

**DEMOCRACY AND CONSTITUTIONAL  
CHANGE IN BRITAIN**

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***UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON***

**PhD THESIS**

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## ABSTRACT

Since 1997, Britain has undergone a major programme of constitutional reform. The programme was introduced against a backdrop of declining electoral participation and political trust. A key objective of the reforms was to strengthen citizens' engagement with the political system. This analysis explores how far the reforms have succeeded in generating closer linkages between citizens and governments, manifested in higher rates of electoral turnout and political trust. Four reforms are analysed in detail: the regulation of party funding, electoral reform, devolution, and directly elected local mayors.

In evaluating the impact of these reforms, the analysis draws on a variety of *input* (ie. pre-reform) and *outcome* (ie. post-reform) measures. In relation to devolution to Scotland, the analysis finds that institutional reform has established a tier of government in which a substantial proportion of Scots invest their trust. However, devolution appears to have had a less substantive impact on electoral turnout. In the case of new electoral rules, the opposite appears to be the case: those who favour the new voting rules are mildly more likely to participate in elections than those who do not, although there is no relationship with political trust. Directly elected mayors have had little impact on aggregate rates of turnout, although the evidence from London suggests that support for the model is positively associated with electoral turnout. The dividend from the tighter regulation of party funding appears less positive, since people with low levels of political trust are only marginally more likely to favour reform than those with high levels of trust.

Thus, the constitutional reforms appear to have had some impact, although the effects are not substantial and consistent. The analysis concludes by examining the likely impact of a more radical set of institutional reforms, either within the representative model, or extending to forms of direct democracy.

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**Chapter 1**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN BRITAIN SINCE 1997**

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In 1997, the Labour Party was swept into government in Britain. While gaining just 43 per cent of votes, the swing to Labour from the Conservatives was 10 per cent, the largest shift in the popular vote during the post-war period (King, 1998). Four months into its first term, the Government enjoyed the highest approval ratings of any administration since 1945.<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt, then, that the new administration enjoyed substantial legitimacy in the eyes of Britain's citizens. But the change of government occurred against a less benign backdrop. In the last year of the previous Conservative government, levels of trust in government had fallen to a record low; just over one in five people (22 per cent) said they trusted British governments always or most of the time. This represented a decline in popular trust of over 40 per cent in the two decades since the mid-1970s. The change of government in 1997 also occurred against the backdrop of declining electoral participation. The proportion of the electorate taking part in the 1997 election was the lowest since 1918. Fewer people, too, were participating in other elections. Turnout at local elections had fallen by almost ten points, from an average in the 1980s of 43 per cent to just 34 per cent in 1996, and Britain enjoyed the lowest turnout of any European Union member country for European Parliament elections.

Thus, the popularity of the new Labour Government could not mask what appeared to be an underlying disengagement of citizens from their political institutions and processes. Many commentators suggested that British democracy was facing a major challenge of legitimacy. Labour came to office prepared, as it saw it, to address this problem. In particular, it promised a wide ranging programme of constitutional reform, involving fundamental changes to the British political system. Among the many objectives of the reform programme was a desire to arrest the decline in trust and turnout, and to 're-connect' citizens with government. The purpose of this work is to consider how successful the programme has been in meeting this objective. Have the reforms stimulated greater trust and confidence in political institutions and actors? Have they led to higher rates of electoral participation?

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<sup>1</sup> In a Gallup poll in September 1997, 72 per cent of the population expressed approval of the Labour Government's record. The previous highest approval rating, as measured by Gallup, was the 60 per cent rating achieved in April 1953 by the Churchill administration (Butler and Butler, 2000: 265-79).

In the chapters that follow (particularly Chapters Three to Six), I examine a range of evidence that bears on these questions. In this opening chapter, I set the scene for this analysis. I begin by mapping some of the main evidence of Britain's contemporary democratic 'malaise'. How serious is the supposed problem, and in which areas is it concentrated? As we shall see, levels of citizen engagement with political institutions are, in many cases, far from healthy. There is a problem, then, to which constitutional reform might offer a potential solution. In light of this, I then examine the rationales offered for the constitutional reforms introduced since 1997. While the reforms derived from a number of stimuli, I suggest that a key one was a desire to trigger closer linkages between citizens and their governments. For both policy makers and commentators, the re-design of core political institutions was seen as providing for greater accountability and responsiveness, and thus as a means of stimulating closer popular engagement with the political process. However, in an important theme to which I return in the concluding chapter, opinions differed on the extent of the reforms deemed necessary. In particular, while some policy makers and commentators suggested that reforms within the representative model would be sufficient to re-engage discontented citizens, others sought more radical measures, to shift decision making away from a mediated, representative form, to a more direct or participatory model.

Having established the nature of the problem, and identified institutional re-design as a potential ameliorative measure, I then move on to outline the key features of my study, explored in greater depth in subsequent chapters. First, I identify and justify the goals against which the constitutional reforms are assessed. I use two key variables in particular to capture the level of citizen engagement, one attitudinal (the level of trust in political institutions) the other behavioural (the level of participation at elections). I am similarly selective in the reforms I consider, limiting them to four: The regulation of party funding; Reform of the electoral system; Devolution, and; The direct election of local mayors. The rationale for this selection is set out in this chapter; their effects on trust and turnout are considered in Chapters Three to Six.

## **THE 'PROBLEM': BRITAIN'S DEMOCRATIC MALAISE**

Britain was once seen as a model democracy. Its institutions and practices were widely admired, and often commended as superior to the political arrangements in other advanced democracies. This benign state of affairs was reflected in the



satisfaction with their political system supposedly felt by British citizens. In their *Civic Culture* study at the end of the 1950s, Almond and Verba (1963) suggested that Britain approximated to a satisfied, even 'deferential', political culture. Even if we allow for what may initially have been a rather rose tinted take on the data (Kavanagh, 1989), Britain's democracy looks decidedly less healthy today. Few extol the virtues of the 'Westminster' model over the checks and balances of presidential systems or the diffusion of power characteristic of proportionally elected legislatures. Far from being seen as essential bulwarks of effective government and policy performance, Britain's political institutions have increasingly come to be seen as inimical to them. From both the political right (Mount, 1993) and the left (Marquand, 1997), commentators have arraigned the British constitution for the over-mighty executive, weak political representation and ill conceived economic and social policies to which it has supposedly contributed.

Britain's citizens, too, appear less enamoured with their governing arrangements than previously. Since it is the lack of engagement among citizens as a whole that has precipitated the concern among policy makers and commentators with the state of British democracy, I pay some attention to attitudes and behaviour at the mass level. In particular, I document the extent to which citizens in Britain have lost faith, and ceased participating, in their core political institutions. Are policy makers right to allege a malaise of British democracy – in which case a programme of constitutional reform might be an appropriate response – or is the problem exaggerated? The most obvious place to start this review is with the most basic form of citizen engagement: voting. I then go on to explore citizens' attitudinal orientation to the political system, in particular the level of trust and confidence they invest in their governing arrangements.

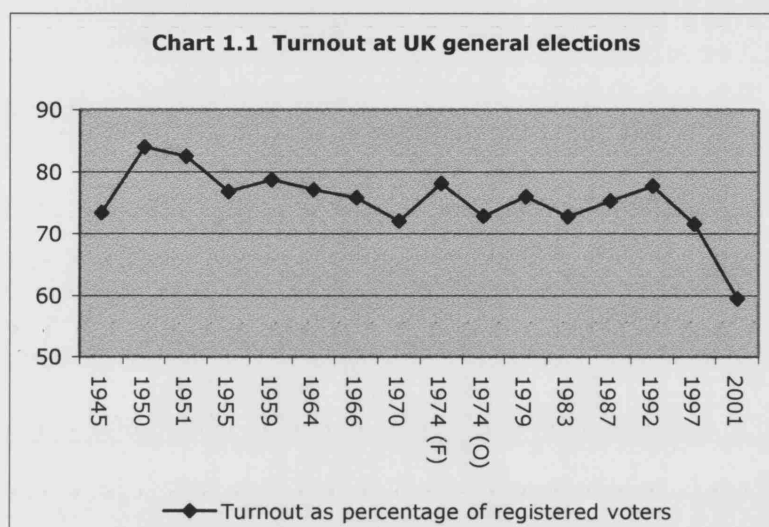
## **Electoral participation**

To many, the most obvious indicator of citizen discontent with the British political system is the declining level of electoral participation. Starting at the national level, Chart 1.1 shows turnout for House of Commons elections in the second half of the twentieth century. Up until 1997, levels of turnout fluctuated between elections, and it was difficult to pinpoint a clear trend. Certainly, turnout declined in the two decades between 1950<sup>2</sup> and 1970, by around ten percentage points. It

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<sup>2</sup> The 1950 election is the most appropriate starting point in considering trends in turnout. Turnout was artificially low at the 1945 election, due to servicemen based overseas and a poor electoral register (Pattie and Johnston, 2001).

then oscillated up until 1997, with no clear trend upwards or downwards. In fact, the trend in participation between 1974 and 1997, measured via a simple regression model of turnout on time, shows an insignificant and insubstantive coefficient, suggesting that the period between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s witnessed no decline in electoral turnout (Pattie and Johnston, 2001). However, the slight drop in turnout in 1997 was followed by a far sharper decline in 2001, when less than six in ten of the registered voting population participated, the lowest level since 1918.<sup>3</sup>



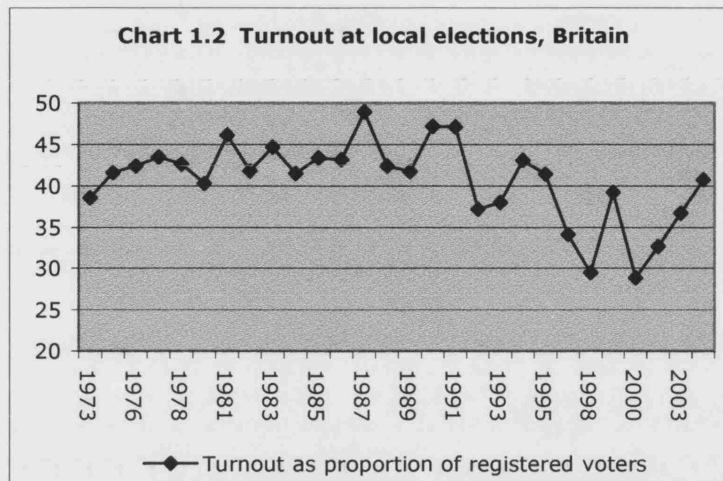
Source: Butler and Kavanagh, 2002: Table A1.1

A similar picture of recent turnout decline can be seen in relation to local elections. In Chart 1.2, I map rates of participation across local elections in Britain since 1973, the year local government underwent significant re-organisation.<sup>4</sup> There is significant fluctuation from year to year. Some contests attract a large turnout since they coincide with a high profile political issue (such as the Poll Tax in 1990), or the run up to a general election (1983 and 1987). Some contests attract a low turnout since they occur in the immediate aftermath of a general election, as in 1992 (Kellner, 2004). But while turnout fluctuated around the 40 per cent level in the two decades between 1973 and 1995, it fell by ten points to just under 30

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the relative trends in electoral turnout, commentators sometimes note low absolute levels of participation, particularly in relation to other west European countries. Mean turnout in Britain between 1945 and 2002 was 75 per cent, eight points behind the EU average of 83 per cent (IDEA, 2004: Fig 2.1). But the gap falls to just five points if we remove from the calculation those countries and periods in which voting is compulsory. Five points hardly constitutes UK exceptionalism.

<sup>4</sup> In showing a single turnout figure, I have lumped together data across local contests, even though average turnout differs substantially between them. Thus, between 1973 and 2004, average turnout for Scottish unitary councils (three contests over the period) was 52 per cent, while for English unitary councils (eight contests) it was just 33 per cent. Given these variations, I only report data for years when two or more types of council have held elections (the data for 1975 is thus omitted since only a

per cent in 1998 and in 2000.<sup>5</sup> Since then, turnout has dramatically increased, so that the 2004 local elections saw turnout levels back to the trend figure of 40 per cent of the electorate. However, the pick-up in 2002 and 2003 was boosted by the use of all-postal ballots for many council elections in England, while turnout in 2004 was boosted by the coterminous timing of the European Parliament contest.



Source: Figures calculated from data provided by the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth

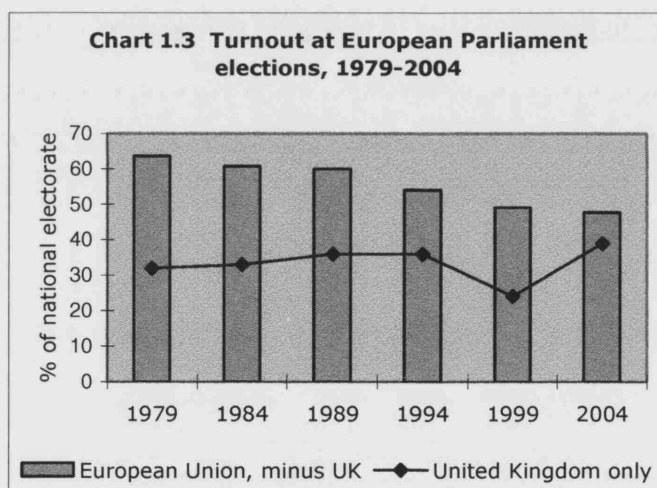
As with local elections, turnout at European Parliament elections showed a decline in the mid to late 1990s, before witnessing a recovery (Chart 1.3: dark line). In the fifteen years since the first direct elections to the European Parliament, turnout in the UK remained fairly constant at around one third of the electorate. In 1999, turnout declined to just 24 per cent, but then reached a new high of 39 per cent in 2004. Much of this recovery is attributable to the use of all-postal ballots in four regions and the combination on a single day of European Parliament, local and London Mayor/Assembly elections (Electoral Commission, 2004: 107-15). The second feature shown in the Chart is the relationship between turnout in Britain and that in other EU member states (represented by the bars). In each of the five elections prior to 2004, the turnout rate in Britain was the worst, or joint worst, among EU countries. But until 1999, domestic turnout was at least progressing towards the average across other member states (principally due to declines in turnout across the EU). While the 1999 election

single type of council held elections in this year). I have also omitted data for 1979, 1997 and 2001, since these contests took place at the same time as Westminster elections, inflating turnout levels.

<sup>5</sup> The 1999 peak is an anomaly, largely caused by an unusually high turnout in the Scottish unitary council elections that year. Once the figures for these contests are removed, average turnout falls to 35 per cent, still a minor recovery, but well below the usual levels for the preceding period.

represented a setback, the turnout level in Britain in 2004 was not far short of the EU average.<sup>6</sup>

The data on electoral turnout points, then, to a declining level of popular engagement with the political system. Granted, turnout at the local and European level has recently witnessed an upturn. However, this owes less to an upsurge in citizen regard for the political system, than to such 'artificial' stimulants as the timing of elections (running multiple elections together) and the method of voting (providing postal ballots). Certainly at end of the 1990s, it appeared that citizens were increasingly disengaged from the electoral process. In Chapter Two, I examine the reasons for this disengagement, identifying in particular what curative role might be anticipated for constitutional reform. But the basic picture drawn from recent trends in electoral participation does suggest something of a problem.



Source: European Parliament

### Attitudes towards the political system

It is much easier to gauge the health of citizen-government linkages by reference to the behaviour of citizens than by reference to their attitudes. Behaviour has a determinacy that attitudes often don't. One votes or one doesn't. One joins a political party or one doesn't. But attitudes lack such precision. As we shall see, there is much debate about what is being measured when surveys ask respondents about their 'trust' in government or their satisfaction with the way

<sup>6</sup> For 2004, the average EU figure covers the fifteen west European members only, and excludes the

democracy 'works'. In the limited space here, I don't attempt to explore these issues; I merely review a selection of measures to see how far they paint a consistent picture of cognitive and affective engagement with the political system.

Unfortunately, we lack many measures that enable us to map the ways that British citizens have evaluated their political agents and institutions over time.<sup>7</sup> But we have some indicators, and I report these here. Given its prominence among commentaries on the state of Britain's political system, I start by examining trends in political trust. Trust is a complex notion<sup>8</sup>, but relates at core to the belief that someone else – an organisation or individual – will act in a way consistent with one's interests, or at least consistent with what has been promised. This sense of acting in someone's best interests (where the someone is the collective public) is what the following question, asked on a fairly regular basis since the early 1970s<sup>9</sup>, seeks to tap:

"How much do you trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party?"

- Just about always
- Most of the time
- Only some of the time
- Almost never

Chart 1.4 reports the proportions indicating that they trust government "most of the time" or "almost always".<sup>10</sup> Over the thirty year period between 1974 and 2003, the picture is one of some fluctuation around an overall decline. In the mid-1970s, almost four in ten people indicated that they trusted their governments; by 2003, this proportion had fallen to less than two in ten. The decline was particularly acute between 1987 and 1996.

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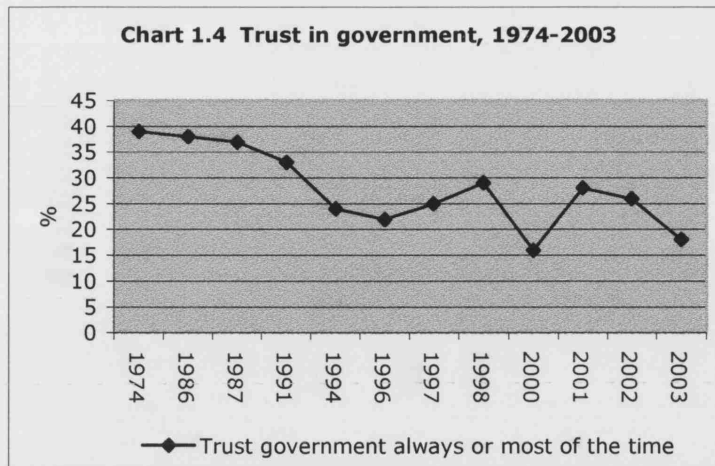
ten new members, the turnout in many of which was very low.

<sup>7</sup> It is not sufficient to point to negative assessments of the political system in any one year as evidence of an acute problem (although, regrettably, many academic and non-academic commentaries do just that). For if negative assessments have long been the norm, this suggests that critical judgements can co-exist with an essential stability of the political system. On the other hand, if attitudes can be shown to have become more critical and negative than in the past, this would suggest that the political system is facing new questions over its legitimacy, a challenge to which a concerted response (for example, fundamental institutional re-design) would be called for. Let me give one example of the way in which snapshots of public attitudes may lead to misleading conclusions being drawn. In the *British Social Attitudes* survey in 2000, it was found that two thirds (67 per cent) of respondents agreed that "People like me have no say in what the government does". On the face of it, the level of negative attitudes suggests an acute contemporary problem. But a similar question asked by Gallup in 1968 - "In your opinion, do people like yourself have enough say in the way the Government runs the country?" - elicited a similar negative response, with 68 per cent of people responding that they lacked sufficient voice (Gallup, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> See O'Neil (2002) for a critique of survey based measurements of political trust.

<sup>9</sup> The wording of the question when originally asked in 1973-74, as part of the *Political Action Study*, was "How much do you trust the Government at Westminster to do what is right?".

<sup>10</sup> The trend remains almost exactly the same if mean levels of trust are calculated.



Source: Bromley et al, 2001; *British Social Attitudes* surveys, 1986, 1997, 2001-03

A second judgement that casts light on how citizens evaluate political institutions concerns responsiveness. A number of individual questions have been asked on the *British Social Attitudes* survey that explore how responsive citizens believe key political actors and institutions to be. I focus on three measures, for which we have a reasonable time series:

"How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- (a) Parties are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions
- (b) Generally speaking, those we elect as MPs lose touch with people pretty quickly
- (c) It doesn't really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same

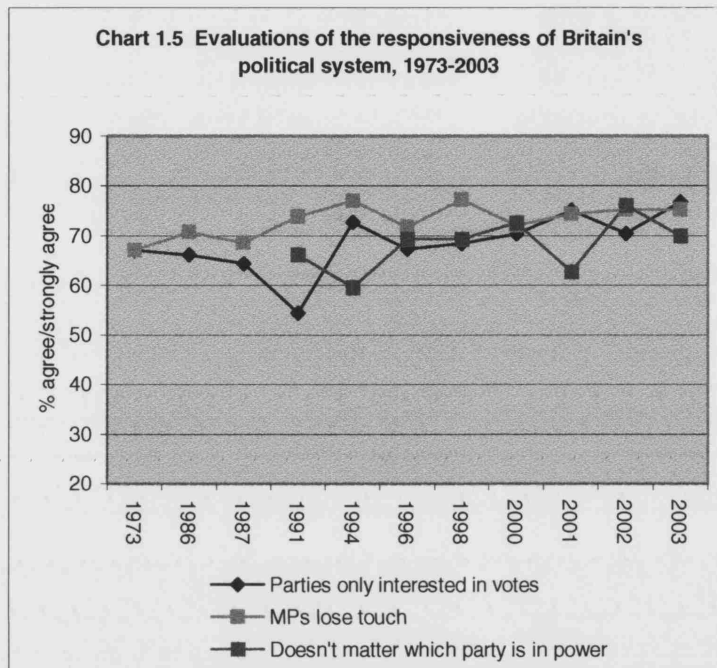
- Agree strongly
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Disagree strongly"

These indicators are often treated as measurements of the same feature, namely the extent to which political institutions respond to the demands made on them, the notion of 'system efficacy' (Marsh, 1977).<sup>11</sup> Note that two of the questions relate directly to the role of political parties, and are thus of interest as much for what they reveal about public attitudes towards these specific institutions, as for what they reveal about system responsiveness more generally.

Ever since the early 1970s – and almost certainly before then, too (see footnote 7) – citizens have taken a dim view of the responsiveness of their political institutions (Chart 1.5) In 1973, two thirds of respondents believed that MPs were out of touch with voters and that the parties were more interested in

<sup>11</sup> Although statistical analysis by Pattie and Johnston (2001a) suggests that these items do not cluster together under a common label of 'system efficacy'.

people's votes than in their opinions. Given such high initial levels of doubt, it is perhaps not surprising that perceptions of responsiveness have not declined by that much ever since. However, the past three decades have seen a slight deterioration in public attitudes, particularly around the early 1990s (the same period that saw a sharp decline in trust; Chart 1.4).



Source: Marsh, 1977: Table 5.4; *British Social Attitudes* surveys.

Moreover, unresponsiveness appears to be the fault of the system, not of citizens themselves. Asked in 1959 to respond to the statement "Some people say that politics and government are so complicated that the average man cannot really understand what is going on", 59 per cent agreed (Almond and Verba, 1963). By 1996, that proportion had risen to 66 per cent, although it fell to 61 per cent by 2003. So although a majority among the population admits to difficulties in understanding politics, this proportion has not increased over time. Shortcomings on the part of citizens themselves are thus not to blame for perceptions that the political system has become less responsive.

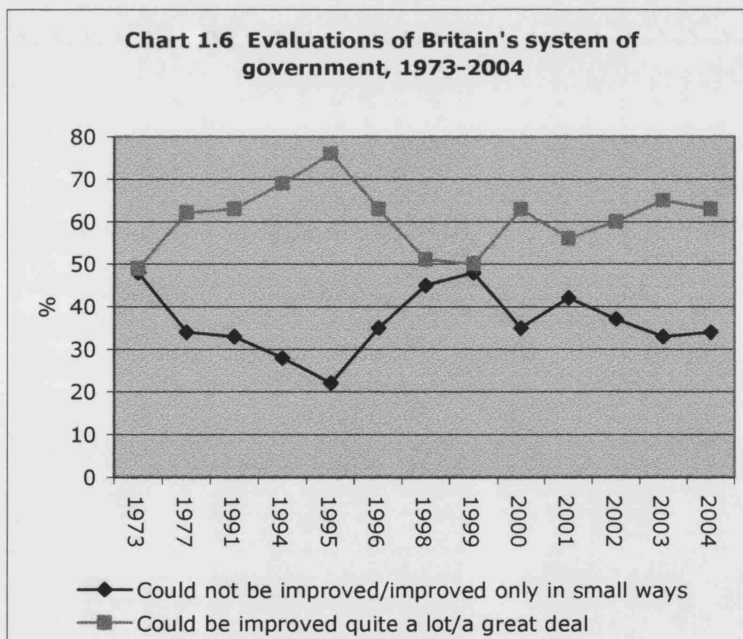
Having gauged evaluations of the trustworthiness of party government and the responsiveness of parties and their representatives, I now turn to two measures that probe attitudes towards the effectiveness of the political system more generally. These measures similarly tap evaluations of the way the system actually works, or its "informal structure" (Fuchs et al, 1995), but they do so in more abstract terms. They can thus be considered rather more 'diffuse', less

'specific', judgements than those stimulated by questions about particular actors or institutions.

The first question - which dates back to the early 1970s - asks respondents to evaluate the "present system of governing in Britain", by reference to one of the following options:

- It works extremely well and could not be improved
- It could be improved in small ways, but mainly works well
- It could be improved quite a lot
- It needs a great deal of improvement

As Chart 1.6 shows, popular discontent with the functioning of the political system was rampant in the mid-1990s. In 1995, over three quarters (76 per cent) believed Britain's political system needed at least quite a lot of improvement (of which 35 per cent thought it needed a great deal of improvement). Although government replacement in 1997 brought attitudes back to where they had been in the early 1970s, demands for improvement have subsequently risen.



Source: Bromley, Curtice and Seyd, 2001: Table 9.6; 1994: ICM/Channel 4; 2001-03: British Social Attitudes; 2004: ICM/State of the Nation

A second question - again originating in surveys conducted in the early-1970s - asks respondents how satisfied they are with the way that democracy works in Britain. This question is usually held to tap attitudes towards the overall working



of the political system ('diffuse' support); it is thus held to be a good measure of how people believe their political institutions actually function (Fuchs et al, 1995; Anderson, nd). Drawing on Eurobarometer surveys since 1973, Clarke et al (2004: Fig 9.3) show that mean levels of satisfaction with democracy, while fluctuating somewhat, followed a gentle upwards trajectory over the thirty years to 2001. In other words, far from becoming more discontented, citizens have, if anything, become rather more positive about the operation of the democratic system over the last three decades.

In this section, I have presented data on a selection of indicators of citizens' attitudes to their political institutions. It would be a mistake to rely too much on these indicators in gauging what is a complex phenomena. Overall, however, I suggest that, over the past three decades or so, British citizens have adopted a more critical stance towards their political system. However, this discontent is most manifest in relation to specific actors, institutions and processes; it does not appear to spill over into frustration at the broad contours of the political system.

### **Conclusion: The nature of Britain's democratic malaise**

The replacement of an unpopular Conservative government in 1997 might have been a cause of celebration for many. But for even more, disenchantment and/or disengagement characterised their relationship with Britain's political system. Levels of electoral participation had fallen at all tiers of government. Fewer and fewer people trusted their political agents or believed that their political institutions would respond to their needs and demands.<sup>12</sup> True, even the limited data presented here suggests that the picture was not all gloomy; evaluations of the performance of the political system in broad terms had actually strengthened somewhat. But there can be no doubt that, at the end of the twentieth century, a substantial question mark hung over the popular legitimacy of Britain's political system. It was this waning legitimacy that the constitutional reform programme of the incoming Labour Government was in part designed to address.

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<sup>12</sup> These indicators of democratic disengagement are far from unique to Britain, and can be found across most advanced democracies. On the decline in electoral participation, see Franklin (2004). On the decline in political trust and confidence, see Norris (1999), Pharr and Putnam (2000) and Dalton (2004).

## THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS AND THEIR RATIONALE

The constitutional reforms introduced since 1997 represent fundamental changes to the way Britain's political system operates. Whether the reforms deserve comparison with the first expansion of the franchise in 1832, or even further back with the move to a constitutionally limited executive in 1688, their significance cannot be doubted. Just a list of the most notable reforms is sufficient to convey the breadth of the programme.<sup>13</sup> Power has been decentralised via the creation of new tiers of government in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London.<sup>14</sup> The capital, London, and several other towns in England have seen the introduction of directly elected mayors. New voting arrangements have been introduced for regional and European elections. More extensive checks on the authority of the executive have been introduced. A stronger rights regime has been established, with judges accorded greater powers over executive authority. The executive has also been made more open, with specific rights for citizens and organisations to access official information. The legislature has been reformed, with a recast membership in the upper chamber, and new working arrangements in the lower chamber. Provision has been made for greater public voice on constitutional issues, via referendums. Finally, more formal arrangements have been introduced for the way parties are funded and compete at elections.

For a party that traditionally has been suspicious of constitutional reform (Foley, 1999: 190-9; Bogdanor, 2001; Evans, 2003: ch2), this flurry of activity must be counted as something of a surprise. What motivated Labour's concern to reform Britain's political institutions? Rationales for policy innovations can be both overt (ie. made public) and covert (ie. kept hidden). The constitutional reforms were clearly motivated by covert, as well as overt, factors. In particular, as an opposition party for eighteen years, Labour despaired at its failure to check the activities of successive Conservative governments (Evans, 2003: chs3-4).<sup>15</sup>

But political reform was also motivated by a set of more principled - and overtly stated - arguments. Most of these arguments were *intrinsic*; they concerned

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<sup>13</sup> For more detailed descriptions of the reforms, see the many textbooks and articles that have appeared since 1997. One particularly comprehensive textbook is Oliver, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Since the devolution reforms in Northern Ireland are *sui generis*, I do not deal with them in the course of this work, the focus of which is thus on Britain.

perceived flaws in Britain's political system which the constitutional reforms were designed to remedy. These arguments suggested that the political system was over-centralised, over-dominated by a powerful executive and excessively secretive, with a supine parliament, poor democratic accountability of executive agencies and weakly entrenched individual rights (for key statements by policy actors, see: Smith, 1992, 1993; Brown, 1992; Labour Party, 1993, 1997; Blair, 1996a; Joint Consultative Committee, 1997; Irvine, 1998). On these policy accounts, constitutional reform served an inherent good, providing Britain with more decentralised and open government, stronger checks and balances on, and individual rights over, the state, clearer forms of accountability and more extensive opportunities for citizen participation.

