$739,267	\$423,915	\$16,041
Gary Johnson	\$578,125	\$560,112	\$18,013
Thaddeus McCotter	\$513,816	\$518,454	\$927
Buddy Roemer	\$345,032	\$335,556	\$9,476

N.B. Pink denotes a candidate who withdrew from the primary race before the Iowa Caucus

And Barack Obama, running unchallenged for the Democratic nomination, had already raised and spent the following:

Candidate	Total Receipts to end 2011	Total spending to end 2011	Cash On Hand
Barack Obama	\$128,345,283	\$48,449,308	\$81,761,012

N.B. Much of Obama's spending was on opening field offices across swing states, an area where he was to enjoy a big advantage over Romney in the 2012 general election (indeed, some of Obama's campaign offices had never been shut following his 2008 victory).

Lack of success in the "money primary" can force candidates out before any voting actually occurs - in 2000, two notable casualties were Elizabeth Dole for the Republicans and Bob Kerrey for the Democrats, both of whom withdrew from the race by the end of 1999. In 2011 Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty withdrew from the race in September, more than four months before the Iowa caucuses, after failing to make his mark in the Ames Straw Poll. Typically candidates with little money withdraw after the first few state primaries, unless they make a surprise splash (as Huckabee in 2008 and Santorum in 2012 both did in Iowa). In 2008, every candidate except Obama and Clinton (for the Democrats), and McCain, Huckabee and Paul (for the Republicans) had withdrawn by 7th February (after Super Tuesday). However, in 2012 four candidates were still slugging it out at the end of March.

However, it should be noted that money is not everything. Bush faced a real challenge from McCain in 2000, although the Arizona Senator's funds were much smaller. In 2008 McCain went on to win the nomination despite having considerably less money at the start of the year than Romney or Giuliani (who won no state contests and no delegates). And Mike Huckabee managed to finish the Republican primary season as runner-up to McCain, despite his relatively small amounts of money. Santorum and Gingrich in 2012 showed that momentum in early states can attract money to a campaign; Obama also demonstrated this in 2008, raising c\$130 million compared to Clinton's c\$75 million in the first quarter of 2008 off the back of a string of primary victories in February and March.

And note also the **differences between the invisible primaries of 2008 and 2012**, with less money being raised and spent in 2012 than four years previously. As a Bloomberg article noted: "*The top nine Republican candidates spent \$53 million through September [2011], compared with \$132 million spent at the same time four years ago.*"⁷ This may be because candidates read the lessons from McCain's and Huckabee's relatively underfunded operations in 2007, but the article principally attributed the difference to the greatly increased number of GOP debates – 11 by the beginning of December 2011 – reducing the need for candidates to run expensive ads to gain exposure and get their message across.

⁷ <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-12-01/cheapest-primary-in-a-decade-defies-campaign-spending-prediction.html> accessed March 26 2013

Another reason for less money in 2011 might be the proliferation of SuperPACs – groups raising funds in unlimited donations to campaign for candidates following the *Citizens' United* Supreme Court decision in 2010. SuperPACs are not allowed to coordinate with a candidate's official campaign, but many were run by former staff members of the candidate they favoured (e.g. Romney and Obama), and FEC rules even allowed the candidate to appear at a fundraising event for the SuperPAC. With many individual and corporate GOP donors choosing to give through SuperPACS, less money shows up in the official campaign account filings.

In contrast to the UK system, money can sometimes overshadow the personal qualities of a candidate. Concern was indeed expressed about Bush's experience and abilities in 2000, yet he went to win the nomination, helped to a considerable degree by the vast amounts of money (c\$100 million for the primaries) he was able to raise. On the other hand, Obama's success in raising large amounts of money in the invisible primary gave his candidacy a credibility that, as a freshman Senator, he might otherwise have lacked. And Rick Perry's fundraising success in 2011 did not translate into support in the early races of 2012.

Primaries & Caucuses

In order to win a party's nomination, Presidential candidates have to win the primary vote in a sufficient number of states to give them a majority of delegates at the convention. The number of delegates per state is determined by its population size, but often adjusted for how strongly it tends to vote for the party at election time.

Candidates place a great deal of emphasis on winning **the Iowa Caucus and the New Hampshire primary**. The voting in these early states can make or break a campaign; although the winner does not always become the nominee, failing to make an impact in either can force a candidate out of the race. This was shown by Giuliani in 2008, when he opted to ignore Iowa and New Hampshire in order to campaign in Florida, a delegate-rich state thought to be favourable to the former New York mayor – by failing to build early momentum in the north, he bombed in Florida as well and pulled out of a race in which he had led the polling for most of the invisible primary. In 2012, Perry, Bachmann and Huntsman all rapidly withdrew from the GOP race after weak performances in Iowa and New Hampshire.

Furthermore it is argued that these states have too much emphasis placed upon them and they are unrepresentative of the United States. Iowa is a rural state, whose GOP caucus voters are exceptionally conservative, and New Hampshire is small, rural and predominantly white. Both states carry an importance which is out of all proportion to their economic and political worth and their demographic importance. Candidates focus much of their attention there in the hope of doing well and gaining the critical momentum needed to campaign in other states. Santorum spent 104 days in Iowa in 2011, and Obama 83 days in 2007, while McCain spent 45 days in New Hampshire in 2007-08.

Defenders of the system regard this “**retail politics**” as an important test of the candidates' ability to engage with real voters in unscripted situations, and an antidote to the dominating impact of money and ads on the rest of the “**wholesale**” primary season. Ads are important in these early states (as negative ads successfully attacking Gingrich on behalf of the Romney campaign showed in Iowa in 2012), but they are relatively less significant than in later contests and their media markets are cheap, again allowing less well-funded candidates a chance to make their mark. For 2012 Romney and pro-Romney Super PACs spent \$4.3 million in Iowa, compared to \$5.9 million spent on behalf of Rick Perry and only \$0.56 million on behalf of Rick Santorum, the eventual winner.

On a more positive note it could be said that the TV ads and general media coverage about the candidates do serve to **educate and inform** the public and so help decision making. In the

UK an Opposition leader is likely to have been in place for some years before a General Election, with guaranteed media coverage and regular participation in set-piece events like Prime Minister's Questions, so the public know them well by polling day. As a Separated system, the USA lacks a focal opposition leader to rival the President's stature, so the primary process is very important in introducing voters to the eventual candidate in the year or so prior to the November general election.

Alternatively it should be recognised that the **primaries can be brutal**. Attacks using negative advertisements can damage both the candidate and image of the party, as may be demonstrated by the highly negative ads in the 2012 GOP primaries. Well over 90% of all the ads run in the 2012 Florida GOP primary were negative. This trend has been exacerbated by the 2010 *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision which allowed unlimited campaign finance spending by external groups such as businesses and interest groups, freeing Super PACs to raise and spend as they like in support of candidates, providing they do not directly coordinate with the official campaign. It should be noted, however, that several Super PACs (e.g. the pro-Romney "Restore our Future") were run by former aides to the candidates they support. This could well serve to further disenchant the public at a time when low voter turnout is already a cause for concern.

Critics also suggest the process is **too long**. The election of a party leader in the UK is likely to take a few weeks. The presidential primaries can last for 5 months with up to a year's campaigning before that, as the 2008 Democrat race proved and the 4-month 2012 GOP race confirmed. A long race can discriminate against outsiders, as candidates need organisation in many states and huge amounts of money to campaign nationwide. It can also expose divisions within the party (2008 Democrats and 2012 Republicans again), that may be difficult to heal in time for the autumn general election. Finally, 2012 suggests a long race for the challenging party can be problematic, tying up time and money while an incumbent without a primary opponent from their own party raises funds that can be kept entirely for the general election. It is also notable that many of the attack lines used by Romney's GOP rivals in the 2011 and 2012 debates were reused by Obama in the summer and autumn.

On the other hand, Obama was originally regarded as a long-shot for the Democrat nomination in 2008, yet proved himself over the long haul. The ability to run a disciplined campaign over dozens of states, each with different rules for delegate selection, coordinating hundreds of campaign workers and tens of thousands of volunteers over many months may be considered a good examination of executive and strategic abilities, and so a suitable test for a candidate seeking the Presidency. Some commentators note that problems in the Clinton 2008 campaign exposed previously unsuspected weaknesses in Hillary as a candidate.

Another, apparently inconsistent criticism of the primary process is that it has become "**front-loaded**", with the outcome decided in just a small number of early states. In both 2008 and 2012 the Iowa caucuses were held at the very start of January, and the party National Committees' attempts to define a later timetable were derailed by states such as Florida, South Carolina and Nevada insisting on holding their votes as early as possible despite cuts in their convention delegates being imposed as a penalty. Within a few weeks, all but a handful of candidates had dropped out without the large majority of states having an opportunity to express an opinion upon them. As a senior Republican has said:

"There has been increasing concern that a front loaded nomination system that ends almost as soon as it begins, raises barriers to all but the best connected and well-funded candidates. It may not allow voters adequate time to consider the qualities of various candidates and their views on the issues".⁸

⁸ William Brock, head of the Republican Advisory Committee on the presidential nominating process.

Commonly, by mid-March (often shortly after Super Tuesday) one candidate has established such a lead in delegates that all their rivals drop out, even though the majority of delegates have still not been awarded and most states have yet to vote. Although strongly ideological candidates such as Ron Paul may compete to the end of the primary season in order to promote their position within the party, usually less successful candidates see money drying up and succumb to pressure from the party establishment to get out of the race in order to preserve party unity. This happened with the Republican nomination in 2008; the long-running Democrat race, which stretched into early June, has very much looked the exception to the rule – although the 2012 GOP race also remained competitive until late April and Ron Paul competed until the last primaries in June.

The **media** also have a key role to play. In Iowa it is said the Des Moines Register can influence the outcome of the caucus and so have a key role to play in the selection of the next president. TV and internet can expose personal failings such as Bush's drink-driving and alleged former drug-taking, or Clinton, Cain and Gingrich's embarrassing sexual histories. They can also champion a candidate such as McCain or Gingrich or Santorum, if only to make a primary more exciting. Fear of media scrutiny of troubles early in his marriage was said to have prevented respected Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels from entering the race in 2011.

Like the TV ads though, the media can inform and educate and improve the scrutiny of candidates. Both in 2007-08 and 2011-12 a long series of debates between the rival candidates allowed exhaustive examination of policy positions and character. The **27 2011-12 Republican debates** were particularly influential in allowing Gingrich to remain competitive despite weak organisation and funding, while demonstrating the shallow policy grasp of one-time front-runner Rick Perry. Arguably voters should know about the personal lives of candidates and policy stances through critical media coverage, which now includes exhaustive commentary online. Cain's alleged sexual harassment and affairs, racist comment in newsletters sent out by Ron Paul in the 1990s, and Texas' record in job creation were all heavily scrutinised in 2012, as were Obama's association with an inflammatory pastor, the Revd Jeremiah Wright, in 2008.

Primaries have also been criticised for the **absence of peer group review**. Under the old arrangements (until the early 1970s), the party bosses and powers within the party would hold great sway in the selection of candidates. They would have better insider knowledge of the skills needed to be an effective president than the general public and they would be more aware of an individual candidate's ability to fulfil this role. As mentioned above, money, public image and telegenic appeal might explain the victor in a primary campaign, yet these skills would be of little use in the White House. Some commentators have pointed to Obama's problems as President as predictable given his lack of executive experience – demonstrating that campaign skills do not translate well into the hard grind of administering. Other political scientists point out that the endorsement of party establishment figures is still vital to success, signalling to primary voters the credibility and electability of a candidate, and opening access to rich party donor networks, citing the success of Romney in 2012 in support of this argument.

Both parties have some unpledged “**superdelegates**” whose well-informed votes may provide an element of peer-review at the convention, but in the GOP these amount to little more than 5% of delegates and play no real part in the selection. Democrat superdelegates do make up about 20% of the overall total, and might have decided the race in 2008, but this was a unique occurrence and ultimately most superdelegates chose to support Obama in recognition of his success in the primary season. Arguably, this was an abdication of their responsibility to exercise genuine peer-review, but most thought it would be incredibly damaging to the party's general election prospects if they went against the democratic voting process.

Concern has also been expressed about the **low turnout** in primaries and the actual **people who vote**. As most people who vote tend to be engaged in politics, they tend not to be representative of the public at large. Whilst the “selectorate” is broader than in the UK, the voters themselves may not be representative and they may choose a candidate who has party appeal but lacks public appeal. Presidential candidates are generally advised to be more extreme for the primaries (i.e. to the right for the Republicans and to the left for the Democrats), then to move to the centre once the nomination has been secured. In Romney’s case in 2012, this forced him to pledge himself as “severely conservative” and adopt hardline positions on immigration, abortion, gay marriage, climate change and gun ownership that reversed stances he had taken as a moderate Governor of liberal Massachusetts ten years previously. Later Obama would attack him both for these relatively extreme positions and for inconsistency (“flip-flopping”).

Concern about voters is especially relevant in caucuses, which have very low turnouts (e.g. fewer than 6000 voted in the Maine Republican caucuses in both January 2008 and February 2012, both very competitive years) and so can be dominated by activists. This is especially true on the Republican side as the caucus vote itself is often just a “beauty contest” and does not actually pledge delegates, who are instead awarded through county and state party conventions where well-organised partisans can dominate the process. In 2012 Ron Paul did very well in terms of delegates in several states with caucuses and state conventions, using his committed supporters to gain more delegates than others considered fair (e.g. 21/24 delegates from Maine, where Romney had beaten Paul 39% to 36%, and 22/28 in Iowa, where Paul had been third on 21%).

It is notable that in 2008 did much better in caucus states than primaries, which Clinton tended to win, but the very high turnout (often swelled by Independents in open and semi-open races) in Democrat contests that year may undermine this point. However, the success of the very conservative Rick Santorum (widely considered unelectable in a general election) in 2012 Republican contests characterised by low turnout suggests a selectorate problem continues.

Possible reforms to the primary system include:

1. A **national primary**; where all vote on the same day in all 50 states to reduce the time element. This would greatly favour front runners and those with money who could advertise nationally and set up a national organisation.
2. A **national primary** where the country is one constituency and votes are compiled across the country. This would encounter similar problems as outlined above but resolve the disproportionate power held by Iowa and New Hampshire.
3. A **more even distribution of states over the primary season**. In 2000 on Titanic Tuesday 16 states voted including New York and California, while in 2008 22 states voted in the Democrat’s Super-Duper Tuesday. Such a reform will require the agreement of the states which may not be forthcoming.
4. **Regional primaries** where the nation is divided into four.
5. **Campaign finance reform** - see later.

CONDUCT OF CAMPAIGNS

Similarities

Election campaigns in the USA and UK have obvious **similarities**: leaders criss-cross the country but their appearances are aimed less at those they are meeting and more at generating good photo-opportunities for the national media. Local candidates work hard to win votes on their own account. Policy platforms or manifestos are released. Volunteers are mobilised to canvas support and get out the vote on election day or through postal ballots. And because both systems operate using First Past the Post, most effort and attention is directed into a minority of swing states or marginal constituencies where the election result is not a foregone conclusion – meaning that much of the country is comparatively ignored by the media and the national campaigns.

It is also the case that **UK campaign strategies have been heavily influenced over the years by American methods**. The 1990s saw more attention to “spin” – managing the press and generating positive media opportunities – as well as the use of focus groups to try out and refine messages in advance of the campaign. The 2000s saw the arrival of database-driven targeting, with direct mail and telephone banks being used to reach voters with carefully crafted messages. And the 2010 election saw the first leaders’ debates, emulating the Presidential debates which are such a prominent feature in US elections.

One of the biggest changes has been the increasing focus in the UK on the role of the party leader – sometimes known as Presidentialism. National strategies are now very strongly based around the leader’s personal strengths, promises to voters, and their schedule of campaign events.

Differences

Overall, however, the UK and the USA are very different in the ways in which campaigns are conducted:

- Firstly, the UK **parliamentary system** means that there is only one first-order national election, every four or five years. Party leaders have to stand in their own constituencies and rely on their party colleagues winning seats all over the country in order to achieve the legislative majority which will bring them power.

By contrast the US **separated system** has federal elections every other year, but in Mid Term elections only Congressional seats (all 435 House districts, plus a third of the Senate) are contested, while in Presidential years the same Congressional contests take place in addition to the race for the White House

- US elections are very **candidate-centred**, with much less direction by the national party. This is true of Presidential elections, where once the candidate is selected through the primary system he is free to shape his own agenda and campaign strategy, rather than being beholden to policies and structures put in place by the national party committee. The party will rally behind the candidate and spend money on their behalf, but the nominee calls the shots. For example, John McCain ran in 2008 as a very different kind of Republican than George W Bush, and the campaign he ran was essentially an extension of his primary organisation, as was Obama’s. Romney’s campaign in 2012 was different again, although the rise of SuperPACS meant that he had less control over the adverts (almost all negative) put out on his behalf. This candidate-centred issue also holds for Congressional elections, where candidates for House or Senate seats expect to fight (and fund) their own campaigns, adopting only as much of the national party’s messaging as they find appropriate for their locality. Candidates will stress their local roots and campaign on issues that only

approximately relate to those being articulated by Presidential candidates and other party leaders; some (e.g. the 2012 Senate races of Democrats Claire McCaskill in Missouri and Joe Donnelly in Indiana, both of whom won in states that Obama lost) make a point of stressing their independence from their own party line. Even when the Congressional campaign committees channel money to particular candidates, they do not do so in the expectation of promoting a nationally coherent party message, but simply in the hope of enabling candidates in swing seats to eke out narrow wins.

In comparison, UK elections are **party-centred**, dominated by the national party machines. Party leaders genuinely control their party machines over a period of years, and local candidates mostly echo the policies and slogans coming out of the national headquarters, sticking close to the party line. This is also because constituency spending is very restricted in UK elections, so local candidates depend on the national campaign in order to reach voters via the media, advertisements and direct mail or telephone canvassing (even if the messages in direct mail or telephone calls are targeted for local consumption, this tailoring will be done by national party strategists, using sophisticated demographic databases – lessons learnt from US campaign techniques). UK candidates are also much less likely to have strong local roots than their US counterparts, at least when they initially contest a seat.

- National **policy platforms** are much more prominent in UK elections than in the USA, where personalities and a few key issues tend to dominate. This is partly because the parliamentary system in the UK has been expected to deliver a legislative majority for the party that wins the election, who are then considered to have a mandate to implement the manifesto promises they made. The MPs elected for the winning party are also expected to vote for the items within it, on the grounds that they were elected under that manifesto.

US elections are much more personality driven at all levels. Although Presidential candidates are expected to lay out a platform for what they would do with power, this is often much vaguer than in the UK. And the official party platform adopted at the Convention may even conflict with the candidate's own preferences – for example, the GOP platform in 2012 rejected abortion even in cases of rape or incest, which was not Romney's declared position. The discrepancy mattered little, as few paid attention to the official platforms.

Congressional elections typically do not see national policy manifestos comparable to the UK, although there have been some attempts to rally candidates behind a set of principles or promises – most famously the Republican "Contract with America" in 1994, but also the Democrats 6 for '06 in 2006 (note that both of these were from parties that had been out of power in Congress for some time, perhaps incentivising candidates to present a more united front than usual). Overall, in a separated system no one candidate or party can usually expect to implement a detailed set of policy proposals as a majority party can do in the UK legislature.

It is also noteworthy that manifestos also play less role in European elections. Even though elected representatives will sit in political groups in the European Parliament made up of similar national parties⁹, these groups do not usually offer pan-European manifestos. The main exception to this is the Socialist group's attempt to run a Europe-wide manifesto in 2009, but, in a bad year for left of centre parties, this was seen as unsuccessful. One key reason for this also applies to manifestos in multi-party systems generally – everyone knows that a party is unlikely to be able to implement its promises in government without a great many concessions to coalition partners. So campaign pledges have more the status of guiding principles or aspirations that may

⁹ e.g. the European People's Party for Centre Right parties, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats for Centre Left parties, and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

form the basis of negotiations after the election. Following the 2010 hung parliament, it will be interesting to see if UK manifestos also decline in significance.

- **US campaigns also last much longer than UK ones.** The main American campaigning runs through September and October into early November, whereas British general elections last only five weeks. But the role of the primaries in the USA means that in practice candidates are often campaigning for most of the year before election day. In recent years the UK has seen more importance given to the “near campaign” in the months running up to polling day, especially as part of the Conservatives target seats strategy under Lord Ashcroft’s influence – the significance of this can be seen in the introduction of spending limits during this period for the first time ahead of the 2010 election. However, few challengers in the UK give up their other jobs to campaign full time months ahead of an election, as is common in the USA.

The greater length of campaigning in the United States is especially obvious in Presidential elections. This can be partly explained by the primary system, but also by the fact that challengers for the White House are often relatively unknown to the general public and they need time to sell themselves to the electorate. This contrasts strongly with the UK where a leader of the opposition is likely to have been leading their party for some years before the polls open, and where they have regular high-profile opportunities to make their mark on voters, such as Prime Minister’s Question Time.

It is possible that the greater length of campaigns in the USA, and the need for candidates who are initially unfamiliar to project themselves to the public, means that US campaigns may have more influence on election outcomes than their UK equivalents. Obama’s success in introducing himself favourably to the American public in 2007-8, and later in framing Romney’s business background as a negative in the summer of 2012 could be cited here, as could Obama’s superior campaign machine in both elections.

- In both countries campaigns have increasingly **adopted new information technologies** to reach voters more efficiently, but usually America leads the way with British parties later trying to adopt methods that appear successful. The creation of vast databases of demographic and economic information by marketing firms has been exploited by American parties in order to target voters very precisely with tailored messages, using direct mail, telephone banks and, increasingly, email. The Republican party led the way with these techniques in the late 1990s, and maintained a campaign edge for several election cycles until the Democrats caught up. British parties have also adopted these methods (if they can afford to), with tailored mailings and phone calls being used by both Labour and Conservative very flexibly in the 2010 election.

Social media has also become significant in American campaigning, with Obama highly successful in building an online community of supporters, donors and volunteers, many of whom gave email addresses allowing regular contact with the campaigns and further targeting of campaign messages. Other candidates now try to generate this sense of interaction and commitment. British parties have tried to develop a similar online presence, not least because they would love to be able to raise more money from supporters online, but without conspicuous success. But as in America, online video is becoming an important way of reaching the public, and this may increase over time in the UK.

- The USA has many **paid political professionals**, hired by candidates (rather than parties) to act as their campaign managers, strategists, pollsters for hire. This is very

different from the UK, where very few people make money out of running political campaigns, and most of those who do work directly for the national parties rather than individual candidates (who could not afford their services and would not, under election law, be allowed to pay enough anyway). One indication of the flow of campaign methods from the US to the UK is the tendency for British parties from time to time to buy in expensive American political consultants (e.g. David Axelrod assisting Labour and Jim Messina working with the Conservatives in 2015) to assist them with aspects of their campaigns, such as polling, messaging, and (in 2010) debate preparation.

