



Assessing the Political Impact of Candidate Selection Rules: Britain in the 1990s

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Abstract

Does the inclusiveness of candidate selection rules affect political outcomes? The likely effects of greater inclusiveness have been much debated, with some assuming that they bring parties closer to voters, and others assuming that a party which adopts more inclusive selection rules is likely to pick candidates that diminish its electoral appeal. Thus, there is agreement on the importance of rules, but disagreement on their likely impact. Yet so far there has been little research on this question outside of U.S. primary elections. This paper aims to help fill this gap by investigating British parties' experiences with a variety of candidate selection rules in recent elections. The study uses data from the 1992 and 1997 election and candidate studies to map the distance between party candidates and party voters, asking whether rule differences and rule changes offer plausible explanations for the relative proximity of the two groups. It finds some support for the proposition that more inclusive rules produce candidates who are closer to party voters, at least on the most salient issues. These findings suggest that parties which adopt more inclusive selection rules are not necessarily undertaking an electorally risky strategy.



Hypotheses:



Relative Party Distance Hypotheses:

1. Liberal Democrat candidates will be politically closer to their party's voters than will candidates from other parties.
2. If Liberal Democrat candidates are politically closer to their party's voters than will candidates from other parties, Labour Party candidates will be closer to their party's voters than are their Conservative counterparts.



The Labour Party Hypothesis

3. Compared to 1992, the Labour Party's candidates in 1997 will be politically closer to their party's voters



The "Blair Babes" Hypothesis

4. In 1997 the Labour Party's female candidates were politically closer to the party's voters than were their male counterparts.

Variables

Dependent Variables

Measured on a five point scale index variable indicating absolute distance between the views of party supporters and party candidates on issues related to:

Economy

- inflation, vs. unemployment
- Tax cuts vs. govt. spending
- Govt. spending on NHS
- Govt. spending on trade unions

Tolerance

- Ethnic tolerance
- Gender Discrimination

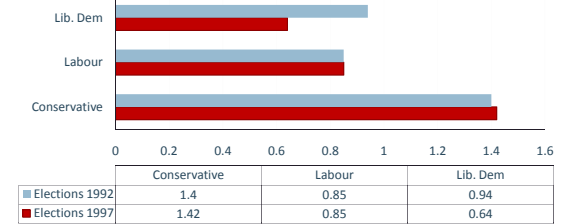
EU Membership

Main Independent Variables

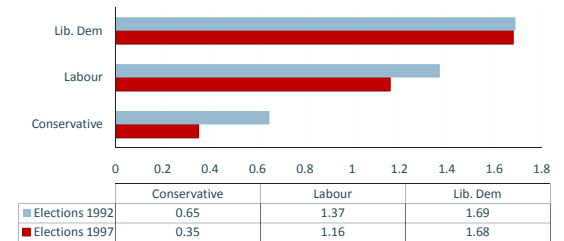
Lib. Dem.	Measured dichotomously (1= Liberal Party candidate)
Labour	Measured dichotomously (1= Labour Party candidate)
Conservative	Measured dichotomously (1= Conservative Party candidate)
Elections 1997	Measured dichotomously (1= Elections 1997)
Female	Measured dichotomously (1= female candidate)

Main Results

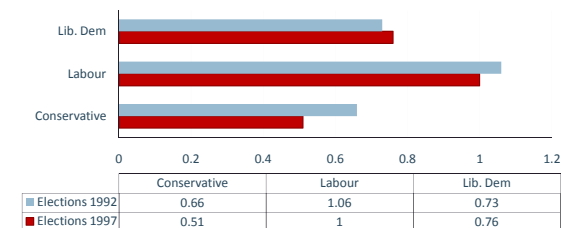
Distance: Candidate-Party Supporters Economy



Distance: Candidate-Party Supporters EU membership



Distance: Candidate-Party Supporters Tolerance



*All figures show the distance between a party's candidates and their voters on a five-point scale of policy preference.

Other Results

Labour Party 1992 vs. 1997 Elections Distance Between Candidates and Voters (Non Incumbent Candidates)

	Economy	EU	Tolerance
Elections 97	-0.004	-0.18***	-0.05*
Female	0.003	-0.1**	0.2***
N	680	664	675
R ²	0.0020	0.0343	0.0797
Adj. R ²	-0.0054	0.0270	0.0383

*Indicates statistical significance at 0.1 level in one tail test
**Indicates statistical significance at 0.05 level
***Indicates statistical significance at 0.01 level

Female Labour Candidates, 1992 and 1997 Distance Between Candidates and Voters (Non Incumbent Candidates)

	Economy	EU	Tolerance	Abortion
Election 1997	0.004	-0.15***	-0.05	-0.26***
Female	0.01	-0.06	0.2***	0.37***
Female x 97	-0.03	-0.12	-0.03	-0.19
Conditional Female x 97	-0.03	-0.07	-0.26***	-0.45***
N	680	664	675	650
R ²	0.0034	0.0364	0.0456	0.0830
Adj. R ²	-0.0054	0.0276	0.0370	0.0744

***Indicates statistical significance at 0.01 level

Data Sources:

1. Heath, A., R. Jowell, J.K. Curtice, J.A. Brand, and J.C. Mitchell. BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION CROSS-SECTION SURVEY, 1992 [Computer file]. ICPSR version. London, England: Social and Community Planning Research [producer], 1992. Colchester, England: ESRC Data Archive/Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributors], 2004.
2. Heath, A., R. Jowell, J.K. Curtice, and P. Norris. BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION CROSS-SECTION SURVEY, 1997 [Computer file]. 2nd ICPSR version. London, England: Social and Community Planning Research [producer], 1998. Colchester, England: The Data Archive/Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributors], 2000.
3. The British Representation Study 1992
4. The British Representation Study 1997