The rationale for the reform programme also extended into a broad set of instrumental or *extrinsic* dividends. One set of benefits identified by some of the main policy actors concerned the decision making processes and outputs of government. On this account, Britain's political institutions needed to be reformed (or, as more commonly put, 'updated' or 'modernised') if they were to facilitate the kind of decision making processes appropriate in a globalised economy (Allen, 1995; Labour Party, 1996). A second set of benefits related less to the capacity of executive agents than to their relationship with citizens. I have already noted the decline in popular engagement with Britain's political institutions since the 1970s. Concern that the political system was suffering ever weaker levels of popular legitimacy came to form a consistent theme among many commentators, dating back to the late 1960s and early 1970s (Birch, 1984). By the mid-1990s, these doubts had risen; not only was Britain's political system failing to provide the conditions for good governance, it was also failing to retain the support and engagement of its citizens.

A concern with this popular discontent and disengagement came to form a key element in the Labour Party's rationale for constitutional change. The then leader of the party, John Smith, claimed in 1992 that:

"... across Britain, people are losing faith in our democracy. This is largely because government has become so remote. People feel increasingly isolated and powerless. Disillusionment and cynicism [has] spread". (Smith, 1992: 179-80; see also Smith, 1993)

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<sup>15</sup> This covert rationale is entirely consistent with Labour's reluctance, once in office, to move beyond any reforms expressly promised as manifesto commitments (for example, by reforming the electoral system for Westminster).

The theme was taken up by Smith's successor, Tony Blair. A year before gaining office, Blair argued that:

"Changing the way we govern, and not just changing our government, is no longer an optional extra for Britain. So low is popular esteem for politicians and the system we operate that there is now little authority for us to use unless and until we first succeed in regaining it". (Blair, 1996b)

In its 1997 election manifesto, Labour noted that: "There is undoubtedly a national crisis of confidence in our political system, to which Labour will respond in a sensible and measured way" (Labour Party, 1997: 32). Thus, ignoring the issue of whether arising from principle or for reasons of electoral advantage<sup>16</sup>, key policy actors within the Labour Party were increasingly voicing concern about a perceived disconnection between governments and citizens. It is within this context that figures such as John Smith and Tony Blair rationalised the need for constitutional reform.<sup>17</sup> True, both suggested that their reform proposals would have intrinsic merits, such as remedying an over-centralised, unaccountable and secretive state. But the larger goal for both leaders (judging by the issue with which both chose to open their accounts in the two texts just quoted) was the benefit these intrinsic virtues would confer on the relationship between citizens and governments. In fact, Tony Blair (1996a) even suggested that 'democratic renewal' be preferred as a term to 'constitutional reform'.<sup>18</sup>

Similar rationales for the constitutional reform programme are apparent among other important policy actors. In a key text published on the eve of the 1997 election, Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle (1996: 191) argued that Labour ministers must treat constitutional reform as a central part of the party's programme in order to:

"... demonstrate convincingly that they recognise the public's deep-seated disillusionment with politics, and that it will be unacceptable for the old show to go on with only different-coloured rosettes."

<sup>16</sup> Many Labour politicians believed that the picture of an alienated citizenry, and the need for political reform, were electorally resonant messages, and good sticks with which to beat the Conservatives (Evans, 2003: chs 3-4).

<sup>17</sup> Some commentators have argued that Tony Blair was not committed to constitutional reform, but instead inherited the various commitments from a more sincere reformer, John Smith (Flinders, 2004). Whether this is true or not does not affect the validity of my analysis, since Blair *did* retain the commitments, and *did* provide his own public rationale for the various measures (and in very similar terms to Smith's). It is thus reasonable to explore the success of the reforms in the terms set out by Blair - namely the need for democratic renewal - without enquiring further about the sincerity of these rationalisations.

<sup>18</sup> Although this preference no doubt reflected a calculation about the relative public resonance of the two terms.

In the same vein, having noted that "Our political system is in a bad shape. Scandals, sleaze, patronage, secrecy and waste have undermined public confidence and eaten away at our democracy", Jack Straw and colleagues claimed that "Our plans [for constitutional reform] will begin to restore the bond of trust and confidence between government and the British people" (Straw et al, 1996: 12). In retrospective accounts of why the Labour Government devoted so much energy to constitutional reform during its first two terms in office, the two Lord Chancellors to have served between 1997 and 2004 both pointed to the need to boost public confidence in, and engagement with, the political system (Irvine, 1998; Falconer, 2003). And, finally, we should note that constitutional reform as a means of re-engaging Britain's citizens was not a position limited to the Labour Party. The Liberal Democrats, longer standing supporters of reform, also suggested that changes to the political system were necessary to reverse perceived declines in trust and turnout (Liberal Democrats, 1993, 2000).

Among many of the key policy actors then, constitutional reform was seen as a means of strengthening the linkages between citizens and political institutions, linkages perceived to have atrophied badly in recent years. This is not to suggest that the reforms are primarily explicable on these terms. I have already noted that some proposals for constitutional reform concentrated on their intrinsic merits<sup>19</sup>, or on such extrinsic benefits as the payoffs for effective decision making and governance. Nor is it to suggest that constitutional reform was the only means by which policy actors hoped to generate closer linkages between citizens and government (although as the quotations from Tony Blair indicate, the reforms were regarded as vital to this goal). All I want to establish here is that, central to the introduction of a wide ranging programme of constitutional reform after 1997 was a desire to re-engage citizens with democratic institutions and processes. (The reform of democratic institutions to re-engage disaffected citizens is a recent trend across many western countries (Cain et al, 2003), although few have undergone such radical institutional restructuring as Britain.)

In this, policy actors were not alone. Ever since the British political system became an object more for brickbats than for admiration in the 1970s, multiple proposals have been put forward for its reform. Many of these have invoked in their support the spectre of an increasingly disengaged and alienated population.

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Gordon Brown's two main speeches on the need for constitutional reform hardly touch on the implications for patterns of citizen engagement (Brown, 1992, 1997).

Granted, some have suggested that the legitimisation crisis arose in response to the country's declining social and economic performance (for such diagnoses, see Birch, 1984; Marquand, 1988; Bogdanor, 2003). But others pointed the finger of blame squarely at Britain's political institutions. On these accounts, while social and economic changes have stimulated citizens' expectations and demands of the political system, the system itself has remained largely inert.<sup>20</sup> In particular, domestic governing arrangements were judged to have failed to provide citizens with sufficient control over collective affairs. Historically, the limitations on citizen participation arose from the fact that Britain's core political institutions were developed well before the principle of popular sovereignty gained widespread acceptance. As a result, Britain's constitutional arrangements privileged 'representative government' over 'representative democracy' (Judge, 1999; see also Marquand, 1988; Wright, 1994). Yet the basic practices around which these arrangements were built, or at least came to be built - parliamentary sovereignty, periodic elections and party discipline - were increasingly seen from the 1970s onwards as incompatible with popular demands, and thus as a prime cause of declining citizen confidence. As David Marquand argued:

"... the Schumpeterian assumption that democratic politics revolve around a competitive struggle for the people's vote ... can no longer provide the basis for a legitimate political order" (Marquand, 1988: 241).

Geoff Mulgan, too, saw popular discontent with the political system arising from the limited control and participation it afforded them:

"If there is a single core problem with our current system of governance it is that the people are disconnected with it; that it is not self-government by any meaningful definition."  
(Mulgan, 1996: 223)

A third contemporary commentator, Andrew Adonis, was equally clear that:

"Today's discontent with politics is largely caused by a failure to adapt the political system sufficiently over recent decades" (Adonis, 1997: 5).

Many commentaries on the need for constitutional reform were thus made in the name of stimulating a more trusting, supportive and participatory citizenry.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The 'legitimation crisis' is not, of course, a peculiarly British disease, but has arisen as an issue across many western democracies; see footnote 12).

<sup>21</sup> Although not all proposals were couched in such terms. Many rationales for constitutional reform in Britain relied on intrinsic arguments, that is arguments based on the inherent merits of the reforms, not on the wider benefits they are held to bring. For example, James Cornford (1993) rationalised a programme of constitutional reform on the need to restrain the Executive, with no mention of the

However, compared with policy actors, commentators tended to be rather more critical of the basic institutions of representative democracy, and thus more demanding when it came to the required reforms.<sup>22</sup> It is worth examining the main lines of these criticisms and demands, since they suggest what factors might (allegedly) lay behind citizens' disengagement from political institutions, and thus what remedies might be required. A theme touched on throughout this work is that institutional design can affect citizen attitudes and behaviour in many ways. The reforms introduced in Britain since 1997 work within one institutional model, namely a representative framework. But other models are also available, based on a far greater level of popular participation, potentially unmediated by partisan intermediary bodies. Competing institutional models, and the factors that define them, are set out more clearly in Chapter Two. What I want to note here are the range of diagnoses and cures offered in contemporary commentaries on Britain's political system. In particular, I want to explore how far the perceived problems with British democracy, and the recommended improvements, are synonymous with those offered by policy actors. Or, maybe commentators discern a broader set of ailments and remedies, suggesting perhaps that the reforms introduced since 1997 may not go far enough. I return to this issue in the Conclusion, when I consider why the constitutional reform programme, radical though it is, may not have achieved its envisaged goal, of citizen re-engagement. Here, though, I merely want to note the contours of the commentators' case.

One strand of commentary - particularly strong among 'legalistic' accounts - identifies the principal shortcoming of Britain's governing arrangements as excessively weak constraints on the Executive (eg. Cornford, 1993; Mount, 1993). These diagnoses, which generally make little reference to levels of citizen engagement, tend to yield proposals for stronger checks and balances, and for tighter legal and rights-based constraints on executive activity. More far reaching critiques identify additional shortcomings, such as the limited participatory opportunities available to citizens, and the centralisation of political power at Westminster (eg. Marquand, 1988, 1997). In addition to supporting more extensive checks and balances, these accounts stress the importance of decentralising power, thereby creating more extensive opportunities for participation and alternative forums of political agency (Hirst, 1990: ch2; Mulgan,

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wider implications for the way citizens engage with their government. This is not to criticise Cornford's argument, merely to note the terms on which this was couched.

1994: ch1; Marquand, 2000, 2004: 116-48). The shortcomings in Britain's constitutional arrangements identified by these two sets of accounts are reasonably similar to those expressed by the main policy actors, as are their recommendations. Thus, on these commentaries, the constitutional reform proposals put forward by Labour in opposition - if not those actually delivered in government (see Chapter Seven: Conclusion) - are broadly an appropriate response to the perceived deficiencies in the British political system.

As I noted above, a fairly consistent theme among the recent critiques of the British political system is the lack of participatory opportunities afforded to citizens. Commentators contrast the growing educational and cognitive capabilities of the population with the continued restriction of political expression to (infrequent) periodic elections. From this concern arise various proposals that go beyond the 'traditional' list of constitutional reforms discussed in the previous paragraph. One proposal is to increase the opportunities for citizen involvement in decision making at the local level, either through direct election to the governing boards of bodies such as health authorities and schools (Fishman, 1989), or through selecting citizens to serve on such bodies through lot (Wright, 1994: 98). Another is extend the opportunities for participation outside the political realm, in the economic and social domain, via workplace democracy and various forms of associationalism and corporatism (Hirst, 1990; Wright, 1994). A third proposal is to supplement indirect forms of participation, via election, with direct methods of engagement. Some commend the use from time to time of referendums and devices such as citizens' juries, as an adjunct to representative arrangements (Marr, 1996; Alexander, 1997; Bogdanor, 1997). Others identify a wider variety of mechanisms for direct participation - such as e-democracy devices like online voting and debate - which are envisaged as a far more regular form of interaction between elected representatives and citizens (Wright, 1994, 1996; Mulgan, 1996; Adonis, 1997; Barnett, 1997; Clarke, 2002).

One of the attractions of more direct forms of citizen engagement is that they open the potential for bypassing the role of political parties. While most commentators agree that political parties play a valuable role in the representative process - in helping to identify and aggregate social preferences - some argue that this role is double-edged, with a deleterious side, too. Parties are held to unduly dominate, and thus constrain, the issue agenda, preventing

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<sup>22</sup> The more critical and radical nature of the commentators is no surprise; policy actors hopeful of one day assuming office via representative democratic processes are hardly likely to fundamentally question these processes.



the emergence and discussion of new issues (Hirst, 1990; Mulgan, 1994, 1996; Bogdanor, 1997). This dominance is doubly dangerous for effective representation, since the parties are believed to hold ever weaker bonds with key social groups (Barnett, 1996; Bogdanor, 1997), and - by virtue of becoming more hierarchical - with their own activists (Barnett, 1996). The use of direct devices such as referendums and citizens' juries thus opens the potential for extending participation while curtailing the role of the parties.<sup>23</sup>

This is a brief and highly simplified review of some of the many critiques of the British political system and of the proposals for its reform. My purpose has been to identify two broad perspectives that seek to explain why citizens have become disengaged from political institutions and processes, and what role constitutional reform might play in addressing this. The first perspective essentially suggests that the decline in legitimacy is due to remote political institutions, insufficient opportunities for participation and a weakly constrained and over-secretive executive. Given this diagnosis, the prescription is for a major programme of constitutional reform. Commentators adopting this perspective are thus relatively sanguine about the potential revitalising effects of the reforms:<sup>24</sup>

"If the political vacuum was filled by constitutional reform and a devolution of power downwards, the whole of the British political process would be revitalised. People would overcome their cynicism towards their MPs and become genuinely interested in affairs of state, precisely because they would have a genuine way of affecting their representatives at Westminster." (Fishman, 1989: 454)

The second perspective is more cautious about the ameliorative role of constitutional reform for Britain's democratic shortcomings. The disjuncture between the demands made by citizens and the capabilities of representative institutions is held to be too great to be bridged simply by reforming these bodies. Instead, a more radical programme of direct citizen participation is required. The Labour MP, Tony Wright, argues that:

"What is essential ... is to ensure that Labour's constitutional reforms, important though they are in their own terms, are seen as part of a much wider ambition to revive civic life and reconnect people to the political process." (Wright, 1997: 12)

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<sup>23</sup> Some commentators also propose schemes to extend participatory opportunities within the parties, such as all-member primary contests for leader and candidate selection (Wright, 1994: 97).

<sup>24</sup> Or they were when Labour was setting out its proposals in opposition; what the party has delivered in government is often a different matter. See Chapter 7: Conclusion for further discussion.

More critically, having commended the role of constitutional constraints on government, Adonis and Mulgan go on to argue:

"These additional constraints might improve the quality of governance in Britain. But their limitation is that they would do little to answer the basic deficiency of modern democracy. They would, in short, do nothing to reduce the dominance of politicians. Instead, they would simply shuffle power from one group of politicians to another, with the addition of a few judges." (Adonis and Mulgan, 1997: 228)

The end result of merely 'shuffling' power from one group of politicians to another might, if anything, be greater, not less, public disaffection (Mulgan, 1996).<sup>25</sup>

There is thus much consensus that, going into the twenty first century, the British political system faces a major problem of legitimacy. Citizens today are believed to be more critical of their political agents and institutions, and less likely to engage with them. There is also much agreement, even among Conservative politicians and commentators, of the need to reform these institutions to strengthen the linkages between citizens and government. But whereas the main policy actors and some commentators see the constitutional reform programme proposed by Labour as, in the main, a sufficient response to the problem of legitimacy, other commentators suggest that more fundamental reforms are required, in particular a move to more extensive citizen participation and engagement outside the confines of the political parties.

## **ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN BRITAIN: INDICATORS OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND CASE STUDIES**

Having reviewed the nature of Britain's democratic malaise, and the potential ameliorative role of the constitutional reform programme, I now turn to outlining the main elements of the research undertaken in the subsequent chapters, in particular Chapters Three to Six. The main purpose of these chapters is to consider what effect various important institutional reforms have had on the linkages between citizens and government. In Chapter Two, I specify the main overarching theoretical accounts of why particular institutional configurations

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<sup>25</sup> Some Labour policy actors have expressed similar beliefs, that citizens will only be re-engaged with the political system if they are accorded more opportunities for direct participation in collective decisions. Thus, David Blunkett has recently argued that "Tackling voter disengagement will ... require more than simply creating formal constitutional rights, important as these are. The central challenge is whether we can develop a genuinely participative democracy, sustained by a robust, vibrant political culture which meets the conditions of contemporary Britain" (Blunkett, 2001: 133). The solutions to citizen disengagement lie "... beyond creating new layers of formal representation or accountability" (*ibid*: 145).

should yield beneficial outcomes. Before then, in this section, I introduce and rationalise both the core indicators by which citizen-government linkages will be measured, and the particular institutional reforms that will be analysed.

The linkages that bond citizens with their political institutions are multi-faceted, based on a variety of attitudinal and behavioural characteristics. In the discussion above on the health of democracy in Britain, I concentrated on two indicators: electoral participation and political attitudes. In the rest of this study, I continue with these two indicators (although supplemented, where appropriate, with additional measures). There are two reasons for this focus. First, as noted in the section above on the rationale for constitutional reform, the need to stimulate higher levels of turnout and political trust was frequently invoked by both policy actors and commentators. Granted, not all the policy actors who raised the spectre of a democratic malaise identified shortcomings in both turnout and trust. Tony Blair, for example, frequently noted the decline in public trust in government and political institutions, and identified this as a goal of his Government's constitutional reform programme (see page 19). But Blair made few similar warnings, and set no similar priority, when it came to rates of electoral participation. Nonetheless, while a decline in the public's regard for political institutions might have figured more highly among policy actors and commentators, both also identified low and falling rates of electoral turnout as a symptom of Britain's democratic malaise, and institutional reform as an appropriate response (see the opening sections in Chapters Three to Six for claims about specific reforms). It therefore seems appropriate to adopt similar indicators when it comes to reviewing the impact of the reforms.

The second reason for selecting turnout and trust as measures is that both are key indicators of the health of a democracy. Irrespective of any particular claims by policy actors or commentators, levels of electoral participation and political trust provide important information about the quality of the linkages between citizens and governments. Thus, to the extent that political reform is intended - at least in part - to improve the quality of democratic life in a country, the impact on turnout and trust is intrinsically important. Why? The basic goal of any democratic system - representative or direct - is to ensure that collective decisions are responsive to citizens' demands. If, in a representative democracy, citizens feel that these decisions are not responsive, the impetus to take part in elections, and to invest trust in one's representatives, will wane. Thus, in an unresponsive democratic system, levels of electoral participation and political

trust will likely be very low. Conversely, a healthy (ie. responsive) system, with appropriately designed political institutions, should encourage citizens to register their demands, via elections, and to invest trust in their representatives.

This is not to take the simplistic line that, by virtue of high turnout (or trust) alone, some countries can be judged more 'democratic' than others (Parry and Moyser, 1994). But it is to argue that, in general, participation levels reflect citizens' judgements about how responsive the political system is to their demands, and therefore that high electoral turnout, all other things being equal, signifies an effective and legitimate political system (Powell, 1982: ch2). A similar case can be made for political attitudes, such as trust. The more citizens feel that political institutions are designed to ensure responsive outcomes, the more likely they are, all other things being equal, to invest trust in their political agents. Trust is by no means the only indicator that could be chosen to gauge citizens' attitudes to their political institutions; responsiveness, or 'efficacy', as noted above, would be an alternative.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, while I acknowledge doubts over the concept (Hardin, 1999) and its measurement (O'Neill, 2002), political trust - in the sense of a citizen's confidence that a political agent will act in their best interests or at least in the way they promised - appears to me to constitute a good measure of the health of citizens' relations with representative institutions and actors. (The fact that it is so routinely referred to by policy actors and commentators only adds to its appropriateness as an indicator.)

So electoral turnout and political trust are the two basic indicators I use in analysing the constitutional reforms introduced in Britain since 1997. In abstract terms, well designed (ie. responsive) political institutions should stimulate both turnout and trust. But should we really anticipate the constitutional reforms having the same beneficial effect on both variables? After all, even theoretically, it is not difficult to construct scenarios in which turnout and trust do not run in parallel. Thus, for example, citizens that feel able to invest high levels of trust in their governments - due to a responsive set of political institutions - may feel less inclined to participate at elections. If participation is primarily motivated by a desire to register policy demands, then citizens who are confident in the responsiveness of their electoral mechanisms and who thus feel able to trust their

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<sup>26</sup> Ideally, too, one should judge institutional design not only by how far it stimulates appropriate behaviour (turnout) and attitudes (trust) on the part of citizens, but also substantively by whether it responds to their demands. Responsiveness can be operationalised in terms of policy congruence: the proximity of policy demands made by citizens and the policy programmes introduced by governments. While policy congruence has been the subject of many highly informative studies, we lack sufficient

rulers, may not feel the need to participate at every election. In fact, they may rationally decide to participate only when their own demands change or when existing demands are in danger of being ignored (because a party representing conflicting demands is poised to take office). On such scenarios, high trust would be detrimental to, and not associated with, high turnout.<sup>27</sup>

So abstract arguments about the coexistence of a participatory and trustful citizenry cut both ways. What about in practice; how far are high rates of participation associated with high levels of trust? Or, is the relationship weaker, suggesting that citizen attitudes and behaviour are largely independent of one another, or even negative, with one condition existing at the expense of the other?<sup>28</sup> Drawing on data from the *British Election Study 1997* and the *British Social Attitudes 2001* surveys, I find a mild and positive relationship between the two variables. Thus, those who express trust in government tend to participate in elections at a slightly higher rate than those who express distrust. At the 2001 general election, for example, turnout was 73 per cent among those who said they trusted government 'most of the time' or 'always', but only 64 per cent among those who said they trusted government 'only some of the time' or 'almost never'. The correlation between turnout and political trust is a modest, but statistically significant, 0.19 in 1997 and 0.28 in 2001.<sup>29</sup>

The conclusion is that there is some overlap between citizens' political behaviour (turnout) and their attitudes towards political institutions (trust). Those who profess trust in their rulers are more likely to engage in elections than those whose trust is lower. However, the relationship between the two is not very strong; many people trust but without engaging, or engage but without trusting. Thus, individual level data suggests that, while institutional reform is unlikely to

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data in Britain for the period pre and post 1997 to conduct similar analysis in relation to the new institutional configurations.

<sup>27</sup> It is often suggested that low trust might be associated with high participation, as citizens who are discontented with their political agents engage *en masse* to eject them from office (see Norris, 1999b). While this reasoning is fair, the goal set by political actors and commentators for constitutional reform in Britain was to increase political trust by strengthening the responsiveness of core political institutions. If successful, this would imply that citizens should, in the main, be trustful, irrespective of the government in office at any one point in time. Citizen distrust would, on this argument, indicate a belief that the institutions themselves were unresponsive, in which case mobilising to change the government – by voting at an election – would make little difference.

<sup>28</sup> Since my objective is to review whether institutional reform might stimulate participation *and* more supportive attitudes (or only one, perhaps at the expense of the other), I merely test for evidence of an association. Thus, can the conditions that stimulate high participation also stimulate high trust? I am not interested in the causal relationship between turnout and trust. While cross-sectional analyses (such as those reported here) suggest a mutual positive relationship, more extensive longitudinal research suggests that changes in electoral participation – specifically, the decline in turnout across countries since 1945 – are unrelated to levels of political trust (Franklin, 2004: ch5).

<sup>29</sup> For similar results from cross-national analyses, see Dalton, 2004: 173-6; Norris, 2002: Table 5.5.

stimulate turnout or trust at the expense of the other, it may not always boost both at the same time. In fact, not all of the reforms introduced by the Labour Government in Britain since 1997 are addressed at both together. Some are primarily aimed at one, albeit with the potential for secondary effects on the other. I therefore turn to the four reforms I consider in this work, to examine how far each might be anticipated to affect turnout or trust or both together.

The four reforms I analyse are: The regulation of party funding (Chapter Three); Electoral reform (Chapter Four); Devolution (Chapter Five), and; The direct election of local mayors (Chapter Six). Why have I selected these reforms as my case studies? The first reason is that they all represent significant changes to the way political authority is exercised in Britain. This is clearly the case with devolution and electoral reform. But even the regulation of party funding and the introduction of directly elected mayors have major implications for political agency, the first at the national level, the second at the local level. So the first reason for my choices is that each is a significant reform in its own right. The second reason, following on from the first, is that each may be thought likely to affect the relations between governments and citizens. As set out in more detail in the relevant individual chapters, each reform is intended - among other goals - to encourage electoral participation (electoral reform, devolution and local mayors) and/or to stimulate greater public trust (the regulation of party funding, electoral reform, devolution and local mayors).

Moreover, each reform is designed to do so via a rather different route; the selection of these four reforms thus has the virtue of highlighting the variety of ways in which institutional design might affect the linkages between citizens and governments. This issue is dealt with more fully in Chapter Two, so I only prefigure this discussion here. All the reforms I deal with share a certain commonality in falling within the representative model of democracy; none institutes frequent and unmediated citizen voice in the manner of direct, or participatory, democratic models. Three of the reforms assume a partisan basis to the representative process, by operating within the confines of a party based model of electoral competition. The partial exception is the mayoral model which, as set out more fully in Chapter Six, opens the way for non-partisan forms of electoral choice. The reforms also differ in the extent to which they provide opportunities for citizen participation. A basic distinction here is between the new party funding regime, which among the reforms does the least to upset the

existing representative model, and the other three reforms, which provide in varying degrees for greater participation.

These distinctions thus raise two issues about the relationship between institutional design and citizen-government linkages. First, given the question marks over the legitimacy of political parties as representative bodies (see Chapter Two), are reforms that maintain their dominant role liable to fail in their goal of strengthening public confidence and trust? Second, might similarly limited effects be anticipated for reforms that fail to provide more extensive opportunities for citizen participation? Taking these two issues together, we can ask whether institutional reforms that operate within the representative model - based on party dominated competitive elections - are capable of meeting the demands of contemporary citizens in Britain? Or, is a more fundamental shift to a participatory model - with or without the mediating role of political parties - required? These are fascinating questions. Regrettably, they cannot be answered conclusively, since the survey data available in Britain simply doesn't allow for the required level and precision of analysis. But the questions - which are set out in more detail in Chapter Two - hover over my examination of the constitutional reforms, and I attempt at least a partial answer in the concluding chapter.

The third and final reason for my selection of case studies is that each is covered by at least some individual level data (although the extent of this varies between the reforms, as will be seen in the specific chapters).<sup>30</sup> The availability of survey data means that we can explore the relationship between citizens' views on the reforms and patterns of behaviour and attitudes. While aggregate data can be used to gauge the impact of a reform on citizen behaviour - as I do at various points in later chapters - it is a relatively blunt source of information, and obviously cannot be used to enquire into the effect on citizen attitudes.

In sum, then, my case studies each represent important reforms to Britain's governing arrangements, they collectively elucidate the different ways in which institutional reform can shape the relationship between citizens and governments,

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<sup>30</sup> This contrasts with other elements of the post-1997 reform programme - such as the Human Rights Act - even though these measures might plausibly be anticipated to have some positive effects on citizens' attitudes towards political authority. The only other major reform that might be expected to have such an effect - indeed, it was largely justified on the grounds of enhancing transparency and trust - is freedom of information. However, the freedom of information provisions only came into effect in January 2005, too late for my analysis, and have anyway been the subject of only very limited previous public opinion surveys.

and they are all the subject of a reasonable level of primary data, through which empirical judgements can be reached.

One final issue demands coverage at this stage. This issue is best expressed in the form of an objection: surely it is simply too early to judge the impact of the constitutional reforms in Britain? After all, the reforms are still young. The oldest – the creation of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly under new electoral arrangements – dates back only to 1999, while new rules on party funding derive from 2001, and elected mayors from 2002. How can we possibly reach conclusions just six years, at best, into the reform process?

This objection has a common-sense logic. Citizens accustomed to the behaviour of political agents under one set of rules are likely to reserve judgement on any new rules until they observe how their agents' activities change. Underlying such doubts are more theoretical assumptions of 'sociological' or 'cultural' forms of institutionalism. Put simply, these suggest that changes in political institutions do not effect immediate shifts in behaviour on the part of citizens or elites, but rather incremental processes of change that build up over time. In the case of political elites, changes only occur once parties and their leaders begin to appreciate, and work within, the new incentives and constraints under which they now operate, a process that can take a considerable time (see Geddes, 1996 for examples of behavioural 'stickiness' in the context of institutional reform in developing countries). The process can take even longer for citizens, as populations socialised into a dominant pattern of behaviour only slowly change these patterns as new age cohorts replace older ones (for this argument, see the brief discussion in Chapter Four of Mark Franklin's analysis of turnout decline).

