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Do Traditional Party Campaigns Matter Anymore? Experimental and Survey Evidence from Britain

Joshua H. Townsley

School of Politics and International Relations

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Abstract

'If you believe in something, write it on a piece of paper and stick it through a letterbox'

This quote, attributed to former Member of Parliament David Penhaligon (1944-1986)[1], epitomises traditional electioneering in Britain. But local campaigns that had long been characterised by labour-intensive activities such as canvass visits and leaflets are changing. Dwindling numbers of local activists means that parties are struggling to maintain widespread contact with voters through such labour-intensive means. While developments in communication technology have introduced new, digital forms of campaigning, traditional activities remain resilient. It is against this backdrop that the motivation behind this thesis is presented – should traditional campaigning be allowed to whither? I explore the role and impact of campaigning in Britain today, focusing on the most common modes – leaflets and canvass visits.

First, I examine the role these activities play when it comes to increasing participation at election time. I make an empirical contribution to a largely US-based, non-partisan Get Out The Vote (GOTV) literature by conducting new voter mobilisation field experiments in the May 2017 round of English local elections. The study represents one of the few partisan GOTV experiments to be carried out in Britain, and the first individual-level experiment anywhere to include postal voters. Embedded in a real party campaign, the experiments show that leaflets, and a combination of canvass visits and leaflets, both have positive effects on voter turnout at

[1] Pack (2014).

a local election. Meanwhile, there is evidence of a mobilisation 'ceiling effect' among higher turnout postal voters.

I then use the marked electoral registers from the subsequent general election to examine the downstream effects the treatments had on turnout. I find that the effects of campaign contact detected in the May local election were quickly subsumed at the general election in June, when underlying turnout rose substantially. Together, the experiment and the downstream analysis provide new empirical evidence that traditional campaigns mobilise voters at lower saliency elections.

Finally, I investigate the role that voters' preferences for different types of campaign contact play in conditioning campaign effects. While research into campaign activities is extensive, this represents the first attempt to examine voters' preferences when it comes to how they are contacted. Using survey data of voters in Wales, I show that there is considerable heterogeneity in preferences, driven largely by levels of political interest and previous exposure to different activities. I also find evidence that *wanting* to be contacted conditions campaign effects, contributing to ongoing debates about which voters are most influenced by campaigns.

Overall, I provide evidence that while under threat, traditional party campaign activities still play a vital role in increasing turnout at lower saliency elections – though the temporal durability of effects are susceptible to being consumed at subsequent higher turnout elections. Given that low turnout elections are becoming increasingly common in Britain, however, I argue that the importance of traditional campaign activities is unlikely to diminish for some time to come.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Is Traditional Campaigning Under Threat?

Party campaigning is a central feature of our elections, and by extension, of political life in democratic states. Political parties regularly compete at (and between) election times in order to secure the support of voters. This campaigning serves a key role in democracies of increasing participation and engagement among electorates (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). A great deal of this campaigning is carried out 'on the ground' by volunteers, members, and activists of political parties. Significant resources are dedicated to party campaigns, and they have, subsequently, been the subject of much scholarly research. This thesis is, effectively, an attempt to take an 'audit' of the state of traditional campaign activities in Britain today – how do they affect turnout? And do voters want them anymore?

The motivation behind examining the role of traditional party campaign activities and their effect on voter turnout is that existing research suggests that the nature of local campaigning is changing – and this is having an effect on the types of campaign activities that voters are being exposed to. Many studies have investigated political campaigns, and used experiments to test the mobilising role of leaflets and canvass visits in particular. However, existing Get Out The Vote (GOTV) studies are overwhelmingly based in the United States, and usually test the effect on nonpartisan campaign activities, rather than partisan treatments used by actual candidates in real elections. This thesis tries, therefore, to apply the causality-focused methodology of

American GOTV studies to examine the mobilising effects of traditional party campaigning in Britain.

In the thesis, I use experiments to examine how traditional party campaigning affects turnout among postal and non-postal voters, and the downstream mobilisation effects of campaign contact at a subsequent election. I also analyse novel survey data to explore the demand for campaign contact among voters, and the extent to which voters prefer traditional forms of contact from their would-be representatives, as opposed to more modern, digital forms of communication.

This first chapter places the role of traditional campaign activities in the wider literature on campaign activities and development. I provide an overview of the changes that have taken place in the style of political campaigning in advanced democracies, focusing on Britain. Further, the chapter provides an outline of the contextual 'threats' to traditional campaigning. Specifically, this includes the decline in levels of campaign activists at local level who provide the majority of the labour required to carry out traditional campaign activities. I then finish by outlining the main rationale behind this thesis.

1.1 From Public Meetings to Snapchat: How Local Campaigns Have Changed

It is now well-cited that local campaigning (or "constituency campaigning" as it is often termed in the British literature) was long regarded as a sideshow with regards to determining electoral outcomes (Denver et al., 2003). In the United States, the impact of local electioneering was dismissed as "mere spectacle at the margins of a predetermined outcome" (Issenberg, 2013:79).

In Britain, academics argued that national trends ensured uniform swing between parties across seats, ultimately rendering local campaigns mere 'ritual' (Nicholas, 1951; Butler and King, 1966; Butler and Stokes, 1969). The consensus was that this uniform swing across seats demonstrated the irrelevance of local campaigns to electoral outcomes (Butler and Stokes, 1969). These scholars argued that national trends such as economic performance rendered the practice of constituency-level campaigning largely redundant. In the field of electoral studies, these arguments "largely remained dominant until the 1990s" (Cutts, 2006b: 221). By the 1990s, a growing body of evidence began to challenge this and forge a new consensus (Whiteley and Seyd, 1994; Johnston and Pattie, 1995; Denver and Hands, 1997). Finding that national and local elections could be determined by more than just economic performance and incumbency, these revisionists established that local campaigning does matter (Cutts, 2006b). Essentially, variations in relative campaign effort across constituencies could explain variations in support across constituencies, and individuals contacted by campaigns were more likely to vote (Gerber and Green, 2008).

Once the appreciation of campaigning had grown in academic circles, new tensions emerged over the comparative effect of campaigns at the constituency level versus the nationally-organised campaign (Whiteley and Seyd, 2003; Fisher, Denver and Hands, 2004). Despite these tensions, it is now widely held that the prime function of a local campaign is to mobilise the electorate and turn individuals into voters (Denver and Hands, 1997; Cutts, 2006b; Johnston and Pattie, 2006; Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2008). This process is important, as voting becomes habit-forming, greatly increasing an individual's chances of voting in subsequent elections (Cutts et al., 2009). But alongside developments in the literature on campaigning's effect, a substantial line of research has tracked how the style of local electoral campaigning in Britain has changed too.

Traditional campaigning in Britain had long been characterised by public meetings, door-to-door canvassing by armies of volunteer activists, and widespread leafletting. The 1992 general election, described by Denver and Hands as the 'fax election' (1997), is often considered one of the first general elections in Britain in which the fundamental nature of local campaign techniques began to move away from the dominance of these activities. In their series of studies surveying candidates' agents, Denver et al. (2003) noted that the proportion of local campaigns that reported using traditional techniques declined at subsequent general elections in 1992, 1997, and 2001. Over this period, the proportion of campaigns that carried out doorstep canvassing fell from 84% to 71%. Similarly, the proportion of voters reporting being canvassed by parties during the campaign fell between 1992 and 2001. It was likely that these changes were at least in part related to the changing electoral contexts of these contests, for instance the uncompetitive nature of the 2001 general election (Denver et al., 2003: 548). Nevertheless, it was clear that traditional activities such as doorstep canvassing that were widely regarded as a "key feature of a well-organized constituency campaign" (Ibid) were also declining due to more fundamental reasons. Indeed, between 1992 and 2001 there was a marked fall in the mean number of campaign workers, from 54 to 37, and in the numbers of polling day workers (Denver and Hands, 1996; Denver et al., 2002).

The traditional campaign was making way for the so-called "modern" campaign. Traditional local campaigns were once typified by their reliance on labour-intensive activities such as mass door-to-door canvassing and leaflet dropping by members and volunteers (Fisher and Denver, 2008). But as membership – and crucially, numbers of local campaign workers – declined, campaigns in Britain turned to more modern and less labour-intensive campaign activities such as telephone canvassing and direct mail in order to meet the shortfall in labour (Ward, 2003).

Fisher and Denver identify this trend as becoming particularly noticeable from the 1990s (2008: 803). Over this period, technology such as computers developed significantly and became more widespread (and their cost cheaper). While canvassing was on the decline, the widespread use of computers and telephones around the turn of the millennium meant that local campaigns – in Britain as well as in Europe and elsewhere – started reaching voters in new, less labour-intensive ways (Denver and Hands, 2002; Norris, 2002; Carty, Eagles and Sayer, 2003; Denemark, 2003; Denver, Hands, Fisher and MacAllister, 2003; Ward, 2003; Marsh, 2004; Fisher and Denver, 2008; 2009). Telephone canvassing, in particular, became a key feature of canvassing and of the polling day 'knocking up' operation. As Denver et al. noted in 2003, "constituency campaigns across the country are being modernized – more traditional methods of campaigning are in decline, and constituency organizations are increasingly adopting new techniques" (2003: 550). These techniques that surfaced in local campaigns around the turn of the century as a result of advances in technology such as telephone banks and direct mail are often classified as 'modern campaigning' in the literature (Fisher and Denver, 2009; Fisher et al., 2011b).

Despite this, however, leafletting and canvassing remained relatively common at the 2001 and 2005 general elections. But around the turn of the millennium, technological developments began to have further, marked effects on the way that parties contact potential voters at the local level. The internet began to influence local campaigns in terms of the resources they use, the way voters are targeted, and the nature of the technology that is available to them. In recent years, there has been a marked development in the use of digital methods in local party campaigning known as 'e-campaigning'.

It is widely acknowledged that parties began to campaign using online technologies just over 20 years ago (Ward, Gibson, and Cantijoch, 2018: 318). Norris (2001) argues that parties more widely were moving towards a so-called 'post-modern' era of campaigning, which was typified by an increased level of professionalisation, an emphasis on personalised messages, and on shaping policies to meet the demands of voters (Norris, 2000). Ward, Gibson, and Cantijoch (2018) argue that 21st Century campaigns are typified by three features. Firstly, computing advances and the development of campaign software have helped parties to use big data to target voters with a higher degree of sophistication. This includes the tailoring of messages to specific individuals, or groups. Traditionally, local parties would aim to contact all voters, across the board. But with the use of voter databases, campaign software, and 'big data', parties now increasingly target specific voters in what is known as 'micro-targeting' (Fisher and Denver, 2008; Fisher et al., 2016a). Research shows that campaigns are increasingly data-driven and coordinated from the centre, rather than solely by local parties (Denver et al., 2003; Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2008; Cutts, 2014). This has aided their efforts to target specific voters such as party supporters, but also more fine-grained targeting based on social media 'likes' and shopping habits.

Secondly, the internet has allowed a degree of decentralisation to candidates, local parties, and activists by providing low-cost platforms for such actors to communicate with voters (Norris, 2000, Gibson and Ward, 2003). The 2008 Obama presidential campaign is seen as something of a moment of transformation in how electoral campaigns made use of data, as well as digital technology (Sudulich and Wall, 2010; Gibson, 2013). For the first time, a campaign made wide use of blogging, email lists, text messaging, YouTube, and other social network sites to communicate with voters and activists (Harfoush, 2009).

Finally, internet technologies have introduced a greater degree of interactivity between voters and campaigns. The interactive nature of the internet offers numerous advantages to party campaigners (Sudulich and Wall, 2010). Such platforms as blog and social media, for example, allow voters to engage in dialogue with campaigns and candidates, creating a less top-down campaigning approach (Ward, Gibson, and Lusoli, 2003). Such transformations in the style of local campaigning created a new framework for examining campaign activities, based on whether the mode of contact is 'offline' or 'online' (Aldrich et al., 2016).

Though, these features are not necessarily clear cut. For instance, Denver and Hands (1997) noted that parties were already starting to target voters prior to the internet. The notion of increased interactivity has been called into question by studies showing that parties' use of platforms such as websites (Ward, 2005; Gibson, 2012) and social media (Williamson, 2010) focus predominantly on providing information, rather than interaction. Parties in Britain first created official websites in the mid-1990s (Gibson, Ward, and Lusoli, 2003). Separate websites for candidates shortly followed, though their effect on electoral outcomes was initially minimal (Ward and Gibson, 2003), and focused on disseminating information downwards to members (Gibson and Ward, 1998). Indeed, evidence from Britain suggests that candidates tend to use websites and social media to simply replicate messages from party HQ (Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward, 2008), suggesting that such technology has not radically decentralised campaigning.

By recent general elections, however, e-campaigning has expanded significantly. The general elections of 2010 and 2015 in particular have been noted for witnessing significant development in the use of online and social media. The regular agent survey studies by Fisher et al. find that the use of "email, web technology, and social media" (2016a: 14) increased markedly between 2010 and 2015. They find that e-campaigning had increased among both

Labour and Conservative local campaigns and was more marked in target seats. By the 2017 general election, digital campaigns involving social media and websites, as well as online phone banks and voter databases, were widespread among political parties (Walsh, 2017; Dommett and Temple, 2018). Parties used Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram as part of their campaigning activities (Dutceac Segesten and Bossetta, 2017). Nevertheless, traditional activities were not extinct. Parties now make use of such activities as social media in British election campaigns alongside modern and traditional activities (Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse, 2011b; Anstead, 2017).

Thematically, these broad changes echo the three 'ages' of political communication, that have developed since the 1960s (Magin et al., 2017). Between the mid-19th Century and the 1960s, communication was typified by face-to-face contact between parties and voters, often focused on partisans (Gibson and Rommele, 2001), of which there were then many (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002). Mass-centred campaigns then began to exploit the use of television and broadcast news to campaign from around the 1960s (Blumer and Kavanagh, 1999). The growth of 'modern' campaign techniques corresponded with the rise of more targeted communication from the 1990s that used methods such as direct mail and the internet to reach specific groups (Ibid). The fourth age has since been developed that focuses on Web 2.0 platforms such as social media and the concentration on individual-level targeting (Magin et al., 2017).

Generally speaking, the dawn of the internet age has, in many respects, intensified trends that were already underway in electoral campaigns, including targeting and personalisation (Ward, Gibson, and Cantijoch, 2018). Nevertheless, digital campaigning has facilitated a) an increased focus on and use of big data to coordinate targeting (usually from party HQ), and b) an outsourcing of campaign coordination activities to party activists. Digital methods are

particularly effective when it comes to organising campaign activists (Pole, 2009). The 2012 Obama campaign, for example, recruited 2.3 million volunteers, and that in one day 100,000 of these campaign activists knocked on 7 million doors (Enos and Hersh, 2015).

With regards to the impact the digital era of campaigning has had on directly increasing participation, effects are positive, but modest (Boulianne, 2009). Observational studies provide evidence that online methods are less effective than traditional methods at directly mobilising voters (Fisher, Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2011b; Hansen and Kosiara-Pederson, 2014; Fisher, Johnson, Pattie, Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2016a). In their study comparing online and offline campaigning, Aldrich et al. (2016) also find that online campaigning has weaker effects on turnout than traditional methods. The integration of traditional and digital campaigning means that the advantage of online methods is not their ability to mobilise voters (e.g. Nickerson, 2007), but rather in their ability to coordinate more traditional campaign activities among activists. For instance, online campaigning has been shown to be particularly effective when it comes to encouraging greater participation in the campaign itself among younger voters (Aldrich et al., 2016). Gibson (2013) shows that digital media was pivotal in facilitating a grassroots-based style of campaigning during Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. Digital media allowed control over campaign activities to be devolved to the activist-level to help facilitate traditional campaign activities, rather than replace them. For example, Obama's 'MyBO' site allowed would-be activists to sign up to participate in carrying out traditional campaign activities in their area. Though, Gibson argues that the adoption of such 'citizen-initiated' campaigning is less pronounced in Britain, citing the more formal party membership arrangements and campaign spending restrictions in place (Gibson, 2013: 191).

Despite the rise in digital campaigning techniques, they have not fully replaced traditional activities (Fisher et al., 2016a) – perhaps due to the modest effects they have on directly mobilising voter turnout. In their comparative study into the use of digital and traditional campaigning, Aldrich et al. (2016) find that the adoption of direct contact between campaigns and voters through digital means is far more widespread in the US than in Britain, echoing previous findings by Gibson et al. (2014). Indeed, traditional campaign contact in Britain remains the more common form of voter contact (Fisher et al., 2016a).

Table 1.1. Three-Stage Development of District-level Campaigning (Fisher and Denver, 2008)

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Technical	• Short-term campaign preparations. • Sporadic use of technology. Campaigning is largely traditional and labour intensive	• Longer-term preparations including specialist campaign committee at centre. • Technology widely used alongside traditional campaign techniques.	• Permanent campaign with specialist campaign department at centre. • Technology replaces traditional campaign techniques.
Resource	• Decentralised with little standardisation. • Voluntary activity and use of traditional party bureaucracy. • Impressionistic feedback based mainly on canvassing.	• Centralised and standardised. • Voluntary workers directed by party professionals. • More scientific sources of feedback, including opinion polls.	• Decentralisation of operation with central scrutiny. • Professional staff on short-term contracts. • Greater range of polling techniques making greater use of feedback.
Thematic	• Whistle-stop tours by party leaders. • Focus on mobilising the vote of supporters.	• Tours by party leaders focused on target seats. • Mobilising voters across all categories.	• Party leaders concerned only with target seats. • District campaigns become more important than the national campaign. • Targeting of individual voters.

In Table 1.1, Fisher and Denver (2008) summarise the main trends in how local campaigns in Britain have developed in recent decades, using data from the regular agent survey. Over recent general elections, they note that local campaigns in Britain are becoming increasingly

sophisticated in terms of targeting and the variety of activities used to contact voters. As per Stages 2 and 3 of Fisher and Denver's comparative framework (2008), technology is now widely used alongside the more traditional forms of contact such as leaflets and canvassing.

Despite "the greater reluctance of British parties" to embrace e-campaigning fully (Gibson, 2013: 191), such methods are becoming increasingly popular among local campaigns in recent British elections (Fisher et al., 2016a). Targeted direct mail and telephone calls, as well as online targeting through social media are increasingly widespread forms of campaigning for political parties, often supporting one another (Fisher et al., 2016a; 2016b). This suggests that parties in Britain have not yet transitioned fully into Stage 3 of Fisher and Denver's (2008) framework, in which traditional forms of campaigning become replaced altogether by modern and e-campaigning. In this sense, e-campaigning poses less of a direct threat to traditional campaign activities, and more of an opportunity to help campaigns maintain levels of traditional campaign contact and help counter the prevailing downward trends resulting from changes to numbers of volunteer activists.

As per Fisher and Denver's (2008) framework, we know that alongside the wide variety of activities being used today, local parties are increasingly targeting these activities to particular voters. The process known as 'micro-targeting' involves using big data to direct a targeted approach to campaigning – both in terms of the message itself, but also in terms the mode through which voters are contacted (Fisher and Denver, 2008; Fisher et al., 2016a). This is accompanied by a trend towards increasingly data-driven coordination from the centre, rather than solely by local parties (Denver et al., 2003; Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2008; Cutts, 2014). In terms of messaging, a landmark election in the use of data-driven micro-targeting was the 2008 US presidential contest, in which parties used the information they had on voters to determine

which scripts volunteers used when canvassing in-person or over the phone (Issenberg, 2012). In terms of who parties contact, most campaigns now have a database of information about voters that is used to develop individual-level predictions of political support (Nickerson and Rogers, 2014). These data-generated voter 'propensity scores' can help minimise the likelihood of mobilising supporters of the opposition, while contacting undecideds and supporters more precisely (Endres and Kelly, 2018). There can be negative consequences of such a targeted approach to campaigning, however, as certain voters such as the young, those on low income, and less educated, can be excluded from campaigning altogether. This is because such voter 'propensity scores' are often based strongly on past turnout, marking irregular or non-voters lower in terms of who the party tries to contact (Endres and Kelly, 2018). UK parties are now also widely adopting such micro-targeting strategies (Ross, 2015). The Conservatives used voter data to target specific seats that contained particular types of voters that were more likely to swing towards the party (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015; Anstead, 2017).

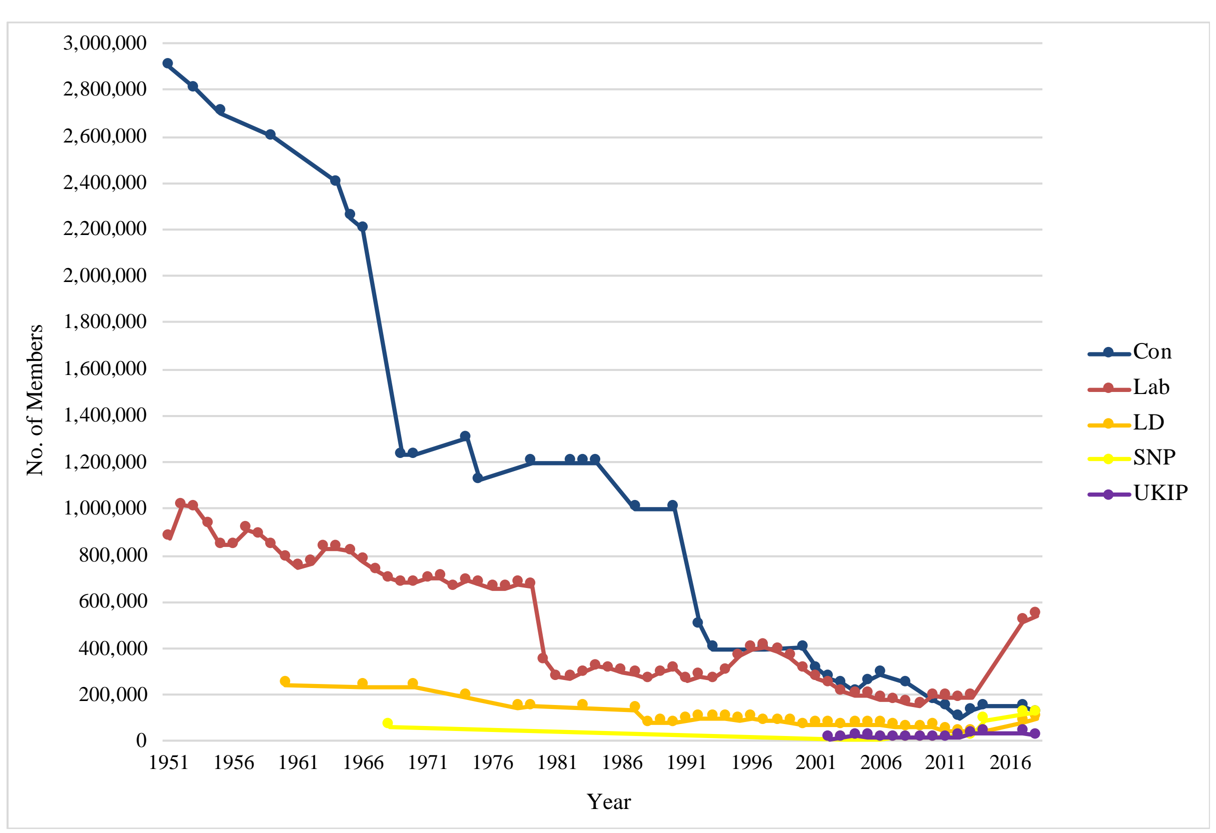
In summary, technological developments have meant that local campaigns in Britain now use an array of techniques with which to contact voters. Their targeting has become more sophisticated – not only do parties target key seats, but also key voters within those seats. Despite this, traditional campaigning appears to remain resilient. Though, alongside technological developments, there are also more existential threats to the use of labour-intensive activities such as doorstep canvassing.

1.2 Declining Party Activism in Britain

The development of digital campaigning has not resulted in the replacement of traditional campaign activities. Arguably, the more important threat to their existence going forward is the trend of declining party activism in Britain that restricts the labour required to carry out

such activities. Traditional campaign activities are carried out predominantly (though, it is important to note, not exclusively, e.g. Fisher et al., 2014; 2016b; Scarrow, 2015) by party members. Delivering leaflets, making phone calls, and knocking on doors are highly labour-intensive activities (Green and Gerber, 2015). In order to keep in regular contact with the electorate, political parties rely on their activist base at the local level. However, one of the most striking, and oft-cited, features of the development of political parties since the 1950s is the decline of mass party membership. The trend has been marked in the US (Green and Gerber, 2000), and across Europe (Van Biezen et al., 2012; Poguntke et al., 2016). In Britain too, the trend has been just as prevalent. Figure 1.1 (below) shows the levels of membership for each main political party in Britain since the 1950s (Bennie, 2014).

Figure 1.1. Membership of the main political parties, 1951-2018



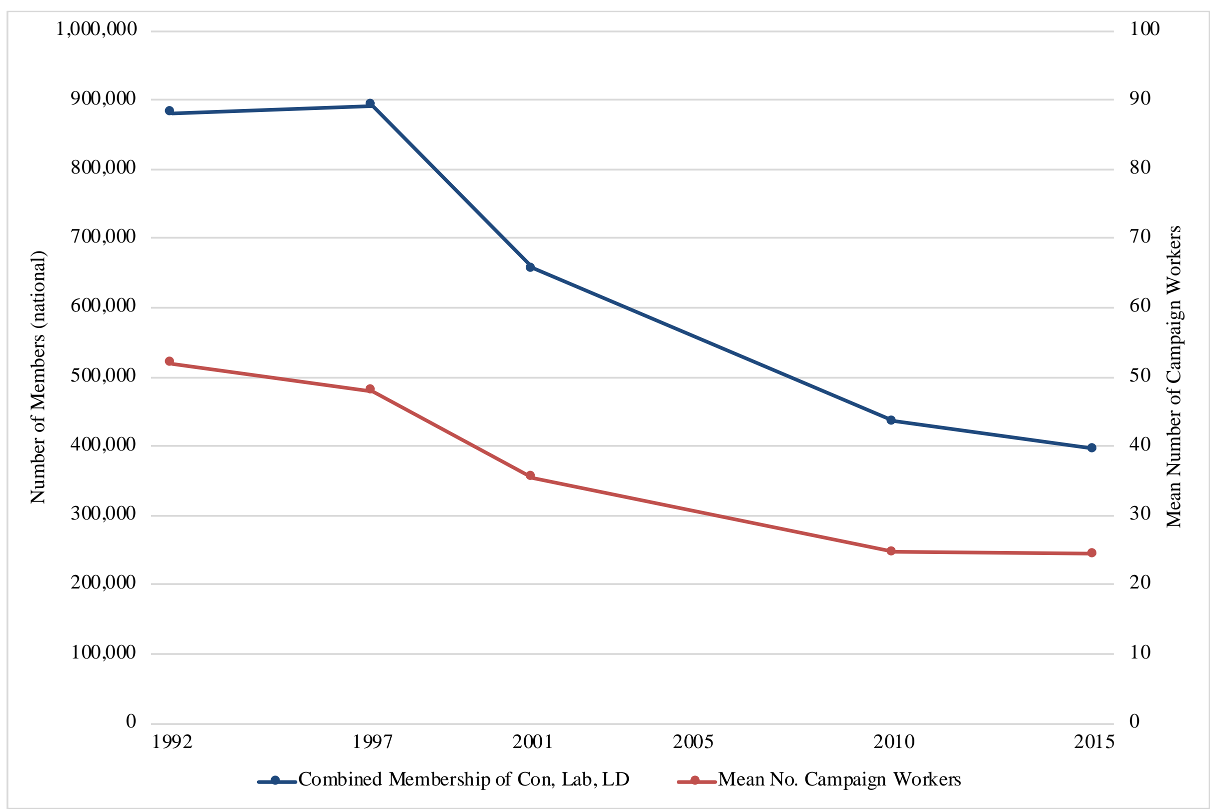
Sources: (Bennie, 2014; House of Commons Library, 2018; Keen and Jackson, 2018)

Since World War II, membership of the main British political parties, the Conservatives and Labour, has declined dramatically. The decline in the number of Conservative party members has been the starkest – from around 2.9 million in the early 1950s to 124,000 in 2018. Labour also experienced a fall from around 1 million to approximately 200,000 in 2014. Recent membership surges in the Labour party in the 'Corbyn era' have bucked this trend, with Labour membership in 2018 standing at its highest level since 1979. It remains to be seen whether or not this surge is a one-off outlier for Labour, closely associated with Jeremy Corbyn himself. But over the long term, other parties too have experienced a decline. Despite increases since 2010 in the membership of smaller parties such as UK Independence Party (UKIP), and the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), the overwhelming trend in the membership of parties is one of decline between 1951 and 2003, stagnation between 2003 and 2018, with a surge in Labour members since 2015.

But how are these trends associated with levels of local party activism? There is evidence that the decline in party membership is closely associated with the average number of campaign workers that local campaigns have at their disposal at election time (Denver et al., 2003). Drawing upon data from the regular surveys of party agents, Figure 1.2 shows the mean number of campaign workers (per local campaign) at general elections between 1992 and 2015, and the combined Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat national memberships at each general election.[2] The figure shows that as national membership levels have dropped since 1992, so has the average number of campaign workers. Both have fallen by around 50% between 1992 and 2015.

[2] Membership figures are taken from latest estimates. 1992-2010 (Bennie, 2014), 2010 (Keen and Jackson, 2018). 2015, prior to the general election Labour (Pope, 2016), Liberal Democrat (Speed, 2015), Conservative (estimate taken from Keen and Jackson, 2018).

Figure 1.2. Mean number of campaign workers per local party and national party membership (Bennie, 2014; Keen and Jackson, 2018; Party Agent Survey, 1992-2015)



The steep decline in the mean number of campaign workers per local party correlates closely with the falling numbers of national party members at the general elections between 1992 and 2015. Party membership among the main political parties fell from 881,000 in 1992 to 396,000 in 2015. Over the same period, the average number of campaign workers fell from 52 to 24 in 2015. This trend appears to confirm expectations that a) membership levels are strongly associated with parties' campaign workforce, and b) membership has declined over the long term.

Why does this matter? At the local level – where most direct campaign activities take place – political parties rely heavily (often exclusively) on unpaid, volunteer labour to directly contact

voters (Fisher and Denver, 2008). Volunteers carry out the vast majority of traditional local campaign activities such as doorstep canvassing and delivering leaflets (Fisher et al., 2016b). These remain essential local campaigning activities that constitute the core of a party's local campaign effort (Johnston et al., 2012). Volunteer activists are drawn heavily from a local party's membership. Therefore, as membership declines, numbers of campaign activists decline, meaning we would expect local political parties to struggle to maintain the same level of campaign contact with voters (Fisher et al., 2016a). As Fisher and Denver observe, "Party members are the bedrock of traditional constituency campaigning" (2008: 803). Partly in response to this, research in Britain (Denver and Hands, 2002; Denver, Hands, Fisher and MacAllister, 2003; Fisher and Denver, 2008, 2009) is consistent with evidence elsewhere such as Canada (Carty, Eagles and Sayer, 2003), New Zealand (Denemark, 2003), Ireland (Marsh, 2004), and Australia (Ward, 2003), that parties relied more on new methods such as direct mail and phone calls with which to contact voters. But, in light of these trends, how can we measure the levels of traditional campaign activities in recent years?

1.3 Canvassing and Leafletting Since 1992

In the face of these significant changes in technology and labour resources, how much has the overall use of traditional campaign activities such as door-to-door canvass and leaflets changed in recent British elections? In order to illustrate the extent to which prevailing trends in levels of activism have affected the use of leaflets and canvass visits in day-to-day election campaigning, I pool data from cross-sectional surveys of party agents in Britain carried out at general elections since 1992. The agent survey is carried out after every general election in Britain in recent decades and was used to establish Fisher and Denver's (2008) framework for comparative analysis of local campaign development. The survey routinely asks party agents (legally required for every candidate, responsible for running local campaigns) a series of

questions about the local campaign. Comparing the emphasis local campaigns put into traditional campaigning across recent general elections provides a supply side assessment of the extent to which the use of traditional campaign activities has changed in recent years.[3] In order to compare the trends in leafletting and canvassing contact, the party agent survey therefore provides a reputable indication. Focussing on the period between 1992 and 2015 also provides a vital snapshot of the period during which technological changes in campaign techniques have spread, such as websites and party software (Fisher and Denver, 2008). It also captures a period in which party membership in Britain saw significant decline (Keen and Jackson, 2018), meaning we would anticipate changes in levels of traditional, labour-intensive campaigning. The survey data also breaks the responses down by political party, meaning we can see how trends vary between the main parties.[4]

The agent survey day has limitations, however, that are worth noting. For instance, party agents may report higher levels of campaign contact to show how hard they campaigned at the election. Similarly, agents may suffer from false recall – not remembering the extent of the campaign efforts. Nationwide is also only available for general election campaigns. These are Britain's only regular first order election, but this data would not capture the significant amount of campaigning that takes place in between general elections, primarily for elections to local government. There is no reason to assume that campaigning trends at general election would not be indicative of trends in local elections as well, however. A possible concern is that accuracy of the data at any given general election, in addition to the issues of measurement

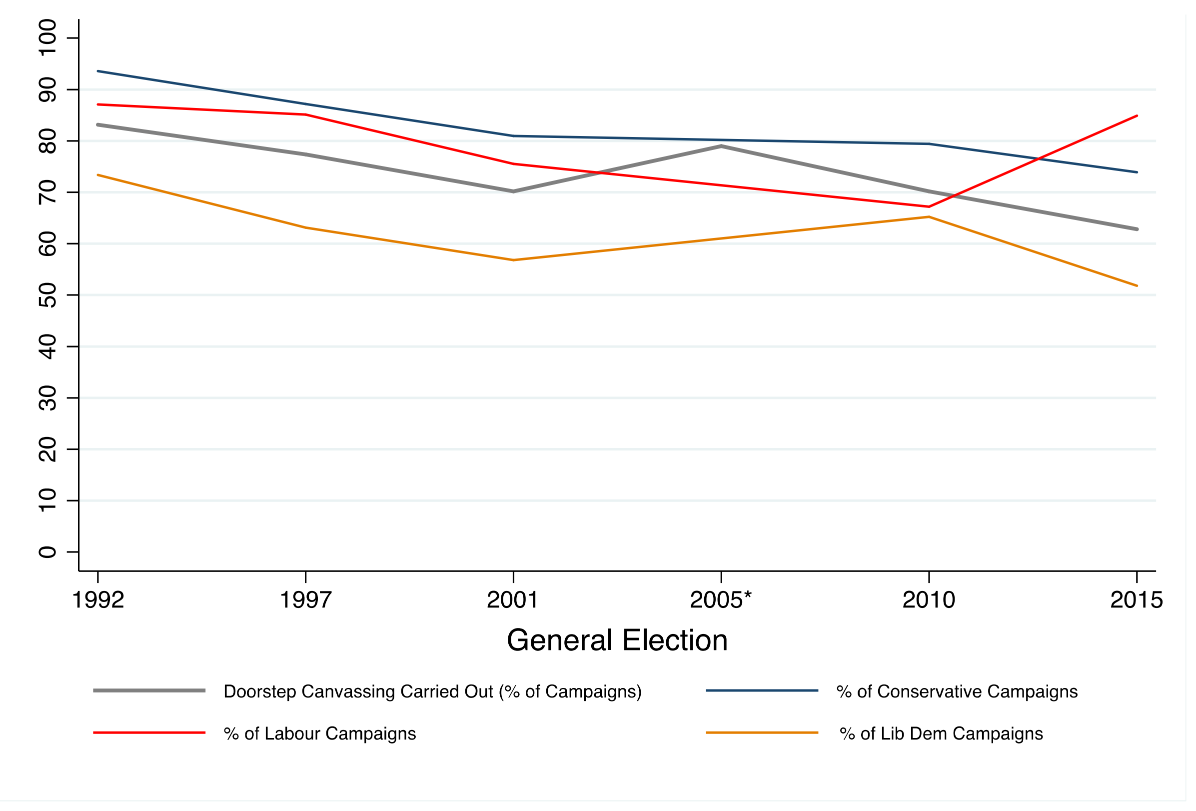
[3] Data for the 2005 agent survey was not available.

[4] Due to small Ns from other party agents, I only present the party breakdowns for the Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties. The total number of responses in each year are as follows: 1992 (1,004), 1997 (1,300), 2001 (1,250), 2010 (1,028), and 2015 (892).

error highlighted above. Sometimes, local elections coincide with general elections, which may inflate overall levels of personal contact. Similarly, contact is likely to be higher at tighter general elections, such as those of 2010 and 2015, which may blur the overall trend. Finally, in some areas, local parties may dedicate more campaign effort to local election campaigns than general election campaigns if they have sitting councillors, but no hope of winning the GE constituency. However, the problems faced by local parties in terms of declining numbers of members and activists should be consistent across both local and general election campaigns. Due to data availability, the trends must be treated with caution, but are still a good proxy for wider trends in levels of traditional campaign contact over time.

Firstly, we can measure how the emphasis on door-to-door canvassing has changed in recent years. Canvassing represents the most labour-intensive campaigning activity that local parties can carry out (Green and Gerber, 2015). The process of going door-to-door to speak to voters is often slow and takes a significant amount of time to carry out. We would expect, therefore, to see a decline in the use of canvass visits as local activist numbers fall. Data from the party agent survey presented in Figure 1.3 reveals that canvassing has indeed declined over the period analysed. Figure 1.3 shows the proportion of local campaigns carrying out doorstep canvassing at general elections between 1992 and 2015.

Figure 1.3. % of local campaigns carrying out doorstep canvassing

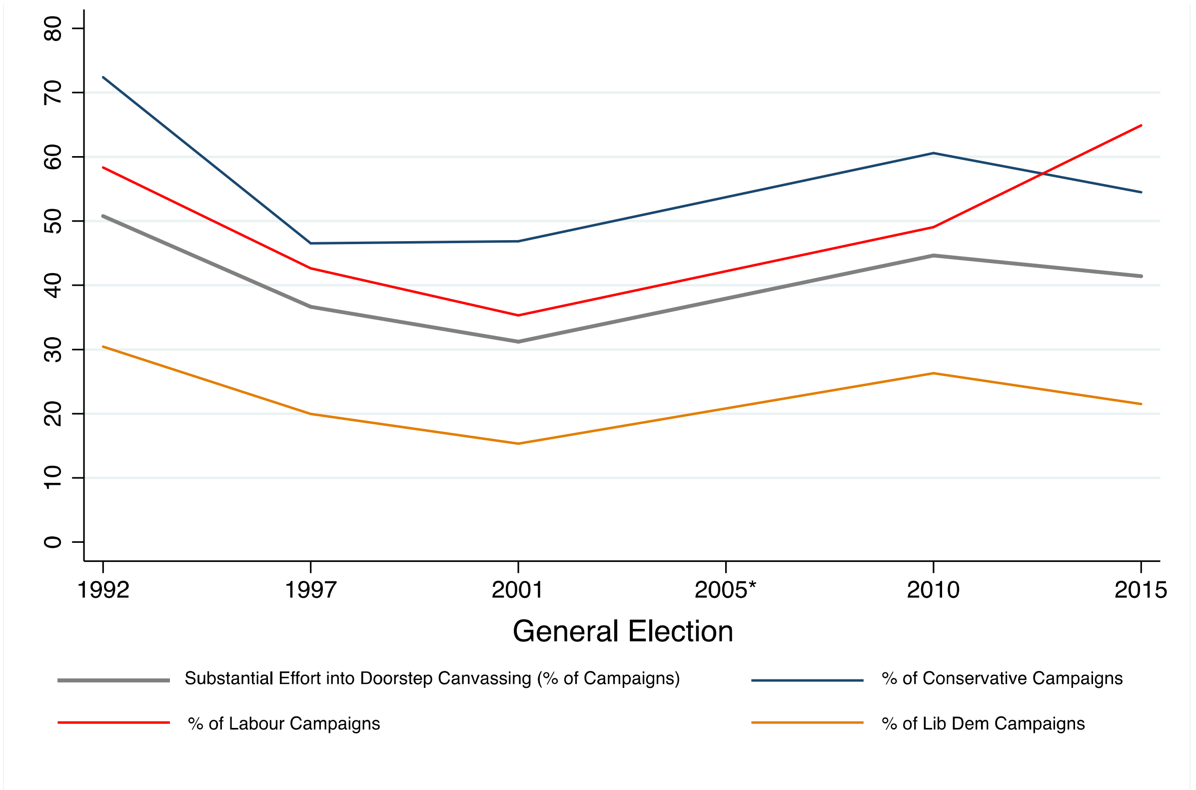


In 1992, 84% of local campaigns carried out doorstep canvassing. By 2015, this had fallen to just over 60%. Similarly, the proportion of local campaigns that put "substantial effort" into doorstep canvassing has fallen steadily since 1992. In 1992, around half of local campaigns claimed to put "substantial effort" into canvassing. This fell to around 30% in 2001 but was up to around 40% in 2015. The outlier to this downward trend is the Labour Party in 2015, which experienced a sharp rise in the use of doorstep canvassing. This is likely a result of Ed Miliband's increased focus on the need to hold millions of conversations with voters during the campaign (Hope, 2015). Overall, however, it is clear that there has been a steady decline in the use of doorstep canvassing by local parties at general elections. It should also be noted that it is possible that the survey of party agents overstates the true level of doorstep canvassing, as

well as other campaign activities[5] and is less likely to pick up data from those local campaigns that have become inactive altogether and therefore do not respond to the survey. Nevertheless, using data from a slightly different question from the survey – asking agents how much "effort" was put into canvassing, rather than simply whether canvasing was carried out at all – shows a similar pattern (Figure 1.4).

[5] This is because the agent survey is not weighted by how active the local campaign is. As a result, it is possible that there is a bias in responses towards more organised and active local campaigns. Agents are a legally required appointment for all candidates. However, not all will campaign equally. For instance, many candidates are simply 'paper' candidates with little hope of winning, and therefore campaign only minimally, or not at all. Such agents could be less likely to respond to a survey on the campaign if they were not active in planning any general election campaign. However, this is only conjecture, and given that this chapter is concerned with trends across general elections, there is no reason to think that this would be more of a problem at one election compared to another.