- The **role of the media** is also different in the UK to the USA, and this will be treated separately in the next section.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, American election campaigns are hugely more expensive than British ones. **The role of money** has been given a section of its own to explore this critical difference.

THE MEDIA AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Similarities

In both systems the **traditional broadcasters attempt neutrality** between the parties (e.g. CBS, ABC – BBC, ITV), providing equal coverage and refraining from endorsing specific candidates and parties.

But in both **other media outlets are much more partisan**, not just endorsing a particular party but acting as cheerleaders for them and attacking their rivals. This applies to most newspapers in the UK, and most especially The Daily Mirror, The Sun, The Daily Mail and often the Express and Telegraph. In the USA newspapers may also take sides, although this has become rarer in recent years with a contraction of the (highly regional and local) newspaper market - often now a city only has one paper, more reluctant to be associated with a particular party lest it alienate supporters of the other side. Media partisanship is instead seen on the airwaves, with talk radio stations and newer broadcasters such as Fox and MSNBC strongly associated with particular political positions.

And **in neither country does the government control the media directly**; in both the USA and UK it would be unacceptable for a party in power to attempt to manipulate what media companies broadcast to gain an electoral advantage. This contrasts strongly not only with authoritarian and managed democracies such as Russia, Iran and Venezuela, but even with some European democracies such as Italy, where the party in power has considerable sway over state broadcasters.

Finally, **new media** have enriched political coverage and understanding in both countries. Political websites, news hubs, campaign sites and blogs now allow voters much easier access to a huge range of in depth news, commentary and analysis. They have allowed new voices to break into political reporting (e.g. The Huffington Post, Politico, Real Clear Politics in the USA; Doughty Street, Guido Fawkes and Politics.co.uk in Britain). However, old media outlets (such as the New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, BBC, Guardian, Telegraph, Times and Daily Mail) have proved very flexible, and now run very successful online operations that provide far more depth than their printed or broadcast output can offer. Civil society groups such as OpenSecrets in the USA or They Work for You in the UK offer great detail to citizens who wish to find out more about the politicians seeking their vote. And partisan sites and blogs often find a political niche, providing news and comment that fits in with voters existing world view and reinforcing their ongoing commitment to a party or cause.

Differences

Unlike the UK, the **USA has no legal obligation on its broadcasters to provide balanced coverage** of politics and elections. A “Fairness doctrine” existed in the post-war period to ensure some balance, but this was repealed in the 1980s, allowing the rise of conservative talk radio and later Fox News, MSNBC, etc. At the same time, conservatives commonly charge the supposedly more neutral traditional broadcasters (CBS, ABC, PBS) with a liberal bias, often labelling them the “mainstream media”, whose values they see as hostile to those of ordinary Americans.

Nor does the USA have the same national newspaper market as the UK. Fewer Americans take a newspaper, and those that do tend to read a regional or local paper. Although a few papers (e.g. the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Wall Street Journal) are read across the country, these lack the reach and political influence of the UK’s mass market partisan tabloids. American newspapers lack the power to shape the perceptions of parties and their leaders, and to frame the issues considered politically important that their UK counterparts do. To a large extent this role is taken by the US broadcast media instead.

A third huge difference is the ban on **political broadcast advertising** in the UK. Party political broadcasts, which have to be carried on the main channels at election periods and occasionally at other times, are not at all similar to the immediacy and often raw negativity of American campaign ads. Lasting several minutes and often dull, they are easily escaped by the average voter, whereas US campaign ads plague anyone turning on their television or radio in an election period, even for a few minutes – this was especially true in swing states such as Ohio in 2012, when TV ads reached saturation point. Furthermore, PPBs in the UK are produced by national parties and dwell on national themes, although they may at times aim to promote the qualities of the party leader personally, while US ads are often intensely local and personal, produced by nearly every major party candidate for federal office and many running in state elections. This difference is also one of the main explanations of the different role money plays in elections in the US and UK – see next section.

Change

The biggest change in recent campaigns was the introduction of **leaders' debates** in the 2010 UK election. Anticipation and exhaustive coverage of the three debates dominated much of the campaign, increasing the media focus on the party leaders at the expense of other politicians and massively increasing the profile of the Lib Dems. They also ensured it was a good election for the “old media” broadcasters, although online commentary and analysis, often in real time, was also vigorous.¹⁰

The first debate clearly had the greatest impact on the campaign, shooting Nick Clegg to prominence and creating an apparent 3-horse race as post-debate polls saw the Lib Dems potentially overtaking Labour. This contrasts with the received wisdom about US debates, which tend to confirm the existing political preferences of viewers rather than shifting many voters' opinions. However, the 27 GOP primary debates in 2011-12 may have been unusually influential in shaping the race for the Republican nomination, and an unusually decisive win by Romney over Obama in the first 2012 Presidential debate resulted in the polls tightening considerably in October. Perhaps the UK experience was a predictable consequence of allowing a third party into the debates on equal terms, something that has not happened in the USA since 1992, when Ross Perot gained enough support to feature in some 1992 debates; his success in gaining 19% of the vote that year ensured that the two main parties successfully excluded him from the debates in 1996).

However, the second and third UK 2010 debates were tighter, with voters closer to the American model in their tendency to see the leader of their favoured party as the winner. And, of course, ultimately the surge in Lib Dem support proved illusory, and they finished the election with only 1% more of the popular vote, and with 7 fewer seats in the House of Commons.

So it could be argued that the UK debates were in the end similar in their impact to their American inspiration; huge media events that emphasise the leaders' personal qualities, but which do not necessarily have much impact on the outcome of the election. In 2010 it seemed likely that debates would be a key feature of UK elections in the future, but David Cameron's refusal to sign up for similar events in 2015 (so that instead there will be parallel interviews of leaders and a big 7-way debate between all British parties) has shown that Americanisation of UK Politics is not an inevitable and one-way process.

¹⁰ <http://www.newstatesman.com/digital/2010/05/voting-influenced-users> Accessed April 2 2013

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Role of Money - Overview

Similarities

In almost every modern democracy, the ability of political parties to raise money and spend it to persuade voters to support them on election day is an important aspect of the election process. Typically the money is spent on organisation, leader tours and rallies, polling and other research, phone banks and direct mail operations, and, most of all, on advertising. This ability to aggregate resources is indeed one of the main reasons political parties are so important within democratic political systems, and helps to explain why independent candidates and new parties often fail to achieve electoral success.

In both America and Britain much of this money comes from wealthy individuals and interest groups, including companies and trade unions, which are big donors to both Labour and the Democrats. Unlike some European countries, US and UK political parties get little of their money from public funds (i.e. the taxpayer), although some state funding is available in both systems. Both the USA and the UK have some restrictions on fund-raising – for example, foreign donors are not allowed (with rules against this tightened in both countries after some minor scandals in the 1990s). In both countries there is a public debate over the impact of election donations, with concern that rich individuals, companies, unions and other interest groups can buy influence with politicians.

Differences

However, despite some similarities, the differences between the USA and the UK are enormous in this area. Hugely more money is spent in the USA:

- including primaries, the 2008 Presidential race cost c\$1.75 billion
- including primaries, the 2012 Presidential race cost c\$2.5 billion
- the 2010 and 2014 Congressional mid-terms both cost up to c\$4 billion (again, including the cost of primary campaigns).
- All the election spending associated with the 2012 US Elections (federal, state, local, etc.) is estimated at \$6 billion.
- And the 2014 North Carolina Senate race alone is estimated to have cost over \$120 Million, with Colorado's race also over \$100 Million – the two costliest Congressional elections in US history. In each case, two-thirds of the money was spent by outside groups rather than by the candidates themselves.¹¹ In the same mid-term, California's 7th District is estimated to have cost over \$24 Million.
-
- The whole UK 2010 general election is estimated to have cost c£56.5 million (about \$85 million)
- even multiplied by five to take account of the difference in population size, the UK amount only comes to c\$425 million equivalent).

There are a number of reasons for this disparity:

- **Rights and the law.** The Supreme Court has ruled (*Buckley vs Valeo* 1974) that the 1st amendment right to freedom of speech extends to freedom to spend as much money as you wish on election campaigns. And while there are still some restrictions on the amount of money that can be raised from companies and interest groups, in *Citizens United vs FEC* 2010 the Supreme Court ruled that corporations are also covered by free speech rules, and can spend as much as they like in support of a candidate, as long as they do not directly coordinate with it. And in *McCutcheon vs FEC* 2014 the Court

¹¹ <https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/topraces.php?cycle=2014&display=allcandsout>

scrapped aggregate limits that prevented individuals giving more than \$117 000 in total to candidates and national parties combined.

- In contrast, there are strict legal limits on both national and local campaign spending in the UK.
- **Culture.** American citizens are much more willing to donate money to candidates/ political causes than British citizens (or indeed, other Europeans). This reflects the greater philanthropic culture of the small-government, low-tax USA – Americans are also much more likely to give to religious bodies, as well as charities such as the arts, which would be subsidised heavily by the state in most European countries. In continental Europe this comparison extends to state funding of political parties – in 2007 French political parties received €107 million (c\$144 million) of taxpayer funding (€70 million of regular annual funding, plus €37.5 million towards their election campaign costs)¹²; German parties receive €133 million (c \$179 million) a year from the state, but get no specific campaign funding. In both France and Germany parties get 30-40% of their funding from the taxpayer.

By contrast with both USA and continental Europe, British parties struggle to raise even the relatively small sums they are allowed to spend at election time, with Labour in particular heavily dependent on the goodwill of the trade unions for enough money to compete with the business-backed Conservatives. All parties are losing members, which further depletes their regular income, while the state gives them only £7 million a year towards their central office costs. Increased state funding for political parties has been debated for some time in the UK, but in 2012 the parties were lukewarm about the proposals (to increase funding to c£20 million a year) of a commission looking into the issue, aware of how unpopular this would make them in a period of austerity.¹³

- **Matching Funding.** Since the 1970s, US Presidential candidates have been eligible for funding from a public programme which matches money raised from individual donors. This was offered as an incentive to limit campaign spending – those accepting matching funds (in 2008 \$21 million per candidate was available for the primaries, \$85 million per candidate for the general election) have to commit to spending limits. There is no UK equivalent of this (although it is similar to campaign funding available in France to the Presidential candidates in the second round run-off vote). It should be noted that so much money is now spent by third parties on behalf of candidates (e.g. in ads run against the rival candidate, or as soft money in voter registration drives, etc.), that the restriction of election spending imposed by matching funding is nowhere near as great as originally envisaged.
- **Individual vs Party.** In the UK and Europe, most campaign fundraising and spending is undertaken by the political parties, whereas in the USA money is largely raised and spent by individual candidates (who are often independently wealthy). Intra-party primary contests cost huge amounts of money in their own right, and in Congressional elections the same donor may choose to give to a large number of individual candidates.
- **Advertising and speech rights.** In the USA much (but not most) campaign money is spent on television advertising, which is banned in the UK (and heavily limited in France), although a few free Party Political Broadcast slots are available for the parties

¹² France case study - <http://www.france24.com/en/20100706-french-parties-politicians-funded-france-government-legislation> accessed April 2 2013

¹³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/oct/28/political-parties-more-state-funding> accessed April 2 2013

to speak to the electorate. The United States' constitution's 1st amendment would make such restrictions impossible and there is no free airtime for party political broadcasts. European countries typically interpret free speech rights in a much more restrictive fashion; although quite large sums of money may still be spent on poster and newspaper advertising in the UK and elsewhere, these do not come close to the cost of a US election.

See this *Monkey Cage* article for an analysis of what campaign finance actually gets spent on - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/03/20/aaron-schocks-downfall-tells-us-we-need-to-look-at-political-spending-as-well-as-giving/>

- **Size matters.** Not only is the USA a very populous country (300 million, compared to 60 million in the UK, 65 million in France and 85 million in Germany), it is also enormous. This makes election campaigns even more expensive than they would be in a more compact, densely populated country of similar population. Much money is spent on travel around the USA (often by aeroplane), on hotel accommodation for campaign teams, on large numbers of field offices to coordinate local campaigns, and on buying airtime in very many different media markets (as opposed to just one in the UK). The length of US elections (including the invisible primary, primaries and general election campaign) exacerbates all these costs.
- See this Library of Congress page- <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/campaign-finance/index.php> (accessed April 2 2013) for **comparative summaries** of a range of different countries' systems – very useful.

Change

- European political parties are seeing **declining membership** (down c40% in 13 European countries 1970s to 1990s), hitting their ability to raise funds. In the UK the combined membership of all political parties is now less than 500 000 – this is a key driver in demands for more state funding of parties, which appear ever more reliant on a few donors with deep pockets.

The USA does not have paid-up party membership in the same way, and indeed party registration has continued to fall, but recent elections have shown that millions more ordinary Americans are willing to donate to candidates than ever before. Using the internet and innovative social marketing techniques, first Howard Dean, running for the Democrat nomination in 2004, and Barack Obama in 2008 demonstrated how huge sums could be raised in small donations from a greatly-increased donor base.

- **Matching funding** for Presidential elections is in decline. Because they place restrictions on spending (very roughly, if candidates accept the maximum \$21 million in the primaries, that limits them to c\$50 million of total primary spending; accepting the \$85 million for the general election means no further money can be spent in the autumn campaign), candidates may decide they would be better off without. Since 1996 it has become common for major candidates not to accept matching funding for the primaries (e.g. Bush, Kerry and Dean in 2004; Obama, Clinton, McCain, Giuliani, McCain and Paul in 2008) – this frees them to raise and spend as much as they could in pursuit of their party's nomination. No major candidate accepted matching funding for the 2012 Republican primaries¹⁴.

¹⁴ True as of 25th Feb 2012; only Buddy Roemer has sought and qualified for matching funding.

Until 2008, however, every Republican or Democrat nominee for the general election had accepted matching funding for the autumn campaign, limiting their own spending from that point (to \$85 million in 2008). In 2008, however, Obama backtracked on an earlier pledge to accept matching funds, and chose not to do so, confident in his ability to raise far more money than the matching limits. McCain did accept matching funds and so limited his own spending to the \$85 million limit; Obama outspent him by 4 to 1 in the most expensive race in US history¹⁵. As a result, it is likely that in future accepting matching funding will be seen as a sign of weakness in a major party candidate, and so the system may be in terminal decline (unless the limits are substantially raised in the future or campaign finance laws dramatically changed).

Both parties still accepted c\$17 million from the Federal Elections Commission in matching funding for organising each of their 2008 and 2012 conventions,

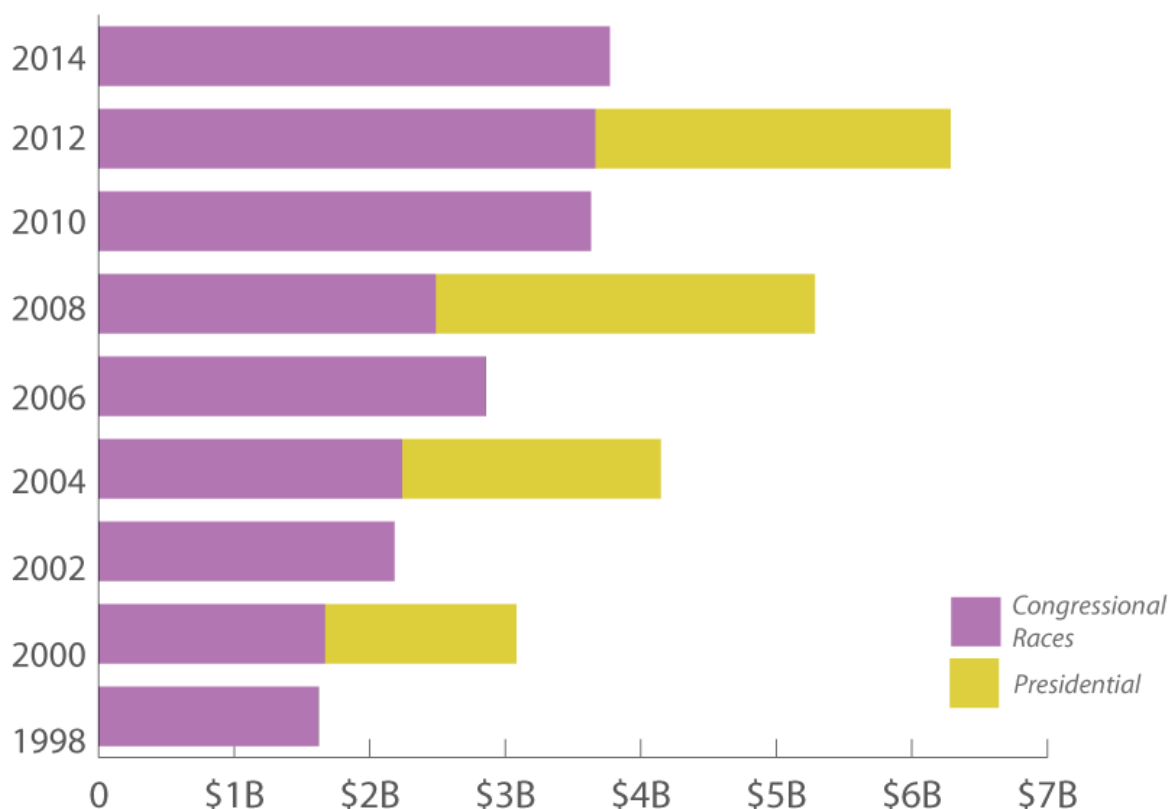
- The **rise of the internet** is changing the nature of advertising in all countries. To some extent it is replacing television as a popular medium, especially with the young; it is certainly expanding the reach of political advertising. This is having an impact in both the US and the UK. Firstly it provides a cheap way of reaching an audience with a video advertisement, and of targeting your message to a particular group. This means that a campaign with little money, such as Labour in 2010 or Santorum in 2012, can release a lively ad and hope that it will “go viral”, generating lots of views and positive publicity for little outlay.

Secondly, as the boundaries between television and the internet continue to blur, the ban on broadcast advertisements in the UK may lose some relevance. Experiments in the 2010 election showed that paying for US-style short advertisements to be embedded in popular sites could be a successful strategy in the future. The Conservatives also invested a significant sum of money in buying up Google search terms in order to direct browsers to their sites and ads. All of this may put upward pressure on the cost of campaigning in the UK in future.

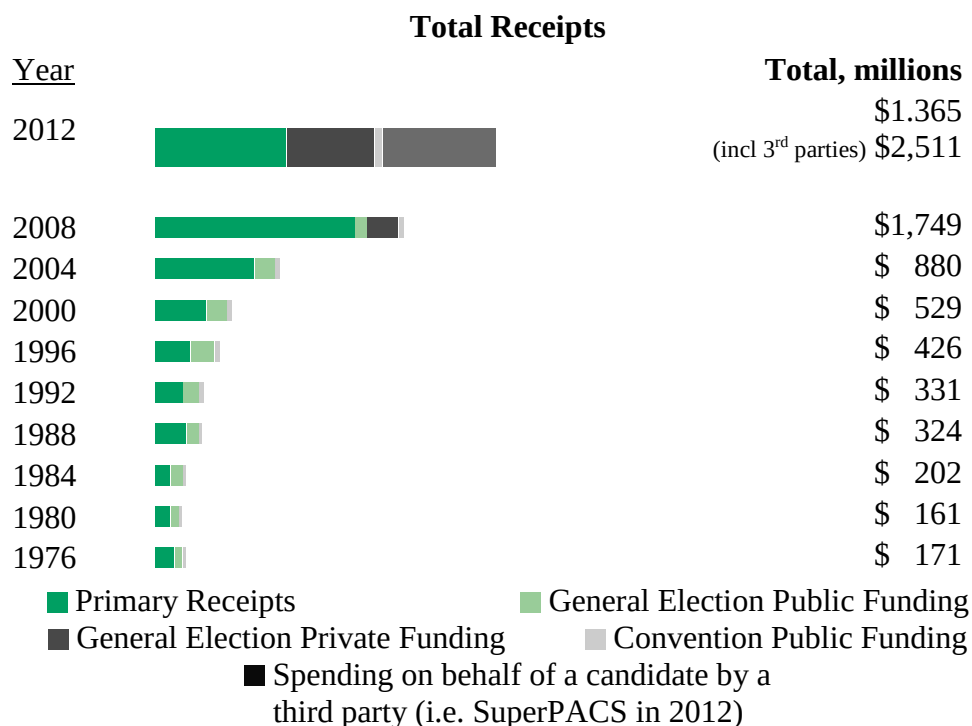
¹⁵ <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=anLDS9WWPQW8> accessed April 2 2013

Campaign Finance in the USA

Elections in the United States are hugely expensive and becoming ever more so, as the tables below indicate: <http://www.opensecrets.org/overview/cost.php>



Presidential Election Fundraising and Spending, 1976 – 2012: Total Contributions to Presidential candidates



(Numbers are not adjusted for inflation) ¹⁶

¹⁶ Center for Responsive Politics - <http://www.opensecrets.org/pres08/totals.php?cycle=2008> Accessed April 2 2013

Note that 2012's election differs in three key respects from those before it:

- The amount raised by candidates is actually lower than in the previous race
- Neither candidate accepted public matching funding (nor did the main GOP primary contenders)
- But overall the election was much more expensive, as outside groups (SuperPACs) spent very large sums attempting to get their preferred candidate elected.

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2012

Candidate	Party	Total Raised	
Barack Obama ¹⁷	D	\$741,000,000	
Mitt Romney	R	\$473,000,000	
All other Pres candidates		\$3,822,771	
			\$1,120,650,835
Cost of primaries (less Romney and Obama)			\$147,878,778
Of which			
- Ron Paul		\$40,627,094	
- Newt Gingrich		\$23,616,988	
- Rick Santorum		\$22,358,245	
Total spending on Presidential race (excluding external groups)			\$1,268,529,613
External groups spending (on Presidential and Congressional races)¹⁸			
(Party committees & SuperPacs, unions, etc)			\$2,655,678,931

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2008

Candidate	Party	Total Raised	
Barack Obama	D	\$744,985,000	
McCain, John	R	\$368,093,000	
Nader, Ralph	Indep	\$4,000,000	
All other Pres candidates		\$1,458,000	
			\$1,118,536,000
Cost of primaries (less Romney and Obama)			\$598,510,167
Of which			
- Hilary Clinton		\$221,557,563	
- John Edwards		\$57,137,322	
- Mitt Romney		\$107,142,234	
- Rudy Giuliani		\$58,965,241	
- Ron Paul		\$34,534,903	
Total spending on Presidential race (excluding external groups)			\$1,717,046,167
External groups spending (on Presidential and Congressional races)¹⁹			
(Party committees)			\$585,214,688

¹⁷ In theory Obama raised \$442 million in primary funding, and \$299 million in general election funding, but as an unopposed incumbent, all of his fundraising could be dedicated to the November election.

¹⁸ <http://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/index.php?cycle=2010&view=A&chart=A> accessed April 3 2013

¹⁹ <http://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/index.php?cycle=2010&view=A&chart=A> accessed April 3 2013

Campaign Finance Reform

“The twin loopholes of soft money and bogus issue ads have virtually obliterated our campaign finance laws.”