The common sense and theoretical objections clearly have much to commend them. In real life, citizens are not simply highly rational and fully informed utility maximisers, who change their behaviour immediately they are faced with new incentives and constraints (see Norris, 2004: 7-22 for a pithy discussion of the 'rational choice' versus 'cultural' approaches to institutional design). Yet this is not to admit that evaluations of short term institutional effects are somehow baseless and misleading. For one, it could be argued that short term evaluations are better at capturing pure 'institutional effect' than longer term judgements. Thus, assuming that individuals at least in part conform to the informed utility maximisers of rational choice theory, any short term shifts in attitudes or behaviour can be thought of as representing a response to changing institutional



conditions. Longer term shifts, by contrast, may be determined less by new institutional conditions than by the performance of policy actors and the policy outputs generated by these institutions. In other words, such performance and policy evaluations may 'contaminate' responses to new institutional conditions, which may be more accurately discerned in the short, rather than in the long, term.

A more pragmatic response to the objection is simply to point to the provisional nature of the results. Maybe ten or twenty years down the line, researchers will be able to assess categorically how far the constitutional reforms have, or have not, re-engaged citizens with governments (although again, the question would remain of how far the measured effects are due to the new institutions themselves, and how far to the performance of actors within these institutions?). The limited timeframe of the reforms thus far means I cannot offer such definitive conclusions here. What I attempt to do is to set out some of the data and methodologies that one might employ in exploring the impact of institutional reform on citizens' engagement with the political system. Having reviewed this data, I then make some judgements about what level of (re)engagement has been stimulated in the short term. But my conclusions are highly tentative and provisional. As I show in Chapters Three to Six, and return to in Chapter Seven, the discernible institutional effects are, in many cases, very small. It may well be that more pronounced effects only become apparent over time. But I offer the following evaluations and results as initial judgements, and as baseline results on which later, and more definitive, analyses can be based.

## **Chapter 2**

### **DO INSTITUTIONS MATTER?**

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In the previous chapter, I outlined the 'problem' (in the form of public disregard for, and lack of engagement with, Britain's political institutions) and a potential 'solution' (systematic reform of those institutions). In the following four chapters, I examine how far these solutions have, indeed, addressed the problem by boosting levels of system support and electoral engagement. In this chapter, I take a step back to consider in more general terms whether institutional reform can serve to stimulate closer linkages between citizens and their governments. Should the claims made by policy actors and commentators in favour of institutional reform be treated as realistic expectations, or as pious hopes? Is the redesign of political institutions an appropriate response to declining trust and participation?

The answer to these questions has, I suggest, two necessary components. The first is to identify why political trust and electoral turnout have declined in the first place. In particular, do the most convincing explanations for the deterioration in public engagement leave room for an ameliorative role for political institutions? Are the falls in political trust and electoral participation attributable to factors which might, in principle, be addressed by appropriately (re)designed political institutions? Or, are the phenomena explicable in terms of more fundamental considerations, such as social or demographic changes, in which case institutional design might play little or no role? The second task is to identify what kind of institutions might stimulate closer engagement between citizens and governments. Can we identify what institutional arrangements tend to maximise levels of citizen trust and participation in collective political institutions? The answer to this latter question will obviously be instructive in anticipating the likely impact of the constitutional reforms in Britain.

This chapter considers these two tasks. I begin by examining why there has been a decline in recent years in levels of political trust and electoral turnout. I then turn to the task of identifying optimal institutional configurations, and considering what these suggest for the likely effects of Britain's constitutional reforms. Throughout, I consider theory and evidence drawn both from Britain and from comparative studies. While we need to be clear about the explanations for domestic trends, a comparative perspective is also useful. Often the domestic

data is insufficient to reach firm conclusions, and evidence drawn from elsewhere can help to compensate. Even where the domestic data is extensive, it is useful to explore how far it matches the comparative data, and thus how robust it might be.

## **THE CAUSES OF DECLINING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT**

Before taking at face value the claim that institutional reform can stimulate closer linkages between citizens and their political system, let us examine some alternative perspectives and some hard evidence. At the broad level, we don't have to dig too deep before unearthing explanations for political outcomes that accord little or no role to political institutions. There are a variety of accounts that argue that political outcomes can be explained primarily in terms of broad economic, social and cultural factors. These approaches were most prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, when concerns with the robustness of democratic systems prompted researchers to investigate the factors that underlay the instigation and durability of representative democracies. These factors were often identified as levels of economic development and types of social structure and cultural attributes, rather than in terms of the nature and design of political institutions (Rothstein, 1996: 139).<sup>31</sup> More recent research has focused less on the durability of democracy than on its vitality. But many studies have similarly pointed to the primary causal role of such social factors as levels of associational membership, or 'social capital' (Putnam, 1993). These accounts have in common the explanation of political outcomes by reference to underlying behavioural or structural factors, rather than to the existence and role of formal political institutions. On these accounts, it would be difficult to see how Britain's democratic malaise – or, indeed, that facing other advanced countries - might be properly addressed through the redesign of political institutions. However, without delving into the history or contours of the revival of institutional analysis (for overviews of which, see Goodin, 1996; Peters, 1999), I simply note that there are now a variety of approaches that suggest the contrary; that institutions 'matter'. These accounts suggest that the existence and design of political institutions systematically affect the way citizens behave, and thus generate distinctive social outcomes.

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<sup>31</sup> For instance, Almond and Verba (1963: 498): "... the development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the structure of government and politics; it depends on the orientation that people have to the political process - upon the political culture".

This may be granted, yet doubts may remain about whether the design of political institutions has any relevance to patterns of trust and turnout. To substantiate their case, doubters may point to the fact that, while the institutional configurations in advanced democracies differ widely, most are facing a common problem of declining citizen engagement, manifested in falling levels of political trust and electoral turnout (Dalton, 2004: 29-30; Franklin, 2004: 10-11). Alternatively, if one were to focus on any particular western country, one might find, in spite of stable political institutions, considerable fluctuations in levels of trust and participation (as I showed in Chapter One in the case of Britain). Surely these observations are enough to show that the design of political institutions is essentially irrelevant for levels of citizen engagement with their political system?

This argument is misdirected, however. Few claim that institutions *themselves* have precipitated the decline in trust across western countries (although for examples of such claims, see Dalton, 2004: 194). A more common, and plausible, argument is that changing economic and social conditions have generated shifts in citizen expectations and values, in turn stimulating new and more intense demands on national political systems. However, the systems themselves have failed to adapt to these changes, and as a result are poorly equipped to respond to the new demands being made of them. The net result is public discontent with core political institutions. Thus, it is perfectly reasonable to argue that institutions matter even when the essential stability of political institutions may appear to belie this. Indeed, on this account, it is precisely because of institutional inertia that distrust and non-participation have increased.

What support is there for such 'institutionalist' arguments in the case of the two phenomena that are the focus of this work: the level of citizen trust in political institutions, and the degree of participation in elections to these institutions? In Chapter One, I noted that, on these two indicators, levels of citizen engagement with governments in Britain and in other advanced countries have declined in recent years. In order to establish what rejuvenative role institutional design might play, we need to explore the causes of this decline. While there is some overlap in the causal arguments mounted in relation to political trust and electoral participation, there are also some differences. I therefore consider trust and turnout separately.

There are three main accounts of why citizens in western democracies take a dimmer view of their political institutions and agents today than a decade or so

ago.<sup>32</sup> The first is that the *performance* of these institutions and agents has either declined, or has at least failed to keep pace with rising public expectations and demands. Expectations might relate to outcomes or to processes. Judgements that relate to outcomes take as reference points factors such as economic performance, whether measured in 'egocentric' or 'sociotropic' terms.<sup>33</sup> Judgements about processes relate to factors such as the responsiveness of government to citizens' demands and the degree of (perceived) misconduct and corruption among policy actors. The second account is linked to government performance, but identifies the problem more squarely at the level of citizens themselves, focusing on *value change* among the population. While there are many variants on this theme, a common hypothesis is that, as a result of rising education levels and declining social bonds and mores, people today - especially the young - hold heightened expectations of the political system, while at the same time enjoying weaker affective linkages with it. The combination of new issue demands, plus looser bonds with the political system, has meant that citizens are now more likely to be critical of political arrangements than previously. The third account also focuses on changes at the broad social level. However, it is less concerned with demands on the political system, than with linkages between citizens themselves. On the *social capital* account, dwindling citizen engagement in associational bodies stimulates a declining trust in one's fellows. As people become less trustful of their fellow citizens, they also become less willing to invest trust in their political agents and institutions. Thus, the result of broad, long term social changes yields negative results for citizens' relations with government.

This is a very brief summary of a far wider literature, which identifies a range of factors that are alleged to contribute to political distrust.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, while not all of these factors are covered in the three headings above, my account does capture the more plausible - and well documented - hypotheses. The important point to note is that the three approaches have rather different implications for the role that institutions might play. Both the *government performance* and *changing values* accounts provide some role for political institutions. Thus, if variations in trust are found to arise from changes in the responsiveness of

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<sup>32</sup> The timing, and magnitude, of the trends vary between countries. See Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995; Norris, 1999; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; and Dalton, 2004. The following section is based on the discussion of the causes of declining trust in Dalton, 2004: ch3.

<sup>33</sup> Factors other than economic conditions might enter into citizens' judgements about outcomes. However, these factors are often difficult to measure; economic variables are usually preferred (Bok, 1997; Miller and Listhaug, 1999)

<sup>34</sup> A number of other causal factors have been identified. See Listhaug, 1995; Listhaug and Wiberg, 1995; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Norris, 1999; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2001, 2002.

institutions - maybe arising from new issue demands among the public - then redesigning these institutions to make them more responsive should, all other things being equal, yield beneficial results. The same is true if distrust is found to reflect increasing citizen perceptions of misconduct and corruption among office holders. In both cases, institutional reform might exert a direct effect.<sup>35</sup> That is, new political institutions might themselves stimulate a positive outcome, by increasing institutional responsiveness and reducing opportunities for corruption. However, if the root cause of rising distrust is the declining policy performance of governments (relative to expectations), then we might anticipate the redesign of political institutions playing a less central role. Rather, the role might be a less significant, indirect one in which institutional reform promotes better policy decisions, stimulating more positive economic outcomes, in turn encouraging more supportive attitudes among citizens. While some examples of institutional reform in Britain have been justified on such grounds,<sup>36</sup> we could not expect all the reforms introduced since 1997 to work in this way. Finally, the social capital account provides political institutions with an even more meagre ameliorative role. If the cause of declining trust is traced back to a progressive disengagement by citizens from voluntary associations, it is difficult to see how the reform of core political institutions might improve matters at all.

What evidence is there to support or reject these three broad accounts of declining trust? Summarising considerably a wide body of empirical data, the evidence from Britain and overseas suggests that social capital and economic performance accounts do a relatively poor job of explaining the decline in political trust. In the case of Britain, it is hard to argue that falling trust reflects weakening social bonds, since levels of associational membership and social trust have held up well over the last two decades or so (Hall, 1999; Newton, 1999: 175-6; Johnston and Jowell, 2001). In any case, most studies - British and comparative - tend to find a weak relationship between social trust and political trust (Newton, 1999: 179-80; Newton and Norris, 2000; Bromley et al, 2001). The same is largely true when it comes to indicators of economic performance. Comparative studies examine the relationship between performance and citizen attitudes by reference either to aggregate level data or to individual level data. While the results are not identical, both approaches tend to suggest a rather

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<sup>35</sup> Although the institutional reforms required to promote responsiveness and to reduce the incidence of corruption will, of course, be very different. Hence the varied nature of the reforms considered in chapters Three to Six.

<sup>36</sup> The obvious example is the independence on monetary policy granted to the Bank of England in 1997. Another example would be the claims made in favour of decentralised government (see Labour Party, 1996).

modest relationship between economic outcomes and trust (Listhaug, 1995; Listhaug and Wiberg, 1995; McAllister, 1999; Miller and Listhaug, 1999).<sup>37</sup>

By comparison with the social capital and economic performance accounts, government responsiveness appears to have a stronger relationship with trust. Responsiveness is a difficult concept to operationalise and measure. But most studies that try to overcome these difficulties – for example by identifying the relative positions of parties, governments and voters on an ideological scale – tend to suggest that lack of responsiveness does contribute to low trust, whether measurement are taken at one point in time or over time (Listhaug, 1995; Dalton, 2004: ch7). In turn, government unresponsiveness can be traced back to the increased demands made on the political system (for example, by voters as a result of changing values and expectations), rather than to a decline in the ability of the system to respond (Listhaug, 1995; Listhaug and Wiberg, 1995; Dalton, 2004).<sup>38</sup> Just as unresponsive institutions appear to corrode citizens' political trust, so too does perceived misconduct on the part of political agents. There is strong evidence to support this hypothesis for other countries (on Japan, see Pharr, 2000), although little evidence is available in Britain (but see Chapter Three). However, the hypothesis is at least consistent with the particularly sharp decline in political trust among Britons in the early to mid-1990s (Chart 1.4), at the time when there was a strong media focus on issues of 'sleaze' among politicians (Dunleavy et al, 1995).

On this – admittedly highly condensed – account of a wide empirical base, how far are the dominant causal explanations of declining political trust consistent with a role for political institutions? The answer is in the main a positive one. Accounts of political trust that appear to leave little role for institutional design – such as the social capital and economic performance theories – have been found to perform rather poorly. Accounts which leave rather more room for the potential ameliorative role of political institutions – notably accounts of government responsiveness and behaviour – appear to perform better.

What about the determinants of my second key indicator of citizen-government linkages, electoral participation? There have been a huge number of studies seeking to explain why individuals participate at elections in certain

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<sup>37</sup> A broadly similar finding is reached in Pattie and Johnston's (2001) analysis of political trust in Britain, although Clarke et al (2004: 302-9) suggest that evaluations of economic and social performance are a rather stronger predictor of attitudes towards the political system.

circumstances but not in others. Given constraints of space, I can do no more than summarise some of the main approaches and principal findings, drawing on recent British (Heath and Taylor, 1999; Johnston and Pattie, 2001; Pattie and Johnston, 2001a; Clarke et al, 2004: chs7-8) and comparative (Franklin, 2002, 2004: ch1; Norris, 2002: ch2, 2004: chs 1 and 7) studies. These studies tend to identify three broad factors that shape turnout. The first emphasises qualities of voters themselves, notably the resources - skills, time, money - they command and the values and orientations they hold (for example, the balance between 'material' and 'postmaterial' attitudes, and the level of trust in the political system). The second focuses on the role of mobilising agencies, such as political parties, organised interest groups and information agencies such as the media. The third stresses the context of the election itself, covering both the rules under which it is held, and the importance, or 'salience', of the contest.

As in the case of political trust, some of these broad accounts are more commensurate with a role for institutional design than others. Thus, if low or declining turnout is explicable predominantly in terms of changes in the resources commanded by voters, this suggests rather little ameliorative role for core political institutions. Similarly, if turnout is primarily determined by the activities of mobilising agencies, the design of political institutions might be expected to have only a weak effect. However, if turnout is primarily dependent on the context within which an election takes place - in other words, its rules or salience - institutions might be expected to play a more central role.

Which of these broad explanations hold sway? Many studies show that individual resources and the mobilising role of agencies significantly shape rates of electoral participation (for Britain, see Clarke et al, 2004: ch7; comparatively, see Norris, 2002: ch5, 2004: ch7). However, fluctuations in turnout over time tend also to reflect changes in electoral context, in particular the level of electoral competition. As Franklin (2004: 206) puts it, "Turnout appears to vary because of variations in the character of elections, not because of variations in the character of society ...". Thus, short term shifts in participation are predominantly attributable to variations in the costs and benefits of voting.<sup>39</sup> In particular, if one election presents voters with a close race between clearly delineated parties, this will

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<sup>38</sup> Although some argue that globalisation has weakened the ability of governments to respond to citizens' demands (Scharpf, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Although longer term trends - such as the decline in turnout across western democracies over the past two or three decades - are also influenced by social and demographic changes, such as the lowering of the voting age after the mid-1960s, and the introduction into the electorate of the 'baby boom' generation at around the same time (Franklin, 2004).



likely stimulate a higher rate of participation than if the election is a foregone conclusion contested by parties offering similar proposals (Heath and Taylor, 1999; Pattie and Johnston, 2001a; Clarke et al, 2004: ch7). On the other hand, turnout will be negatively affected if government formation is unresponsive to electoral choices. In a fragmented or uncohesive party system, electoral competition may not be decisive for government, since the critical process will occur after the election – through coalition bargaining – rather than arising directly from the election itself (Powell, 1982: ch4; Franklin, 2004).

Thus, while explanations of electoral turnout identify a number of reasons why participation among western democracies has declined recently, most leave at least some room for the role of political institutions. In particular, institutions help shape the 'saliency' of an election; the extent to which the preferences expressed by citizens are likely to be decisive for government and policy outcomes. I turn in the following sections to consider the institutional conditions in which decisiveness is maximised. All I note here is that the recent falls in turnout – in Britain as well as among other advanced democracies – appear to have been caused in part by a decline in the competitiveness of elections, a causal factor to which institutional reform might, in principle at least, offer some sort of remedy.

## **THE OPTIMAL DESIGN OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

Having established that the design of political institutions may be expected to exert systematic effects on levels of citizen trust and participation, the issue arises of what sort of institutions? In general terms, we may say that citizens are likely to invest trust in, and participate in elections to, political institutions when they believe these institutions are responsive to their demands. If institutions and agents are perceived to be unresponsive, it would be rational for citizens to withhold their trust, and to opt-out of participating in collective decisions. But under what conditions are institutions most likely to be seen as being responsive? Under what circumstances is it rational for citizens to trust their agents, and to participate in their selection?<sup>40</sup>

These questions have been posed, albeit often couched in different terms, for over two thousand years. In the space here, I cannot hope to cover even a

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<sup>40</sup> Some deny that it can be rational for citizens to trust political rulers or political institutions, and thus question whether it makes sense to design institutions to try and achieve this end (Hardin, 1999).

minute proportion of the analyses offered, and conclusions reached. Instead, I focus on a limited number of explanations for why certain political institutions might perform better than others. One of the most cogent explanation – in theoretical terms and for its applicability across various institutional forms – is the 'Principal-Agent' model drawn from rational choice accounts of political and economic decision making. I therefore spend some time in outlining the main conclusions of this model, and in exploring their implications for the British reforms. I also use Principal-Agent accounts to set up a broader analytical distinction, namely that between institutional arrangements that *concentrate* political power and those that *disperse* political power. This distinction is apparent in Principal-Agent models of delegated authority. But it is made more explicit in the well known typologies offered by Bingham Powell and Arend Lijphart among others, that contrast 'majoritarian' with 'proportional' or 'consensus' forms of decision making. These frameworks are, as will be seen, useful means by which to analyse the effects of the constitutional reforms in Britain.

But the success or otherwise of these accounts hinges not simply on their theoretical rigour or quality of their postulates, but on how they perform in practice. Thus, alongside a delineation of abstract models of institutional effects, I also consider what empirical evidence exists to support their conclusions. While the data on how institutions affect the nature of citizen-government linkages is not always as extensive as one might wish, it is sufficient to allow us to explore the validity of the main abstract accounts. Thus, I combine theoretical and empirical analysis in the task of determining the nature of optimal institutional arrangements. In the light of this information, we will be in a good position to anticipate the likely effect of the reforms introduced since 1997 in Britain.

However, these reforms are multifaceted, and cannot be understood wholly through the terms of either Principal-Agent accounts or concentrated-dispersed models of political authority. So I conclude the chapter by introducing two further considerations, or frames of reference, that I hope provide for a fuller understanding of Britain's constitutional reforms. The first concerns the extent to which representation and decision making is oriented around partisan political actors, namely the political parties. This frame of reference is concerned with the extent to which the links between citizens and social outcomes are mediated by partisan bodies. I explore some accounts that are highly critical of the role of political parties, and which commend non-partisan forms of linkage. This sets the

scene for the analysis of one reform that arguably builds on these critiques, namely directly elected mayors at the local level, explored in Chapter Six. The second frame of reference concerns the degree of popular participation in collective decision making. This frame is concerned with the extent of citizens' opportunities to register their political preferences. Again, I outline some concerns at the limitation on these opportunities in contemporary Britain, and the call for more extensive forms of citizen participation. To rehearse an argument developed more fully in Chapter Two, none of the constitutional reforms considered in this work does much to increase the degree of citizen participation or 'voice' in collective decisions. So the argument about participatory opportunities does not appear in any of the case study chapters (Chapters Three to Six). Rather, it reappears in the concluding chapter in the context of whether further changes to Britain's political system – beyond the existing institutional reforms – might be required to re-engage its citizens.

### **Models of political authority: Theory and evidence**

In seeking to establish what kind of institutional arrangements might be most conducive to an engaged citizenry, I draw for primary theoretical insights on the Principal-Agent model, derived from rational choice accounts of political authority. The model is particularly useful to my concerns here, since it seeks to identify the institutional conditions in which political leaders (agents) are responsive to the demands of citizens (principals). The Principal-Agent model thus explores the conditions in which citizens may feel it appropriate to invest trust in their leaders, and to participate in their selection (the twin dependent variables of this study). The model begins with the observation that, in a system of delegated, or representative, democracy the principal always runs the risk that their goals will not be acted on by their agents. Given the asymmetries in information between the principal and her agent (Muller, Bergman and Strom, 2003), and thus the risk that deviant or lax behaviour by the agent may go undetected, this leaves the principal open to 'agency loss'.

Given these risks, why delegate at all? Surely the costs involved in delegating responsibility are such that a direct form of democracy - in which citizens take decisions on their own behalf rather than through representatives - is to be preferred? While theorists in the rational choice tradition, attuned to the perils of delegation, tend to sympathise with this position, they usually point to the high transaction and opportunity costs inherent in any system of direct decision

making. In addition, delegation has a more positive dividend, since agents are likely to be "more public-spirited, conscientious and competent than those whom they represent" (Brennan and Hamlin, 2000: 180).

Thus, it is rational for decision making to be delegated to others, although citizens must ensure that their wishes continually drive the behaviour of these agents. They can do so in two ways. The first is to select only those agents whose characteristics or behaviour lead the principal to believe will yield beneficial outcomes. The risk here is that principals do not select the right agents to do the job; a problem known as 'adverse selection'. The second is to ensure that, once in position, the agent continues to act in accordance with the principal's interests. The risk is that they do not, either by shirking or by pursuing divergent policies or attempting to extract rents; a problem known as 'moral hazard'. Institutions help reduce the risk of such agency loss by introducing incentives as a reward for virtuous behaviour, and by imposing costs to deter deviant behaviour (Pettit, 1996). More specifically, institutions minimise the risk of adverse selection by helping to secure appropriate agents. Since these institutions do their work prior to the delegation process, they are known as *ex ante* institutions. Institutions also reduce the risks of moral hazard, by constraining agents once delegation has taken place; *ex post* institutions (Brennan and Hamlin, 2000: 68-76; Strom, 2003).

*Ex ante* institutions help allocate appropriate agents to positions of discretionary power. They do so by enabling citizens to screen potential candidates for government, and by entering into a contract that stipulates what the agent will do to serve the principal's ends (Strom, 2003). The basic mechanism used in the selection process is competition; electoral in the case of a political relationship, financial (eg. auctions) in the case of an economic relationship. Elections encourage potential agents to put their policy proposals before the principal, who makes a selection based on the attractiveness of the proposals and the credibility of the agent. The form taken by the screens and contracts depends on the nature of the electoral competition. In a system dominated by strong political parties, these collective agencies will screen potential representatives, with voters then selecting between the parties on the basis of their candidates and the contract on offer (the election manifesto). In a system of weak parties, electoral competition will be between individual candidates, and voters themselves will screen the competing agents (Muller, 2000). Similarly, the contract that voters enter into depends on the electoral system. Thus, a ballot structure providing for

multiple preferences allows voters to send a complex set of signals to the parties, while a structure based on a single preference restricts these signals (Mitchell, 2000).

The task of restraining the agent once they have assumed authority falls to *ex post* institutions. While the primary mechanism of *ex ante* control is the screen, its *ex post* counterpart is the sanction. As its name suggests, this mechanism allows the principal to punish an agent who has not fulfilled the terms of their contract. The most obvious means of doing so is to eject the agent from office at the end of their electoral term. Just as effective screens require the principal to have good knowledge of the competing agents and their promises, so effective sanctions depend on the ability of the principal to monitor their agent's activities. This requires the agent to provide information about their activities, notably through such institutions as freedom of information regimes and registers covering the pecuniary interests of elected members. Since it is usually too costly for the principal to monitor all their agent's activities themselves, this role is often entrusted to a variety of third parties, such as parliamentary committees, opposition parties and independent audit and scrutiny bodies (Lupia and McCubbins, 2000; Lupia, 2003; Strom, 2003).

Monitoring provides the principal with the information they need to evaluate how well their agent has performed in office, and whether they deserve reward or punishment. Assuming that voters do, indeed, use this information to sanction poor performing administrations<sup>41</sup>, the very fact of monitoring should impel the agent to comply with their electoral contract. But even so, screening and sanctioning agents via elections is unlikely to be sufficient. As Brennan and Hamlin (2000: 224) note, "Electoral competition, even when optimally deployed, is unlikely to deliver perfect government; the elected will generally retain some discretionary power to depart from the wishes of the electorate. It is here that the further quest for constitutional protection via the separation of powers begins".<sup>42</sup> The separation of authority depends on executive functions being allocated to distinct agents - to judges, members of a second chamber, a sub-national tier of government, even the public itself via referendum provisions - rather than being concentrated in a single agent. In Tsebelis's (2002) terms, this means establishing 'veto players' within the political system.

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<sup>41</sup> And, unfortunately for democratic theory, often they do not (Przeworski, Stokes and Manin, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> James Madison: "A dependence on the people is no doubt the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions." (*Federalist Papers*, 51).

Thus, in a delegated relationship, political institutions can reduce the risk of agency loss by providing for *ex ante* competition (screens and contracts) and *ex post* constraints (sanctions and checks). How do the two types of mechanism relate to one another? Specifically, how far are different political systems based on one form of mechanism or the other - or are they combined together - and what benefits and drawbacks accrue to each?

Parliamentary forms of democracy tend to be based on strong *ex ante* controls rather than on extensive *ex post* constraints. This is particularly true of 'Westminster' variants of the parliamentary model, in which political authority is concentrated in a unified agent (single party cabinet governments), with few or no significant external checks. Instead, the electoral process screens and sorts agents, with disciplined political parties ensuring subsequent compliance with the terms of the electoral contract (Muller, 2000). The strength of the parties and the singularity of agency mean that, in theory at least, *ex ante* electoral competition is capable of minimising agency loss across all stages of the delegatory process.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, presidential regimes incorporate stronger *ex ante* institutional checks on political authority. Here, agency loss relies less on a screening process via competitive elections, than on formal constraints that follow from distributing power across multiple agents. Some parliamentary systems base themselves on both strong political parties (*ex ante* competition) and extra-parliamentary checks and balances (*ex post* constraints) (Strom, 2003).<sup>44</sup> But, across west European countries at least, there appears to be a trade off between the two forms of control; the stronger the role of partisan political competition, the fewer the formal constraints on government (Strom et al, 2003b).

In abstract terms, this trade-off is unsurprising. The risk of agency loss can be reduced - though not entirely eliminated - through either *ex ante* competition or *ex post* constraints; if one set of mechanisms is thoroughly implemented, there will be less imperative for the other. Indeed, the very factors that promote strong *ex ante* controls (responsiveness and accountability via cohesive parties and unified government) are undermined by strong constraints of the *ex post* variety (checks and balances via the separation or partition of authority).<sup>45</sup> For

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<sup>43</sup> There are four stages to the delegatory 'chain': from voters to elected representatives, from representatives in parliament to the executive, from the collective executive (cabinet) to individual ministers, and from ministers to officials (Muller, Bergman and Strom, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> For example, Germany, where political power is divided between the government, the sub-national lander, the Bundesrat and the constitutional court.

<sup>45</sup> In addition, political systems based on *ex ante* rather than *ex post* controls tend to score highly in terms of 'efficiency' or 'delivery'. Thus, decisions reflecting the views of the majority of the population can be introduced, rather than being constrained by minority groups. The less extensive the veto

Brennan and Hamlin, the two forms of citizen control operate on a distinct logic, representing the "opposite sides of a coin" (2000: 84). Thus, while screening "relies on the incumbent being given space in which to exercise discretion ... sanctioning mechanisms operate by restricting such space" (*ibid*: 86). Under ideal arrangements, then, political systems should attempt to minimise agency loss either through strong party government and electoral competition, or through extensive institutional constraints on the executive, but not through both (Brennan and Hamlin, 2000: 252-4; Strom, 2003).