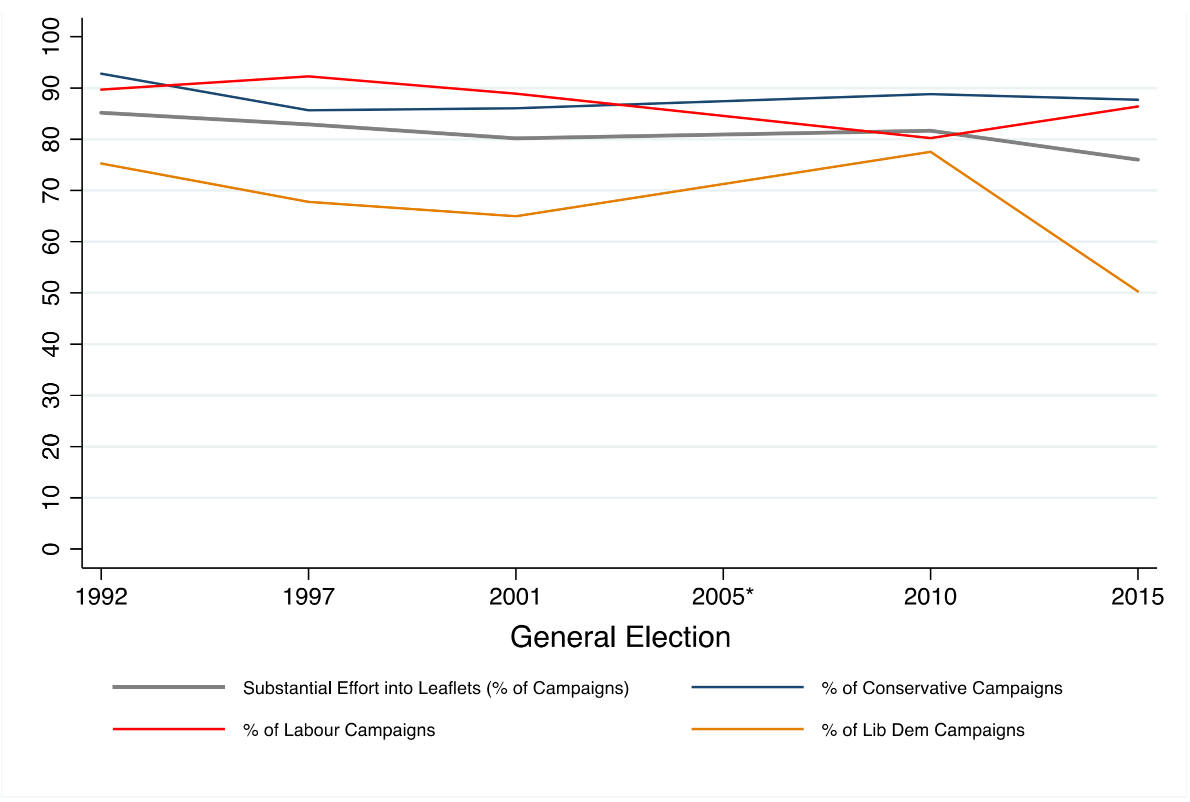
Figure 1.4. % of local campaigns putting “substantial effort” into canvassing



Doorstep canvassing appears, according to the party agent survey, to be on the decline. But what of the other traditional campaign activity that forms a core component of a local campaign’s voter contact – leaflets? Given the labour-intensive nature of doorstep canvassing, we would expect falling campaign labour supplies to disproportionately affect more labour-intensive campaign activities such as canvassing. After all, while both are labour-intensive, canvassing requires significantly more time and volunteers to contact, say, 100 voters, than a leafleting session (Green and Gerber, 2015). Often, the intended targets of canvass visits are not at home or are unwilling to open the door to speak to party canvassers. It takes much less time to distribute 100 leaflets as activists do not have to knock and wait for someone to answer the door. Therefore, it is possible that leaflets and other activities have been less affected by membership changes than canvassing. Figure 1.5 shows the proportion of local campaigns putting “substantial effort” into leafleting. The data reveal that the effort put into leafleting has

been relatively stable over the last six general elections but has declined somewhat. In 1992, around 85% of campaigns put substantial effort into leafleting. By 2015, this had dropped to 75%. The decline between 2010 and 2015 appears to be driven largely by a sharp drop in the Liberal Democrats' leafleting efforts.

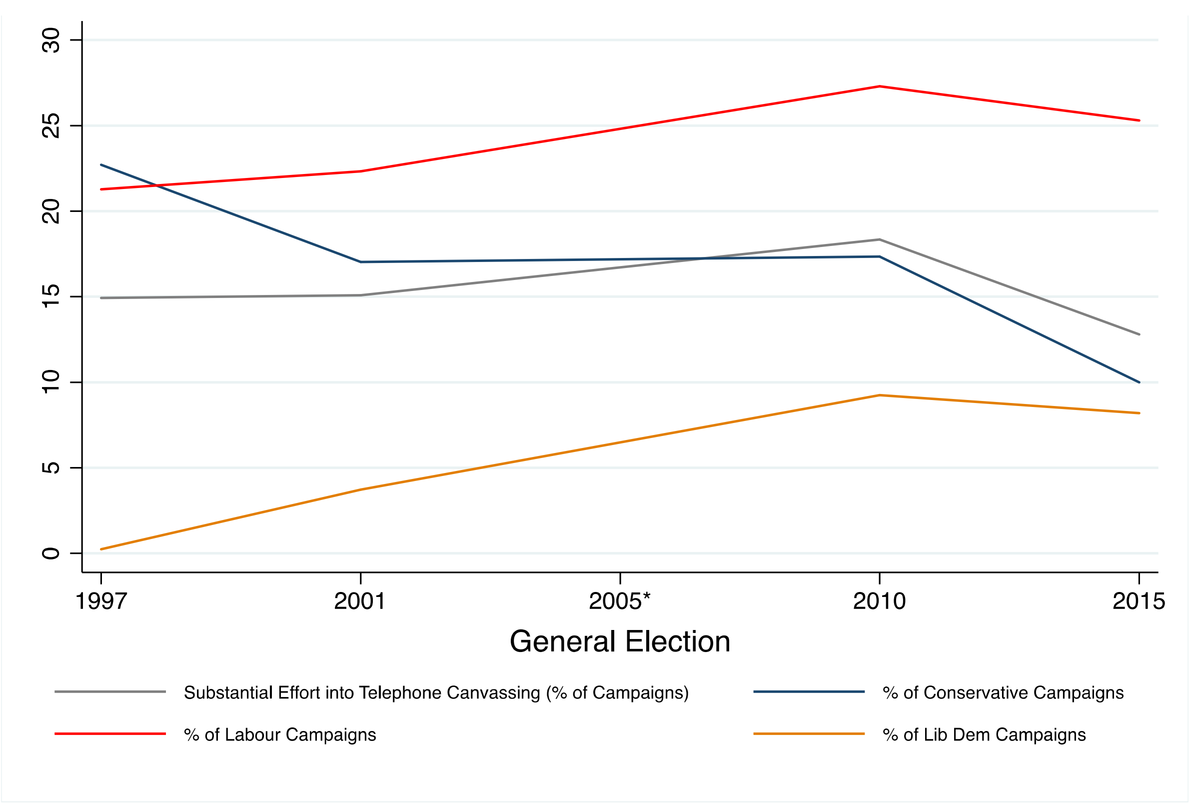
Figure 1.5. % of local campaigns using leaflets, 1992-2015



While not typically classified as a traditional campaign activity, telephone calls provide a useful comparator to leaflets and canvass visits. Telephone calls require labour, but can be made from the local party office, or, increasingly, from home. Like leaflets, the use of telephone canvassing has remained stable since 1997, when the party agent study first included survey questions on telephone calls. Since 1997, the proportion of local campaigns putting "substantial effort" into telephone canvassing has remained at around 15% (Figure 1.6).

Generally speaking, parties make less use of telephone canvassing than doorstep canvassing and leaflets.

Figure 1.6. % of campaigns using telephone canvassing, 1997-2015



Overall, research in recent decades on local campaigning in Britain shows that the traditional campaign is indeed changing. Parties now make use of a wide variety of activities, ranging from leaflets and canvass visits to targeted mail and Facebook adverts, in order to contact voters at election time. Driven in part by developments in communication technology and by long term changes in the numbers of local campaign activists willing to volunteer for their local parties, local campaigns in Britain now no longer rely solely on traditional, labour-intensive activities such as leaflets and canvass visits. However, these activities are not being wholly cut out by parties. Evidence shows that they are being supplemented by other activities rather than replaced altogether.

Data from the agent survey shows that the overall use of traditional activities has declined steadily in recent years. Nevertheless, they remain surprisingly common, given the vast array of communication technology that is ultimately available to parties today. Steep falls in activist levels has indeed corresponded with a decline in the amount of doorstep canvassing that is carried out by parties. Traditional campaigning is under threat, but perseveres. Indeed, canvassing and leaflets both remain two of the most common forms of direct contact that voters have with local campaigns.

1.4 Research Overview

From these developments, the central motivation of this thesis is presented: how do traditional campaign activities such as leaflets and canvass visits fare in the modern campaigning era? What role do these activities play in terms of increasing political participation, and what do they offer to political parties and campaign activists in the years to come that more modern and digital forms of campaigning (despite their rise in recent years) might not do? Indeed, if traditional activities such as face-to-face canvassing are gradually declining, the question of whether they increase turnout is a crucial one in order to help inform the decision about whether to let such activities wither or not. This thesis sheds light on these questions using a combination of field experiments, individual turnout records across the 2017 local and general elections, and novel survey data from Wales. The dissertation is laid out as follows.

Chapter 2 reviews the existing base of empirical evidence on the effects of various campaign activities on voter turnout. I discuss the methodological issues surrounding the measurement of campaign effects, and the different approaches that have been taken including campaign spending, surveys of candidate agents, and surveys of voters. While highly informative and valuable to campaign research, I focus my review of empirical evidence on the large body of

GOTV field experiments. These studies have the advantage of producing causality-focused effect estimates through randomised assignment to control and treatment conditions. The experimental approach also allows scholars to separate the impact of different campaign activities, meaning their effects on turnout can be compared. The review of this now-substantial body of experimental research focuses on the findings of several meta-analyses conducted by prominent scholars in the field (e.g. Gerber et al., 2013 and Green and Gerber, 2015). This is also supplemented by reviewing specific experiments that are particularly relevant to my research question due to their location (e.g. British-based experiments such as Foos and John, 2016). The chapter reviews these findings and assesses the landscape of this body of research with regards to my research question. The consensus that emerges from this literature that personal campaign interactions (i.e. doorstep canvassing) are the most effective way to increase voter turnout. But, I argue that this body of research has limitations in answering my research question, namely, it is overwhelmingly based in the United States, and largely tests the effect of non-partisan campaign treatments on voter turnout. Existing experimental research is insufficient in so far as providing a clear answer to the question of how important traditional campaign activities are to local level campaigning conducted by political parties in Britain today. This chapter concludes, therefore, by outlining why a new British-based, partisan field experiment is needed to ascertain the effect that traditional party activities have on voter turnout.

Chapter 3 then discusses the main theoretical explanations that are raised in the literature regarding why we would expect traditional campaign activities to increase turnout, when, and among whom. This chapter engages with the theoretical approaches taken in broad voter behaviour literature, as well as theories discussed in the specific GOTV literature, to explain how and why certain campaign activities boost turnout – and in which contexts. These

approaches include the ‘social connectedness’ that arises from face-to-face canvassing interactions (Green and Gerber, 2004), the noticeability of receiving a text message (Dale and Strauss, 2009), and how partisan contact might affect the calculus of voting (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). I also outline the theoretical framework that argues that the impact of campaign contact is also, fundamentally, a function of the specific electoral context and the underlying predisposition of the individual to vote at that given election (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009). The aim of the thesis is not to test these theories against one another, however. Rather, I explore the ‘core propositions’ raised by these discussions in order to produce a series of theoretical expectations that arise from the literature, which I then test in the proceeding empirical chapters.

Chapter 4 represents the first of the three empirical chapters of the thesis. The chapter outlines the research design of two pre-registered field experiments carried out in cooperation with the Liberal Democrats in 2017. The first is conducted among regular, ‘in-person’ voters at the May 2017 local elections in Suffolk, England. The second is conducted almost-simultaneously among postal voters in the same electoral division. I describe the randomisation process, the treatments, and the sample sizes in detail. I also present balance tests to affirm the randomisation process in each experiment. I then discuss the results, specifically, the effect that partisan leaflets and canvass visits have on voter turnout at the May 2017 local election, how the effects differ between non-postal voters and postal voters, and what this tells us about how campaign effects differ according to the underlying propensity to vote (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009). I conclude Chapter 4 with a discussion of the findings, how they compare to similar studies comparatively, and their implications for the research question.

The second empirical chapter (Chapter 5) then examines whether the initial campaign treatments had "downstream effects" on participation at the subsequent general election in June 2017. I outline my expectations based on existing research into downstream effects and theoretical discussions raised in Chapter 3 regarding election saliency, before then describing the research design. Because the study essentially represents a panel of the same voters over two moments in time, I present the rates of attrition between the elections, and confirm that the rates did not vary appreciably between the control and treatment groups. I then re-run the balance checks. The results are detailed with regards to any evidence of 'temporal spillover' in turnout effects between the original experiment in May and the June general election. The chapter concludes by examining what the results suggest regarding the research question.

Chapter 6 then turns to examining whether there is a demand for campaign contact among voters themselves and whether this demand conditions the effect of subsequent contact. This chapter analyses survey data, and therefore takes a different methodological approach to examining the mobilising role of campaigning from Chapters 4 and 5, which use experimental design. This chapter presents novel survey findings from the Welsh Election Study that focus on – for the first time – how (and if) voters *want* to be contacted by campaigns. In this chapter, I explore these preferences, and test the role they have in conditioning the impact of campaign contact. I discuss the potential consequences of these findings for the future of party campaigning.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 7) considers the implications of the main findings of the preceding chapters. This focuses on the implications the findings have for our understanding of the role that traditional campaigning plays in British politics today, as well how they relate

to the existing empirical findings reviewed in Chapter 2, and the theories discussed in Chapter 3. It then discusses where future campaign research might venture.

1.5 Conclusion

The primary research question of this thesis is to examine the role of two traditional campaign activities used by political parties in Britain at the local level – leaflets and canvass visits. These activities have long been a staple of British local campaigns (Denver et al., 2003), and represent two of the most common forms of direct contact many voters have with political campaigns. However, technological developments have meant that leaflets and canvass visits are no longer the only forms of campaign contact in town. Further, in line with the trend across most European countries (Van Biezen et al., 2012; Poguntke et al., 2016), as well as Canada, Australia, and Israel, political party membership in Britain has steadily – and at times dramatically – fallen since the 1950s (Keen and Jackson, 2018). This is having knock-on effects on the types of activities political parties can use when campaigning locally. Members represent most of the labour that is required for local campaigns to contact voters at election time. Members form the bulk of the volunteer workforce that deliver leaflets and knock on doors on behalf of candidates (Fisher et al., 2016b).

This chapter has outlined recent developments in the nature of local electoral campaigning. The focus has been on the use of traditional activities, in the context of wider changes in party campaigning, including levels of activism and the growth of digital, 'e-campaigning'. I examined existing research on trends in how parties campaign, as well as using secondary data from surveys of party agents in Britain. The primary goal of this was to outline this contextual problem that motivates the thesis' research enquiry.

I find that, since 1992, the use of traditional campaign activities has indeed fallen, but are resilient. According to the regular agent survey, the use of leaflets has dipped but remains widespread. At every general election since 1992, between 80 and 85% of local campaigns put substantial effort into leafleting at election time. Telephone calls, meanwhile, are much less common (around 15% of campaigns put substantial effort into calls) but have likewise been relatively stable since 1992. Doorstep canvassing, however, has experienced a steady decline since 1992. In 1992, just over 80% of local campaigns carried out canvassing. By 2015, this had fallen to around 60%. The proportion of campaigns claiming to put substantial effort into canvassing has also fallen – from 50% to 40%.

The mix of activities used by local campaigns is changing, with parties no longer relying exclusively on traditional activities. Instead, such forms of contact are supplemented with more modern and digital forms of campaigning – and, crucially, are being coordinated and targeted with the help of digital methods. Gone are the days when parties canvassed voters *en masse*. However, research shows that the 'traditional campaign' is far from extinct (Fisher et al., 2016a). While both have declined, data from the agent survey shows that leafleting represents the most ubiquitous local campaign activity in Britain, followed by doorstep canvassing.

From these developments the central research question of this thesis is generated: how do traditional campaign activities survive in the modern era of electoral campaigning? Further, how concerned should we be by the potential future decline of the traditional campaign resulting from falling activist levels?

The goal of this chapter was to outline the motivation behind the central research question and why the role of traditional campaign activities is worth examining. The chapter also outlined

the broad approach that the thesis will take to answering the research question, including the structure and topics of the chapters. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical mechanisms that might connect canvass visits and party leaflets to higher voter turnout. I will then review the existing body of research on the effect of campaign activities on turnout, including leaflets and canvass visits, to examine how this literature contributes towards– and how it falls short of – answering the research question.

Chapter 2: Canvassing and Leafletting Effects: Existing Empirical Evidence

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the key motivation behind this thesis' research question of what the role of traditional party campaign activities in Britain is today. This motivation centres on existing research that suggests that as parties' long-term membership levels have fallen and new technology has allowed the development of modern and digital campaigning techniques, the extent to which local parties in Britain rely on traditional campaign activities is declining. However, traditional campaigning remains resilient (Fisher et al., 2016a). How do such activities survive in the modern, digital era of electoral campaigning? This chapter reviews the existing evidence base concerning the effect of canvass visits and leaflets on turnout and highlights the limitations existing research has in fully addressing the thesis' research question.

In this chapter, I focus on the large body of research that has shed light on the effect of campaign activities on voter turnout. This includes both observational studies, but also Get Out The Vote (GOTV) field experiments. Through random assignment to various campaign activities, the significant body of field experiments provide causality-focused findings with a high degree of internal validity. The current GOTV literature has developed substantially over recent decades and is now vast. The literature provides clear findings on the effect of campaign contact on turnout, namely, that personal campaign activities (i.e. face-to-face canvassing) have powerful effects on voter turnout, while impersonal activities such as leaflets have

negligible impact. I review these studies and highlight particularly important studies and what their findings tell us with regards to my research question.

The existing body of empirical evidence, while vast, has limitations in answering the central research question of this thesis, however. Existing GOTV studies are based overwhelmingly in the United States, and test largely nonpartisan, 'civic' campaign treatments. The geographical imbalance in the GOTV literature has indeed been noted by scholars recently, leading to recent calls for more GOTV experiments in Europe in order to widen the geographic base of GOTV evidence (Bhatti et al., 2016). There is a general lack of GOTV experiments that test the effect of *partisan* campaign activities, i.e. activities carried out on behalf of political parties. Most US-based experiments test the effect of nonpartisan campaign activities, and while the consensus around these treatments is well-established, there is greater uncertainty regarding the impact of treatments carried out by political parties and their candidates. While the European GOTV literature is developing (Bhatti et al., 2016), the base of experimental evidence is far smaller with regards to the effects of partisan campaign activities in Britain. In this chapter, I argue that to test the turnout effect that traditional, party campaign activities have in Britain today, further experimental evidence is needed.

I first outline the main methodological approaches to measuring the turnout effects of campaign activities, including using survey and campaign spending data and the main benefits of the experimental approach. Due to the large number of experiments that have now been published in this field, to summarise the main findings I focus on discussing important meta-reviews of GOTV experiments, as well as highlighting key individual studies. I draw upon the robust findings from existing GOTV experiments to establish my expectations regarding the field

experiment, and research question. But, I conclude the chapter by arguing that the existing GOTV literature is insufficient to answer the central research question of this thesis.

2.2 Methodological Approaches

A recurring theme that emerges from the literature concerns the variety of ways one can approach the measuring of campaign effort and intensity. Fieldhouse and Cutts (2009) note that issues focused around measuring campaign intensity are central to the literature on campaigning. A variety of approaches have been used to measure campaign intensity and strength at the aggregate level. Some scholars have used income and spending to measure campaign intensity and effects. This approach has been used widely, for instance in the US (Jacobsen, 1978), Europe (Sudulich et al., 2013; Smulders and Maddens, 2017), Ireland (Benoit and Marsh, 2008), and Britain (Johnston et al., 1989; Johnston and Pattie, 1994; Pattie and Johnston, 1995; Pattie et al., 1995; Fisher, 2015). This seems intuitive, as income and spending facilitate the hiring of local organisers, advertising, and production of traditional campaign literature. Data on local and national party income and expenditure also has the benefit of being easily quantifiable and readily available for researchers. In Britain, for example, spending data is published regularly on the Electoral Commission website.

However, there are several disadvantages to this approach to measuring the impact of doorstep canvassing and leaflets. Firstly, formal campaign spending does not take into account all-year round campaign spending, as accounts only include spending during the 'short campaign'. It ignores the reality that in areas with closely-fought elections, campaigning takes place almost continuously throughout the year (e.g. in marginal parliamentary constituencies in Britain (Cutts, 2006b)). In Britain, changes in the legal restrictions on campaign spending to now include the 'long' campaign of four months before a General Election is called goes some way

to tackling this shortcoming. Secondly, income and expenditure do not capture the many hours of unpaid time given by committed volunteers, who tend to perform the bulk of the traditional campaigning tasks such as canvassing and leafleting. While using the amount of money a party raises and spends locally can be revealing of a local campaign's wider campaign effort, it is far from a perfect approach to measuring the effect of specific activities.

Alternative approaches have their merits. Research in Britain has been conducted using surveys of party members as a way of researching party campaigning (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al., 1994; Whiteley and Seyd, 1994). While local members tend to form the spine of the local campaign efforts, it is far from an ideal measure. There is a long-term decline in overall party membership from which British parties have not been immune (Keen, 2015). But parties have adapted to this trend, and research has found that political parties rely on the volunteer efforts of 'supporters' who are not party members (Fisher et al., 2016b). This phenomenon shows that research should not rely entirely on party membership alone. Surveys of party agents (Denver and Hands, 1985; 1997; Fisher et al., 2016a) have also been used to measure campaign intensity. This also seems intuitive, as party agents tend to run campaigns on behalf of the candidates and have close knowledge of the operation of the campaign. Studies using this approach find positive effects of canvassing on electoral outcomes (e.g. Fisher and Denver, 2009).

Other studies into the effects of various campaign activities on voter turnout take the form of observational approaches, i.e. using survey data to discover if voters who were contacted by parties at election time voted at higher rates than those not contacted, or through field experiments. Indeed, Panagopoulos explains that for much of the last century, "researchers advanced such analyses using mainly observational approaches", relying predominantly on

surveys (Panagopoulos, 2015: 311). Whether in Britain (Butler and Stokes, 1969) or the United States (Campbell et al., 1960; Verba et al., 1995), surveys tended to inform the major scholarly works that informed opinion on how voters behaved. Asking individuals would capture the effect of exposure to party campaigning. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) used the American National Election Studies (ANES), which asked "did anyone from one of the political parties call you up or come around and talk to you about the campaign?". Voter survey approaches in Britain find that canvassing boosted turnout more effectively than telephone calls, and increased vote share for parties (Pattie and Johnston, 2003; Cutts et al., 2012; Johnston et al., 2012).

But this method of analysing the effect of exposure to campaigning also has a limitation concerning causation as exposure to the campaign 'treatment' is not randomly assigned (Green, McGrath, and Aronow, 2013). Parties tend to target their campaign efforts at likely voters, meaning that causation cannot be clearly identified here. Was it the exposure to campaigning that increased turnout? Or was it that those individuals more likely to vote anyway were being targeted by parties' campaign efforts? This issue can call into question the credibility of observational approaches to studying the effectiveness of different voter mobilisation techniques (Gerber et al., 2004). The link between exposure to campaign contact and voting could also be considered spurious if parties find it easier to contact certain individuals who happen to vote at higher rates anyway. This might be due to their accessibility, or work, or living arrangements. Measures of campaign contact in surveys might just be measures of other individual level attributes or characteristics that also correlate with voting (e.g. living in multi-occupancy households).

Further problems exist with observational approaches. Namely, surveys are subject to measurement error. Most surveys ask individuals to self-report exposure to campaign contact, which relies on the accurate memory of respondents. Relying on asking people if they voted has inherent problems itself due to social desirability bias. In other words, people might lie in order to appear to conform to the social norm of voting, though matching surveys with official voting records allowed these to be 'validated'. The phrasing of common survey questions can also cause ambiguity over the treatment. For example, Rosenstone and Hansen's seminal work (1993) used the American National Election Study (ANES) to determine the effect of exposure to campaign contact. The survey used the question "Did anyone from one of the political parties call you up or come around and talk to you about the campaign?". This can cause confusion over what the study is measuring – phone calls or canvassing. These limitations to survey-based approaches concerning their causal claims sparked a "renaissance" in research on voter turnout in recent decades (Green, McGrath, and Aronow, 2013).

Field experiments, however, provide a more internally valid method of identifying the effect of campaign efforts, at the individual level. Field experiments represent the majority of research into the effectiveness of different voter mobilisation techniques. In a field experiment, subjects are randomly assigned to either a treatment group that is exposed to campaigning in some form, or a control group, which is not exposed to any campaigning. The random assignment to these groups means everyone has an equal chance of being exposed to treatment, thereby ensuring that those who are exposed to the stimulus/treatment share broadly similar characteristics with those who are not exposed. This ensures that these other factors that may be increasing turnout for certain individuals are 'controlled for'. While 'treatment' in surveys could be skewed towards people who were likely voters anyway, in field experiments there is no such selection bias. Field experiments also have the advantage of allowing the researcher to

control, or at least know, when exactly subjects are exposed to treatment. This allows their effects to be more accurately measured. Altogether, field experiments' main advantage over observational approaches is their ability to convincingly identify causation through randomised treatment of subjects (Gerber and Green, 2012). Since the turn of the millennium, a wealth of experimental research in the area of voter turnout has developed. According to their meta-analysis, Green, McGrath, and Aronow (2013) note that this work falls broadly into two strands. Firstly, there are experiments that test the effectiveness of different campaign modes – or voter mobilisation techniques. Secondly, there are experiments that explore and test the effects of various social psychological theories on voting behaviour. Both strands offer considerable insight into what makes people vote and have advanced our understanding of voting behaviour considerably in a relatively short period of time.

However, while providing more robust causal claims regarding the effect of campaign contact and turnout, the field experimental approach is not without its own limitations. The main concern with using experiments to test the effect of campaign activities on turnout is that experiments can lack external validity (Mutz, 2011). The extent to which the results of a single location experiment can be generalised to other locations and contexts is often questioned (Druckman and Kam, 2011). Meanwhile, a survey of a representative sample of voters, or of all candidate agents can make claims about campaign effects across a larger population. Further, in the area of GOTV research, single location experiments are common due to the difficulties posed in carrying out large-scale, nationwide studies (Fieldhouse et al., 2013). In Britain, for instance, only one large-scale, nationwide GOTV experiment has been conducted (see: Fieldhouse et al., 2013). Interestingly, this study found that the effects of a nonpartisan GOTV campaign were largely uniform across different locations, providing evidence that external validity may not be as big a concern as has been feared. Nevertheless, the

generalisability of results beyond specific contexts remains a legitimate criticism levelled at field experiments.

The availability of reliable and accurate data can be a problem for field experiments. For instance, to test for heterogeneous effects among different subsamples of an experimental population means relying on the available data. The data provided by the local party or organisation may be out of date, or inaccurate (as voters may, for instance, lie to party canvassers asking for their voting intentions, or their intentions change over time). This can lead to flawed analysis by subsequent researchers relying on inaccurate measures of pre-treatment variables. Meanwhile, a professionally-designed and conducted survey can provide a wealth of data for the researcher, which can also be linked to previous waves if applicable.

Finally, the extent to which the field experiment provides an accurate, authentic replication of ‘real’ party campaigns is vital to subsequent claims made about their effects. For instance, if subjects of the experiment know they are being studied, we may expect to see a Hawthorne effect, whereby they alter their behaviour because they know they are being studied. This may lead to participants being more likely to vote than they would normally be because they know the campaign treatment originated from an organisation studying their behaviour (Gerber et al., 2008). This would not provide an accurate test of a real party campaign, therefore, making it essential that campaign experiments maintain authenticity.

2.3 The Power of the Personal

What do studies show about the effect of traditional campaign activities when it comes to voter turnout? There is a wealth of experimental studies that test the effect of non-partisan campaign treatment on voter turnout. Many studies grew out of the desire by scholars and organisations

to understand how parties might gain a competitive advantage over rivals during campaigns (Issenberg, 2012). However, this literature was relatively limited until recent decades when a surge of experimental research made the GOTV literature one of the most developed in political science (Bedolla and Michelson, 2012). Prior to this, however, reliable empirical evidence on the effect that specific campaign activities had on turnout was scarce.

Widely considered to be one of the first studies testing the effect of different voter mobilisation techniques was an experiment by Harold Gosnell in the 1920s (Gosnell, 1927). Gosnell found that individuals exposed to campaign mail were more likely to vote than those who were not. Gosnell distributed leaflets in Chicago and found that 75% of those who received a leaflet voted, compared to 65% of those who did not receive a leaflet. Studies later in the 20th Century appeared to confirm that exposure to campaign contact had an effect on turnout. In 1953 and 1954, Samuel Eldersveld carried out doorstep canvassing experiments in Michigan to test the impact that face-to-face contact had on voters' turnout. In one experiment, in which Eldersveld targeted voters who lacked information about a proposed revision of the local municipal charter, he found that "75 per cent of those who had been personally contacted in the experiment voted" (1956: 156). In his 1954 experiment involving local party activists, Eldersveld found similarly powerful effects associated with canvassing. He concluded that "canvassing efforts were closely related to voter activation" (1956: 155).

However, Eldersveld's experiments had flaws. For instance, those who were assigned to canvassing conditions but were not successfully contacted were then re-assigned to the control group. This 'failure-to-treat problem' potentially introduced imbalance between the control and treatment groups, as those who are not reachable at the door likely possess certain characteristics that distinguish them from those who are reachable (Green and Gerber, 2008).

The sample sizes involved in Eldersveld's studies were also very small – ranging between 30 and 40 in each experiment, meaning the results fell well short of statistical significance. It was sometime before field experiments were used once more to examine the effect of GOTV treatments. Miller, Bositis and Baer (1981) tested the impact of letters, phone calls, and personal visits by precinct committeemen on turnout in the 1980 Illinois primary election. They found that phone calls and letters had strong effects, but they had repeated the methodological mistakes involved in Eldersveld's experiments. Meanwhile, Adams and Smith (1980) found a statistically significant effect of partisan telephone canvassing. An experiment by Bochel and Denver (1974) represented the first to be conducted in Britain and sought to test the effect of canvassing specifically. They found that turnout among the canvassed treatment group was 10 percentage-points higher than the control group.

However, it was not until the turn of the millennium that field experiments began to be applied more widely to the study of voter mobilisation, and with a greater degree of methodological rigour. Gerber and Green sparked this surge of experimental research in the field with their now well-known New Haven studies in 1998. Their first experiment compared the effects of doorstep canvassing, direct mail, and commercial (as opposed to volunteer) telephone calls on voter turnout using non-partisan Get-Out-The-Vote messaging appeals (Gerber and Green, 2000). The sample sizes involved were significantly larger, including 1,600 individuals contacted by canvassing, 4,800 by telephone calls, and 11,000 households by direct mail. The results echoed those of Bochel and Denver (1974) and suggested that of the three methods tested, doorstep canvassing had the most powerful effects on mobilisation on turnout. Personal contact, Gerber and Green found, increased turnout by 8.7 percentage points compared to a control group that received nothing (Gerber and Green, 2000: 658). Direct mail had a small

effect of 0.5 percentage points, while the effects of telephone calls were statistically insignificant.

Since Gerber and Green's study, hundreds of field experiments have been conducted, all investigating the effectiveness of different modes through which campaigns try to mobilise voters. According to Green and Gerber's meta-analysis, in "forty-four of fifty-one experiments, canvassing was found to increase turnout" (2015: 31). Green and Gerber report the treatment effects among compliers, i.e. those subjects assigned to the treatment group who are regarded as 'reachable', known as the complier average causal effect (CACE). Across all 51 studies, the average treatment effect estimate was 4.3, i.e. turnout was 4.3 percentage points higher on average across these experiments among those assigned to canvassing treatment groups.[6] The meta-analysis also breaks this down by turnout rate in the control group. This allows us to assess the extent of the effect sizes according to the base rate of turnout. Does, for instance, exposure to campaign contact (canvassing) have a greater impact on voters in a low turnout election such as a local by-election, or in a high turnout context such as a general election? Evidence suggests that experiments conducted in mid-turnout elections tend to be most impactful. The average CACE is 4.6 percentage-points for studies in which the turnout rate among the control group was under 30%. For studies in which the turnout rate in the control group was between 30% and 50%, the CACE is 6.2. This then diminishes as the turnout rate among the control group increases (50-70% = 1.4 points, 70%+ = 0.6 points). In other words,

[6] The results across all studies into a given voter mobilisation technique are then combined and weighted inversely according to each study's standard errors. In other words, studies with higher reported standard errors are weighted less in the combined average treatment effect scores (Green and Gerber, 2015).

based on existing experiments canvassing is most effective at mobilising voters during mid-turnout elections, when the turnout rate for those not assigned to treatment is between 30% and 50%. In such elections with “few policy repercussions”, face-to-face canvassing is also effective (Green and Gerber, 2015: 32).

Comparing the average effect of canvassing – 4.3 percentage points – to other voter mobilisation techniques, it is clear that impersonal techniques tend to have smaller effects on turnout. Canvassing is shown to be far more effective than direct mail. Of 85 studies included in Green and Gerber’s meta-analysis[7], “non-partisan mailers”[8] have an average effect of just 0.5 percentage points per piece of mail (2015: 192). However, the power of the personal is not limited to face-to-face contact. Rather, studies have found that semi-personal forms of contact such as telephone calls are more effective when made with a more personal, conversational tone (Nickerson, 2006; 2007). One such experiment, conducted by Nickerson (2006), tested the effects of volunteer telephone calls urging individuals to vote. Nickerson found that calls made by volunteers, as opposed to professional phone banks (as tested by Gerber and Green (2000) and found to be ineffective), raised turnout by 3.8 percentage points. Other studies have also supported the idea that the more personal and interactive telephone calls are, the more effective they become (Nickerson, 2007; Ha and Karlan, 2009). According to Green and Gerber’s meta-analysis, the average effect of phone calls appears to be somewhere between those of canvassing and direct mail. Volunteer phone calls (28 studies) have an average effect on turnout of 2.8 percentage points – less than canvassing, but more than direct mail. This

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[7] Green and Gerber (2015) report the CACEs of 85 separate studies investigating the effect of direct mail.

[8] Mailers that use “conventional” messaging, as opposed to any exertion of social pressure/social norm messaging, which will be discussed later.

average effect then drops to 0.8 points for commercial phone bank calls (19 studies), suggesting that even semi-personal techniques can vary in their effectiveness based on whether or not they have a more 'personal touch'. Exposure to multiple telephone calls can boost turnout further, however, as calls are more effective among those who have been called by campaigners earlier in the campaign (Michelson et al., 2009).

By and large, observational studies have produced similar findings to those produced by field experiments. Studies in Britain that use spending to measure campaign intensity find effects on turnout (Fisher, 2015; Johnston et al., 1989; Johnston and Pattie, 1994; Pattie and Johnston, 1995; Pattie et al., 1995; Whiteley et al., 1994). Surveys of voters or candidates' agents similarly find that local campaign mobilise voters (Denver and Hands, 1997; Cutts, 2006b), and provide strong evidence that traditional doorstep campaigning is particularly effective (Fisher et al., 2011a; Fisher and Denver, 2009; Fisher et al., 2014; Pattie and Johnston, 2003).

The effect of other, more modern techniques has also been tested, but have been found to be less effective than canvassing. Observational studies in Britain find that e-campaigning has no statistically significant effect on turnout (Fisher et al., 2016d; Gibson and Cantijoch, 2011). A series of field experiments by Nickerson (2007) tested the effects of non-partisan emails on college students in the US, with results suggesting a weak negative effect. In other words, those contacted were less likely to turnout. Stollwerk's partisan experiment (2006) using emails from the US Democratic Party to Democratic voters during a mayoral election in New York also found a negative effect, though statistically insignificant. However, an experiment by Davenport (2012) found that emails sent from people the recipient knew personally had strong effects among those who opened the email. Again, this stresses the importance of the 'personal touch'. Experiments testing the effect of emails from government officials in the US have also

found positive results. A series of experiments by Malhotra et al. (2012) found that mass emails from elected officials in charge of administering elections in the US increased turnout by 0.5 percentage points. While this is a small effect, it also comes with a low cost associated with sending an email. While mass emails appear to be ineffective, when they are given a personal touch, such as being received from a familiar contact such as a friend, or are from a known official, they can be effective.

The ineffectiveness of mass emails suggests that other impersonal techniques such as test messages (SMS) would be ineffective also. Intriguingly however, text messages (SMS) have been found to increase turnout in some cases. An experiment conducted by Dale and Strauss (2009) found that among voters who had opted in to receiving a SMS text message reminder to vote, turnout was 4.1 percentage points higher than those who opted in but were not sent a text. Dale and Strauss posit that this was because text messages provide a 'noticeable reminder' to vote among those who were already sufficiently engaged enough to have signed up to receive a voting reminder. This 'noticeable reminder' would not, they argue, be enough to mobilise those individuals who are not habitual voters anyway. This is somewhat brought into question by Malhotra et al.'s experiment (2011) in which text messages to recipients who did not specifically opt-in was found to increase turnout. They found that texts from the local registrar of voters (an official in charge of administering elections) increased turnout by less than a percentage point. This appears to support the results of email experiments in which emails from a government official were found to be effective.

Experiments testing the effects of Facebook and other social media are few in number at present, but growing. While emails appear to have minimal effects, based on existing evidence e-campaign techniques such as Facebook adverts also appear have little impact on turnout. A

large experiment involving millions of Facebook users conducted in 2010 found that Facebook adverts notifying users that “Today is Election Day” had no effect on voter turnout (Bond et al., 2012). Meanwhile, a second treatment that showed users the profile pictures of friends who had voted produced a 0.4 percentage point increase in turnout. While small, this again shows the impact that social norms can have on political participation. Two experiments reported by Collins et al. (2014) likewise found that showing a live countdown to Election Day on Facebook had no effect. Observational studies have also found little impact of e-campaign activities (Fisher, Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2011b; Fisher, Johnson, Pattie, Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2016a; Hansen and Kosiara-Pederson, 2014). A series of experiments conducted by Haenschen (2016) in the US, however, found that status updates that use various social pressure messaging to encourage turnout had enormous mobilising effects ranging from 15.8 to 24.3 percentage points. Though, the effects should be treated with caution given the limited sizes of 239, 293, and 671 participants.

Overall, the existing evidence base on the turnout effects of a wide variety of campaign activities points to the clear finding that personal canvassing has strong effects, while leaflets and other ‘soft-touch’ activities such as social media do not (Gerber and Green, 2017). The precision-weighted effect on turnout, based on Green et al.’s (2013) meta-analysis review, of face-to-face canvassing is around 2.5 percentage points, while other, less personal activities such as commercial phone calls and leaflets have a smaller effect. The impact of contact tends to be greater when a form of social pressure messaging is used. Short of such pressure messages, however, personal contact is the most reliably effective way for campaigners to mobilise turnout.

2.4 Limitations

However, there are two key gaps in the existing body of research on the effect of campaign activities on voter turnout that fundamentally restrict their application to the central research question of this thesis. Firstly, there is a sharp imbalance in the literature between US and European based studies (Bhatti et al., 2016; 2017; Foos and de Rooij, 2017; John, 2017). The literature in the United States is particularly well developed. But there are far fewer GOTV experiments conducted in Europe. The generalisability of these findings to other electoral contexts is, therefore, questionable as a result.

Emerging evidence in Europe is seeking to rectify the imbalance (e.g. Ramiro et al., 2012; Pons and Liegey, 2013; Pons, 2014; Bhatti et al., 2016; Cantoni and Pons, 2016; Foos and John, 2016; Nyman, 2017) – and provides evidence that some findings do not generalize well to non-US contexts. Indeed, some studies have found results that differ to those in the US. Bhatti et al.'s (2016) meta-study of 9 canvassing experiments across 6 European countries finds that canvassing has a smaller effect – a precision-weighted effect of 0.8 percentage points, compared to 2.5 percentage points in the United States.

Experiments involving the effect of direct mail and letters show similar results to those in the US, however. A two-wave GOTV experiment conducted in Britain testing the effects of direct mail and telephone calls on turnout, for instance, detected modest effects (Fieldhouse et al., 2013). Carrying out non-partisan campaign treatment across the 2009 European Parliamentary and 2010 General Elections, Fieldhouse et al. found that mail recipients voted at a rate of 1.6 percentage point higher than the control group. The effect of telephone calls, meanwhile, was estimated at around 1.7 percentage points. Elsewhere, Bhatti et al.'s (2015) experiment in Denmark found that direct mail increased turnout by around 1 percentage point. These findings

confirm those of US-based experiments, showing that leaflets and telephone calls do increase turnout, but that their effects are relatively small. However, European GOTV experiments are not as numerous as in the US, meaning there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the effects of various methods of contact. For example, in their meta-study, Bhatti et al. (2016) find a much wider confidence interval surrounding the effect of canvassing in Europe than in the US. Some studies have replicated key US findings in Europe, but many do not.

Some scholars have speculated that because turnout is generally higher in European elections, there could be a 'ceiling effect' on mobilisation efforts (Bhatti et al., 2016). Cultural factors, such as how accustomed people are to being contacted and how accustomed they are to different activities from country-to-country could also condition mobilisation effects. For instance, canvassing is less frequent in countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway than in the US or Canada (Karp, Banducci, and Bowler, 2007). There is good reason, therefore, to further investigate the effect of GOTV activities in Europe. While elections in Britain and the US share institutional characteristics such as a first past the post voting system, it does not necessarily mean that campaign effects will be the same under both systems. Empirically, non-US based studies can strengthen claims made about the effectiveness of various GOTV efforts in different contexts (John and Brannan, 2008). The limited number of European-based GOTV studies has led some scholars recently to call for further campaign experiments to continue to redress the geographical imbalance (Nielsen, 2014; Bhatti et al., 2016).

The European GOTV literature is growing, but there are still comparatively few partisan experiments that test the effect of campaign interventions on behalf of political parties. This point forms a second limitation of the existing experimental literature on the effects of voter mobilisation campaigns. Most of the experimental research, upon which our understanding of

the effectiveness of different campaign techniques rests, is non-partisan in nature. This is an important limitation because, after all, while "most field experiments are conducted using non-partisan GOTV messages" (Alvarez et al., 2010), the overwhelming majority of campaigning is partisan, carried out by political parties. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is reason to question the applicability of non-partisan studies to partisan campaigns. Firstly, there is mixed evidence surrounding the comparison of partisan and non-partisan campaign effects (e.g. McNulty, 2005; Panagopoulos, 2009). Additionally, partisan and non-partisan campaigns usually have different goals (to increase the party's turnout and to increase overall turnout, respectively), and can tap into different mechanisms. For instance, while non-partisan campaigns might stress 'civic duty' or exert social pressure (Gerber and Green, 2017), partisan campaigns present party cues to voters (Foos and de Rooij, 2017) in the form of labels, names, or messages, which can tap into voters' pre-formed opinions about that political party and their policies (Green et al., 2002).

Indeed, in the US, experiments suggest partisan campaign contact produces weaker effects on turnout than its non-partisan equivalents (Nickerson, 2004; Cardy, 2005; McNulty, 2005; Michelson, 2005; Nickerson, Friedrich, and King, 2006). McNulty (2005) reports results from four experiments, which showed that only nonpartisan phone calls increase turnout. Testing professional phone banks, Green (2004, 2005) finds no evidence that partisan phone calls increase turnout. Green et al. (2013) conclude from their meta-review of leaflets and direct mail that partisan messages actually have a (statistically insignificant) negative effect of -0.2 percentage points on voter turnout. However, other studies have suggested that partisan mobilisation efforts can be effective. In one experiment that directly compared the effects of both forms of messaging, Panagopoulos (2009) found no statistically significant difference, with partisan and non-partisan telephone canvassing presenting similarly sized positive effects

on turnout. Yet, while US studies generally suggest that partisan campaign interventions are less effective than interventions on behalf of neutral or 'civic' organisations, there have been only a few partisan studies in a European context, and these show mixed results.

An experiment in Sweden found that party canvassing increases turnout by 3.6 percentage points (Nyman, 2017). An experiment by Cantoni and Pons (2015) in Italy randomly assigned 26,000 voters to receive visits from candidates and party volunteers. They found that canvass visits by volunteers increased turnout by 1.8 percentage points. Meanwhile, experiments that randomise party contact at the aggregate level often report null effects (Ramiro et al., 2012; Pons and Liegey, 2013; Pons, 2014). Ramiro et al. (2012) show that partisan leaflets delivered in Spain had no effect on voter turnout. Meanwhile, a countrywide experiment during the 2012 French presidential elections found that canvassing had no effect on voter turnout. In this study, Pons (2016) randomly assigned entire precincts to receive door-to-door canvassing from Social Democrat Party activists. While there was no effect on turnout, the contact increased the party's vote share, suggesting there were effects in terms of persuading rival supporters to vote for the party.

These findings have been echoed in a UK context as well. In Britain, beyond a handful of studies (Foos and John, 2016; Foos and de Rooij, 2017), existing GOTV experiments have focussed on non-partisan interventions (e.g. Fieldhouse et al., 2013; John and Brannan, 2008; Cutts et al., 2009). Foos and John (2016) conducted an experiment with the Conservative Party in Somerset. They found that leaflets and canvass visits by Conservative activists had not effect on turnout overall, only stimulating turnout among Conservative party supporters. Foos and John conclude that exposure to partisan campaigning, even personal campaigning that is found to be so effective in a non-partisan context, *demobilises* supporters of rival parties. The

aggregate effect of this being that turnout overall does not increase. In their Birmingham-based experiment with the Labour Party, Foos and de Rooij (2017) find that partisan phone calls boost turnout by 2-3 percentage points, but that calls with a stronger partisan tone had stronger effects on supporters.