Senator McConnell, Kentucky

The oft-quoted remark that “*money is the mother's milk of American politics*” was borne out by the 2008 elections which saw total spending of \$5.28bn, with over \$1bn spent on the Presidential election alone for the first time. This was the costliest election ever but continued a trend of escalating costs dating back to the 1980s. 2012 was even more expensive.

Whilst it is possible to justify such spending in terms of the need for staff and materials it is also the case that vast amounts must be spent on TV advertising if running a political campaign at national, state or local level.

This spending in itself might not be too great a cause for concern. TV advertising might be seen as means of educating and informing the public, of encouraging public debate and of mobilising the electorate. The consequence of this dependency upon money though, is what raises this issue to political prominence in the United States. Rather like the “cash for questions” scandal in the UK, concern lies with the price to be paid for representatives soliciting funds from donors. Over the years, billions of dollars have been given to industries and interest groups in the form of grants and tax breaks. The essential question remains though which came first, the donation or favourable policy treatments? Do donations come before favourable policies, or do they merely flow to those who have supported a particular policy? Is it the case that money talks and the Congressman votes? Given the amounts of money concerned and the fact that this could amount to a form of elitism in government, with only the wealthy being able to “buy” influence, campaign finance is a central issue in American political debate today.

Reform in the 1970s

There was legislation in the 1970s, which highlights the fact that this is not a new problem. Ironically, Nixon signed the first legislation signed in 1972 and then went on to divert campaign funds into “slush fund” accounts to pay for the illegal activities surrounding the Watergate break in.

The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 was passed as an antidote to the pre-Watergate activities of politicians. It attempted to tighten up the use of money in elections by

- Establishing strict disclosure requirements for campaign donations
- Limiting donations to candidates (“hard money”) to \$1000 dollars per donor per candidate
- Introducing state matching funding of presidential elections
- Establishing a Federal electoral Commission (FEC) to ensure the provisions of the act were enforced.

The Rise of Soft Money

The FECA worked reasonably well for a while, although its attempts to limit actual election spending (as opposed to fundraising) were struck down by the Supreme Court in the 1976 *Buckley vs Valeo* case, which established that spending money to get elected is a form of speech and is therefore constitutionally protected under the 1st Amendment. *Buckley* meant that independently wealthy candidates could spend as much as they liked of their own fortunes on getting elected, although they were still limited in how much they could raise from others.

By the 1990s, however, parties had found a way around the Act. Although donations directly to candidates (“hard money”) were limited, donors could give as much as they wished to political parties for “party building” (“soft money”) purposes, even if this also had the effect of helping individual candidates for that party, who might benefit from voter registration drives, get out the vote organisation, and the running of issue ads that did not specifically endorse a candidate.

Soft money donations in presidential elections²⁰

1980	\$19m
1992	\$86m
1996	\$263m
2000	\$476m

Soft money rapidly came to dominate elections and drove increases in unregulated spending. The central controversy hinged upon the distinction between hard and soft money. It is alleged that the parties are adept at siphoning the funds back to the candidates. Whilst many point to the apparent demise of the parties; “*The party's over*” as Broder remarked; others argue that the re-diverting of soft money to candidates has given the parties a new lease of life and provides an illustration of how the parties have been able to adapt to changing circumstances and to find new functions which give them meaning. The Washington Post described advertisements run by the Democratic National Committee as virtually indistinguishable from advertisements promoting Clinton's campaign. The Republican National Committee had 56 seconds of one advertisement devoted to Dole and a mere 4 seconds to the issue which it was supposed to promote. Indeed it was the case that it would seem that the parties have been able to find their way around the FECA to render it largely redundant.

That contributions and spending limits no longer had any real force as was evident from the trade unions and interest groups spending \$70m in 1996 for political purposes, mostly on candidate specific advertising. Providing it was not coordinated with the candidates, this **independent expenditure** on supposedly issue-based campaigning was unregulated. In practice such corporate, union and interest group money clearly influenced races by funding negative ads in which one candidate was obviously targeted, to the benefit of the unnamed but favoured rival.

Given these developments it would appear that the FECA 1974 no longer served its purpose and there were calls for further reforms. These calls gained weight after the 1996 elections when the Democratic National Committee returned \$2.8m from questionable sources such as foreign nationals or people contributing on the part of third parties. The fundraising antics of both Clinton and Gore also were a cause for concern with large donors being able to stay over in the White House (the most expensive bed and breakfast in town!). The Federal Electoral Commission was seen as unable to enforce the spirit of the law as it had been slow and generally weak. Its structure with three from each party resulted in deadlock and cuts in its budget further reduced its potency. Consequently, it came as no surprise to see attempts from 1998 to remedy the situation.

Reform since 2000

Attempts in 1997-9 to ban soft money donations and restrict independent expenditures did not succeed due to filibusters in the Senate, but in 2002 the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, also known as the McCain-Feingold Act after its sponsors, was passed. The Act:

²⁰ *The Economist*, “Soft money wins again”, 23.10.99

- banned soft money contributions to national parties
- raised the hard money limits to \$2000 per election, to be automatically adjusted for inflation in future.
- Restricted independent expenditure, banning companies, unions and non-profits from paying for ads that mention a specific candidate within 60 days of a general election or 30 days of a primary.
- Required disclosure of the sponsors of advertisements within a broadcast (leading to the common tag-line in candidate ads of “I’m Mitt Romney and I endorse this message”, etc.

McCain-Feingold withstood initial legal challenges but its restrictions on independent advertising were limited in a 2006 ruling (*Wisconsin Right to Life v. Federal Election Commission*), which ruled that ads aimed at specific legislative issues could not be banned even if they also mentioned candidates in forthcoming elections. This was seen by some analysts as evidence that the court had moved in a conservative direction with the appointment of Justice Samuel Alito to replace the more centrist Sandra Day O’Connor. This view was confirmed in January 2010 when the Supreme Court ruled that corporations and civil society organizations such as pressure groups and unions were entitled to the free speech protection of the 1st Amendment, provided they did not coordinate their ads with any candidate or party’s official campaign.

The *Citizens United* decision was immediately controversial, not least because it was a 5-4 decision from an ideologically polarised court. Liberal commentators and groups particularly denounced the majority opinion’s ruling that corporate bodies deserve the same speech rights as individuals under the constitution. President Obama also denounced the decision in his State of the Union address.

Super PACs

As predicted in 2010, the *Citizens United* decision has had a major impact on campaigning, with a dramatic rise in independent expenditure, particularly on negative ads attacking the rivals of an organization’s favoured candidate. These have largely been funded by Super PACs (independent expenditure political action committees), that can accept unlimited donations from companies and individuals in order to influence elections, providing they do not coordinate with official campaigns. Coordination has been very weakly defined by the Federal Election Commission, and so Super PACs have become extensions of the candidate’s campaign, often run by former staff members; candidates can advise their supporters to donate to sympathetic Super PACs and even attend their fundraisers.

Super PACs do have to disclose who their donors are, although in practice companies and rich individuals can often maintain anonymity if they wish to, for example by setting up a company solely for the purpose of donation. According to the website *OpenSecrets.org* in 2012: “The **top 100 individual donors to super PACs**, along with their spouses, represent just **1.0% of all individual donors** to super PACs, but **73% of the money** they delivered.”

Other “social welfare” organisations (known as 501c(4)s, after a provision in the tax code which covers them), whose main purpose is not to influence elections but who may run election ads in addition to other activities, are exempt even from the donor disclosure requirement. Often these 501c(4)s are closely linked with a supposedly more political Super PAC, sharing offices and even staff. Karl Rove’s Crossroads GPS is such a 501c(4). Democrats have attempted to pass legislation require 501c(4) organisations to reveal their donors, but this has failed to make progress in a divided Congress.

Super PACs had a major impact on the 2012 Republican primary race, with more than \$85 million spent by them²¹ (in comparison, the candidates have spent about twice that on their own official campaigns). In particular pro-Romney groups blanketed the airwaves with negative ads against his rivals in close contests in Florida, Michigan and Ohio. The main players are:

Restore Our Future	pro-Romney	\$153.7 M (covers both primaries and general election campaigns; given by a range of donors, but 97% came in gifts of \$25000 or more)
Red, White and Blue	pro-Santorum	\$7.5 M (40% or so donated by Foster Friess, a Christian hedge-fund billionaire)
Winning Our Future	pro-Gingrich	\$23.9M (largely donated by Sheldon Adelson, a Las Vegas billionaire)
Endorse Liberty	Pro-Paul	\$3.5M spent to March 2012
Priorities USA Action	Pro-Obama	\$79,050,419 Endorsed by the Obama campaign in January 2012, after the President switched from his earlier public reluctance to benefit from the <i>Citizens United</i> ruling he had criticised. Priorities USA Action also has an associated 501c(4) group.

It should be noted that although Obama's own campaign had more money than Romney's, Romney had more financial support once SuperPACS and other outside money was taken into account. Much of this was spent on running ads against Obama; however, it should be noted that while Presidential candidates are given somewhat preferential rates in the purchase of broadcast ads, outside organisations are not, and so the Obama campaign, with less reliance on SuperPAC money, got more bang for its advertising buck than the pro-Romney forces.

Although Super PACs seeking to influence the Presidential election have received the most attention, they may be most influential in Congressional races, where a donation of several hundred thousand dollars can have a very significant impact. In 2010 outside spending in Congressional races more than doubled, to \$280M, which was more than the national parties spent. Critics point to the dangers of allowing wealthy individuals and corporations to buy political influence, both by affecting the outcomes of elections and perhaps by swaying the subsequent legislative votes of successful candidates they have supported. However, further reform appears very unlikely – Congressional Republicans are largely opposed to stricter disclosure requirements, and major reform appears impossible unless the ideological disposition of the US Supreme Court shifts significantly in a liberal direction.

For an interesting argument that outside money doesn't truly decide races, see this *Crystal Ball* article - <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/why-outside-spending-is-overrated-lessons-from-the-2014-senate-elections/>

²¹ <http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/>
<http://www.economist.com/node/21548244>
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ari-berman/super-pacs-2012_b_1281716.html all accessed March 2012

UK Party Funding

In comparison to the United States, the amounts involved in UK politics are minuscule. Most of the funds raised by the parties are needed for election campaigns and it is therefore difficult to separate the two. The central question remains, however, how much influence do these donations buy? Is it the case that he who pays the piper calls the tune?

- Allegations of sleaze dogged the Conservatives in 1997 with the Cash for Questions scandal to the fore resulting in Hamilton losing the safe Conservative seat of Tatton to the independent Martin Bell.
- Labour too has encountered similar problems. Soon after the 1997 election concerns were raised about the £1m donation from Ecclestone, the head of Formula 1 motor racing, at a time when the government was considering an advertising ban on tobacco in sport.
- Similar concerns were raised about Mandelson taking a loan from a cabinet colleague and not declaring it at a time his department were investigating his business affairs and his support for passport applications from major donors to the party, the Hinduja brothers.
- And in 2002 Blair was criticised for supporting a company's bid to buy a Romanian steel firm when it was revealed that the company was owned by Mittal who had given £125,000 to the Labour party.
- Following the 2005 election Labour was hit by a police investigation when it was revealed that several men who had lent large amounts to the party had been nominated for peerages. No evidence was found that this had been a condition of the loans, and the case was dropped without trial, but considerable suspicion remained around the "Cash-for-honours" scandal.
- The Conservatives were also heavily criticised between 1999 and 2010 for their financial reliance on rich businessmen, especially former-Party Treasurer Lord Ashcroft, who was non-resident in the UK for tax purposes.
- Labour have continued to rely upon union funding, especially since the 2005 General Election; critics have argued that this makes the party beholden to the unions and strongly influences policy. This charge has gained force since the election of Ed Miliband as party leader, as he lost in the votes cast by MPs and Labour party members, only winning because he had a strong lead in union votes.
- And in 2012 the Conservatives were embarrassed when a Sunday Times sting operation caught their Treasurer on tape offering private access to Prime Minister David Cameron and a chance to influence the policy process to companies that donated six figure sums.

There was also a perception that elections were becoming too expensive. 1997 election spending was:

Con = £28M
Lab = £26M
Lib Dem = £2.3M

Apart from in 2005 when Labour racked up massive party debts to secure the maximum budget, the Conservative Party has consistently outperformed all other political parties in terms of the campaign chest (see table below).²²

In response to this dissatisfaction, upon election in 1997 Labour made it compulsory to reveal all donations over £5,000. And the Neill committee recommended higher standards of integrity, openness, accountability and objectivity in public life. Caps on election expenditure and new rules about permissible donors were introduced in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act of 2000, and the rules were adjusted in 2006 and 2009. To quote from the Electoral Commission:²³

	Conservative			Labour			Liberal Democrat		
	Current prices	2011 values RPI	2011 values AEI	Current prices	2011 values RPI	2011 values AEI	Current prices	2011 values RPI	2011 values AEI
1910 (Dec)	0.1	13.2	58.3	0.0035	0.3	1.5	0.2	17.7	78.4
1983	3.7	10.2	14.7	2.1	5.7	8.2	1.9	5.4	7.7
1987	9.0	20.8	27.0	4.7	10.9	14.1	1.8	4.2	5.4
1992	11.2	19.0	22.7	10.2	17.3	16.8	1.8	3.1	3.7
1997	28.3	42.3	47.3	26.0	38.8	43.5	2.1	3.1	3.6
2001	12.0	16.4	16.9	10.8	14.8	15.2	1.3	1.8	1.9
2005	17.7	22.0	21.5	16.9	20.9	20.5	4.2	5.3	5.1
2010	15.6	16.6	16.0	7.1	7.6	7.3	4.7	5.0	4.9

Fundraising

“There is no limit to the amount an individual or organisation can donate or lend to an organisation/individual. However, the money must come from a permissible source if it is above £500.

When organisations/individuals receive a donation or a loan above £500, they must verify that the donor or lender is permissible.

Under Section 54 of PPERA, eligible donors or lenders are:

- *an individual registered in a UK electoral register (including bequests)*
- *a UK registered company which is incorporated within the European Union and carries on business in the UK*
- *a GB registered political party*
- *a UK registered trade union*
- *a UK registered building society or Friendly society*
- *a UK registered limited liability partnership that carries on business in the UK*
- *a UK based unincorporated association that carries on business in the UK*

Expenditure

The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) regulates campaign expenditure, which is defined as any expenditure incurred by a party for electoral purposes; that is, for the purpose of enhancing the standing of or promoting electoral success for a

²² 2011 Report into Party Funding for the Committee on standards in Public Life: http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/Library/Pinto_Duschinsky_The_finances_of_the_largest_three_British_political_parties_Sept_2011.pdf accessed March 2012

²³ <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/legislation> accessed March 2012

party at a forthcoming or future election. This includes issuing disparaging material relating to another party or its candidates.

Campaign expenditure includes any expenditure incurred by a party in connection with the following items:

- party political broadcasts
- advertising
- unsolicited material to electors
- manifesto or other policy documents
- market research and canvassing
- media/publicity
- transport
- rallies or other events

The PPERA specifies that 'notional expenditure' must also be treated as campaign expenditure. Notional expenditure is incurred when a party receives benefits in kind, i.e. when someone else bears the costs that a party would otherwise have been liable for; for example, a party supporter might pay half the costs towards a party's advertising campaign. The amount paid by the supporter would be treated as notional expenditure and would be counted as campaign expenditure incurred by the party.

Limits

All parties contesting a relevant election are subject to limits on expenditure incurred in the 'regulated period' in advance of an election. These limits are separate to the limits on election expenses incurred by individual candidates standing at elections.

Parties are subject to expenditure limits at Parliamentary general elections, elections to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Parliament. There are no separate limits on campaign expenditure incurred during local election campaigns; however, expenditure incurred at local elections must be included in a party's expenditure return if the expenditure is incurred during a regulated period for another election.

Parties' expenditure limits are determined by the number of constituencies and/or regions that the party is contesting:

<i>Election</i>	<i>Regulated period (ends with the date of the poll)</i>	<i>Determination of spending limit:</i>	<i>Maximum spend (based on party contesting all constituencies/regions)</i>
UK Parliament	365 days	£30,000 per constituency contested*	£18.96m GB £540,000 NI

It should be noted that these spending limits only apply to national party spending during the specific election campaign (usually about a month). Parties can spend as much of they like preparing for elections and in the “near campaign” of advertising and election build-up during the months before the general election is formally called by the Prime Minister.

In addition to these limits of party campaign spending, there are separate limits for individual candidates at constituency level. In 2010 these were:

Constituencies

Spending regulations are now divided between -

the "Long Campaign": from the 1 January 2010 to the date that Parliament was dissolved (12 April 2010), and

the "Short Campaign": from the dissolution of Parliament through to polling day.

The long and short campaigns have a baseline limit per candidate of £25,000 and £7,150 respectively, with a top-up of:

5p per elector in a borough/burgh constituency

7p per elector in a county constituency.

UK 2010 General Election Fundraising and Spending

Although the 2010 election in the UK was fought under a much more heavily regulated environment than the USA, one party still had a clear campaign finance advantage.

- Conservatives raised more than £32 million in 2009, and so were able easily to spend up to the maximum allowed in Campaign month of £18.96 million, plus £350,000 for Northern Ireland.
- The Conservatives have spent c£100M since Cameron became leader in 2005. Some of this was spent on clearing the accumulated debt the party had built up by 2005, more went in large fees for pollsters and advertising agencies, and large salaries for key advisers (including from the USA).
- Labour raised c£16 million in 2009, mostly from trade unions, but this also had to pay off substantial debts and ongoing expenses in preparing the party for the general election. Labour only had a total war chest of £8 million for the actual campaign.
- Donations during the campaign month:
 - Con = £7.3M
 - Lab = £5.3M
 - Lib Dem = £0.7M
- The Conservatives had £25M for 2010 election, including the full £18M for the campaign month
- Labour only had £10m including local marketing, including just £8M for the campaign month
- Lib Dems had c£5M for national campaign alone
- With better funding, Cameron was able to use planes regularly during the campaign, while Brown did so only on a few occasions – mostly the Prime Minister of the time had to travel by train.
- Labour's manifesto was printed on cheap, recycled paper, and the party tried to exploit "word of mouth" and online techniques.
- Even including expenditure by constituency candidates, the combined total cost of the UK 2010 campaign was:²⁴

○ All parties campaign spend (election month only)	£31,154,793
○ + candidate expenditure (both long and short campaign)	est £25,363,749
	= est £56,518,542

(or about \$85M in US dollars)

²⁴ [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/party-finance-analysis/campaign-expenditure/uk-parliamentary-general-election-campaign-expenditure#GB parties CE](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/party-finance-analysis/campaign-expenditure/uk-parliamentary-general-election-campaign-expenditure#GB%20parties%20CE) accessed April 3 2013

Commentary after the 2010 election concluded that if another election was called in less than two years it would be disastrous for the national marketing strategies employed by Labour and Lib Dems. There would be little to no money available for outdoor advertising, national party leaflets or direct advertising material – and almost certainly no budget for search advertising or online video. Conservatives would be more able to fight a second quick election, but would not be able to fund a similar campaign to 2010.²⁵ Such considerations may have incentivized the parties to form a Coalition government with a commitment to a full 5 year term in the hung parliament situation of May 2010.

Proposals for Reform

All parties have experienced shrinking membership over the past few decades, reducing a traditional source of funding. And all have been embarrassed at times as a consequence of taking money from rich donors. This has led to attempts to reform the system, especially attractive to Labour and the Lib Dems who are typically at a funding disadvantage compared to the Conservatives. After the 2010 election the independent Committee on Standards in Public Life, chaired by Sir Christopher Kelly, was asked to look again at party funding. The Committee reported in November 2011, recommending:²⁶

- A cap on individual donations of £10,000 per year
- A requirement that union members opt in individually to their union's funding of Labour (at present unions provide the bulk of Labour's funding, and their members have to specifically opt out if they do not want part of their individual membership dues to go to the party).
- Reduced campaign spending limits
- Greatly increased state funding for political parties (at present the taxpayer provide some funding for parties national policy-development work – "Short money" - but this is not supposed to be spent on campaigning). Kelly suggested that state funding might be £3. per vote won in general elections, and £1.50 per vote won to devolved assemblies.
- Some tax relief for political donations

Political reaction to the Kelly Committee proposals was cool. The Conservatives want a much higher cap on donations, perhaps £50,000 per year, and for Labour's union donations to be capped in the same way as corporate donations - i.e. as a single donation per union, not thousands of small donations from individual members. Labour is unenthusiastic about anything that might potentially reduce its union funding, and will not compromise with the Tories on how union donations are categorised, despite Ed Miliband distancing the Party from the unions in other ways. All of the parties believe that the public has no appetite for seeing its taxes going to political parties, especially in a time of cuts and increased taxation. Although the March 2012 Tory funding scandal that forced party co-Treasurer Peter Cruddas to resign brought the issue back into the news, reform continued to be elusive and no agreement was reached ahead of the 2015 election.

The main arguments on state funding for political parties are as follows:

²⁵ <http://www.ukmarketingnews.com/liberals-and-labour-would-have-no-campaign-funds-for-a-second-election-say-industry-experts/> accessed April 3 2013

²⁶ <http://www.economist.com/node/21540290> accessed April 3 2013

ARGUMENTS AGAINST STATE FUNDING OF POLITICAL PARTIES	ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF STATE FUNDING OF POLITICAL PARTIES
It would penalise third and smaller parties, entrenching the dominance of the two main parties who would get the biggest share of the funding	It would end reliance on donations from sectional groups, companies and individuals who are then able to exert influence on the party.
Difficult to determine who gets what	The parties now fight more elections
There are more important priorities for government spending, especially in a period of austerity.	Parties vital for democracy - a means to combat falling turnout
Money does not always buy influence. New Labour successfully distanced themselves from the trade unions, for example. A number of Eurosceptic past Tory donors have given up on the party and gone over to UKIP, unhappy that the Conservative leadership will not embrace EU withdrawal.	It would end inequalities between the parties and ensure a level playing field at election time
Parties should look to re-engaging with the public and rebuild their membership. State funding will alienate the public, who do not want their taxes to be used in this way, and so drive further disillusionment with politics.	Financial support could be limited to a modest but meaningful amount. Other services need not be affected
Such expenditure would only encourage wasteful expenditure on posters and the like	Some state funding is already available for the opposition party
State funding would strengthen the party HQ at the centre when it is local parties which need the support	It is used successfully in other countries

VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Types of Analysis

It is helpful when studying theories of voting behaviour to think firstly in terms of **structural factors** (a *social structures model* involving race, gender, class, religion, region, etc.), creating partisan alignment/ identification that influence voting behaviour in the **long-term**. Then consider factors which affect voting in specific elections: **shorter-term factors** such as the economy; the record of the current administration; the relative appeal of party policies on issues of contemporary salience to the public; perceptions of party leaders; and the impact of election campaigns, including the role of the media, debates, money, etc.