Underlying the *ex ante* and *ex post* constraints is a distinction between institutional arrangements that concentrate authority in a single agent – which, by virtue of a unified chain of delegation and strong electoral controls, ensure compliance with the principal's wishes – and arrangements that disperse authority between multiple agents or principals – which prevent agency loss by limiting, and imposing checks on, the exercise of discretionary power. This distinction between *concentrated* and *dispersed* power has close affinities with the well known delineation between different forms or models of democracy made by Bingham Powell and Arend Lijphart, among others. Lijphart couches his typology in terms of 'majoritarian' or 'consensus' models of democracy; Powell's terms are similar though not identical: 'majoritarian', and either 'representational' (Powell, 1982), or 'proportional' (Powell, 2000) models.<sup>46</sup>

On these accounts, governments are responsive either when they are selected by a majority among the population (the 'majoritarian' model), or by as many of the population as feasible (the 'proportional' model). The majoritarian model assumes the existence of a 'popular will', the task of competitive elections being to identify this, and ensure its translation into a government outcome. Whichever party wins the election must then enjoy a relatively untrammelled exercise of power, to ensure the election 'mandate' is carried out. By providing for a direct link between voter preferences and government outcomes, the majoritarian model is held to provide the conditions in which governments are responsive and accountable to their citizens. The key institutions underpinning the majoritarian

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points, the greater the capacity of the system to deliver what citizens want, or at least what the majority of them want (Brennan, 1997; Rockman, 1997; Tsebelis, 2002). Also, systems based on *ex ante* controls tend to institute fewer potentially self-defeating incentives than systems based on *ex post* constraints. These constraints may undermine intrinsic motivations for agents to behave in a trustworthy manner, replacing them with extrinsic incentives that produce less optimal results (Pettit, 1996; Brennan, 1997; Strom, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Since the elucidation of these models that follows draws on Powell (2000), I use the terminology he employs there.

model are a restricted party system, single party governments and a unitary distribution of political power (Lijphart, 1999: 243-6).

By contrast, the 'proportional' model is more sceptical about the notion of a clear popular will, seeing public attitudes as more diverse. On its terms, the political system should be organised to take account of these multiple strands of opinion, entailing the dispersal, rather than the concentration, of power. This is achieved through the electoral system - with proportional voting rules ensuring a close correspondence between the distribution of citizen preferences and government outcomes - and through extra-electoral institutions that provide an additional means for minority demands to be heard. A key role here is played by the existence of multiple parties, coalition governments, a federal distribution of authority (Lijphart, 1999: 243-6) and a 'strong' legislature, containing powerful subject and scrutiny committees (Strom, 1990).

The distinction made in Principal-Agent accounts between *ex ante* and *ex post* forms of political control does not mirror exactly the distinction between majoritarian and proportional models of democracy. For a start, there is some cut-across between the categories used. Thus, for example, the use of a proportional electoral system is central to the definition and operation of Lijphart's 'consensus' form of democratic rule; yet the use of proportional voting systems is also accommodated within the Principal-Agent account as one means of ensuring tighter *ex ante* controls, via the 'signalling' of complex voter preferences. In addition, while Principal-Agent models are primarily concerned with issues of agency, Lijphart's analysis of majoritarian and consensus models largely ignores these considerations, focusing instead on the degree of representation provided to distinct social groups (Strom et al, 2003a: 737-9). However, Powell's (2000) analysis of competing democratic models is concerned with issues of agency as much as with issues of representation. And if we summarise Principal-Agent considerations as a contrast between institutions that minimise agency loss through partisan influence, and those that work through external constraints, there are very direct parallels with the majoritarian and proportional/consensus distinctions made by Powell and Lijphart. What we are left with, then, are two accounts of political institutions - one drawn from abstract, deductive reasoning (Principal-Agent models), one drawn from inductive analysis (majoritarian-proportional models) - that cohere around a similar distinction: that between arrangements that ensure responsiveness by concentrating political power, and those that work by dispersing political power.



There is considerable value in extending (or rather compressing) the discussion of the Principal-Agent model into this basic distinction. For, while it may not do justice to all the considerations involved in Principal-Agent style theorising, it does allow us to establish a basic trade-off. This asks whether the linkages between citizens and governments are healthier under concentrated (majoritarian) or dispersed (proportional) forms of political authority? This contrast allows us to delineate rather more clearly the likely effects of the constitutional reforms in Britain. It also enables us to explore the comparative empirical evidence on the effects of different political arrangements, since this evidence is often couched in terms of concentrated and dispersed forms of authority.

Let me address this evidence. What does data collected from comparative analysis suggest for the relative merits of concentrated and dispersed political arrangements? The focus of many of these analyses is on the institutions that translate citizen demands into social outcomes. Thus, the basic independent, or explanatory, variables are often the party system or the electoral rules. On the one hand, relatively concentrated party systems are held to promote responsive governments, and thus to stimulate more supportive political attitudes (Weil, 1989; Anderson, 1998) and higher rates of electoral participation (Powell, 1982). On the other, the use of proportional electoral rules is held to increase the incentives to participate, by minimising the chances of votes being 'wasted' (Powell, 1982). Proportional voting rules also allow for the 'entry' of new parties, helping to contain any voter discontent within the political system, in turn minimising negative attitudes (Miller and Listhaug, 1990). Another way of expressing the same underlying idea draws on the notion of electoral 'winners' and 'losers'; those who gain government representation following an election, and those who do not. While majoritarian systems maximise the size of the 'win', proportional systems attempt to maximise the number of winners (Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Norris, 1999a).

In practice, I suggest that the evidence fails to find fully for either the majoritarian or proportional models. Lijphart's cross-national analysis suggests that consensus systems outperform majoritarian ones when it comes to levels of satisfaction with democracy and electoral participation (Lijphart, 1999: 276-87). Note, however, that these distinctions in performance arise from variations in the electoral system, party system and types of executive cabinet (Lijphart's 'executives-parties' dimension), rather than from variations in the

decentralisation of power or existence of checking institutions (the 'federal-unitary' dimension) (*ibid*: 293).

Analyses of specific political institutions lend some support to Lijphart's commendation of consensus arrangements over majoritarian ones. Thus, there is some evidence that citizen support for political institutions is higher under proportional electoral rules and multi-party systems, in which parties differentiate themselves, and which facilitate the 'entry' of new parties, thus channelling voters' discontent within the system (Miller and Listhaug, 1990; Anderson, 1998). Other studies find that proportional voting methods - which increase the incentive to participate by reducing 'wasted' votes - are associated with higher rates of electoral turnout than majoritarian or plurality rules (Powell, 1982: ch4; Blais and Carty, 1990; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin, 2002). While there are few studies that go beyond the electoral and party systems to examine the effect of dispersing political power on levels of political support, one study that does shows attitudes to be more positive under decentralised than under centralised arrangements (Strom et al, 2003a: 730).

However, in other analyses, the representational virtues of dispersed institutional arrangements appear to be counter-balanced by the accountability afforded by concentrating political power. Thus, Norris (1999a) finds that political support is higher in countries that use plurality voting rules than in those using proportional ones.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, both electoral participation and political support has been found to be higher in countries characterised by a two party, or moderate multi-party, system than in countries where the party system is more fragmented (Weil, 1989, Norris, 1999a, 2002: ch4). And the more that political power is dispersed - either through the territorial decentralisation of power, or through the establishment of veto points such as an active second chamber - the lower the levels of political support (Norris, 1999a) and the rates of electoral participation (Jackman, 1987; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin, 2004: 142-44).

So the comparative evidence fails to point to a clear dividend for institutional arrangements that either concentrate or disperse political power. The often contradictory nature of the findings may be a product of variations in the research design (selection of cases, data and analytical methods used etc), but may also point to the contingent nature of the effects. Thus, institutions may

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<sup>47</sup> To complicate the picture still further, a recent analysis suggests that the type of electoral system makes no difference to variations in political support (Listhaug et al, 2002).

yield a particular outcome in one country or at one point in time, but may not do so in or at another.

## **THE EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN BRITAIN**

Thus far, I have outlined some theoretical rationales that account for why particular institutional arrangements should have systematic effects on the relations between citizens and their governments. I suggested that these rationales could be broadly summarised in terms of a basic trade-off between arrangements that concentrated political power, and those that dispersed political power. Not only is this distinction clear in conceptual terms, it also exerts significant leverage in empirical terms. Most studies that examine the nature of citizen-government linkages under concentrated or dispersed political arrangements tend to conclude that these arrangements are significantly associated with such indicators as citizen attitudes and levels of electoral participation. However, I have shown there to be little agreement on which set of arrangements yields the greatest dividend.

What conclusions does this suggest for Britain, whose political institutions have undergone radical reform in recent years? What predictions should we make about the likely impact of these reforms on levels of citizen engagement?

Traditionally at least, Westminster style political arrangements have provided a relatively effective means of minimising agency loss. Thus, strong, internally disciplined political parties, ensure individual representatives are closely screened, and that appropriate contracts are designed to ensure compliant behaviour. In addition, the singular nature of agency provides a strong link between electoral choices and policy outputs. As Strom (2003: 94) observes, "Party cohesion under a Westminster system allows voters to make reasonably well-informed choices and ensures a certain amount of responsiveness and accountability in government". Later in the same volume, having reviewed institutional arrangements across west European countries, the authors conclude that "... Westminster democracy certainly has its share of problems, but it is important to recognise the democratic purpose of its party cohesion, competition and hierarchy" (Strom, Muller and Bergman, 2003a: 738).

What are the 'problems' referred to by Strom and his colleagues? The main drawback of Westminster style arrangements is their relative lack of

'transparency', reflecting the internalisation of decision making within the governing party and cabinet. Under such arrangements, there is little compulsion to open up decisions to public scrutiny, unlike in systems involving separated powers - such as presidential models - where decision are more public by virtue of the negotiated nature of the governing process. As a result, principals in a Westminster style system find it more difficult to monitor the actions of their agents. To compound the problem, many Westminster systems lack oversight bodies that can force the agent to divulge important information, and most lack the kind of institutional checks that can prevent the agent from undertaking activities that damage the principal's interests (Strom, 2003).

These drawbacks would not be so pressing if the traditional virtues of the Westminster model were as apparent today as a few decades ago. But they are not. In particular, the key role of the political parties in providing for *ex ante* accountability is now weaker than before. While the parties may have maintained their office-filling capacity at the legislative and executive levels, their links with the electorate have deteriorated. Both in Britain (Saalfeld, 2003) and in other advanced parliamentary systems (Strom et al, 2003b), political parties no longer offer the consistent electoral choices they once did, instead increasingly adapting core beliefs to reflect growing volatility of choice among the electorate. Nor, in the case of Britain, does the electoral system itself provide the same responsiveness, ensuring that small shifts in public opinion are decisive for government outcomes. And even in office, the parties are less cohesive and disciplined than before, again weakening the link between the choices that voters make and the actions of governments (Saalfeld, 2003). Overall, these shortcomings undermine the ability of the 'party government' model to minimise agency loss within a situation of delegated responsibility.

How might these shortcomings be overcome so that the political system ensures that social outcomes are responsive to the demands of citizens? If institutions of 'concentrated' political authority (eg. a two party system, strong executive government, limited decentralisation of power) are failing to provide for a responsive political system, one option would be to strengthen the nature of electoral competition, by extending the opportunities for citizens to engage in *ex ante* selection and preference expression. Thus, the power of dominant parties might be weakened, and electoral competition enhanced, by restrictions on the financial resources that parties can use to mobilise support at elections. Such restrictions on campaign finance would help remove the distortions to electoral

competition, facilitating the 'entry' of new parties into the electoral marketplace. Introducing greater transparency to campaign finance might also stimulate public trust in the role of parties and elections, although citizens may remain concerned about the potential for agency loss under any arrangements short of full collective (ie. state) provision of campaign resources (see Chapter Three).

Political agents may become more responsive to citizens if the latter are given additional opportunities to signal their preferences. This is one of the main arguments for the decentralisation of political authority, a rationale invoked in Britain to justify the devolution of power to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, London and the English regions.<sup>48</sup> The rationale was strongest in the case of Scotland, where it was argued that distinctive policy preferences could only be accommodated by a dedicated political authority, over which the population could exert greater control. Similar arguments had less conviction when it came to Wales and London, resulting in a weaker set of institutions in these areas, and a very cautious approach in the case of the English regions. But while decentralised political authority allows for distinctive preferences to be signalled more clearly - and thus for political agents to be more responsive - this may come at a cost. Decentralised arrangements may increase the complexity of government for citizens, serving to blur lines of responsibility and weaken the accountability of decision makers (Chapter Five).

The competing desiderata of preference expression and competitive elections, on the one hand, and clarity of responsibility and accountability, on the other, are even starker when it comes to the rules used for elections. Thus, systems of proportional representation serve to increase the marginal utility of individual votes and the representational equality of parties. Both help stimulate levels of electoral competition, and thus the incentives for citizens to participate. However, what is gained in terms of competition may be lost when it comes to control over governments, specifically the decisiveness of elections for government outcomes. As with devolution, the institutional reforms introduced in Britain since 1997 have only partially affected the nature of the electoral rules, making it difficult to predict aggregate effects. Thus, while proportional electoral rules have been introduced for devolved and European elections, a form of plurality rule remains

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<sup>48</sup> The ability of citizens to register their preferences in relation to specific policy areas has also been invoked in extending the electoral principle to some local service providing bodies. Thus, at the local level, citizens in Britain now have the opportunity to elect board members of urban regeneration schemes and some Foundation hospitals, while proposals have been put forward to extend this model to organisations such as health boards, the police and schools (see *Financial Times*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2003).

in place for Westminster contests. Moreover, even the variants of PR now in place hardly extend voters' ability to enter into more complex electoral contracts with their political agents. In particular, those casting their ballot at the devolved or European elections have no means of registering their preferences in ordinal fashion, since the lists on offer allow only for a simple nominal decision (the lists are 'closed' rather than 'open'). Thus, the new electoral arrangements in Britain mark a compromise between concentrated and diffuse forms of political authority. The effects are considered in Chapter Four.

So the constitutional reforms introduced since 1997 arguably minimise agency loss by increasing levels of *ex ante* preference expression and political competition. They also perform a similar role through the strengthening of previously weak *ex post* constraints.<sup>49</sup> The level of these constraints in Britain were, until 1997, very limited.<sup>50</sup> But since then, they have been extended, in two directions: towards helping principals to monitor their agents, and towards constraining the activities of these agents.

In parliamentary systems, monitoring and checking of the agent are often done internally - within the political parties and government - rather than externally by a third party. Strom (2003) notes that internal monitoring is generally weak, since the monitoring institutions, such as parliamentary committees and ombudsmen, are often subject to direct or indirect partisan control. While some attempts have been made to bolster the oversight role of the House of Commons, there remains an informational asymmetry between the legislature (here, the principal) and the executive (the agent) (Saalfeld, 2003). To compensate for this, there has been a move to monitoring by third parties. Such "accountability agencies" (Manin et al, 1999) include bodies responsible for information (eg. a statistics agency), oversight (eg. an electoral commission) and audit (eg. a budgetary office). But while agencies such as the Statistics Commission, Electoral Commission and National Audit Office greatly increase the amount of

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For analysis of the first direct elections to New Deal for the Community projects, see Rallings et al, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> There has been a general move across western Europe towards stronger *ex post* institutional constraints on political authority, reflecting the declining vitality of party based *ex ante* forms of controls on political agents (Scharpf, 1999). In Scharpf's terminology, this represents a shift away from 'input oriented' legitimations of political authority, in which government is justified on the basis of popular involvement in, and consent to, collective decisions. In its place, legitimacy is now increasingly conferred through 'output oriented' means, namely the extent to which governments can maximise the common welfare, subject to constraints on their power.

<sup>50</sup> Strom and his colleagues quantify this by showing that, prior to 1997, political authority in Britain faced the lowest degree of external constraint (measured by such factors as the level of sub-national government consumption, central bank independence and judicial review) of the 17 west European countries reviewed (Strom et al, 2003b: 699).

information provided about agents' activities, their role is compromised by being subject to partisan control (in the case of government statistics at least).

Monitoring of the agent by citizens themselves may depend on forcing their representatives to disclose information about themselves. One example of this is the establishment in 2004 of a Register of Member's Interests, whereby MPs were obliged to declare any external financial interests that might be thought to compromise their duty to voters. More significant is the introduction in 2005 of a Freedom of Information regime, compelling public bodies to release information and data requested by individuals and organisations. Again, however, while this regime greatly enhances the ability of the principal to monitor the actions of their agents in principle, its effect is compromised in practice by the extensive nature of the derogations from its coverage.

As with the monitoring function, the reforms introduced in Britain in recent years have at first glance significantly enhanced the number of institutional constraints within the political system. These constraints can be thought of as either *partitions* (where power is divided among multiple principals) or as *checks* (where the division is between multiple agents) (Strom, 2003: 76). The constitutional reforms have introduced some partitioning of authority, notably through devolution to sub-national institutions and reform of the second chamber. However, the limited territorial extension of the devolved model, and the restricted authority granted to agents in Wales and London - although not in Scotland - limits the extent to which power can genuinely be said to have been partitioned. Likewise with the second chamber, where the reforms have so far merely replaced one set of agents (the hereditary peers) with an additional set (appointed peers). In fact this reform has arguably entrenched rather than weakened partisan control of the second chamber. Until reform moves further, either to a primary or secondary mandate for members of the second chamber, power will not have been sub-divided among additional principals, and thus no real partitioning of authority will have taken place.

The main additional check on government since 1997 has been the formal increase in judicial oversight of executive decisions, based on the Human Rights Act.<sup>51</sup> This provides judges with a clearer role in reviewing the actions of the executive and in identifying any decisions that are deemed incompatible with the

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<sup>51</sup> The granting of independence to the Bank of England was another important check on executive authority, albeit limited to a specific policy area, namely the conduct of monetary policy.

Act. However, judicial authority does not extend to nullifying any such decisions, and as such the higher judiciary cannot be counted a 'veto player' on Tsebelis's (2002) terms. Moreover, the judicial arm is not distinct from the control of partisan actors, since judges are still selected by the Lord Chancellor who is also a member of the executive cabinet and thus a partisan actor.<sup>52</sup>

In summary, the constitutional reforms introduced in Britain since 1997 provide for modest increases in *ex ante* electoral competition, through more rigorous controls on campaign finance, and through the extension of electoral selection to devolved tiers of government, via proportional voting rules. At the same time, the exercise of political authority is also subject to more extensive monitoring and to more formal constraints. Seen in light of the distinction made earlier between 'concentrated' and 'dispersed' forms of government, these reforms shift Britain's institutional arrangements from the former model towards the latter model. Political agency remains concentrated within a strong party model of government, but subject to new forms of territorial and functional constraints. The British political system arguably remains closer to the concentrated model than to the dispersed model, although it has undergone a clear shift in the direction of the latter. But being something of a halfway house makes it difficult to draw out clear predictions about the effects of the reforms.

One option is to explore the effects of individual reforms. I have started to set out some of the considerations involved in this section; Chapters Three to Six take up this task in more detail. A second option is to try to discern likely effects across the political system as a whole, taking into account several institutional reforms. This is the approach taken by Lijphart in delineating two 'models' of democracy - the majoritarian and consensus - each of which consists of an amalgamation of multiple individual institutions. The conclusions we might anticipate from Lijphart's analysis for the British reforms are negative. Thus, the fact that the constitutional reforms retain an essential concentration of power in Britain must raise doubts about their ability to effect closer linkages between citizens and governments.<sup>53</sup> Until power is dispersed through more representative political arrangements (particularly a more proportional electoral system for Westminster), Lijphart's analysis suggests a limited dividend from the recent reforms. However, counter-balancing this perspective is an alternative arising

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<sup>52</sup> Although the Government is currently proposing to end this situation, in the *Constitutional Reform (HL) Bill*, introduced on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2004.

<sup>53</sup> For a diagrammatic representation of the effect of the constitutional reforms in Britain on Lijphart's two dimensional typology of majoritarian and consensus models, see Flinders (2005).



from the concern with agency loss characteristic of Principal-Agent analyses. Here, the pathology of democratic systems lies less in the extent to which they provide for representation, than in their susceptibility to adverse selection and moral hazard. On these grounds, the concentration of power in Westminster style arrangements provides robust means by which agency loss can be minimised. In particular, clear *ex ante* forms of electoral competition through strong party government impose effective control on discretionary authority, control whose effects are undermined by extensive formal institutional constraints. Thus, the limited shift away from the majoritarian model effected by the reforms is something to be welcomed rather than bemoaned.

### **THE WIDER ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN BRITAIN**

There are a variety of ways in which the constitutional reforms introduced in Britain can be analysed, and their effects anticipated. I have already outlined two such frameworks. Thus, on the Principal-Agent account, institutions work by increasing citizens' *ex ante* controls over their political agents and/or by imposing *ex post* constraints on them. The former set of controls, especially in 'Westminster' models of democracy, are primarily ensured through distinctive and cohesive political parties, competitive elections and the concentration of political authority. Constraints, on the other hand, tend to disperse political power between multiple principals or agents, each checking the authority of the others. In rather similar terms, the distinction made by Powell and Lijphart between 'majoritarian' and 'proportional' or 'consensus' arrangements is built around institutions that either unify or disperse political power.

These rationales will be drawn on in the course of the case study chapters that follow. The distinction between concentrated and dispersed political authority, and the benefits and drawbacks of each, can usefully be used to examine the role of electoral reform (Chapter Four) and devolution (Chapter Five). The stress placed by the Principal-Agent model on preventing agency loss and on providing for effective electoral competition also underpins reforms to the way electoral campaigns are funded (Chapter Three). But these frameworks do not exhaust our understanding of the way the constitutional reforms in Britain might work. In the final sections of this chapter, I introduce two additional frameworks. Neither constitutes – here at least – a fully fledged theory; rather, they comprise a series of observations and injunctions. I introduce them because they help us appreciate better what changes the constitutional reforms effect to Britain's

governing arrangements, and what outcomes these might lead to. In the case of one of the frameworks (the 'non-partisan' model), the observations and injunctions are important in accounting for a particular reform (the introduction of directly elected mayors at the local level in Chapter Six). The relevance of the other framework (the 'participatory' model) is more general, and arises from the light it throws on the existing constitutional reforms, and the limited effects it anticipates from them. Since this framework suggests what further reforms might be required for British citizens to engage more fully with their political institutions, it is touched on again in the concluding chapter.

### **The 'Non-partisan' model**

This account of political decision making focuses on the role of political parties in mediating between the expression of popular preferences and the decisions taken by governments. In its descriptive form, the account notes the contemporary unpopularity of parties as compared with two or more decades ago. Thus, while 84 per cent of British citizens identified strongly with a political party four decades ago, just over one half (54 per cent) do so today (Clarke et al, 2004: Fig 3.1). Over the same period, party membership has declined from 9 per cent of the electorate to just 2 per cent (Webb, 2002: Table 2.6). More analytically, the account suggests that the decline of social, cultural and ideological identities has weakened the bonds between social groups and the parties. This effect is compounded by the rise in education levels and the increasing salience of issues (notably of the 'postmaterialist' variety, such as environmentalism) that cut across, rather than mirror, established distinctions between political parties. In addition, political competition is argued to be increasingly concerned with issues of competence ('valence' politics), rather than with the positions parties take on these issues ('positional' politics) (Bogdanor, 1997; Mair, 2002).

The normative supplement to these descriptive and analytical accounts is that parties and party democracy are increasingly irrelevant to political life. Thus, if political competition has become oriented around questions of competence rather than around positions and values, it is only a short step to questioning why parties matter, and whether important decisions would not be better taken by independent experts rather than by partisan actors (Mair, 2002)? Indeed, faced with the evidence of citizen mistrust of, and lack of engagement with, political parties, it may be thought that any system of democracy which maintains their central role will enjoy less popular support and legitimacy than one in which the

parties' role is curbed (Bogdanor, 1981, 1997). Such normative accounts rarely go as far as suggesting that the parties' role be eliminated altogether. There is plenty of evidence that parties continue to define issues for citizens, and to mobilise voters at election time. Even if this role is less important than it once was, parties are still important institutions within the representative process.

But their role might be reduced if, at certain elections and on certain issues, voters were offered a choice of policies unmediated by political parties. At the extreme, this might entail the increasing use of 'direct' forms of democracy - such as the referendum and other small-scale participatory initiatives - in which decisions are made by citizens themselves (see next section). Alternatively, decisions might continue to be taken indirectly, but by non-partisan intermediaries. Such actors would arguably be well suited to electoral competition based on valence or competence issues, rather than on positions or values. Being unencumbered by the ideologies and traditions faced by longstanding parties, non-partisan actors would be free to adapt their campaigns to whatever appeals they thought most likely to fit with voters' preferences. Such a relationship would still entail decision making through the selection of representative agents. But these agents would be non-partisan; they would be drawn from outside the ranks of the political parties, and base much of their electoral appeal on this status. In many cases, this appeal would be based on the qualities of the leader, rather than on the group as a whole (Meny and Surel, 2002a).

Some of the constitutional reforms introduced since 1997 provide the potential for a move in such a direction. Electoral reform, and in particular the move to proportional representation for the devolved and European tiers of government, provides the means for new groups and independents to gain representation (Bogdanor, 1981). Moreover, the Labour Government has introduced reforms that are explicitly, or at least covertly, designed to weaken partisan forms of representation. An example of a reform overtly designed on these lines is the stipulation that elections to the boards of local New Deal for Community (NDC) partnerships be non-partisan (Rallings et al, 2004). A more high profile reform is the introduction of directly elected local mayors which, while less overtly concerned to weaken the partisan grip on local councils, was arguably introduced with this aim at least partly in mind (see Chapter Six). Mair (2000, 2002) describes the effect of weakening partisan actors as a shift to 'populist' democracy. In Chapter Six, I note that directly elected mayors might be

considered a form of 'executive' democracy. The point is that the competence and responsiveness of individuals is elevated above the aggregative representational role that parties perform. The parties may continue to dominate positions of political authority at the national level. But at the local level at least, some of the institutional reforms introduced since 1997 might be starting to undermine their position.

### **The 'Participatory' model**

My discussion of the Principal-Agent model noted the concern that delegated authority entails the risk of agency loss. The question was raised of why citizens should delegate authority at all? Although rational choice derived accounts provide good reasons in favour of delegation, other accounts favour retaining primary political authority in voters' hands. Under the 'participatory' model, the only way in which citizens can ensure that collective decisions truly reflect their interests is to take these decisions themselves.

The principal claims of this account have been extensively set out elsewhere (see Budge, 1996, and references therein), and there is little need for me to reiterate them. Some claims for 'direct' or 'participatory' democracy hinge on the benefits of public deliberation for citizens' cognitive and critical faculties, and for the quality of the decisions taken (Held, 1996: 263-70). However, for my purposes, the argument is simply that direct citizen engagement in the process of decision taking is likely to stimulate citizens to trust political institutions, and to participate in their decision making procedures.<sup>54</sup> In other words, since citizen discontent and non-engagement with representative institutions in part appears to spring from the lack of responsiveness of these bodies, the solution is identified as more frequent opportunities for citizens to determine decision making themselves (via consultation, initiation of debates and policy priority setting and issue resolution).

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<sup>54</sup> Of course, if a political system was wholly determined by direct citizen engagement, there would be no political institutions, or at least none of the kind found in a representative system (legislature, executive etc). Under this arrangement, it would make no sense to talk about the effect on trust in 'institutions'. Ditto for electoral participation, since there would be no elections. But the claims for direct democracy are usually not intended to suggest that all representative mechanisms are swept away, and all decisions made collectively. Indeed, most of its proponents see direct democracy as a complement to representative bodies such as parties, not as a supplement to them (Budge, 1996; Held, 1996: 263-70).

Yet in spite of the occasional warm word from Labour ministers on the merits of greater citizen participation,<sup>55</sup> the institutional reforms introduced since 1997 are wedded to the representative model. The extension of popular voice is limited to the creation of new electoral opportunities around devolution, based on competitive elections dominated by political parties. Granted, the rhetoric surrounding the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in particular suggested that the new institution would engage far more directly with the Scottish people than its Westminster counterpart. This reflected a claim among some policy actors in Scotland that the devolved institution be seen as an embodiment of 'popular sovereignty' rather than the 'parliamentary sovereignty' supposedly typified by Westminster. In spite of this, political authority in Scotland is primarily organised in a conventional (ie. representative) manner, based on periodic competitive elections contested by political parties. The closest the Government's reforms have come to establishing a principle of greater popular involvement is the increased use of referendums since 1997. In the period prior to 1997, just three referendums had been held at the national or regional levels in Britain.<sup>56</sup> This usage has increased since 1997, with four referendums already having taken place (at the regional level), and a further two in the pipeline.<sup>57</sup> Yet each of these referendums concerns issues of constitutional reform, the 'rules of the game'. No mainstream policy issue has been put to the people at the national level, although issues have been tested at the community and local levels.<sup>58</sup>

The participatory model is thus relatively pessimistic about the likelihood of Britain's institutional reforms stimulating closer links between citizens and governments. Commenting on the formal checks imposed on British government since 1997, Adonis and Mulgan (1997: 228) argued "These additional constraints might improve the quality of governance in Britain. But their limitation is that they would do little to answer the basic deficiency of modern democracy. They would, in short, do nothing to reduce the dominance of politicians. Instead, they would simply shuffle power from one group of politicians to another, with the

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, the comments made by Peter Mandelson, then Trade Secretary, at the British Embassy in Bonn, March 1998, in which he claimed that "... it may be that the era of pure representative democracy is slowly coming to an end". See also Blunkett, 2001.

<sup>56</sup> On continued membership of the European Economic Community (1975) and on devolution to Scotland and Wales (1979).

<sup>57</sup> Those already held all concern the devolution of power: Scotland and Wales (1997), London (1998), the North East of England (2004) and directly elected mayors (multiple localities). Two further referendums have been promised, on entry into the European Single Currency, and on electoral reform for the House of Commons.