There is emerging evidence, therefore, of ‘differential mobilisation’ – whereby campaigns mobilise supporters but demobilise supporters of rival parties (Foos and John, 2016). Foos and John argue that this is not surprising given the different aims of partisan and non-partisan, ‘civic’ campaigns, wherein the former aims to increase turnout of their own supporters while the latter aim to increase turnout among all potential voters. According to Foos and John, partisan campaign contact results in *differential* turnout (among supporters of different parties), which simultaneously mobilises party supporters and decreases supporters of rival parties, showing little effect on overall turnout. In other words, while non-partisan canvassing increases turnout among those exposed to it, adding a partisan message to the canvassing tends to only mobilise voters who support your party and demobilise supporters of other parties. This is echoed in survey-based studies (Karp and Banducci, 2007; Karp, Banducci, and Bowler, 2007).

2.5 Empirical Contribution

The aim of this review of existing empirical evidence is to assess what we know about the effect of traditional party campaign activities when it comes to mobilising people to vote. There is a substantial body of GOTV experiments that have established a clear consensus that personal canvass visits have strong effects on voter turnout, while impersonal activities such as leaflets have weaker effects. However, the existing experimental research base of party campaign contact in Britain is narrow. There is a spatial imbalance in terms of where most

existing GOTV experiments have been conducted. Most field experiments are conducted in the United States, and relatively few in Europe. The result is that the extent to which US findings are generalisable to a European context is as yet unsettled. This has led to recent calls for further GOTV experiments to be conducted in Europe (Bhatti et al., 2016). While some important studies have been conducted in Europe, an imbalance remains, meaning a continued question hangs over the generalisability of the findings produced in the US. Moreover, while the body of European GOTV experiments is indeed growing, there are few partisan experiments. Existing studies in the US have advanced our understanding of the mobilisation effects of various campaign methods, but often test the effect of nonpartisan campaign treatment, as opposed to partisan treatment. Research conducted thus far suggests that the turnout effect of partisan campaign activities might be smaller than that of nonpartisan campaigning. Yet this result is based on a limited number of studies, which require supplementing if the finding is to be deemed robust.

The result of these limitations is that comparatively little is known about the effect of party leaflets and canvass visits when it comes to mobilising voter turnout in a British context. This is an important gap in our knowledge of voter mobilisation because, crucially, the overwhelming majority of campaigning in most countries, including Britain, is done by political parties aiming to mobilise voters, and not by 'civic' organisations. The implication of this gap is that the extent to which scholars of voter turnout should be concerned by the potential declines in levels of party canvassing is uncertain. With long term levels of party membership and activism falling, and the change in the use of 'traditional' campaign modes, the levels of traditional, face-to-face contact between parties and voters is changing. But how concerned should we be by this trend? Should parties prioritise their scarce labour resources towards maintaining levels of face-to-face contact with voters, or can they focus on other

methods, safe in the knowledge that canvassing does little to mobilise voters? This thesis conducts and analyses a UK-based, partisan campaign experiment. In so doing, I take the methodological rigour of GOTV experimental research to the field of British local campaigning.

The first contribution of this thesis, therefore, is to extend the evidence on *partisan* campaign effects. The second contribution is to expand the base of existing studies on campaign effects outside the US. Identifying the effect of traditional, partisan campaigning in Britain can shed light on how concerned we should be by the decline of levels of party membership and activism in local campaigns. Expanding the locational diversity of GOTV experiments is also central to building our knowledge of the extent to which the effects of voter mobilisation can be generalised in different contexts. Scholars have recently called for further GOTV experiments outside the US (Bhatti et al., 2016; Bhatti et al., 2017). The implementation and analysis of a GOTV experiment in a European context therefore represents a significant contribution of this dissertation. The United Kingdom also represents a good location in which to replicate existing US-based GOTV research, as it shares a first past the post system with the US, and similar ground campaign styles that utilise leaflets, mail, canvassing, and telephone calls (John and Brannan, 2008). Substantively, the dissertation also contributes to our existing research on British party politics. By examining the extent of the decline in levels of face-to-face voter contact and examining the effect that exposure to partisan canvassing has on voter turnout, I evaluate how concerned scholars of voter turnout should be at declining levels of partisan canvassing in Britain.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the main findings from the significant GOTV literature, and what it tells us about the effects we might expect traditional party campaign activities to have on voter turnout in Britain. Get Out The Vote experiments have found that different campaign activities – leaflets, letters, telephone calls, doorstep canvassing – have different effects on voter turnout. The consensus reigns that personal, face-to-face canvass visits are the 'gold standard' when it comes to increasing voter turnout. The methodological rigour of experimental design, and its strength in identifying causality, means, "the facts generated by the field experimental literature on voter turnout rank among the most stubborn in all of social science" (Green, Aronow, and McGrath, 2012: 12).

While the GOTV literature is extensive, I argue that the evidence base on the effects of traditional activities carried out by local campaigns in Britain today is narrow, especially given the number of campaign experiments that have been conducted to date. While the body of GOTV research is developing in a European context, only several GOTV studies have been published in Britain (see, for instance, Foos and de Rooij, 2017 and Foos and John, 2016). Consequently, evidence on the effect of different forms of campaign contact on voter turnout in Britain is thinner. As such, I argue that new experimental evidence is needed to help examine the role that traditional activities have in British local campaigning today.

The following chapter _____. Subsequent chapters then outline the main empirical components of this thesis. Chapter 4 presents the main field experiment. The aim of the experiment is to test the effect that party leaflets have on turnout, and the additional effect of canvass visits carried out by party activists. The experiment builds on existing campaign research by including postal voters in the experimental population to examine whether effects differ

according between high and low propensity voters. In the following chapter, I outline the research design, including details of the random assignment and treatments, and analyse the results using official voter turnout records. I then discuss the main findings of the experiment, and their implications for the research question. Chapter 5 then uses turnout records of the same sample of voters to examine the downstream effects of the experiment to test whether the mobilisation effects detected in Chapter 4 linger at the subsequent general election.

Chapter 3: Campaigns and Turnout: Theoretical Expectations

3.1 Introduction

Having identified the empirical 'gaps' in the existing research into the effect of traditional campaign activities, this chapter outlines the main theoretical expectations underpinning this thesis and the subsequent empirical chapters. Given the vast amount of labour, dedication, and energy (not to mention financial resources) that are dedicated to local campaigning, it would seem that most parties and practitioners expect that their efforts do affect voter turnout. *Why* campaign activities affect turnout exactly has also been the subject of much scholarly research. This chapter presents a discussion of the key theoretical approaches to be found in the existing literature relating to campaigns and voter turnout, and how they inform this thesis' expectations.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the main schools of thoughts regarding voter behaviour to create context for the theoretical discussion that follow. I first outline the classic models of voter behaviour, including the sociological and Michigan schools of thought, as well as the Downsian rational choice model. These theories, while not directly related to explaining the effect of specific campaign activities, provide a useful setting for the theoretical approaches discussed later in the chapter.

Secondly, I outline why campaigns might affect turnout, and why specific activities might affect turnout. While this thesis is not designed to test theories of why certain activities might increase turnout (or otherwise), a discussion of these existing theories provides a useful basis from which to inform expectations and assess the results of existing empirical studies, and of my own empirical results presented later. I draw upon these theories to paint a picture of why we might expect certain activities to stimulate voter turnout.

The discussion of these theoretical mechanisms represents an important one because while the experimental literature on the effects of various campaign treatment is extensive, there is, in contrast, a general lack of theoretical discussion as to *why* various methods do or do not affect turnout (Bedolla and Michelson, 2012). Voting theories have developed over time that identify various key sources that drive the decision to vote, including class, partisanship, income, and education. However, these factors that have long been associated with predicting voters' behaviour are not fundamentally altered by exposure to one particular campaign activity or another. Given this, scholars have noted that, interestingly, campaign activities mobilising voters would seem to contradict a great deal of traditional scholarly literature on why people vote (Bedolla and Michelson, 2012). Exploring the theoretical mechanisms that could underpin the effects (or otherwise) of party campaign activities is, therefore, a worthwhile enterprise to establish the expectations for latter empirical chapters.

These include two theories that have been posed and debated by GOTV scholars that seek to explain why certain campaign activities mobilise voter turnout. One theory, posited by leading scholars Don Green and Alan Gerber, states that campaign contact must be personal in order to affect voter turnout. As a result, canvass visits trump all other (impersonal) forms of contact because of their 'personal touch'. Green and Gerber argue that personal interactions increase

the 'social connectedness' between the voter and the political process. This makes voters 'feel wanted' at the polls, and thereby boosts participation. The second theory, posited by scholars more recently, suggests that the extent to which campaign activities increase turnout is a function of how 'noticeable' they are to voters. They argue that noticeability, and not necessarily a social connection established through personal interactions, has the cut-through required to mobilise a voter.

Finally, I discuss theoretical arguments surrounding when campaigns are most effective. This includes discussion of electoral context and underlying propensity of voters to participate, drawing upon Arceneaux and Nickerson's 'threshold of indifference' framework (2009). They argue that the impact of campaign contact is not just a function of the mode of contact, but also of the voter's underlying propensity to participate and the saliency of the election. Their model proposes that only voters whose propensity to turn out is near their indifference threshold are mobilised to vote by campaign contact. This indifference threshold is determined by the voter's general level of interest in the election. I discuss how this theory relates to partisan campaigning in Britain, and how it also informs the expectations of this thesis. This section also discusses which types of voters could be most affected by campaigns, and how this informs the empirical work in Chapter 6.

I conclude this chapter by drawing upon these discussions to develop a series of core theoretical expectations that underpin the empirical work carried out later in this thesis. Based on the theoretical discussion outlined in this chapter, I posit that 1) we have good reason to expect that campaigning increases political participation, 2) we have reason to expect that doorstep canvassing, in particular, is particularly effective compared to leaflets, 3) that the effect of

campaigning is likely to vary according to the underlying propensity to vote of the individuals, the specific electoral context, and voters' priori attitudes towards politics and campaigning.

3.2 Classical Approaches to Explaining Voter Behaviour

Why people vote has long been the subject of academic research. This section will outline the main schools of thought surrounding this question. As this thesis is concerned with the effect of traditional campaign activities – canvassing and leaflets in particular – it is useful to place theoretical discussions surrounding these particular activities in the broader literature on voter behaviour and turnout. Why these activities might impact on voter turnout cannot be fully examined before providing a discussion of the broader approach to the turnout decision.

There are two main approaches to explaining voter turnout and behaviour: sociological theories and rational choice theories. The former concerns the role that group membership and social factors such as class play on the voting decision. The latter, meanwhile, approaches the turnout decision from a cost versus benefit framework, whereby rational individuals will only vote if they deem the benefits outweigh the costs associated with voting.

The sociological model of voting originates from prominent works in the mid-20th Century (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954; and Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). The model contents that group memberships, such as those based on class, religion, or ethnicity form an individual's voting decision. Such divisions could explain voting decisions over time, namely, that voters would vote in the wider interests of the group to which they belong (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). The logic went that opinion leaders in groups would represent the more politically active members, and their influence would flow to other

group members, often through presenting group norms. According to the sociological model, campaigns serve to mobilise groups to turnout through such leaders.

The core findings of Lazarsfeld et al.'s study – that group memberships explained voter behaviour – found support in the British context. In Britain, where the link between social class and voting behaviour was particularly strong (Pulzer, 1972), sociological theories long carried credence. Butler and Stokes found that class was a powerful explanatory factor in Britain (1969), dismissing the role of campaigns as irrelevant. Lazarsfeld et al.'s study was not without methodological and theoretical criticism (e.g. Rossi, 1964), however. Indeed, in terms of voting behaviour (as opposed to turnout), the model came under criticism for not accounting for the fluctuations in voting between elections (Campbell et al., 1960). In Britain, the link between class and voting has weakened over the years (Crewe et al., 1977; 1986). Such criticisms gave rise to the Michigan school of thought in the second half of the 20th Century. Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes' seminal study, *The American Voter* (1960) sought to build on Lazarsfeld et al.'s work with a more psychological approach to explaining voter behaviour that incorporated psychological attachment to political parties. In Britain, this approach was supported (Butler and Stokes, 1974), as many voters were found to be long-term partisan supporters, which helped form their self-image as partisans. Butler and Stokes (1974: 49) argued that family had a lasting impact on these identities, which were also connected to their class status.

What do such schools of thought mean for the role of electoral campaigns? The long-term nature of factors such as partisanship and sociodemographic factors arguably render campaigns insignificant. The role of campaigning under the Michigan model was similar to that under the sociological models – limited to mobilising voters using affiliations to the wider group/party

by providing partisans with information. However, later studies found a decline in the importance of partisanship in explaining voter behaviour in the US (Nie et al., 1976) and in Britain (Crewe et al., 1977). Given the marked decline in long-term factors such as ideological attachment and party loyalties, campaigns have arguably become more necessary over time in order to turn voters out (Trumm and Sudulich, 2016; Fisher, 2018).

The rational choice theory of voting differs substantially from these sociological approaches. In his famous work, Downs (1957) introduced economic theories to explaining voter behaviour. He argued that voters were rational actors whose decision to vote was based on the following formula:

$$pB>C$$

Where p is the probability of the individual's vote being decisive to the outcome, B is the benefits enjoyed by voting, and C is the costs associated with voting. p is a function of the likelihood of a single vote ultimately proving decisive – either due to the closeness of the election or the size of the electorate, both of which can affect the probability that one vote might make the difference. The benefits derived from voting are influenced by individual's preferred party winning, and the utility that follows. Costs, meanwhile, can be driven by the effort involved with going to the polling station, or the time it takes to decide how to vote. Ultimately, individuals vote when the benefits of voting outweigh the costs.

The rational choice model is not without critics (e.g. Brennan and Buchanan, 1984). A crucial criticism lies in explaining why people bother to vote at all, given that the probability of one vote being crucial (the p term) is very small. Aldrich (1993) argues that because the costs and benefits associated with voting are so small, they cannot be considered under the rational

choice framework at all. Though, the premise that the costs and benefits are very small is itself contentious (e.g. Green and Shapiro, 1994).

Riker and Ordeshook (1968)'s calculus of voting built on Downs' work by introducing a *D* term into the model, thus:

$$Voting\ (V) = pB + D - C.$$

The authors argue that the voting decision is still a function of the probability that vote is decisive (*p*), the material benefits gained by the favoured party winning (*B*), and the costs associated with actually casting a ballot (*C*). But, they argue that the expressive benefits of casting a ballot and fulfilling one's civic duty (*D*) also explains the decision to turnout. Elements of the rational choice model again find support in Britain. For example, studies find a link between closeness (or marginality of seats) and turnout (Denver and Hands, 1974; Heath and Taylor, 1999). In the case of a marginal constituency, or a close election, the *p* term increases, raising turnout.

Campaigns play a crucial role under the rational choice model of voting. Campaigns serve to provide information about the closeness of the election (affecting the *p* term) and the benefits of that particular party gaining office (affecting the *B* term). By bringing electoral information to voters' doorsteps, campaign activities can also reduce the costs associated with voting (reducing the *C* term). Indeed, experimental evidence shows that campaigns designed to lower information costs have positive effects on turnout (Green and York, 2018).

3.3 Why do Campaigns, and Specific Types of Campaign Contact, Influence Voter Behaviour?

This section outlines the theoretical approaches taken in the literature to explaining why campaigns might affect turnout, and why specific activities might affect turnout. Firstly, campaigns have often been regarded as providers of information. The role of campaigns as information-providers, rooted in the rational choice model. Firstly, we have good reason to expect party campaign appeals to reduce costs for voters. We know that, on the whole, voters' capacity for processing political information, particularly in comparison to the other day-to-day information, is relatively limited (Mondak, 1993). As a result, most individuals tend to have relatively low levels of political information (Page and Shapiro, 1992). To process political information, voters make use of heuristics and cues as 'shortcuts' to aid decision-making (Sniderman et al., 2001). While non-partisan campaigns might appeal to 'civic duty' or exert social pressure (Gerber and Green, 2017), partisan campaigns present party cues to voters (Foos and de Rooij, 2017). Party labels, names, or messages, mean voters can more easily associate the candidate in question with their pre-formed opinions about that political party and their policies (Green et al., 2002). This, in turn, helps to reduce the costs associated with making the decision over whether to support the candidate, support an alternative candidate, or not to vote at all.

This approach does not in itself explain why certain campaign activities would increase voter turnout more than others. We can assume that if campaigning increases turnout by reducing information-gathering costs, then the most effective campaign methods would be those that carry the most useful information about the election. Arguably, a leaflet might contain just as much, if not more, information on the party, the candidate, and the election, as a canvass visit. In fact, given that most canvassing interactions tend to be brief, leaflets would arguably provide

more information to the voter, reduce costs more, and therefore have a greater effect on voter turnout. Why then would face-to-face campaigning do this more than other methods? It could be that canvass interactions are more noticeable and more likely to cut-through to voters' consciousness than a piece of paper that can be (and usually is) merely glanced at before being easily discarded. As such, the '- C' term is likely to be smaller as a result of a canvassing interaction providing political and practical voting information (e.g. "the election date is on ____, these are the party's policies, etc.").

As well as reducing costs, party contact can also affect the benefits associated with voting (Foos and de Rooij, 2017). Evidence shows that for individuals who are inclined to support the party, partisan contact can activate the expressive benefits that can be associated with turning out in support of that candidate (Green et al., 2002). Partisan experiments in Britain also find evidence that the effect of party contact is related to the recipients' pre-existing party identity (Foos and John, 2016; Foos and de Rooij, 2017).

Campaign contact can also serve to affect the *D* term of the calculus of voting, by allowing an individual to gain intrinsic and extrinsic rewards from voting, both of which might increase the *D* term. These rewards are based on the fact that voting is a social norm with inherent social pressure to conform to it (people *should* vote). Conforming to this socially desirable behaviour increases rewards (*D*). Voting is widely considered to be a social norm (Blais, 2000), and underpins the effect that exposure to campaign contact can have on turnout. Psychology explains how the desire to conform to social norms has an extremely powerful effect on human behaviour. Social psychologists describe two types of social norms. Injunctive social norms are what people perceive society deems you *should* do. For instance, most individuals know that society thinks they *should* vote. Descriptive social norms, meanwhile, are what people

perceive most others in society *actually* do. For instance, an individual might perceive that most people vote at election time. Both types of social norms are important, and psychologists explain that 'priming' these norms results in an increase in behaviour that is consistent with these norms (Reno, Cialdini, Kallgren, 1993). This can be utilised to increase socially desirable behaviour. Studies have found that by stressing descriptive norms surrounding recycling, for instance, (i.e. "most people recycle") increases rates of recycling (Cialdini, 2003). The effect also works in a negative sense, however. Studies of both descriptive and injunctive social norms have in recent years been applied to voting behaviour. An experiment by Gerber and Rogers (2009) found that emphasising that turnout is low induces a lower rate of turnout among those treated compared to those exposed to a 'turnout is high' message. Gerber and Rogers argue that the desire to conform to the descriptive norm explains the differences in turnout between the two groups in their study. Those who were led to believe that turnout is generally quite low were primed to conform to that descriptive norm. Those who were instead told that turnout is high were more likely to vote themselves. This also chimes with classic voting studies of the Columbia School that explained that voting behaviour was a result of a desire to conform to a group identity or affiliations based on religion, ethnicity, and class (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954). Individuals have an inherent desire to conform to what others do.

Injunctive norms are also powerful determinants of human behaviour. As injunctive norms focus on what an individual believes they *should* do, survey-based studies have found that individuals who have a strong sense of civic duty are more likely to vote (Blais, 2000). Experimental studies, meanwhile, have found evidence that explicitly priming these social norms can have strong effects on voting. An experiment by Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008) tested the effect of the desire to conform to social pressure has on mobilising voters, compared

to the effects of a sense of civic duty. Their randomised field experiment involved distributing direct mail letters to voters containing their past voting record, and notified them that whether or not they voted at the upcoming election would be made public to their neighbours. The experiment had powerful effects. The control group had a turnout of 29.7%, while those who were shown their own voting record turned out at 34.5%, and those whose voting record would be made public to their neighbours turned out at a rate of 37.8%. This dramatic 8.1 percentage point treatment effect of this form of social pressure messaging is far greater than effects normally expected from mail experiments, and rivals that of face-to-face canvassing. The findings, they argue, show that not only priming the injunctive social norm that you *should* vote, but also introducing a 'threat' of social surveillance drastically increases the likelihood of conformity to the socially-desired behaviour. The experiment has since been replicated in a high-saliency election in the US (Rogers et al., 2017) with similar results. Other experiments that threaten to make it public that certain people did not vote (Panagopoulos, 2010a) find strong effects, confirming these findings.

Michelson, Bedolla and McConnell (2009) found that follow-up telephone contact with individuals who predicted they are likely to vote increased their propensity to turn out. They argue that the power of social norms drives this effect, as individuals were prompted with references to the social norm of voting "which makes a difference among those voters for whom conforming to that norm matters" (Michelson, Bedolla and McConnell, 2009: 21). The social norms associated with voting can be strong even when not prompted outright. Davenport's (2010) experiment tested the effect of just handing individuals a document that shows their previous turnout record. This document was not accompanied by any get-out-the-vote appeals and boosted turnout by around 15 percentage points. She argues that even when voters are not 'shamed' into voting directly, nor threatened with making their turnout record

public to their neighbours, there is still an effect from knowing that their turnout record is being recorded. Further, adding some form of 'observability' into the treatment that still falls short of threatening to make the individual's turnout record public greatly increases that individual's desire to conform to the socially desirable behaviour of voting. Even varying whether a piece of GOTV mail has a message in the top corner stating that the recipient 'may be contacted after the election to discuss their voting experience' has a powerful effect on turnout (Rogers et al., 2016). Other, subtler exertions of social pressure, such as showing a pair of eyes on treatment material to invoke feelings of being watched, have also shown effects on turnout (Panagopoulos, 2014a; 2014b). Contact that shows acknowledgement of and gratitude towards the act of conforming to the social 'norm' of voting also elicits a response from voters (Panagopoulos, 2010a; 2011).

Personal interaction increases the potential of rewards by focusing attention on the turnout decision. The canvasser's very presence on the doorstep implicitly highlights this social norm of voting in the voter's mind. The more prominent this social norm is in the voter's mind, the more psychological benefits they will gain by conforming to it. Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008) argue that the expressive benefits of voting are formed of both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards are driven by the social norms surrounding voting and belief that voting improves individual's social standing among peers. Intrinsic rewards are associated with the personal satisfaction or enjoyment gained from casting a ballot. Psychology research supports this model, as behaviour is a function of individual attitudes towards the behaviour itself, and the inherent pressure driven by social norms associated with the behaviour. In other words, people know they *should* vote, and that it is considered a 'bad thing' if one does not vote. People therefore gain intrinsic and extrinsic rewards from voting. Personal interaction can increase D by telling the canvasser that they plan to vote (which increases the extrinsic

rewards, i.e. voter gains a psychological benefit by telling a peer that they plan to vote, and then actually going on to cast that vote in a public space – the polling station). Intrinsic rewards can also be gained from voting following a canvassing interaction as the individual can gain personal satisfaction from following through on expressing an intention to vote to a canvasser.

Regardless of the mechanism – be it providing information or triggering social norms – it is clear that we should expect campaign contact to increase turnout. But why would we expect certain forms of contact to increase turnout?

While not the first GOTV experiment, Gerber and Green's study (2000) marked a surge in the application of field experimental research to the area of voter turnout. The previous chapter reviewed the results of this extensive body of empirical research in detail. For the purposes of this chapter, attempts by GOTV scholars to explain why particular campaign activities might be more effective than others are relevant to outlining this thesis' theoretical approach to explaining why traditional campaign contact might affect voters. There are 2 specific approaches taken to explaining the impact of particular campaign methods.

The first – Gerber and Green's 2000 study – proposed a 'social connectedness' approach to campaign activities. In their study, Gerber and Green find that canvass visits have powerful effects on turnout. In one of the first attempts to explain variation in the extent to which different methods mobilise turnout, they emphasise the powerful role that personal contact has on voters (Gerber and Green, 2000). The explanation lies in a mix of psychological and sociological influences and became known as social connectedness (or 'social occasion') theory (Gerber and Green 2000; Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003; Green and Gerber 2004).

They start with the premise that declining turnout has corresponded with declines in levels of personal communication between politicians and voters (Gerber and Green, 2000; Addonizio, Green, and Glaser, 2007). Parties have replaced personal forms of contact with more time and labour-efficient, impersonal forms such as direct mail, leaflets, and emails. While referring to the United States in their argument, this is a trend that I have also identified in Britain in Chapter 1. These two trends are related, Green and Gerber argue. Mobilising a voter is akin to "inviting them to a social occasion" (Green and Gerber, 2004: 92), and that personal contact works because a campaigner's "willingness to devote time and energy" to talk personally to an individual signals the importance of participating in the electoral process and voting (2015: 38). Personal interaction makes voters feel 'wanted' and 'valued' at the voting booth, and the loss of personal contact between parties and voters has led to an erosion in this sense of belonging with the voting process.

As the previous chapter outlined, the bulk of non-partisan GOTV studies lend strong support to the social connectedness explanation. Face-to-face campaign contact consistently boosts turnout to a greater degree than impersonal methods (Gerber and Green, 2000; Green and Gerber, 2004). In a similar vein, experiments have shown that telephone calls can be effective at boosting turnout when carried out by volunteers with a more personal tone (Nickerson, 2006). These findings are consistent with regards to other behavioural encouragements, such as donating blood (Jason et al., 1984) or recycling (Reams and Ray, 1993). Voters, the evidence suggests, respond positively to personal interactions with campaigners, while impersonal leaflets have negligible effects on turnout.

More recently, some political scientists have offered an argument that modifies the social connectedness framework. Following an experiment in which text messaging (SMS) was found

to be highly effective at increasing turnout, Dale and Strauss (2009) posited the Noticeable Reminder Theory. The theory starts on the basis that voters do not need to be persuaded to vote – rather, they merely need to be *reminded* to vote. The extent to which different campaign methods effectively mobilise participation is, therefore, a function of how noticeable they are as reminders, rather than a function of the extent to which they increase voters' sense of connectedness with the voting process.

Noticeable Reminder Theory contends with the social connectedness argument as follows. Noticeable Reminder Theory argues that most registered voters already want to vote – as they have registered to do so. The very act of registering to vote "indicates a commitment to the idea of voting" (Dale and Strauss, 2009: 789). The reason some do not vote is due to being too busy, or simply forgetting. Social Connectedness theory, meanwhile, argues that non-voting is explained by a lack of personal connection with the voting process. Given that registering to vote is often considered one of the most significant barriers to participation (Ibid), this suggests that the decision about registering to vote is the bigger test of social connectedness to the voting process, rather than the decision over whether or not to cast a vote once the election arrives. The consequence of this approach is that registered voters only require a noticeable reminder to vote, rather than the more significant task of building a sense of personal connection with the voting process. The former only needs to be *noticeable*, while the latter requires a more powerful personal interaction.

Indeed, Dale and Strauss argue that the social connectedness argument (Gerber and Green, 2000) explains the power of personal contact, but does not apply to all voters all the time. Rather, they argue that it is more applicable for voters who are further away from their indifference (between voting and not voting) threshold – either because they are not habitual

voters, or because the election is of low-saliency. Personal contact is a more powerful mobilising tool for such voters than impersonal contact because it brings them closer to the electoral process. Meanwhile, habitual voters have already weighed the costs and benefits of voting when registering to vote, and only need a noticeable 'nudge'/reminder to vote rather than persuading to vote. Noticeable Reminder Theory implies, therefore, that simple reminders to vote work, but only for people who are strongly predisposed to vote. Personal contact, meanwhile, may be required to mobilise those who are less predisposed to turn out.

The consequences of NRT would be that any noticeable campaign activity might increase turnout – and campaigning does not have to be personal in order to be effective. Experimental evidence appears to support Noticeable Reminder Theory. Dale and Strauss tested the effect of text messages reminding individuals to vote, on the assumption that text messages are highly noticeable. The Social Connectedness framework would suggest that such impersonal methods would have no impact on voters' behaviour. Yet, they found that the messages boosted turnout by 3 percentage points – higher than most impersonal methods. A crucial caveat to Dale and Strauss' experiment is that they sent text messages to subjects who had signed up to receive them. It is likely that subjects were far more receptive to the treatment than the typical voter. However, further support for Dale and Strauss' 2009 experiment was found in a replication study by Malhotra et al. (2011) in which they sought to test the robustness of Noticeable Reminder Theory. Dale and Strauss sent 'warm' messages to subjects, in that the subjects had previously signed up to receive them. In their study, Malhotra et al. find that even 'cold' text messages (messages sent to those who have not signed up to receive them) increase turnout. Though the effect of 'cold' text messages was lower than 'warm' messages, the effect was still

between a 0.8 and 0.9 percentage point increase in turnout.[9] These findings were then replicated in Europe by Bhatti et al. (2017). The fact that even 'cold', impersonal reminders in the form of text messages can increase turnout represents firm support for Noticeable Reminder Theory – though suggests that Green and Gerber's social connectedness argument requires qualification. Further, evidence suggests that 'reminders' are particularly powerful among habitual voters in lower salience elections and infrequent voters in high salience elections (Malhotra et al., 2011). This is consistent with Dale and Strauss' theory, as these voters are closest to their indifference threshold about voting or not, and that noticeable reminders are all that is required to mobilise these individuals.

More evidence is needed to explore whether other impersonal, but noticeable campaign methods can be effective, in order to further test NRT. Also, research should indeed address what is noticeable as a campaign activity – and why. Nevertheless, NRT represents an important contribution to our understanding of why different methods work more than others. There is strong reason to suggest that it is the noticeability of a campaign technique that determines its effect. While personal contact does signal the importance of participating in the election, and can be very powerful, Dale and Strauss' contribution is in showing that impersonal methods can be more effective than initially believed. Their explanation of the effectiveness of campaign contact being a function of its noticeability is firmly rooted in psychological explanations of how humans process information communication. Voters face numerous pressures on their time as a result of day-to-day life, and do not spend much time thinking about politics or who to vote for. The result of this is that voters can set aside only minimal time and mental energy towards processing information about elections (Lupia and

[9] ITT effects (intent-to-treat), i.e. the effect of being assigned to receive treatment.

McCubbins, 1998). As such, the extent to which contact cuts through with voters, meaning the communication becomes internalised by individuals, is the determinant of how it might affect human behaviour.

A key tenet in explaining the reason forms of campaign contact mobilise turnout is drawn from NRT – that the *noticeability* of campaign contact is what counts. In the original experiments associated with NRT, scholars find that SMS is noticeable because it passes "some threshold of attention" (Bhatti et al., 2017). People check their phones frequently, and a text message is difficult not to read or acknowledge when 'checking' one's phone. Could, then, any form of campaign contact be effective, as long as it is noticeable to voters?

A key inference of Noticeable Reminder Theory is that the effectiveness of different forms of contact are a function of how noticeable they are, and not of whether they are personal or impersonal and how this draws voters towards the voting process (as Green and Gerber posited). We can regard canvassing as one of the most noticeable forms of party contact there is. Meanwhile, a leaflet delivered by a local candidate or party activist can be easily ignored by a voter and thrown into the recycling. A brief in-person conversation with the candidate or activist on the doorstep is more intrusive, and harder to ignore or forget due to the element of human and social interaction.

3.4 When Are Campaigns Most Effective?

We would expect, given theoretical mechanisms outlined in the previous sections, leaflets and especially canvass visits to influence voter turnout, but would we also anticipate these effects to be stronger at certain times, or among certain people, than others? This section outlines the theoretical arguments outlined in the literature regarding when campaigns are most effective.

Indeed, questions surrounding the different circumstances under which electoral campaigns are most and least effective are becoming increasingly important in the field (Fisher, 2018: 286). In terms of vote choice, for example, research shows that the popularity of a party conditions the expected electoral payoffs of its campaign efforts (Fisher et al., 2018). Similarly, in terms of mobilisation, individual-level experimental research provides the theory that the effects of campaign contact vary according to the recipient's underlying predisposition to vote at any given election. Research by Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009), in which they examined the effects of 11 GOTV field experiments, found that the effect of campaign contact is a function of how close an individual is to their 'threshold of indifference' between voting and abstaining. They find that those closest to this threshold are more responsive to campaign effects (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009), as they are more likely to be tipped over the threshold and into voting by campaign contact. Meanwhile, individuals who are either habitual voters or habitual abstainers are further away from their thresholds, rendering campaign contact less effective among such voters. Crucially, Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009) argue that the type of voter that is closest to this threshold changes from election to election. For instance, at a low/mid saliency election such as a typical local election, most voters are close to their threshold between voting and abstaining. Whereas, at a high salience, high turnout election such as general election, those who are occasional voters at local elections would be closer to their indifference threshold and more likely to be 'nudged' over that threshold by campaign contact.

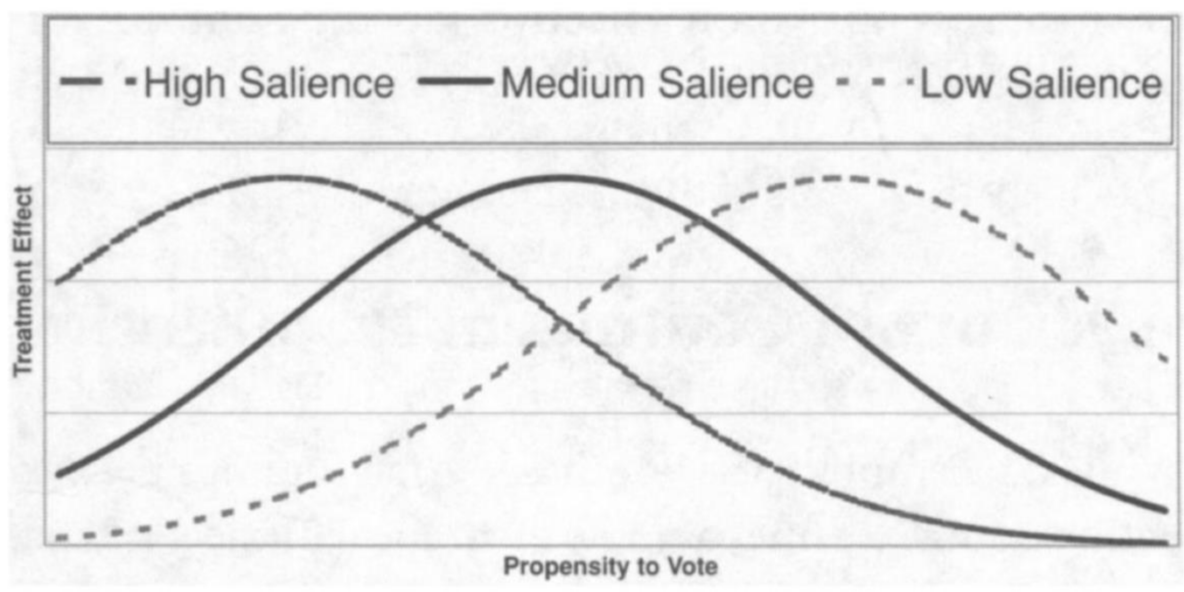
More formally, Arceneaux and Nickerson summarise this theory as follows. Vi denotes whether or not an individual votes at an election. Pi denotes an individual's underlying propensity to vote, while M is the effect of campaign mobilisation. G is the level of general interest in the

election, while *V** is a latent variable reflecting an individual's decision to vote. V* is related to, but distinct from Pi in that the former is more short term and subject to changes, while the latter is an "enduring individual-level trait" (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009: 4). They argue that an individual will vote (Vi) if V* crosses a certain threshold of interest in the election, which is determined by G. Formally, this is expressed thus:

$$V^* = P + M$$
$$\text{and } V = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } V^* \leq -G \\ 1 & \text{if } V^* > -G \end{cases}$$

Graphically, the relationship between propensity to vote, the saliency of the election, and the mobilisation effect of campaign contact is displayed in Figure 3.1. The 'peaks' represent the point at which campaign contact is most effective. At high salience elections, campaign contact would be most effective at mobilising low propensity voters. At low salience elections, campaign contact is most effective among high propensity voters. Meanwhile, at a medium salience election, campaign contact mobilises voters whose propensity to participate is in the middle.

Figure 3.1. Relationship between propensity to vote and campaign mobilisation (Arceneaux and Nickeron, 2009: 4)



Arceneaux and Nickerson's model referred primarily to US elections. How, then, might the model relate to elections in the British context? Salience of elections in Britain can vary significantly, reflected by the varying levels of turnout (House of Commons Library / Guardian DataBlog, 2012). At one end, participation can be as low as 15-25% at Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections. At the other end, turnout at UK general elections is typically around 65-70%. In between, there are low-mid saliency elections to local government and devolved institutions, at which turnout is typically around 30-40% and 45-55%, respectively. Based on Arceneaux and Nickerson's model, we would expect campaign contact to be most likely to have a mobilising effect among high propensity voters at PCC elections, among low propensity voters at general elections, and among mid propensity voters at local and devolved elections.

Determining where voters are on this propensity to vote scale is difficult and can vary according to the electoral context. But, we can determine a particular set of voters that typically have a very high propensity to vote that illustrates the application of Arceneaux and Nickerson's

model. Consider, for example, the case of postal voters in Britain. Their underlying propensity to vote is high, as evidenced by a) the fact they applied for a postal vote in the first place – arguably evidence that they are more interested in voting and do not want to miss their opportunity to participate, and b) their very high rate of turnout, which is frequently upwards of 80% (Rallings and Thrasher, 2014). As such, they can be characterised as being further away from their 'indifference threshold' and thus less susceptible to mobilisation efforts. In essence, given the very high turnout rate of postal voters in Britain we would expect a 'ceiling effect', where the impact of campaign mobilisation efforts is limited by the fact that most of the target group vote already. While this question has not been a topic of much experimental research, it echoes Arceneaux et al.'s (2012) aggregate level experiment in the US that finds that voters in vote-by-mail areas are less affected by GOTV efforts than those in traditional voting areas.

So, we can anticipate that saliency and underlying propensity to vote might condition campaign effects. But might we also expect other factors beyond a voter's likelihood of participating to condition the effect of campaign contact? For instance, we know that campaigns provide information to voters (Foos and de Rooij, 2017), but the manner in which voters process this information can vary substantially. Information processing is commonplace during elections, according to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979; 1984; Petty and Wegener, 1999; Chmielewski, 2012). The model describes how voters process information presented to them, and how this processing in turn influences their decisions and subsequent behaviours. ELM is a dual-process cognitive model that theorises two routes that people take when processing information (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984).

Firstly, some voters process information via the central processing route. Processing political information through this route involves a significant deal of mental effort in considering

choices. A person carefully evaluates the arguments and choices before them as they process the information, often relating the information to their own knowledge and values (Perloff, 2003). As a result, the decision that the individual makes via the central processing route is stronger and longer-lasting. The decision is also far more likely to predict subsequent behaviour, i.e. voting. The alternative path that ELM theorises is the 'peripheral route'. In the peripheral route, a person relies on more shallow cognitive processing. This might include relying on 'cues', for example, rather than engaging in deeper evaluative thinking. This route, consequently, expends minimal mental effort in reaching a decision, akin to flying on "autopilot" (Griffin, 2006: 217). As a result of taking the peripheral route, decisions taken result in weak or minimal changes in terms of attitudes or behaviour (Petty and Wegener, 1999).

Two factors determine whether an individual operates in the central processing route – a) motivation to process the message or information, which refers to an individual's "desire to process the message" (Chmielewski, 2012: 35), and b) ability to critically engage with and evaluate the information, which refers to the individual's cognitive capacity to engagement with the information presented to them (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979). An individual will only process information via the central route if they possess both high motivation and the ability to do so.

ELM gives reason to expect that campaign contact will be more effective if processed via the central route. But what might determine whether an individual processes information via the central or peripheral routes? We could expect that if voters' motivation to process campaign information would be higher if they wanted to be contacted. This would indicate a higher demand to receive information pertaining to the campaign and thus a motivation to process the

information thoughtfully. This would result in deeper engagement with campaign contact, making the contact, in turn, more likely to result in behavioural change, e.g. voting (Chmielewski, 2012).

3.5 Expectations and Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the key theoretical discussions relating to a) why people vote, b) how campaigns and specific campaign activities affect this behaviour, and c) when campaigns are most likely to influence behaviour. This chapter has presented various theoretical approaches that are pertinent to providing possible explanations that connect traditional, partisan campaigning to voter turnout. It is important to note, however, that no single approach offers a full explanation and the various approaches have been presented in order to provide a series of propositions that form the theoretical origins of this thesis. I will outline the specific theoretical expectations that can be drawn from these theoretical discussions, and how these map on to the subsequent empirical chapters.

Firstly, I expect contact from partisan campaigns in a British context to increase voter turnout. Numerous theoretical mechanisms have been discussed in the campaign and GOTV literatures that connect party campaign contact to voter turnout. While the long-term factors associated with classic sociological and Michigan schools left little room for a significant role for campaigns, the “decline in the intensity of group and voter attachment to parties” has created space for campaigns to play a bigger role in recent decades (Fisher, 2018: 288). Under the rational choice framework, there is also plenty of reason to anticipate that the efforts of party campaigns at the local level will affect voter turnout (Green and York, 2018). Campaigns are consistently noted as being providers of information for voters (Foos and de Rooij, 2017). Under the rational choice model, campaigns can serve to reduce the costs associated with

voting, increase the benefits, and trigger social norms that might affect the *D* term. As such, the first expectation of this thesis is that *traditional campaign activities will have a positive impact on political participation*.

Secondly, we have reason to expect that personal interactions will be more powerful than impersonal interactions. Despite considerable research, the precise mechanism that drives the effect of particular campaign activities on individual-level turnout is still unclear (Broockman and Kalla, 2016). Prominent scholars have posited mechanisms that are supported by empirical findings. Alan Gerber and Don Green argued that in order to establish a 'social connection' with voters, campaign contact requires a 'personal touch' that leaflets cannot offer. Mobilising a voter, they argue, is akin to "inviting them to a social occasion" (Green and Gerber, 2004: 92), and personal contact signals a campaign's "willingness to devote time and energy" to voters (2015: 38). Alternative explanations suggest that it is the noticeability of a campaign intervention that drives its effect, as registered voters only require a reminder (Dale and Strauss, 2009). Dale and Strauss' theory contends that personal contact does indeed establish a social connection, but that for some voters all that is needed is a noticeable reminder to vote. This is because for voters nearer their 'threshold of indifference' between voting and abstaining, only a 'nudge' is needed rather than persuasion to vote. The more noticeable forms of contact are therefore the most effective.

Despite these different approaches, it is consistently acknowledged in the GOTV literature that 'soft touch' campaign activities have minimal effects on turnout. Only highly noticeable activities such as personal canvassing, text messages, or heavy-hitting social pressure messages have strong effects on turnout. Therefore, the second expectation of this thesis is that *partisan*

campaigning will not effectively mobilise voters unless it includes personal contact (e.g. doorstep canvassing).

Thirdly, we have good reason to expect that campaign effects are a function of the context and voters' underlying propensity to vote. Voters who are closest to the threshold between voting and abstaining are the most likely to be prompted into participating as a result of campaign contact. The types of voters closest to this threshold will change from election to election, depending on the levels of general interest in the given contest. We might expect, for example, that contact will be effective at mobilising turnout among mid propensity voters at a lower saliency (e.g. local) election. Meanwhile, those same voters are likely to become high propensity voters at a high saliency (e.g. general) election, meaning the mobilising effect of campaign contact will diminish. As such, the third theoretical expectation of this thesis is that *traditional campaign activities will have a great impact on voter turnout in low-mid saliency elections*.

Finally, we have reason to anticipate that factors beyond a voter's underlying propensity to vote will determine the extent of a campaign's effectiveness. For instance, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theorises that behavioural change (e.g. voting) is more likely to occur when individuals process campaign information via a 'central' route, whereby their motivation and ability to process information are high (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979; 1984; Petty and Wegener, 1999; Chmielewski, 2012). This gives rise to the final theoretical expectation that *campaign contact will be more effective among those who demonstrate a higher level of motivation to receive and process campaign information and a high ability to do so*.