In general terms there is a marked similarity between recent trends in voting behaviour in both the UK and the USA.

In both long term factors have given way to the increased importance of short-term factors. **Dealignment** has been marked in both countries, with social structures models no longer explaining voting behaviour as well as they did in the 1960s, leading to an increased number of independents and floating voters. Voters then have ceased to vote out of habit or tradition and no longer have a blind allegiance to any particular party. Instead they are much more likely to consider the relative merits of the candidates and parties, their policies and past performances, and accordingly vote on the merits and failures in an objective manner - the rational choice model.

Another vital aspect of this dealignment is that it manifests itself not only in the increased numbers of independents voting judgementslly, but also in the reduced turnout evident in some recent elections on both sides of the Atlantic. This trend has been more apparent in the USA in the past but the 2001 general election in the UK witnessed the lowest turnout (59%) for an election in the UK since 1918, and the very unpredictable 2010 election still only saw turnout of 65%. On the other hand, the 2008 US election turnout of 62% was the highest since 1968.

Despite a broad consensus on the impact of dealignment on voting behaviour, it is clear that a social structures model still has relevance today, with key social groups still associated with support for a particular party, even if this alignment is not as strong as it was 50 years ago.

Structural Factors

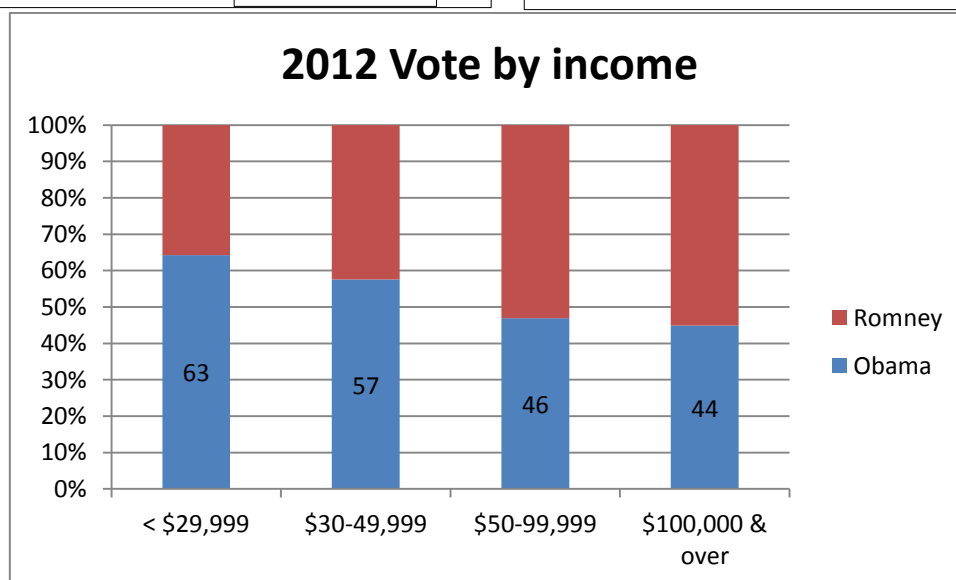
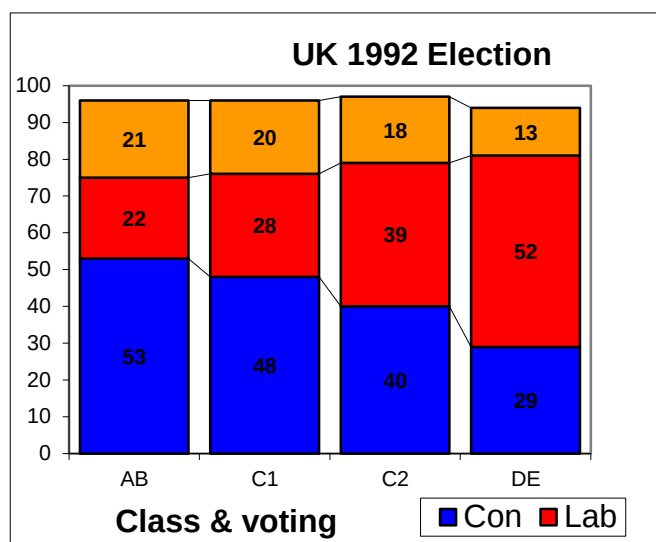
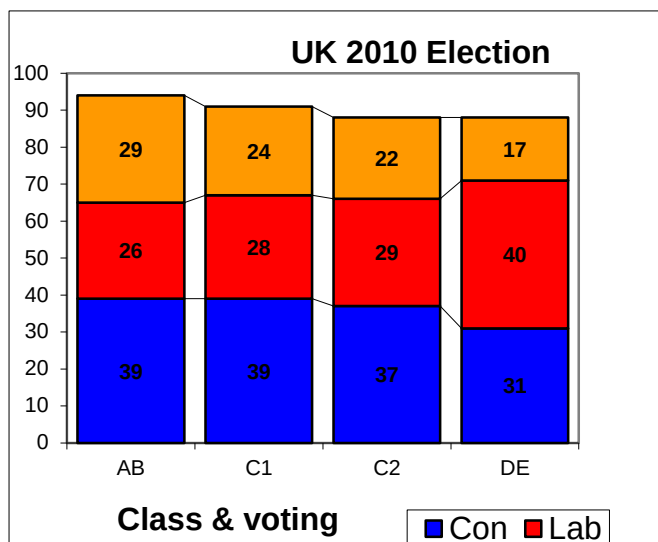
Class Alignment and income

Class is still very significant in the UK but less important than in the past (see 2010 graph below) – but it is hard to compare UK class conceptions to the USA:

- In Britain, class was generally recognised to be the main determinant of voting behaviour. Put bluntly, if you were working class you were inclined to vote for the Labour party and if you were middle class then you would be likely to vote for the Conservative party. It should be recognised that this is not to say that all the working class voted Labour and all the middle class voted for the Conservatives. Data suggested that in the 1960s approximately 70% of the working class voted Labour and 80% of the middle class voted Conservative.
- There were always been **deviant** voters who voted against the party which their class usually supported. Indeed if all the working class had voted Labour, due to the greater size of this class, they would always have been in power. The size of the middle class Labour vote and the number of working class Conservatives was a vital factor in determining the outcome of elections. Great emphasis was therefore placed upon the

C2s, the upper working class, who became regarded as the kingmakers in elections. Indeed in the 1980s they were even termed “Thatcher's storm troopers”.

We can compare class to wealth in the USA which reveals a similar pattern ²⁷ – the poorer are more likely to vote Democrat, the richer Republican – but there is a pattern of decline in both countries compared to the strong correlations of the past – dealignment (compare the 1992 and 2010 UK graphs below). Note that in the USA dealignment has been lopsided – since 1992 the very poorest Americans are somewhat more likely to vote Democrat than they were, but richer Americans are also somewhat more likely to vote Democrat than they were.

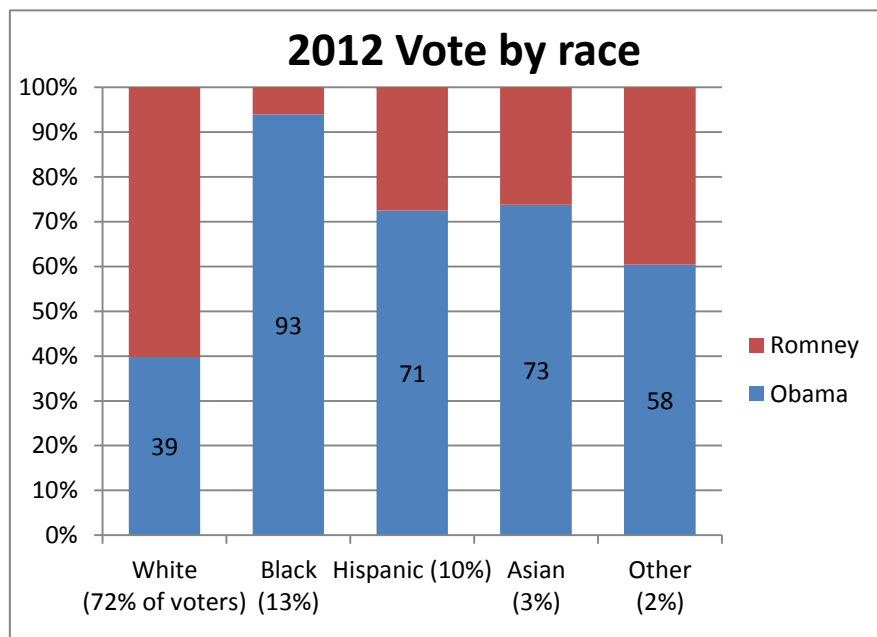
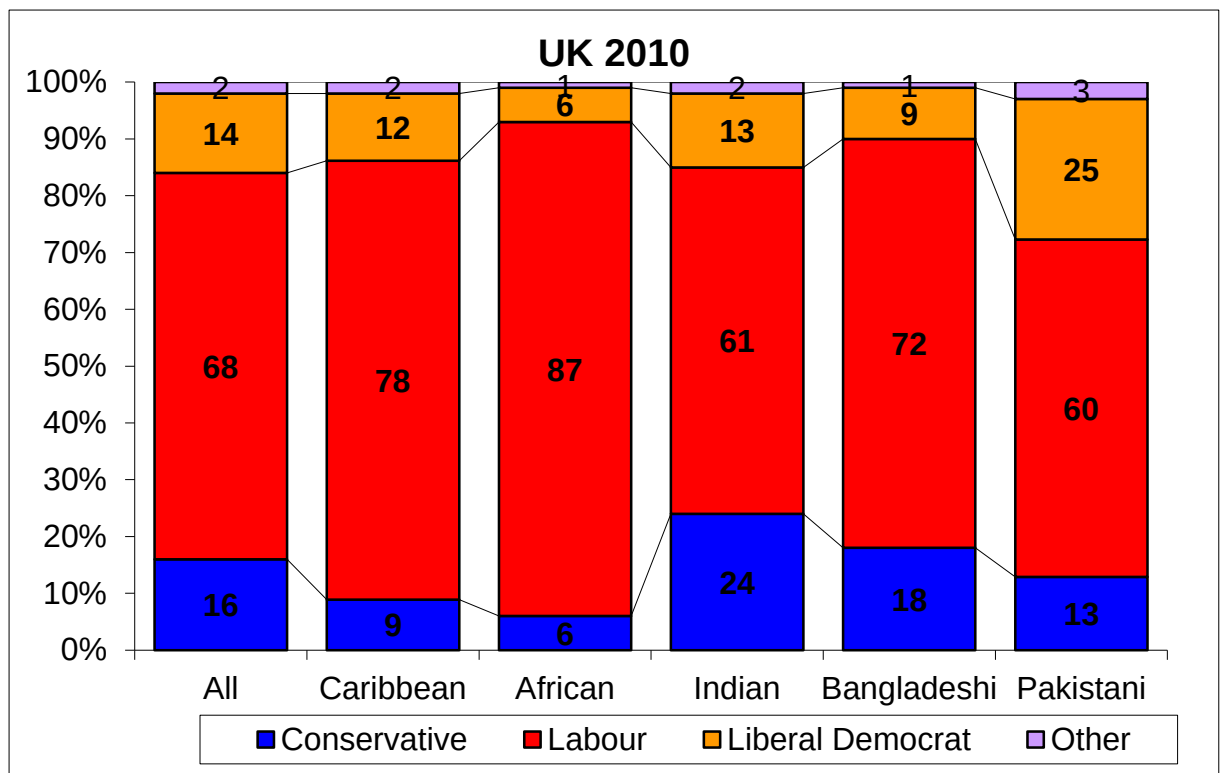


- does this reflect the rise of “values voting” in USA? There is no obvious equivalent in the UK.
- it could reflect the changing party positions in both countries – with the United States becoming more ideological in values terms; the UK seeing Lab moving to centre, and the Conservatives appealing more to working class from the 1980s onwards, while new issues such as EU or the environment cannot be defined easily in class terms.

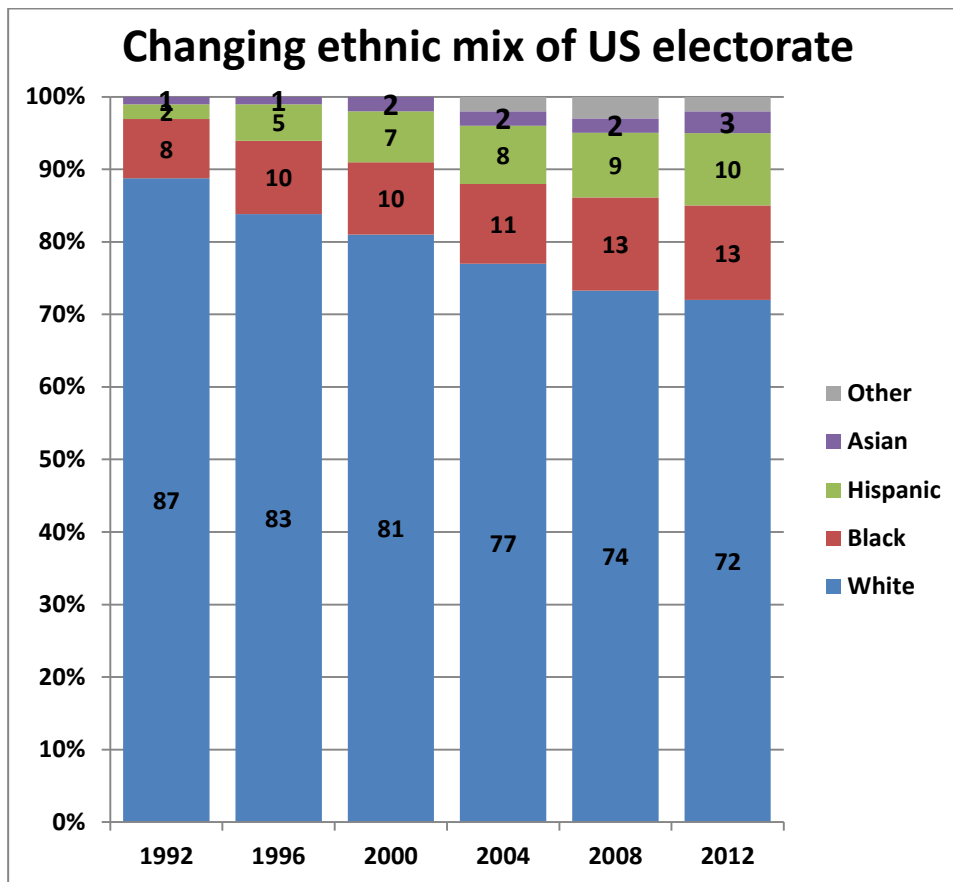
Race

Ethnicity is a clear area of **similarity** in that black voters in the USA and all ethnic minority voters in the UK heavily favour one party (see graphs). Hispanics also break for the Democrats, although the 44% margin Obama achieved among Hispanics in 2012 is unprecedented and well up from the 36% margin he achieved in 2008. This may reflect the strongly anti-immigration flavour of the GOP campaign.

- However, there have been some clear **differences** – in the USA Hispanics have been very different from blacks, with Republicans (especially G W Bush who won 44% of the Hispanic vote in 2004, limiting Kerry to a 9% margin with this group) gaining more support from them over time. Asian-Americans have been a swing voting group (giving Bush Snr 55% of their vote in 1992), although they broke for Obama in 2008 and again (more heavily) in 2012.



- Only c13% of UK citizens are from ethnic minorities, whereas 28% of US citizens are (up from 26% in 2008 and forecast to keep rising over the next few decades). However, in both countries they are somewhat less likely to vote than whites (except that in 2012 black American turnout was slightly higher than whites for the first time in History), so in the USA ethnic minority voting behaviour makes a much bigger potential difference to the outcome of an election.

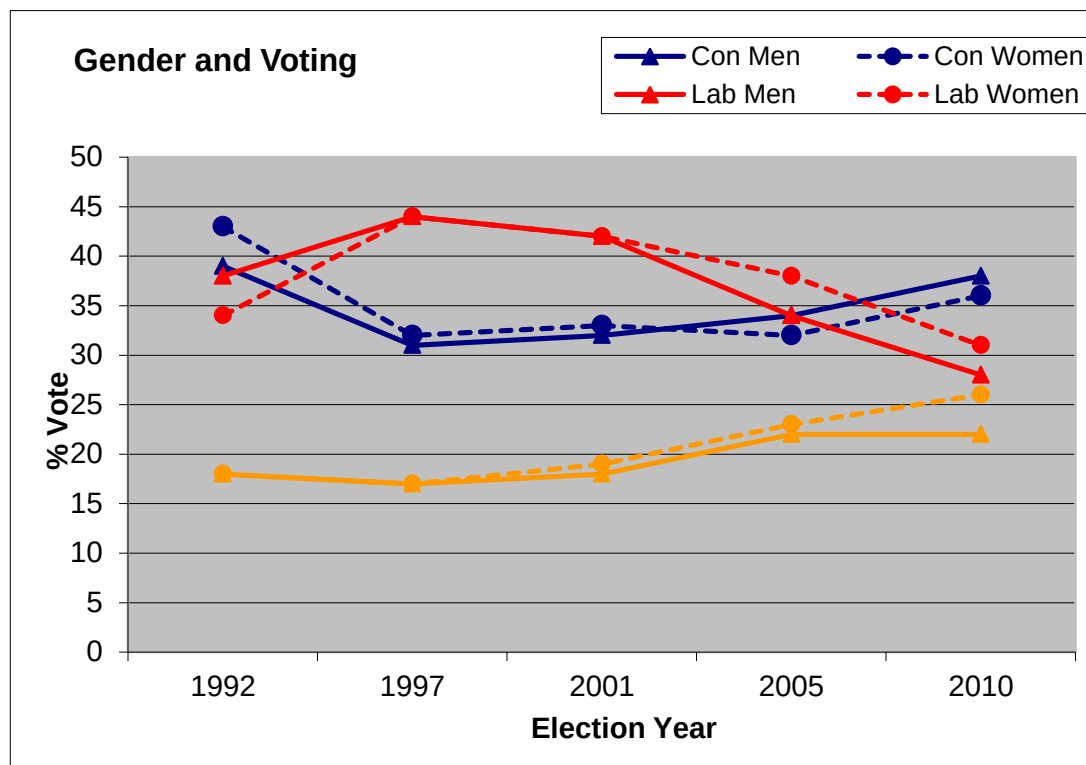


- Change** – much of the post-2012 election discussion has centred on the demographic coalition assembled twice by Obama. It appears that all non-white voters now heavily favour the Democrats, while the Republicans can win 60% of the white vote and still lose an election. So not only are voters increasingly polarised by race, changing demographics also mean that non-white voters make up an ever-expanding share of the electorate (see graph above). However, note that white voters are still much more likely to turn out for mid-term elections, which explains much of the 2010 and 2014 Republican success. Whether the GOP can regain some of non-white voters (and the Democrats a higher share of white voters) will be a major issue ahead of the 2016 election - immigration reform now seriously on the table and in Senator Marco Rubio the Republicans have a prominent and electorally successful Hispanic leader.
- It could be argued that black and Hispanic voting in both countries is really a function of other factors – especially class and income, but party preferences are also historically conditioned – the experience of civil rights in USA, and of the immigration/ multicultural/ equality debate in UK are both significant here.

Gender

Significant gender differences in voting exist in both countries, but are more marked in the USA than the UK. In the United States women are much more likely to vote Democrat than

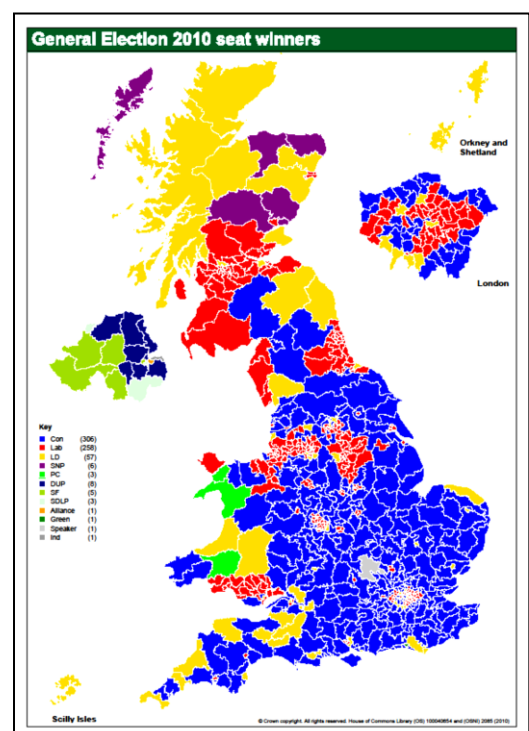
men by 8-16% over past 20 years (in 2012 Obama won 55% of the female vote, but only 45% of the male vote), whereas they are more likely to vote Labour in the UK by only 2-4%. However, the UK has seen significant change in the past 20 years (see graph below), as women historically used to favour the Conservatives – New Labour worked hard to reach out to female voters in the 1990s, with some success.



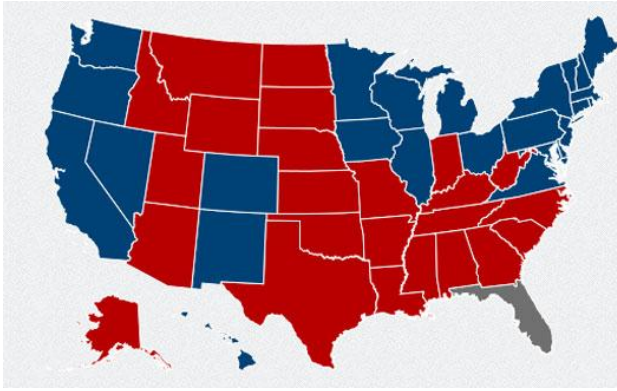
Region

Regional voting patterns are **similarly very significant** in both countries – with some regions seeing voting heavily dominated by one party (see maps for US 2012 and UK 2010 below²⁸).