<sup>58</sup> Local referendums have been held on various issues, such as council tax levels and hospital provision, and the Government made provision for ballots of school parents over selection criteria used by local schools.

addition of a few judges". In their view, Britain's democratic malaise requires the introduction of more opportunities for citizens to participate directly in collective decisions. This pessimistic view of the potential for constitutional reform within the representative model, and the claims made for more extensive citizen participation, will be reviewed in the concluding chapter.

### **Coda: A framework for understanding Britain's institutional reforms**

I have presented various theories and frameworks that suggest how the design of political institutions might affect levels of trust and participation among citizens. The injunctions contained in the Principal-Agent model, the majoritarian-proportional models, and the non-partisan account share the common feature of working within the representative model. That is, while acknowledging the claims of direct forms of engagement, they identify optimal patterns of institutional design within a framework in which authority is delegated from citizens to governments. For the Principal-Agent and majoritarian-consensus models, delegation is achieved through the medium of political parties. The institutional variations within these models are thus of the *inter-party* variety; they may shift the level and nature of electoral choice, but retain the basic pattern in which political authority is determined by parties competing for elected office. The non-partisan model retains the delegation of political authority from voters to representatives, but limits the role of partisan actors. It thus assumes a non-partisan representative framework, or *extra-party* model. (An intermediate model is one in which the parties retain their primacy, but are stimulated to become more responsive and less monolithic, via internal democratic mechanisms; *intra-party* democracy.<sup>59</sup>)

Three of the four reforms I consider in this work fit squarely within the inter-party model (elected mayors – which move towards an extra-party model – are the exception; see Chapter Six). But to see how the reforms work on a broader canvass, I have constructed a simple typology based on two dimensions: the degree of partisanship and the level of participation. This typology offers a descriptive-analytical account of how the four reforms considered in this work might operate (Chart 2.1). The vertical axis denotes the extent to which political authority is mediated by partisan actors, namely the political parties. The horizontal axis denotes the extent of citizen participation. Participation can be

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<sup>59</sup> For a similar typology, and discussion of the intra-party model, see Dalton, Scarrow and Cain, 2003.

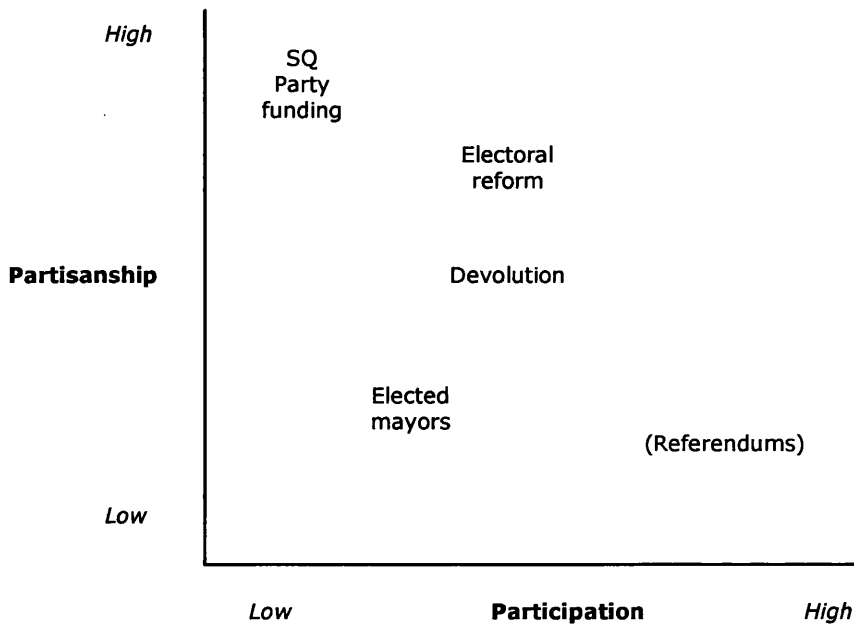
indirect (via elections) or direct (via referendums); all that the horizontal axis measures is the frequency with which citizens get to express their preferences.<sup>60</sup>

The *status quo ante* (SQ) is located in the top left hand corner. In other words, prior to 1997, political agency in Britain was characterised by a high level of partisanship, and a low level of participation. The first reform I consider - the regulation of party funding - also sits in a top left position. As Chapter Three sets out, the reform is intended to bolster the role of parties within the representative model, and thus does least of all the reforms to disrupt the *status quo*. The second and third reforms - electoral reform and devolution - mark a shift towards the bottom right direction, since they extend citizen participation while also, by virtue of the PR electoral systems in use, partially weakening the hold of the political parties.<sup>61</sup> Devolution sits below electoral reform - implying lower partisanship - because the decentralisation of authority to smaller political units opens the way for greater direct engagement with citizens and interest groups, over and above the mediating role played by political parties. The fourth reform - the direct election of local mayors - sits lower still on the vertical axis. Again, participation is extended (admittedly to a small fraction of the English population, which is why the reform sits closer to the status quo on the 'Participation' axis than electoral reform or devolution), but this time at rather more expense, in theory at least, to partisan control.

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<sup>60</sup> I define frequency in rough terms as the number of times in an electoral cycle that a citizen gets to express their preferences, with some note taken of what proportion of the population can do so.

<sup>61</sup> Voters in England, outside London, have gained no new opportunity for preference expression. Moreover, the reformed voting system for European Parliament elections has merely substituted a categorical choice under a 'closed' list system for a categorical choice under the previous single member plurality system. So the extension of preference expression through electoral reform is limited to the new voting systems used for the devolved elections; hence electoral reform as a measure appears at the same point on the 'Participation' axis as devolution.

**CHART 2.1 Typology of constitutional reforms, by partisanship and participation**

Overall, note that all the action takes place on the left side of the matrix; none of the reforms introduced thus far takes us far onto the right side denoting high rates of participation. Only if institutional reform embraced the far greater use of mechanisms such as referendums would the representative model be supplemented by a significant shift towards citizen participation (the labelling of referendums in parentheses simply denotes that this reform is not considered in any detail in this work). The question raised, and to which I return in the concluding chapter, is whether this matters. Is institutional reform in the absence of new opportunities for participation capable of reflecting citizen demands, and thus of stimulating high regard for, and engagement with, the political system?

## CONCLUSION

It is now time to summarise the answers to the questions addressed in this chapter:

*Are levels of trust and turnout responsive to the design of political institutions?*

I have suggested a generally affirmative answer to this question. In accounting for declining levels of political trust and electoral turnout, factors such as



government responsiveness and electoral context appear to be at least as important, if not more so, than factors like economic performance or broad social and demographic changes. Although different political institutions do not wholly account for variations in responsiveness and context, they help to shape these wider determinants of citizen engagement. Thus, it would be overstating the case to suggest that the recent declines in levels of political trust and electoral turnout across advanced democracies are primarily explicable in terms of poorly designed political institutions. However, the most plausible explanations for the deterioration in citizen engagement appear to afford at least some rejuvenative role for appropriately designed political institutions.

*Under which institutional arrangements are trust and turnout maximised?*

The impact of institutional design on citizen attitudes and behaviour is the subject of a long tradition of theoretical and empirical analysis. In this chapter, I have set out some competing theoretical claims about institutional effect, along with analysis of their empirical foundations. Drawing on rational choice derived models of political authority, I noted a distinction between arrangements that concentrate political power, and those that disperse it. On Principal-Agent accounts, citizens can ensure the responsiveness of their leaders either through strong electoral competition and a unified chain of delegation from citizens to decision makers, or through constraining their leaders' discretionary authority. The distinction between institutions that concentrate political authority and those that disperse it can also be seen in accounts of 'majoritarian' and 'consensus' or 'proportional' models of democracy. These, too, suggest that citizens' influence over their political rulers is greatest either when power is retained within a limited number of political actors, or alternatively when it is divided among many actors.

In theory at least, both set of arrangements can work well in ensuring that governments are responsive to their citizens, and thus that citizens trust these rulers and participate in their selection. At the empirical level, it is difficult to discern systematic effects for one set of arrangement or the other. Thus, while some studies identify more supportive political attitudes and higher rates of electoral participation under concentrated political arrangements (eg. two party systems, plurality electoral rules, unitary territorial distribution of power, limited veto players), others find for more dispersed arrangements (eg. multiple party systems, proportional electoral rules, federal territorial distribution of power, multiple veto players).

Thus, there is a fairly clear distinction at the theoretical level between different accounts of the conditions under which political trust and electoral turnout are maximised. However, it is far from clear which of these accounts provides the best mapping of levels of citizen engagement in practice. In addition, there are two further abstract accounts of political authority that identify additional institutional features that might impact on levels of citizen engagement. The first suggests that citizens are more likely to respond to arrangements where the translation of voter preferences into social outcomes is not mediated by partisan actors. The second suggests that responsiveness can only be achieved when citizens retain for themselves the power to make decisions, rather than delegating responsibility to political agents.

*What are the implications for institutional reform in Britain?*

In descriptive terms, the constitutional reforms introduced since 1997 have provided for stronger *ex ante* forms of political competition by, among others, allowing for electoral control to be exerted over territorially distinct tiers of government (devolution to Scotland, Wales and London), and by reducing imbalances in the parties' ability to showcase their proposals in the electoral marketplace (campaign finance reform). The reforms have also provided for clearer *ex post* controls on political authority, by introducing more formal checks (through a more explicit oversight role for the judiciary and by hiving off decisions over monetary policy to an independent body) and by increasing the amount of information provided through third party monitors. However, the reforms fall well short of the extensive checks and vetoes – institutional and partisan – characteristic of most presidential, and many parliamentary, systems. On Lijphart's terms, Britain has become a more consensual political system in some respects, while remaining heavily majoritarian in others.

Whether this limited transition is likely to effect more vibrant patterns of citizen engagement largely depends on what form of political arrangements the observer deems optimal. As I have suggested, it is not clear that, in empirical terms, there is a substantive dividend to either concentrated or dispersed forms of political arrangement. If one believes that government responsiveness is maximised where a unified chain of delegated authority means electoral competition is decisive for government outcomes, then the limited scope of the domestic reforms might suggest a largely positive dividend. On the other hand, if one is

more concerned to ensure responsiveness via the dispersal of power to multiple bodies – via partisan and institutional veto players – then the effect of the reforms might be considered less benign.

The two additional abstract accounts introduced in this chapter would anticipate limited effects from the reforms. The non-partisan account would point to the continued dominance of the political parties as agents of representation, although specific local initiatives – such as the direct election of executive mayors – might be considered to have a more positive impact. Most pessimistically of all, the participatory account would suggest a wholly negative dividend, since the reforms perpetuate a model in which political authority remains delegated from citizens to agents. On this account, the responsiveness of governments to citizens is only marginally affected by devolving authority and by strengthening judicial oversight. What is required for genuine responsiveness – and thus high rates of trust and participation – is for citizens to have the opportunities to take decisions themselves, through more participatory forms of democracy. I return to this argument in the concluding chapter. Before then, I turn to examine the effects of my four case study reforms in Britain: the regulation of party funding, electoral reform, devolution and directly elected local mayors.

### **Chapter 3**

## **REGULATING PARTY FINANCE**

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Prior to the reforms of party and election funding, political parties in Britain were voluntary bodies whose funding was the subject of little regulation. As a result of the reforms, the parties are now formally recognised in law, with their funding the subject of closer regulation. While the reforms have stopped short of transferring the funding of the parties to the state, they represent a clear shift, from a 'voluntaristic' model of parties to a 'rule bound' one (Webb, 2001). What motivated this radical change in approach? While a variety of reasons can be identified, pre-eminent was a belief that reform was necessary to reduce public perceptions of misconduct by politicians.<sup>62</sup> The regulation of party funding was introduced in the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* (henceforth PPERA). Here is how the reform was justified to both Houses of Parliament during the Second Reading debates:

"All political parties - and the reputation of the political system as a whole - will benefit from the 'Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Bill'"

*Jack Straw, Home Secretary (HC Debs, 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 2000, col 35)*

"This Bill will do much to strengthen public confidence in the democratic process"

*Lord Bassam, Home Office Minister (HL Debs, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2000, col 1094)*

In this chapter, I consider these claims. I ask what evidence there is that a tighter regulatory regime has yielded greater public confidence in political institutions? The answers to this question are instructive, not only for the new party funding regime itself, but also for judgements about the role of institutional change in the round. In the previous chapter, I mapped out a simple typology of constitutional reform, which placed each of my four case study reforms in terms of their distance from the status quo. The reform of party funding is the closest of the four reforms to the status quo. Thus, while the reform holds significant implications for the role and operation of the parties, and thus for the nature of democracy in Britain, it does so by maintaining the essential features of the representative system: the periodic delegation of authority by citizens to collective actors (the parties) via competitive elections. The wider context of the

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<sup>62</sup> Of all the constitutional reforms I consider in this work, the regulation of party funding is the one most closely associated with a desire to alleviate declining political confidence among the public, although other - secondary - goals were also clearly important (see Fisher, 2000: 25-7). Reforms of party funding rules in other countries have also been undertaken to alleviate public concern with political corruption (Alexander and Shiratori, 1994; IDEA, 2004a: 170).

analysis in this chapter thus concerns how far it is possible to strengthen citizen-government linkages through reforms that maintain these basic features of the representative model of democracy.

The task of assessing the impact of the new party funding rules is not an easy one, however. For a start, the new regime has been in place only since early 2001, providing little time for its effects to manifest themselves. This need not be a problem if the issue of party funding and the reforms themselves were highly salient in the public mind (in which case the reforms might induce a prompt effect among the population). But as I suggest later on, the reforms do not appear particularly salient (or rather, popular understanding of the way parties are funded is limited). Thus, given the limited time elapse since the introduction of the reforms, we need to be highly cautious when examining the evidence. Compounding the problem, rigorous analysis of the party funding issue is bedevilled by the relative paucity of good quality survey data. As befits an issue that has only recently assumed a high public profile, there is little historical data on public attitudes to party funding, and even more recent data is limited (Heywood, 1997: 419). Thus, when it comes to the impact of the new reforms in Britain, judgements will of necessity rest on piecing together multiple pieces of evidence, rather than relying on a single data source.

These caveats do not rule out empirical study of the new party funding regulations; rather, they suggest caution in interpreting any results. In order to compensate for the difficulties inherent in evaluating the British data, I preface my domestic discussion with a review of the evidence from overseas (pages 75-80). Here, in many cases, party funding regulations are more mature, and their implications thus more readily apparent, than for the nascent reforms in Britain. But before turning to the international and domestic evidence, I conduct a brief review of theoretical considerations. Why should regulating the way parties raise and spend money induce a positive payoff for citizens' attitudes towards their political agents?

## **THE 'PROBLEM' OF PARTY FUNDING**

Political parties play a crucial role in representative democracies, by serving as key linkages between the preferences of individual citizens and the decisions of governments. But while parties help to structure and simplify the electoral options for voters, they must also be responsive to voters' preferences. If parties

cease being responsive, they undermine the linkages between citizens and governments on which representative democracy depends.<sup>63</sup>

The need for parties to be responsive may, however, be compromised by the role of money in election campaigns. If parties are beholden to the financial power of individuals or corporate bodies, they may align their policy positions closer to those of their backers than to those of their supporters or the wider voting public. In this sense, parties become 'captured' by their funders.<sup>64</sup> As the costs of election campaigns have risen and the revenue from party membership has fallen (Farrell and Webb, 2000; Mair, 1997: chaps 5-6), parties are increasingly reliant on alternative sources of income, providing the conditions in which agency loss may be incurred (Hopkin, 1997). Concerns may also arise if campaign spending is perceived to shape election results. If the parties contesting elections command very different levels of financial backing, political competition may become uneven, with well endowed parties better equipped to publicise their message in the political marketplace. The role of campaign finance may also allow wealthy donors to skew democratic outcomes towards their favoured party, breaching the fundamental principle of equality of voice.<sup>65</sup> A slightly different problem may arise if private capital seeks an outcome that is illegitimate, either because it is illegal (eg. kickbacks on bribes) or unprincipled (eg. the awarding of posts or honours on a non-meritocratic basis).

There are, then, two key problems latent in the requirement of political parties for money (Rose Ackerman, 1999: 133-5). The first is that uneven financial power provides some parties or candidates with an advantage over their competitors, perverting the process of political competition which assumes equality between competitors. The Committee on Standards in Public Life (1998: 26-7) identified this as the 'fairness' problem. The second problem is that a system of private donations opens the way for 'agency loss', as social outcomes are skewed in the interests of those holding the purse strings. Such agency loss may take the form of parties biasing a certain set of interests in policy formulation. Or, at a morally,

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<sup>63</sup> Commentators who are critical of political parties rest their case, in large part, on the belief that, in offering a single package of measures in the face of highly complex citizen preferences, parties restrict political choice and thus fail to act as responsive agents (Bogdanor, 1997).

<sup>64</sup> True, rational choice theory downplays the risk of such an outcome since, under the basic model of electoral competition, parties and candidates should converge on the median voter. Under this model, campaign finance should be unable to budge office-seeking parties from this position (the logical corollary being that, since donations have no substantive impact, no campaign finance should be forthcoming). However, once the strict postulates of the electoral competition model are relaxed, political funding does open up the possibility of agency loss (Brennan and Hamlin, 2000a).

<sup>65</sup> There is some disagreement about how far this concern is valid. In the case of Britain, election results at the local level appear to be responsive to campaign spending (Pattie et al, 1995), although party fortunes at the national level appear little affected by campaign spending (Fisher, 1999).

although not necessarily politically, murkier level, private benefits may improperly be sought in return for financial bequests; what the Committee termed the problem of 'misconduct'.<sup>66</sup>

The issue of party funding raises, then, multiple concerns and potential problems. My concern here is with the potential for the way parties are funded to generate concerns - whether valid or not - about agency loss. I am therefore not greatly concerned with party funding as it relates to the nature of the political marketplace: the 'fairness' question. There is little to suggest that the lopsided nature of political competition weakens public confidence in the political system (except among those who suffer from the current regime, notably supporters of the Liberal Democrats and other small, or 'third', parties).<sup>67</sup>

I am interested in what the Committee termed the issue of 'misconduct', since such behaviour potentially involves agency loss. However, 'misconduct' is a broad term, and needs a little further delineation. In particular, we need to distinguish between misbehaviour that essentially involves personal considerations, and those that raise political questions. *Political* misconduct arises when an elected official seeks to boost their power by breaching the decision making rules laid down by a liberal democracy (eg. the rule of law, due process etc). If misconduct by an official does not infringe these rules, then however repugnant or shocking the act itself, it should not be treated as political misconduct, but as *personal* misconduct (Markovits and Silverstein, 1988). Thus, to give an example, the spate of allegations under the last Conservative government regarding politicians' sex lives should be treated as examples of personal, not political, misconduct since they contravened a set of social norms rather than the rules governing the political process (the 'cash for questions' affair, on the other hand, clearly infringed due process and was thus an example of political misconduct).

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<sup>66</sup> The Committee also identified two further problems relating to party funding. One was the escalating costs of elections, the other the declining capacity of cash-strapped parties for effective policy formulation. The first problem may have direct implications for the public's confidence in the political process (indeed the Committee (1998: 24-5) identified it as one of the main reasons for citizen concern, along with the inscrutability of party donations), although the implications of the second for public attitudes are at best indirect.

<sup>67</sup> The degree of political competition may impact on such factors as electoral participation, however. Thus, many studies of campaign finance in the United States explore the impact on electoral competition, in particular the impact of different arrangements on incumbents and challengers. Recent research suggests that campaign finance reform might induce greater electoral competition - by strengthening the position of challengers vis a vis incumbents - and thus boost turnout (Goidel et al, 1999; Gross and Goidel, 2003; for contrary results, see Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2000). In Britain, as already noted (footnote 65), analysis suggests that constituency election results are partially contingent on campaign spending. However, campaign finance reform is less likely to have an effect on turnout here as in the United States, since local spending is already heavily capped.

The distinction between different forms of misconduct is important in the context of this chapter, since the aim of the party funding regulations is to reduce political misconduct rather than the more amorphous area of personal scandal. Political and personal scandal are sometimes treated together under general headings such as 'sleaze'. But, in theory at least, the problems of agency loss and social transgressions are distinct issues in political life and attract different solutions.<sup>68</sup> In this chapter, then, I try to maintain a distinction between 'political' and 'personal' forms of misconduct, albeit recognising that public perceptions of personal misbehaviour by elected officials might well have a negative dividend for confidence in the political system.

So much for the 'problem' in theory; what about in practice? Is there any evidence that Britain's political system has suffered recently from increased agency loss, in a manner that might, in principle, be addressed by more stringent rules on party funding? One way in which political agents act contrary to their principal's interests is by engaging in corrupt activities. Political corruption may be defined as "the misuse of public office for private gain" (Anderson and Tverdora, 2003). While political corruption is only a subset of activities that involve agency loss (which may or may not involve private gain), it is a useful indicator in helping quantify the extent of agency loss in political life. It is usually believed that, in Britain, examples of corruption arising from party funding are relatively low by comparative standards (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1981). This is certainly reinforced if we examine the corruption rankings produced by Transparency International. These rankings - the *Corruption Perceptions Index* - are based on judgements made by country analysts and business people. They are thus based on subjective evaluations rather than the actual incidence of corruption but, in the absence of such 'hard' data, are probably the best comparative and longitudinal guide we have. The Index shows that, on a scale of 0 (very corrupt) to 10 (highly clean), Britain scored 8.70 in 2003, in line with the scores for other west European countries, and above the United States which scored 7.50 (Transparency International, nd). We can also use the Index to make comparisons of corruption over time, since the rankings date back to the 1980-85 period. Between 1980-85 and 2003, the perception of corruption in Britain actually fell, with its 'transparency' score rising from 8.01 to 8.70. Such improvement is common to many west European countries. Thus, among ten

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<sup>68</sup> Specific initiatives to prevent personal misconduct have been introduced (such as the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament), but are not considered here.



such countries, the mean score increased from 8.16 in 1980-85 to 8.51 in 2003 (ibid).<sup>69</sup>

On this measure at least, corruption in Britain has actually fallen in recent years. However, the Index measures perceptions of various forms of corruption across a range of public institutions, not simply actions relating to the way parties are funded. In addition, what may matter is not so much the actual incidence of corruption - or observers' judgement thereof - as the public *perception* of wrongdoing. Unfortunately, we lack much historical data capable of showing how far public perceptions of wrongdoing have increased or declined in recent years. In general terms, we know that trust in government has fallen by a half since the start of the 1990s (see Chart 1.4 in Chapter One). More specific to the issue of political conduct, other surveys have shown that people's evaluations of legislators have declined (although we have no measures of the propriety of party financing). Thus, asked whether they thought that "most MPs have a high personal moral code", the proportions agreeing fell from 42 per cent in 1985, to 26 per cent in 1995 and to 17 per cent in 2004. And while 46 per cent of voters in 1985 felt that most MPs make money by using public office improperly, a decade later that figure had risen to 64 per cent (although it has subsequently fallen back, to 59 per cent in 2004) (Mortimore, 1995; King, 2004).

Against this backdrop, Britain has joined many other countries in attempting to counter declining public confidence in political parties through tighter legal controls on the way parties raise and spend money. Having outlined the nature of the 'problem', I now turn to these 'solutions'.

## **THE ROLE OF PARTY REGULATION**

Political corruption may be prevented through some well designed, basic constitutional structures, such as high levels of electoral competition between unified parties. Additionally, corruption may be limited by removing from official discretion decisions (eg. on monetary policy) that allow significant costs and benefits to be imposed directly on individuals (Rose Ackerman, 1999: 130; 2001). However, such 'de minimis' features are often unable to prevent political corruption - or at least public perceptions of official misconduct - at which point additional, more specific, institutions might be required. These generally include

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<sup>69</sup> The countries I selected are: Austria Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland.

rules, codes of conduct and regulatory institutions; mechanisms of 'formal' accountability, in Philp's (2001) term. When it comes to party funding, the reforms tend to embrace a variety of the following: requirements for public disclosure of party revenues and spending, limitations on donations and campaign spending and some form of state financing of party activities (Rose Ackerman, 1999: 140-2; Pinto-Duschinsky, 1981: 247).

The particular instruments selected depend on the goals that are to be achieved. If policy actors are concerned to reduce the amount of election spending, limits on party spending can be introduced. By weakening the demand for funds, spending limits might also choke off their supply, although if this is the primary concern additional reforms might be required, notably the disclosure (or full anonymity<sup>70</sup>) of, and limits on, individual donations.

If the public is concerned about the responsiveness of parties – and the potential for private donations to induce agency loss – the solutions might be broader. In general terms, the solutions fall into three broad groups.<sup>71</sup> First, there are systems in which the parties depend on private sources for their income, with little or no rules governing how parties may raise and spend their money. This is the 'mini' scenario, which applied, in broad terms, to Britain prior to the party funding reforms.<sup>72</sup> Second, there are systems where parties depend on private donations for the bulk of their income, but where raising and spending money is closely regulated. This 'midi' system is where Britain now sits. Third, under a 'maxi' scenario, the potential for agency loss is reduced still further – and in principle eliminated altogether – by collectivising party funding via a system of subventions from the state (another feature of the 'maxi' model is the imposition of caps on donations, since this is generally accompanied by the provision of funding from the state<sup>73</sup>). The reforms in Britain attempt to restore public

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<sup>70</sup> *Contra* those who argue that sunlight represents the best disinfectant, others suggest that total darkness, via the complete anonymity of donations, is a more effective means of ensuring that private donations do not encourage agency loss (see the argument of Ian Ayres, discussed in Brennan and Hamlin, 2000a).

<sup>71</sup> I term these three the 'mini', 'midi' and 'maxi' solutions. A seasoned commentator on party funding, Karl-Heinz Nassmacher, also identifies three models – whose conditions correspond to mine – terming them the 'autonomy', 'transparency' and 'advocacy' options (IDEA, 2004a: 10-13).

<sup>72</sup> The only substantive restrictions concerned spending at the constituency level, which was tightly capped.

<sup>73</sup> If donations are capped, the parties will face a funding shortfall unless they can increase considerably the number of donations they receive. It is very rare for a country to set limits on donations without also providing funding from the state. Indeed, among western countries, there are no examples of a regime that caps donations to parties without providing significant state support (although some countries operate the opposite model, by providing state support without capping donations) (see IDEA, 2004a).

confidence via a 'midi' set of institutions.<sup>74</sup> Should we find these reforms have had little effect, the question will be raised of whether a more 'maxi' solution is required.

The 'midi' level reforms of party funding in Britain established a raft of new regulations, covering party fundraising and expenditure. For the purposes of this chapter, the noteworthy features of the new regime are: (1) a requirement for party donations and spending to be publicly disclosed, and (2) a cap on national election spending by the parties. Moreover, both measures are overseen by a new independent body, the Electoral Commission.

The regulations introduced in Britain are intended to reduce potential agency loss by increasing the amount of information available to the principal about their agent's behaviour (via disclosure requirements), and by reducing the agent's demand for private funding (via spending limits). As a result of these outcomes, it is hoped that the reforms will improve citizens' confidence in the political process. However, it might also be argued that, on the contrary, the reforms will actually damage public confidence. For instance, disclosure requirements might make the public more aware of the role of private capital in party funding; this information might generate particular concern if donations originate from individuals or corporations with unsavoury reputations.<sup>75</sup> Second, while the introduction of new rules might strengthen the 'formal' accountability of office holders, it might weaken the more organic informal, or 'political', sense of accountability (Philp, 2001; Pujas and Rhodes, 2003: 18). Finally, while the role of capital is seen by many to be corrosive of democratic practice, others point to its beneficial character and warn of the dangers of setting strict limits to the resources committed to elections (Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2000; Brennan and Hamlin, 2000a).<sup>76</sup>

One reform rejected by the Neill Committee, and not introduced as part of the Government's reform package, is the state funding of political parties. However, state funding remains on the agenda, with recent indications that it is being

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<sup>74</sup> Although Britain has long had a system of partial state support for certain party expenses - now extended to include policy development work - the bulk of the parties' election expenses still derives from private sources.

<sup>75</sup> Thus, one explanation for the failure of party regulation in the United States to quell public unease about campaign finance is precisely that the regulations are working, albeit in a perverse way by contributing to revelations about political scandal (Gross and Goidel, 2003: 18-20; Herrnson, 1993: 36). In Britain, the furore over the large donation to Labour by Richard Desmond in 2002, arose from the donor's background in publishing pornography as well as the perceived conflict of interest it created for the Government. I am indebted to Justin Fisher for this point.

considered by the Government.<sup>77</sup> In addition to its continued attraction for policy makers in Britain, I also consider state funding in my analysis since it remains the 'maxi' response to the potential for agency loss.<sup>78</sup> In theory at least, the collective provision of party finance aligns the interests of the principal (voters) and the source of funding (the state), thus avoiding agency loss. But while state funding might prompt voters to feel more confident about their political institutions, it might also have negative consequences. In particular, state funding is held to ossify the political system, by shoring up existing parties against new entrants. By restricting the responsiveness of the political marketplace, state funding might have the effect of increasing citizen discontent (Pierre et al, 2000; Alexander, 2001: 205; Pujas and Rhodes, 2003: 18). The analysis that follows thus considers not only the effect of disclosure and spending rules, but also the role of state funding.

## THE INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

As I noted at the outset, one of the difficulties in evaluating the impact of the party funding reforms in Britain is their short life thus far. Although the next section provides some evidence about their early effects, there are clearly limits on what we can glean from reforms whose existence dates only from 2001. It is appropriate, then, to begin with evidence from countries with more mature regulatory regimes. Such information will serve as an important guide to the kind of effects we might anticipate at home.