I now present the first of three empirical chapters designed to provide new evidence pertaining to these expectations.

Chapter 4: What effect do party leaflets and canvass visits have on turnout? Experimental evidence

4.1 Introduction

This chapter[10] reports the design and results of a field experiment involving 6,525 voters, conducted in co-operation with the Liberal Democrats during the English local elections in 2017. The experiment is designed to test what effect traditional campaign activities – leaflets and canvass visits – have on voter turnout. In so doing, this study is designed to provide evidence on the main research question of this thesis, namely, what is the effects of traditional campaign activities on turnout in Britain is today? The study represents one of the few to test the effect of party leaflets on turnout in Europe, and is the second (published) study to test their effect in a UK partisan context (Foos and John, 2016). The design broadly replicates Foos and John's in that the treatments involve leaflets and canvass visits carried out in a relatively pro-Conservative area politically. However, the design deviates from existing studies in two ways.

[10] This chapter is forthcoming as a journal article in *Political Science Research and Methods*. Full citation: Townsley, Joshua. 2018. Is it worth door-knocking? Evidence from a UK-based GOTV field experiment on the effect of leaflets and canvass visits on voter turnout. *Political Science Research and Methods*. doi:10.1017/psrm.2018.39.

Firstly, this design deviates from most non-partisan GOTV studies by testing the effect of leaflets and the additional effect of a canvass visit, rather than directly comparing the two. In so doing, I aim to more closely replicate real party campaigns – that tend to use leaflets widely – and use canvassing more sparingly in addition to, rather than in instead of leaflets (Fisher et al. 2016). Results show that while the leaflet and canvass combination boosts turnout by 4.9 percentage points, leaflets alone also have a substantive impact on turnout of 4.3 percentage points. The additional effect of the canvass visit (0.6 percentage points) is statistically insignificant from the effect of the leaflet alone. While this experiment does not directly compare the two activities, it does find that party campaigning does not necessarily have to be personal in order to affect turnout.

Secondly, in addition to examining overall effects, I aim to build upon existing GOTV research that looks at which types of voters are most affected by campaign contact, and in which electoral contexts. Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009) found that across 11 GOTV campaigns, those closest to their 'indifference threshold' (between voting and abstaining) were more likely to be mobilised than those who are either certain to vote or certain to abstain. A meta-analysis of 51 canvassing experiments by Green and Gerber (2015) also finds that the average CACE of canvassing is highest (6.2 points) when the underlying turnout rate is between 30% and 50%. When turnout is lower or higher than this, the effect of canvassing diminishes (<30% = 4.6 points, 50-70% = 1.4 points, 70%+ = 0.6 points).

But few have tested whether campaign effects vary according to whether subjects are registered to vote by post, or in person. This represents an important gap in existing research. Postal voting (or 'Vote-By-Mail' in US parlance), in line with other forms of early voting, is a

growing phenomenon internationally (McAllister and Muller, 2018). In the US 2012 presidential contest, for instance, almost 1 in 3 voters cast their ballots before election day (McDonald, 2017). In states such as Oregon and Washington, almost all votes are cast by mail (Alvarez et al., 2012). In Australia, almost 1 in 3 voters cast their ballot prior to election day, many using postal votes (McAllister and Muller, 2018). Meanwhile in Britain, postal voting has been on the rise in recent years. At the 1997 general election, only 937,205 postal ballots were issued, and just 2.3% of all the votes cast were cast by post (Cracknell, 2014). By 2015, the figure had more than quadrupled to 16.4% (Rallings and Thrasher, 2015). Due to their high turnout rate (Rallings and Thrasher, 2015), postal voters are a major source of potential support for political parties. In US states such as Oregon and Washington, for instance, almost all votes are cast by mail (Alvarez et al., 2012). In Britain, one in five of the total votes cast at general elections are cast by mail (Rallings and Thrasher, 2015), and around one in three of votes cast in local elections (Electoral Commission, 2013). But we know little about whether the mode through which voters cast their ballots impacts on the effectiveness of parties' campaigning.

The reasons for this are largely logistic. Postal voters and in-person voters tend to cast their ballots at different times, making it problematic to time experiment treatments. As a result, postal voters are usually excluded from experimental populations prior to randomisation, or it is assumed that the way subjects cast their ballots is constant (Arceneaux et al*.,* 2012). The question of whether effects differ between the two has been subject to an aggregate-level natural experiment before (Arceneaux et al*.,* 2012), which found that mobilisation efforts are less effective in areas with high levels of postal voting (or 'vote-by-mail' in US terminology). The second contribution of this study, therefore, is to present the first individual-level GOTV experiment among postal voters, to my knowledge. Including postal voters also creates an opportunity to test the thesis that campaign effects differ between high and lower propesntiy

voters (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009). I run the same experimental design among postal and non-postal voters in order to compare effects between them. The study is designed in such a way as to replicate treatment within the same election campaign in the same area among (1) households containing postal voters and (2) non-postal voter households. I find that leaflets and canvass treatments boost turnout among in-person voters but have negligible effects on postal voter households.

The chapter is laid out as follows. Firstly, I outline the research design of the experiments. This section includes discussion of the choice of a field experimental research design, the setting of this study, the clustered random assignment, and the treatments. I present balance tests to verify the randomisation procedure and discuss the issue of noncompliance encountered in the canvassing treatments. The next section then presents the results of the experiments, including (1) the effect of campaign contact (i.e. assignment to either treatment), (2) the effect of the treatments separately, and (3) a comparison of the effects between postal voters and non-postal voters. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of these results, and their broader implications.

4.2 Research Design

I conducted a randomised field experiment with the Liberal Democrats at the English local elections in 2017. Field experiments are used widely in Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) research, and the use of a field experiment to answer my research question has numerous advantages over other methods such as a survey. Firstly, field experiments provide an internally valid method of identifying the effect of campaign efforts, at the individual level. Subjects are randomly assigned to either a treatment group that is exposed to campaigning in some form, or a control group, which is not exposed to any campaigning. The random assignment to these

groups means everyone has an equal chance of being exposed to treatment, thereby ensuring that observed and unobserved variables are balanced between treatment and control groups. In other words, those who are exposed to the stimulus/treatment share broadly similar characteristics with those who are not exposed. This ensures that these other factors that may be increasing turnout for certain individuals are essentially 'controlled for'. While 'treatment' in surveys could be skewed towards people who were likely voters anyway, in field experiments there is no such selection bias. Field experiments also have the advantage of allowing the researcher to control, or at least know, when exactly subjects are exposed to treatment. This allows their effects to be more accurately measured. Altogether, field experiments' main advantage over observational approaches is their ability to convincingly identify causation through randomised treatment of subjects (Gerber and Green, 2012).

4.2.1 Experiment Setting

In this study, the experimental population comprised registered postal voters and non-postal voters in the ward (known as an 'electoral division' for county councils) of Thedwastre North in Suffolk, England. The Suffolk Liberal Democrats were approached in 2016 with the idea to undertake a field experiment in the run-up to the 2017 elections to Suffolk County Council using a combination of leaflets and canvass visits. The party gladly agreed to support the experiments, provided resources were not significantly diverted from 'target' seats nearby. A 'paper' candidate was subsequently identified and selected for the purposes of the study. The choice of Thedwastre North was driven primarily by the researcher's contacts within the Liberal Democrats locally. The division straddles the A14 road between Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket. The area is largely rural, with one small town, Elmswell, several smaller villages (Norton, Woolpit, Tostock, and Badwell Ash), and numerous hamlets.

The area is a relatively pro-Conservative[11] one, and the local authority supported leaving the European Union in the 2016 referendum, by 55% to 45% (BBC, 2016a). The setting therefore differs from those of similar partisan studies in Britain, which have tended to take place in areas that are relatively favourable politically (Foos and John, 2016; Foos and de Rooij, 2017). Turnout is also fairly typical of the country. In 2013, the local elections experienced a turnout of 31.3% in Thedwastre North, compared to 31% across all of the County Council elections in England that day (Electoral Commission, 2013). This suggests that the area is not atypical of the rest of England in terms of its underlying level of turnout. Taken from the local party's voter database, the study population totalled 6,525 registered voters in 3,371 households.

Importantly, the election in which the study takes place is a local election to the County Council. Local elections in Britain are typified by their relatively low levels of voter participation. As noted, turnout across England in the local elections of 2013 (the last round of comparable local elections to those in which the experiment was conducted) was just 31%. The experiment therefore provides a test of whether campaign contact can mobilise voters at a low saliency election, in which their underlying propensity to vote is likely to be low. However, by comparing the effects of traditional campaign activities between low turnout non-postal voters, and high turnout postal voters, these experiments provide a useful setting to examine whether the effects of party campaign contact differs according to voters' underlying propensity to vote.

[11] Figure A1 in the Appendix shows the location of Thedwastre North within Suffolk County Council, and Table A1 shows the result from the previous local election in 2013.

4.2.2 Clustered Random Assignment

As the household was the unit of randomisation and contact, voters were clustered into their households. In order to compare the effect of treatment between postal voters and non-postal voters, the former needed to be separated from the latter. This was not straight forward, however, as postal voters do not all live in the same household as other postal voters. Therefore, households were first separated based on whether or not they contained postal voters. Households containing at least one postal voter (i.e. households comprised entirely of postal voters, or a mix of postal voters and non-postal voters) were placed into the postal voter component of the experiment. Most subjects (76%) in this half of the experiment were postal voters. These 'postal voter households' were then randomly assigned to either a control group, or one of two treatment groups. Meanwhile, the remaining households (all of which contained only non-postal voters) were placed into the 'non-postal voter household' component of the experiment, and randomly assigned to separate control or treatment groups.

As a result of this design, spillover between postal voters and non-postal voters in the households that contained both could not be ruled out. But in all such households that contained a mixture of postal voters and non-postal voters, the household was assigned to the postal voter experiment. The potential for spillover was small, as all households in the non-postal voter experiment contained non-postal voters only, and most subjects in the postal voter households were postal voters (76%). Further, no individuals lived in a household with an individual assigned to another treatment or control group – postal voter or non-postal voter. Likewise, no

households contained individual(s) in the postal voter experiment and individual(s) in the non-postal voter experiment.[12]

The result was six randomly assigned groups: a control and two treatment groups in the postal voter household experiment, and a control and two treatment groups for the 'non-postal voter household' experiment. This process is summarised in Figure 4.1.[13]

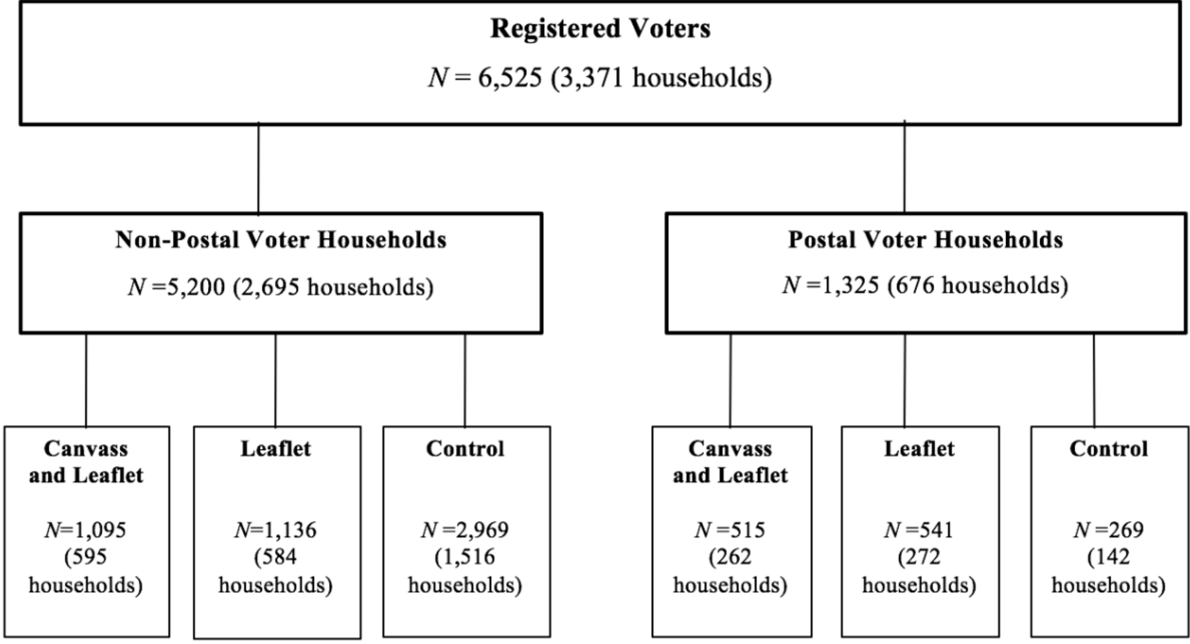
The nature of the research design has empirical ramifications regarding what the experiments are testing. Firstly, the experimental design cannot test the turnout effect of direct exposure to the treatments. Rather, any effects could also be the result of downstream effects within the household (see, for instance, Nickerson, 2008; Cutts and Fieldhouse, 2009; Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2016), caused by an individual being taken to the polls by their partner after they spoke to a canvasser. The design can estimate effects at the household level. Secondly, while all non-postal voter households contain entirely non-postal voters, some of the postal voter households contain non-postal voters (24% of subjects in the postal voter household experiment were not registered postal voters). Given this, the comparison between the two can only reveal how voters in households *containing* postal voters react to treatment, compared to non-postal voters. Finally, while there are leaflet-only and leaflet + canvass treatment groups, the design does not have a canvass-only treatment group. This decision was made largely due to time and logistic

[12] A note of the numbers of postal voters in the postal voter household groups: 1,012 of the 1,325 voters in the postal voter experiment were registered postal voters (396 of the 515 in the canvass group; 410 of the 541 in the leaflet group; and 206 of the 269 in the control group).

[13] Several villages were excluded from the non-postal voter experiment as they were subject to a pilot experiment beforehand. To avoid any contamination of multiple treatments voters in these villages were removed from both the treatment and control groups (i.e. removed from the population altogether).

restraints. I wanted to ensure that each treatment combination contained a reasonably-sized N that we were able to successfully contact. But both myself and the local party did not feel that we would be able to carry out the respective treatments for three groups (six, if broken down by postal voter v non-postal voter sections). The limitation of this decision is that the experiment cannot test for potential synergy effects, e.g. whether the effect of the canvass + leaflet combination is or is not larger than the combined effects of the leaflet-only and canvass-only effects.

Figure 4.1. Field Experiment Research Design Process



It is worth noting how the timing of the treatments were decided. The timing of the treatments was an issue, given that postal voters receive their ballots in the post around two weeks before non-postal voters cast their ballots on election day. This present a dilemma in terms of timing. If the treatments were carried out during the period leading up to the in-person polling day, it is likely that some, if not many, postal voters would have already participated. The decision was made to contact all voters in the two-week period prior to their being able to cast their respective ballots. This meant contacting postal voters during the two-week period prior to

their ballots being sent out, and contacting non-postal voters during the two week period prior to polling stations opening on election day.

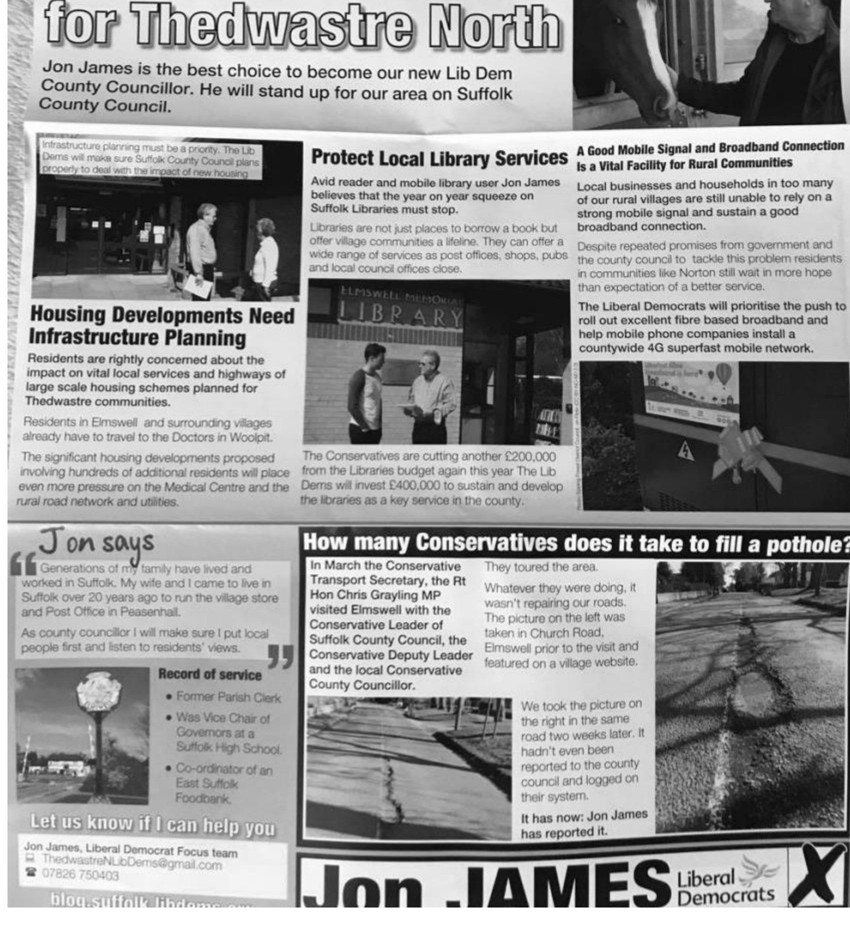
The relative sample sizes of the different groups were determined based on how many households we (the researcher and the local party), thought we could realistically contact during these periods. This was based on the timeframe and the personnel available at different times during the campaign. We wanted to ensure treatments were carried out two weeks prior to postal votes being sent out, and polling day, for postal voter households and non-postal voter households, respectively. We knew that there were fewer postal voter households than non-postal voter households, but we had approximately the same amount of time to contact each. Therefore, we decided to assign a larger proportion of postal voter households, which we were contacting during the first half of the campaign, to the treatment groups (534 out of 676 households, compared to 1,179 out of 2,695 for non-postal voter households).

4.2.3 Treatments

All treatments were partisan in nature and carried out by the researcher or a volunteer. Treatments were kept as 'authentic' (i.e. as close to what the local campaign would do anyway), as possible. The first treatment was a Liberal Democrat party leaflet (Figure 4.2). A fortnight was spent touring the Thedwastre North area with the Liberal Democrat candidate to collate photographs and stories to populate the leaflet. The leaflet was printed in full colour A3, and contained the legally-required party imprint, as well as Liberal Democrat party branding. The leaflet contained numerous local policy issues and manifesto commitments covering issues that are under the remit of the council for which the election was being held, including libraries, transport, and schools. This differed from the leaflets used in Foos and John's (2016) similar

UK party experiment, where the Conservative leaflet delivered was a ‘sorry we missed you’ flyer (an image of this leaflet is in the Appendix for comparison – Figure A4). The aim was to test the impact of typical, standalone leaflets that contain more information on the upcoming election. Party leaflets typically contain information about local issues and the candidate. Evidence shows that voters often respond to photographs and other personal candidate attributes (Mattes and Milazzo, 2014), so the leaflet included photographs of and information about the candidate and colourful, eye-catching information about the issues at stake at the election.

Figure 4.2. Lib Dem Leaflet



Thedwastre North

FOCUS

gaining seats from Labour, UKIP and the Conservatives in by-elections up and down the country.

Lib Dems +31 | UKIP -4 | Lab -13 | Con -22

News from **Jon James** and the Lib Dem team • Delivered by volunteers to residents in Badwell Ash, Elmswell, Finningham, Gt Ashfield, Hunston, Langham, Norton, Stowlangtoft, Tostock, Westhorpe, Woolpit & Wyverstone

Jon James: the best choice for Thedwastre North

Jon James is the best choice to become our new Lib Dem County Councillor. He will stand up for our area on Suffolk County Council.

Infrastructure planning must be a priority. The Lib Dems will make sure Suffolk County Council plans properly to deal with the impact of new housing

Housing Developments Need Infrastructure Planning

Residents are rightly concerned about the impact on vital local services and highways of large scale housing schemes planned for Thedwastre communities.

Residents in Elmswell and surrounding villages already have to travel to the Doctors in Woolpit.

The significant housing developments proposed involving hundreds of additional residents will place even more pressure on the Medical Centre and the rural road network and utilities.

Protect Local Library Services

Avid reader and mobile library user Jon James believes that the year on year squeeze on Suffolk Libraries must stop.

Libraries are not just places to borrow a book but offer village communities a lifeline. They can offer a wide range of services as post offices, shops, pubs and local council offices close.

The Conservatives are cutting another £200,000 from the Libraries budget again this year The Lib Dems will invest £400,000 to sustain and develop the libraries as a key service in the county.

A Good Mobile Signal and Broadband Connection is a Vital Facility for Rural Communities

Local businesses and households in too many of our rural villages are still unable to rely on a strong mobile signal and sustain a good broadband connection.

Despite repeated promises from government and the county council to tackle this problem residents in communities like Norton still wait in more hope than expectation of a better service.

The Liberal Democrats will prioritise the push to roll out excellent fibre based broadband and help mobile phone companies install a countywide 4G superfast mobile network.

Jon says

"Generations of my family have lived and worked in Suffolk. My wife and I came to live in Suffolk over 20 years ago to run the village store and Post Office in Peasenhall.

As county councillor I will make sure I put local people first and listen to residents' views."

Record of service

- Former Parish Clerk
- Was Vice Chair of Governors at a Suffolk High School
- Co-ordinator of an East Suffolk Foodbank

Let us know if I can help you

Jon James, Liberal Democrat Focus team
ThedwastreNLibDems@gmail.com
07826 750403

How many Conservatives does it take to fill a pothole?

In March the Conservative Transport Secretary, the Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP visited Elmswell with the Conservative Leader of Suffolk County Council, the Conservative Deputy Leader and the local Conservative County Councillor.

They toured the area.

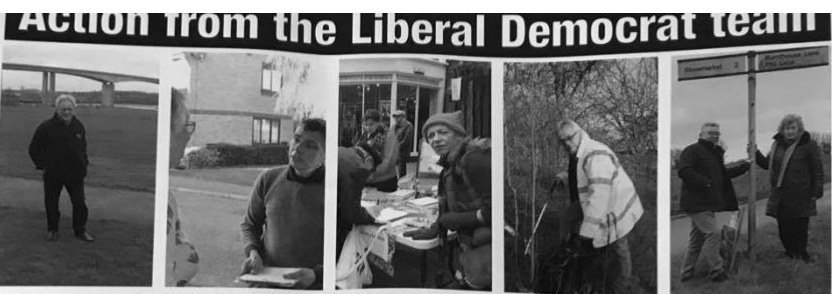
Whatever they were doing, it wasn't repairing our roads. The picture on the left was taken in Church Road, Elmswell prior to the visit and featured on a village website.

We took the picture on the right in the same road two weeks later. It hadn't even been reported to the county council and logged on their system.

It has now: Jon James has reported it.

Jon JAMES Liberal Democrats X

Action from the Liberal Democrat team



Across the county Liberal Democrat councillors and campaigners are out and about serving their communities. They are a strong team who work hard all year round to represent residents and stand up for their area on the county council. This election is a clear choice between the complacent Conservatives and hardworking Lib Dems.

Tackle the Care Crisis

The Conservatives have plunged the NHS and social care system into crisis.

More than a million elderly people do not receive the care and support that they need, while patients face longer waits for GP appointments and planned operations are cancelled.

We need action now. That's why Suffolk Liberal Democrats promise to invest extra in social care.

We will work with the NHS and charities to help people live well at home and reduce unnecessary stays in hospital.

It's a clear choice...

the Lib Dems' positive plan vs. Conservative cuts

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS WILL take back control of the county council's disastrous highways contract unless there is rapid improvement – we will fix the roads and pavements the Conservatives have ignored

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS WILL protect our local libraries so they can further enhance the community services they offer

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS WILL give mental health the attention it deserves. Our plan for Suffolk delivers extra mental health support in schools to give children the tools to cope

or

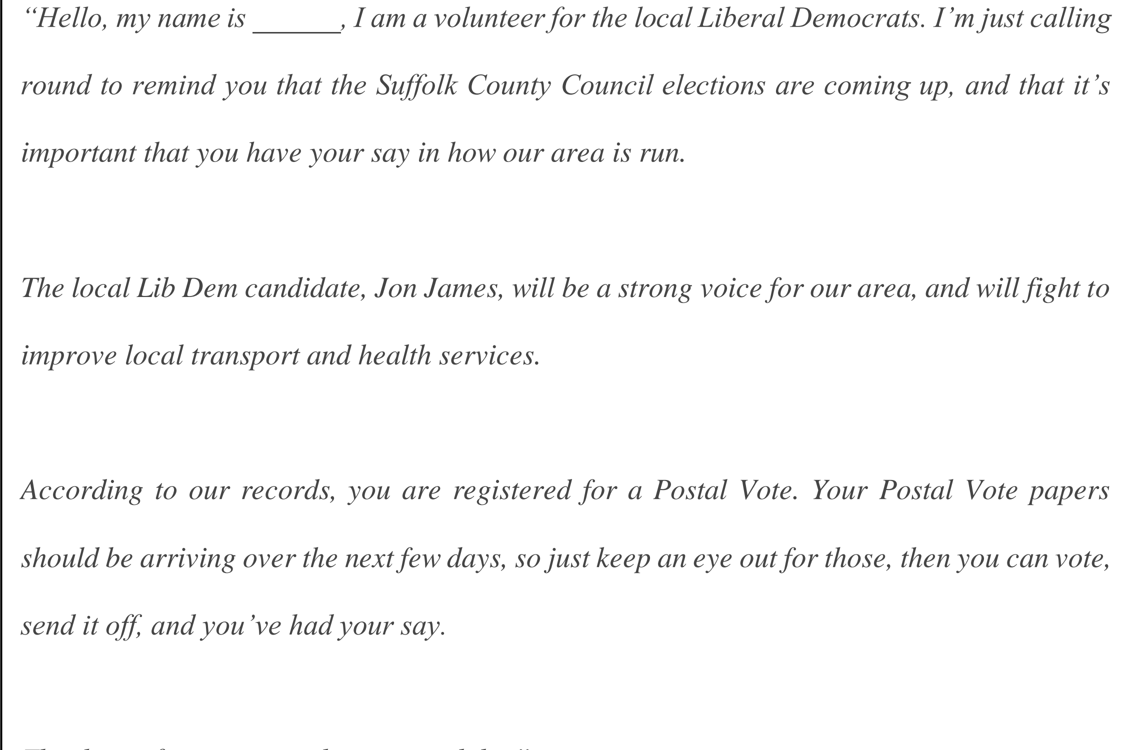
THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE FAILED to look after our roads and pavements. Their disastrous highways contract means potholes aren't repaired, signs are not cleaned and congestion gets worse

CAUTION POT HOLES

THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE CUT our vital services including bus services which local people rely on.

THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE FAILED to deliver the services and infrastructure we need to cope with the impact of the hundreds of thousands of new homes they have agreed to build

One treatment group was assigned to receive a Liberal Democrat leaflet, while the other group received the same leaflet at the same time, followed by a canvass visit from a volunteer. In all cases, the canvass visit proceeded the leaflet delivery by fewer by 3 days. The control group was not directly exposed to any Liberal Democrat campaign treatment. The canvass scripts (Box 1 and 2) were partisan in nature, again aiming to replicate personal visits carried out by campaigns at local elections. Canvassers were instructed to deliver the script, but not to stick rigidly to it, and to be as friendly as they liked. In sum, a random sample of households received either a) a leaflet, or b) a leaflet *followed by* a doorstep visit from a party activist. As this second treatment group received the same party leaflet, in essence, the study is designed to examine what, if any, *additional* effect a canvass visit has on turnout on top of a party leaflet.



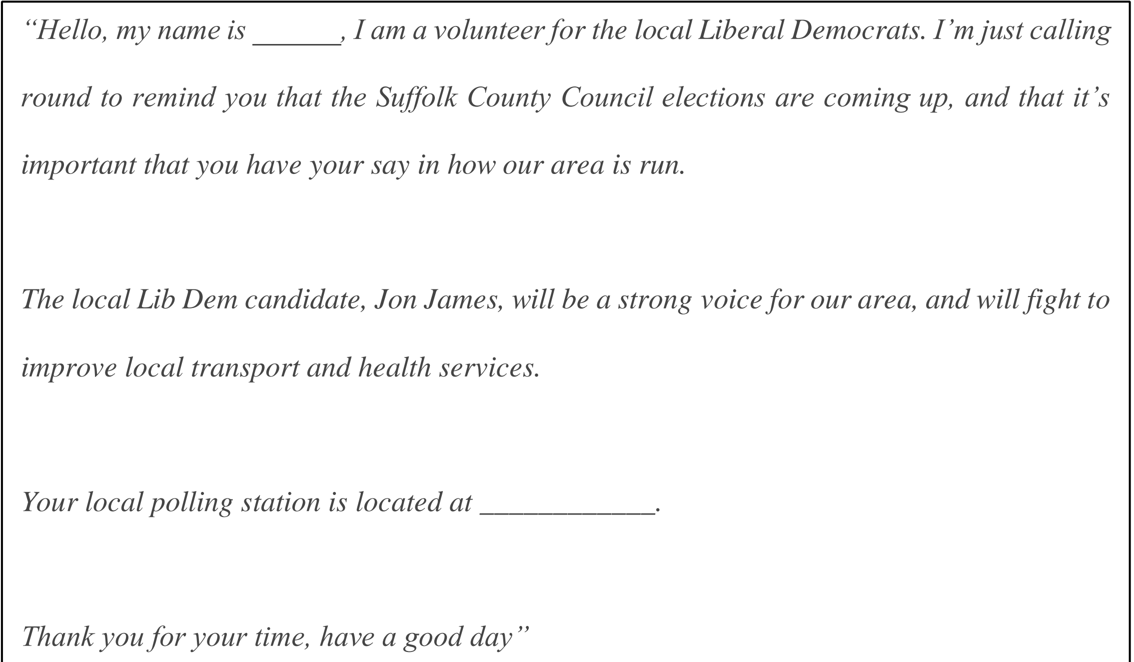
"Hello, my name is ______, I am a volunteer for the local Liberal Democrats. I'm just calling round to remind you that the Suffolk County Council elections are coming up, and that it's important that you have your say in how our area is run.

The local Lib Dem candidate, Jon James, will be a strong voice for our area, and will fight to improve local transport and health services.

According to our records, you are registered for a Postal Vote. Your Postal Vote papers should be arriving over the next few days, so just keep an eye out for those, then you can vote, send it off, and you've had your say.

Thank you for your time, have a good day"

Box 4.1. Canvass script for postal voter households



"Hello, my name is ______, I am a volunteer for the local Liberal Democrats. I'm just calling round to remind you that the Suffolk County Council elections are coming up, and that it's important that you have your say in how our area is run.

The local Lib Dem candidate, Jon James, will be a strong voice for our area, and will fight to improve local transport and health services.

Your local polling station is located at ____________.

Thank you for your time, have a good day"

Box 4.2. Canvass script for non-postal voter households

In order to compare the effects among postal voter households, and non-postal voter households, they both received the same treatments. This presented difficulties in terms of timing, as postal voters are sent their ballots a few weeks prior to election day in order to allow enough time to vote. Meanwhile, non-postal voters vote on election day itself. To take this into account, the same treatments were applied to both, but at different times. Postal voter households were treated within the two-week period prior to their postal votes being sent out by the local authority (17th April). Leaflets were delivered between the 4th and 14th April, while those assigned to the canvass group were canvassed between 10th and 16th April. All contacts were therefore made just before postal voters received their ballots. Non-postal voter households began receiving their treatments a week later, all within the two-week period leading up to polling day. It is possible that the differential timing of the treatment could mean that turnout-inducing events might affect one type of household and not the other, thereby confounding the treatment method and time. However, given that both the postal voter and

non-postal voter components of the experiment had their own control groups, the experiment is designed to measure the difference in turnout between the treatment groups and their respective control groups, to allow effect comparisons. For robustness, when producing the estimates for the treatment effects, I include a dummy variable that distinguishes between the postal voter and non-postal voter experiments to account for the confounding factor resulting from the differential timings of the treatments.

4.2.4 Contact Rates and Noncompliance

Table 4.2 shows the final sample sizes and contact rates. All leaflets in the postal voter household experiment, and the non-postal voter experiment were successfully delivered, meaning the leaflet contact rate (compliance being defined as a leaflet being successfully delivered to the household) was 100%. In total, 534 postal voter households, and 1,179 non-postal voter households, received a leaflet. However, like most experiments involving canvass visits, one-sided noncompliance was an issue among those living in households assigned to receive a canvass visit in addition to the leaflet. Among this group, compliance is defined as the voter living in a household in which at least one person opened the door and interacted with the canvasser. 262 postal voter households (containing 515 registered voters), and 595 non-postal voter households (containing 1,095 registered voters) were assigned to receive a canvass visit in addition to a leaflet. The successful canvass contact rate was 28%. This is towards the lower end of the range found in other European canvassing experiments (e.g. Bhatti et al. (2016) had a contact rate of 22% in their Labour Market Union, while Nyman (2017) had a contact rate of 60%). The rate is also lower than the 40% found in the other UK party

experiment involving door-to-door canvassing (Foos and John, 2016).[14] The low contact rate reduces the reliability of the canvass treatment effects, which is discussed further in the following section.

Table 4.2. Sample size and contact rates by treatment group

	Registered Voters	Leaflet Contact Rate	Canvass Contacts achieved	Canvass Contact Rate
Postal Voter Households				
Canvass + Leaflet	515	100%	143	28%
Letter only	541	100%	-	-
Control	269	-	-	-
Non-Postal Voter Households				
Canvass + Leaflet	1,095	100%	302	28%
Leaflet only	1,136	100%	-	-
Control	2,969	-	-	-
N	6,525			

4.2.5 Balance Test and Data Assumptions

Randomisation ensures that observable and unobservable characteristics of the experimental subjects should be balanced between treatment and control groups (Gerber and Green, 2012). Table 4.3 presents the balance of available individual-level characteristics across the treatment and control groups. This data was obtained through the local Liberal Democrats' voter ID

[14] This is likely to have been due to a number of factors including the fact that much of the campaigning fell over the Easter period, when many people were away on holiday. In most cases, two or three canvass attempts were made to improve the success rate, all within 3 days of the delivery of the leaflet.

database. As Table 4.3 shows, the covariates do not vary appreciably between assignment groups, indicating that the randomisation process was successful.

Table 4.3. Balance of Pre-Treatment Covariates between Assignment Groups, % (n)

	Postal Voter Households			Non-Postal Voter Households		
	Control	Leaflet Only	Canvass + Leaflet	Control	Leaflet Only	Canvass + Leaflet
Lib Dem ID	7.4	8.3	6.6	11.2	10.8	10.1
	(20)	(45)	(34)	(332)	(123)	(111)
Women	50.2	52.3	54.6	51.6	50.4	50.9
	(135)	(283)	(281)	(1,533)	(572)	(557)
Voted in 09	48.7	44.7	44.7	25.3	23.2	23.5
	(131)	(242)	(230)	(752)	(264)	(257)
Age 60+	7.8	10.5	7.4	7.7	6.7	7.7
	(21)	(57)	(38)	(229)	(76)	(84)
Age 35-59	4.1	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.3	2.1
	(11)	(14)	(13)	(77)	(26)	(23)
Age Under 35	7.8	6.7	8.0	7.7	8.5	5.7
	(21)	(36)	(41)	(229)	(96)	(62)

Voted in 2009 most recent turnout data available in Thedwastre North. While more recent turnout data would be preferable, it is the balance between the groups that is crucial.

To verify the randomisation statistically, I follow the procedure outlined by Gerber and Green to test whether imbalances are larger than one would expect from chance alone (2012: 109). I run a multinomial logistic regression model to test whether assignment to treatment groups is significantly related to available individual-level covariate data. The results of the regression are reported in Tables A2 and A3 in the Appendix and show that all covariates taken together do not significantly predict assignment to treatment conditions, increasing confidence that the randomisation process was successful. The pre-treatment covariate data is also used in the subsequent analysis, and includes sex, party support based on previous canvass analysis, ward, registered postal voters, previous turnout, and age group.

The random allocation to treatment and control conditions was conducted by the researcher through the party's software, *Connect*. The random nature of assignment underpins the causal claims the study is able to make (Gerber and Green, 2012). This study also assumes *one-sided noncompliance*, *non-interference*, and *excludability*. These assumptions will briefly be outlined below.

Noncompliance occurs when not all of the subjects assigned to receive treatment were actually treated. This is an issue for the canvass treatment, which I take into account in the following section in which I present the results. I use the standard procedure for dealing with one-sided noncompliance as outlined in Gerber and Green (2012). Crucially however, I assume that this noncompliance is one-sided, meaning that no subjects in the control group were treated. This is fulfilled in so far as I know that no leaflets were delivered to, nor canvass visits attempted on, houses that were assigned to the control condition. It would be impossible, therefore, for subjects living in households assigned to the control condition to be directly treated. Of course, it is possible that subjects living in neighbouring households may be exposed to treatment indirectly through interaction with their neighbours. The fact that this cannot be ruled out simply means that I can only claim that outcome effects are a result of *living* in a household exposed to treatment. I also assume non-interference between households, which means that every household's probability of being assigned to treatment is unaffected by other households' assignment. Excludability is also assumed, which means that the outcome is affected by treatment and not by assignment to treatment. The main threat to these assumptions is that treated subjects then discussed their treatment with other subjects, encouraging them to vote (Nyman, 2017). I reduce the extent to which this can happen by cluster randomising at the household level, so that there is no risk of subjects assigned to treatment living in the same

house as subjects assigned to control conditions. Because people sharing a house together interact on a daily basis, this would violate the non-interference and excludability assumptions.

The study was pre-registered and included a pre-analysis plan.[15] The experiment was conducted in accordance with the pre-registration with no substantive deviations to the research design itself. There were two deviations concerning the theoretical discussion and analysis that were made due to data availability issues. These are outlined and explained in the Appendix (A5).

4.3 Analysis and Results

Turnout data at the 2017 local election was obtained from the local council's official records released after the election and matched to the experimental records. To estimate the effects, I use the Intent-To-Treat (ITT). The ITT is the standard way to measure treatment effects in experimental research. The ITT is calculated by comparing the turnout rate (%) between those assigned to the control and treatment groups. The ITT therefore shows the effect of being assigned to a treatment group compared to a control group, and avoids the spuriousness associated with a turnout comparison of those successfully contacted and those not contacted (e.g. because those who were not successfully contacted are more likely to be deceased or have moved house (Gerber and Green, 2000; 2015)).

The results for the full sample, and for the postal voter and non-postal voter experiments separately, are presented in Table 4.4. The three models show the estimated ITT effects of (1)

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[15] The pre-registration details and pre-analysis plan can be found on the EGAP website: http://egap.org/registration/2589.

any campaign contact (2) a leaflet only, and (3) a leaflet + canvass visit combination. The models are estimated using linear regression with standard errors clustered at household level. Covariates covering the factors described above – sex, party support, ward, postal voter registration, previous turnout, and age group – are included in the model. Adjusting for covariates has the advantages of correcting for any minor imbalances in the assignment process and increasing the precision of the estimates, while still producing unbiased effect estimates (Gerber and Green, 2012: 109). In order to illustrate the effects visually, I also present the predicted marginal effects of the treatments in Figure 4.3.

Table 4.4. Experiment results

			(1) Any Campaign Contact (leaflet, canvass + leaflet)			(2) Leaflet Only			(3) Canvass + Leaflet		
	N	Control Group Turnout	Turnout	Effect (SE)	Covariate adjusted (SE)	Turnout	Effect (SE)	Covariate-adjusted Effect (SE)	Turnout	Effect (SE)	Covariate-adjusted (SE)
Full sample	6,525	-	-	**3.5*** (1.6)	**3.6*** (1.5)	-	2.5 (1.9)	2.8 (1.8)	-	**4.4*** (1.9)	**4.5*** (1.8)
Postal Voter Households	1,325	70.3%	69.0%	-1.3 (4.2)	-2.6 (3.9)	67%	-3.3 (4.7)	-4.8 (4.3)	71.1%	0.8 (4.6)	-0.3 (4.3)
Non-postal voters	5,200	25.0%	29.2%	**4.2*** (1.7)	**4.6**** (1.6)	28.7%	3.7+ (2.1)	**4.3*** (2.0)	29.7%	**4.7*** (2.1)	**4.9*** (2.0)

Robust standard errors (in parentheses) clustered on households. All tests two-tailed. **p<.01, *p<.05, +p<0.1.

All effect sizes that are statistically significant at conventional levels of at least 95% confidence are highlighted in bold for ease of interpretation. Looking first at Model 1, subjects that were exposed to the Liberal Democrat campaign – in any form – were 3.6 percentage points more likely to vote, significant at the 95% level. This effect is stronger among the non-postal voter households, for whom the campaign increased turnout by 4.6 percentage points.

Models 2 and 3 present the effects of the two treatments. Model 2 shows the effect of the leaflet, which increased turnout by 2.8 percentage points across all voters, though this is statistically insignificant at conventional levels. Again, this effect is stronger among non-postal voting households at 4.3 percentage points. Model 3 shows the effect of the canvass visit and leaflet combination, which boosted turnout by 4.5 percentage points, significant at the 95% level. This appears to suggest that while leaflets alone are ineffective, the leaflet and canvass visit combination has strong effects on voter turnout. However, this is only the case among the full sample. Among subjects in the non-postal voter household experiment, the leaflet only treatment increased turnout by 4.3 percentage points. The effect of the leaflet plus canvass visit is larger – 4.9 percentage points. Among postal voter households each treatment had negative and statistically insignificant effects.[16]

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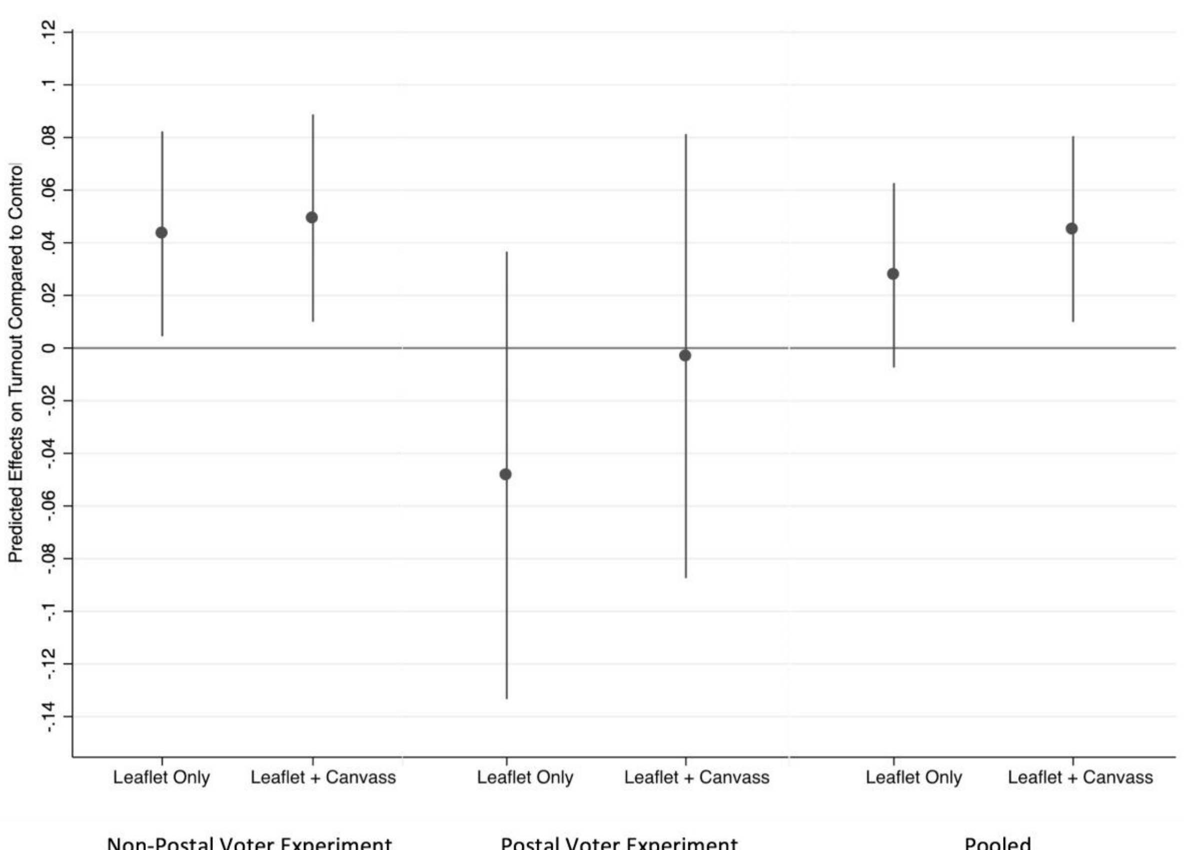
[16] Canvassing experiments typically report the Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE) estimator, to account for one-sided noncompliance in the canvass treatment group. To account for one-sided noncompliance, I followed the procedure laid out at length in Gerber and Green (2012). Estimating the treatment effect (tr), given the contact rate (cr), we can divide the intent-to-treat (ITT) effect by the contact rate (cr), to give us the CACE. Thus: ITT / cr = CACE. This measure is a standard assessment of the effect sizes in GOTV field experiments given issues of noncompliance (i.e. not everyone in the treatment group(s) accepting their assigned treatment). Gerber and Green (2000) note that this is

Figure 4.3. Covariate-Adjusted Predicted Effects on Voter Turnout



Note: the solid lines represent 95% Confidence Intervals.