- In the UK Labour do well in Scotland, Wales, and Northern urban areas, whereas the Conservatives are strong in the South and rural areas. In the United States Democrats typically do well on the West Coast and in the North East, while the Republicans have come to dominate the South and the plains states. And in both systems one party tends to dominate in rural areas and another in urban areas – so the main battles to decide election outcomes are often in suburban districts and swing regions (e.g. the upper Mid West in the USA, the West Midlands in the UK)



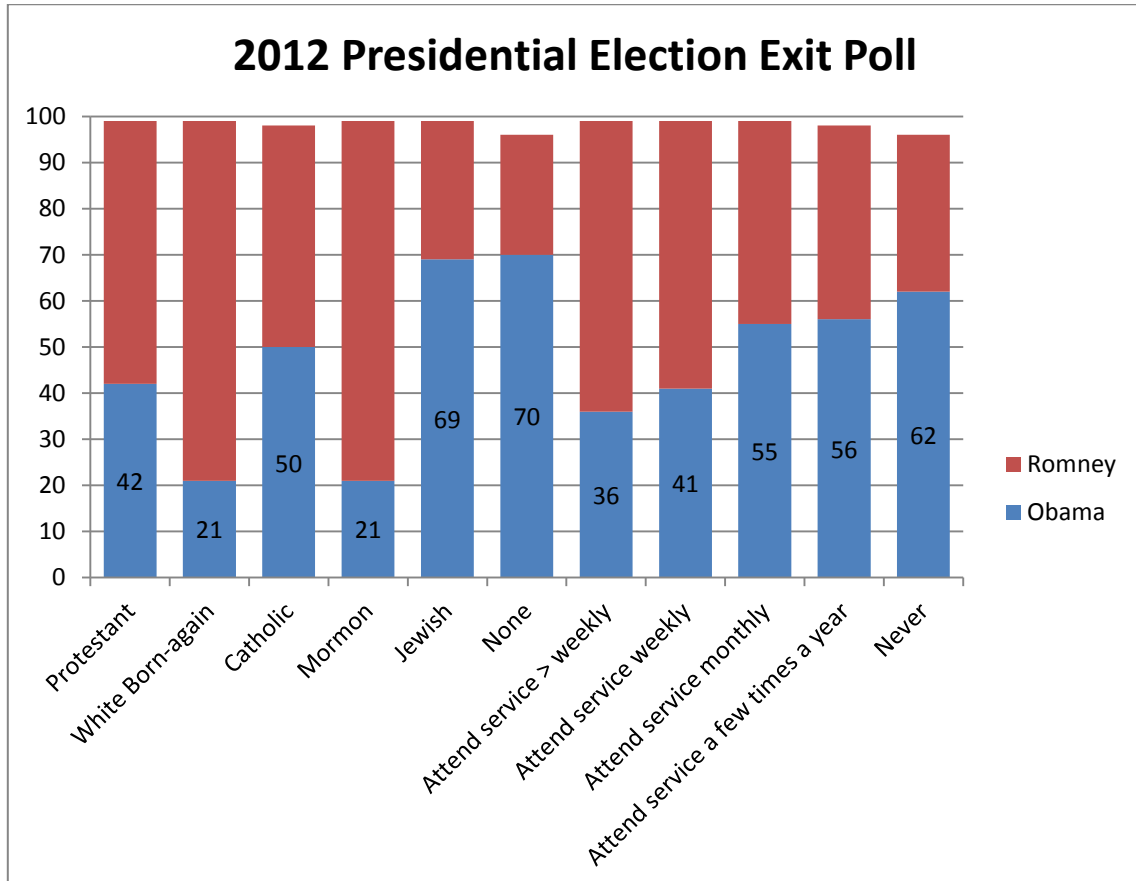
²⁸ <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1112/83320.html> accessed April 3 2013 and <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/RP10-36> accessed March 2012



- However, a major **difference** is obvious, as the USA has a strongly 2-party system while the UK now has very strong regional/ nationalist parties, with the Lib Dems doing well in the “Celtic fringe” and in parts of South West England. In large areas of England Labour and the Conservatives do not directly rival each other as first and second in constituency results, with the Lib Dems now often the alternative to Labour in northern urban areas and to the Conservatives in more southern and rural seats.
- The USA has also seen **change**, as the South has become solid for Republicans since the 1970s (although Obama won 3 Southern states in 2008 and 2 in 2012), and the North-East and California for the Democrats.

Religion

Religion is a very significant factor in American elections, but of much less relevance in the UK.



- The expression of religious identity was always present in US voting behaviour, but the rise of values issues from the 1980s onwards has made parties more ideological and made issues such as abortion, gay rights, school prayer, etc. important for regular churchgoers. The support of white evangelical voters was very important for Bush in 2000 and 2004, but less so for McCain in 2008 – he only got 55% of religious voters compared to Bush's 64/63%. Romney did better with religious voters, winning 59% of those attending Church at least weekly; his 78% with born-again white Christians is remarkable, given that many view his Mormon faith as a non-Christian cult, and shows how important a GOP constituency this 26% of the electorate has become.
- In the UK the early twentieth century stereotype of the Church of England being the “Tory Party at prayer” has long diminished, although non-Anglican Protestants such as Methodists are still somewhat more inclined to give their votes to Labour or the Lib Dems. Some research indicated that at the 2005 UK election Blair and Labour did disproportionately well among Catholics, helping them achieve a historic third term.

Class Dealignment and Partisan Dealignment

Since 1960s voters in liberal democracies have *moved away from*:

party and group voting – a stable, lasting alignment in which voting affirmed a sense of social identity.

- this was encapsulated in the *party identification model* developed in the USA in 1950s, which stressed **long-term** loyalty to a party – partisan alignment.
- this could be compared to voters' strong identification with a social group in Europe at this period, with the group's interests represented by a particular party (e.g. Labour and working class voters in the UK, Christian Democrat parties and Catholic voters in several EU countries).

towards basing their decision on:

- issues, the economy, leaders and party competence – **all short-term factors**
- a *rational choice model* was developed to explain newer patterns of voting, where voters were seen as consumers, wanting to maximise the benefit to themselves by comparing the policy offerings of rival parties. Their previous voting history was not seen as very significant in shaping this choice, although voters might view policy offerings through filters that reflect their perception of party image and leadership.
- also a *retrospective voting model* where ballots are cast in response to perceptions of government performance (so another form of rational choice) – the idea that an election is a kind of referendum on the administration in office, rather than an abstract comparison of rival parties.

this would also imply that political campaigns, and perhaps the media, would be more important in determining the outcome of an election.

Partisan Dealignment in the UK

Such a strong identification revealed the tribal nature of British politics, in that most tended to have strong identification and were then lifelong Labour or Conservative supporters.

This trait began to crumble in the pivotal decade of the 1970s for a number of reasons:

1. Perhaps the most important factor in ending partisan alignment was the economic problems encountered by the UK from the late 1960s onwards. With rising unemployment and high inflation, the UK experienced the previously unheard phenomenon of stagflation. The post war economic miracle of uninterrupted growth with full employment, low inflation and rising living standards came to an end. The Post war consensus based around the principles of Keynesian Demand Management policies began to crumble.
2. Closely allied to this was the growing perception that politicians of any party could no longer deliver the goods. Promise as they might to “cut inflation at a stroke”²⁹, successive governments were unable to deal with the UK's economic problems.
3. In the 1960s a cultural revolution had started with the development of a rights culture and a general decline in deference. People would no longer accept explanations or instructions at face value, people became more independent, more inclined to work things out for themselves and to challenge orthodox views be they from politicians or parents.
4. Changes in the media were also critical in affecting the public mood. Early TV interviews with the Prime Minister for example simply allowed the PM to use the medium to promote his and his party's views without criticism. Since that time investigative journalism has greatly developed and TV presenters such as Sir Robin Day gave politicians a more effective grilling. The papers too would not hold back in highlighting every flaw in a government's record.
5. The rise of new issues which cut across the traditional left-right spectrum, for example Europe, the environment and Scottish nationalism. Citizens who felt strongly about such issues would not find a natural home in either of the main big parties, and would be more likely to become involved in a pressure group, or to give their support to a minor party instead.

These factors together with an increasingly educated and sophisticated electorate meant that the people were less likely to enthuse about the abilities of a politician or a party and thus could not be relied upon to turn out to vote loyally at election time.

On a personal note I would emphasise the usefulness of differentiating between the two alignments mentioned. I feel partisan dealignment is extremely relevant to a discussion of the electorate today, whereas class dealignment seems less pertinent. Partisan dealignment can for example be clearly linked to one of the most important factors in UK voting behaviour today, that of declining voter turnout.

Partisan Dealignment in the United States

In response to the Great Depression of the 1930s the Democrats were able to build an electoral coalition of various groups known as the New Deal Coalition which ensured Democratic control of the Presidency and Congress for most of the period from the 1930s to late 1960s. This was a generally an era of stable voting patterns with a high degree of alignment when voters felt a strong attachment to a party.

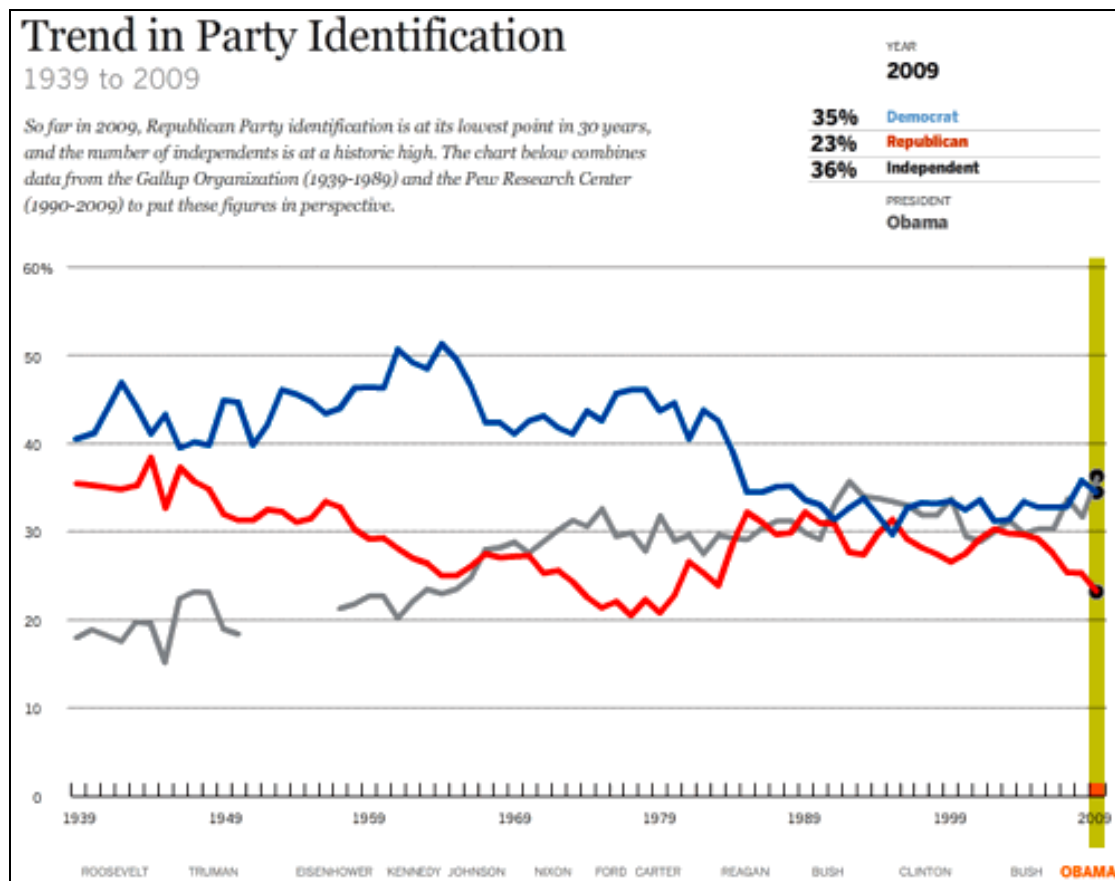
From the 1960s onwards dealignment has occurred and the number of strong identifiers has reduced.

In the 1970s the level of dealignment stabilised and has remained relatively constant.

²⁹ Edward Heath, *Conservative Prime Minister, 1970-74*.

There was a suggestion of a Republican realignment in the 1980s due to the popularity of Reagan and the coat-tails effect he had on the rest of the Republican party. Studies revealed however this was not to be the case.

In 2000 39% identified with the Democrats, 35% with the Republicans and 27% called themselves independent³⁰. Many believe Gore's main failing was his inability to secure these voters.



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This dealignment has led to an increase in split-ticket voting where voters have voted for one party's candidate for the presidency and for another in Congressional elections. This ushered in a period of divided government where the norm has become for one party to control the presidency only for the other to control the Congress leading to gridlock in government.

Partisan and cultural conflict in the USA in the Clinton, Bush and Obama years may have led partisan identification to rise again in USA (self-identified Independents have fallen from a 40-year range of 30-38% to 29% in 2009), while parties have become more ideologically distinct – compare to convergence of parties in UK (“I agree with Nick?”)? Certainly split ticket voting has declined in the USA in recent years, while it has increased in the UK.

US voting behaviour is generally more complex than in the UK and Europe where religion, region and race do not play such a great role. The two main parties are national and there is no place for a Southern party, or a party for Hispanics. Similarly class has not been to the fore in electoral politics.

³⁰ CNN exit polls

³¹ <http://www.realclearpolitics.com/horseraceblog/2009/05/> accessed March 2012

Dealignment has meant that candidates have become a much more important factor in the determination of voting and consequently, the rise of candidate-centred elections is acknowledged. At the 2004 National Party Convention for the Republicans it was declared “*This is a Bush convention*”.³²

Whilst dealignment has clearly occurred, it must be remembered that partisan identification remains an important factor in the USA, encouraged by its voting registration system, and the chance to vote in primaries. And when “independents” are analysed, many prove to be reliable supporters of one particular party, with only a third or so true “swing voters”.

More important, given lower US turnouts, is which party galvanises its own supporters best to vote, and to vote for their candidate rather than the other party’s– Bush Jnr and his strategist Karl Rove were very good at this; the Palin candidacy was a bid to energise the Republican base in this way by McCain, the Ryan pick a similar attempt by Romney.

Alan Grant argues that 3 main factors influence voting behaviour

1. Issues
2. Candidates
3. Party identification

Comparing Factors contributing to Dealignment 1960s-> in UK and USA

Factor	Explanation	USA	UK
Decay of social divisions: – partly due to rising prosperity and a consumer society - also a decline in manufacturing and associated strong trade union allegiance, (plus, in the UK, privatization of previously nationalised industries - rise in female employment: (households increasingly contained more than one occupation, with a dilution of household class identity)	As cleavages of class and religion weaken, so too do loyalties to parties based on them	Income is not a good predictor of voting. Ethnicity, gender and religion all remain strong predictors of voting behaviour – “religious right” has become v important party of GOP constituency As in UK state vs private sector employment a significant voting predictor still	Decline of Trade Unions important. Helps to explain rise of Lib Dems? Class has declined but other sectoral cleavages have become important – e.g. employment by the state or in private sector; state/social housing vs owner occupier (N Ireland an exception re identity politics?)
Rising education	Educated voters can interpret events with less need for party cues	Increasing educ becoming associated with greater social tolerance, more likelihood of voting Democrat	May be imp in rise of socially liberal Lib Dems, > willingness of wealthier to vote for Labour

³² Representative G. Nethercut (R) cited in *Washington Times*, 4.8.00

Television becomes dominant medium	Replaces the more partisan coverage in many newspapers	But US had widespread TV by 1960s when identification high. Today television > partisan now than 15 years ago	May be generally true but Sun, Mirror, Telegraph, etc. have clearly defined positions and v high circulations.
Disillusionment with party politics	Publicity about abuse of power, broken promises, corruption reduce popular trust in parties – “They are all the same” - esp signif with young, who are thereby unlikely to start a strong identification with any party	- Watergate - Iran-Contra - Bush Snr tax rises - Clinton era scandals - Gingrich, De Lay scandals - Bush expansion of govt - Obama’s perceived failure to deliver + Gridlock in Congress (< 12% now approve of how Congress does its job)	- Sex scandals in 1990s - Cash for Qs - Cash for honours - Divisions within parties (e.g. Lab in 1980s, Tories over Europe in 1990s, Blair vs Brown) - perception Parl ignored by Exec - backbenchers as “lobby fodder” - MPs expenses scandals - Euroscepticism?
Convergence of party policies	If policies diverge again, party loyalties may also recover	Relative consensus 1988-2003? (esp on econ & f pol issues) More recent divergence? (on econ, social and f pol issues)	Acceptance of Thatcher reforms EU Environment Iraq - more divergence since 2008?

But - dealignment is a process, structural factors still influential in explaining voting patterns in both UK and USA (see graphs above).

Consequences of Dealignment: The Increased Number of Floating Voters and Volatility

The natural consequences of dealignment are that voters are more likely to be independent and switch their vote between the parties. By the same token, the stability which was the hallmark of the past, has gone with the appearance of a more volatile electorate where we now are more likely to witness greater swings in the vote between the parties and greater differences in voting across the country. Voting has become more unpredictable and indeed there are those who question whether it is valid science as a consequence of these developments. The swing in 1997 of 10.2% to Labour was the greatest ever recorded.

In many respects 1997 represented a new era in voting behaviour. A point from where we needed to start again in explaining trends in voting behaviour, such was the degree of change.

Class still remains important, but it should not be forgotten that

1. Labour is increasingly becoming less dependent upon working class support
2. The Liberal Democrats draw support from all the classes

Regional voting patterns changed with Labour breaking out of the northern enclaves to which it was reduced in the 1980s. Conversely it has lost support in some of its former heartland such as Scotland, the North and Wales, although to Lib Dem and nationalist parties rather than the Conservatives. However, the Conservatives have become ever more an English party

of the southern home counties, and in 2010 Labour lost nearly all of its seats in southern England outside the big cities.

Across the country swings are now much less uniform. In 2001 Essex swung to the Conservatives but Kent did not. In 1992 Yorkshire swung to the Conservatives whilst most of the country swung to Labour. And in 2010 Labour actually increased their vote in Scotland, while their vote in London held up well above the national swing to the Conservatives.

Shorter-term explanations of Voting Behaviour

Issue Voting – the Consumer/Rational Choice model

If the electorate were not aligned, it was thought that as free thinking individuals without any party ties to bind them, the electorate would vote for the party which offered the best policies for the issues which concerned them.

It was suggested that voters could be likened to shoppers in a supermarket, picking policies and therefore parties without any particular brand loyalty. Hence the **Consumer / rational choice model** of voting behaviour.

These issues would change in importance (**salience**) from election to election.

Psephologists³³ identified the salience or importance of an issue. In the 1980s, unemployment and defence were more important than they are today. Labour's defence policy in 1987 was said to have cost them votes as the electorate considered this to be an important issue at the time. In the 1997 and 2001 elections these were not such important issues, but in 2005 the Iraq war was significant and in 2010 economic worries once again predominated with voters.

Whilst issue voting would seem to provide the obvious solution to fill the vacuum left by dealignment, it does not provide a satisfactory explanation for voting behaviour as in the 1980s Labour often enjoyed a lead on important issues such as unemployment, health and education, yet they still went on to lose elections.

Retrospective Voting

Another explanation of modern voter behaviour focuses on the performance of the party most recently in power, following the old British political adage, "Oppositions don't win elections, governments lose them". On both sides of the Atlantic it has been argued that voters above all respond to the economic performance of the country, rewarding a government with another term in good times, and replacing them with the opposition during recessions and periods of high unemployment.

This can be seen at the national level - in 2008 US polls 93% said economy was "not so good" or "poor", such voters split 54-44% for Obama. Alternatively some analysts argue that personal economic circumstances (e.g. disposable income, house prices movements, interest rates and mortgage payments, perceptions of job security, etc.) matter more to voters than the wider national picture - those worried about personal/family finances broke 58%-40% for Obama in 2008.

Evidence cited in favour of retrospective voting's importance in explaining election results would include:

- unemployment, disposable income, inflation all especially important
- US e.g.s. would include Carter's loss in 1980; Bush Snr's win in 1988 but loss in 1992 (despite his victory in the Cold War and the recent demise of the Soviet Union);

³³ People who study voting behaviour

Clinton's re-election in 1996; Bush Jnr's re-election in 2004 and the voters' rejection of the Republican candidate in 2008. The Democrats' heavy losses in the 2010 Mid Term elections would also fit this pattern.

- UK e.g.s would include Thatcher's win in 1979 and re-election in 1987, Blair's re-elections in 2001 and 2005, and the voters' rejection of Labour in 2010.

But the evidence on retrospective voting is mixed:

- In the USA, Reagan won re-election despite high (albeit falling) unemployment in 1984; Gore lost in 2000 despite a favourable economy. Obama may well win re-election in 2010 despite continuing economic problems and high unemployment.
- In the UK Thatcher won re-election in 1983 and Major in 1992 at times of recession and high unemployment. Blair won in 1997 despite a strong economic recovery.
- In 2012 Obama overcame a weak economy to record a substantial win – no President had previously been re-elected with unemployment as high as 7.9% on election day.

Voters' **perceptions** of the economy seem to be the really important thing:

- this allows parties room for manoeuvre - so Reagan re-elected in 1984 as economy recovering; Blair able to exploit the UK's "jobless recovery" in 1997 to defeat the Conservatives; Obama re-elected in 2012 with high but falling unemployment (as Reagan had been in 2004).
- And voters filter choice through perceptions of **party image** – so Lab not seen as a viable alternative to Cons in managing economy in 1983 and 1992; Cons not seen as credible enough in 2010 to win a majority?

And other issues can play an important part if they have **salience** with the public:

- US: war on terror 2002, 2004; Iraq 2008? Obamacare in 2010 Mid Terms? Immigration and healthcare in 2012?
- UK: NHS waiting lists 1997; Iraq 2005? immigration 2010?
- and every European government that committed troops to Iraq in 2003 lost power in the next four years (Spain, Italy, Poland, etc.)

It is easier for voters to judge retrospectively when single-party government is common, such as the UK, USA and Australia – it is harder in multiparty systems where small parties may continue in power regardless as part of a coalition (Neths, Italy and Germany in past).

However, some European democracies are seeing convergence towards a two-party system, e.g. France, Italy, while the UK has a Coalition government for the first time since 1945.

Plus the increased importance of **party leaders** (are they strong/competent to deliver the party's promises?) may allow a party to change perceptions more rapidly than in a period of social alignment / ideological differences – e.g. McCain 2008, Major in 1991, Cameron 2005, Blair in 1994, Brown 2007.

Judgemental Voting and Valence

Consequently something more than issue or retrospective voting is required to explain modern voting behaviour. David Denver³⁴ puts forward the view that issue voting can be incorporated into something a little broader which still takes into account the dealigned nature of the electorate.