Unfortunately, in the rapidly expanding literature on public attitudes to political institutions, little attention has thus far been paid to the behaviour of politicians and bureaucrats, in particular to levels of corruption. As Pharr (2000: 191) notes:

"Although studies of individual corruption and political ethics cases go forward, and corruption itself, its causes and cures, attracts research, the deeper significance of conduct-in-office issues for relations between mass publics and leaders in democracies goes largely unexplored."

Even in the United States, where public attitude surveys have long underpinned political research, and where campaign finance is a long standing political issue,

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<sup>76</sup> These supposed beneficial effects include: funding and promoting grassroots campaigning and funding political advertising which helps inform voters at election time.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, the support offered to state funding by the Labour Party's outgoing general secretary, David Triesman ('Political parties may get state aid', *Daily Telegraph*, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2004).

there have been few surveys that specifically address the inter-relationship between corruption, party funding and the public (McSweeney, 2000: 47). Case studies of individual countries, such as Italy and Japan, have shown that levels of corruption are a strong predictor of public confidence in government (Della Porta, 2000; Pharr, 2000). These results are reaffirmed by cross-national research, which shows that corruption is linked to evaluations of the political system. Controlling for a range of factors, one such study shows that individuals in countries with high levels of corruption exhibit more negative political attitudes than citizens in less corrupt countries (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003).

We thus have some evidence that political misconduct does generate more sceptical or cynical public attitudes. To this extent, there is a 'problem'. However, when it comes to gauging the efficacy of the various solutions, the evidence base is limited. Most western nations have introduced regulations to cover the way parties raise and spend money. But there is little data that explores what impact these reforms have had on public attitudes. Insofar as comparative studies of party funding regimes have an analytical focus, it tends to be on the impact of regulations on the parties and their funding, rather than on public attitudes.<sup>79</sup> This is a pity since, as many of these studies note, an important trigger for the introduction of regulations in the first place was public concern with the way parties and candidates are funded (see Gunlicks, 1993; Alexander and Shiratori, 1994; Williams, 2000).

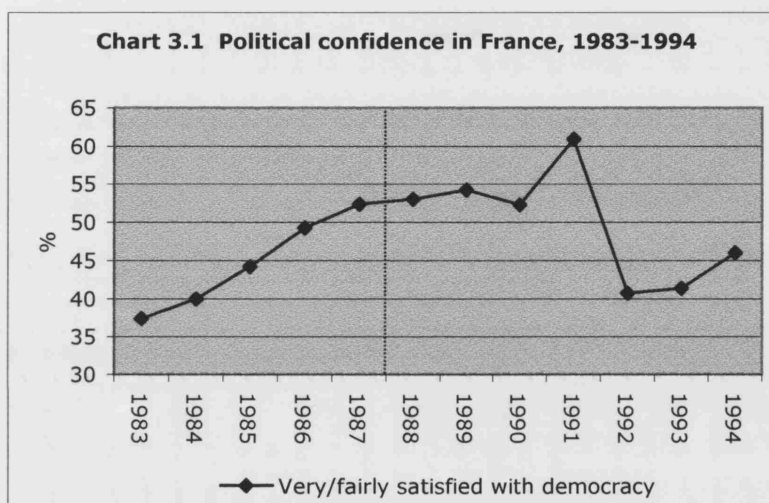
The comparative literature does suggest, however, that the reforms introduced in western nations since the 1960s and 1970s - the dates of the first moves to tighter regulation of party funding in Germany, the United States and Canada - have not substantially alleviated public concern. Thus, many of the country case studies contained in the main cross-national studies of party funding (notably the studies just referenced) end with accounts of further reforms either being introduced by, or at least urged on, policy actors. This suggests that the existing regimes are unsatisfactory, either in providing adequate funding for the parties and/or in preventing corruption or public perceptions of such.

If we examine the immediate impact of major regulatory reforms in western democracies, there appears to be little payoff in terms of greater public

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<sup>79</sup> While state funding is often advocated as a means of preventing agency loss, it is also seen by its proponents as a means of supporting the essential work of parties at a time when funding from voluntary sources is under threat (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1998; Fisher, 2002).

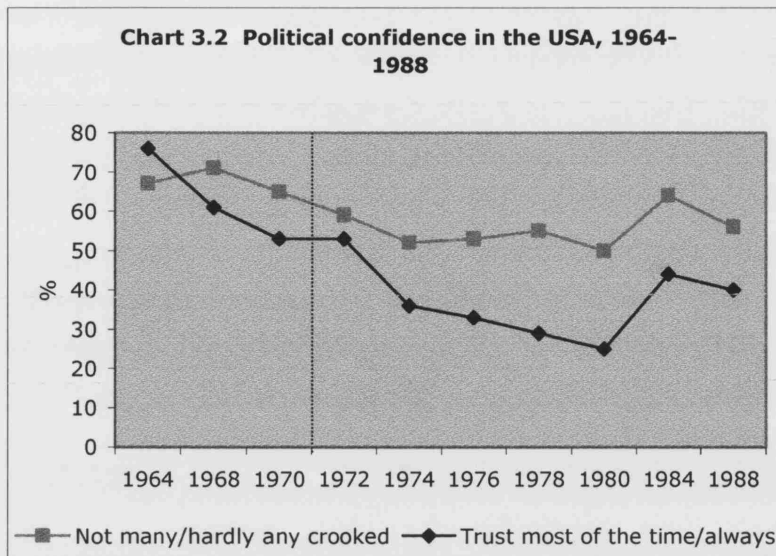
confidence. We might expect to see any discernible improvement in public attitudes in those countries that introduced a package of reforms at one go, rather than over time (on the basis that a 'big bang' approach is more likely to impinge on the public consciousness than an incremental approach). The only countries to have adopted such an approach are the United States (in 1971, when disclosure and donation limits were introduced), Canada (in 1974, when disclosure and spending limits were introduced) and France (in 1988, when disclosure, donation and spending limits and state funding were introduced). But as we can see from Charts 3.1 and 3.2, there is no immediate - or even long term - dividend in terms of public confidence in either France or the United States.<sup>80</sup>



"On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in France?"  
Source: *Eurobarometer*

<sup>79</sup> Even the recent exhaustive study of party funding rules from IDEA (2004a) contains no evidence on the impact of regulations on public confidence in the political process.

<sup>80</sup> The example of France might suggest why party regulation has not had a more positive effect. For a start, as noted earlier, increased transparency might serve to bring previously concealed sources of party funding to light, as was the case for business funding of French parties in the early 1990s. Second, reform packages that do not cover all issues of party funding tend to produce calls for further reform, thus highlighting the supposed deficiencies of the new regime. This was the case in France with business funding of the parties, which was not included in the 1988 reforms. Finally, the reforms may be introduced but not scrupulously followed, as was arguably the case with spending limits in France (Clift and Fisher, 2004). Unsurprisingly, poorly designed and enforced regulations tend to have little positive impact on public confidence in the political system.



"Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?"  
 "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right: just about always, most of the time or only some of the time?"  
 Source: *National Election Study*, University of Michigan

Aside from cross-country comparative studies, the bulk of the research on campaign finance reform has focused on the United States. Much of this research concentrates on the impact of campaign finance on electoral outcomes, rather than on citizen attitudes. However, some analyses have addressed the impact of campaign spending on such factors as voters' awareness of the candidates and knowledge of their policy positions (eg. Coleman and Manna, 2000) and levels of grassroots campaigning and voter turnout (Ansolabehere and Snyder, 2000). These analyses find that campaign spending has a positive impact, suggesting that reforms that cap spending and donations actually tend to harm the quality of electoral democracy. Other research that focuses more specifically on the impact of campaign finance reform is equivocal on whether tighter regulation has a detrimental impact on electoral turnout (Goidel et al, 1999; Gross and Goidel, 2003; Milyo et al, 2002). In the most direct analysis of the effect of reform on citizens' relations with government, Primo and Milyo (2003) explore the impact of different state regulatory regimes on levels of political efficacy. They show that the impact of these regimes is not uniform. While the public disclosure of contributions is associated with higher citizen efficacy, limits on contributions and spending have no significant effect on efficacy. However, public funding of campaigns is associated with a mildly negative impact on efficacy, suggesting that citizens react against the use of their money if this does not help 'clean up' politics. The authors conclude that different regulatory mechanisms have

different effects, but overall the impact of party funding regulation on citizen attitudes is modest.

Summarising the trends across many western countries, Pujas and Rhodes (2003: 18) suggest that:

"It is clear that a restoration of public confidence in political parties requires ... new and transparent forms of party financing. But ... this is far from simple. The crisis of party funding systems in many countries today reflects the fact that few countries have found effective and legitimate solutions ...".

The comparative literature thus suggests that regulatory regimes have not served to reinvigorate public confidence in the political process. This may be for one or more of three reasons. The first is that public distrust in political institutions, though affected by disquiet over party funding, is driven by a more fundamental set of forces. As an example of this, levels of political trust in the United States have been found to be unresponsive to levels of campaign spending, with the correlation between trends in the two variables over time found to be close to zero (Primo, 2002). As McSweeney (2000: 47-8) observes in relation to the United States, public distrust did not just follow, but also pre-dated the Watergate scandal in 1974. Indeed, if party funding is not a particularly salient political issue for the public, any reforms - although worthy in themselves - may have little public payoff. In the United States, many point to the low salience of campaign finance as an explanation for its weak impact on public confidence (Ayres, 2003; see also Corrado, 2000: 7; Mayer, 2001; Primo, 2002; Sorauf, 1990: 213).

A second reason for the weak apparent impact of party regulation is that the reforms themselves fail to meet popular demands. Thus, citizens in the United States are found to favour limits on campaign funding that go well beyond the regime currently in place (McSweeney, 2000). In France, Italy and Spain, surveys have similarly shown the unpopularity of the existing regimes of state support for parties (Pujas and Rhodes, 2003).

Third, while party regulations may reduce the 'political opportunity structures' for office holders to engage in misconduct and corrupt activities, they do not foreclose them completely, particularly if the regulations are poorly designed or enforced. Thus, while state funding is designed to eliminate - or at least heavily reduce - the parties' dependence on private sources of finance, in practice, the



increasing cost of elections has encouraged parties to supplement state resources with private donations (Heywood, 1997: 431). Alternatively, the regulations may simply be circumvented by the parties and office holders (Nassmacher, 1993).

The international evidence is thus salutary for those who believe the new party funding regulations in Britain are likely to significantly reduce public concerns with political misconduct. Overall, the evidence from overseas suggests that tightly constrained systems of party funding have failed to convince citizens of the probity and responsiveness of their political agents. Moreover, public concerns seem as evident in countries that have adopted the 'maxi' solution of collective state funding of the parties (eg. Germany) as in those where parties still rely on private donations (eg. Sweden).

### **THE DOMESTIC EVIDENCE**

Given the recent genesis of the party funding reforms, the majority of the data considered in this section relates to 'inputs' rather than 'outcomes'. In other words, the analysis focuses on evidence collected prior to the reforms, rather than measuring their impact in practice. I do marshal some evidence about the immediate outcomes of the reforms, via public opinion surveys and media coverage figures (pages 88-91). But my judgements about the effect of the regulations depend largely on data collected before 2001; in other words, the judgements are of the *likely* impact of tighter party regulation.

The hypothesis that the tighter regulation of party funding will stimulate public confidence ideally requires the following causal linkages:

- An association between perceptions of official misconduct and confidence in the political system.
- High levels of public support for the reform options being introduced.
- An association between support for regulation and confidence in the political system.

This sequence links the 'problem' (agency loss via politicians' misconduct) to the 'reform' (party regulation) to the 'goal' (public confidence in the political system). Under conditions of voter ignorance, it would be possible for the reform to be linked to the goal without citizens appreciating the nature of the underlying problem. In other words, the public might not associate party regulation (the

solution) with political misconduct (the problem), but an association may still exist between support for regulation and levels of confidence in the political system. The crucial factor is, then, the third one, although in the following sections, I will examine the evidence for each of the factors in turn.

### **Is concern about misconduct linked to trust?**

As I showed above (page 72), there is some evidence of the public's concern with political misconduct. How far does such concern affect generalised levels of confidence in the political system? Does the perception of misconduct damage confidence in the political system itself, or simply depress support for the actors concerned? The former position tends to be the more common among analysts.<sup>81</sup> Thus, writing about the increase in corruption among developed countries in the 1990s, Heywood (1997: 419) suggests:

"The revelation of widespread political corruption helped undermine one of the support structures - the claim to operate on the basis of public accountability - which had underpinned western democracies in the post-war world."

This was also the view of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (1998: 25), which suggested that:

"Allegations [of misconduct by the political parties], and the unnecessary mystery that surrounds the funding of the political parties, is damaging. It damages the parties themselves. It is also a factor tending to corrode public confidence in the political process as a whole".

Unfortunately, we have rather few domestic survey instruments by which to test the nexus of public misconduct and party funding. One source that provides some leverage on this issue is the *British Social Attitudes* survey for 2002. This survey asked respondents the following question to gauge perceptions of corrupt political behaviour: "How often would you say Labour [or the Conservative party] does favours for people or companies who give the party large sums of money?". Given the rather leading nature of the question, it is not surprising that one quarter of the sample believed that both parties grant favours "very often"; once

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<sup>81</sup> An interesting subtlety is introduced by Philp (2001), who suggests that public misconduct may have different consequences in different political systems. He suggests that in political systems marked by 'formal' mechanisms of accountability, such as the United States, public misconduct is seen primarily as a violation of these rules, rather than as infringing the political norms underpinning the system as a whole. But in other countries, such as Britain, accountability is more 'political' and relies to a greater degree on an informal bond of trust between citizens and governments. In these systems, public misconduct tends to be seen as a violation of that trust rather than as a breach of a rule.

those answering "fairly often" are included, the proportions rise to almost six in ten of the sample. If we focus only on those who believed favours were done "very often" (one quarter of the sample for both parties) or "not very often" (around 15 per cent of the sample for both parties), we do find the anticipated association with political trust. Thus, among those who thought favours were frequent, between three and four in ten "never" trusted British government. Among those who thought favours were infrequent, the proportion of low trusters is between just above one in ten. The correlation between a respondent's perception of misconduct and their trust in the political system is 0.25.<sup>82</sup>

A second piece of evidence we have suggests a slightly stronger relationship between perceptions of official misconduct and political confidence. In this analysis, Pattie and Johnston (2001) used data from the 1997 *British Election Study* to examine what affected the public's views on the moral standards of British politicians. Using a multiple regression model, they found that evaluations of moral standards were significantly related to generalised attitudes towards the political system. Those who strongly agreed that politicians' moral standards had declined showed lower levels of efficacy and trust than those who were less sure there had been a decline or who thought no decline had taken place.<sup>83</sup>

A final piece of evidence also suggests a clear negative dividend from perceptions of misconduct. This analysis adopts a rather different approach, by comparing the views of a sample of voters across the country with those located in six constituencies whose MPs (three Conservative and three Labour) were accused of misconduct prior to the 2001 general election. Using data from the *British Election Study* of that year, Bowler and Karp (2003) find that levels of respect for politicians and parliament are significantly lower among voters in the six constituencies than among voters across the country as a whole. In other words, misconduct by office holders does appear to reduce citizens' support for both specific political actors and political institutions in general.

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<sup>82</sup> However, might the relationship work the other way, too, with those with low political trust more likely to perceive misconduct among office holders than their trusting counterparts (Heywood, 1997: 419; Pujas and Rhodes, 2003)? The British data suggest this is a plausible hypothesis. Thus, using the same data source, we find that almost five in ten of those with low trust believed both parties "very often" did favours for party donors. But only around one in ten low trusters believed that parties "never" granted such favours. In other words, there is a relationship between a person's level of political trust and the extent to which they perceive the parties to favour donors, but it is unclear which judgement is the causal one.

<sup>83</sup> But the negative consequences of a belief in declining moral standards among MPs do not extend to participation at elections. In fact, at the 1997 general election, those people who thought that standards had not declined were more likely to abstain than those more critical of MPs' behaviour. In

### **Does the public support party regulation?**

The second issue to consider is the level of public support for the regulations recently introduced in Britain. Strictly speaking, it is possible for the reforms to have a beneficial impact on public attitudes even if there was no prior public support for them. But this could occur only if the introduction of the reforms served to convert attitudes (ie. akin to showing citizens the error of their ways), something that seems unlikely. It is more plausible to argue that the reforms will have a positive impact by building on existing support for tighter party regulation. It is for this reason that one commentator on United States politics believes that any introduction of state funding for congressional elections would fail to boost public confidence in Congress. Since public attitudes to state funding are shown to be ambiguous, Jacobson (1980: 224-5) argues that reform would alienate as many people as it would please.

Unfortunately, as befits a relatively low salience constitutional reform, there is little survey evidence by which to assess British voters' attitudes towards the regulation of party funding. The most informative set of questions appeared on the 1996 *British Social Attitudes* survey, and sought opinions on whether individual donations should be a private matter (also asked on the 1997 survey) and whether a limit should be set on individual donations. In addition, the 1991 MORI *State of the Nation* poll sought views on setting limits to parties' election spending, while a 2003 survey examined attitudes to setting limits on donations. The public's views on these issues are set out in Table 3.1.

Given the low regard in which parties are held, it is not surprising to find widespread support for limiting their expenditure on election campaigns, with eight in ten voters supporting this reform. But there is more reticence when it comes to the disclosure of donations. In both 1996 and 1997, almost one half of respondents supported the right of donors to keep their donations private (the increased support in 1997 for the publicity principle is partly explained by the question response options, which did not include an equivocal option - 'neither agree nor disagree' - thus forcing respondents to take sides). It is more difficult to discern what support exists for capping individual donations. In 1996, only a bare plurality (38 per cent) agreed that individual donations should be subject to

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other words, the more disgruntled the voter was about standards, the more this acted as a spur to action rather than as a demotivating factor (Pattie and Johnston, 2001a).

a limit, although in 2003, virtually three quarters (70 per cent) supported this option.<sup>84</sup>

**Table 3.1: Public attitudes towards the regulation of party funding**

%	1991	1996	1997	2003
Should there be or not be a set limit to the amount of money political parties can spend across the nation on general election campaigns?*				
- Should	81			
- Should not	14			
- Don't know	5			
N	n/a			
Any individual who gives money to a political party should be allowed to keep their gift private if they wish.**				
- Agree/Agree strongly		48	46	
- Disagree/disagree strongly		29	52	
- Neither agree nor disagree		14	-	
- Can't choose		8	3	
N		(989)	(3093)	
There should be a limit on how much money a single individual can give to a political party.**				
- Agree/Agree strongly		38		
- Disagree/disagree strongly		29		
- Neither agree nor disagree		24		
- Can't choose		10		
N		(989)		
There should be limits on how much people can donate to political parties.***				
- Tend to agree/agree strongly				70
- Tend to disagree/disagree strongly				26
- Neither agree nor disagree				4
- No opinion				1
N				(1500)

Note that column percentages may not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Sources: \* MORI (Dunleavy et al, 2001); \*\* British Social Attitudes (Curtice and Jowell, 1997); \*\*\* MORI (Electoral Commission, 2003)

These measures provide us with a glimpse into the public's reaction to party regulation. They suggest strong support for regulating the role of the main collective actors, the parties, with support more recently for extending restrictions to individual donors. Note that the survey questions relate to two measures already introduced in Britain (ie. limits on party election spending and the disclosure of donations) and one not thus far introduced (ie. limits on donations). A further measure proposed by many who believe that the role of private money corrodes the responsiveness of parties is a shift to state funding. The responses to four surveys conducted over the last decade or so suggest

<sup>84</sup> The rather large discrepancy between these figures may be explained by subtle differences in question wording (thus, limits are to be applied to "a single individual" in the 1996 version, but to "people" in general in the 2003 version). Or, it may be that, having experienced both Conservative and Labour governments, voters in 2003 are more willing than they were seven years' previously to

rather limited public support for this option, with only around one third of voters agreeing that the parties should be funded from the public purse (Table 3.2). Voters may be unwilling to countenance state funding on the basis that this would impose costs on themselves as taxpayers. But neither do they believe the measure would prevent agency loss. Asked in 2003 whether "politics would be more honest if parties were funded through taxes", just 31 per cent agreed, while 56 per cent disagreed (Electoral Commission, 2003).

**Table 3.2 : Public attitudes towards state funding of parties**

%	1991	1996	2002	2003
It has been suggested that during general elections, a fixed amount of public money should be given to political parties to finance election campaigns. Do you think this is a good or bad idea?*				
- Good idea	39			
- Bad idea	53			
- Don't know	8			
N	N/a			
Political parties need to be funded by the government to do their job properly.**				
- Agree/Agree strongly		33		
- Disagree/disagree strongly		28		
- Neither agree nor disagree		26		
- Can't choose		12		
N		(989)		
Do you approve or disapprove of the present system of paying for political parties by collecting money from party members, businesses, trades unions and wealthy individuals?***				
- Approve			34	
- Disapprove			47	
- Don't know			19	
N			N/a	
Do you think that political party funding should come mainly from taxes or do you think it should remain as it is now, with funds from party members, businesses, trades unions and wealthy individuals?				
- Should come mainly from taxes			26	
- Should remain mainly as it is now			58	
- Don't know			16	
N			N/a	
Which of the following best reflects your view?**** <sup>1</sup>				
- Parties totally funded by taxes				7
- Parties mainly funded by taxes, some donations				9
- Parties funded equally by taxes/donations				17
- Parties mainly funded by donations, some taxes				26
- Parties totally funded by donations				37
- Don't know				3
N				(1500)

Note that column percentages may not sum to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Sources: \*MORI (Dunleavy et al, 2001); \*\*British Social Attitudes (Curtice and Jowell, 1997); \*\*\* ICM Party Funding Poll, May; \*\*\*\* MORI (Electoral Commission, 2003).

<sup>1</sup> The full question wording was:

"Which of the following best reflects your view?"

introduce limits. Voters in 1996 might have preferred waiting to see how an alternative (Labour) government would behave before committing themselves to such a reform.

Political parties should be totally funded by taxes, with voluntary donations being banned.  
 Political parties should be mainly funded by taxes, with some voluntary donations allowed.  
 Political parties should be totally funded equally by taxes and voluntary donations.  
 Political parties should be totally mainly by voluntary donations, with some funding from taxpayers.  
 Political parties should be totally funded by voluntary donations, with no funding from taxpayers."

We should treat the figures in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 with some caution. While most of the issues tested do not attract a high proportion of uncommitted respondents (those not being able to answer either in favour or against a particular option), for some, up to one fifth are unable to provide an answer. Thus, on some issues, attitudes among members of the public may not be well formed. The most recent study - by MORI in summer 2003 - provides evidence to reinforce this caveat. The MORI survey found that few people feel informed about the way parties are currently funded. Just over one quarter (27 per cent) thought they knew "a fair amount" or "a great deal"; but 72 per cent said they knew "just a little" or less.<sup>85</sup> The survey also highlights potential inconsistencies in attitudes, with eight in ten respondents (79 per cent) agreeing that people should have the right to make donations to their favoured party, while seven in ten also agreeing that a system of voluntary donations is unfair because of the influence it allows donors to buy (Electoral Commission, 2003).

We should bear in mind, then, that surveys on attitudes to party funding may be shaping, or even creating, opinion rather than measuring it. But given this caveat, the survey data appears to show some public support for increasing the regulation of party funding, although not to the extent of collectivising party resources through the state.

### **Is support for party regulation linked to political disaffection?**

The third, and crucial, question is whether support for tighter party regulation is linked to general dissatisfaction with politicians and governments? In other words, are those with low levels of confidence in the political system more likely to support reform of party funding than those with high levels of confidence? If so, there is at least the possibility that such institutional change will help improve confidence in the political system, although such an outcome will be less likely if we find that support for reform is concentrated among those whose confidence is already relatively high.

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<sup>85</sup> Attitudes towards reform options may be liable to significant change when individuals become more informed about the topics. Thus, while in large scale opinion surveys, attitudes towards state funding of the parties has been found to be largely negative, qualitative research - using focus groups in which greater levels of information can be imparted and the issues discussed among participants - suggests popular approval of state funding (Electoral Commission, 2004a: chapter 2).

One study already referred to suggests that such an inverse relationship between political confidence and support for reform does, indeed, exist. Pattie and Johnston's (2001) analysis of attitudes towards the political system highlights that, in comparison with respondents who believe that individual donations to parties should be kept private, those who believe they should be made public showed significantly lower levels of political efficacy, trust and a belief that democracy was working well in Britain. In other words, low confidence in the political system is found to be associated with greater support for the regulation of party funding.

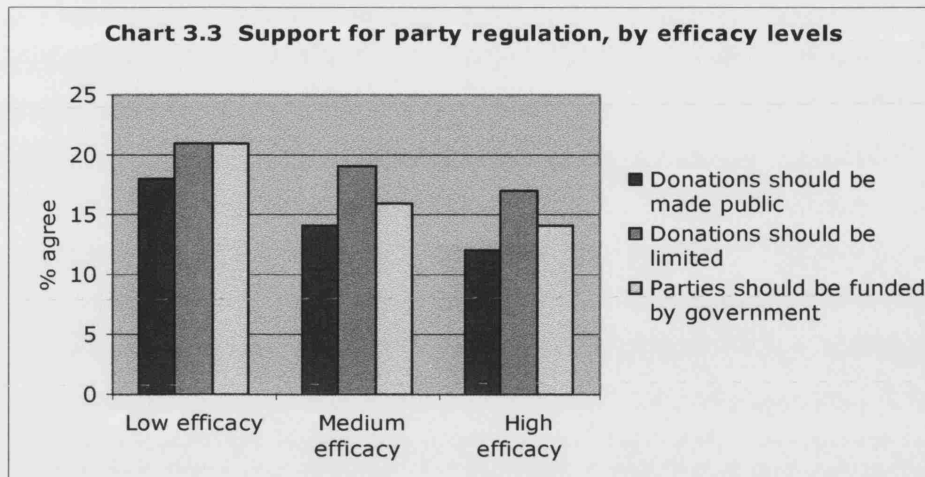
I have extended this analysis by using data provided by the 1996 *British Social Attitudes* survey which, as noted above, tested responses to three potential regulatory reforms: the public disclosure of donations, limits on donations and the state funding of parties.<sup>86</sup> I have examined the distribution of support for each of these regulations according to the respondent's attitudes towards the political system. The attitudinal measures I use are a scale covering political (or 'system') efficacy.<sup>87</sup> Initially at least, we find that support for reform is greater among those with low confidence in the political system than among those with high confidence. As can be seen in Chart 3.3, people whose efficacy is low are more likely to support the three forms of regulation than those whose efficacy is high, although the differences are not that great. But the relationships attenuate once simple control variables are introduced. We know that Britons' attitudes to the political system vary by education levels, with the more educated tending to hold more supportive attitudes than the less educated (Bromley and Curtice, 2002). If we test the relationship between efficacy and support for the three reform options, controlling for education, the subsequent partial correlations weaken still further ('donations made public'=0.12,  $p < .01$ ; 'limits on donations'=0.05, not sig; 'parties funded by government'=0.09,  $p < .05$ ).

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<sup>86</sup> One disadvantage of using data from 1996 is that this year marked the nadir in public confidence in political institutions. Thus, just 22 per cent of people trusted government in 1996, against 29 per cent two years later (Chart 1.4, Chapter One). Thus, while the 1996 survey is used because of the various questions on party funding it carried, there are some pitfalls due to the low levels of trust recorded by the survey.

<sup>87</sup> The efficacy scale consists of four items (listed in Annex One), and has a good internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78. I also tested the relationship between support for party funding and various indicators of political trust, but no significant relationships emerged.





Source: *British Social Attitudes 1996*

What does this analysis suggest about the inter-linkages between perceptions of official misconduct, the reform of party funding and public confidence in the political system? First, it suggests that the problem is rather starker than the solution. Thus, while perceptions of misconduct appear to affect more generalised attitudes to those in office, there is less of a link between the new regulatory regime and levels of political confidence. This is to be expected; problems are always easier to identify than solutions, especially when the solution in question is a hypothetical one (as it was for survey respondents until 2001). The solutions appear to have some relationship with citizens' attitudes to the political process, but those with a negative picture of the process are only marginally more likely to support party reform than those more content with the status quo.

### **The outcome of party regulation**

The domestic evidence presented thus far has been limited to 'inputs' (data collected prior to the reforms), and can inform us only about the *likely* impact of the reforms. Thus, we must bear in mind that, while the results so far provide rather meagre encouragement for reformers, they do not imply a null payoff in practice. A considered judgement on the impact of the reforms must wait a little longer, since the rules have only been in place since early 2001. But in the meantime, what evidence is available that, provisionally at least, might suggest what effect the new regulations have had?