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comparable to running a two-stage least squares regression of turnout on campaign contact, with randomisation as an instrumental variable (Gerber and Green, 2012).

Across the pooled groups, the CACE is 6.2 percentage points, with a 95% confidence interval of -8.2 to 20.6. The confidence intervals surrounding the CACEs for the postal voter and non-postal voter household experiments are also wide. Among postal voter households, the CACE is 16%, with a 95% confidence interval of -10.4 to 42.5. Among non-postal voter households, the CACE is 2.3%, with a 95% confidence interval of -15.1 to 19.7. The low contact rate (28%), as well as the sample size, contribute to the uncertainty surrounding the CACE of the canvass treatment. As such, reliable inferences of the additional effect of canvassing cannot be made with a meaningful amount of statistical power, which is also reflected in the lack of statistical significance of the effects.

The results suggest that the campaign affected postal voter households and non-postal voter households differently. As can clearly be seen from Figure 4.3, there was no significant effect of campaigning on turnout among postal voters. Yet among non-postal voters, both leaflets and canvassing had statistically significant effects in boosting turnout. While postal voting households turned out at a far higher rate than non-postal voting households (Table 4.4), this was not due to the Lib Dem campaign, which had no discernible impact on turnout.

Overall, the results show that the Lib Dem campaign had an appreciable positive effect on turnout. However, results suggest that this was driven largely by the effects among non-postal voter households rather than postal voting households. The results show that merely providing people with a party leaflet was enough to increase turnout among non-postal voting households, while only a limited further boost to turnout was provided by canvass visits.

4.4 Discussion and Conclusion

4.4.1 The Effect of Leaflets and Canvass Visits on Voter Turnout

By providing new, UK-based experimental evidence on the effect of party campaigning on turnout, this study builds on the limited literature of European partisan field experiments and provides direct evidence on the main research question of this thesis. The results support the first of the theoretical expectations derived in Chapter 3 – that traditional campaigning increases turnout. While this finding is not new, it represents one of the first partisan experimental studies in Britain to confirm it. Indeed, the 3.6 percentage point ITT of traditional party campaign contact (i.e. assignment to receive either of the treatment combinations) detected sits towards the higher end of other GOTV studies. Indeed, US (Green et al., 2013)

and European (Ramiro et al., 2012; Pons, 2014; Pons and Liegey, 2016) studies often report null effects of partisan campaign contact on turnout. The two published UK partisan experiments, similarly, have shown null (Foos and John, 2016) or modest (Foos and de Rooij, 2017) effects of leaflets and phone calls, respectively, on overall participation.

By testing the effect of party leaflets, this experiment builds on the scarce literature of European-based experiments that test impersonal, partisan campaign contact. Existing nonpartisan experiments in the US frequently report null effects of leaflets on turnout (Green et al. 2013). The effect of the leaflet (4.3 points among non-postal voters) therefore sits towards the higher end of the existing literature. The effect is also higher than reported in US partisan studies (e.g. Cardy, 2005; Barton et al., 2013). The result is all the more surprising given that the leaflet itself contained no specific behavioural or social pressure cues that have shown powerful effects elsewhere (Nickerson, 2007; Green and Gerber, 2008). Like Foos and John's (2016) study, the leaflet contained partisan messaging. In this study, the leaflet was larger and contained more photographs and issue information than the Conservative leaflet that produced no overall effect in Somerset (Foos and John, 2016)[17], which could have made it more noticeable among supporters and rival supporters. But with so few European experiments testing the impact of party leaflets (studies so far have tested canvassing, e.g. Ramiro et al., 2012; Pons, 2014; Bhatti et al., 2016; Cantoni and Pons, 2016; Pons and Liegey, 2016; Nyman, 2017, or phone calls e.g. Foos and de Rooij, 2017), the effects of different designs and types of leaflets merit further research.

[17] See Figure A4 in the Appendix for an image of the leaflet delivered in Foos and John's study.

A further contribution is to emerging European GOTV research on the effect of canvassing. That canvass visits in this study appeared to produce only limited additive effects supports the emerging thesis that door-to-door canvassing produces weaker turnout effects in Europe (Bhatti et al., 2016). This may not be particularly surprising, given that the script simply echoed standard party scripts used at election time, and those found to produce similarly weak turnout effects in Britain and Europe (Ramiro et al., 2012; Pons, 2014; Foos and John, 2016; Pons and Liegey, 2016). However, given that this experiment, along with most of the experiments included in Bhatti et al.'s (2016) meta-study involved partisan canvassing, there remain questions over whether canvassing is simply weaker in Europe, or whether it is the partisan nature of such canvass visits that render them less effective. Though, given the low contact rate in this study and high degree of uncertainty around the effect, the result should be treated with caution. Without a third treatment group testing the impact of canvass visits alone, it is not possible to determine whether it was simply the initial partisan contact that prompted the effect, or whether the canvass reinforced the impact of the initial leaflet, and thus worked in tandem with it.

4.4.2 Heterogeneous Effects

In order to compare the mobilisation effects of traditional party campaign activities between those registered to vote by post, and in person, this study separated households based on whether or not they contained postal voters. I then randomly assigned these households to separate treatment and control groups and replicated the treatments among them both. As such, the design of this study effectively allowed for two experiments to be conducted almost simultaneously at the same election, in the same area, using the same treatments. Empirically, this allowed us to make a comparison of the mobilising effects of campaign contact between

more high propensity voters (i.e. in households containing postal voters), and more low propensity voters (voters in households containing non-postal voters) at a low saliency election.

This comparison shows that while treatments increased turnout among non-postal voters, they had null effects on households containing postal voters. The results provide evidence that traditional campaign activities have particularly strong mobilisation effects among voters that have a low/mid underlying propensity to vote. This analysis is the first to test how party campaigns effects vary according to registration status. The results provide support for Arceneaux et al.'s (2012) aggregate level findings from the US. They are also in accordance with Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009) review of US-based GOTV experiments showing that campaign contact is most effective among those voters closest to their 'indifference threshold' between voting and abstaining in any given election. In this case, the average postal voter was further from their indifference threshold, as evidenced by their very high turnout. Non-postal voters, meanwhile, were typically closer to this threshold. The latter were subsequently more likely to be mobilised by campaign contact. In other words, postal voters were highly likely to turnout anyway, meaning the effect of party campaign contact was minimal. Similarly, we can interpret the findings in the context of a 'ceiling effect' in the mobilisation effect of contact among postal voters. Postal voters, after all, turn out at rates of 70 - 85% in Britain already (Rallings and Thrasher, 2014; 2015). In this experiment, the turnout of individuals living in households containing postal voters was similarly high. If participation rates of postal voters are already very high, it follows that any potential mobilising effects that might come from additional campaign contact would meet a 'ceiling'.

The findings are also in line with effect sizes from other GOTV experiments conducted in low/mid-turnout elections. Green and Gerber's (2015) meta-analysis finds that the average

CACE of canvassing is highest when the underlying turnout rate is between 30% and 50% (6.2 points). When turnout is lower or higher than this, the effect of canvassing diminishes (<30% = 4.6 points, 50-70% = 1.4 points, 70%+ = 0.6 points). The results of this experiment are in line with these findings, showing effects of around 4 percentage points at a low/mid-turnout election in which the underlying turnout in this area was around 30%.

The findings could have implications for the way party campaigns might choose to distribute their resources. Campaigns generally consist of two periods. During the long campaign, campaigns aim to persuade and socialise voters, while during the short campaign, they focus on mobilisation (Johnston et a., 2013). If a ceiling effect exists among postal voters, parties may want to focus their mobilisation efforts on non-postal voters and persuasion towards postal voters who are highly likely to turnout regardless. The characteristics of postal voters and their behaviour during campaigns merit future research.[18] Especially as they represent a significant and growing proportion of votes cast at local and general elections, rising from 2.3% of all the votes cast at the 1997 general election to 16.4% in 2015 (Rallings and Thrasher, 2015). In some parliamentary constituencies, over 50% of votes are now cast by post (Cracknell, 2014). The research design presented in this chapter therefore provides a useful template for future experiments to compare effects between postal and non-postal voters.

4.4.3 Limitations

There are, however, limitations to the main findings in this study. First, the limited sample size meant it might have been difficult for my experiment to identify significant differences in

[18] A demographic comparison of the postal voter households subsample with the full sample and the non-postal voter subsample is presented in the Appendix (Table A7).

effects across different treatment groups. Among postal voters, for example, only around 500 individuals could be assigned to each of the treatment groups, while only 269 individuals formed the control group. These numbers limit the statistical power needed to detect fairly small treatment effects. Secondly, the experiment has external validity issues that draw into question the extent to which the findings are generalisable. As the experiment was conducted with the Liberal Democrats, in a relatively pro-Conservative area, it may be that the results underplay the potential effects of partisan campaigns in more politically favourable areas. Indeed, there is observational evidence that the impact of electoral campaigns can be conditioned by the popularity of the party itself (Fisher et al., 2018). Similarly, it is not clear whether the findings would generalise to less rural, or more competitive electoral areas. The election itself was a low saliency contest, which allowed me to test whether campaign contact increases turnout when the underlying rate of turnout is low but does not examine the role of campaign contact at more salient first order contests such as a general election. The analysis in Chapter 5 presents a test of the downstream effects of the original experiment at a high turnout election but does not test the effects of traditional activities carried out during a high saliency general election.

In opposition to this, however, there is evidence that geographical context does not substantially alter campaign effects detected in GOTV experiments. In their population-based experiment in Britain, Fieldhouse et al. (2014) found that campaign treatment effects did not vary by geographical area and that, to all intents and purposes, effects are uniform. The authors conclude that these findings indicate that effects detected in single-location experiments, such as that conducted in this thesis, can be extended to a range of areas.

There are also limitations on the extent to which the results can speak to the effect of campaigning in other countries. Factors such as the party system, local political campaigning culture, and electoral systems, can all influence campaign effects. Indeed, there is evidence that traditional forms of campaigning are more ingrained in countries with candidate-focused electoral systems (Farrell and Scully, 2007). As a field experiment conducted in the small geographical space of a County Council electoral division, the findings will be strengthened, refined, or challenged through replication in other contexts. In so doing the cumulative scientific knowledge will be advanced.

Secondly, while the findings speak to research into how effects differ according to voters' underlying propensity to vote (i.e. Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009), the limited nature of my measurement of voter propensity means the results provide an imperfect test of this theory. I use postal voter registration (i.e. whether the voter is registered to vote by post or in-person) to indicate high or low propensity voting, respectively. On the surface, this seems a good indicator, as postal voters are far more likely to turn out, reflected in their higher underlying level of turnout. However, there are a number of other factors associated with postal voting that make it a problematic measure of underlying propensity. For instance, it could signal that the decision to vote has been made at an earlier point in time, which would render subsequent contact ineffective. Postal voting might also be correlated with age, as well as poor health, rendering it a messy measure of a voter's underlying propensity to vote. A more preferable measure would be voters' turnout record at previous elections. However, this data was far from complete in the dataset provided by the local party. As such, the conclusions drawn on how contact effects differ among different voters according to their underlying propensity to vote must be treated with caution.

Thirdly, while this thesis focuses on the effect that campaign activities have on turnout, it does not directly measure the effect on vote share. This is an important limitation to acknowledge, as parties are, after all, self-interested and rational actors whose aim is not to increase political participation across the board, but to maximise their own electoral performance. In order to measure the effect of parties' campaign efforts on vote share in an experimental design, individual level vote choice data is needed. Unlike turnout data, data on vote choice is not publicly available at the individual level, meaning it must be inferred from surveys before and after treatment. This requires significant financial means and was subsequently beyond the resources available for this thesis but should not be dismissed in future research.

The third limitation is that this study does not include any digital or e-campaign techniques that are, as I discuss, gradually supplementing traditional activities. Given the multi-level nature of campaigning today, that combines local canvass data with centrally-coordinated analysis of 'big data', this thesis does not test possible synergy effects of several combined forms of campaign contact at once. For instance, the effect of combining a targeted Facebook advert that is coordinated centrally from the party's headquarters with a leaflet delivery and canvass visit from a local activist on the ground. This thesis does not directly test either a) the synergy effect that could result from combining traditional and digital campaign techniques, or b) the impact of micro-targeting campaign contact to specific voters. Nevertheless, the experiments reveal that traditional campaigning can play a vital role when it comes to mobilising voter turnout at local elections.

Chapter 5: Drowned out by the noise? The downstream mobilisation effects of campaigning between local and general elections

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the downstream effects of the party campaign reported in Chapter 4.[19] The field experiments reported in Chapter 4 found that traditional party campaign activities increased turnout at the local elections in May 2017. But did these effects stop there? As Bedolla and Michelson argue, "one of the most important questions regarding voter mobilization is whether its effects endure" (2012: 173). A line of campaign research has focussed on whether the effects of GOTV contact detected in field experiments do indeed have any longitudinal impact on turnout at subsequent elections (Gerber et al., 2003; Cutts et al.,

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2009; Davenport et al., 2010; Bedolla and Michelson, 2012; Fieldhouse et al., 2016). Such studies test whether subjects assigned to receive some form of initial GOTV treatment are not only more likely to vote than the control group at that election but are also more likely to vote than the control group at the next election(s), with no additional treatment being administered. Existing empirical evidence on the durability of campaign treatments (referred to henceforth as 'downstream effects') is mixed, however. Some experiments are shown to have enduring effects on voter turnout (e.g. Gerber et al., 2008; Cutts et al., 2009; Mann, 2010; Panagopoulos, 2010), while the effects of others decay, and at varying rates (e.g. Davenport, 2010; Gerber et al., 2010). Scholars have argued that a 'habit' effect could explain why sudden, artificial shocks to voter turnout have enduring effects on participation (Cutts et al., 2009; Gerber et al., 2009). But there is no consensus on why the effects of some experiments endure, suggesting habit-formation among subjects, while others dissipate.

While this remains something of an open question (Davenport et al., 2010), there is evidence that underlying turnout and saliency of the original and subsequent elections could play a role in determining downstream effects (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009; Davenport et al., 2010). For instance, effects detected in higher saliency elections (e.g. John and Brannan, 2007) have downstream effects at subsequent lower saliency elections (Cutts et al., 2009). Meanwhile, the effects of experiments conducted at lower saliency elections tend to persevere at subsequent lower saliency contests but not at higher saliency elections such as presidential elections (Gerber et al., 2008; Gerber et al., 2010; Davenport, 2010). There is reason to expect, therefore, that if a campaign can boost turnout at a higher saliency election, then effects will persist – but if turnout is mobilised at a lower saliency election, effects will be more likely to decay. But, due to the amount of time between elections, the effect of context and saliency on downstream effects can be muddied with the decay that might solely be down to time passing.

This chapter contributes to the developing literature on how election saliency and underlying propensity to vote condition campaign effects by reporting the results of a pre-registered analysis of the downstream effects from the partisan campaign experiment conducted in the 2017 local elections in the UK to the general election a month later. The chapter provides a new experimental setting in which to test downstream campaign effects. While existing literature suggests there is a relationship between electoral context and the strength (or decay) of downstream effects, it is often difficult to unpick this relationship from simple temporal decay. This study is unique due to the close proximity, but vastly differing saliencies of the two elections – a result of UK Prime Minister Theresa May's decision to call a 'snap' general election. By analysing the same voters over two periods of time, this chapter essentially applies a longitudinal panel design to the original GOTV experiment to track how the initial mobilisation effects endure (Cutts et al., 2009).

The study also represents one of the few downstream analyses to be conducted outside of the US, and the first to examine the downstream effects of partisan campaign treatments in Britain. Given the tendency towards non-partisan, US-based studies in the GOTV literature, we have very few analyses of the downstream effects of partisan campaign contact in differing political contexts. A further contribution of this chapter, therefore, is to provide one of the few downstream analyses to be conducted outside of the US, and the first to examine the downstream effects of partisan campaign treatments in Britain.

The initial experiment, reported in Chapter 4, was conducted in a lower saliency local election in which underlying turnout in the area was 37%. This chapter tests whether these effects persist at the high saliency general election that took place only a month after the original

experiment, and in which underlying turnout in the experimental location was 78%. The close proximity but vastly differing underlying rates of turnout between these two elections provides an opportunity to test whether downstream effects carry from a low to a high saliency election.

In this chapter, I first discuss findings of other downstream GOTV studies and the theoretical expectations regarding why we might expect turnout effects to persist over time. Analyses of the downstream turnout effects of GOTV experiments are rarer than GOTV experiments themselves, and, like the literature as a whole, are overwhelmingly US-based. Nevertheless, these studies provide a useful guide as to why we might expect turnout effects of campaign contact to linger at subsequent elections. These studies show that effects at one election often continue at subsequent elections, decaying over time. I then discuss the theoretical expectations and hypotheses regarding the downstream analysis of effects from the experiment in conducted during the May 2017 local election to the high saliency general election in June 2017.

I outline the research design of my downstream analysis. This includes describing the setting of the June general election, and how it differed from the May local elections in which the original experiment was conducted. I also present analysis of the rate of attrition in terms of the experimental subjects between May and June, and re-conduct balance tests to verify that the rates of attrition did not vary significantly between control and treatment groups. I then analyse whether the turnout effects detected in May continued in June, and discuss what the findings mean with regards to the thesis' central research question.

5.2 Explaining Downstream Effects

5.2.1 Summary of Downstream Studies

GOTV experiments show that different campaign activities have various effects on voter turnout (Green and Gerber, 2015). In the experiment reported in Chapter 4, I find comparatively strong party leaflet effects, and a weak additive effect of canvassing. But there have been calls to analyse the longitudinal effects of GOTV experiments, which can be valuable to campaigners and practitioners, but also for our understanding of voter behaviour (Green and Gerber, 2002). A body of literature in the US has begun to analyse the downstream effects of GOTV experiments. By analysing the turnout records of experimental subjects at elections following the initial study, scholars have indeed found evidence that mobilisation effects do not stop at the election at which the treatments were carried out. Randomly assigned treatment that boosts turnout in one election can also boost turnout in following elections.

In one of the first studies to test potential downstream effects, Gerber et al. (2003) found that those mobilised to vote as a result of non-partisan canvass visits and direct mail in the 1998 midterm elections were also more likely to vote in local elections a year later. In their original 1998 experiment, they detected an intent-to-treat (ITT) effect of canvass visits of 3 percentage points (i.e. those assigned to receive a canvass visit turned out to vote at a rate that was 3 percentage points higher than the control group). At the election in 1999, those previously assigned to receive a canvass visit a year earlier still turned out at a rate of 1.1 percentage points higher than the original control group. Meanwhile, those who received several pieces of direct mail in 1998 were also more likely to vote in 1999. In the original experiment, the ITT effect of one piece of direct mail was -0.8 percentage points, but the effect of two pieces was 0.5 percentage points, and of three pieces 1.5 percentage points. In 1999, the ITT effects of those

who received two or three pieces of mail were 0.1 points and 1.9 points, respectively. Taking the effects of both treatments together, the original ITT effect of 1.8 percentage points was 1 percentage points a year later. These results showed that the original 1998 treatments had an enduring – though reduced – effect on voter turnout at the subsequent election.

Other studies also find that while turnout effects reduce as time goes on, there is still a positive impact at subsequent elections (Bedolla and Michelson, 2012). In their study, Hill and Kouser (2015) mobilised turnout at primary elections in California using a series of letters. They find that some voters exposed to treatment in the primary election were more likely to vote in the subsequent general election as well. Negative influences on turnout detected in aggregate level studies have also been found to have lasting impact. Atikinson and Fowler (2014) find that when certain festivals in Mexico reduce turnout at one election, turnout is also reduced at subsequent elections. In the only published UK-based downstream study, Cutts et al. (2009) analyse a GOTV experiment that was conducted in Manchester at the 2005 general election by John and Brannan (2007). The original treatments carried out by John and Brannan had strong effects on turnout, in line with those detected in US GOTV studies (Green and Gerber, 2015). The ITT of canvassing was 3.6 percentage points, and 3.5 points for telephone calls. After matching the electoral records of the same individuals at the local elections a year later, Cutts et al. found that turnout in the original canvassing treatment group was still 1.6 percentage points higher than that of the control group. The telephone group, meanwhile, still voted at a rate of 2.9 percentage points higher than the original control group. While the effects of treatment in 2005 on turnout in 2006 was of borderline statistical significance, the results showed evidence of an enduring effect of campaign contact on turnout.

5.2.2 Theorising Downstream Effects

Why do effects persist at all? Firstly, habit-formation and socialisation-based research gives reason to anticipate that downstream effects will be detected (Gerber et al., 2003). The theory goes that "if two people whose psychological propensities to vote" are the same, but one decides to vote at one election while the other does not, that behaviour "alters their likelihood of voting in the next election" (Green et al., 2003: 542). If all other factors affecting one's likelihood of voting are held constant voting at one election increases the likelihood of voting at the next election. The precise mechanism for this is unclear. One explanation rests on the idea that voters are more likely to be targeted by political campaigns at future elections, which tend to target voters rather than non-voters. However, Rogers et al. (2017) found no evidence that those mobilised to vote as a result of their 2012 social pressure mailing in the US were then more likely to be targeted by campaign contact at the subsequent general election.

An alternative mechanism could be that voting reinforces someone's belief that they are an engaged, civic-minded individual (Cutts et al., 2009). In other words, they think of themselves as voters (Bryan et al., 2011). If individuals possess an underlying predisposition to vote, voting at one election renews this belief, which eventually becomes embedded over time. Another perspective is that voting at one election reduces the cost of voting. As someone casts a ballot in an election, they gain knowledge about the voting process – e.g. the location of the polling station and how to cast a ballot – that they remember for future elections. Experimental and observational research supports this (Green and Shachar, 2000), as previous turnout is a strong predictor of current propensity to vote. If an external campaign stimulant artificially raises turnout at one election, these mechanisms are activated and we would expect there to be a lasting effect on turnout. In all, there are numerous mechanisms that underpin a socialisation-based approach to anticipating downstream turnout effects.

While there is evidence supporting the habit-formation mechanism, it is not yet clear why downstream effects persist in some contexts, but not in others. Indeed, while studies show that downstream effects often exist, under what circumstances are the initial effects are most likely to persist, and when they are more likely to dissipate? At present there is no consensus regarding this puzzle, but existing evidence on downstream effects suggests saliency and election type could explain the varying rates of effect decay between elections.

Scholars have recently drawn attention to the role that saliency plays in determining campaign effects. Most notably, Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009) suggest that contextual factors such as saliency/underlying turnout and individual factors such as voters' own propensity to vote play a key role in explaining initial campaign effects. In short, Arceneaux and Nickerson argue that campaigns mainly mobilise voters who are close to their indifference threshold between voting and abstaining, but that where this threshold lies is a function of the saliency of the election.[20] We might, therefore, anticipate that while campaigns are likely to mobilise voters in a lower saliency contest, the likelihood of such effects persevering at subsequent high saliency elections are less likely. This is supported by Coppock and Green's analysis of downstream effects in the US, which finds that "downstream effects are more likely to persist in "like" elections…less so in other types of elections" (2016: 1060).

[20] To test Arceneaux and Nickerson's theory in the context of downstream effects, information on voters' underlying propensity to vote, as well as on overall election saliency and turnout would be required. However, there are insufficient numbers of existing downstream studies that report underlying propensity of voters, as most studies tend to report saliency and levels of turnout in control and treatment groups.

We might expect, for instance, that if the saliency of the election changes dramatically enough (between the original experiment and subsequent elections), the underlying turnout serves as a 'rising tide' that simply washes away differences between control and treatment groups. In other words, if the saliency rises substantially, the rising tide of turnout between the elections could serve to simply 'lift all boats' such that the turnout of those in the control group 'catches up' with those in the treatment group(s) who were originally mobilised. Rising, or falling, evidence suggests that saliency serves as a great leveller, wherein relatively small differences in turnout between control and treatment groups (of, say a few percentage points, as per most GOTV effects) are equalised (Coppock and Green, 2016). Meanwhile, downstream effects could be more likely between elections of similar saliency and underlying levels of turnout.

Evidence from recent downstream studies that have been conducted can be considered in terms of the saliency of the elections and their sequence. Table 5.1 presents turnout in the control and treatment groups in the original election in which the experiment was conducted, as well as at subsequent elections for which data is available. The table also reports the sequence of elections between the original and subsequent contests in terms of saliency/underlying turnout. Unfortunately, downstream effects are not frequently reported, rendering the list rather short. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that when turnout is mobilised at lower or higher saliency contests, effects are more likely to persist at subsequent lower saliency contests than at higher saliency elections (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Summary of Saliency and Downstream Effects in Existing Studies (Davenport et al., 2010; Cutts et al., 2009; Hill and Kousser, 2015)

	Election Date	Control Group Turnout	ITT Effects of Treatment(s)				Avg. of ITTs	Saliency Sequence
Gerber et al., 2008	Aug-06	29.7	1.8	2.5	4.8	8.1	4.3	Original election
	Nov-06	84.5	-0.02	0.1	0.3	1	0.3	Low-High
	Jan-08	34.8	0.3	0.3	0.6	1.2	0.6	Low-Low
	Aug-08	31.7	-0.2	0.3	0.8	1	0.5	Low-Low
	Nov-08	81.1	-0.4	-0.1	-0.1	0	-0.2	Low-High
Gerber, 2010b	Nov-07	27.7	1.4	4.9	4.5		3.6	Original election
	Jan-08	32.8	0.2	1.9	1.2		1.1	Low-Low
	Aug-08	28.1	0.7	1	0.5		0.7	Low-Low
	Nov-08	77.6	-0.4	-0.1	0.3		-0.1	Low-High
Panagopoulos, 2010 - Ely, IA	Nov-07	15.6	6.3				6.3	Original election
	Jun-08	6.1	1.9				1.9	Low-Low
	Sep-08	5.4	-0.7				-0.7	Low-Low
	Nov-08	44.7	1.4				1.4	Low-High
Panagopoulos, 2010 - Monticello, IA	Nov-07	30.9	4.5				4.5	Original election
	Jun-08	10.8	-0.4				-0.4	Low-Low
	Sep-08	10.9	-0.3				-0.3	Low-Low
	Nov-08	67.9	4.1				4.1	Low-High
Panagopoulos, 2010 - Holland, MI	Nov-07	24.4	0.8				0.8	Original election
	Aug-08	11.1	0.1				0.1	Low-Low
	Nov-08	59.4	-0.4				-0.4	Low-High
Davenport, 2010	Nov-07	9.6	4.1	5.7			4.9	Original election
	Feb-08	26.6	3.6	5.6			4.6	Very Low-Low
	Sep-08	14.8	-3.9	-3			-3.5	Very Low-Very Low
	Nov-08	55.3	-6.5	-0.4			-3.5	Very Low-High
John and Brannan, 2007/Cutts et al., 2009	May-05	51.5	3.5	3.6			3.6	Original election
	May-06	29.8	1.6	3.4			2.5	High-Low
Hill and Kousser, 2015	June-14	9.3	9.8				0.5	Original election
	Nov-14	27.4	27.4				0	Low-High

At one end of the scale, in their review of Panagopoulos' (2010a) experiment, Davenport et al. (2010) found that an initial 4.5 percentage point effect detected in Iowa in 2007 translated into a 4.1 percentage point effect in 2008. In contrast, the initial effects ranging from 1.4 to 4.9 points detected by Gerber et al.'s (2010) experiment, and the 5.7 percentage points detected by Davenport (2010), virtually disappeared at subsequent elections. Davenport et al. (2010) find that the effects of Gerber et al.'s (2008) experiment during the August 2006 primaries in Michigan persisted at the November 2006 midterms, the January 2008 primaries, and the August 2008 primaries, but not at the 2008 presidential election in which underlying turnout was around 50 percentage points higher. Similarly, the initial effects ranging from 1.4 to 4.9 points detected by Gerber et al.'s (2010) experiments during the November 2007 midterms, persisted at the January 2008 primaries but disappeared at the 2008 presidential election. The effects of Davenport's (2010) study at the 2007 municipal elections likewise continue several months later at the 2008 primaries, but not at the 2008 presidential election. Finally, in a supplementary analysis Hill and Kouser (2015) also find that letters that mobilised turnout in the 2014 primary elections had no downstream effects at the November presidential.

This pattern is not clear cut, however. Davenport et al., (2010) note that some studies conducted in lower saliency contests had strong downstream effects across higher and lower saliency elections (e.g. Mann, 2010; Panagopoulos, 2010). However, even in the case of Panagopoulos' (2010) series of experiments at municipal elections in 2007, strong downstream effects at the 2008 presidential election were only detected in the area that had the highest underlying level of turnout in the original election – 31% in Monticello, Iowa.

While saliency is likely to be a factor, we would also expect effects to decay naturally over time regardless of context. But it is difficult to separate the natural decaying effect of time from

the role played by the saliency patterns of the elections. For instance, while effects might decay from a lower turnout election to a higher turnout election a year later, the notion that this is related to the differing saliency of the elections is undermined by the fact that a year passes between the contests. In other words, would the downstream effects persist if an election of the same saliency was held much sooner after the original election? This chapter tests for downstream effects by exploiting an unusual situation in which the time between elections is very small, while the saliency differs significantly. To test for potential downstream effects from a low saliency election to a high saliency election, I examine the downstream effects of a partisan experiment conducted in the UK local elections in 2017. I exploit the timing of the 'snap' general election called by Prime Minister Theresa May for June 2017 and analyse the turnout records of the same voters involved in the original election experiment, to test whether the initial effects persisted a month later.[21]

In this chapter, I test the downstream effects from a low saliency election to high saliency election. Given the close proximity of the elections, one might expect strong downstream effects. However, at a low salience election such as the local election in which the original experiment was conducted, underlying turnout was 35.4%. In this contest, according to Arceneaux and Nickerson's threshold of indifference framework, many voters were close to their indifference threshold between voting and abstaining. As such, campaign contact provided the 'nudge' to tip them over the threshold into voting. But at a high salience, high turnout election such as the June UK general election, those who were close to their

[21]Figure A1 in the Appendix shows the location of Thedwastre North within Suffolk County Council, and Table A1 shows the result from the previous local election in 2013.

indifference threshold at the local election would now be further away from their indifference threshold and more likely to vote. Participation at general elections is much higher, meaning fewer of these voters are close to their indifference threshold. As such, we would expect the effects of the original campaign contact to dissipate.

I find that the initial campaign effects detected at a low saliency election rapidly disappear at the subsequent high saliency election. While both treatments – the leaflet, and the leaflet/canvass combination – increased turnout in the original experiment in May, neither had a statistically significant impact on voter turnout in the high saliency contest a month later. The limited sample size involved with the experiment makes it difficult to reliably detect effects smaller than 1 or 2 percentage points, such as we might expect based on previous studies of over-time effects of GOTV treatments. Nevertheless, the fact that the considerable turnout effects detected in the original election virtually disappeared only a month later presents evidence that party campaign contact has a more important effect on turnout when the underlying propensity to vote is low.

5.3 Research Design

5.3.1 Measuring Downstream Effects

On 18th April 2017, just over a fortnight before the May local elections, UK Prime Minister Theresa May announced her intention to hold a 'snap' general election, 3 years earlier than the next regularly scheduled election in 2020. The calling of an early general election had long been the prerogative of the Prime Minister, but was limited by the Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011, which required a two-thirds majority of MPs to vote to dissolve parliament and thus trigger an election. On 19th April parliament supported the move, and the election was

subsequently held on 8th June 2017. Theresa May's decision came largely as a surprise, but was taken in light of strong opinion polls for her Conservative Party (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2018). Despite the 'snap' nature of the election, the period between Prime Minister declaring her intention to hold the contest, and the actual election was relatively long (Ibid).

As we might expect in a 'snap' general election, across Britain the intensity of local campaigning was reduced (39% reported being contacted by a party, compared to 52% in 2015 (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2018: 301). However, campaigning at the 2017 election was typical of recent general elections in terms of style – relying heavily on leaflets and letters. In terms of saliency too, there is evidence that the election was broadly similar to typical general elections. For instance, turnout was similar to that of previous contests – 68.7%, compared to 66.4% in 2015 and 65.1% in 2010 – and in line with increases in turnout at recent general elections since 2001. Locally, the Thedwastre North area in which the original experiment was conducted falls within the Bury St Edmunds parliamentary constituency, which tends to experience less intense campaigning due to its status as a 'safe' Conservative seat (BBC, 2017). Turnout in Bury St Edmunds was 70.8%, slightly above that of the national level. Among subjects in the original May experiment specifically, turnout was 77.7%.

That the overall turnout among experimental subjects most than doubled from 35.4% in May to 77.7% in June is indicative of the higher saliency status of the general election. Indeed, general elections are considered the UK's only regular first order contest (Reif, 1984). The increased turnout and the close temporal proximity of the May and June elections – separated by just 35 days – provides an interesting test for downstream effects. From one perspective, the proximity of the second election to the first election suggests effects should persist. But if downstream effects are influenced by underlying turnout – specifically, by much increased

underlying turnout, then we would expect the original effects to decay. Would we expect downstream effects to differ between postal voters and non-postal voters? We might anticipate that the latter would be more likely to exhibit downstream effects as they were mobilised by the original experiment. Treatment effects among postal voters, meanwhile, suffered from an apparent "ceiling effect" wherein their high underlying rate of turnout meant that further increases were unlikely (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009).

I analyse the turnout records of the same voters involved in the original election experiment, to test whether the initial effects persisted a month later. The June marked registers covered the same polling districts that comprise the location of the original experiment – Thedwastre North Electoral Division. These records were coded and then individually matched to the original experiment records. The result was a dataset containing the June turnout records of the subjects in the original experiment. To measure the downstream effects, I follow the same method used by Roger et al. (2017) and Davenport et al. (2010), namely, to compare the turnout rates between the original control and treatment groups at a subsequent election by running a regression of turnout on assignment to treatment condition prior to the original experiment. This analysis was pre-registered in advance of receiving the results.[22]

The setting of this downstream analysis differs from Cutts et al.'s study in an important way that is worthy of mention. This analysis aims to detect the downstream effects of treatments at a local election on turnout at a general election, unlike Cutts et al.'s study, which analysed the reverse. It should be acknowledged that the two are very different elections in Britain. General

[22] Study was pre-registered with EGAP (the details of the pre-registration and the pre-analysis plan can be found here: http://egap.org/registration/2936).

elections in Britain are a first order contest (Reif, 1984), and turnout is far higher than at local elections. As the original experiment showed that campaign contact mobilises voters less inclined to turnout, this stimulus is likely to be weaker at an election in which the incentive to vote among these same voters is much higher.

5.3.2 Limitations

It is worth noting that measuring the downstream effects of the original treatments is not without potential limitations. Firstly, there is a chance that confounding variables can affect the results. However, we would anticipate that any factors that affect turnout would affect both treatment and control groups equally due to the random nature of assignment prior to the May election. In essence, such factors are contained in the error term. This holds for calculating the difference in turnout between control and treatment groups in June. While the overall level of interest in the election (and, therefore, turnout) is higher in June, due to the randomisation process, this should, in theory, affect treatment and control groups equally. My use of controls in determining the May and June effects also helps to reduce possible confounding variables.

A second limitation is the possibility that the mobilisation effect detected in May results in the treatment group being disproportionately more likely to be contacted by the local campaigns of other political parties. This would mean, as Rogers et al. note, "some or all of the habit effect is attributable to the extra attention that … voters received in the run up to the (subsequent) election" (2017: 92). In other words, any turnout effect detected in June could simply be the result of other party campaign contact, and not of lingering downstream effects resulting from the Lib Dem campaign in May. Logically, there seems a strong likelihood that other parties might target the 'new' voters who participated as a result of the Lib Dem campaign contact in

May. After all, campaigns tend to target voters rather than non-voters. Empirical evidence on this phenomenon, however, suggests that treatment subjects are no more likely to be contacted by other campaigns following a successful GOTV experiment. In their study, Rogers et al. (2017) examined whether subjects assigned to the treatment group following a successful GOTV campaign in June 2012 were then more likely to be contacted months later by the US presidential campaigns in October-November 2012. Using data from the Obama campaign and several other nonpartisan sources, they found no evidence that those mobilised to vote as a result of their June 2012 social pressure mailing were then more likely to be targeted by other campaigns at the subsequent general election. While this represents only one instance in the US, the fact that increased turnout in their original experiment did not lead to increased contact in the treatment group from a "subsequent, analytically sophisticated" campaign is evidence against this particular limitation. Indeed, while it cannot be ruled out that increased turnout in May led other campaigns to target the treatment group in June, it seems unlikely that the local Lib Dem, Conservative, Labour, or Green campaigns – in an uncompetitive constituency – would have matched the overall effort or targeting sophistication of the 2012 US presidential election campaigns in Wisconsin.

5.3.3 Attrition and Balance Checks

The final potential limitation is related to the longitudinal nature of this analysis. Namely, that the possibility of attrition can impact the experimental sample. As such, it is necessary to examine if there has been any attrition in the sample of voters between the May and June elections. We might expect a proportion of subjects from the experiment to fall off the electoral register between May and June due to ineligibility, deaths, or simply moving away from the area. However, given the short space of time between the May local election, and the June

general election, the rate of attrition was relatively low. After the marked electoral registers were checked after the June general election, 253 voters from the original sample of 6,525 voters could not be found. Following the June general election, the overall sample size therefore fell from 6,525 to 6,272, representing a total attrition rate of 3.9%. Furthermore, the rate of attrition between the treatment and control groups are broadly similar. The rates of attrition in each experimental component, and each treatment/control group separately are presented in the table below.

Table 5.1. Rates of Attrition in Treatment and Control Groups

Assigned Group		Attrition Rate
Full Sample		*3.9%*
Non-Postal Voter Groups		*3.3%*
	Control	2.7%
	Leaflet	3.8%
	Leaflet + Canvass	4.4%
Postal Voter Groups		*6.1%*
	Control	4.5%
	Leaflet	6.7%
	Leaflet + Canvass	6.4%

We can examine whether, following attrition between May and June, the balance of pre-treatment covariates between assignment groups differs substantially. Randomisation ensures that observable and unobservable characteristics of the experimental subjects should be balanced between treatment and control groups (Gerber and Green, 2012). However, given that there are small differences in the rates of attrition between the assignment groups, we can check again for balance between pre-treatment covariates among those subjects for whom data is available in June. Table 5.2 presents the balance of available individual-level characteristics across the treatment and control groups. This data was obtained through the local Liberal

Democrats' voter ID database. As Table 5.2 shows, the covariates do not vary appreciably between assignment groups. To verify the randomisation statistically, I follow the procedure outlined by Gerber and Green to test whether imbalances are larger than one would expect from chance alone (2012: 109). I run a multinomial logistic regression model to test whether assignment to treatment groups is significantly related to available individual-level covariate data. The results are reported in Section A5 in the Appendix and show that the covariates do not significantly predict assignment to treatment conditions, increasing confidence that attrition did not affect the initial randomisation process. The pre-treatment covariate data is also used in the subsequent analysis, as per the pre-registration and pre-analysis plan, and includes sex, party support based on previous canvass analysis, ward, previous turnout, and age group.

Table 5.2. Balance of Pre-Treatment Covariates between Assignment Groups, % (n)

	Postal Voter Households			Non-Postal Voter Households		
	Control	Leaflet Only	Canvass + Leaflet	Control	Leaflet Only	Canvass + Leaflet
Lib Dem	7.4 (19)	8.3 (42)	7.1 (34)	11.3 (326)	11.1 (121)	10.4 (109)
Women	50.2 (129)	52.7 (266)	54.4 (262)	51.4 (1,485)	50.7 (554)	50.8 (532)
Voted '09	49.8 (128)	46.9 (237)	46.5 (224)	25.9 (747)	23.9 (261)	24.3 (254)
Age 60+	8.2 (21)	10.5 (53)	7.5 (36)	7.8 (226)	7 (76)	7.8 (82)
Age 35-59	4.3 (11)	2.8 (14)	2.5 (12)	2.7 (77)	2.4 (26)	2.2 (23)
Age Under 35	8.2 (21)	7.1 (36)	8.3 (40)	7.9 (227)	8.8 (96)	5.6 (59)

Voted in 2009: most recent turnout data available in Thedwastre North. While more recent turnout data would be preferable, it is the balance between the groups that is crucial.

5.4 Results

Table 5.1 presents descriptive information about the turnout rates of subjects in both experiments. Namely, how the rate of turnout in June differs between those who voted in May and those who did not. The June turnout data was gathered in the same way as the May turnout data. The local party obtained the official turnout records from the local authority, which were then made available and matched to the experimental records. Unexpectedly, voting in May is strongly associated with voting in June. While 77.7% of subjects voted in the June general election, turnout was higher among those who had previously voted in May (97.3%) compared to those who had not (66.6%). This is in line with existing research that shows previous turnout is a strong predictor of turnout (Green and Shachar, 2000).

Table 5.1 Turnout Rates in June, by Turnout Rates in May

	Voted in May	**Did not vote in May**	**Total**
Voted in June	97.3%	66.6%	77.7%
	(2,199)	(2,673)	(4,872)
Did not vote in June	2.7%	33.4%	22.3%
	(62)	(1,338)	(1,400)

To calculate the longitudinal impact of an initially-successful campaign experiment, the difference in turnout between the control and treatment groups among the same voters needs to be compared. As Bedolla and Michelson (2012: 179) explain, if an initial experiment detected a difference in turnout between control and treatment groups of 10 percentage points, and at the next election the difference between the same voters was 5 percentage points, "half of the treatment effect persisted into the next election". In order to allow comparison with the May 2017 experiment, the same estimator that was used to determine the results of the original experiment in Chapter 4 is used to detect possible downstream effects in June. In both cases, the estimator used was a multivariate linear regression of turnout on assigned treatment, which controlled for pre-treatment covariates that were available from the local party voter database

(sex, party support (based on previous canvass analysis), ward, postal voter registration, previous turnout, and age group). Did the effects of Lib Dem campaign contact in May endure at the general election in June? Table 5.3 presents the Intent-To-Treat (ITT) effects on turnout, with the left half showing ITT effects in May, and the right half showing ITT effects in June to allow comparison.