He suggest that voting behaviour is principally determined by assessments of

³⁴ David Denver, "Elections and voting behaviour", *Developments in Politics*, Vol. 4, Causeway Press

1. Policies
2. Ideologies
3. Leaders
4. Past performances
5. Party competencies

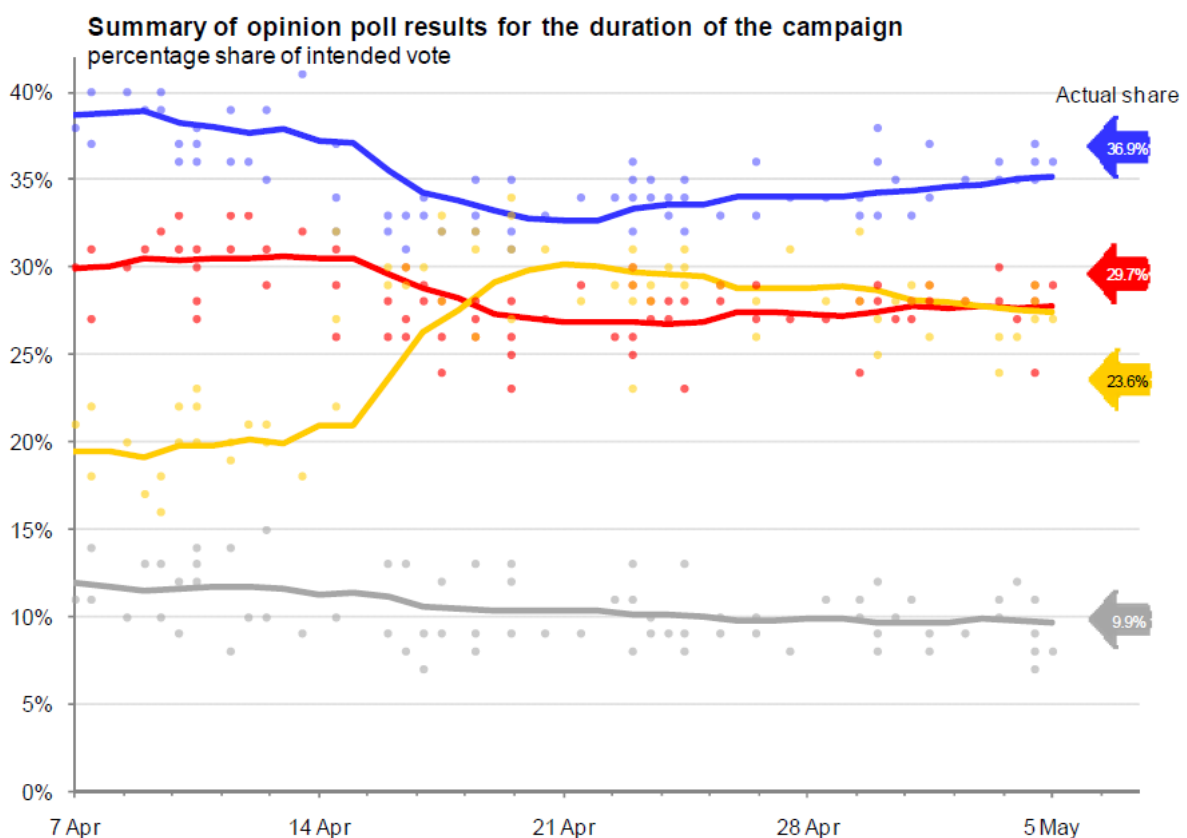
This analysis lends itself to explaining the outcome of the last few UK elections. It recognises, for example, that on many important issues the parties are no longer far apart – New Labour’s economic policies were closer to their Tory predecessors than to those of past Labour administrations, while the Conservatives in 2001 and 2005 were to a large extent offering the same levels of public services as Labour, but promising to manage them more effectively. Elections were therefore often about **valence** issues – which party did voters judge best at achieving shared goals: a question best answered by many voters by considering their perceptions of the parties’ leaders and their previous record. It is notable that at the 2010 UK election more voters named the party leader as a reason for their voting intention than ever before.

And in the USA this would allow an explanation to encompass the importance of Presidential candidates and the continuing (increasing?) ideological differences between the parties, while allowing room for issues voting and retrospective judgements.

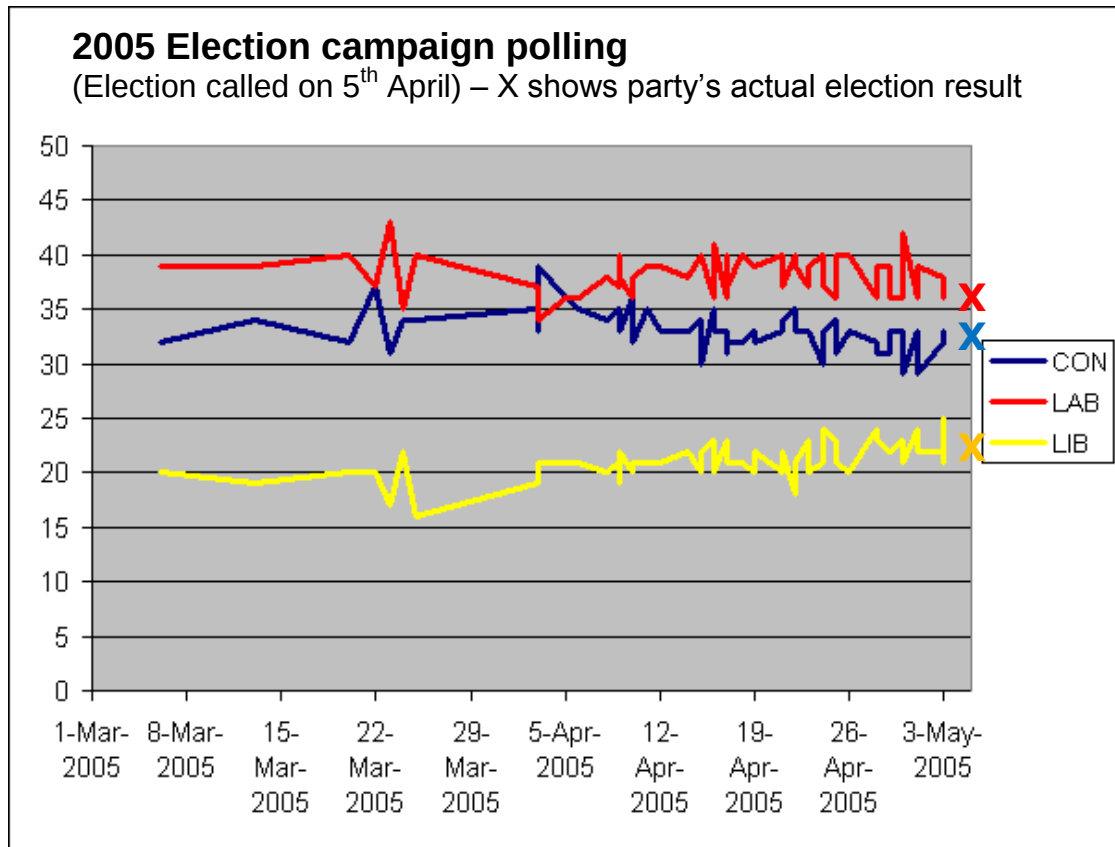
Do election campaigns matter?

Given the above explanations of voting behaviour, both long-term/structural and short-term, it is worth asking whether the actual election campaigns fought by political parties make any difference to the outcome. Whether voters are still in some way influenced by their long-term alignment with a particular party, or whether they are making judgements about issues, government performance and party credibility, it seems that the electorate may be making up its minds well in advance of polling day.

Certainly opinion polling in **UK election campaigns** tends to suggest that the final result is



very close to the opinion of the electorate at the point when the election is called (see 2010³⁵ and 2005³⁶ graphs below):

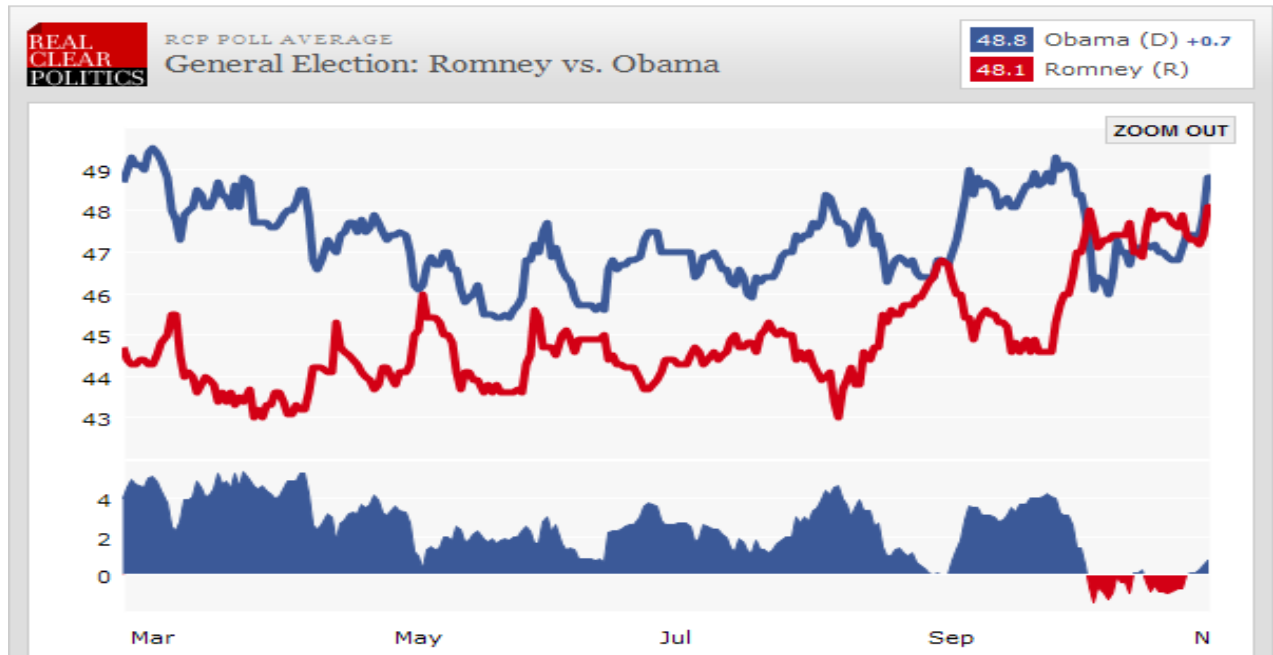


- It should be noted that in both the cases above there were some inaccuracies in the campaign polls compared to the final election result – in fact the polls at the start of the campaign period were often closer to the actual result than the polling during the campaign.
- Nonetheless, in both elections the Lib Dems did rather better than the pre-campaign polls would have predicted, increasing their support by 10% or so by polling day. The greater visibility of the third party during the campaign period, both because of its own efforts and because broadcasters are obliged to cover it more fully than usual, helps to explain this. It is also noteworthy that in both elections support for the Conservatives declined a little over the campaign period.
- Studies also suggest that although the net change in support for the different parties during the campaign period is relatively small, this masks considerable more shifting (“churn”) between parties on the part of voters. This churning includes voters shifting in opposite directions, so much of it is cancelled out, but it does imply that campaigns can make a difference to voting intention. Presumably a truly terrible campaign by one party and a highly effective campaign by another could result in a larger net swing than usual over the campaign period.
- And in a single member simple plurality system such as Britain’s, the large majority of seats are regarded as safe for the main parties. The election’s outcome will actually be decided in a 100 or so of marginal constituencies, so even a 1 or 2% shift in voting intention over the campaign period can make a difference between winning or losing.

³⁵ <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/RP10-36> accessed March 2012

³⁶ <http://www.electoralcalculus.co.uk/polls05.html> accessed March 2012

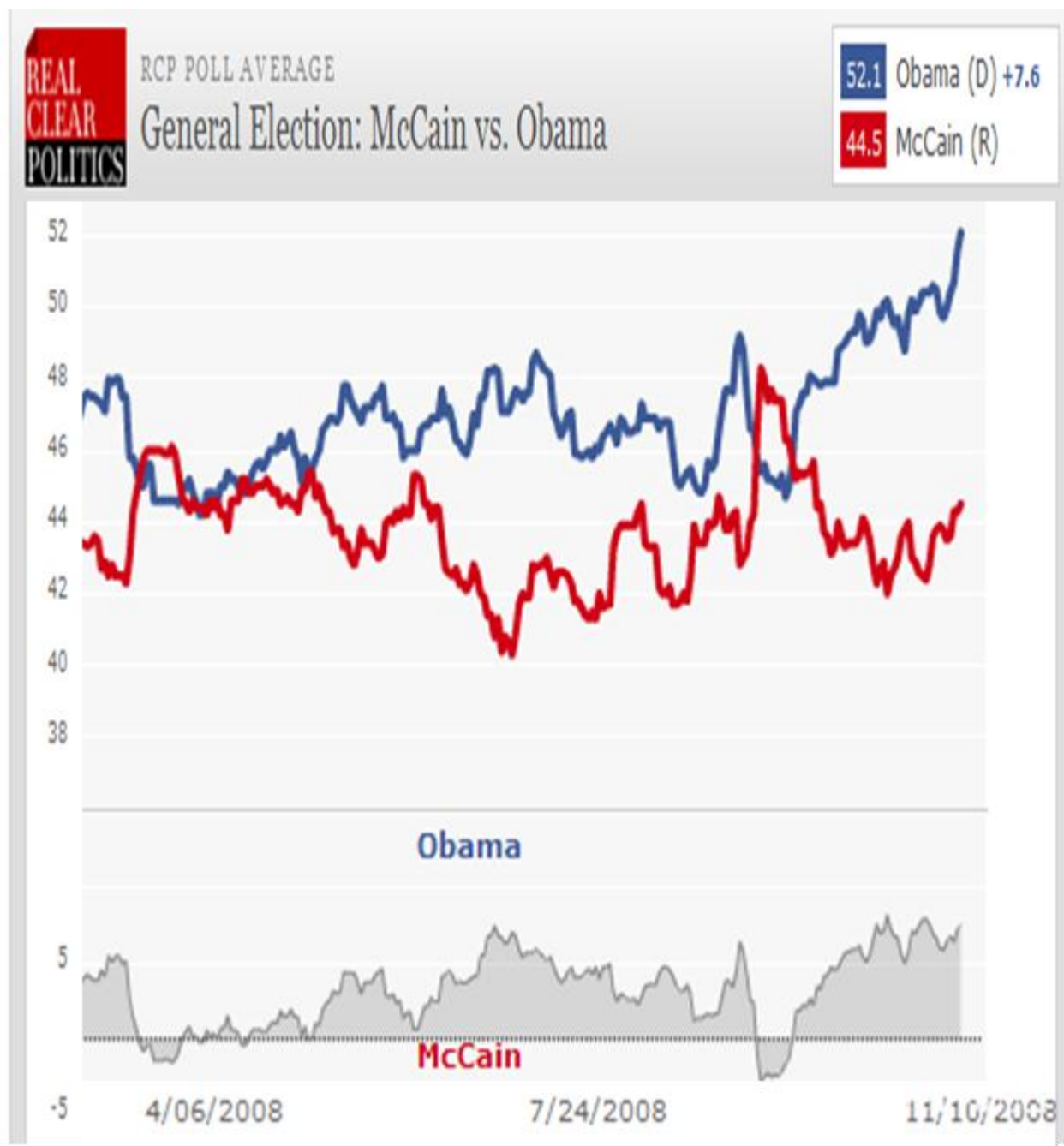
US elections appear to see more change over the campaign period (see graphs on following pages for 2012, 2008 and 2004³⁷ - all show the last eight months of the race to the same vertical axis scale to allow some comparison of the relative size or narrowness of a poll lead). This apparent volatility may however reflect an unusually close 2004 race and unusual 2008 and 2012 campaigns. 2008 saw McCain, the Republican nominee in place three months before the Democrat primaries finally concluded with Obama securing the nomination (March vs June). Obama also had an unusually large funding advantage compared to McCain – over 2:1 In 2012 Obama’s narrow lead evaporated in October following a decisive Romney win in the first debate, while Hurricane Sandy dominated the last week of the campaign.



- It is also the case that American election campaigns **differ** substantially from UK campaigns:
 - British campaigns are much shorter, with only a month or so between an election being called and polling day, whereas American campaigns last for nine weeks or so (from Labour day in early September after the party conventions have concluded). In practice both countries start their “near campaign” well before the recognised starting period, but US elections still last much longer, with the primary season beginning 11 months before polling day. This may mean that American campaigns can have more impact on the result of the election than in the UK.
 - British campaigns are also more strictly regulated, in terms of media coverage, bans on TV ads, and limits on campaign spending, creating a more level playing field for the parties and minimising the possibility that one party’s advantage in fundraising and media support can have a decisive impact on the outcome. US elections lack these restraints, potentially allowing a better-funded campaign to dominate the campaign period and so change more voters’ minds.
 - US elections lack a meaningful third party, which means that shifts in voting intention are amplified compared to the UK. This also allows for **tactical voting** – choosing to vote for a party which is not your first choice but which is

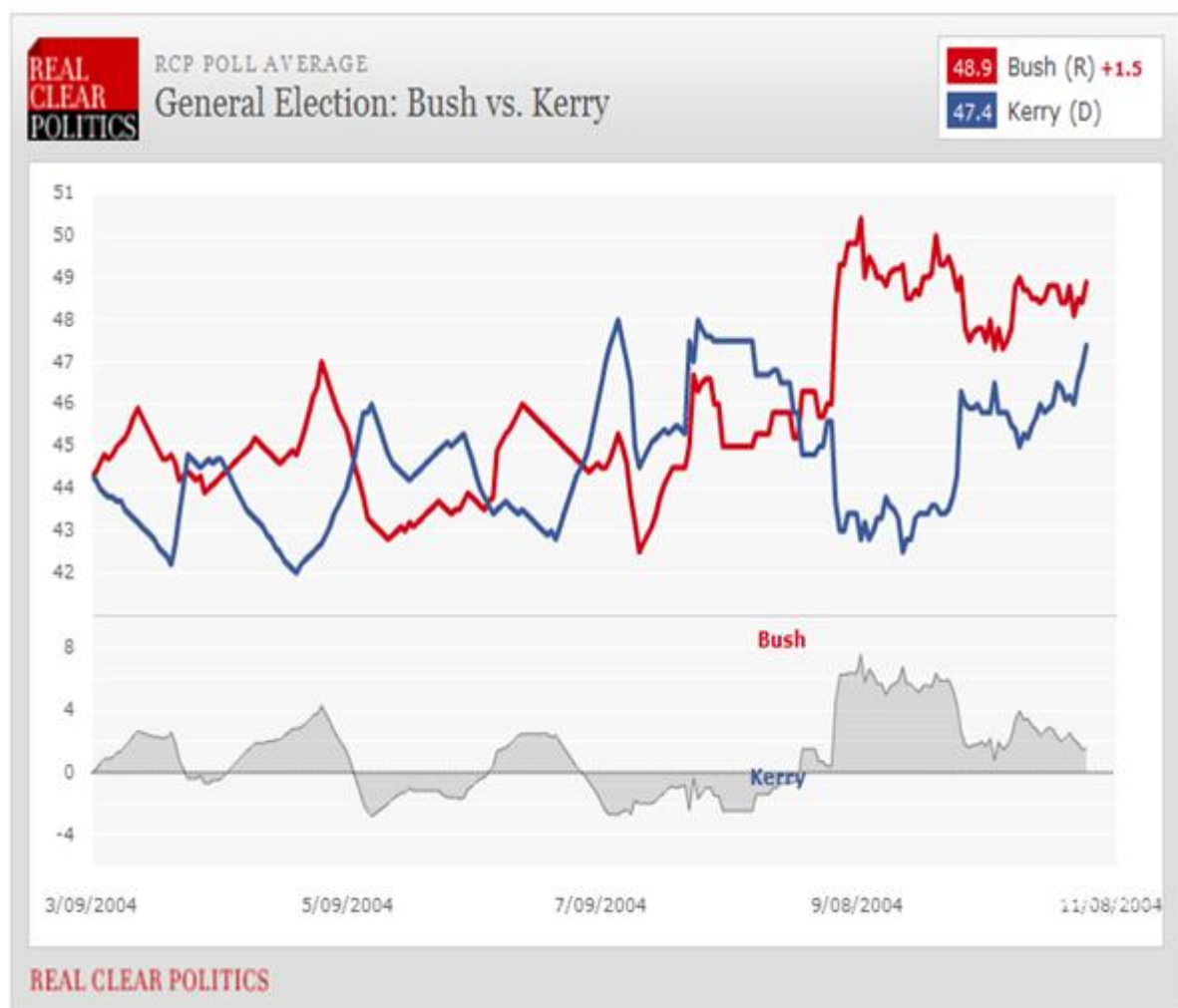
³⁷ http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2012/president/us/general_election_romney_vs_obama-1171.html
 Accessed April 3 2013

considered a lesser of two evils. In 1997 and 2001 this benefited the Lib Dems as normal Labour voters chose them in order to defeat the Conservatives; in 2005 Labour appeared to suffer more from the tactical choice of some voter to support the Lib Dems. Tactical voting seems to have been less significant in the 2010 election.



- Lower US turnout may also amplify the effectiveness of the campaigns; a stronger campaign may not only win over undecided voters, it may also galvanise more of its supporters to cast an actual vote.
- However, despite the differences between US and UK election campaigns, the winner of American Presidential elections can often be predicted months in advance by political analysts' models, which plug in data such as the incumbent President's popularity several months before election day, other polling such as "right track/wrong direction" opinion, economic figures such as second quarter growth, and whether a candidate enjoys incumbency advantage. Broadly these reflect a rational choice/retrospective voting view of voter behaviour, and assume that the actual campaign will make little difference to the outcome.

9 out of 11 forecasting models predicted a Democrat win in 2008. Models also predicted that 2012 would be a close election but that Obama would win it.



- A major **similarity** between the UK and the USA is that most parts of the country see relatively little serious campaigning. This can be explained by the use of winner-takes all systems, such as First Past the Post for Westminster constituencies, and the US system where a plurality winner takes all of a state's Electoral College votes. Combined with the regional variation in party identification (see above), this means that an election will be decided in a relatively small number of marginal constituencies or swing states – about 20% in each case (c130 constituencies, c10 states).

In 2012 the US election was even more narrowly focused than previously, with all the serious general election campaigning (and therefore money) focused on nine swing states: Florida, Ohio, Virginia, Colorado, Nevada, New Hampshire, Iowa, Wisconsin and North Carolina. These states provide a good test of whether the campaign matters. Although the two sides had similar ad spending available to them, Obama was not hindered by the need to fight a primary and so was able to run a lot more ads than Romney in these key states; crucially his campaign chose to run a barrage of negative ads seeking to define Romney unfavourably in the summer of 2012, while Romney was attempting to raise new funds and unable to respond or start general election campaigning of his own. Obama also had a much superior “ground game” with many more field offices to coordinate volunteers at a local level and register new voters, along with better software tools with which to identify potential voters and to coordinate neighbourhood activity³⁸. All this meant that the Democrats much better at getting out the vote in these key states than the GOP.

All of this seemed to be rewarded on polling day with victories for Obama in eight out of these nine key states (all but North Carolina), allowing him a convincing Electoral College win when their votes were added to the safely blue West Coast and North East/Upper Midwest. And yet, for all of Obama’s lauded campaign strategy and ground game advantages, he did not win these states by any greater margin than would have been expected from a national swing. This is not to say that his campaign and all the time and spending it poured into the key states was useless, after all Romney was also competing hard in all of them, but it does indicate that the campaign itself matters a lot less than observers assume in the heat of the contest – fundamentals such as Presidential popularity, the economy and changing demographics seem to be more important.³⁹ The similar failure of the 2010 Conservative strategy of focusing resources ruthlessly on key marginal appears to confirm this – again, they did not outperform national swings in these seats where they were able to mobilise far more resources than Labour or the Lib Dems.