One piece of evidence we have gauges voters' own views on the impact of the Labour government in reducing sleaze. This evidence draws on a question asked

of respondents to the *British Election Panel Study*. This panel ran for the period of the government's first term (1997-2001), so only just covers the introduction of the party regulations. But at least it enables us to see if the new regime had any immediate payoff. The results – maybe unsurprisingly – suggest it didn't, with evaluations of sleaze in 2001 as negative as they were in 1998, shortly after Labour came into office (Table 3.3).<sup>88</sup> Indeed, a recent survey item that focused on the role of the Committee on Standards in Public Life suggests a similarly limited dividend from the party funding reforms. Asked about conduct in public life in the decade since the Committee was established (in 1994), 16 per cent of respondents judged standards to have improved, while 35 per cent judged there to have been no change, and even more – 37 per cent – thought standards had declined.<sup>89</sup>

**Table 3.3: Evaluations of government attempts to reduce 'sleaze', 1997-2001**

"How successful has the Labour government been so far in cracking down on sleaze in politics?"					
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Very	18	5	4	5	6
Fairly	46	40	37	42	41
Not very	20	35	35	33	35
Not at all	6	14	17	14	16
Too early to say/Don't know	10	7	7	7	5
Balance ( 'very'/'fairly' minus 'not very'/'not at all' )	+38	-4	-11	0	-4

Source: *British Election Panel Study*

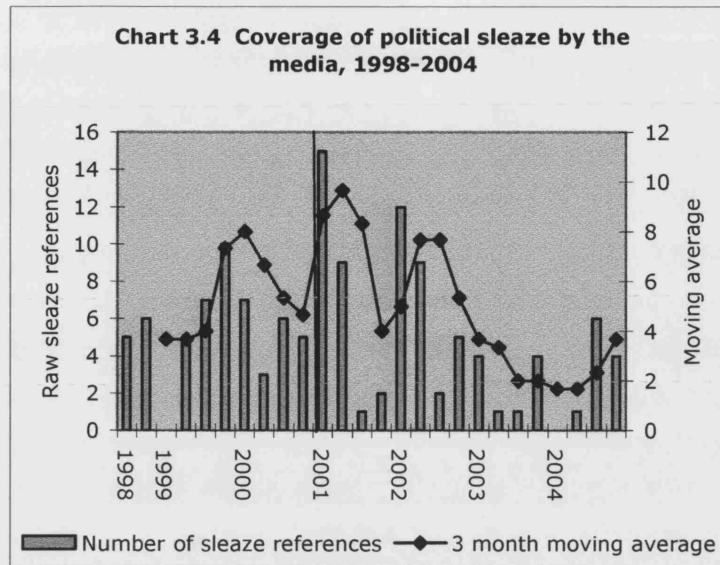
One reason why the new regulations appear to have made little immediate impression might be that voters, quite sensibly, prefer to see any new rules well embedded before judging whether they have been a success or not. Alternatively, if we adopt a more pessimistic view of public knowledge of such issues (recall the low levels of public understanding revealed in the MORI poll on political funding, page 86), it might be argued that public ignorance stands in the way of the new rules having much success. However, institutional reform need not only work directly (with the public responding to the fact of institutional change), but can also operate indirectly. Here, the party regulations might stimulate a virtuous

<sup>88</sup> The fieldwork for *BEPS* was conducted in summer 2001, thus capturing any immediate public response to the new funding rules. I have also disaggregated the figures for the population sample as a whole by education and levels of political interest. If evaluations of the crackdown on sleaze were sensitive to how much a respondent knew about the new party funding regulations, we might expect this to show up in more positive evaluations among the well educated (those with degree level qualifications) and/or those with a high interest in politics. In fact, the figures for both sub-groups show no major variation with those for the whole sample.

<sup>89</sup> Survey conducted by YouGov, and accessed at: <http://www.yougov.com> (fieldwork conducted in November 2004).

circle, by reducing levels of political misconduct, in turn reducing media coverage of such incidents, in turn increasing voters' perception of 'clean' politics and finally yielding increased confidence in the political process. This outcome might be generated without voters having any explicit knowledge of the original reform. The causal chain admittedly hinges on a number of assumptions. And, as noted above, the first link might break down if the effect of tighter regulation - for example, the disclosure requirements - is to increase, rather than decrease, media coverage of alleged misconduct. Irrespective of which hypothesis is the more plausible, it is highly likely that public attitudes are to some extent driven by indirect forms of information - such as media reports - rather than by direct knowledge of the institutional rules themselves. We can get a handle on the state of such indirect drivers of public attitudes by examining whether media reporting has responded to the new party funding regime.

Following previous work by Dunleavy and Weir (1995), I approach this task by monitoring the incidence of the combined words 'sleaze' and 'government' in newspaper reports from 1998 to 2004 (covering the period before and after the introduction of the new regulations at the start of 2001). Chart 3.4 shows the raw number of references per quarter (the methodology is set out in Annex One). The graph shows a fluctuating pattern, with the amount of coverage highly dependent on particular individual cases (for example, the peak in winter-spring 2001 concerned the case of the Hinduja brothers). Thus, the short term effect of the new regulations may have been to increase media awareness, and thus coverage, of potentially incriminating donations. But since then, the trend in media coverage has been downwards, represented by the moving average. It is difficult to tell whether this reflects media weariness with the issue, or growing rectitude among politicians in response to the new regulations. Irrespective, there is some evidence that the issue is less in the public eye than previously.



Source: LexisNexis database

## CONCLUSION

The domestic data reviewed in this chapter showed that public perceptions of official misconduct is negatively associated with confidence in the political system as a whole. To this extent, the 'problem' is real. When it comes to the 'solution' - or at least the solutions either already introduced in Britain or still under discussion - there is scant evidence that the reforms will alleviate discontent among voters. Thus, I showed that support for a raft of party regulations is only marginally associated with expressions of low confidence in the political system.

This raises the question of whether the existing regulations - notably the requirement for the parties to disclose donations and spending - are sufficient to boost public confidence in the way that political agents are funded? Just as there is only a weak association between political efficacy and support for the disclosure of donations (a measure already introduced), so there is a similarly weak association when it comes to the collectivising of party funding through the state (a measure not yet introduced). In addition, as we saw in Table 4.2, there is little evidence that such a step would command widespread support among the British population. For these reasons, we might doubt whether a move from a 'midi' to a 'maxi' model would boost public confidence in the political system. This conclusion is only reinforced by the evidence from overseas, which suggests that, while collectivising party funding may in theory reduce the potential for agency loss, in practice it does not persuade voters that political parties are responsive and responsible institutions.

## **Chapter 4**

### **ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL REFORM**

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This chapter examines what impact reform of the electoral system has had on linkages between citizens and government. For the first time in fifty years, voters in Britain now have the opportunity to use a system of proportional representation (PR) to elect their public representatives, to the new devolved assemblies in Scotland, Wales and London, and to the European Parliament. At the same time, however, the devolved bodies cover just 16 per cent of the British population, and turnout for the last European Parliament election in 2004 was less than four in ten of those eligible to vote. For the bulk of the population, Westminster remains the focal point for legislation, with little sign at present that electoral reform will be extended to this tier. The context for the following analysis is thus one which combines new voting arrangements for sub-national and supra-national elections, with the electoral status quo for Westminster.

I should note at the outset that new electoral systems were not introduced in Britain primarily as a means of galvanising supposedly discontented citizens. Rather, the reforms were designed to provide a more balanced pattern of representation.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, there was a hope - even an expectation - among many policy makers that the introduction of proportional electoral systems would promote more supportive political attitudes and higher rates of participation. Consider the following statements by leading politicians and lobbyists (while the last statement is admittedly a highly cautious one, it is significant given that its source is a self-confessed critic of PR):

"[Single member plurality], and its pernicious consequences, are major causes of public disaffection with the political process".

Charles Kennedy MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, in 'How Shall We Elect Our MPs?', London: Make Votes Count (nd)

"[Electoral] change is essential to help the revival of voting and interest in politics in the UK"

*Mo Mowlam, former Cabinet Minister, Make Votes Count website*

"Only by changing the voting system to more closely reflect the feelings of the nation can we even begin to address [the] growing sense of frustration and rebuild a sense of trust."

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<sup>90</sup> See, for example, the speeches by the respective sponsoring ministers at the second reading debates on the *Scotland Bill* (HC Debs, 12<sup>th</sup> Jan 1998, col 27) and the *European Parliament Elections Bill* (HC Debs, 25<sup>th</sup> Nov 1997, cols 803-17).

*Pam Giddy, former Chair of Charter88, in 'How Shall We Elect Our MPs?', London: Make Votes Count (nd)*

"My guess - and it can only be a guess - is that turnout [at European Parliament elections] will improve under the proposed [regional list] system"

*Jack Straw, former Home Secretary, speaking at the second reading debate on the 'European Parliament Elections Bill', Nov 1997*

It is these claims - that electoral reform will help 'reconnect' citizens and their political agents - that I explore in this chapter.<sup>91</sup> The bulk of the analysis (pages 102-22) analyses what impact different electoral systems have on attitudes and behaviour among citizens in Britain. Before I embark on this task, though, I turn to two others. First, I consider, in theoretical terms, why different forms of electoral system should be thought to have systematic, and distinct, effects on citizens' attitudes and behaviour. In particular, I contrast competing claims made for plurality and proportional electoral rules (pages 93-7). I then explore how far these claims fare when set alongside the evidence arising from comparative and country case studies (pages 97-102). Having considered both theory and overseas evidence, I then turn to examine the effects of electoral reform in Britain.

### **THEORY: WHY SHOULD ELECTORAL RULES HAVE SYSTEMATIC EFFECTS?**

In examining the effects of electoral systems, we should keep closely in mind their purpose and function. In a situation of delegated responsibility, elections are the fundamental means by which citizens (principals) establish control over their elected representatives (agents) (Brennan and Hamlin, 2000). But they do so in very different ways. One important distinction - as noted in Chapter Two - is between electoral rules that serve as instruments of 'accountability', and those that provide for conditions of 'representation'. The basic point is that different electoral rules are designed to perform different functions, for example to provide conditions for either accountable government or representative government. As Katz (1997: 29) observes, "... to specify the function of elections is to define representation".

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<sup>91</sup> The chapter does not seek to provide a general overview of the merits of plurality and proportional electoral systems. Nor does it consider other features of elections that might impact on levels of political support and participation. One such feature would be the frequency with which elections are held. Aside from the devolved bodies, a number of service providers at the local level (for example the boards for New Deal for the Community projects and foundation hospitals) are now directly elected, with the government considering plans to extend the electoral principle to other local bodies such as police authorities (*Financial Times*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2003).

If in general terms, plurality and proportional electoral rules are designed to achieve largely distinct goals, what specific features of each are held, at the theoretical level, to yield systematic consequences for citizens' attitudes and behaviour? In Table 4.1, I summarise the arguments typically made to explain the effect of electoral systems on citizen behaviour and attitudes. The table identifies features that are held to be either conducive or detrimental to political support and participation. The key causal, or independent, variables are the electoral system itself, the party system, government status and local forms of political representation.<sup>92</sup> On some arguments, the electoral system has a direct impact on citizens' attitudes and behaviour; on other accounts, this effect works through another (or intervening) variable such as the party system. Since the electoral system itself is primary, it is listed separately in the first column in Table 4.1, with the other, secondary, variables following in column two. The third column in Table 4.1 ('Application to electoral system') lists the different institutional arrangements that tend to arise under PR and plurality electoral systems. Columns four and five summarise the hypothesised effects of different electoral rules on citizens' political attitudes and behaviour. Column four identifies the positive features associated with PR, column five the negative features.

The first institutional variable in Table 4.1 is the electoral system itself. The most important feature is the allocation rule: the way votes are converted into seats. Lower constituency level thresholds under PR than single member plurality systems means that a party need receive fewer votes to gain a seat. Thus, the efficacy of an individual vote in terms of gaining representation is higher in PR (fewer votes are 'wasted'), which is held to encourage participation and supportive political attitudes. Such attitudes may also be encouraged if citizens perceive that the higher proportionality of PR systems is akin to greater 'fairness', and thus that PR systems are more legitimate (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998). But the allocation rule is not the only important feature of an electoral system; the way a citizen's choices are registered (the ballot structure) is also important. In particular, some systems allow for more than one preference to be expressed between candidates and/or parties, while others (for example, single member plurality) limit this choice to a simple nominal decision.

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<sup>92</sup> Table 4.1 does not list all the variables of different electoral rules that might shape citizen attitudes and behaviour; it is restricted to features of electoral systems that feature particularly prominently in the theoretical literature.

**TABLE 4.1 Explaining the impact of electoral systems on public attitudes and behaviour**

Key variables		Application to electoral system	Conducive to stronger political linkages (PR argument)	Conducive to weaker political linkages (plurality argument)
Primary	Secondary			
Electoral system		Proportionality higher under PR than SMP	Increase in the efficacy of individual votes in gaining representation	
			Increased perceived fairness of seat allocation	
		Opportunity to express more preferences under PR than SMP	Ballot structure increases number of preferences	
	Party system	Greater number of parties under PR than SMP	Low thresholds reduce barriers to formation of new parties	Excessive fragmentation may leave voters with unclear choices
		Greater policy distance between parties under PR than SMP	Greater ideological variation between parties increases voters electoral options	Excessive variation (polarisation) may yield ineffective governments
	Govnt status	Multiparty governments more likely under PR than SMP	Higher proportion of voters represented in government	The gain of 'winning' is lower with coalitions than single party governments
				Elections less decisive if government formation depends on coalition bargaining
	Local representation	Higher district magnitude under PR than SMP	Multi-member constituencies maximise voters' chances of congruent representation	Multi-member constituencies reduce accountability

PR = Proportional representation    SMP = Single member plurality

The link between the electoral system and citizens' attitudes and behaviour is also indirect, mediated by various further institutions that are contingent on the electoral system used. The first contingent feature is the nature of the party system. The key distinction between PR and plurality systems lies in the propensity of the former to produce more parties, and more ideologically distinct parties, than the latter. In particular, lower thresholds erect fewer barriers to the formation of new parties, which may act as 'channels' for political discontent. In contrast to the 'flexibility' of PR systems, plurality systems are more 'rigid', less adaptable to new issue demands, and more likely to induce citizen discontent (Miller and Listhaug, 1990). A system comprising multiple parties is also likely to provide a wider ideological representation for voters, since the logic of political competition with multiple parties is centrifugal, while under two party conditions it is centripetal. Under multiparty conditions, the greater ideological distance between the parties enables more voters to find a 'home', while under two party



conditions, the median voter is privileged at the expense of more ideological voters (Cox, 1997: ch12; Katz, 1997: 150-60; Miller and Listhaug, 1990).<sup>93</sup>

However, the positive benefits of PR systems have been challenged by alternative perspectives that suggest a more negative dividend. In systems characterised by a high number of ideologically distinct parties, governments may be unresponsive to citizens' preferences, due to the trade-offs that may be required during government formation, and voters may be presented with opaque electoral choices since they cannot be sure that a party will be able to carry out its promises in government (Weil, 1989). In other words, multiparty systems may be more flexible, but this time to the detriment of citizen integration into the political system. As Brennan and Hamlin (2000: 207) argue:

"... it is not more choice that is necessarily desirable; it is more effective choice over the relevant thing. In electoral choice, the object of ultimate normative significance is the set of policy decisions the elected government makes. Choice on that matter counts normatively; arrangements that obscure such choice are presumptively undesirable."

The second important institution that is held to shape reactions to different electoral systems is government status. Proportional electoral systems are more likely to yield governments which command majority support among the electorate than plurality arrangements, in which governments often command only plurality support (Powell, 2000: 98-101, 127-32). Thus, coalitions often involve a greater number of electoral 'winners' than single party governments, tending to boost levels of political support (Anderson and Guillory, 1997). In a situation where voters believe their chances of being represented in government are high, the incentives to participate may also rise. However, in opposite vein, multiparty governments may limit the 'win' for supporters of major parties, reducing their incentives to participate and their support for the system.

A third intervening institutional variable is the nature of local representation. Citizen attitudes and behaviour may be affected by the nature of representative linkages at the local level as much as by those at the national one (Esaiasson, 1999). In Britain, the debate over electoral systems frequently focuses on the quality of local representation. The claim by supporters of plurality arrangements based on single member districts is that constituents enjoy a stronger relationship

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<sup>93</sup> A modification of this argument is that, in multiparty conditions, the parties have an incentive to cultivate the allegiance of 'niche' groups, rather than become the 'catch all' entities that the logic of plurality systems demands. This clustering tendency has the effect of strengthening the linkages

with their representative than they would under multi-member arrangements. Candidates in single member districts have an incentive to pursue votes across a wide section of the electorate and, if elected, to retain a 'personal vote', which encourages close attention to the needs of their constituents. Moreover, the simplicity of the arrangement and the advocacy role of the local member help constituents identify their representative, who is thus more accountable for their actions (Crewe, 1985). Advocates of PR based on multi-member districts suggest that this argument is misguided since voters' preferences are primarily ideological or partisan, not territorial. Electoral districts based on multiple members enable a wide range of ideological positions to be represented, ensuring more voters are served by a party with policies similar to their own (Lakeman, 1984; Amy, 1993: 177-80).

In sum, we can identify various arguments concerning the effect that PR and plurality electoral systems are supposed to have on citizen attitudes and behaviour. To my mind, the arguments on both sides are *prima facie* strong ones. At the theoretical level at least, it remains an open question which type of electoral rule will have more beneficial effects on citizen-government linkages. The question can only be resolved empirically. I begin by considering the evidence from international analyses, in the form of cross national and country case studies. This evidence provides a context for the domestic findings reviewed afterwards, a context that is particularly important given the relatively recent introduction of the reforms in Britain. The international context also allows us to marshal a wider body of evidence than possible in the domestic arena. As I explain in the next section (pages 102-3), the survey data available in Britain does not allow us to fully test all the theoretical claims just reviewed. Adding in data from overseas thus boosts our evidence base, allowing more rounded judgements to be made about the effects of different electoral systems.

## **THE INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE**

In the following sections, I examine evidence drawn from various cross-national analyses and a single country case study. Cross-national analyses are more prevalent than country studies, since fundamental changes in electoral rules within countries have, until recently, been extremely rare (Lijphart, 1994a: 52). The capacity of cross-national analysis has also improved recently with the

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between voters and parties (measured, for example, in terms of party preferences and identification), with positive payoffs for attitudes and participation (Anderson, 1998; Karp and Banducci, 2000).

availability of more individual level data (Karp and Banducci, 2000).<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, we should remember that country case studies - in which observations are made before and after a reform is introduced - make it easier to control for a wide range of variables, allowing for a more sensitive assessment of the impact of institutional reform (Banducci et al, 1999). In the following sections, the cross-national evidence is thus complemented with a country case study, that of New Zealand, whose electoral system underwent fundamental reform in the mid-1990s.<sup>95</sup>

### **Support for the political system**

The studies reviewed in this section examine differences in the level of political support across countries - treating each country as a single unit - using variations in either the electoral system or party system as the explanatory variable. Three of these studies (Anderson, 1998; Norris, 1999a; Listhaug *et al*, 2000) attempt to maximise the validity and generalisability of their findings by including a high number of countries in their analysis. Two others (Miller and Listhaug, 1990; Weil, 1989) seek reliability through a smaller number of cases, where more attention can be paid to specific country circumstances. Whether these methodological distinctions explain the varying results we find is difficult to tell. Certainly, the results do not convey a consistent picture about the impact of institutional design on levels of political support.

Two of the studies hypothesise that political support should be higher in systems with multiple parties than in those with two dominant parties. Both Miller and Listhaug - using data from Norway, Sweden and the United States - and Anderson - using data across fourteen European Union countries - confirm their predictions, by finding multiparty systems to be associated with higher political support. On the other hand, Weil (1989) argues that multiparty systems should be associated with lower political support. Using data for six western countries, he, too, confirms his hypothesis, reporting that fractured or polarised party systems are associated with lower levels of political support. It may be, of course,

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<sup>94</sup> The main source of individual level data is the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* (CSES) project. CSES is a collaborative programme of cross-national research encompassing over fifty states. For details, see <http://www.umich.edu/~cses/>.

<sup>95</sup> The New Zealand example is highly relevant for Britain. For a start, it is the only example - with the exception of France in 1986 - of a country moving from a majoritarian electoral system to a proportional one (Banducci and Karp, 1999: 219; Lijphart, 1994a: 52-6). Prior to 1996, New Zealand was an archetype of the 'Westminster' model (Lijphart, 1999), while the reform introduced in that year changed the electoral system from a single member plurality model to a version of the Additional Member system. The new system is similar in many respects to the electoral rules in Scotland and Wales.

that polarised party systems have negative effects on citizens' evaluations of the political system, while moderate multipartism has less malign effects. This is precisely what Norris' (1999a) cross-national study finds. Her evidence is reported as suggesting that two party and moderate multiparty systems maximise the responsiveness and accountability of governments, and are thus more strongly associated with political support than are one party or polarised party systems.

It seems that citizens view their political institutions rather dimly in situations where the party structure comprises either a single dominant party or a large number of parties. Political support is higher when the party structure retains some responsiveness, through two party, or moderate multiparty, arrangements. Yet the latter types cover a wide range of possible party permutations (for example, in the British context the 'dominant two party' system at Westminster elections and the moderate multipartism at the devolved contests). Can we get a more discerning picture by focusing on electoral rules as the dependent variable? *Prima facie*, this seems unlikely, given the close relationship between electoral rules and party systems (Lijphart, 1994a). And, indeed, cross-national studies of electoral systems provide little additional clarity. One study (Anderson, 1998) finds a strong positive relationship between political support and the proportionality of the electoral system. On the other hand, Norris (1999a, 2001) uncovers a negative relationship, with political support higher in majoritarian systems than in proportional ones. In the most recent, and fullest, treatment of the subject, Listhaug and his colleagues (2002) find no clear relationship - either negative or positive - between the proportionality of an electoral system and levels of political support.

Do we gain a clearer picture of the effects of electoral reform by turning from cross-national analyses to a country case study? In New Zealand, support for electoral reform prior to the introduction of the new proportional rules in 1996 gave some reason to anticipate a positive dividend from the change. Thus, support for reform was linked with dissatisfaction with the political system; low levels of political trust and efficacy were associated with support for electoral reform (Banducci and Karp, 1999; see also Karp and Bowler, 2001). But in spite of this, the impact of reform on political attitudes has been mixed. At the aggregate level, the two years following the first PR election saw a decline in levels of satisfaction with democracy (Karp and Bowler, 2001). True, panel data collected both pre and post reform show a rise in political efficacy among voters,

in particular a stronger belief that one's vote 'counts' (Banducci et al, 1999; Banducci and Karp, 1999). But there is limited evidence that electoral reform is working in the way its supporters hypothesise. Thus, contrary to the claim that electoral reform should increase efficacy particularly among electoral 'losers', the New Zealand data shows no real difference in attitudinal patterns among supporters of major and minor parties.

In addition, those who supported electoral change prior to the reforms were found to be less likely to exhibit high trust and efficacy afterwards. Only among the more highly educated was electoral reform associated with higher trust and efficacy. Banducci and Karp (1999: 229) conclude that "... the potential for political reform to instil greater confidence, at least in the short run, is limited to those with higher levels of political awareness". The only group whose attitudes did conform to expectations were those who voted strategically in 1993, by supporting a major party at that contest under plurality rules, but a minor party under the new proportional rules in 1996. Political efficacy among this group was significantly higher following reform (Banducci et al, 1999).

### **Electoral participation**

What makes people participate (or not participate) at elections is the subject of a vast literature. In this section, I consider only the theory and evidence that relates to the role of institutions, in particular the type of electoral system.

Most studies that investigate the role of institutional rules on turnout employ a cross-sectional approach, using as units of comparison either whole countries (see Jackman, 1987; Blais and Carty, 1990; Jackman and Miller, 1995; Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin, 2002; Norris, 2003) or sub-national units (Ladner and Milner, 1999). While there is some disagreement among these studies about the exact magnitude of the effect, there is broad agreement that countries with proportional voting rules enjoy rather higher turnout than those with majoritarian rules (the premium usually being of between three and six percentage points).

But these effects are less noticeable when the unit of analysis changes to variations in turnout over time. In a cross-national study which modelled longitudinal trends in electoral participation, Franklin (2002, 2004) found that changes in electoral system proportionality had no impact on aggregate turnout. These findings are reinforced by the results from the New Zealand case study.

The first election held in New Zealand under PR, in 1996, recorded an increase in turnout over the previous election, although turnout at subsequent elections – in 1999 and 2002 – has fallen. There is little evidence that factors associated with the introduction of PR – such as dissatisfaction with coalition politics – contributed to this decline; indeed, there is some speculation that PR helped avert a larger decline in turnout by aiding small parties such as the Greens who attract substantial support among young voters (Vowles et al: 2002, ch7). Studies have also found that the new voting rules encouraged supporters of minor parties to participate (Karp and Banducci, 1999). In aggregate terms, however, reform of the electoral system in New Zealand does not appear to have contributed greatly to turnout in either direction.

According to Franklin, reforms to the electoral rules are unlikely to yield a turnout dividend since the new rules will only influence the behaviour of a small section of the population, specifically those entering the voting population for the first time, with older voters being more socialised into patterns of participation or non-participation (Franklin, 2004: 115-6). Franklin's argument is that it is the younger age cohorts who are the most susceptible to the kind of 'short term' contextual changes that new electoral rules represent. But we might also anticipate the kind of effect that electoral reform might have in Britain by considering the characteristics of those who do not participate at elections. Reform of the voting rules is unlikely to affect participation among 'apathetic abstainers' (Crewe, 2002: 225). Using data from the *British Election Study*, we can quantify this group as roughly one quarter of those who failed to vote at the 2001 general election (total abstentions being 40 per cent of registered voters).<sup>96</sup> The remaining three quarters of abstainers (ie. 30 per cent of the electorate) are, in Crewe's terms, either 'alienated', 'indifferent' or 'instrumental' abstainers; people who might, in principle, be motivated to vote if the electoral rules made for more voter choice, greater distinction between the parties and a closer contest. So, taking Franklin's estimate of the 'boost' from proportional voting rules - six per cent - we can surmise that the likely impact of introducing a proportional electoral system for Westminster would be only around two percentage points ( $0.06 \times 30 = 1.8$  per cent).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> 'Apathetic' abstention is determined by those who, in response to a question on why they did not vote in 2001, answered "I'm just not interested in politics".

<sup>97</sup> This estimate would be even smaller if I had taken any previous general election, in which levels of abstention were much lower (although this reductive effect might have been countered if the proportion of 'apathetic abstainers' was also lower). Also note that this effect is the 'short term' boost; as Franklin (2004: chap4) points out, an institutional change that endures will yield longer term, or 'cumulative', effects, as successive incoming age cohorts (ie. new voters at 18) respond to the rules and, as they get older, become socialised into these patterns of behaviour. Thus, the long term effect

## Summary of international evidence

What does the international evidence suggest about the likely impact of electoral reform in Britain? The clearest institutional effect arises from cross-national analyses of turnout, where PR electoral systems are consistently associated with higher participation rates. But this finding may be an artefact of the research design, since the impact of electoral rules appears to disappear in studies that model changes in turnout over time. When we turn to public attitudes, we find a mixed picture, with some studies suggesting political support is highest under a majoritarian electoral system, others finding for proportional rules, and yet others suggesting little clear results either way. The international evidence is thus inconclusive as to whether citizen-government linkages are maximised under either plurality or proportional electoral arrangements. At this stage, it remains an open question how a population like Britain's, long used to a plurality electoral system, will react to new proportional arrangements. But in reviewing the domestic picture, the international evidence provides us with one useful pointer, namely that the effect of reforming electoral rules might not be that great. A certain sensitivity will thus be required in reviewing the British data.

## THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL REFORM IN BRITAIN

### Approach, methods and sources

The first part of my analysis of the domestic evidence explores three questions. First, what level of support is there for electoral reform among the British population? Second, is there any link between such demands and levels of confidence in the political system? In particular, are demands for reform concentrated among those with low confidence in the existing rules of the political game? Third, where PR electoral rules have been introduced, what impact have they had on turnout?

These indicators are 'direct' measures of the effect of electoral rules on citizen attitudes and behaviour, since they relate to changes in trust and participation that appear to arise from different institutional arrangements. As such, they are the strongest, or primary, pieces of evidence about the impact of electoral reform

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of switching electoral rules from plurality to proportional arrangements might be greater than the short term effect.

in Britain. However, as I pointed out earlier (see Table 4.1), the effects of electoral systems arise in a number of additional ways, often via their impact on such mediating variables as the nature of the party system, the type of government and the quality of local representation. It may be that citizens react as much to these, secondary, features, as to the introduction of new electoral rules per se.<sup>98</sup> Thus, in order to reach a more considered judgement about the impact of new electoral rules, we must cover both direct, or primary, effects and indirect, or secondary, ones.

Unfortunately, however, we cannot deal with all the secondary effects identified in Table 4.1, since the data available to us in Britain has various limitations. Thus, for example, we have little or no data about how voters responded to the different range of parties offered to them at election time (in terms of their number and ideological distribution). So the data available in Britain does not allow us to examine all the causal arguments outlined in the earlier theoretical section. To try and overcome these shortcomings in the individual level data, I turn to various aggregate level indicators as a (partial) substitute. This data measures voters' behaviour rather than their attitudes, but used judiciously, it can help us in constructing a picture of how British voters have responded to new electoral rules. As for my sources, the aggregate data relates to the results of the first PR elections held in Scotland, Wales, London and for the European Parliament. The individual level data draws on population surveys conducted both across Britain over the last thirty years, as well as surveys conducted around the first devolved elections in Scotland, Wales and London (although no survey was conducted around the European Parliament in 1999).<sup>99</sup>

### **Attitudes to, and participation around, electoral reform**

I begin my analysis by considering the level of support for electoral reform among British voters. The key question is whether we can identify sufficient support to indicate a likely positive payoff from such a measure. I start by examining attitudes to the electoral system at Westminster. But these attitudes relate to a hypothetical scenario, since no firm proposal for a new electoral system for the

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<sup>98</sup> This may be particularly true during the early years on a new institution, such as an electoral system. During this period, voters may respond more to such 'tangible' features of the new system – such as whether it yields a coalition or single party government, or multiple rather than single member districts – than to the mere existence of the new rules.