Table 5.3. Intent-To-Treat (ITT) effects of treatment in May and in June (Covariate-Adjusted)

	May ITT			June ITT			
	Both Treatment Groups Combined	Leaflet	Canvass + Leaflet	Both Treatment Groups Combined	Leaflet	Canvass + Leaflet	*N (June)*
Full Sample	**3.6*** **(1.5)**	2.8 (1.8)	**4.5*** **(1.8)**	-0.2 (1.4)	-0.9 (1.7)	0.5 (1.6)	*6,272*
Non-Postal Voting	**4.6**** **(1.6)**	**4.3*** **(2.0)**	**4.9*** **(2.0)**	-0.3 (1.6)	-1 (2.0)	0.4 (2.0)	*5,028*
Postal Voting	-2.6 (3.9)	-4.8 (4.3)	-0.3 (4.3)	0.5 (1.9)	-0.1 (2.3)	1.2 (2.1)	*1,244*

Robust standard errors (in parentheses) clustered on households. All tests two-tailed. *** p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05.

Effect sizes that are statistically significant at conventional levels of at least 95% confidence are highlighted in bold. Looking at the results for the June general elections, we find that across the full sample, those assigned to receive Lib Dem campaign contact in May were slightly less likely to vote in June than the original control group (ITT = -0.2, SE = 1.4). This is despite this group being 3.6 percentage points more likely to vote in May. Turning to the separate treatment groups, the leaflet group was also less likely to turnout than the control group (ITT = -0.9, SE = 1.7). Meanwhile, the canvass/leaflet combination groups were 0.5 percentage points more

likely to vote than the control groups (SE = 1.6). These effects, however, fall short of statistical significance. The pattern is similar in the non-postal voter and postal voter experiments, separately. In both cases, the leaflet group was less likely to vote in June, while the canvass and leaflet combination had a small positive downstream effect, but both fall short of statistical significance.

There is, therefore, weak evidence of any downstream effects of the original treatments. In my analysis, I find that across the full sample the ITT effects fall from 2.8 and 4.5 for leaflets and the canvass/leaflet combination, respectively, to -0.9 and 0.5 in June. The 0.5 percentage point downstream effect of the canvass and leaflet combination is positive, suggesting that there may be some enduring impact of the canvass and leaflet treatment combination. Indeed, we might expect this treatment combination to be the most likely to have an enduring effect, as it was the most powerful treatment in the original experiment. However, the drop off in their effect between May and June is substantial, and with the current sample size it is not possible to reject the null hypothesis of the longitudinal effect being zero.

5.5 Discussion

The aim of this chapter was to examine whether exposure to partisan campaign activities in a low/mid saliency election has downstream effects on turnout at a subsequent high turnout general election. This chapter exploits the timing of the 'snap' UK general election called for June 2017 to examine whether effects persist from a low saliency to a high saliency contest taking place only a month later. In essence, I apply a longitudinal panel design to the original partisan campaign experiment. In so doing, the analysis represents one of the few downstream analyses to be carried out in a non-US context, and the first partisan downstream analysis to be conducted in Britain. The results show that while the traditional campaign activities had strong

effects in boosting turnout at the May 2017 local elections, they quickly dissipated and were ultimately only temporary as the difference in turnout between those in the control and treatment groups was negligible only a month later.

That almost all of the initial mobilisation effects detected in May had decayed by June may, from one perspective, surprise some campaign scholars. Not only because many existing studies have found that around half of the initial mobilisation effect often carries on to the next election (Gerber et al., 2003; Cutts et al., 2009; Panogopoulos, 2010), but because in this study the original experiment was conducted only a month earlier than the subsequent election, leaving little time for subjects to resort to underlying behavioural patterns. Most existing studies seek to capture downstream effects around a year after the initial experiment, when the next regularly scheduled election takes place (Davenport et al., 2010). With the May local election and the June general only a month apart, the rate of decay in the effect of the original campaign contact is one of the fastest detected (e.g. Gerber et al., 2010; Davenport, 2010). While the initial mobilisation effect was relatively strong, it lasted only a month.

However, the findings are in line with existing evidence from elsewhere that downstream effects tend to be more likely between "like" elections (Green and Coppock, 2016), rather than between low and high saliency contests (Davenport et al., 2010). The results speak to Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009) research in that they show that the context and saliency of elections plays a key role in determining campaign effects. Indeed, many experiments show that campaign effects are strongest when the underlying turnout at the election is lower – and vice versa (Green and Gerber, 2015). While turnout in the original May experiment was 35.4%, at the June general election it was 77.7%. Arceneaux and Nickerson (2009) show that the effect of campaign contact is a function of how close an individual is to their 'threshold of

indifference' between voting and abstaining. This chapter suggests that turnout effects were detected in the former as many voters were close to this threshold. At the latter, however, those who were formerly close to this threshold were much further away due to the higher saliency of the June election, hastening the decay of the original effects.

Indeed, many experiments show that campaign effects are strongest when the underlying turnout at the election is lower. For example, in their meta-analysis, Green and Gerber (2015) find that the average effect (i.e. the CACE) of canvassing is 4.6 percentage-points when the turnout rate among the control group is under 30%. For studies in which the turnout rate in the control group was between 30% and 50%, the CACE is 6.2. This then diminishes as the turnout rate among the control group increases (50-70% = 1.4, 70%+ = 0.6). In other words, based on existing experiments canvassing is most effective at mobilising voters during mid-turnout elections, when the turnout rate for those not assigned to treatment is between 30% and 50%.

This chapter does not directly test Arceneaux and Nickerson's threshold of indifference framework. Future research might be able to expand on this framework in greater detail. With detailed information on individual-level past turnout record, future scholars might be able to the test whether effects persist among low and high propensity voters, and across different saliency directions. With limited data coverage on previous turnout, this chapter was not able to explore such factors.

Future research into downstream effects might also test whether other factors contribute to downstream effects, or the lack thereof. For instance, the much-reduced downstream effects in this analysis could have been connected to the partisan nature of the original treatments. The partisan treatments in the May 2017 experiment meant that the stimuli were very specific to

that election, for instance by referring to the local election candidate and issues at stake at that contest. As well as the candidates, the issues at stake generally in the June election were different to those in May. As such, voters may have been less likely to associate the original treatments with the turnout decision at hand at the very different general election. The ability of voters to recall contact from elections to different levels of government could be measured and used to explore the notion that voters associate contact from parties to specific elections. Indeed, other studies that have detected stronger downstream effects followed experiments that made civic duty-based appeals to turnout, which perhaps live longer in recipients' memory. The arguments underpinning civic duty appeals are, for instance, more generalisable to different elections than partisan scripts and literature. It could be that partisan-based prompts to vote are ultimately less likely to endure than appeals that trigger more deeply-held and generally-applied feelings of having a sense of civic duty to vote.

The downstream effects resulting from campaign experiments are worthy of further research. This chapter suggests that the rate of decay in the original effects could be a function of the salience of the subsequent election. However, future research might consider the different contexts in which effects are most likely to persist in order to determine at which elections GOTV campaign reap the most civic rewards. While the traditional campaign activities had strong effects at boosting turnout at the May 2017 local elections, the difference in turnout between those in the control and treatment groups was negligible only a month later. This chapter therefore adds further evidence to the original experiment that shows that campaign effects are strongest when underlying turnout is low.[23]

[23] The data, code, and any additional materials required to replicate all analyses in this article are available at the Journal of Experimental Political Science Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PI2CBB.

Chapter 6: What the voters want: Analysing voters' preferences for campaign contact

6.1 Introduction

The goal of this thesis is to assess the role that party campaign activities play in British politics today. Chapters 4 and 5 presented empirical evidence on the role that traditional activities play

with regards to mobilising voters and increasing turnout. The campaign experiment presented in Chapter 4 showed that leaflets and canvass visits both positively affected voter turnout at a low/mid-saliency, local election, though effects were concentrated among non-postal voters only. Meanwhile, Chapter 5 showed that while the initial effects were substantial, they rapidly decayed at the high saliency general election only a month later. Combined, these empirical chapters provide evidence that traditional campaign activities can still play a vital role in mobilising voter turnout. This chapter will build on previous chapters by examining – for the first time – the demand for campaign activities among voters themselves, and the extent to which these preferences condition the effect of campaign contact – in other words, do voters want to be contacted by parties, and does this enhance the effect of campaign contact?

Scholarly research often portrays political campaigns as being the vital instruments in providing information to voters about the election, the issues, and the candidates (Trumm, Sudulich, and Townsley, 2017). But research overlooks whether the specific ways through which information is provided to voters are the preferred ways among voters themselves. Why is it worth investigating voters' preferences with regards to how they are contacted by party campaigns?

Firstly, as outlined in Chapter 1, we know that parties themselves are increasingly tailoring their campaign activities and messages to specific voters. Alongside efforts to target contact, and tailor messaging (Fisher and Denver, 2008), parties also now consider which modes of contact would be most suitable for different voters. Modern local campaigns rely on a wide range of activities with which to persuade and mobilise prospective voters. Increasingly, parties aim to use modes that are tailored to specific voters, rather than using the same, staple mode of contact for all. In Britain, the Conservatives, for instance, utilised Facebook in 2015 to target

older voters who used the platform to communicate with their grandchildren (Fisher et al., 2016a). Parties increasingly recognise that in order to successfully engage with the electorate, it is important that voters are contacted in ways that suit them. As Fisher et al. (2016a) discuss in their study into the changing use of campaign activities in Britain, middle-aged voters may be more amenable to communication by email, while younger voters may prefer social media. It could also be the case that older voters place more value on personal interactions such as phone calls or canvass visits, while younger voters may reject such activities as intrusive. While parties increasingly consider such tailoring of campaign modes to different voters, political science research has yet to make inroads into which forms of contact different types of voters prefer, and the extent to which this matters. For parties to target their campaign activities and tailor their messages to specific voter preferences, these preferences must be better understood. Understanding voters' preferences could thus help inform parties in their efforts to target types of campaign contact to specific voters, and better tailor their campaigning to be most effective. Such tailoring of campaign contact would increase efficiency for parties – at a time when the declining number of local activists is a concern.

Secondly, testing the extent to which voters' contact preferences matter to political campaigns contributes to the wider literature on when campaigns matter most. Political scientists have paid considerable attention to the differing effects that different modes of campaign contact have on voter turnout (e.g. Green and Gerber, 2015). Research has also begun to examine when campaigns are most effective in relation to voters' underlying propensity to vote (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009). But, research has yet to examine the extent to which voters' attitudes towards campaign contact might condition campaign effects. Analysing preferences can also reveal the extent to which demand for modes of contact (from voters) exceeds supply (from parties) in the form of contact, or vice versa. Identifying possible 'contact deficits' in particular

campaign modes also contributes towards the thesis' purpose of taking a wide audit of the role of traditional campaigning in Britain.

I find that there is a strong demand for campaign contact among voters, including for traditional activities, but that there is considerable heterogeneity in terms of preferences. Leaflets are the most popular form of campaign contact among respondents – though a similar proportion state a preference for not being contacted at all. There is a substantial demand for canvass visits and emails, albeit this demand is weaker than that for leaflets. Multinomial logistic analysis confirms theoretical expectations that preferences are driven by levels of political interest, but also my hypothesis that previous exposure is also associated with preferences for different campaign modes. But are these preferences important when it comes to the mobilising effect of campaign contact? In the second half of this chapter, I present evidence that preferences do indeed condition the mobilising effect of campaign contact. Namely, contact appears more effective when the recipient wants to be contacted, as opposed to when the recipient does not want to be contacted.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I describe the data from the 2016 Welsh Election Study and the way in which voters' preferences for different campaign modes are measured, before briefly outlining voters' overall preferences. I then outline my broad theoretical expectations regarding what drives these preferences, present the research strategy and variables used to test these expectations, and discuss the results. The second half of this chapter then discusses why we might expect preferences to condition the effect of campaign contact, before outlining the research strategy and discussing the results.

6.2 Measuring Preferences for Campaign Modes

6.2.1 Data

To explore the attitudes of voters towards different campaign activities – and the conditioning effect of these preferences on campaign effectiveness – I analyse the results of the 2016 Welsh Election Study[24]. The survey is based at the University of Cardiff and asks a series of questions of a representative sample of respondents in Wales, UK. Among these includes a survey question asking voters for their preferences when it comes to campaign contact from parties at election time. The question featured in the pre-election wave (Wave 1) of the survey and is presented in Figure 6.1. The survey represents, to the best of my knowledge, the first time that voters have been asked questions on how they want – or do not want – to be contacted by political parties.[25]

[24] The Welsh Election Study 2016 was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The survey comprised of 3 waves (pre-election – March, during the campaign – April, and post-election – May), each consisting of around 3,000 respondents. The sample was internet-based, with fieldwork being carried out by YouGov.

[25] Special thanks go to Professor Roger Scully (University of Cardiff) for helpfully agreeing to requests from Professor Ron Johnston (University of Bristol), Professor David Cutts (University of Birmingham), and myself to add this question to the pre-election wave of the survey.

Figure 6.1: Campaign Contact Preference Question, Welsh Election Study 2016

Please rank in order of preference the three ways you would most prefer to be contacted by a party during an election campaign? (If you prefer not to be contacted, or if you wish to answer Don't Know, please choose that option only).

- *Telephone call*
- *Leaflets*
- *A personal letter delivered to your home*
- *A visit to your home*
- *Contact in the street*
- *Email*
- *Twitter*
- *Facebook*
- *Any other social network*
- *Text Message (SMS)*
- *I prefer not to be contacted by parties during an election campaign*
- *Don't Know*

The limitations of this survey measure should be acknowledged, however. For instance, it is possible that the question suffers from acquiescence bias, whereby the respondent tends to agree or comply with the question. In this case, a potential source of acquiescence bias could be respondents choosing forms of contact when their real preference is 'not to be contacted'. In other words, to acquiesce when answering the question is to indicate a preference for a type of contact. Similarly, a degree of social desirability bias could be at play, whereby voters feel that the socially desirable response is to opt for contact over 'prefer not to be contacted'. While both of these are indeed potential sources of bias, it is unclear if wanting to hear from political parties at election time is particularly socially desirable to the extent that, say, voting is.

A further potential limitation is of ordering effects, whereby respondents opt for options presented first over those presented further down. In this case, ‘no contact’ is presented near the bottom of the list of responses, meaning respondents could be artificially less likely to choose ‘no contact’. On the other hand, both ‘prefer not to be contacted’ and ‘Don’t Know’ are mentioned in the question itself, which could serve to remind respondents of these options. Nevertheless, these are potential sources of bias, meaning the data should be treated with a degree of caution.

The question ran with other election study questions on voting preference, issue attitudes, respondents’ demographics and levels of engagement, etc. This allows us to use the data to test the influence of a number of variables on difference contact preferences. The number of respondents that answered the question on campaign contact preferences is 3,070, representing a sizeable sample size for analysis.

However, it is worth noting that using Wales as a case to reveal the campaign contact preferences of Britain as a whole could be called into question. As a nation of Britain that has its own national assembly and a slightly different party system, it might not be seen as a typical case for the country as a whole. However, there are several reasons why Wales is unlikely to differ substantially from the rest of Britain for the purposes of attitudes towards being contacted by party campaigns. Indeed, on several key measures of political behaviour and attitudes towards politics generally, Wales does not differ substantially from the rest of Britain or the UK.

Firstly, as a basic measure of electoral behaviour, we can compare turnout levels in Wales to those of the rest of the United Kingdom. At the most recent general election, 66.1% of those

registered to vote across the UK actually voted (BBC, 2015). Turnout was 65.6% in Wales, 65.9% in England, 71.1% in Scotland, and 58.1% in Northern Ireland. Turnout in Wales was, therefore, the closest to the UK-wide turnout of all the nations in the United Kingdom, making it broadly representative on this front. Another key attitude that might impact opinions towards parties and campaigns, and one on which it is vital to ensure Wales is relatively representative of the UK, is trust towards politicians in general. On this measure also, attitudes in Wales do not vary significantly from the rest of the UK. According to wave 9 of the British Election Study, conducted in 2016, 19.5% of Welsh respondents report having 'no trust' in MPs. This is broadly similar to the proportions of respondents in England (18.5%) and Scotland (21.3%) reporting having no trust in MPs, and the proportion across all respondents (19%). The fact that Wales has similar turnout levels to the rest of the UK, and similar levels of trust in politicians suggest that respondents in Wales should not fundamentally differ from the rest of the country in their attitudes towards various forms of campaign contact.

Before analysing voters' preferences, we can examine which campaign activities voters in Wales, and in particular in the Welsh Election Study in 2016 were exposed to. In so doing, we can see evidence of the variety of campaign modes used by political parties in Wales. Table 6.1 (below) presents the self-reported contact rates during the 2016 Wales Assembly election campaign. Just over half (51%) of respondents reported being contacted in at least one way by at least one political party during the campaign. By far the most common form of contact was leaflets (36%). Telephone calls (8%), home visits by canvassers (4%), and personal letters (2%) are also reported by voters.

Table 6.1: Self-reported voter contact, 2016

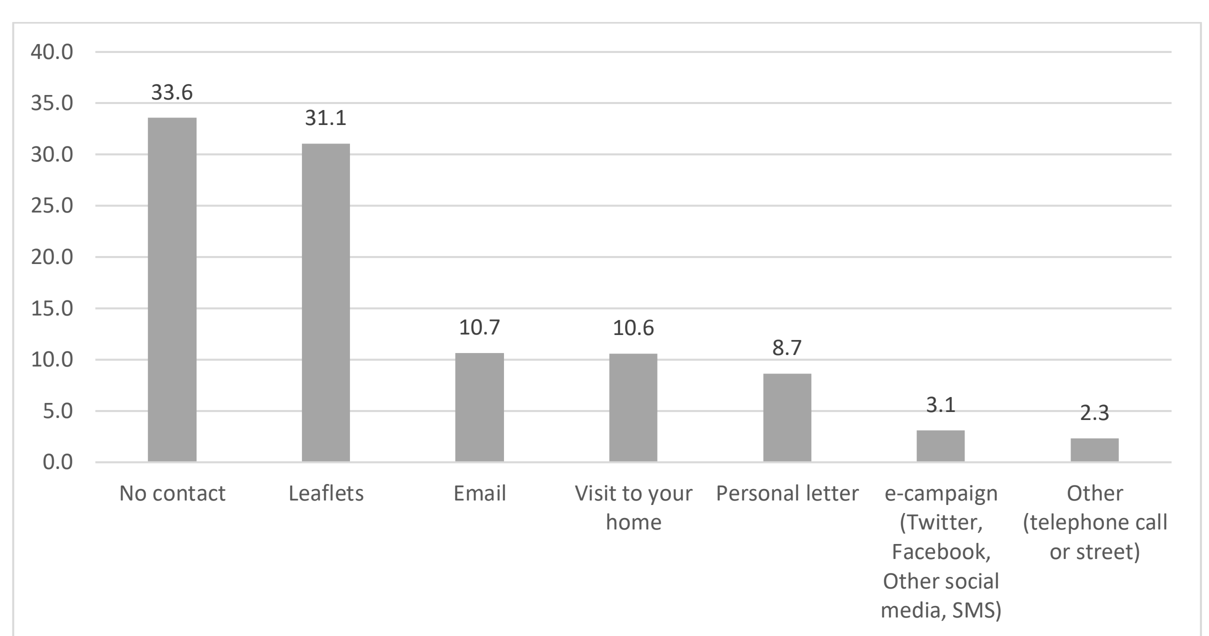
Contact	***N***	***%***

Not contacted	1,504	49.2
Contacted	1,553	50.8
Leaflets	1,106	36.2
Phone call	254	8.3
Home visit	107	3.5
Letter	64	2.1
Email	14	0.5
Can't remember	3	0.1
Street	1	0.03
Twitter	1	0.03
Facebook	1	0.03
Text (SMS)	1	0.03
Other	1	0.03
Other social network	0	0
	3,057	

6.2.2 Preferences Among All Voters

What forms of campaign contact do voters want? Figure 6.2 shows the proportion of respondents who ranked each activity as their most preferred way of being contacted by political parties at election time. A significant portion – 34% – of respondents report not wanting to be contacted by parties at all during an election campaign. This is perhaps unsurprising, as many voters are likely to spurn politics and view contact from political parties as a nuisance. However, the majority of voters expressed a top preference for some form of contact. The survey reveals that there is significant variation in *how* voters want to be contacted. Leaflets are by far the most popular mode of contact – preferred by 31% of respondents. This is followed by email (11%), a visit at home (i.e. canvassing) (11%), and letters (9%). Telephone calls and street visits, as well as e-campaign modes such as text messages (SMS) and social media are the least popular modes of contact.

Figure 6.2: Voters' Preferred Modes of Contact with Political Campaigns



There is, therefore, a strong demand among voters for traditional campaign activities. 31.1% of respondents selected leaflets as their most preferred mode of contact from political parties at election time. Leaflets therefore represent the most popular mode of contact, narrowly behind a preference for no contact at all. Meanwhile, just under 11% of respondents opted for email and doorstep canvassing. Other modes including letters, various forms of e-campaigning (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, SMS), and telephone calls/contact in the street were less popular.

6.3 Explaining Campaign Preferences

6.3.1 Political Interest and 'Mere Exposure'

But what drives these preferences? Why would one respondent prefer not to be contacted, while another opts for a canvass visit, or an email? This section will outline the main theoretical expectations regarding what might drive preferences for different modes of campaign contact (and none). The theoretical discussion falls into two broad approaches. Firstly, I discuss the

role of political interest. In particular, I discuss why we would expect political interest to be a powerful driver of preferences for most forms of contact over no contact. Secondly, I draw upon psychological literature to outline the theory that familiarity is likely to drive preferences for certain forms of contact over others. This process is known in psychological research as the 'mere-exposure' effect, which states that people are more likely to prefer objects to which they have been previously exposed. Following this discussion, I present analysis that provides evidence pertaining to these two theories, before then examining the extent to which such preferences matter, by analysing the conditioning role preferences have on the effects of exposure to campaign contact.

What drives the desire to be contacted by political parties at election time? On the one hand, we would expect a preference for campaign contact to stem from a desire for further information about the election, the candidates, and the issues at stake. From this perspective, those who would welcome further information about the election are likely to be those who are interested in the election, and in politics more widely. It is reasonable, therefore, to anticipate that preferences for contact would be higher among those who are interested in politics generally.

In this sense, preferences for contact can be considered akin to a participatory behaviour, wherein those with higher levels of political interest are more likely to contact politicians generally. Political interest is the extent to which "politics arouses citizens' curiosity" (van Deth, 1990: 278), and "a citizen's willingness to pay attention to political phenomena" (Lupia and Philpot, 2005: 1122). Interest is a strong and consistent predictor of participation, and "one of the most important factors behind political engagement, participation, and other types of political behaviour" (Moeller et al., 2018: 1054). Indeed, a vast body of research bears this out.

Increased levels of political interest have been consistently found to impact highly on one's likelihood of voting (Breckler, 1984; Denny and Doyle, 2008; Hadjar and Beck, 2010; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1948). Levels of political interest are strongly associated with political participation, alongside attitudes towards other political phenomena such as direct democracy (e.g. Schuck and De Vreese, 2015). Politically-interested individuals are also more likely to discuss politics and follow politics closely (Sheerin, 2008).

Given the powerful role that levels of political interest play in predicting other participatory behaviours, it is highly likely that they will also account for whether or not voters want to interact with political campaigns. We would expect more politically-interested individuals to be more likely to want contact from parties at election time, in order to, for example, learn more information about the upcoming election. Meanwhile, less politically-interested individuals will be more inclined to state a preference to not be contacted by their prospective politicians. My first hypothesis (H1), therefore, is that *more politically-interested respondents will prefer all forms of campaign contact to not being contacted.*

However, while political interest is likely to drive preferences for contact as opposed to no contact, why might some respondents opt for certain forms of contact over others? Beyond accounting for preferring contact to no contact, there is no clear rationale for why political interest would explain preferences for email as opposed to leaflets, or canvassing as opposed to telephone calls. In addition to political interest, therefore, we might also expect previous exposure to have some effect in terms of determining which modes of contact people prefer in particular. This second theoretical expectation regarding explaining contact preferences is drawn from social psychology and the study of preference formation.

‘Mere-exposure’ is a psychological mechanism developed by Zajonc (1968) whereby people develop preferences for certain objects or things simply because they are familiar to them. When asked to express preferences, individuals “canvass their memories for information… and use what they find to form preferences” (Druckman and Lupia, 2000: 8). This is known as a memory-based process (Lodge et al., 1990). Druckman and Lupia (2000: 4) note that “the extent to which people hold preferences over types of objects depends on their prior experiences with related objects”. Zajonc (2001) speculates that mere exposure increases familiarity and signals that the stimulus is safe and benign (Kam and Zechmeister, 2013), which in turn leads to favourable preferences being formed.

Broadly speaking, there is strong evidence in support of mere exposure theory beyond the field of psychology. In the area of consumer marketing research, there is evidence supporting mere exposure effect as, generally speaking, consumers are more likely to consider purchasing a brand’s product if they have been previously exposed to the brand (Coates, Butler, and Berry, 2004; 2006; Holden and Vanhuele, 1999). Evidence has also been found in political science in the process of evaluating candidates (Fishbein and Azjen, 1975; Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). In their quasi-experiment Kam and Zechmeister (2013), for instance, test the effect of mere exposure to candidates’ names on their popularity among voters, and find support for mere exposure theory.

A logical expansion of mere exposure theory is that its effects will be stronger in an environment where the subject holds relatively weak prior attitudes to call upon when asked to express a preference. For instance, one can reasonably expect that voters do not hold strong prior attitudes regarding whether they prefer, say, a leaflet or a canvass visit. Applying this theory to the process of developing preferences for different forms of campaign contact

suggests that previous exposure to a particular type of campaigning will be associated with preferences towards it. My second hypothesis (H2), therefore, is that *preferences modes of campaign contact will be higher among those who have previously been exposed to that particular form of contact*.

6.3.2 Data and Method

The empirical analysis that follows is based on data from Waves 1-3 of the 2016 Welsh Election Study. Observations represent individual survey respondents (N = 2,859). The analysis is weighted. The dependent variable – *preferences* – is a nominal variable that measures which form of campaign contact the respondent prefers (including preference for no contact). The potential limitations of this measure have been discussed in the previous section, including potential social desirability bias, acquiesce bias, and potential ordering effects. Respondents chose from a list of 11 options, representing a wide variety of campaign modes as well as an option for 'prefer no contact'. For the purposes of simplicity, similar modes of contact have been grouped for this analysis, thus: No contact, leaflet or letter, canvass visit, email or e-campaign, and other (including telephone call and contact in the street). Due to the categorical nature of the dependent variable, a multinomial logistic regression is used, with preferences for no contact as the base category.

The first main independent variable (*political interest*) is measured with an ordinal indicator that asks respondents how interested they are in politics. The responses run from 1 (Not at all interested) to 4 (Very interested). As political interest serves as a powerful predictor of a range of political behaviours including voting (Breckler 1984; Hadjar and Beck 2010; Lazarsfeld,

Berelson and Gaudet 1948), it is expected that higher levels of political interest will correspond with preferences for most forms of campaign contact (as per H1).

The second independent variable of interest – *previous exposure* – is also categorical. The variable relies on a series of questions asking if, and how, respondents were recently contacted by political parties. As the preferences question was asked in Wave 1, I take respondents' answers to these questions from Wave 1, which asked respondents in March (prior to the election campaign beginning) if and how they had been recently contacted.

In addition to the main independent variables, I control for a series of demographic factors common to political research (Plutzer, 2018), including gender, age, class, employment, and education. While not necessarily predictive of electoral participation (Paxton, Kunovic and Hughes, 2007: 264), *gender* remains a core control variable in political behaviour research (Plutzer, 2018), and is coded dichotomously as Male or Female. *Age*, meanwhile, is an ordinal variable and represents a strong predictor of political participation (Plutzer, 2002; 2018), with younger citizens less likely to participate in elections than older citizens. Due to the decline in traditional campaigning since the 1950s (Fisher and Denver, 2008), we may also anticipate that older people are more likely to have been exposed to activities such as canvassing and leafletting before, and therefore might register a more favourable response to such activities than their younger counterparts. By the same logic, high rates of exposure to the internet and social media among younger respondents might result in higher rates of approval for e-campaigning activities among the young.

In addition, I control for socio-economic factors in the analysis. Socio-economic status, as a general concept, is widely considered to be significantly associated with political activity and

engagement (Verba et al., 1995). Within this, *class* is measured by socio-economic group (ABC1 or C2DE). *Education* is also a strong predictor of participation and civic engagement (Li, Pickles, and Savage, 2005; Plutzer, 2018), and in this analysis is measured by highest qualification attained. Finally, *employment* distinguishes between respondents according to their employment status (including full time, part time, retired, student, and unemployed/not working).

6.3.3 Results

Table 6.2 reports the results of a multinomial logistic regression that models preferences for modes of campaign contact, with preferences for no contact as the base outcome. Coefficients that are at least significant at the 90% level are highlighted in bold for ease of interpretation. As the results are of a multinomial logistic regression model, we should interpret categories with positive coefficients as being more likely to prefer that type of contact compared to the base category of no contact.

Table 6.2: Modelling Preferences for Campaign Contact

Contact Preference	Variable		Coefficient
No Contact	(base outcome)		
Leaflet or Letter	Previous Contact (Base = Not contacted)		
		Leaflet or Letter	0.661***
		Canvass Visit	0.770
		Email or E-Campaign	1.306
		Other	0.013
	Gender (Base = Male)		
		Female	0.518***
	Age (Base = Under 30)		
		30-44	0.250
		45-59	-0.274
		60+	-0.001
	Class (Base = ABC1)		
		C2DE	0.201
	Employment (Base = Full Time)		
		Part Time	0.063

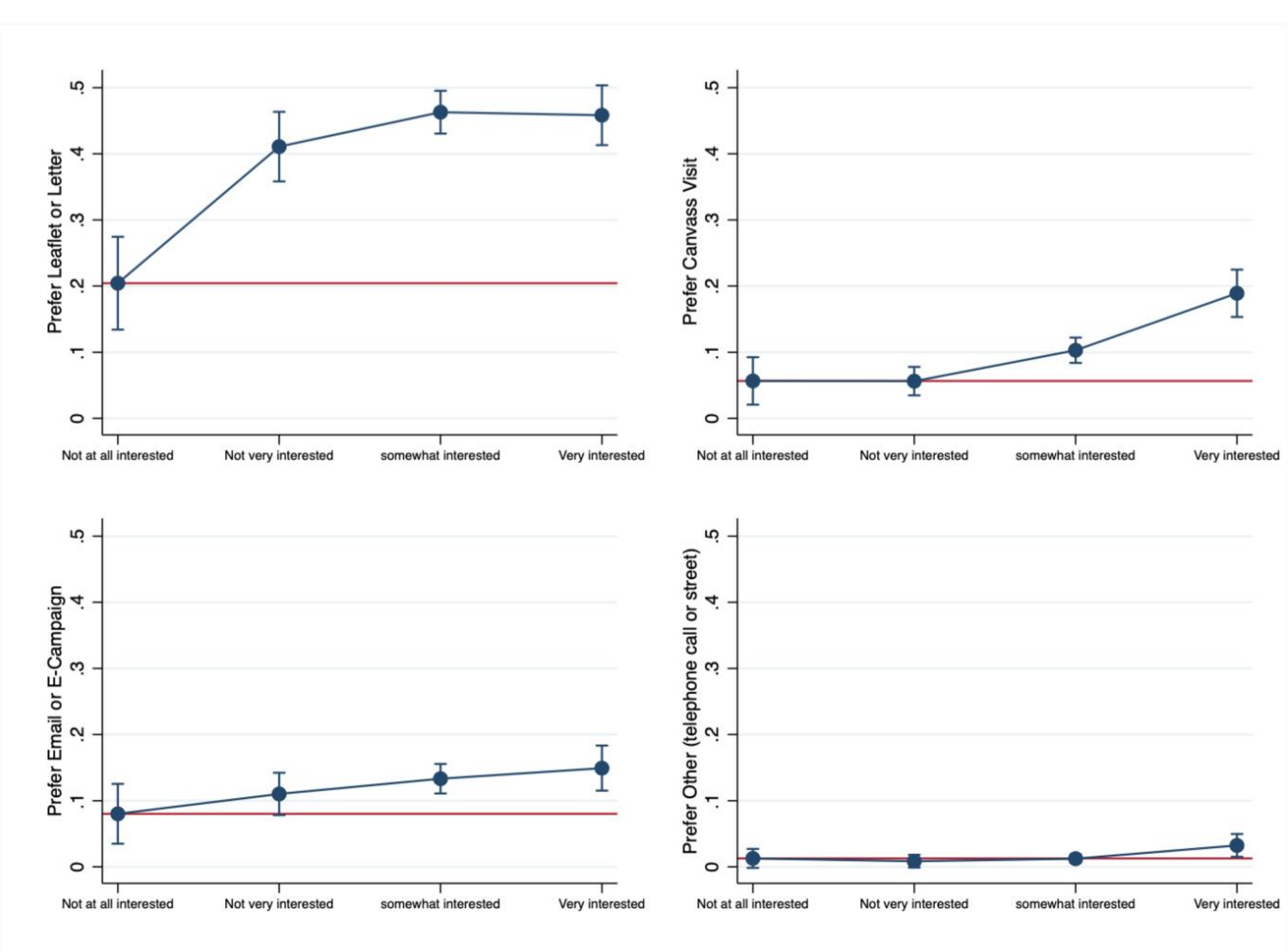
	Student	0.374
	Retired	0.377*
	Unemployed/Not working	0.047
	Education (Base = No Quals)	
	GCSE/Equiv	0.106
	A Level/Equiv	0.264
	University	0.291
	Other Qual	0.228
	Political Interest (Base = Not at all interested)	
	Not very interested	1.143***
	Somewhat interested	1.624***
	Very interested	2.138***
	Constant	-1.961***
Canvass Visit	Previous Contact (Base = Not contacted)	
	Leaflet or Letter	0.778***
	Canvass Visit	2.229***
	Email or E-Campaign	1.856**
	Other	0.727
	Gender (Base = Male)	
	Female	0.162
	Age (Base = Under 30)	
	30-44	0.512
	45-59	-0.010
	60+	0.652
	Class (Base = ABC1)	
	C2DE	0.304*
	Employment (Base = Full Time)	
	Part Time	-0.400
	Student	-0.248
	Retired	0.281
	Unemployed/Not working	-0.654*
	Education (Base = No Quals)	
	GCSE/Equiv	0.106
	A Level/Equiv	-0.114
	University	0.059
	Other Qual	0.143
	Political Interest (Base = Not at all interested)	
	Not very interested	0.438
	Somewhat interested	1.405***
	Very interested	2.535***
	Constant	-3.145***
Email or E-Campaign	Previous Contact (Base = Not contacted)	
	Leaflet or Letter	0.522**
	Canvass Visit	-0.004
	Email or E-Campaign	3.983***
	Other	0.908*
	Gender (Base = Male)	
	Female	-0.058
	Age (Base = Under 30)	
	30-44	0.211
	45-59	-0.835***
	60+	-0.468
	Class (Base = ABC1)	
	C2DE	0.271
	Employment (Base = Full Time)	

	Part Time	-0.289
	Student	0.027
	Retired	-0.372
	Unemployed/Not working	-0.117
	Education (Base = No Quals)	
	GCSE/Equiv	-0.793**
	A Level/Equiv	-0.101
	University	-0.290
	Other Qual	-0.338
	Political Interest (Base = Not at all interested)	
	Not very interested	0.763**
	Somewhat interested	1.315***
	Very interested	1.951***
	Constant	-1.451***
Other	Previous Contact (Base = Not contacted)	
	Leaflet or Letter	-0.450
	Canvass Visit	-11.404***
	Email or E-Campaign	2.806***
	Other	2.320***
	Gender (Base = Male)	
	Female	0.207
	Age (Base = Under 30)	
	30-44	0.078
	45-59	-0.119
	60+	-0.430
	Class (Base = ABC1)	
	C2DE	-0.102
	Employment (Base = Full Time)	
	Part Time	-0.891
	Student	0.551
	Retired	-0.145
	Unemployed/Not working	-0.309
	Education (Base = No Quals)	
	GCSE/Equiv	-0.723
	A Level/Equiv	-0.671
	University	-1.178
	Other Qual	-0.847
	Political Interest (Base = Not at all interested)	
	Not very interested	0.036
	Somewhat interested	0.774
	Very interested	2.260***
	Constant	-2.712**
	N	2,859
	* *p*<0.1; ** *p*<0.05; *** *p*<0.01	

Looking to the first independent variable of interest – levels of *political interest* – there is a clear relationship that is largely consistent across all modes of contact. Namely, politically-interested respondents want to be contacted by campaigns. The positive and statistically

significant coefficients for ‘very’ and ‘somewhat’ politically interested indicate that individuals with higher levels of interest are more likely to prefer all forms of campaign contact to no contact. To illustrate this relationship, Figure 6.3 plots the predicted probabilities of preferences for each form of campaign contact (base = no contact) by levels of political interest, controlling for gender, age, class, employment, education and previous exposure. The figure shows that higher levels of political interest predict preferences for all forms of campaigning, and especially for leaflets (top-left) and canvass visits (top-right). Therefore, there is clear evidence, as anticipated (H1), that political interest predicts campaign preferences, especially those for leaflets or letters, and canvass visits.

Figure 6.3: Predicted Probabilities of Preferences by Political Interest (Base = No Contact)



Turning to the second main independent variable of interest – *previous exposure* – a relationship also emerges. Generally speaking, there is evidence that previous exposure to a mode of campaign contact increases the likelihood of stating a preference for it. To visualise this relationship, Figure 6.4 plots the predicted probabilities of preferences for each form of contact (base = no contact) by previous exposure to different forms of contact. The predicted probabilities also control for gender, age, class, employment, education and political interest. The results show that previous exposure to a) leaflets or letters (top-left), b) canvass visits (top-right), and c) email or e-campaigning (bottom-left) significantly predict preferences for leaflets or letters, canvass visits, and email or e-campaigning, respectively. The results are particularly striking for e-campaigning, as previous exposure to emails or social media contact such as Facebook or Twitter substantially increase the likelihood of stating a preference for them.

Figure 6.4: Predicted Probabilities of Preferences by Previous Exposure (Base = No Contact)

6.3.4 Discussion

Modelling preferences for different modes of campaign contact confirms my first hypothesis (H1) that political interest drives preferences. Indeed, those respondents who were more interested in politics were far more likely to want to be contacted by campaigns. This is in line with research showing that interest is strongly associated with participatory behaviours such as voting. This suggests that interest, as well as driving participation in politics, also drives the desire to be contacted by parties. Results also suggest that previous exposure to particular modes of contact also explains variation in preferences, as people appear to prefer what they know. This provides evidence in favour of the 'mere-exposure' hypothesis (H2), wherein

people base preferences for objects on their recent experiences with them. The positive, substantial effect of previous exposure to e-campaigning on preferences for e-campaign contact is particularly striking. Though, it is worth noting that this may also be capturing the extent to which respondents use social media and email, as this of course be associated with previous exposure to e-campaigning.

Age was a largely insignificant predictor of preferences. However, under 30s were significantly more likely to prefer email or e-campaigning than 45-59-year olds. This could suggest an element of socialisation, whereby age groups who are more accustomed in their lifetime to certain types of communication are more likely to prefer them. While over 60s were not significantly more likely to prefer canvass visits than younger respondents – as we may expect based on the changing style of campaigns – the relationship between age and preferences remains of interest. The remaining control variables, meanwhile, revealed little in the way of significant results. Education, class, and employment were largely insignificant predictors of campaign preferences. Some gender differences arise, however, as females are significantly more likely to prefer impersonal modes such as letters and leaflets than males.

In summary, the chapter so far has revealed heterogenous preferences among respondents for modes of campaign contact. Specifically, a plurality of voters does not want to be contacted, while a similarly-sized group want to receive leaflets. Substantial groups also state a preference for emails, canvass visits, and e-campaigning, while only a small minority state a preference for other modes such as telephone calls. I have provided evidence in line with existing research into political participation that these preferences are driven by respondents' levels of political interest. However, drawing upon social psychology and 'mere-exposure' theory, I present evidence that previous exposure to particular modes is also associated with preferences for

them. But how important are voters' preferences when it comes to the effect of campaign contact on voter turnout? The second half of this chapter turns to examining whether or not these preferences for campaign contact condition the effect of exposure to it.

6.4 Do Preferences Condition the Mobilising Effect of Campaign Contact?

So far, this chapter has outlined voters' preferences for different forms of campaign contact and provided evidence that these preferences are driven not only – as one would anticipate – by levels of political interest, but also by previous exposure to activities. This chapter now moves to testing whether preferences condition the mobilising effect of exposure to campaign contact. First, the chapter outlines the theoretical expectations regarding why we might anticipate preferences to condition effects at all. The chapter then presents a multinomial logistic regression model that models turnout at the 2016 Welsh Assembly elections, while interacting preferences and contact.

6.4.1 Theorising the Conditioning Role of Voters' Campaign Preferences

Why would we expect what voters want – i.e. their preferences – to condition campaign effects at all? We might reasonably anticipate that an individual's pre-existing preferences for campaign contact has a bearing on how they might process information when they are contacted by a campaign during an election. Information processing is key during elections, and central to much research on how people process information and make voting decision is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979; 1984; Petty and

Wegener, 1999; Chmielewski, 2012). The model describes how voters come to the decisions and behaviours that they do given information presented to them at election time. ELM is a dual-process cognitive model that describes two routes that people take to determine their views – and subsequently, their behaviour (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). Firstly, the model outlines the central processing route. Processing political information through this route involves a significant deal of mental effort in considering choices. A person carefully evaluates the arguments and choices before them as they process the information, often relating the information to their own knowledge and values (Perloff, 2003). As a result, the decision that the individual makes via the central processing route is stronger and longer-lasting. The decision is also far more likely to predict subsequent behaviour, e.g. voting. The alternative path that ELM describes is the peripheral route. In this route, a person relies on more shallow cognitive processing, such as relying on 'cues', and expends minimal mental effort in making a decision. The peripheral route has been likened to flying on "autopilot" (Griffin, 2006: 217), wherein little active thinking takes place. Consequently, decisions taken via the peripheral route result in weak or no changes in terms of attitudes or behaviour (Petty and Wegener, 1999).

Fundamental to an individual operating in the central processing route is a high level of a) motivation to process the message or information, and b) ability to critically engage with and evaluate the information. Motivation refers to an individual's "desire to process the message" (Chmielewski, 2012: 35). Ability, meanwhile, refers to the individual's cognitive capacity to engage with the information presented to them (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979). As per Table 6.3, an individual will only process information via the central route if they possess both high motivation and the ability to do so.

Table 6.3: Elaboration Likelihood Model of Voting (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984; Petty and Wegener, 1999)

	Low Motivation	**High Motivation**
Low Ability	Peripheral route	Peripheral route
High Ability	Peripheral route	Central route

Elaboration Likelihood Model can be adapted to provide theoretical expectations for the effect of preferences on subsequent campaign contact. It is widely considered that campaigns provide information to voters, which may explain the mobilising effects of campaign contact (Foos and de Rooij, 2017). As such, one might reasonably assume that expressing a preference for contact suggests a desire to receive campaign information from local campaigns. This demand to receive information pertaining to the campaign indicates a higher level of motivation to process the information received by the campaign more thoughtfully. In other words, "the desire to process the message" (Chmielewski, 2012: 35) is stronger among those who *want* to receive the message. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) show that this motivation is fundamental to deeper engagement with the campaign contact if/when it does arrive, meaning the contact, in turn, is more likely to result in stronger attitudinal and behavioural change – in this case, voting.

Meanwhile, those who do not want to hear from campaigns at all will have lower motivation to process the campaign contact. As Chmielewski argues, "an individual who does not participate in… the campaign" relies on peripheral processing when making their voting decision (2012: 36). Consequently, we would expect any subsequent campaign contact to be less likely to produce behavioural change in the form of voting.

The notion that voters' pre-existing attitudes towards campaign contact can influence the effectiveness of subsequent contact is akin to theoretical discussions around noticeable

reminders in GOTV research. Dale and Strauss (2009) were the first to propose 'noticeable reminder' theory – the idea that contact must pass some threshold of attention to be effective. This is because voters "sub-consciously filter out bulks of information and campaign communications" (Bhatti and Hansen, 2016: 293), due to their limited ability to process political information (Zaller 1992; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). While Dale and Strauss (2009) argue that to get voters' attention, the contact should be noticeable, my theoretical approach essentially argues that voters are more likely to pay attention to campaign contact when delivered through a mode the voter wants. I hypothesise, therefore, that *contact will have a stronger effect on turnout if the recipient expressed a preference to be contacted*.