- And despite the importance of media attention and money in US election campaigns, it could be argued that both media outlets and potential donors gravitate to likely winners – a **bandwagon effect**. Thus Obama’s huge fundraising edge and (arguably) sympathetic media treatment in 2008 reflected his perceived likelihood of winning the Presidency, rather than actually contributing heavily to his success.

Overall, it appears that the campaign period can still have a significant impact upon an election result, particularly in close races, but that fundamentals such economic performance and Presidential popularity in the year before the contest are the most important explanations of election results. Voting behaviour is now mostly governed by declining (but persistent) structural factors and increasingly important rational choice explanations.

³⁸ <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/23/politics/campaign-stretch-run/index.html> accessed April 3 2013

³⁹ <http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/closing-the-book-on-2012/> accessed April 3 2012 and <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/29/were-obamas-early-ads-really-the-game-changer/> accessed April 3 2013

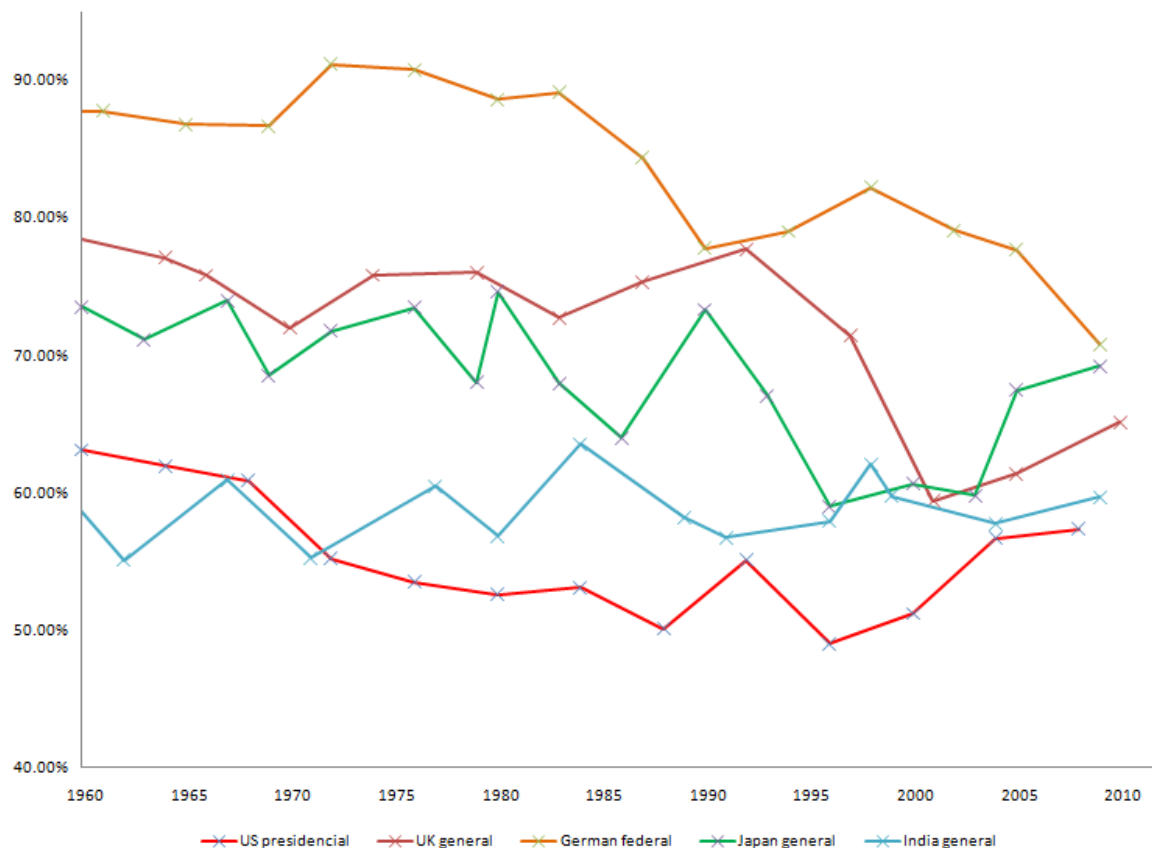
TURNOUT

Overview

Voter turnout is still generally higher in UK than in the USA (especially if UK general elections are compared to Mid-terms, which usually have only 40-45% turnout) but has been dropping for decades, although 2001 marked a low point of 59%. While the USA had its highest turnout for many years in 2008 (62% - although 2004 had also been as high as 60%), this was not as high as had been predicted given the exciting race and Obama's ability to reach out to voters who traditionally didn't vote very heavily (blacks, college students, etc.). In 2012 turnout dropped back to 58.2%.⁴⁰ Turnout in 1996's Presidential election was only 51%.

Downward turnout trends reflect disillusionment with politics; the higher 2008 turnout might link to an Obama effect enthusing the electorate, with a "Hope" message in a time of economic crisis.

European countries usually have higher turnout levels, but many of them have seen declining turnout rates (from over 80% to 70% or less over 20 years). European Parliament turnout has been dropping in every election year in all countries of the EU. As the graph below⁴¹ indicates, most of the selected democracies show saw some recovery in turnout in their most recent major election, perhaps as a result of the economic downturn raising the stakes for voters.



⁴⁰ http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm accessed April 3 2013

⁴¹ <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/4/44/Turnout.png> accessed March 2012

UK - Declining Voter Turnout?

Until recent elections the UK could look with lofty disdain to the low turnout in US elections. However, in recent elections it would appear that the UK is heading in a similar direction.

- Turnout in 1992 was 77%.
- In 1997 turnout was 71 %, the lowest since 1935.
- In 2001 turnout was 59%, the lowest since 1918. In Liverpool Riverside, turnout was 34%, Glasgow, Shettleston 38.8%.
- Turnout recovered in 2005 to 61%
- Turnout in 2010 was 65%, but this still disappointed many observers who had predicted that an unpredictable race in a time of economic uncertainty and with significant differences between the parties would encourage voters to the polls in higher numbers.

When one considers more people voted over two seasons of Big Brother than in the 2001 election, when turnout was only 59%, the problem is put into perspective! Tony Blair had the smallest proportion of the electorate's support of any prime minister in the post war period, winning a huge majority in the House of Commons, 60% of the seats, on the basis of 25% of those entitled to vote. Non-voters outnumbered those who had voted for Labour.

Falling UK turnout can be explained by:

1. Labour's move to the centre. New Labour in effect meant that the electorate had less choice between the parties. Indeed in 1997 when Brown declared that the Labour party, if elected, would adhere to the same tax and spend policies as the Tories, it was clear that contrary to Portillo's wishes, there was no clear blue water between the parties. From a voter's perspective, it made no difference who you voted for as they would merely implement the same policies. As Tony Benn remarked, Labour could take their turn in managing the status quo, a change in government would not result in a change in policies. The same argument might be applied to 2001 and 2005, at least as far as domestic and economic policy was concerned. Even on the dominant 2005 issue of the Iraq war there was little to choose between the Conservative and Labour policies. A 2001 BBC poll revealed 77% thought voting would not change anything. Nonetheless the economic policy offerings of the main parties at the 2010 election were more divergent than for 20 years; turnout rose, but not by much.
2. Dealignment. Both class and partisan dealignment can be used to explain failing voter turnout.
3. Decline of parties. Parties used to have a larger membership and were thus better able to get the vote out. Traditional electioneering of door to door contact and mobilisation of voters has changed. Parties now rely on posters, the internet and telephone calling to get their message across.
4. The creation of an underclass. As opposed to working class, the term refers to those who are dependent upon state benefits or crime and the black economy. The unemployed feel disengaged from politics and are less likely to vote than those in work.
5. The politics of contentment. For those in work with a buoyant economy, politics seems increasingly irrelevant. Provided that their existence is not threatened, they see no need to engage in politics.
Again, turnout in 2010 was up, but not by very much, suggesting that the state of the economy may not be the most important driver of voter turnout.

6. Opinion polls. In 1997, 2001 and 2005, the outcome of the election was never seriously in doubt according to the polls. Neither Labour nor Conservative voters would have felt compelled to vote if the electorate was over before it began as indicated by the polls. This analysis is supported by the high (77%) turnout in 1992, when the election result was far from clear in advance of the count. However in 2010, another unpredictable election, turnout rose to 65%, the highest since 1997 but still far from impressive, raising queries about this explanation.
7. The electoral system: Given the number of safe seats and the electoral system in general, many may feel their vote is likely to be wasted. This particularly applies to Liberal Democrat and UKIP supporters who believe their party has little chance of winning an actual constituency vote. The Electoral Reform Society argued of 2001, *"The burden of failure must be shared by the politicians who failed to enthuse the electorate and the voting system which failed to give them great choice and a chance to make a difference with their vote."* Similarly, Charter 88 stated, *"It is no longer possible to sustain an electoral system that wastes the votes of millions and which forces people to conclude that it is literally not worth their while turning out."* It was argued in the 2011 AV referendum campaign that a change in the voting system would count more votes and so incentivise turnout, but the rejection of AV has denied political scientists an opportunity to test this hypothesis. However, given that turnout for devolved assemblies (50% in Scotland, 42% in Wales in 2011), using more proportional voting systems, is low, and that turnout in continental European democracies using PR systems is declining (e.g. Germany, down to 70% in 2009; Netherlands, down to 75% in 2010; Czech Republic, down to 62% in 2010)⁴² FPTP may not be the most important factor.
8. Growing apathy amongst the young. A key group of non voters are the young who feel disengaged from the political process as a whole. 60% of 18-24 year olds did not vote in 2001, 56% did not do so in 2010.⁴³
9. Voter fatigue. Perhaps this is an argument more pertinent for European, Scottish / Welsh elections and local elections, but it is argued voters are asked to turn out too many times.
10. A lack of political knowledge. It is not just politicians who are not held in high esteem due to sleaze but also the political system, as a whole seems complicated and remote. Blame might be laid at the door of schools or the media for its (non) coverage of politics.
11. Gordon Brown blamed a worldwide decline in voter turnout in 2001, although US turnout rose to nearly 62% in 2008, a high in the past forty years.
12. Growing distrust of politicians. The Conservative Party suffered from sleaze allegations in the 1997 election and Labour too was not untainted with scandals such as the Hinduja affair, Mandelson's loan, Ecclestone's donation and Cash-for-honours. A BBC poll revealed that 65% in 2001 did not trust politicians. By 2010 distrust had grown still higher following the MPs' expenses scandal – yet turnout went up somewhat.

The level of turnout poses serious questions about participation and representation in the UK. The Labour government made absentee voting easier, although this led to accusations that postal votes allowed fraud and manipulation, and there were experiments after the 2001 low point with:

⁴² http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?id=164 accessed March 2012

⁴³ <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2613> accessed March 2012

1. Voting booths being placed in supermarkets
2. Electronic voting by text or over the internet
3. Voting taking place over a weekend as opposed to during the week
4. Citizenship teaching in schools from 2002.

None of these experiments and initiatives were notably successful, and they have not been pursued since.

In addition, Frazer Kemp, MP, suggested compulsory voting as practised in Australia and Belgium, but this has attracted little support from other politicians and parties.

It may well be that any minor reforms might not go far enough and that the UK (along with the US and other liberal democracies) faces a more deep-seated malaise. Freedland argues that these non-voters threaten our democracy and the solution does not lie in tinkering with voting methods. He points to the remoteness of MPs from their constituents and their control by the party whips resulting in Hailsham's "elective dictatorship" which only invites participation every 4 years. He argues the voters have "*detected the little secret of our constitution: it's broken and it is way past time we fixed it.*"⁴⁴

Similarly, "*Disillusionment with a distant Westminster perhaps also points the way toward a devolved future for English government.*"⁴⁵

USA – Low Voter Turnout

The turnout for presidential elections is on average around 50% and as low as 35% for mid-term congressional elections. In the 1960s the figure for presidential elections was around 65%. Although 2008 turnout increased to 62%, this is still very low by the standards of democracies elsewhere; US turnout dropped back to 58% in 2012 and turnout in the 2014 mid-terms was only 36% (compared to 41% in 2010 and 40% in 2006).

This phenomenon can be explained by:

1. Dealignment
2. Complicated registration procedures, including the disenfranchisement of ex-convicts in many states. The recent introduction of voter photo ID requirements in many conservative states is fiercely criticised as making it harder for poorer Democrat supporters, often from minority groups, to vote, and is the subject of ongoing litigation that may reach the Supreme Court.
3. The separated nature of US politics, where one election often has limited consequences; a President will have to work with a Congress that is often dominated by the rival party, limiting the ability of both to achieve their aims. This explains both relatively low turnout in Presidential elections, and very low turnout in Congressional Mid-terms. Even if the House changes at the same time as the White House, the rolling element in Senate elections and the filibuster rule means that often Presidential campaign pledges cannot be delivered in office. And even if Congress and the Presidency agree on new legislation, it can often be struck down by the unelected justices on the Supreme Court.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Freedland, "Rise of the non-voter", *The Guardian*, 18.10.02

⁴⁵ Jonathan Guthrie, "Campaign in a bubble led to joyless victory", *The Financial Times*, 10.6.01

4. General disillusionment with “Washington politics” in the post- Watergate era and more recently the Clinton era.
5. The inability of parties to “get the vote out” as they used to. The decline of the “party machines.”
6. A lack of choice between the parties.
7. The failure of federal government to deliver.
8. Too many elections; few other democracies have major national elections every other year.

Those least likely to vote are the poorly educated, lower income groups, African Americans, women and the young.

This has serious consequences for politics and government in the USA:

1. The level of participation renders government increasingly unrepresentative. Increasingly, the only people to vote are the better off, the underclass being politically apathetic. Consequently, Congress may not serve the needs of everyone. Does this explain the lack of universal health care with over 40m without medical insurance? It is notable that a major healthcare reform had to wait until after the 2008 election, with its much higher turnout figures.

Dolbeare argues that “There is no escaping the class bias to the American electorate, or the (reverse) class bias to those who have quit voting recently As the active American electorate shrinks to a minority of the most affluent, what happens to the idea of community in America?”⁴⁶
2. Those elected will lack legitimacy, as they will not be able to claim an effective mandate from the people.
3. Governments will not be held accountable to the people at election time.
4. Elections will become more about whether parties can energise their base and encourage them to turnout in greater numbers than their rivals (the Democrats largely lost so heavily in 2010 and 2014 because many of their 2008 and 2012 voters stayed at home, while most Republican supporters came out again two years later). This encourages relatively extreme policy offerings and highly partisan positioning, rather than an appeal to the moderate middle.

It should be remembered that the cornerstones of any democratic system of government are participation and representation. Falling voter turnout threatens both and thus threatens democracy itself, although it also a partisan issue in the USA, as the GOP can expect to do better with depressed voter turnout, relying on its older, whiter supporters to go to the polls regardless of the rules and political circumstances.

⁴⁶ K.M. Dolbeare, *The Decay of American Democracy*

ISSUES CONCERNING REPRESENTATION, PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY

In both the USA and the UK criticisms are made about the working of democracy. Commentators worry about low turnouts reducing the legitimacy of elections, the corrupting influence of money, and the way in which the electoral system transfers votes into results. In both countries such criticisms come largely from the liberal-left, with most politicians unenthused about constitutional change.

Similarities

More recently, both countries have seen attempts to change the method of periodically **redrawing electoral district boundaries** to account for population change.

- In the UK this was led from the right, with the Conservatives pressing successfully for a reduction in the number of constituencies (down 50 to 600) as part of the Coalition Agreement in May 2000; this was to be achieved by ensuring that all constituencies were within 5% of the national average number of registered voters – something which was presented as a matter of fairness, although it was thought likely to reduce the bias in the electoral system towards Labour. If Boundary Commission proposals were confirmed, the next election in 2015 will be fought on the new boundaries, making the outcome less predictable than usual – this *may* mean many more seats are competitive and enhance participation and turnout, but it will be hard to separate the effects of this change from the novelty of coalition politics unwinding, especially if the Lib Dem vote collapses. (Should the coalition collapse and an election be called before 2015, it will probably have to be fought on the old boundaries due to time constraints on the selection of candidates). And Labour would retain an advantage due to the more efficient demographic spread of its vote, and from lower turnout in many of its heartland areas, which maximises the value of each vote in those seats.

In the event, the Boundary Commission proposals were never put to a vote, as the Lib Dems withdrew their support in August 2012, following the Conservatives' inability to deliver House of Lords reform. The 2015 election seems certain to be fought on the same boundaries as 2010.

- In the USA the debate has been more bipartisan, with moderates arguing that allowing politicians to control the redistricting process is an undemocratic system aimed at gerrymandering districts to produce a partisan advantage for the majority party. It is alleged that this makes most districts so safe that many votes are wasted (none of the 54 California Congressional seats up for election in 2010 changed hands), disincentivises turnout, and ensures that politics becomes highly polarised and partisan, with moderate voices marginalised.

As a result a number of states are considering changes that would give redistricting responsibility to a non-partisan commission – as in the UK (several states already do this); California has already made this change and the 2012 election was the first time the new boundaries were used there, resulting in many more competitive House districts than previously. However, given the vested interests of the two main US parties in the status quo, widespread adoption of non-partisan models seems unlikely, except in states such as California where ballot initiatives allow non-party causes such as this to be imposed on politicians.

And both countries have seen a greater availability of **absentee ballots** in recent years, usually by making postal voting easier.

- In the USA this varies from state to state, with Washington and Oregon holding some elections only by postal vote. Postal voting is increasingly popular, with up to a third of ballots being cast in advance of polling day in some contests. This has changed the dynamics of election campaigns, putting a stress on organisation to provide your supporters with postal ballot access and making the process of persuasion a more gradual one, rather than a build-up to a single day of voting. In 2012 Mitt Romney's success in a number of primaries (including Florida and Michigan) has been put down to his campaign's ability to mobilise and dominate postal voting in advance of polling day. Some states are experimenting with electronic voting, although there are concerns about the security implication of this.
- The UK also relaxed postal voting rules in 2001 and experimented with all-postal votes in some local elections in 2001-03; these did not result in the hoped-for turnout increases and further initiatives were abandoned. Nonetheless, many more people cast postal votes in the UK than they did in 1997 – perhaps up to a fifth of the electorate in 2010, and some of the changed campaign dynamic visible in the USA can be identified in Britain as well. The shift has not been without controversy, as a number of court cases have found abuses of the system, some associated with local party organisers or leaders in tight-knit ethnic minority communities.

There has also been some discussion in each country about **whether convicted criminals should have the vote**.

- In the UK this has been prompted by a 2006 European Court of Human Rights ruling (*Hirst vs UK*) that prisoners cannot automatically lose their right to vote. The Labour government consulted on the implication of this but did nothing for several years, knowing votes for prisoners would be unpopular. The Coalition initially attempted to grasp the nettle and institute a modest reform that would allow those on shorter sentences to vote, but this was halted by a backbench rebellion, supported by the popular press and in opinion polls, and the issue remains unresolved.
- The issue in the USA is rather different, varying from state to state. Maine and Vermont allow some prisoners to vote, the other 48 states do not. In 36 states prisoners generally regain the right to vote on release from prison (as in the UK). But in 9 states released prisoners do not immediately regain the vote, with various periods and conditions surrounding disenfranchisement. In Virginia, Kentucky and Florida (which combined have 10% of the US population) convicted felons are generally disenfranchised for life, although this may be reversed for individuals under certain circumstances. This is regarded by those on the liberal-left as a civil liberties issue, especially as convicted felons suffering disenfranchisement are disproportionately black Americans – which might have made a difference to the outcome of the Florida election in 2000. A number of states have changed their position on this in recent years but it does not have a prominent place in national debate.

Differences

Differences do exist in the debate over democratic issues in each country:

- In the US much national and local debate centres around the process of **candidate selection**, especially the Presidential primary process. The main parties' national committees change their rules on this in most election cycles – for 2012 the RNC attempted to prevent the race starting too early (they failed, as states were not deterred by the penalties threatened for breaking the rules), and tried to make sure that primaries held before April used a more proportional method of awarding candidates (they were more successful in this, but it was only a marginal difference from 2008). As these examples illustrate, it is difficult for national parties to impose rules upon

states and state parties. See the earlier section on Candidate Selection for more on this issue.

Candidate selection has a much lower profile in the UK. As was noted earlier, the Conservatives did experiment with more open selection processes, calling them primaries after the American model, although the parallels are far from exact. The most American-style primaries process has been used for choosing candidates for Mayor of London, and with more big city mayors due for election in November 2012, it may be that this raises the profile of the issue. Despite a Coalition Agreement pledge to provide state funding for 200 primaries in the safest Westminster constituencies, little has been done to advance this and few think it is now a government priority.

- The **Electoral College** has been the focus of those wanting major reform to the voting system in the USA, but this was largely stimulated by the contentious 2000 election result and has died away almost completely since the 2004 and 2008 elections (see discussion below).

There is almost no movement for **changing from the First Past the Post voting system** used to decide most Congressional seats, as well as state governor, state legislative and local elections. However, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas all require a run-off election for some positions if no candidate reaches 50% of the vote⁴⁷, although these are rarely needed in practice as the US has such a strong two party system that typically the winner of any election does receive a majority of the vote. As the list above indicates, it is up to the states what voting system they use for any election, which makes some change possible but means that there is little national debate about the issue. And the very strong US two party system is both an product of FPTP and a reason why there is little demand for reform.

Electoral reform is a much bigger topic in the UK than the USA and has been a vigorous strand in political debate since at least the 1980s. Largely championed by the Liberal party and its Lib Dem successor, Labour have at times also flirted with electoral reform; see below for more detailed discussion of the issue. As a comparative point, the demand for electoral reform in the UK has grown with the popularity of a third main party, which the USA almost always lacks.

- Finally, **voter identification** has become a hot topic in the USA in recent years, but has little salience in the UK. Many states have passed laws requiring voters to possess official photographic ID – most commonly a driving license – in order to identify themselves at the polling station. Proponents are usually Republican and argue that more needs to be done to safeguard against voting fraud. Opponents argue that there is little or no evidence that voting fraud is a real problem, and that voter ID laws are a ploy to disenfranchise minority groups who are most likely both to lack official ID and to support the Democrats. The Obama administration is currently (March 2012) trying to stop Texas introducing such a voter ID law, arguing that it will unfairly target black and Hispanic voters.

⁴⁷ <http://www.instantrunoffvoting.us/runoffelections.html> accessed March 2012

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The quality of UK democracy has been a strand in the political debate for the past 20 years, with most arguments focusing on turnout issues (see above), the voting system, lack of opportunities for voters to influence politicians on important issues, and over-centralisation of power at Westminster. To some extent the policies of New Labour addressed demands for more say in big decisions, by promising and holding referendums on a number of major issues. Over-centralisation of power was tackled by creating devolved assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, setting up the Greater London Authority with its elected Mayor, although outside these regions English government remains heavily focused on Westminster, with weak local authorities limited in their powers and tax-raising capacity.

Electoral Reform

For decades, interest in electoral reform was confined to the Liberal party, so heavily disadvantaged by the First Past the Post system, and a few Labour MPs and activists. However, 18 years of Conservative hegemony after 1979, despite Thatcher never getting more than 44% of the popular vote, brought many more Labour supporters to see the merits of a more proportional system. When Blair became Labour leader in 1994, he inherited a commitment to consider electoral reform, along with policies on devolution to the UK's regions that would involve the election of new assemblies. Although Blair was never a strong enthusiast for voting reform, the possibility that Labour would need Lib Dem support to form a government after 1997 ensured that it remained in the Labour manifesto. Once in power, Labour delivered on its promise to set up a Commission to recommend changes to the way the House of Commons was elected, putting Lord Jenkins, a Lib Dem grandee who had been a former Labour Cabinet Minister and European Commission President, in charge.

The brief given to the Jenkins Commission was a difficult one: to propose a new election system that would:

- be broadly proportional
- deliver stable government
- give voters more choice
- and retain a link between MPs and constituencies.

Anyone who has studied voting systems will know that these priorities pull in different directions, so perhaps it was inevitable that the Commission eventually proposed a compromise, hybrid system: the **Alternative Vote plus**. AV+ would retain single-member constituencies to elect the large majority (c83%) of MPs, but have regional top-up seats elected through an Open List system to provide for more proportionality. Such a system was not actually used anywhere in the world.

AV+ met with a cool reception. The Tories condemned it as a partisan result that would result in permanent Labour-Lib Dem coalitions and reiterated their traditional preference for First Past the Post. The Lib Dems would have preferred STV or another more proportional system, but were prepared to endorse it as an advance on FPTP. Labour was split, with some Cabinet members in favour, but more against, and most backbenchers hostile; having won power with an enormous majority under the old system, reform no longer seemed so tempting. Labour may also have been influenced by their experience of AMS elections in devolved assemblies, which emphasised that more proportional systems were likely to deprive it of the chance to rule with a majority.

In the end, Blair did nothing, shelving the report and never holding the referendum promised in the 1997 referendum. The episode did, however, establish that any change to the Westminster voting system would have to receive public legitimacy through a referendum.

Labour did make other moves on electoral reform:

- Changing the voting system for the UK's European Parliament seats from FPTP to Closed Party List, a PR system using large multi-member regions (save in Northern Ireland, where STV is used)
- Introducing more proportional systems for the new devolved assemblies.
 - Northern Ireland would use STV for the Stormont Assembly
 - The Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and London Assembly would all use the Additional Member System
- The Supplementary Vote was introduced for directly elected Mayors, in London and elsewhere.
- And in Scotland the Labour-Lib Dem Coalition changed election to local councils from FPTP to STV
- Referendums were used to confirm the creation of devolved assemblies (in London, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland – where the referendum also gave public assent to the Good Friday peace agreement – and in the North-East, where a referendum for a regional assembly failed in 2004). Other referendums were promised, but not held, on entry into the Euro, on changing the voting system, and on the EU Constitution.

These changes meant that all UK voters became familiar with at least two different voting systems; Scots now use four different systems for four different elections. This kept reformers hopes of change to the Westminster system alive, especially as the Lib Dems continued to gain support and seats at Westminster, making likelier a hung parliament in which they could demand electoral reform as the price for coalition. However, Labour was criticised for creating a confusing patchwork of systems, and turnout for the devolved assemblies was usually lower than for general elections, undermining one of the main arguments for ditching FPTP.

In 2010 the Lib Dem dream became true when the general election produced no majority for any party. In negotiations it became clear that both Labour and the Conservatives were prepared to offer some sort of deal on voting reform, but that this would be short of the fully proportional system the Lib Dems favoured, and that it would have to be subject to a referendum. The parliamentary arithmetic dictated that the Lib Dems join with the more sceptical Conservatives, in exchange for a referendum on the Alternative Vote, in which each party would be free to campaign separately. In return the Tories got a reduction in the number of Commons seats and a redrawing of constituency boundaries (see above).

The Referendum on AV was held in May 2011 and proved a bruising experience for the Lib Dems, who had by then become unpopular after going back on a number of manifesto pledges such as on tuition fees. The Conservatives were united and campaigned vigorously against change, stressing the likelihood and dangers of permanently hung parliaments, as well as the increased cost and complexity of the system. Labour were split, but although Ed Miliband and a few Shadow Cabinet members were in favour, they did not argue hard for AV and most of the party opposed it. Even the Lib Dems found it hard to must enthusiasm for a system that was not actually proportional. The Yes campaign never found a clear and compelling case for change, and lacked a strong figurehead to make the case nationally – Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg deliberately stepped back from the campaign, knowing his unpopularity was harming the cause. The final vote was 70% against and only 30% in favour of change to AV.

The future for electoral reform in the UK thus looks very weak following the emphatic “No” in the 2011 referendum. For the Lib Dems it may be a case of “Be careful what you wish for,

'cause you just might get it'⁴⁸, made more bitter by their knowledge that AV wasn't even what they really wanted, but that another referendum now seems unlikely for at least ten years and perhaps a generation. Some commentators⁴⁹ have suggested it might have been a better strategy for the Lib Dems instead to seek STV for English council elections, as they had successfully done in Scotland, aiming to win voters over gradually to the benefits of their preferred system, but whether the Tories would have considered this is unknowable.

Regardless of the politics of electoral reform, the case for changing the UK voting system remains strong in many ways and it will continue to be at least an academic debate. The arguments are outlined below, along with the alternative systems.

The Current System

The First Past the Post system is;

1. Known to the public.
2. simple to use and results are quick to determine,
3. there is no popular demand for change
4. it (usually) creates majority government
5. provides for a constituency MP
6. allows governments to be easily removed from office
7. it forces parties to have a broad appeal and thus works against extremism
8. independent MPs can survive if they have a strong constituency base.

The historical and political context

1. Single member constituencies were not always the norm. They were introduced in 1884 and some dual-member seats survived until 1950.
2. First Past the Post has not resulted in a House of Commons which functions with respect. There have been many calls for reform over the years. The 1917 all-party conference unanimously recommended a switch to the single transferable vote in the cities and the alternative vote in the country. In 1931 the minority Labour government negotiated a bill introducing the alternative vote through the House of Commons only for it to fail in the Lords. In 1951 and February 1974 the party which gained most votes did not gain the most seats. The operation of the system in the 1970s and 1980s renewed calls for reform from those who did not prosper under its operation, namely the Liberals, the SDP / Liberal Alliance and the Labour Party in the 1980s, which produced the Plant Report advocating the use of the supplementary vote.
3. The Conservative Party has not fared well under FPTP in recent elections:
 - Although this was not so evident in 1992
 - in 1997 despite their polling 31% of the vote, Conservatives received only 25% of the seats. 2001 produced a similar result (32% vs 25%).
 - In 2005 Labour won 35% of the vote but 55% of the seats; the Conservatives won 32% of the votes, but only 30% of the seats. The Tories actually won more votes in England than Labour, but gained fewer English constituencies.

⁴⁸ Pussycat Dolls, *When I grow up...*

<http://www.lyrics007.com/Pussycat%20Dolls%20Lyrics/When%20I%20Grow%20Up%20Lyrics.html> accessed March 2012

⁴⁹ OK, just me as far as I know, but I still think it would have been a viable idea and would like to know if the Lib Dem negotiators ever considered it in May 2010 – AJE, March 2012.

- And in 2010, the Conservatives increased their share of the vote to 36%, more than Labour received in 2005, but failed to gain a majority in the House of Commons – they gained 47% of the seats; Labour received only 29% of the votes but won nearly 40% of the seats in the Commons.
4. Whilst the Labour party has clearly gained from FPTP's operation and therefore might seem to have the most to lose from its reform, the Labour did set up the Jenkins Commission and opted for more proportional electoral systems for the elections to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland assemblies and the European parliament. In 2010 Gordon Brown led Labour into the election with a promise to hold a referendum on introducing the Alternative Vote. Consequently, the position of the Labour party should not be pre-judged on the basis of narrow self-interest.

The defects of FPTP

1. It exaggerates changes in opinion and creates governments with disproportional majorities: Labour in 1945, 1966 and 1997, 2001 and 2005; the Conservatives in 1959, 1983, and 1987.
2. From the 1970s onwards, third parties have attracted a greater share of the vote and the disproportionality of the present system has become more evident. Even in 2010, when the Liberals greatly increased their percentage of the vote, they found that 23% of the vote only yielded 9% of the constituencies – a net loss of 8 seats.
3. FPTP creates strong geographical divisions. The Conservative Party now has only one seat in Scotland and few in major urban areas. The Labour party in the 1980s fared badly in the South and rural areas, and this pattern was confirmed in its loss of English seats in 2010.
4. FPTP does not provide for voter choice in the selection of their constituency MP. In most cases the decision is based upon which party the voter wants to form the government and consequently the qualities of the individual candidates are not that well known or considered. Alternative systems such as the additional member system and single transferable vote would remedy this failing.
5. The outcome of elections is determined by the result of around 150 key marginal seats. Campaign resources are concentrated in these areas and safe seats taken for granted. . Voters might never vote for a winning candidate and many votes can be wasted, either voting for a party that has no chance or in piling up votes for a candidate who will win by an enormous majority. Given these circumstances it is remarkable that turnout has remained as high as it has. Still the fact that 35% of the electorate do not vote is a cause for concern, although arguments that it should not be addressed with the introduction of compulsory voting win little political support.
6. MPs are increasingly elected with less than a majority share of the vote at constituency level. In 1992 and 1997 44% were elected without having gained more than 50% of the vote; by 2010 two-thirds of MPs lacked such a majority. This factor is explained by the growth in support for third parties.
7. Women and ethnic minority representation would greatly improve if FPTP were reformed. In New Zealand following change, women now account for 30% of MPs and the number of Maoris also increased dramatically. Women account for 26% of the Bundestag compared to 22% in the UK. Whilst reform alone might not result in change, e.g. in Ireland, STV has not greatly improved women's representation, it is the case that single member constituencies, as we have at the

present time, are likely to provide less opportunity for the advancement of women and ethnic minority groups than other systems which offer a list of candidates.

8. The system is biased. In the past it favoured the Conservatives, now it favours the Labour Party. In elections from 1997 to 2010 it took fewer votes to elect Labour MPs. In 2005 Labour gained 55% of the seats in the House of Commons with only 35% of the popular vote, whereas in 2010 the Conservatives won 36% of the vote but fell 20 seats short of a majority (and Labour gained 40% of the seats with only 29% of the votes). For the Conservatives to form a majority government on their own, it is estimated they would now need to have a lead of 10% or more over Labour.

The redrawing of constituency boundaries passed by the Coalition in 2011 requires almost all constituencies to be within 5% of the average number of voters; this will rebalance the system a little by reducing one of the advantages Labour currently has (on average there are fewer voters in Labour seats at present). However, most of the Labour advantage is due to differential turnout and a more efficient concentration of its vote, so most of the current bias to Labour is likely to remain.

Electoral systems and stable government

1. Britain is not unfamiliar with coalition governments. Not only did the 2010 election result in a Conservative-Lib Dem Coalition, Britain has actually had coalition governments for 45 of the last 160 years. For another 34 years government needed the support of another party. For another 9 years government majorities were so small as to render them useless for governmental processes. This was most recently evidenced with Major's government from 1992 to 1997. Therefore in *"only 64 of the last 150 years has there prevailed the alleged principal benefit of the FPTP system, the production of a single party government with an undisputed command over the House of Commons."*⁵⁰
2. Major decisions have been taken without a party enjoying a strong majority in the House of Commons: Entry into the EEC in the 1970s and the wartime efforts being just two cases in point. The Coalition Government that took office in 2010 has embarked on a major programme of austerity and aims to reform education, health and welfare. In its first two years it has suffered no substantive Commons defeats, although unsuccessful rebellions have occurred on a number of issues (most notably tuition fees and Europe). Coalition governments can, and do, function effectively.
3. International comparisons with Ireland, Germany, Italy and France all reveal that alternative systems have provided for greater continuity of policy and less adversarialism, better economic performances, relative stability in government, more proportionality with better representation of women and ethnic minorities, and more voter choice.

Alternative Voting Systems for Britain without constituency changes

1. Alternative Vote (AV) would

- Maintain the link between constituency and MP with no boundary changes
- Increase voter choice through the use of preferential voting
- Provide for stability in government
- MPs would require a majority of the constituency vote.

⁵⁰ *The Jenkins Report*

However

- AV does little to increase the proportionality of the electoral system. It is even less proportional than FPTP.
- Regional divisions would be likely to continue such as the Conservatives' problems in Scotland.
- Most seats would remain safe.
- By favouring second choices, AV might boost the fortunes of the Lib Dems, leading to permanent hung parliaments and coalition government – an argument that appeared to be important in swaying public opinion against AV in the 2011 referendum.

2. The Supplementary Vote (SV)

- Restricts preferences to two choices and thus reduces the prospect of least favoured candidates counting too much – BUT:
- SV suits a three-party system and therefore has limited appeal in Scotland and Wales.
- Similar problems to AV.

3. The Second Ballot

- Similar problems to AV.
- Suits presidential and leadership elections where clear majority needed but does not provide balance and proportionality.
- It would require the electorate voting twice when there are problems getting them to vote once.

4. The Weighted Vote

- MPs votes would count for more if they were under represented in parliament. For instance a Liberal Democrat vote could be worth 7.5 votes and a Conservative vote 1.25. Problems likely to be encountered if an MP transfers and in operating such a system.

Alternative Voting Systems for Britain that would require constituency changes

5. The Single Transferable Vote (STV)

STV provides for

- voter choice,
- greater proportionality,
- avoids the problem of two classes of MPs
- little encouragement for the proliferation of parties
- STV can also be said to enjoy the support of many of those who advocate reform and has a good track record in countries where it has been used.

However STV would

- lead to large multi-member constituencies. Constituencies would have in the region of 350,000 members, which would ensure a long ballot list, and “too much” voter choice. Voters might not be able to choose between candidates of the same party and the complexity of this method may discourage voting. This

proved a problem when STV was first introduced for Scottish local elections in 2007.

- The counting of votes is even more complicated than the voting. “*The system is incontestably opaque*”⁵¹. Results take time to be determined (the 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly election results took a particularly long time to determine).
- STV is not the system used in European Parliament elections, nor in elections to the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly or the London Assembly.
- STV encourages MPs to pursue local rather than national interests.
- Constituents tend to see all the MPs in a multi-member constituency, not just one, when seeking the resolution of a grievance, thus resulting a duplication and waste.
- The Jenkins Commission considered using STV as part of a hybrid or mixture of systems. As recommended in 1917, STV might be used for large urban areas. However, there seemed be no clear rationale as to why certain areas should use STV and other areas an alternative system.
- The Commission also felt that STV, whilst advantageous to the Conservative party in that it would allow them gains in the Labour heartlands, would not serve the Labour party as well in allowing them electoral victories in Conservative strongholds.

6. List Systems

- A List system provides for:
- Strongly proportionate outcomes
- Ease of use – in Closed Party List systems voters simply mark a X against their preferred party
- Clarity – in a region it is easy for voters to understand how gaining 40% of the vote gains a party 40% of the seats
- Eliminates the need for tactical voting
- Familiarity – already in use in European Election in Great Britain, as well as in many European countries.
- Representation – the overwhelming majority of voters will have at least one representative from their multi-member region from a party for which they voted, giving them a voice in the legislature and a sympathetic person to whom they can turn if they need to seek access to the political system.
- Choice – Open List systems, as operated in many European countries, allow voters to express a choice between candidates from the same party
- Allows strong independent candidates an opportunity to win seats.

However List systems do:

- Allow a proliferation of parties to win seats, making hung parliaments and coalitions the norm
- Allow extremist parties to win seats on a small percentage of the vote, as the BNP did in the UK in 2009
- Vary in proportionality, depending on how many members will be elected from a multi-member region. In a region with six representatives, a party could still get as much as 15% of the vote and not win a seat.

⁵¹ *The Jenkins Report*

- Lose the constituency link with a single member that many UK MPs and voters currently prize. Very large multi-member constituencies are the norm in List systems, meaning that particular local interests may be ignored by all representatives and that most voters have no idea who represents them.
- Give political parties great control over their representatives, due to their power over the ranking order within their party list. This undermines the independence of representatives and means that even deeply unpopular politicians can be guaranteed election if their party places them at the top of their list.
- Open list systems are confusing to voters, most of whom typically choose just to vote for a party, accepting its own candidate ranking uncritically. This undermines both the ease of use and choice arguments in favour of the List system.

7. Hybrid Systems - AMS

Hybrid or mixed election systems are usually known as Additional Member Systems, as they combine MPs elected from single member constituencies (typically by First Past the Post, although the Jenkins Commission proposed using AV for this) with a number of regional top up representatives chosen by an additional ballot. Allocating these representatives involves taking into account the number of constituency representatives already won within that region in order to achieve greater proportionality. Candidates for these top up seats are then chosen from party lists.

AMS systems have the advantages that

- They retain a single member constituency link...
- ...while being broadly proportional at a regional and national level
- In practice they are simple to use, as voters just have to mark an X on two ballot papers, one for a local candidate, and another for their regional party preference
- Citizens are very likely to have a representative within their region whom they helped to elect, giving them someone to turn to when they need access to the political system
- They are familiar to many British voters through their use in Scotland, Wales and London

However, AMS can be criticised for

- Encouraging a proliferation of parties, producing permanently hung parliaments and coalitions (although the SNP did achieve the feat of winning a majority in the Scottish Parliament under AMS in 2011).
- Not actually being very proportional, especially if the top up members are only a small proportion of the representatives. Germany has a 50-50% split between constituency and top up members for the Bundestag, but this means constituencies have to be very large and the link with an individual member becomes tenuous.
- Complexity – the formula by which regional top up representatives are awarded means nothing to most voters, who do not understand how their vote will actually create representation.
- Creating two classes of member: constituency representatives who have a direct mandate from the people in a particular electoral district, and who represent the interests of that area in the legislature, and top up members who lack constituency duties and a real connection with actual voters. Some argue that the latter sort of members should have less voting power to go with their reduced workload.
- Handing too much power to political parties. Not only do the Closed Lists used give parties great sway over top up representatives, but AMS often means that candidates who are defeated for constituency seats end up being elected anyway, in defiance of

the voters, because their party has also put them at the top of its List for top up members.

THE UNITED STATES

The Electoral College

When any election sees the candidate with the largest vote lose, concerns are bound to be expressed about the efficiency of such a system. In the United States such an outcome came about in 2000 due to the workings of the Electoral College. It is not my intention to cover the mechanics of the college in depth or to consider all the arguments for and against. I will briefly outline the role played by the College and furore surrounding its continuation. There are though some core issues to be addressed here with regard to representation, participation and democracy.

Put simply:

- the Presidential election is determined by the voting in each state rather than voting across the country as a whole.
- Each state is allocated a number of votes in an Electoral College based upon the population size of that state. The number of votes for each state equals the number of representatives and senators for that state. Hence the large states receive more electoral college votes - California 55, New York 29, Texas, 38, and Florida 29 (2012 allocation).
- The candidate with the most votes (plurality, not necessarily majority) in that state wins all the Electoral College votes for that state. Hence the system, like that used for most primaries is known as “winner-takes-all”. There is no proportionality. Consequently if a candidate wins the 13 of the largest states and polls no other votes in the remaining 33 states they would win regardless of the size of the nation-wide vote. The 13 largest states account for 280 Electoral College votes.
- There are 538 Electoral College votes in all. Therefore to win the presidency, the winning candidate must win 270 Electoral College votes.
- Many states can be in effect taken for granted if a candidate enjoys a large lead in the polls there. In 2012 neither Obama nor McCain campaigned much in New York, California or Texas, as they were all seen to be certainties for one party; the same applied in 2008 (although demographic change may make Texas more competitive by the 2020 election, as the Democrat-favouring Hispanic population increases rapidly).
- In 2012 the nine critical swing states included Florida (29 electoral college votes), Ohio (18), Virginia (13) Wisconsin (10), Colorado (9), Iowa (6), Nevada (6), New Hampshire (4) and North Carolina (15) - these states saw the bulk of the campaigning and Obama won the first eight of them.
- In 2000 when Bush won Florida (eventually, after the Supreme Court stopped the recounting in counties where the outcome was contested due to problems with voting machines) he secured the magic number of 271 Electoral College votes and thus became the President - even though Gore had polled half a million more votes nation-wide.

The last time such a perverse outcome had happened was in 1888 and the lack of any such repeat has allowed the Electoral College to remain intact until the present time. In 2000 however the largest share of the popular vote was not sufficient to secure the presidency. In previous years, votes in the Electoral College had reflected the popular vote and helped establish a clearer majority for the eventual winner. For example whilst Clinton won 49%

of the popular vote against Dole's 42, he secured 379 Electoral College votes to Dole's 159. This cast fresh doubts on its purpose in a modern democracy. Morris, a former Clinton aide, declared "The Electoral College is an anachronism that we Americans have tolerated because it never got in the way."⁵²

Clearly in 2000 it did get in the way. "All arguments against change have fallen away ... the Electoral College is now an entirely nominal legacy from the age of horse drawn conveyances and delegate democracy."⁵³

It is argued that the Electoral College protects states' rights within a federal system, but the Senate probably serves this function better. More importantly, it was argued after November 2000, that the election of a president in such a manner was likely to pose considerable problems once he assumes office as he will be seen to lack democratic legitimacy. This could have been critical in defining the success or failure of the Bush administration. The US President needs to deal with a Congress which is generally reluctant to follow his lead; consequently the President must attempt to persuade rather than command. In this particular scenario, many feared that the Bush presidency was compromised before it started.

- However, Bush enjoyed Republican majorities in both houses of Congress and had no problems advancing his legislative agenda, even winning Democrat support for some policies, such as his No Child Left Behind education reforms. After the attacks on the United State on 9/11/2001, debate over the Electoral College faded away as Americans rallied around the flag.
- In 2004, 2008 and 2012 the popular vote winner also triumphed in the electoral college, and normal service appeared to be resumed. In this context, proposals to reform the Electoral College have received little attention or support.
- Reforms to the Electoral College could include a 28th amendment to replace the 12th, in order to establish victory by the popular vote rather than by the Electoral College.

Others have suggested a large top-up vote to be added to the winner of the popular vote which would prevent a repeat of the 2000 election.

Some would prefer all states to adopt the more proportional system used in Maine and Nebraska, whereby the winner of the popular vote in each Congressional district gets one elector, with the winner of the statewide vote gaining two additional electors. However, this is not a very proportional system – the only time either state has actually split its delegation was 2008, when Nebraska gave one of its 5 electors to Obama. In 2000 it has been calculated that using the Maine system nationwide would still have given George W Bush victory, despite having fewer votes than Al Gore.

⁵² Dick Morris, "If Gore wins the most votes than Gore should be President", *The Guardian*, 9.11.00.

⁵³ *The Independent* leader column, "The flaws in the US constitution", 11.10.00