6.4.2 Results

I first compare voters' preferences for contact with reported rates of actual contact from campaigns to ascertain whether voters are getting the campaigning they want. This can identify in which modes of contact there are (if any) 'contact deficits', wherein voters want a particular type of contact but do not get it. Table 6.5 shows the rates of campaign contact among voters according to their preferences. The tables present the rates of contact in Wave 3 (post-election).[26] Given the sample sizes involved in doing this, meaningful analysis for every mode of contact is not possible. Nevertheless, we can examine the 4 most numerous modes, presented in Table 6.4 for an indication of the picture.

Table 6.4: Self-reported voter contact versus preferences, by mode, 2016

[26] It should be noted here that – as with most survey research of this nature – there are potential issues of false recall, which could also be influenced by levels of political interest. Similarly, it could be that parties are simply contacting more politically engaged people.

		Preferences (grouped) – Wave 1				
		No Contact	Leaflet or Letter	Canvass Visit	Email/ E-Camp.	Other (Telephone Call or Street)
Contact –Wave 3	Not Contacted	64%	48%	46%	49%	52%
	Leaflet or Letter	28%	40%	37%	38%	30%
	Canvass Visit	3%	3%	5%	3%	8%
	Email/E-Camp.	0%	0%	1%	2%	2%
	Other (Telephone Call or Street)	5%	8%	11%	8%	8%
	Total	100% (N=813)	100% (N=933)	100% (N=251)	100% (N=279)	100% (N=40)

How do voters' preferences for being contacted (or not) compare to actual rates of reported campaign contact? Are respondents broadly getting what they want? Generally speaking, while it is unlikely that parties hold reliable data on what forms of contact people prefer, they appear to be satisfying voters' demands when it comes to being contacted or not. Among those who prefer not to be contacted, only 36% were contacted during the campaign. Among those who stated a preference for some form of contact, meanwhile, contact rates were around 52%. This suggests that, broadly, those who want to be left alone by party campaigns are in fact left alone, while contact is much more likely among those who want some form of contact. However, while respondents who want some form of contact are contacted, they are less likely to be contacted in the way they prefer. With the exception of those who prefer leaflets or letters, voters do not appear to be getting the particular mode of contact they prefer. For instance, while 40% of those who preferred a leaflet or letter received one, only 5% of those who prefer canvass visits were canvassed. Similarly, only 2% of those who preferred email/e-campaigning techniques were exposed to any.

While some voters are getting the type of contact they want, many are not. But to what extent does this matter? Do these preferences condition the mobilising effect of subsequent campaign

contact? To test this, I fit a multinomial logistic regression model. The dependent variable (*voted*) in the following analysis is a binary measure that relies on respondents' claim to have voted in the 2016 Wales Assembly election that took place prior to Wave 3 of the 2016 Welsh Election Study. Self-reported measures of turnout, as is well established in the literature (Karp and Brockington 2005; Wright, 1993), has a key limitation in that they almost always suffer from overreporting of participation due to factors such as social desirability bias. While self-reported turnout is indeed less desirable as a measure of participation than administrative records, studies find that this need not substantively affect analysis. Sigelman (1982: 1), for instance, notes that "substantive conclusions about the factors that influence voting or non-voting are largely unaffected by the use of validated as opposed to reported voting data".

The main independent variable (*preferences*) measures respondents' grouped preferences for various forms of campaign contact, including: No contact, leaflet or letter, canvass visit, email or e-campaign, and other (including telephone call and contact in the street). In addition to the demographic variables outlined in the previous section, and for the purposes of robustness, in the subsequent analysis I also control for previous turnout (at the 2015 general election[27]), which is a consistent and powerful predictor of participation (Geys, 2006).

Table 6.5 reports the results of a logistic regression that models turnout at the 2016 Welsh Assembly elections. Contact during the campaign is interacted with preferences for some form of contact (as opposed to wanting no contact). Coefficients that are at least significant at the

[27] Controlling for turnout at the previous Welsh Assembly election would be preferable (as this would be the same type of election during which this survey was conducted), however, this data was unavailable.

90% level are highlighted in bold for ease of interpretation. As the results are of a multinomial logistic regression model, we should interpret categories with positive coefficients as being more likely to prefer that type of contact compared to the base category (no contact).

Table 6.5: Preferences and Turnout

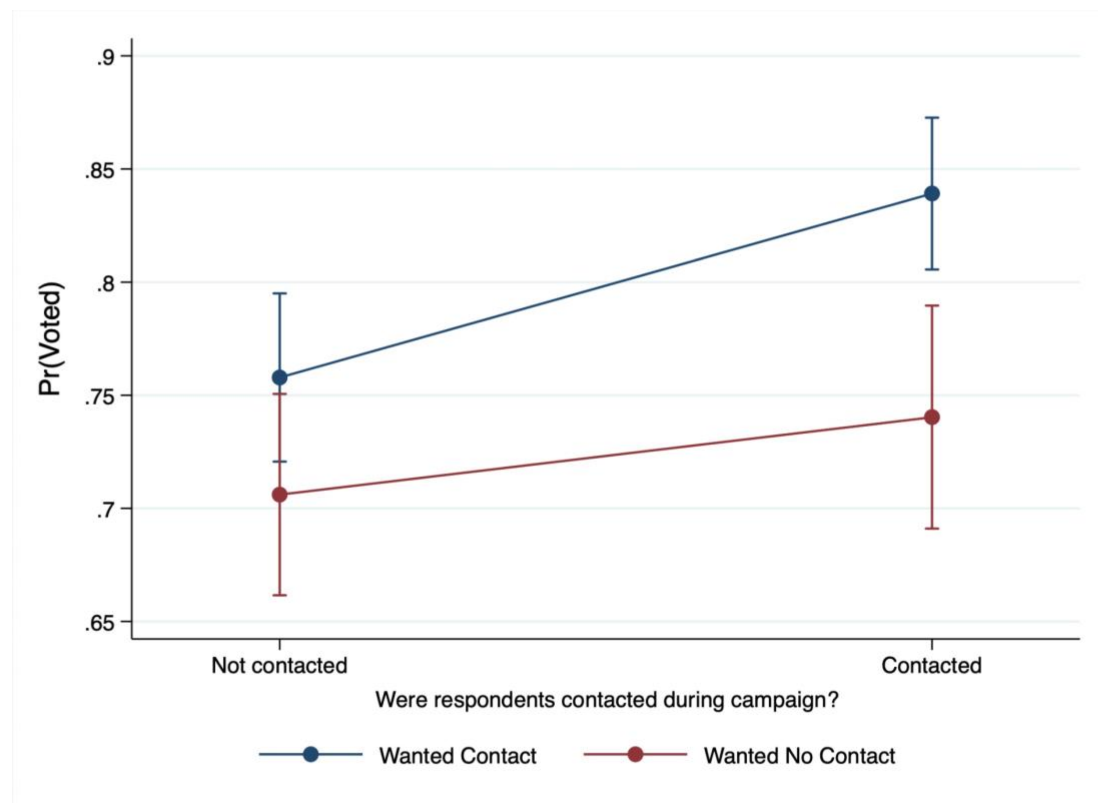
	Turnout in 2016
Not Contacted # Want Contact	(base)
Not Contacted # Want No Contact	**-0.381***
Contacted # Want Contact	**0.742*****
Contacted # Want No Contact	-0.135
Gender (Base = Male)	
Female	0.173
Age (Base = Under 30)	
30-44	0.298
45-59	0.432
60+	0.213
Class (Base = ABC1)	
C2DE	0.006
Employment (Base = Full Time)	
Part Time	-0.233
Student	-0.558
Retired	**0.699*****
Unemployed/Not Working	-0.151
Education (Base = No Quals)	
GCSE/Equiv	0.360
A Level/Equiv	0.223
University	0.589
Other Qual	0.347
Political Interest (Base = Not at all interested)	
Not very interested	0.161
Somewhat interested	**0.958*****
Very interested	**1.674*****
Turnout 2015 (Base = Did not vote)	
Voted	**2.442*****
Constant	-2.280***
N	2,859

* $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.05$; *** $p<0.01$

As anticipated, both previous turnout and levels of political interest were powerful predictors of turnout at the 2016 election. Looking at the interactions, however, the positive and statistically significant coefficient for Contacted # Want Contact shows that contact during the

campaign was more effective among voters who had previously stated a preference to be contacted. Figure 6.6 plots the predicted margins of contact on preferences for contact, controlling for gender, age, class, employment, education, political interest, and previous turnout.

Figure 6.6: Predicted Probabilities of Voting by Contact and Preferences (Base = No Contact)



6.4.3 Discussion

The results suggest that if respondents wanted contact and then got contacted, they were significantly more likely to vote than those who did not want contact and were not contacted. But, crucially, they were significantly more likely to vote than those who wanted contact and did not get contacted, and those who did not want contact and were contacted. In other words, it appears that if contact falls on ‘receptive’ ground (because the recipient wants to hear from

parties at election time), then it has a stronger mobilising effect than if a campaign contacts someone who does not want to be contacted at all. With regards to those who wanted contact but were not contacted, these results could raise fears that such people could drift into disengagement over time if they are consistently not contacted?

6.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to show, for the first time, what voters' preferences are when it comes to being contacted by party campaigns, examine theories that explain these preferences, and present a test of the extent to which these preferences matter. The chapter has presented three main findings. Firstly, I find that there is considerable heterogeneity in voters' preferences for campaign contact. A plurality of voters do not wish to be contacted at all, while a slightly smaller proportion prefer leaflets. There is a substantial demand for canvassing and emails, and minimal demand for other forms of digital campaigning such as social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. It appears that in the eyes of voters, campaigning still represents an important form of contact between them and politicians.

Secondly, I find evidence pertaining to two theoretical expectations regarding what could determine these preferences. I show that preferences for contact (versus no contact) are strongly associated with levels of political interest. This is broadly in line with existing research that links low levels of political interest with low participation generally (Denny and Doyle, 2008). In line with psychology's 'mere exposure' theory, I also find evidence that preferences for particular modes of contact are associated with previous exposure to those modes.

Finally, I present evidence that voters' preferences with regards to being contacted matter. Specifically, I use multinomial logistic regression to show that campaign contact has a stronger

mobilising effect when the recipient wants to be contacted, controlling for a battery of socio-demographic factors, as well as previous turnout and levels of political interest. In sum, this chapter provides evidence that voters' preferences for being contacted enhances the effect of subsequent contact by campaigns.

Should parties, therefore, target their contact towards those who want to be contacted? This evidence suggests this could indeed make campaigns more effective. Though, the evidence is not without limitations. For instance, there are issues of false recall, whereby voters do not accurately remember whether, or how, they were contacted during the campaign. Self-reported voter turnout can also suffer from social desirability bias, wherein respondents over-report participation due to the social desirability associated with voting. It is also likely that campaign contact is not randomly assigned, but is already targeted towards particular voters. This is a common criticism of survey-based approaches to measuring campaign effects, as discussed in previous chapters. In light of these limitations, therefore, the findings of this chapter should be taken as a "first cut" at the nature and significance of voters' preferences for different modes of campaign contact.

Nevertheless, the findings indicate that preferences vary and that preferences matter. They also open up important avenues for future research. While I find that preferences for contact can enhance the subsequent effect of contact, future research might build on this by examining whether this applies to particular modes of contact. For instance, if a voter prefers phone calls, but receives a canvass visit, will the effect of the canvass visit be stronger? With a larger sample size, future studies might investigate such questions. Future researchers might also consider testing how preferences vary according to the party from which the hypothetical contact comes, and the partisanship of the recipient. This could open up research questions regarding cross-

partisan contact. For instance, do preferences still enhance campaign effectiveness when the preference is for contact from Party A, but contact comes from Party B? Due to the 'partisan neutral' phrasing of the survey question in this chapter, this analysis was not possible, but could reveal interesting findings. Furthermore, the conditioning effect of preferences could be submitted to experimental testing, wherein respondents are asked for their preferences prior to treatment. They might then be randomly assigned to either a preferred mode, a non-preferred mode, or no contact at all, and then the turnout in each group could be measured. The findings of this chapter not only represent the voter-centred dimension of assessing the role of traditional campaign contact today, but also open important avenues for future research.

But what does this mean regarding the role that traditional campaign activities play in Britain today and in the future? Chapter 3 showed that randomly-assigned campaign contact can have significant, positive effects on voter turnout. By showing that there is a strong demand for these activities among voters, and that these preferences can also enhance the effect of campaign contact, this chapter presents evidence that parties should maintain traditional forms of campaign contact with the electorate.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Further Research

The central trend in the campaign literature that motivates this study is the changing nature of local party campaigning in Britain. This trend is defined by two key features. Firstly, the adoption of modern and digital modes of election campaigning by local parties. This has been characterised by the increased use of social media alongside other 'modern' modes of campaigning. Secondly, the marked drop in numbers of party members that are available for local parties in order to carry out labour-intensive campaigning. These trends have repeatedly raised questions about the role that traditional party campaigning plays in contemporary British politics (Fisher and Denver, 2008). The aim of this thesis is to shed light on the utility of such traditional party campaigns by applying the experimental research design of (predominantly) US-based GOTV studies.

By analysing a partisan field experiment, a downstream analysis, and survey data, this study explores the role that traditional party campaigns play in contemporary British politics. This chapter provides an overview of the empirical findings resulting from these analyses. I then outline the main contributions of the thesis, the implications of the findings for current theoretical discussions, and the implications for contemporary campaigning in Britain, before discussing how future research might expand further upon this work.

7.1 Main Findings

The empirical work of this thesis is formed around three research objectives – determining the mobilising effect of traditional campaigning, its downstream effects, and the role of voters' preferences for different modes of contact. The findings of each are recalled below to provide a summary of the thesis.

7.1.1 Mobilising Effects of Traditional Campaigning

Through the chapters presented in this thesis, I provide three main empirical findings. The first, and main, empirical finding is that traditional campaign activities still play an important role in mobilising voter turnout, especially at lower saliency elections. But what necessitated the carrying out of these experiments in the first place? After all, the large body of GOTV studies regularly shows that 'soft touch' leaflets have minimal impact on turnout, while canvassing has strong effects on turnout. The existing evidence base formed of extensive GOTV experiments consistently bear this out. However, there are two issues here that limit the use of existing GOTV findings to my research question. Firstly, these studies are based overwhelmingly in the United States, leading to calls from scholars for more campaign experiments to be conducted in Europe (e.g. Bhatti et al., 2016). Secondly, existing studies tend to test, overwhelmingly, non-partisan campaign treatments on behalf of 'civic' organisations, rather than partisan treatments advocating support for a candidate.

I argue that the lack of UK-based partisan experiments means that existing findings from predominantly US-based GOTV experiments have limitations in addressing my research question, and therefore justified the carrying out of a UK-based partisan study. As such, this thesis presents new evidence on the role of party campaign contact in the form of experimental

analysis in a local election in Britain. The experiments – one among non-postal voters and one among postal voters – were designed to reflect real party campaigns and authentic campaign activities carried out by parties in Britain today.

The experiments were conducted in a low-mid saliency local election in Suffolk, England in cooperation with the Liberal Democrat party. Unlike existing GOTV studies, I did not exclude postal voters prior to randomly assigning subjects to treatment conditions, but rather incorporated them into the assignment process in light of research showing that the number of postal voters in Britain is growing (Cracknell, 2014). My research design allowed me to compare how campaign effects differ between very high turnout postal voters and lower turnout non-postal voters. The results of the experiments, reported in Chapter 4, show that at a low saliency election, party leaflets and canvass visits increase voter turnout. Specifically, the receipt of a colourful, A3 sized Liberal Democrat leaflet increased turnout at the May 2017 local elections by 4.3 percentage points. A combination of the same leaflet followed by a doorstep visit from a local canvasser boosted turnout by 4.9 percentage points. However, by conducting the same experiment simultaneously among postal and non-postal voters, my analysis shows that these effects were only present among those who are only registered to cast their vote in-person at the polling station. Postal voters – whose underlying rate of turnout is much higher than non-postal voters – were unaffected by the campaign contact, as treatment had a statistically insignificant effect on turnout. Nevertheless, I provide evidence that registered voters can be quite effectively mobilised to participate in a low turnout local election through contact from a party.

The comparison between postal and non-postal voters revealed that the mobilisation effects were concentrated among the latter, whose underlying rate of turnout is lower at local elections

(Rallings and Thrasher, 2014). Leaflets and canvass visits had minimal impact among the high-turnout postal voters. The empirical findings of this thesis show, therefore, that traditional party campaign activities still have a role to play in turning out voters at British elections. Receiving traditional party leaflets and canvass visits has a substantial effect on voter turnout. But, this thesis provides evidence that such party activities only mobilised those (non-postal) voters whose base turnout was lower.

7.1.2 Downstream Effects

The second finding of this thesis is that initial effects of campaign contact may only be temporary. By obtaining the marked registers covering the same area at the June general election and merging them with the original experimental records, I am able to show the downstream effect on voter turnout. Analysis of the downstream effects of the treatments at the subsequent general election a month later shows that their effects substantially decayed. The statistically significant differences in the rate of turnout between the control and treatment groups in May, which represented the intent-to-treat effect of traditional campaign contact, were no longer present in June.

Of course, the general election in June and the local election in May were vastly different. Between these two contests, the underlying (base) rate of turnout among the same set of voters more than doubled from 35% to 78%. I contend that the lack of downstream effect detected in Chapter 5 is due to the vastly differing rates of underlying turnout at the elections, as had been found elsewhere (e.g. Coppock and Green's US study (2016)). The fact that the effects of traditional campaign activities virtually disappeared altogether at the high turnout, high saliency general election only a month later, suggests that traditional campaign activities have

a vital role to play in increasing voter turnout, but can be susceptible to being washed out by wider factors. Combined with the findings that turnout effects were restricted to lower propensity non-postal voters, this provided evidence that leaflets and canvass visits have noticeable effects on turnout when the underlying turnout is low.

7.1.3 Voters' Preferences for Campaign Contact

The third and final finding relates to the preferences of voters themselves regarding how they wish to be contacted at election time by political campaigns. I showed in Chapter 6 that, while there has been a substantial rise in the use of digital and 'e-campaign' modes in recent decades, voters still express stronger preferences for traditional modes of contact with their would-be political representatives at election time. Specifically, when presented with a variety of traditional and modern modes of campaign contact, a clear plurality of survey respondents still expressed a preference for leaflets and canvass visits from campaigners. 31% of respondents expressed a preference for leaflets, while 11% of respondents opted for canvass visits. Combined, 42% of respondents expressed a preference for one of these traditional forms of contact. This is despite the fact respondents were also given an option of not being contacted at all, as well as more modern and digital activities also being presented to them. Voters' appetite for social media and other e-campaigning techniques was overall rather limited. Only 14% of voters stated a top preference for either emails, Twitter, Facebook, other social networks, or text messaging (SMS).

The chapter found preferences for campaign contact are driven largely by levels of political interest, and that the considerable heterogeneity in preferences for particular modes can also be explained by prior exposure to them. The chapter also found evidence that these preferences

condition the mobilisation effect of campaign contact, with contact being more effective among voters who *want* to be contacted. Given the trend in recent general elections towards tailoring modes of contact towards specific voters (see, for example, Fisher et al., 2016a), these findings can make an important contribution to future political campaigns.

In sum, this dissertation makes a contribution to existing knowledge by presenting evidence that traditional campaign activities still have an important role to play in mobilising voter turnout, especially when it comes to engaging voters to turn out at lower turnout elections. This is supported with novel survey evidence that shows that voters' underlying attitudes towards campaign contact can condition their effects. I argue that the effects traditional campaign activities have on turnout, and the continued demand for them from voters, shows that parties must find a way to maintain levels of contact through traditional means.

7.2 Empirical Contributions

Empirically, this dissertation makes several contributions. Firstly, I apply the causality-focused experimental design of GOTV literature to British party campaigning activities. While not the first to do this (see, for example, Foos and John, 2016 and Foos and de Rooij, 2017), the study itself represents one of only several party campaign field experiments to be conducted in Britain. In so doing, the study contributes towards correcting the imbalance between US, non-partisan GOTV experiments, and those conducted in Britain involving partisan treatments. Testing broadly similar treatments in different contexts serves to advance the cumulative scientific knowledge.

Working with political parties more generally in conducting campaign and voter research can work to the benefit of both the academic community and political parties. Parties often possess

the resources and data needed to shed further light on campaign effects and political behaviour, while scholars can provide the academic rigour and theory-driven hypotheses needed to expand our understanding of voters' behaviour. During the process of this thesis, I opened up avenues of knowledge exchange with the Liberal Democrats in Britain that were to the benefit of both parties. By agreeing to present the findings of my studies to the local Lib Dem party and national party HQ, I was able to more easily secure consent from them to conduct the experiments. This dialogue has also led to other experiments and cooperation with the party. This can be used as a template going forward, or simply as encouragement for scholars to engage with parties and practitioners more broadly in order to further our understanding of voter behaviour.

Secondly, this study represents the first, at the individual level, to include postal voters in the experimental population. Including postal voters allowed me to empirically test whether campaign effects differed between high turnout and low turnout voters within the same election. Postal voting (or 'Vote-By-Mail' in US parlance) is a growing phenomenon internationally (McAllister and Muller, 2018). Allowing some citizens to cast their ballots prior to election day was historically a wartime procedure, introduced in order to allow soldiers who were stationed overseas to participate in elections (Fortier, 2006; ODPM, 2004). Now, forms of early and absentee voting are widespread in many countries as election authorities have relaxed restrictions on their use (McAllister and Muller, 2018). Votes cast by post are an increasingly important aspect of modern elections. In the US 2012 presidential contest, for instance, almost 1 in 3 voters cast their ballots before election day (McDonald, 2017). In states such as Oregon and Washington, almost all votes are cast by mail (Alvarez et al., 2012). In Australia, almost 1 in 3 voters cast their ballot prior to election day, many using postal votes (McAllister and Muller, 2018).

In Britain too, postal voting is on the rise. At the 1997 general election, only 937,205 postal ballots were issued, and just 2% of all the votes cast were cast by post (Cracknell, 2014). In 2001, the rules were changed to make it possible for any individual to get a postal vote on demand. Shortly after this change came into effect, at the 2001 general election, the proportion of votes that were cast by post rose slightly to 4%. But by 2015, the figure had more than quadrupled to 16% (Rallings and Thrasher, 2015). In some constituencies in the North East of England, where accessible postal votes were originally piloted, over 50% of votes are now cast by post (Cracknell, 2014). Postal voters typically receive their ballots several weeks before polling day and can either post it for free to their local electoral authority or deliver it in-person to the polling station on election day. Given the rising take-up of postal voting in Britain (Cracknell, 2014), it will likely be of increasing importance to study their interaction with party campaign efforts. Indeed, the characteristics and attitudes of future postal voters – if trends in postal voting take up continue – may have implications for my findings concerning how GOTV treatment effects differ between postal and non-postal voters. The experimental research design therefore represents a template for future scholars to include postal voters in experimental designs, that are normally excluded from the population prior to the assignment stage.

Matching turnout records at the subsequent general election for the same experimental population also allowed me to analyse the downstream effects of the initial experiment. While reporting null effects, this analysis represented only the second downstream analysis to be carried out in Britain, and the first to measure the downstream effects of a party campaign experiment. Measuring downstream effects of campaign field experiments is a worthwhile endeavour in the study of voter behaviour, as it can shed light on such behavioural patterns as habit, but can also reveal unanticipated positive externalities such as continued increased

participation at elections (Green and Gerber, 2002; Fieldhouse et al., 2016). In this thesis, the analysis allowed me to test whether effects detected in a low saliency election continue among the same group of voters at a high saliency election only a month later.

The research question laid out at the beginning of this dissertation was to examine the role that traditional activities play in British local campaigning today. The question was motivated by a line of existing research showing that traditional campaigning in Britain is changing. The development of technology, combined with the decline in numbers of local, volunteer activists means that parties are increasingly unable to maintain widespread use of traditional activities. Leafleting, and in particular canvassing, are labour-intensive activities. As such, maintaining widespread contact through these means at election time is especially vulnerable to changes in the numbers of local activists a party has at its disposal. Parties are relying on them less and less as their primary means of contacting voters at election time. Due to labour shortages, and the use of digital campaign technology, parties increasingly use such activities sparingly, often targeted at specific voters. Data from the regular survey of local candidates' agents shows that canvassing – and to a lesser extent, leaflets – have experienced a decline in recent decades. The purpose of this thesis was to examine, in this context, the impact of traditional party campaign activities in British elections today. The findings have a number of implications for our theoretical understanding of the role that traditional local campaign plays today.

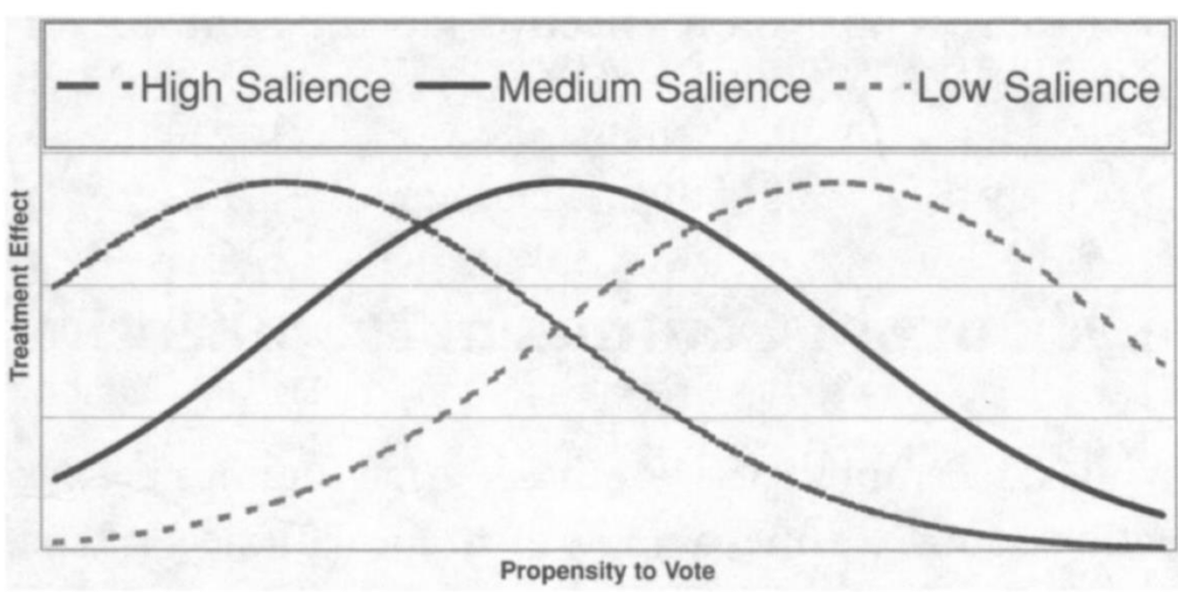
7.3 Theoretical Implications

While this thesis is not designed or set up to test rival theories against one another, the findings do speak to several theoretical discussions outlined in Chapter 3 surrounding what drives campaign effects and under which contexts. Firstly, the comparison of the postal voter and non-postal voter experimental results provide support for Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009)

framework that shows that the effectiveness of campaign contact is a function of voters' underlying predisposition to turn out – which itself is a function of the levels of general interest in a given election.

Graphically, Arceneaux and Nickerson present the relationship between propensity to vote, the saliency of the election, and the mobilisation effect of campaign contact in Figure 7.1. The x-axis refers to underlying propensity to vote (no scales of measurement were included in their original graph), while the y-axis refers to the treatment effect of campaign contact. They contend that the theoretical 'peaks' represent the point at which campaign contact is most effective. At high salience elections, campaign contact would be most effective at mobilising low propensity voters. At low salience elections, campaign contact is most effective among high propensity voters. Meanwhile, as a medium salience election, campaign contact mobilises voters whose propensity to participate is in the middle.

Figure 7.1. Relationship between propensity to vote and campaign mobilisation (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009: 4)



The experiments suggest that party campaign contact can increase turnout. Crucially, however, such contact only increased turnout among the lower propensity, non-postal voters, and not among high propensity, postal voters. The experiments, therefore, find mixed support for Arceneaux and Nickerson's 'threshold of indifference' theory. Where the findings do support Arceneaux and Nickerson's theory, is in showing that it is not just the 'heavy-hitting' nature of the campaign contact that determines its effect, but also the saliency of the election itself. Arceneaux and Nickerson argue that the turnout effect of campaign contact is a function of how close a voter is to their personal threshold between voting and abstaining at any given election. They argue that this threshold changes according to the saliency of the election. I find that campaign contact has a mobilising effect at a low-mid salience local election.

However, in a low saliency election, the 'high propensity' voters should have been more likely to be mobilised by campaign contact. But I find that postal voters were unaffected. This could be explained, however, by the limitations to using postal voting as a proxy measure for propensity to voter might explain this finding. Another explanation is that postal voters, who typically have a very high propensity to vote, were simply too far from their threshold (i.e. they were highly likely to vote regardless). While Arceneaux and Nickerson contend that at a low saliency election, such as the British local election, high propensity voters are the most likely to be mobilised, postal voters are – by virtue of their high turnout and/or their decision to register for a postal vote – particularly high propensity voters, and could therefore be considered far above their thresholds. Similarly, and in contrast to other studies, I find that the effects of campaign contact among the same voters dissipated at the general election a month later. As the salience of the election changed, non-habitual voters were further away from their indifference thresholds and thus turnout out to vote in higher numbers.

The findings also speak to other theories proposed in the GOTV literature. Existing theories on why certain GOTV activities work and others do not produce the core proposition that campaigning needs to be 'hard-hitting' in order to have an effect on turnout. Empirical research shows that intrusive, noticeable methods such as personal, face-to-face canvassing, personal text messages, or mailings that apply social pressure all have strong effects. Meanwhile, 'soft' methods such as leaflets have weak effects. The implication of this would be that if parties rely on canvassing less and less, then there would be ramifications in terms of levels of turnout at elections. Such theoretical discussions include social connectedness theory and noticeable reminder theory. However, the results reported in this thesis differ from these approaches in several ways.

Specifically, I find that while the leaflet and canvass visit combination had the most powerful effect on turnout, leaflets also boosted participation in isolation. The 3.6 percentage point ITT of traditional party campaign contact (i.e. assignment to receive either of the treatment combinations) sits towards the higher end of other GOTV studies that regularly report null effects for such 'soft' forms of contact as leaflets (Green et al., 2013; Ramiro et al., 2012; Pons, 2014; Pons and Liegey, 2016). The leaflet itself also contained no specific behavioural or social pressure cues that have shown powerful effects elsewhere (Nickerson, 2007; Green and Gerber, 2008). Existing theories proposed by Gerber/Green and Dale/Strauss, including the Social Connectedness and Noticeable Reminder Theories, respectively, posit that such 'soft touch' methods have minimal impact on turnout. The effect of party leaflets reported in Chapter 4, therefore, differs from these propositions.

What does this mean for our theoretical understanding of campaign effects? Firstly, as with any surprising result, it is worth noting that the effect could indeed be an outlier. While the research design was planned and carried out in accordance with methods outlined by prominent GOTV experimental scholars (Gerber and Green, 2012), only subsequent replication can assuage this fear. Secondly, like Foos and John's (2016) study, the leaflet contained partisan messaging. In this study, the leaflet was larger and contained more photographs and issue information than the Conservative leaflet that produced no overall effect in Somerset (Foos and John, 2016)[28], which could have made it more noticeable among supporters and rival supporters. If this is replicated elsewhere, it would suggest that a crucial caveat to Dale and Strauss' Noticeable Reminder Theory is that methods traditionally seen as 'soft touch' can be noticeable with the right design. At the least, the implications of these findings would suggest that not all partisan leaflets should be considered the same. Some vary significantly in terms of colour, style, and design, as well as in terms of messaging (Milazzo and Townsley, 2018). Indeed, given the size of the effect, and with so few other European experiments testing the impact of party leaflets (studies so far have tested party canvassing, e.g. Ramiro et al., 2012; Pons, 2014; Bhatti et al., 2016; Cantoni and Pons, 2016; Pons and Liegey, 2016; Nyman, 2017, or phone calls e.g. Foos and de Rooij, 2017), replication and further research into the effects of different designs and types of leaflets is merited.

The weak additional effect of canvass visits similarly differs from these existing theories. Canvass visits in this study appeared to produce only a minor additive effect on turnout, which, along with the emerging thesis that door-to-door canvassing produces weaker turnout effects in Europe (Bhatti et al., 2016), stands at odds with Gerber and Green's Social Connectedness

[28] See Figure A4 in the Appendix for an image of the leaflet delivered in Foos and John's study.

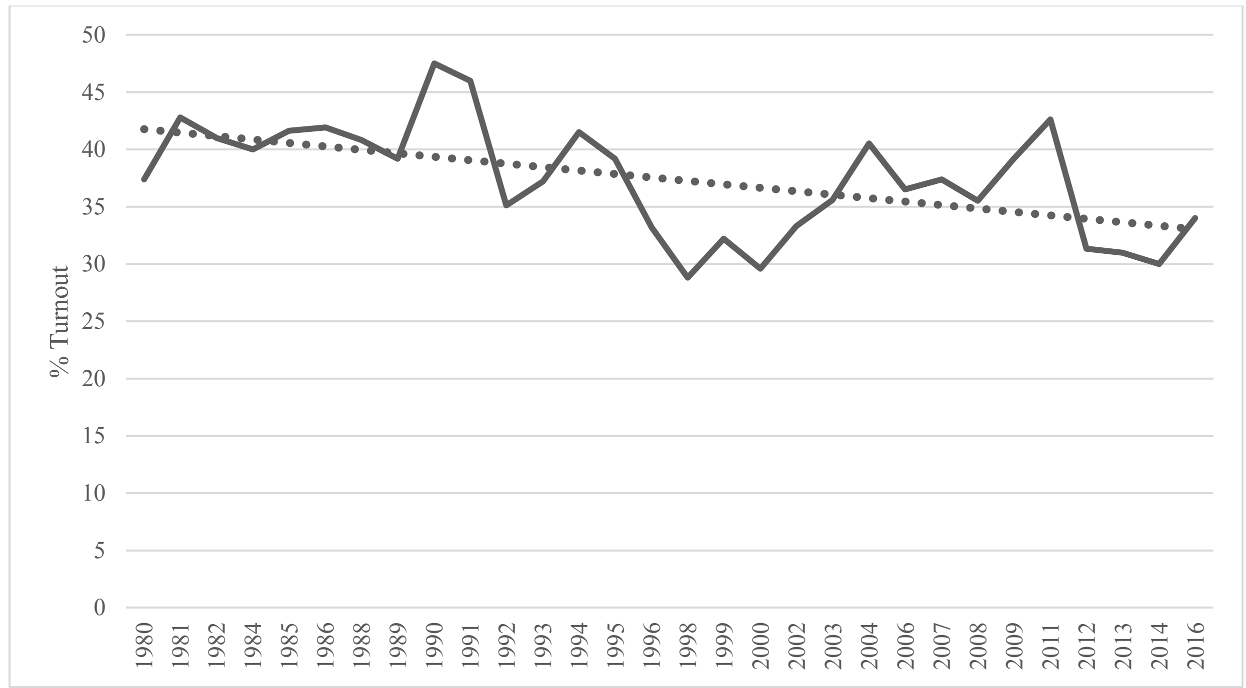
Theory. The finding itself may not be particularly surprising, given that the script simply echoed standard party scripts used at election time, and those found to produce similarly weak turnout effects in the Britain and Europe (Ramiro et al. 2012; Pons 2014; Foos and John 2016; Pons and Liegey 2016). However, given that this experiment, along with most of the experiments included in Bhatti et al.'s (2016) meta-study involved partisan canvassing, there remain questions over whether canvassing is simply weaker in Europe, or whether it is the partisan nature of such canvass visits that render them less effective. Though, given the low contact rate in this study and high degree of uncertainty around the effect, the result should be treated with caution. Without a third treatment group testing the impact of canvass visits alone, it is not possible to determine whether it was simply the initial partisan contact that prompted the effect, regardless of whether that contact was a canvass visit or a leaflet.

7.4 Mobilising Voters in a Low Turnout Era

What do these findings mean for the future of voter mobilisation in Britain? If the electoral landscape of British politics is increasingly epitomised by low turnout elections, then the role of traditional campaigning in raising turnout in such contests will become more important. Indeed, turnout rates over time suggest that low turnout elections could be increasingly common in Britain in years to come. Firstly, consider the case of local elections, in which the experiment was conducted. While generally considered a second order contest, elections to local authorities have implications for vital public services across Britain. Despite this, participation at local elections has declined since the 1980s, when the rate of turnout was

already far lower than at general elections (Figure 7.1).[29] At recent local elections, only around 1 in 3 voters participate.

Figure 7.1 Turnout at Local Elections (excluding those coinciding with general elections), 1980-2016



Source: House of Commons Library / Guardian DataBlog, 2012; Electoral Commission, 2018

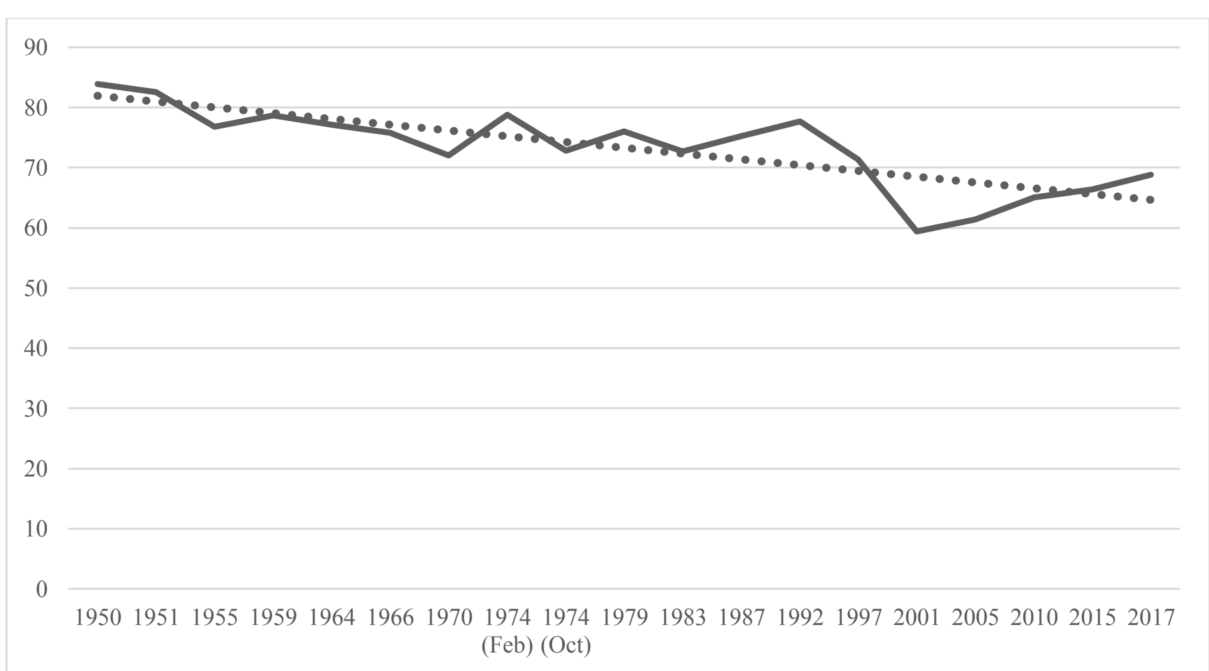
Indeed, there is an argument that this figure would likely be substantially lower still were it not for the increased use of postal votes (Cracknell, 2014). Due to the vastly differing turnout rates between postal and non-postal voters at local contests – regularly more than 40 percentage points – some have argued that the rising uptake of postal voting serves to "disguise" the problem of low participation at local elections (Rallings and Thrasher, 2014: 7). While the high

[29] Local elections are sometimes held on the same day as UK general elections, which can distort their underlying turnout rate. As such, this data excludes turnout at local elections that were held on the same day as general elections.

turnout rate (and increasing number) of postal voters has gone some way to mask it, declining participation in local elections continues to be a problem in Britain. If these trends continue, then the role that campaign contact plays at engaging voters who – at low saliency local elections – lack the incentive to participate, is particularly important.

But declining participation is not just a problem at local elections. There is evidence that turnout is falling in other British elections too. First, consider the turnout rates at British general elections since 1951 (Figure 7.2), generally considered to be Britain's only first order election. Since the height of the early 1950s when turnout was over 80%, participation at general elections has declined, reaching a nadir in 2001 when it dipped below 60%. Though turnout has recovered somewhat since 2001, there has been a trend of declining electoral participation in post-war general elections. If turnout begins to fall once more, campaign contact becomes increasingly important as voters get out of the habit of participating.

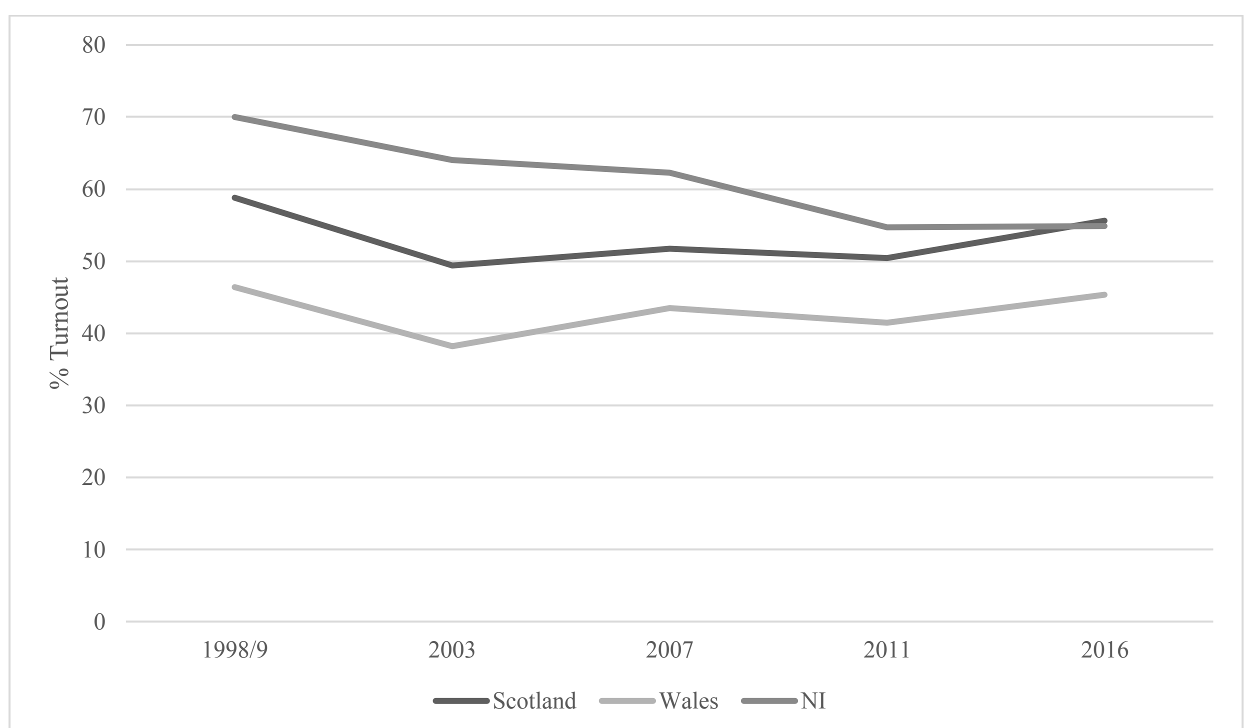
Figure 7.2 Turnout at Post-War UK General Elections, 1951-2017



Source: House of Commons Library / Guardian DataBlog, 2012; Electoral Commission, 2018

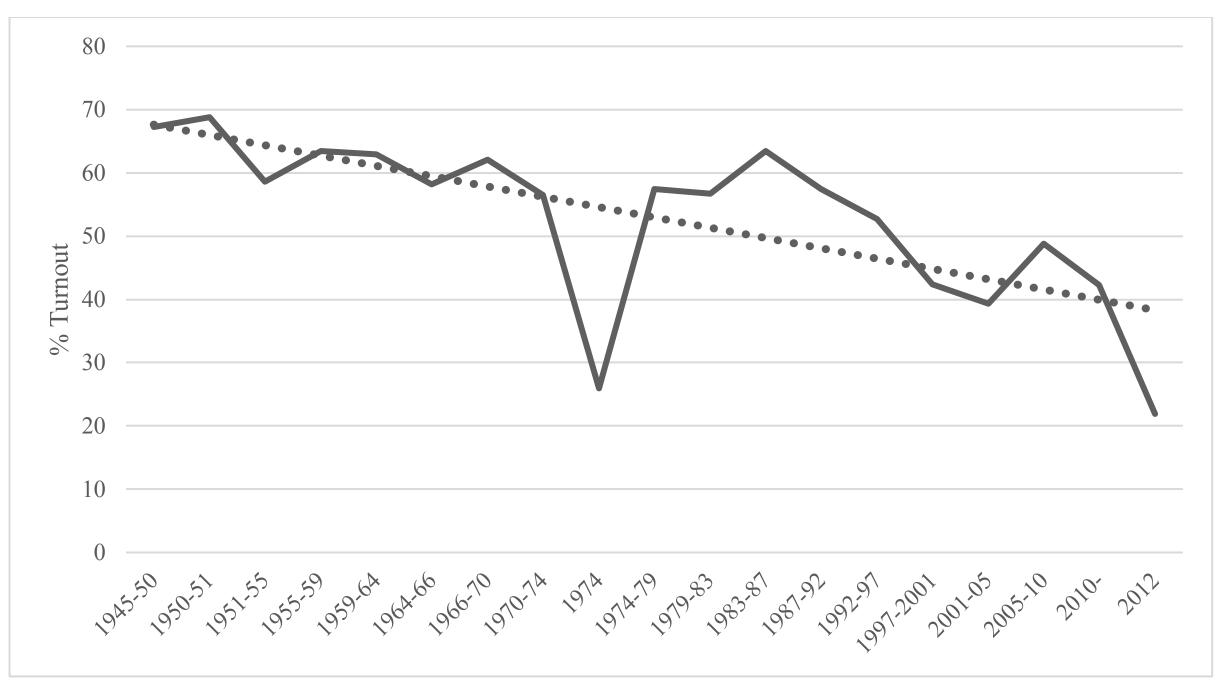
These trends are echoed in other elections that are regularly held in Britain. Figures 7.3 and 7.4 show trends in turnout rates at elections to devolved institutions and parliamentary by-elections, respectively. In both cases, the trend is towards lower turnout elections.

Figure 7.3 Turnout at Elections to Devolved Bodies, 1998/9-2016



Source: House of Commons Library / Guardian DataBlog, 2012; Electoral Commission, 2018

Figure 7.4 Average Turnout at UK Parliamentary By-Elections, 1945-2012



Source: House of Commons Library / Guardian DataBlog, 2012; Electoral Commission, 2018

Turnout to devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland has fallen since 1998/9 when elections to these bodies were first held. We can also see that turnout at Westminster parliamentary by-elections has also fallen since 1945[30]. While by-elections used to see turnout rates of 60%+, it is now unlikely that more than 50% of voters participate. Alongside the declining turnout in these regular elections is the introduction of new elections to positions such as Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). The participation at these elections has also been very low. Turnout in the 2012 and 2016 PCC contests were just 15% and 26%, respectively (BBC, 2016b). Low turnout elections are an increasingly common feature of British politics. If these trends continue, they point towards a greater need for traditional campaign activities that can boost voter turnout among people who do not habitually participate. Likewise, if turnout rates at general election begin to fall again, the role of party

[30] The turnout figures are calculated as the average turnout of parliamentary by-elections held over the course of each parliament.

campaign activities that increase participation might become increasingly important at such elections as well.

But how might the campaign activity of political parties help redress high rates of abstention at local and second order elections in Britain? After all, despite recent surges, party membership – alongside membership of other of traditional, 'civic' groups – has been declining since World War II. Without the labour traditionally provided by large local party memberships, how can parties knock on doors and deliver leaflets to engage citizens in elections? Recent research has begun to shed light on alternative forms of membership that parties are turning to, partly in response to this. Specifically, some parties have recently begun to adopt the 'supporter' model of membership, wherein many of the traditional party activities are carried out by non-member supporters, rather than formal party members (Fisher et al., 2014; Scarrow, 2015; Webb et al., 2017). The motivations behind the rise in the supporter model of membership have been discussed by scholars – ranging from explanations rooted in partisan dealignment (Rahat et al., 2014), cleavage politics (Sandri and Seddone, 2015), and technology (Gauja, 2015). But crucially, if supporters offer a long-term alternative to traditional, formal membership, parties might be able to ultimately replace the labour-intensive campaign work that was traditionally carried out by the latter. Indeed, there is evidence already that in Britain, party supporters are heavily involved in electoral campaign activities (Fisher et al., 2014; 2017). With recent cases of parties in Britain reforming their traditional, formal membership models, including Jeremy Corbyn's Labour (BBC, 2016c) and proposed changes to the Liberal Democrats under Vince Cable (BBC, 2018), there could be opportunity for parties to address recent falls in local campaign volunteers and increase levels of contact with voters.

7.5 Avenues for Further Research

Overall, my thesis shows that while traditional campaign activities may indeed be changing, they still play a vital role in British politics today at increasing participation, especially when the propensity to vote is relatively low. If low turnout elections become increasingly the norm, then traditional party campaign contact will be vital in years to come. However, the limitations associated with this thesis provoke several main avenues for future research. This chapter now turns to turns to outlining some avenues that could be the subject of future research.

7.4.1 Effects on Party Vote Share

The first avenue that campaign researchers, including scholars of GOTV, might consider is how to move beyond simply measuring turnout, but also, crucially, measuring effects on party vote share. The difficulties of measuring individual vote choices represent a substantial obstacle to this avenue of research. The use of surveys would provide a useful way to compare a party's vote share in a treatment group versus a control group. Did the canvassing campaign just increase turnout, or did the party or candidate in question actually gain more votes? This avenue of research would of course be particularly useful to political parties and candidates, whose aim is not to increase overall participation, but to maximise their electoral gains. Indeed, working with political parties may be a convenient way to tackle the issue of measuring individual vote choice. Pons' aggregate level experiment in cooperation with the Socialist Party in France (2016) presented a way for researchers to measure how campaign contacts increase the party's electoral position (Pons found that it did). However, such large experiments require significant cooperation and 'buy in' from national party campaign organisations due to the sheer scale of the study. But, with the potential benefits of the findings to parties, future

research might focus on such endeavours to help campaigners ascertain how effective their campaign efforts are.

7.4.2 Combined Modes and Timing

The variety of parties' campaign modes was discussed in Chapter 1. I outlined the trends we have seen in recent years with regards to the wide range of campaign activities that are now regularly used by political parties to contact voters. In the experiments presented in Chapter 4, I show that leaflets increase turnout, while a combination of leaflets and canvass visits increase turnout by a small (and statistically insignificant) amount on top of the leaflet only effect. Without a third treatment group being assigned to receive a canvass visit only, I was unable to ascertain whether the effect is driven entirely by the leaflet, the canvass visit, or whether any contact would have had an effect, with the follow-up having limited additional effect. This decision was taken based on the resources available to the researcher and the local party during the campaign. However, given the range of campaign modes that are now being used by parties, further research might consider the effects on voter behaviour of multiple contacts using different modes. This has been cited by Don Green and Alan Gerber as one of the next questions that the substantial GOTV literature should now address (2015: 160). As they note, some experiments have looked at the possibility that GOTV contacts have a synergy effect, whereby the overall effect of multiple contacts during a campaign is greater than the sum of the individual effect sizes. In other words, if a leaflet raises turnout by 1 percentage point, and a Facebook advert raises turnout by 0.5 percentage points, would the effect of being contacted by both during a campaign have an effect higher than 1.5 percentage points? Existing experiments have so far found little evidence in support of the notion of synergy (Green and Gerber, 2015). Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that the turnout effect of multiple contacts

is rarely even the sum of the individual effect sizes. But given the multitude of modes now in use, studies into the effect of integrating, for example, online and offline modes is worthy of research.

Another area on which my findings might be built upon to expand the GOTV literature is exploring the timing of the contact in relation to election day. While I found that party leaflets delivered within the two-week period prior to polling day had an impact, future research might test this with the delivery of 'good morning' leaflets delivered on polling day itself. Does the timing of the contact condition its effect on turnout? On the one hand, it could be argued that being contacted on the day might provoke the biggest effect, as the recipient could act upon the mobilisation effort instantly. Alternatively, one might expect that by the morning of the election, the recipient has already made up their mind about whether or not to vote, and any last-minute attempt to mobilise them will be fruitless. Empirically, there is limited evidence thus far. Panagopoulos (2010b) tested the effect of nonpartisan calls carried out 4 weeks, 2 weeks, and 3 days before election day, and found minimal variation between them. Two further nonpartisan experiments similarly found minimal differences between calls carried out a week prior to election day and calls carried out 1 or 2 days prior to election day (Green and Ha, 2015). Siilar findings are reported by other nonpartisan studies that examine the impact of mailings to voters (Murray and Matland, 2014). While these studies suggest that the timing of GOTV contact has little impact on turnout, future research might consider applying these studies in different contexts – including using partisan treatments.

7.4.3 Micro-Targeting

Emerging research shows that parties are increasingly focusing on micro-targeting their campaign contact to voters' preferences. Academic campaign research should likewise follow suit. In this thesis, I analysed the preferences of voters in regards to which forms of campaign contact they prefer in order to examine whether voters' demand for different activities can condition the mobilising effect of subsequent contact. The survey findings presented in Chapter 6 suggest that contact is more effective among voters who want to be contacted by parties. This finding could be expanded upon to test whether this applies to different types of campaign contact.

Future research might build on my findings by examining whether preferences for certain forms of contact enhance their effectiveness. Scholars might use the key findings presented in this thesis to build testable hypothesis regarding how campaign effects can be maximised by targeting contact to specific voters. For instance, is canvassing more effective among voters who want to be canvassed than among those who prefer a leaflet? Or, alternatively, will the intrusiveness of exposure to an unwanted campaign contact leave a more noticeable mark on the voter and consequently have a greater effect? Addressing such questions could inform parties whether or not they should tailor their mode of contact based on voters' preferences. If favourability towards certain forms of contact enhance their effect, then parties should tailor their contacts more (including more widespread use of targeting and taking voters' preferences into account, as per Chapter 6). In this case, we could see the future of party campaigning being very much dictated by whether certain activities work for certain voters. Alternatively, research could find that being contacted by a 'preferred' mode of contact weakens the effect – perhaps the respondent prefers a certain form of contact because it is the least intrusive, and, therefore,

the least effective. Furthermore, there is evidence within the field of psychology that humans are poor judges of what stimuli influence their own behaviour (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977).

Furthermore, while I find that contact is less effective among voters who do not want to be contacted at all, future research might consider whether particular modes are more suited to mobilising less engaged individuals. For example, research might reveal whether a leaflet is enough to effectively mobilise a loyal partisan at a local election. Meanwhile, a more disengaged citizen who votes irregularly at previous elections might require a more personal touch in the form of a canvass visit. Similarly, we might find that younger voters can be more effectively persuaded to vote with a text message, while others will respond more positively to Facebook adverts. Answering questions of who needs a leaflet? Who needs a canvass visit? Etc. can shed light on the future of political campaigning. This thesis has provided initial evidence on whether voters' preferences for certain modes of contact conditions their mobilising effect. While it could be that unwanted campaign modes are more effective than preferred modes, this could prove an important avenue of future research for parties considering their most effective micro-targeting strategies. Given the move towards micro-targeting by parties, and the difficulty parties face in maintaining levels of contact with voters at the local level, voter preferences, and the effects of the same merit further research.

7.4.4 Postal Voting

The experiments reported in this thesis reveal that while campaigning boosted turnout among voters who are not very strongly predisposed towards voting, high turnout postal voters were unaffected. But this finding begs the question of whether and now parties' campaign efforts affect voters in high saliency elections, and voters who have a high underlying propensity to

vote. I find little evidence that the campaign activities have mobilising effects among either. Indeed, turnout effects were insignificant among high turnout postal voters, and the turnout effects that were detected among lower turnout non-postal voters virtually disappeared only a month after the initial experiment.

However, it cannot be ruled out that the campaign had some impact on high propensity voters. In particular, it is worth examining the behaviour of postal voters in future research. As I noted in Chapter 4, postal voting (or 'Vote-By-Mail' in US parlance) is a growing phenomenon internationally (McAllister and Muller, 2018). Postal voters represent a growing proportion of votes cast at local and general elections, in part due to their higher rates of turnout. Postal votes have risen from 2% of all the votes cast at the 1997 general election to 16% of votes cast in 2015 (Rallings and Thrasher, 2015). In some parliamentary constituencies in the north east of England where postal voting was piloted between 2000 and 2004, over 50% of votes are now cast by post (Cracknell, 2014). Indeed, the increasing take-up of postal voting has arguably served to partially mitigate the declining rates of turnout seen at local elections in Britain.

The research design presented in Chapter 4 can be used for future experiments to compare campaign effects between postal and non-postal voters. But it is also worth considering how parties use postal voting to their advantage, and how they might continue to do so in the future. Close attention should be paid in future research to underlying causal factors and directions. For instance, if postal voting raises turnout, then it would be vote-maximising tactic for parties to put more effort into recruiting sympathetic voters on to postal votes, rather than trying to mobilise them directly during the campaign. However, it is possible that it is not the postal voting that raises turnout, but rather that high turnout voters are simply more likely to apply for postal votes. This question is worthy of consideration in future research, not only as a

potential means to raise electoral participation, but also for parties to conserve their diminishing labour resources for the main campaign.

The study of voter turnout more generally is important. Indeed, rates of participation serve as "thermometers of how healthy a democracy is" (Trumm and Sudulich, 2016: 168). High levels of turnout can also maximise the inclusiveness that serves as a vital democratic feature (Dahl, 1973). Beyond such normative arguments, empirical research shows that inequality in levels of political participation are linked to overall social and economic inequality (Avery, 2015). As such, the extent to which local campaigns influence voter turnout is also important. This is especially so given that partisanship, which was long cited as a feature that limited the impact of campaigns (e.g. Campbell et al., 1960), is on the decline. While it is the case that party campaigns have changed in recent decades (Fisher and Denver, 2008), I find that traditional campaign activities can still mobilise voters at lower saliency contests – and there is a strong demand from voters for them. With low turnout elections increasingly commonplace in British politics, the findings presented in this thesis have implications for the nature of citizen engagement with the democratic process and the role of party campaigns in advanced democracies.

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Appendices

Chapter 4 Appendix

Figure A4.1. Thedwastre North Division (highlighted) within Suffolk County Council

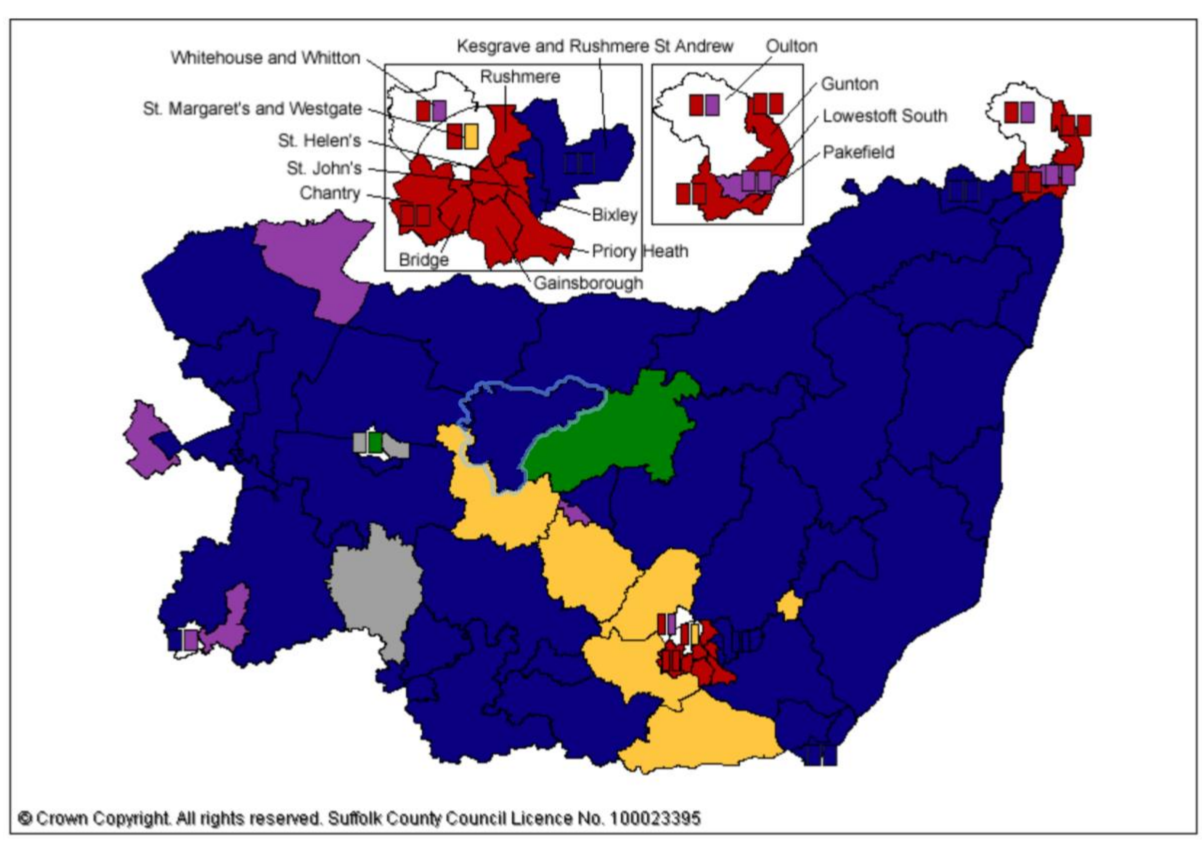


Table A4.1. Suffolk County Council Thedwastre North Division Result, 2013 and 2017

Party	% votes, 2013	% votes, 2017
Conservative	47.5	62.2
UKIP	25.0	-
Green	12.3	21.9
Labour	10.8	9.5
Lib Dem	4.4	6.4
Turnout	31.3	36.7

Table A4.2. Non-Postal Voter Experiment Assignment, Balance of Pre-Treatment Covariates

assignedgroup		Coefficient	P>z
Control	(base outcome)		
Leaflet			
	LibDem	0.0011482	0.992
	woman	-0.0550786	0.431
	votedin09	-0.0933379	0.270
	Reference agegroup = unknown	-	-
	age60	-0.1262793	0.369
	age3559	-0.1253595	0.587
	ageunder35	0.0634146	0.623
	_cons	-0.9030821	<0.001
Leaflet + Canvass			
	LibDem	-0.1121332	0.341
	woman	-0.0363308	0.608
	votedin09	-0.1177861	0.168
	Reference agegroup = unknown	-	-
	age60	0.009354	0.945
	age3559	-0.2227591	0.356
	ageunder35	-0.376107	0.012
	_cons	-0.9086875	<0.001
	N	5,200	
	LR chi2	14.14	
	Prob > chi2	0.2919	

Table A4.3. Postal Voter Experiment Assignment, Balance of Pre-Treatment Covariates

assignedgroup		Coefficient	P>z
Control			
	LibDem	-0.1712153	0.549
	woman	-0.093684	0.532
	votedin09	0.2393998	0.130
	pvhousehold	11.91732	0.983
	Reference agegroup = unknown	-	-
	age60	-0.3773986	0.169
	age3559	0.4265176	0.301
	ageunder35	0.2213558	0.448
	_cons	-12.6601	0.982
Leaflet	(base outcome)		
Leaflet + Canvass			
	LibDem	-0.2402022	0.320
	woman	0.0818189	0.509
	votedin09	0.0785563	0.549
	pvhousehold	11.92541	0.977
	Reference agegroup = unknown	-	-
	age60	-0.389475	0.084
	age3559	-0.0408942	0.917
	ageunder35	0.1702224	0.482
	_cons	-12.01064	0.976
	N	1,325	
	LR chi2	11.97	
	Prob > chi2	0.6086	

As per Gerber and Green (2012), I show that almost all pre-treatment covariates do not differ appreciably between assignment groups. In order to statistically check whether imbalances are

larger than one would expect from chance alone, I run a regression of the assigned treatment on all covariates, and calculate the F statistic. The Likelihood Ratio (LR) Chi-Square test and its accompanying p value for each model are reported in the tables below. As the randomisation process was carried out separately for the postal voter and non-postal voter components of the experiment, the regressions are presented separately below. Table A2 shows the results in the non-postal voter experiment. Table A3 shows the results in the postal voter experiment. The tables show that the only significant predictor of assignment to the Canvass + Leaflet group is being aged under 35 within the non-postal voter part of the experiment. As per Gerber and Green (2012), I present analyses controlling for all covariates, thereby producing unbiased estimates (2012: 109).

Table A4.4. Full Results of Covariate-Adjusted Treatment Effects

	NPV1	PV1	Fullsample 1	NPV2	PV2	Fullsample 2
Lib Dem Campaign	0.046**	-.026	.036*			
	(.016)	(.039)	(.015)			
Leaflet Only				0.043*	-0.048	0.028
				(.020)	(.043)	(.018)
Canvass Visit + Leaflet				0.049*	-0.003	0.045*
				(.020)	(.043)	(.018)
Ward			Reference = Badwell Ash			
Elmswell & Norton	-0.156***	-0.235***	-0.172***	-0.156***	-0.237***	-0.172***
	(.018)	(.039)	(.016)	(.018)	(.038)	(.016)
Woolpit	-	-0.026	0.019	-	-0.029	0.018
		(.042)	(.035)		(.041)	(.035)
Woman	0.009	-0.012	0.003	0.009	-0.013	0.003
	(.008)	(.021)	(.008)	(.008)	(.020)	(.008)
Voted in 2009	0.269***	0.150***	0.236***	0.269***	0.149***	0.236***
	(.019)	(.031)	(.016)	(.019)	(.031)	(.016)
Party Support			Reference = Rival Party			
Lib Dem	-0.024	-0.211*	-0.057	-0.024	-0.214*	-0.056
	(.039)	(.095)	(.037)	(.039)	(.097)	(.037)
Unknown	-0.009	-0.070	-0.022	-0.010	-0.076	-0.022
	(.039)	(.077)	(.031)	(.033)	(.079)	(.031)
PV Household	-	-	0.327***	-	-	0.327***
			(.022)			(.022)
Age Group			Reference = Age Group Unknown			
Age 60+	0.107***	0.026	0.088***	0.107***	0.030	0.088***
	(.028)	(.050)	(.022)	(.028)	(.050)	(.025)
Age 35-59	-0.008	0.001	-0.004	-0.008	0.001	-0.004
	(.045)	(.080)	(.040)	(.045)	(.079)	(.040)
Age Under 35	-0.000	-0.029	-0.007	0.000	-0.030	-0.006
	(.023)	(.055)	(.022)	(.023)	(.055)	(.022)
constant	0.289***	1.331***	0.333***	0.289***	1.361***	0.332***
	(.036)	(.097)	(.034)	(.037)	(.099)	(.034)
N	5,200	1,325	6,525	5,200	1,325	6,525
(Households)	(2,695)	(676)	(3,371)	(2,695)	(676)	(3,371)

Clustered standard errors in parentheses. ***P<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05.

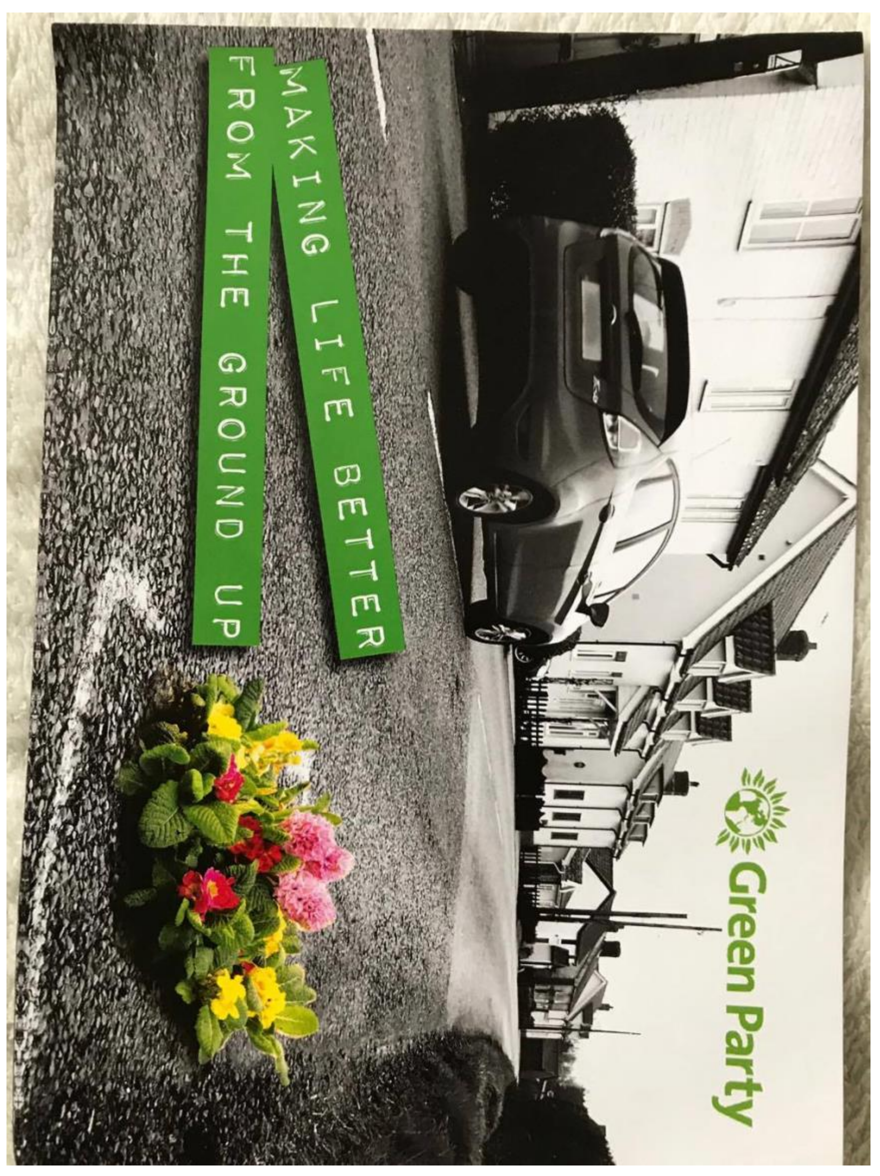
Figure A4.2a. Other Party Leaflets Encountered During Campaign (Conservative)

Figure A4.2b. Other Party Leaflets Encountered During Campaign (Conservative)

Figure A4.2c. Other Party Leaflets Encountered During Campaign (Conservative)

Figure A4.3a. Other Party Leaflets Encountered During Campaign (Green)

Figure A4.3b. Other Party Leaflets Encountered During Campaign (Green)



Deviations from the Pre-Analysis Plan (PAP).

The plan outlined the intention to also compare the effects of treatments among different party supporters. However, due to a lack of data coverage on party support from the local party's voter database, the interaction effects could not provide any meaningful analysis. Party support data provided by the local party only covered 1,000 (15.32%) of the 6,525 subjects. The remainder were "unknown". The analysis is presented in the table below for the purposes of transparency.

Table A4.5 Interaction Effect Models – Party Support

	Full Sample	Postal Voter Households	Non-Postal Voter Households
	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)
Lib Dem Campaign	0.06	-0.06	0.07
	(.06)	(.17)	(.07)
Party Support			
Rival Party	(base)	(base)	(base)
Lib Dem	-0.03	-0.30	-0.00
	(.05)	(.19)	(.05)
Unknown	-0.02	-0.09	0.00
	(.04)	(.15)	(.04)
Campaign#partysuppport			
Campaign#Lib Dem	-0.07	0.11	-0.06
	(.07)	(.22)	(.08)
Campaign#Unknown	-0.02	0.03	-0.02
	(.06)	(.17)	(.07)
constant	0.32***	1.36***	0.28***
	(.04)	(.15)	(.04)
Controls*	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	6,525	1,325	5,200
(Households)	(3,371)	(676)	(2,695)

*Controls include age, gender, ward, and previous turnout

The second deviation was theoretical. The PAP included a theoretical discussion on how citizens' preferences for particular mobilisation methods might affect the efficacy of these methods on turnout. The logic was that I might test a 'popular' method against an 'unpopular' method to provide an alternative explanation for why some methods work more than others. However, I decided not to develop this particular theoretical argument. The data on citizens' preferences was only available for Wales, and not for this particular experiment population. The preferences also deviated significantly by demographics, and therefore, without the same level of detailed demographic breakdown in my own data, I felt I could not make reliable

comparisons (e.g. if older, more politically interested men were more likely to prefer canvassing in Wales, I could not reliably test that canvassing would be more/less effective among this same demographic in my experiment).

Table A4.6 Interaction Effect Models – Age Group

	Full Sample	Postal Voter Households	Non-Postal Voter Households
	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)
Lib Dem Campaign	0.04*	-0.05	0.05**
	(.02)	(0.04)	(1.7)
Age Group			
Unknown	(base)	(base)	(base)
Under 35	0.014	-0.11	0.03
	(.03)	(.11)	(.03)
35-59	-0.03	-0.01	-0.05
	(.05)	(.17)	(.05)
60+	0.09**	-0.09	0.10**
	(.04)	(.13)	(.04)
Campaign#AgeGroup			
Unknown	(base)	(base)	(base)
Campaign#Under 35	-0.04	0.10	-0.07
	(.04)	(.12)	(.05)
Campaign#35-59	0.06	0.01	0.10
	(.08)	(.20)	(.09)
Campaign#60+	-0.01	0.15	0.01
	(.05)	(.14)	(.06)
constant	0.331***	1.35***	0.29***
	(.04)	(.10)	(.04)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	6,525	1,325	5,200
(Households)	(3,371)	(676)	(2,695)

*Controls include gender, ward, and previous turnout

Table A4.7 Demographic Comparison of Voters in Postal Voter Households and Non-Postal Voter Households

	Full Sample	Postal Voter Households	Non-Postal Voter Households
Women	51.5	52.8	51.2
Age			
Unknown	82.3	81	82.7
Under 35	7.4	7.4	7.4
35-59	2.5	2.9	2.4
60+	7.7	8.8	7.5
Party Support			
Rival Party	5.1	4	5.4
Lib Dem	10.2	7.5	10.9
Unknown	84.7	88.5	83.7
Turnout	35.4	69.3	26.8

Figure A4.4. Conservative Leaflet Delivered during Foos and John's (2016) UK Experiment

Chapter 5 Appendix

Table A5.1 – Balance Checks

N=5,028	LR chi2=18.54	Prob > chi2=0.1003	Pseudo R2=0.002	
assigned group		Coefficient	SE	P>|z|
NPV Control (base outcome)				
NPV Leaflet				
	attrition	0	(omitted)	
	partysupport	0.118808	0.0728863	0.103
	woman	-0.0332255	0.0711473	0.641
	votedin09	-0.0644537	0.0859393	0.453
	pvhousehold	0	(omitted)	
	age60	-0.0726262	0.1412698	0.607
	age3559	-0.0911274	0.2309003	0.693
	ageunder35	0.0706419	0.1296399	0.586
	_cons	-1.150081	0.1466865	0
NPV Leaflet + Canvass				
	attrition	0	(omitted)	
	partysupport	-0.0818554	0.0672394	0.223
	woman	-0.0293899	0.0723056	0.684
	votedin09	-0.1303804	0.0868751	0.133
	pvhousehold	0	(omitted)	
	age60	-0.0220448	0.1379297	0.873
	age3559	-0.2292053	0.2415814	0.343
	ageunder35	-0.3759909	0.1529143	0.014
	_cons	-0.7900643	0.135432	0
N=1,244	Lr chi2=14.33	Prob>chi2=0.426	Pseudo R2=0.005	
assigned group		Coefficient	SE	P>|z|
PV Control				
	attrition	0	(omitted)	

	partysupport	-0.016164	0.1555752	0.917
	woman	-0.1060192	0.1540374	0.491
	votedin09	0.1700647	0.1624194	0.295
	pvhousehold	13.03161	960.846	0.989
	age60	-0.314935	0.2777899	0.257
	age3559	0.4090657	0.41367	0.323
	ageunder35	0.1938702	0.2938457	0.509
	_cons	-13.7033	960.8461	0.989
PV Leaflet (base outcome)		outcome)		
PV Leaflet + Canvass				
	attrition	0	(omitted)	
	partysupport	0.297865	0.1476941	0.044
	woman	0.057098	0.1284203	0.657
	votedin09	0.0818927	0.1353326	0.545
	pvhousehold	13.06282	701.6121	0.985
	age60	-0.3569237	0.2329295	0.125
	age3559	-0.0882777	0.4022902	0.826
	ageunder35	0.1165607	0.2450439	0.634
	_cons	-13.70249	701.6121	0.984

Chapter 6 Appendix

Figure A6.1 Preferences by Gender

Figure A6.2 Preferences by Age Group

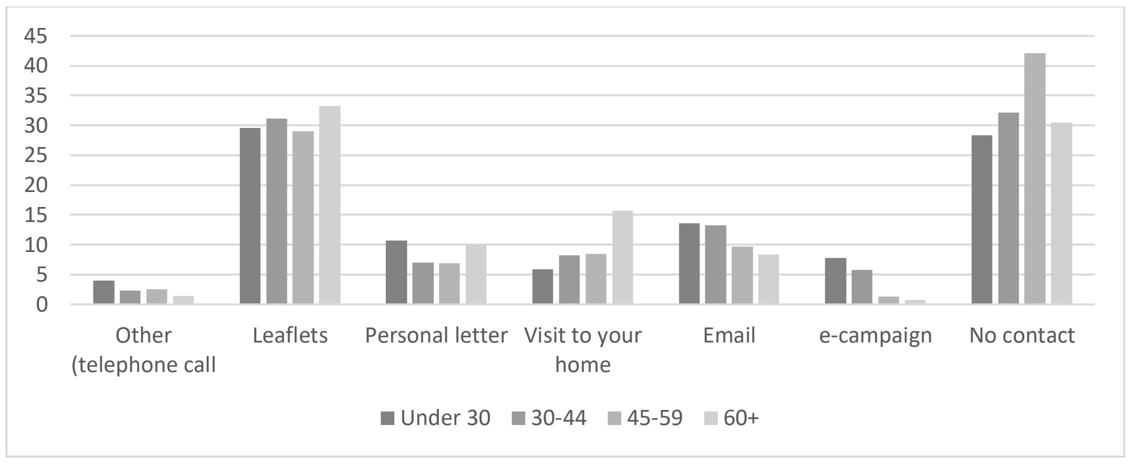


Figure A6.3 Preferences by Class

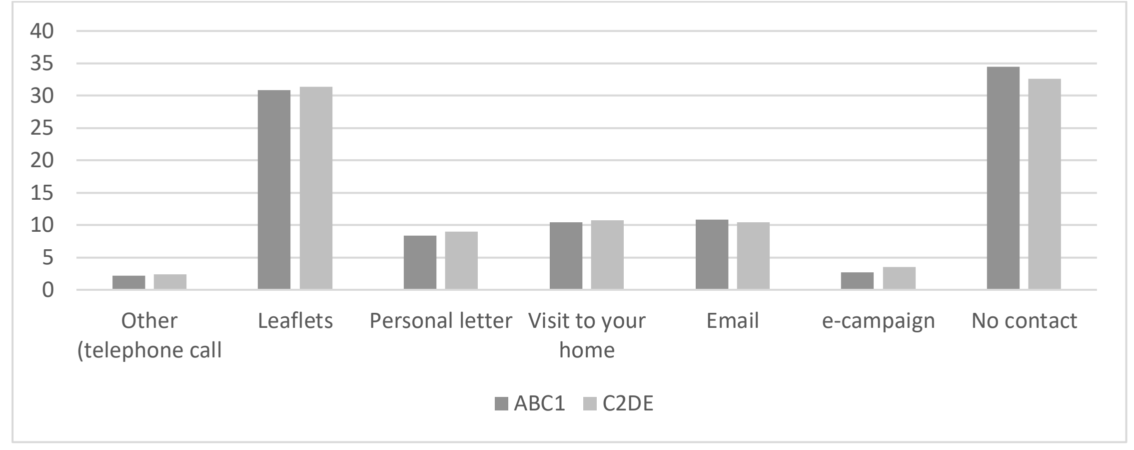


Figure A6.4 Preferences by Employment Status

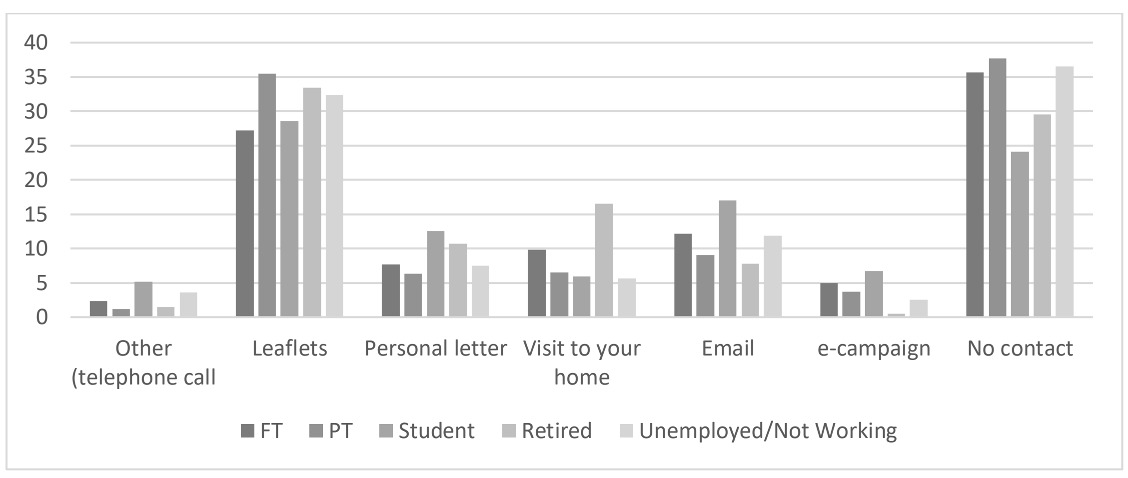


Figure A6.5 Preferences by Living Arrangement

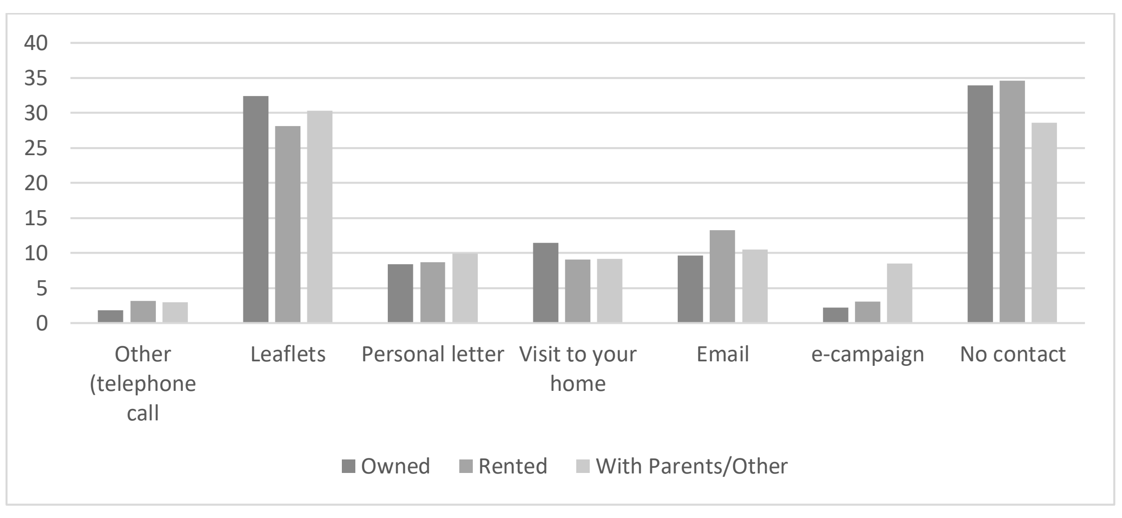


Figure A6.6 Preferences by Education

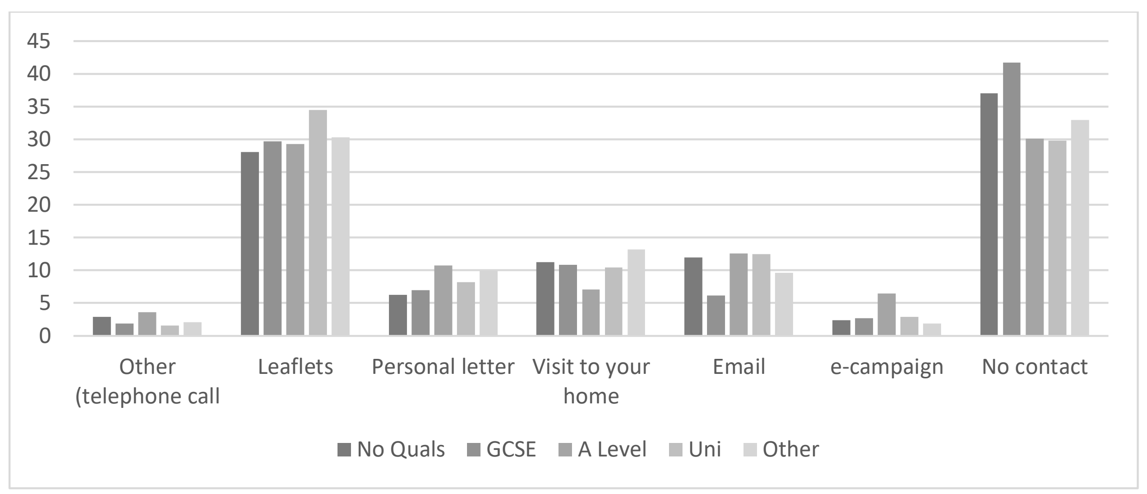


Figure A6.7 Preferences by Political Interest

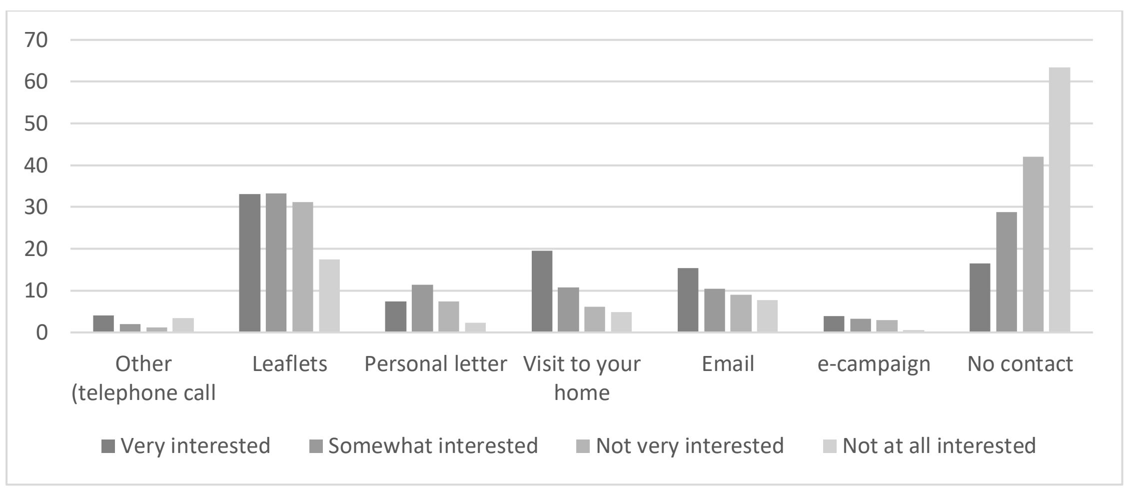


Figure A6.8 Preferences by Propensity to Vote