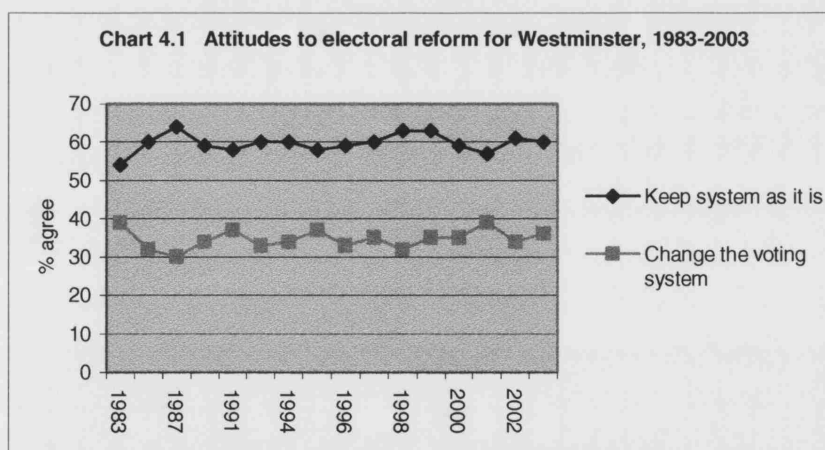
<sup>99</sup> The studies are: the *Scottish Parliament Election Study 1999*, the *Welsh Assembly Election Study 1999* and, in London, the *London Mayoral Election Study 2000* and *London Election Study 2000*. Note that the two London surveys contained fewer assessments of voters' reactions to the electoral system than the Scottish and Welsh surveys, and are thus of only limited use for the purposes of this chapter.



House of Commons is currently on the table. So I supplement the analysis of attitudes among British voters as a whole with those among an electorate - Scotland - with real experience of PR.

When it comes to Westminster, we have good continuous data on attitudes to electoral reform going back to 1983. The survey question I use avoids undue framing effects by presenting both sides of the issue.<sup>100</sup> As we can see from Chart 4.1, there is no clear support for electoral reform for Westminster. Instead, around two thirds indicate a preference for the status quo, against one third for reform, a balance that has remained fairly constant over the last twenty years.

But what of citizens that have real experience of different electoral rules? Does experience tend to make people more positive towards proportional electoral rules? If so, we might speculate about a similar outcome should Westminster switch from plurality to proportional arrangements. After all, a recent study of British voters found that support for single member plurality was highly contingent on a limited knowledge base. Armed with a better understanding of alternative electoral arrangements, people were found to be more receptive to electoral reform (Farrell and Gallagher, 1999).



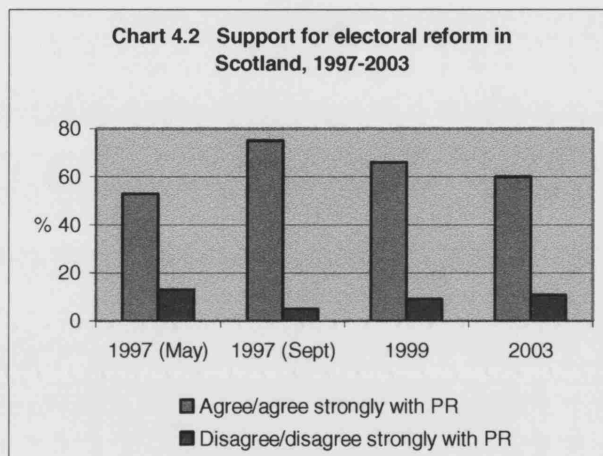
"Some people say we should change the voting system to allow smaller parties to get a fairer share of MPs. Other say we should keep the voting system as it is, to produce more effective government. Which view comes closest to your own, that we should change the voting system or keep it as it is?"

Sources: *British Election Study* (1983, 1992), *British Social Attitudes* (all others).

We can test for such an effect in Scotland, by examining whether support for the proportional system used in devolved elections increased once voters experienced

<sup>100</sup> This is important, since people's attitudes to electoral systems have been found to be highly responsive to the way survey questions are worded (Curtice and Jowell, 1998; Dunleavy and Margetts, 1999).

it for themselves. In Chart 4.2, I record attitudes taken before and after the introduction of new voting rules: in 1997 - immediately after the general election in May, and after the devolution referendum in September - and again in 1999 and 2003. In comparison with summer 1997, Scottish voters were more supportive of PR after the devolved elections in 1999 and 2003. But they were rather less supportive than they had been at the time of the Scottish referendum in September 1997. So while the experience of electoral reform seems to have convinced many voters of the merits of a proportional electoral system, the effect is not sufficiently strong for us to extrapolate a likely positive impact should electoral reform extend to Westminster.



"How much do you agree or disagree that the Scottish Parliament should be elected using proportional representation?"

Sources: May 1997: *Scottish Election Study*; Sept 1997: *Scottish Referendum Study*; 1999: *Scottish Parliament Election Study*; 2003: *Scottish Social Attitudes*

So the level of public support for proportional electoral systems gives little indication that institutional reform will induce more positive political attitudes. We can test this relationship more directly by examining the link between support for electoral reform and attitudes to government. The hypothesis is that support for changing the rules of the game will be highest among those least supportive of the existing political system. If correct, the effect of changing the rules may be to increase system support among these people (although, of course, it may also lower it among those more satisfied with the status quo). Previous research has shown that support for electoral reform is negatively correlated with political trust and efficacy (Curtice and Jowell, 1997: 163-4; see also Wenzel *et al*, 2000). This suggests that electoral reform does, indeed, contain the potential for boosting system support among the current discontents. But more recent data indicates that the relationship between support for reform and trust in the political system has weakened. Using data from the *British Social Attitudes 2000*

survey, I found that, among those with high political trust, around one quarter supported reform of the electoral system for the House of Commons, while among those with low trust, the equivalent figure was not much higher, at around 40 per cent. The correlations between measures of trust and support for electoral reform are weak.<sup>101</sup> It may be that the effect of the constitutional reforms already introduced has been to weaken demand among the 'democratic discontents' for additional reform. Certainly, the more recent data gives little succour to the hypothesis that electoral reform will 're-engage' those with low regard for the political system.

What about the impact of the new voting rules on electoral turnout? Turnout rates for the devolved and European contests held under PR are set out in Table 4.2. For the devolved contests, I show as points of comparison the turnout rates for Westminster and local elections. For the European contests in 1999 and 2004 (England only), the comparison is with the previous contest - under plurality rules - in 1994 and with the preceding local elections. We can see that turnout at the first devolved elections in Scotland and Wales fell well below that at the previous general election, as well as marginally below turnout at the 1997 referendums, which was 60 per cent in Scotland and 50 per cent in Wales (Taylor et al, 1999: xxviii). In Scotland, however, turnout for the first Scottish Parliament election in 1999 comfortably exceeded that for the preceding council elections in 1995, although this was not the case in Wales. In London, too, turnout for the first devolution election was below that at the 1998 local council elections.<sup>102</sup> Finally, turnout for the European Parliament election in 1999 fell sharply from its 1994 level (as well as being significantly below the figure for the previous month's local council elections<sup>103</sup>), but then rebounded even more sharply in 2004.

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<sup>101</sup> I draw on two measures of political trust from the *British Social Attitudes* survey: "How much do you trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party?" and "How much do you trust British politicians of any party to tell the truth when they are in a tight corner?". The correlation between support for electoral reform and 'trust in government' was 0.08, while that for 'trust in politicians' was 0.05 (both significant at the 5 per cent level). I also tested the relationship between support for electoral reform and system efficacy, using a four item scale ( $\alpha=0.76$ ). The coefficient was again weak and, in this case, also failed to achieve statistical significance.

<sup>102</sup> Moreover, the turnout at the 1998 local elections was almost certainly depressed by the fact that a general election had been held a year previously. When local elections in London have not been held shortly after a general election, turnout has been higher (eg. 46 per cent in 1994).

<sup>103</sup> Although the fact that the European poll followed so soon after local elections partly explains the low turnout.

**TABLE 4.2 Turnout at PR and plurality elections**

%	Westminster		Devolved		European			Local
	1997	2001	1999 2000	2003 2004	1994	1999	2004	(various)
Scotland (Scottish Parliament)	71	58	58	49	-	-	-	45 (1995)
Wales (Welsh Assembly)	74	62	46	38	-	-	-	49 (1995)
London (Gt London Assembly)	67	55	33	36	-	-	-	35 (1998)
England (European Parliament)	-	-	-	-	36	24	38	31* (1999)

\* Average across metropolitan, unitary and shire boroughs

Sources: Various. Local results: LGC Elections Centre, University of Plymouth

On the face of it, then, the new proportional rules have done little to enhance turnout. But nor is it clear that they have systematically depressed participation. Recent analysis of turnout across elections in Britain shows that the decline in turnout over the last ten or so years is common to all elections, not just those held under proportional voting rules. In other words, fluctuations in turnout over time tend not to relate to factors specific to one election or another – for example, the particular electoral system used – but to elections across the board (Electoral Commission, 2003a: 25-6).<sup>104</sup> However, aggregate data is a rather blunt tool with which to explore the impact of electoral institutions on turnout. For a more detailed assessment of the voting system, we must turn to individual level data.

There are two research strategies we can use to examine the impact of electoral reform on turnout. First, we can explore if there is any relationship between attitudes to the new electoral system and the propensity to participate. Second, and more specifically, we can explore whether, among people who generally do not vote, participation at elections under new electoral rules is linked to positive evaluations of these rules. We can also reverse the effect: did the new electoral system dissuade people who usually vote from participating? I explore these

<sup>104</sup> However, some specific features of the electoral rules might contribute to differentials in the turnout rate. Thus, following the low turnout at the 1999 European Parliament election, some pinned the blame on the new electoral system used, in particular on the 'closed' nature of the party lists (see House of Commons debate for 14<sup>th</sup> June 1999, cols 9-12). Cross-national analysis suggests that variations in turnout between countries at European Parliament elections are not sensitive to the type of list used; turnout is no lower among countries that use 'closed' lists than among those that use 'open' lists, all other things being equal (Mattila, 2003). But in Britain, not only are closed lists unpopular with British voters, there is also some evidence to suggest their use might have depressed turnout in 1999 and 2004 (Curtice et al, 1999; Curtice et al, 2004). However, the effects of using a closed list system on turnout appears – judging by the size of the coefficients in the regression models used – to be relatively small.

questions using the first election to the Scottish Parliament in 1999 as my case study. For both strategies, the independent variables I use are features of the electoral system in Scotland that theoretical arguments suggest may persuade, or dissuade, voters from participating. The survey indicators I draw on thus record responses to the propositions that: the Scottish Parliament should be elected by PR, the new electoral system is fairer and that there is more point voting than under the system usually used (pro-PR arguments), and that: the new system would produce unstable governments and would give small parties too much power (anti-PR arguments).

The first part of the analysis examines whether these features of the electoral system are associated with voting or non-voting in the 1999 Scottish election. As we see in Table 4.3, there is some variation in the attitudes of voters and non-voters: statements that emphasise the positive features of PR tend to find more ready accord among those that voted than among those who abstained. Likewise, statements based on more negative features of the new system find more ready agreement among non-voters than among voters. However, the associations are not that substantive, highlighted by the weak coefficients. The conclusion is that although the new electoral system may have played a role in shaping people's tendency to participate, this role was a limited one.

**TABLE 4.3 Voting and non-voting by attitudes to the electoral system, Scotland 1999**

	Voters (% agree)	Non-voters (% agree)	Coef	N
<i>Pro PR arguments</i>				
There is more point voting under the new System because every vote counts	74	60	0.15**	1024
The new system is fairer than the system Usually used	65	51	0.16**	1014
The Scottish Parliament should be elected Using PR	71	55	0.18**	1147
<i>Anti PR arguments</i>				
The new voting system will lead to unstable Governments	16	20	0.15**	1000
The new voting system gives too much power To smaller parties	18	21	0.12*	1035

Coefficients are Cramer's V. \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$   
Source: *Scottish Parliament Election Survey, 1999*

The second part of the analysis examines whether the new electoral system played any role in encouraging previous non-voters to participate in the Scottish election or, vice versa, whether it alienated those who normally vote. The measure I use of a respondent's previous participation is whether they reported having voted at the 1997 general election. Among those who reported having

voted at the earlier contest, 79 per cent also voted at the 1999 Scottish Parliament election, while 21 per cent did not vote. Among those who did not vote in 1997, 60 per cent also did not vote in 1999, while 40 per cent did participate.

Before examining the results, a note of caution must be made about what effects we should expect to see. It would be overstating the case to suggest that large numbers of people who did not vote at the 1997 general election would do so at the Scottish election two years on because of the different electoral arrangements in place.<sup>105</sup> So we should not expect to find a strong relationship between participation in the Scottish elections and attitudes to the electoral system. The question is whether we can identify at least a moderate relationship (in which case the hypothesis of institutional effect cannot be dismissed) or no relationship (in which case the hypothesis would be open to some doubt).

In fact, Table 4.4 shows that attitudes towards the electoral system are only weakly related to participation in 1999 among people who did not vote in 1997, and that the relationships are not statistically significant (the same is true if we reverse the causal flow, using habitual voters who abstained in 1999; these figures are not shown here). In other words, it is difficult to argue that the electoral system had any significant impact – either positive or negative – on people's propensity to vote in the Scottish elections when account is taken of their propensity to participate more generally.

**TABLE 4.4 Attitudes to the electoral system in Scotland and voting in 1999, among 1997 non-voters**

	Coef	Sig	N
There is more point voting under the new system because every vote counts	0.18	.33	142
The new system is fairer than the system usually used	0.17	.43	137
The Scottish Parliament should be elected using PR	0.17	.29	170

Coefficients are Cramers' V

Source: *Scottish Parliament Election Survey, 1999*

To summarise the results thus far on attitudes towards different electoral systems and the impact of new electoral rules on participation:

1. There is no clear support among the British population for reform of the electoral system.
2. There is only a weak relationship between discontent with the existing political rules and demand for reform of the electoral system.
3. Among a population that has real experience of PR, there is some evidence that use of the new arrangements is associated with increased support for PR, but the link does not appear to be strong.
4. The use of proportional electoral rules has had only a weak impact on people's propensity to participate at elections.

### **The features and outcomes of electoral systems**

When it comes to the introduction of new electoral rules in Britain, then, the direct effect on citizens appears to have been limited. But as I suggested earlier, citizens may be responsive to various secondary features or outcomes of new electoral systems. Attitudinal and behavioural changes related to these features and outcomes may offer us supplementary evidence about how British voters have responded to the new electoral rules introduced since 1999.

The attitudes and outcomes I consider are set out in Table 4.5 (which builds on Table 4.1). I begin by examining attitudes towards the fairness of the new electoral systems and the value of participating. In turn, these variables affect the incentives for voters to express their true preferences ('sincere' voting) or to compromise these with the aim of maximising the utility of their vote ('tactical' voting) under different electoral rules. I therefore consider the incidence of sincere and tactical voting. The new electoral rules in Scotland, Wales and London - although not those for the European Parliament - also offered voters the chance to express additional preferences, via the two vote Additional Member System ballot. I examine how far voters made use of these opportunities by 'splitting' their ballot between different parties. While preferential voting is usually considered beneficial for voters, the particular arrangements used for the PR elections in Britain carried potentially negative consequences. These elections employed 'closed' party lists, which prevented intra-party preferences from being registered. I therefore consider how voters responded to this limitation on their preferences.

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<sup>105</sup> As I noted earlier, the estimates from cross-national studies of the increase in turnout deriving from the use of PR electoral systems over plurality systems are modest. The impact of electoral system change within a single country is even more limited.

The government outcomes of elections held under different rules vary, with coalitions more likely under proportional rules and single party executives more likely under plurality rules. One implication of coalition governments is that more people are likely to gain representation in the outcome; more people are likely to 'win' at an election. I therefore examine the proportion of winners under different electoral rules. But coalitions may only arise through post-election horse trading between the parties, potentially weakening the link between the expression of preferences by voters and the outcome of an election. How do voters privilege the role of elections in providing for conditions of either accountability or representation (the 'goals' of elections, highlighted at the outset of this chapter)? I therefore explore public responses to the role of elections.

Finally, I examine the way voters have reacted to the new forms of local representation introduced under the new electoral rules, namely the creation of multi-member districts alongside the more traditional single-member arrangements.

**TABLE 4.5 Exploring the impact of electoral systems in Britain: The evidence base**

Key variable	Application to electoral system	Feature of electoral system	Indicator
Electoral system (a) Allocation rule	Proportionality higher under PR than SMP	Increase in the fairness of seat allocation	Attitudes to the fairness of PR systems
		Increase in the efficacy of individual votes	Attitudes to the efficacy of voting under PR systems Levels of 'sincere' voting
(b) Ballot structure	Opportunity to express more preferences under PR than SMP	Increase in the choice available to voters	Levels of split ticket voting Attitudes to closed lists
Government status	Coalitions more likely under PR than SMP	Higher proportion of voters represented in government	Proportion of 'winners' Attitudes to the role of elections
Local representation	Higher district magnitude under PR than SMP	Multi-member constituencies strengthen local linkages	Attitudes to multi-member constituencies. Levels of citizen contact with different types of elected representative.

PR = Proportional representation    SMP = Single member plurality



### ***Fairness, voting utility and voting incentives***

There is some evidence that voters responded favourably to the outcomes of the new proportional rules, in particular to their fairness. In 1999, voters in Scotland and Wales were asked for their responses to the statement that "The new voting system is much fairer than the one usually used at elections". In Scotland, 54 per cent of respondents agreed with this statement, with just 9 per cent disagreeing; the corresponding figures in Wales were 39 per cent and 12 per cent (for similar evidence from qualitative research, see Farrell and Gallagher, 1999).<sup>106</sup> Four years later, at the 2003 elections, no higher a proportion of people in either Scotland or Wales thought the voting system to be unfair, although fewer people in both areas agreed that it was fairer (the shift being in favour of those who inclined to neither view). We get a fairly similar picture in response to the statement "There is more point voting under the new system because every vote counts". In 1999, five times as many people in Scotland and Wales agreed than disagreed with this statement, although experience appears to have lessened voters' enthusiasm somewhat; by 2003, only four times as many people agreed than disagreed.

Among the claims made by supporters of proportional electoral rules is that, unlike plurality contests, the voter is under little or no constraint when it comes to maximising the worth of their vote. By virtue of the multiple seats on offer, and the allocation formula, proportional rules give each party a reasonable chance of gaining representation. By contrast, single member districts and the plurality allocation rule impose high effective thresholds and thus restrict parties' chances of success. In short, a utility maximising individual has a high incentive to support their preferred party under proportional rules ('sincere' voting), but a high incentive to support a different party if this is more likely to win under plurality arrangements ('tactical' voting) (Cox, 1997).<sup>107</sup>

We can test whether proportional rules did, indeed, allow for more sincere voting by examining voters' own rationales for their electoral behaviour. In particular, I examine how far people reported voting for the candidate or party they preferred (a sincere vote), or whether they supported someone other than their preferred candidate or party on the basis that this alternative was more likely to win (a

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<sup>106</sup> Given the propensity of respondents to agree with survey statements, we might suspect that some answers were 'led' by the question. A better gauge of opinion might be to examine those who 'strongly' agreed with the statement. These proportions are rather low, however: just 11 per cent in Scotland and 6 per cent in Wales.

tactical vote). There is some evidence that sincere voting is more prevalent under proportional electoral rules than plurality ones. Take the 1999 election to the Scottish Parliament. Here we find higher levels of tactical voting on the constituency part of the ballot than on the list section. Survey data shows that 51 per cent of people voted sincerely on the constituency section (ie. their choice was for the "best party"), lower than the 57 per cent of sincere voters on the list section. When it comes to tactical voting, 6 per cent of voters in 1999 cast their constituency ballot for a candidate who was not their first choice, against 4 per cent on the list vote (Paterson et al, 2001: 78-80). The picture is the broadly similar in the second Scottish election in 2003, for the London election in 2000, and for the Welsh election in 2003 (see Table 4.6).<sup>108</sup> The differences are, in no cases, great, but they are consistent, which itself suggests an 'institutional effect'. Note also that levels of tactical voting ("Preferred another party but it had no chance of winning") are much higher in Westminster elections than at PR contests.

**TABLE 4.6 Sincere and tactical voting**

	Commons		Scotland		Scotland		London		Wales	
	97	01	1999		2003		2000		2003	
			C*	L*	C	L	C	L	C	L
Rationale for vote choice:										
Preferred another party but it had no chance of winning	10	13	6	4	4	4	7	7	5	3
Thought it was the best party	56	‡	50	57	50	55	57	62	46	49

*Notes:*

\* C=Constituency section of the ballot, L=List section

‡ No measure on the *British Election Study 2001* directly comparable to the *British Election Study 1997*

The figures for House of Commons elections are for Britain as a whole.

Sources: House of Commons: *British Election Study*, 1997 and 2001; Scotland: Paterson et al, 2001: 78-80 and *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2003*; London: *London Mayoral Election Study*, 2000; Wales: *Welsh Life and Times Survey 2003*.

### **Preferential voting**

One claim made by proponents of proportional electoral systems is that they increase voters' ability to express multiple preferences and thus convey a more sophisticated set of demands to policy makers (Mueller, 1996: ch8). In turn, this is held to increase their support for the political system (Farrell and McAllister, 2003). While we lack the data in Britain to evaluate how far preferential voting

<sup>107</sup> Although the incentive for strategic voting may remain under proportional rules (Cox: 1997: ch5).

<sup>108</sup> No comparable data is available for Wales in 1999 since no questions on sincere and tactical voting were contained in the post-election survey.

increased voter satisfaction, we can at least examine how far voters made use of the preferential opportunities offered by the new electoral rules.

One way of assessing the use voters make of the increased number of preferences available to them is to examine patterns of 'split-ticket' voting (whereby an elector distributes their preferences to more than one party on different parts of the ballot). At the devolved elections in Scotland, Wales and London, many voters exercised the option to split their ticket, although estimates of the actual rate vary. In Scotland in 1999, around one in five voters voted differently on the two parts of the ballot (Curtice and Steed, 2000); in 2003, over one in four (26 per cent) did so.<sup>109</sup> In Wales in 1999, the split ticket rate is estimated at between one in four and one in five (Curtice and Steed, 2000; Johnston and Pattie, 2002); at the second devolution election it was one in five (19 per cent).<sup>110</sup> In London in 2000, estimates of split-ticket voting range from one in five (Curtice et al, 2001) to one in three (Dunleavy et al, 2001); at the second election in 2004, the rate was as high as two in five (Dunleavy et al, 2004).

But we need to explore why voters opt to split their ticket, in particular how far such behaviour appears motivated by rational considerations or merely whimsical ones. One way we can explore this question is by examining who are the split ticket voters. Is such behaviour concentrated among those with no strong ties to any of the political parties? If so, we might suspect such behaviour of merely manifesting a certain 'skitterish' tendency among voters. Alternatively, however, preferential strategies might also have been employed by people with strong personal attachments to a party, in which case there would be better grounds for seeing split-ticket behaviour as an instrumental strategy (and thus as more likely to contribute to feelings of satisfaction). I address this issue by examining patterns of split ticket voting among those with strong party attachments (strong partisans) and among those with weaker party attachments (weak partisans). If the expression of multiple preferences was driven by weak orientations to the parties, we should find higher levels of split ticket voting among weak partisans than among strong partisans.

Using data collected immediately after the first devolution election in Scotland, in 1999, the picture suggests preferential strategies were not limited to those with

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<sup>109</sup> Data calculated from *Scottish Social Attitudes 2003* survey.

<sup>110</sup> Data calculated from the *Welsh Life and Times 2003* survey.

weak party ties. When it comes to voters who identify with either Labour or the SNP, weak partisans were only marginally more likely to split their ticket than were strong partisans.<sup>111</sup> For the other main parties, weak partisans were more likely to split their vote than strong partisans. Thus, 24 per cent of weak Liberal Democrat partisans split their ticket, against just 11 per cent of strong partisans. The figures for Conservative identifiers were 17 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. There is some evidence, then, of ticket-splitting being concentrated among those with weak party affiliations. But across the parties, such behaviour cannot be said to be the preserve of weak partisans, but extends to those with strong loyalties, too.

Another way of gauging how far ticket splitting was a deliberate, or instrumental, strategy on the part of voters is to look at the reasons such voters gave for their behaviour. The evidence from the first devolved elections in 1999 indicates that split ticket voting was largely driven by rational concerns. In Scotland, for example, split-ticket voters were more likely than non split-ticket voters to cast their constituency ballot either to support a particular candidate, or for tactical reasons (as opposed to registering support for a favoured party). When it came to the list vote, split-ticket voters were more likely to express a sincere preference (ie. voting for their preferred party) than non split-ticket voters. Conversely, split-ticket voters were less likely to cast their ballot on the basis of previous voting patterns; among those who did not split their ballot, vote choice was more likely to be explained with the rationale "I always vote that way" (Paterson et al, 2001: 78-81). If Scottish voters are typical, then, it appears as though ticket splitting reflects a set of instrumental rationales - to maximise the worth of each vote - rather than reflecting confusion about the purpose of the double ballot.

On the other hand, voters were clearly unimpressed by restrictions on their preferences when it came to the list part of the ballot. Here, electors were allowed to express a preference only between the parties (inter-party preference voting), not between candidates within each party (intra-party preference voting). The post-election surveys in Scotland and Wales in 1999 carried two questions to test voters' reactions to the 'closed' nature of the lists:

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<sup>111</sup> The source is the *Scottish Parliament Election Study 1999*. I measured the degree of partisanship by a question that asked respondents how strongly they identified with a particular party. Those answering that their identification was 'very' or 'fairly' strong I have treated as strong partisans, those answering 'not very strong' as weak partisans.

"I would have preferred to have been able to vote for individual candidates on the regional vote rather than for a party list."

"Parties, not voters, should decide which of the candidates on their regional list gets the seats their party has won."

The questions were deliberately worded in opposite directions to avoid framing effects. Even so, the response of voters is clear. On both questions, between four and five respondents in ten selected the intra-party preference option, with only one quarter or less supporting the restriction on intra-party voting.

### ***Government status***

One way of thinking through how electoral outcomes might shape citizens' attitudes towards the political system is to compare how well voters fare under different electoral arrangements. The underlying argument is that people are more likely to support the political system if they feel it is responsive to their wishes. One useful way of conceptualising this draws on game theory, and asks whether an individual 'wins' or 'loses' from an outcome. As Dunleavy and Margetts (1994: 177) put it: "Influencing government in any of the ways listed above [ie. winning] would be enough to sustain an individual voter's subscription to the democratic creed of individual influence".

An electoral winner is usually considered to be a voter whose preferred party is included in government after an election; a loser is someone whose party is not included in government (Anderson and Guillory, 1997). However, a voter may also be said to 'win' if their preferred candidate or party gains representation at district level. Under proportional arrangements, the relevant district will be the region (for systems based on party lists, such as European Parliament contests) and/or the constituency (for Additional Member system contests for the devolved legislatures). When it comes to single member plurality elections, such as Westminster or the European Parliament contests prior to 1999, the relevant district will be the constituency. As an additional tier of representation for single member plurality elections, Dunleavy and Margetts (1994) suggest the regional level, should the voter's preferred party gain 70 per cent or more of the seats on offer within the region and thus be a 'dominant' party at this tier. Thus, a voter may be considered a winner if they gain representation at one or more of three levels: national government, local constituency or region.

We know from previous research that winners exhibit higher political support than losers.<sup>112</sup> But does the number of winners and losers vary much depending on the electoral system in use? Intuitively, we should find more winners under proportional electoral rules than under plurality ones. After all, the logic of the former is to extend representation to "as many people as possible", while the latter concentrates electoral gains on the majority (Lijphart, 1999: 2).

The proportion of voters classified as 'winners' for various proportional and plurality elections in Britain is given in Table 4.7 (with the methodology set out in Annex Two). The table shows two sets of winners: those gaining representation in government only, and those gaining additional representation at the local and regional levels. When it comes to representation in government only, the proportion of winners under PR rules may be little higher than under plurality rules. Indeed, it is only likely to be higher at all if two or more parties come together to form a coalition government. This occurred in Scotland in 1999, where five in ten voters gained representation, compared to four in ten voters under the 1997 Westminster contest (although even in Scotland, the proportion of winners dropped below the 50 per cent level after the second devolution election in 2003). If parties do not come together in government under PR rules, it may be that the proportion of winners will be even lower than under plurality rules. In Wales in 1999 and 2003, less than four in ten voters gained representation in government. However, notice that once Labour in Wales decided to bring the Liberal Democrats into a coalition government in 2000, the proportion of winners rose to five in ten voters. If, on the other hand, we extend the definition of winning to include regional and local representation, the PR rules in Britain perform far better than the plurality one. In fact, just 4 per cent of voters in Scotland in 1999 and 2003 were 'losers', in having no representation at either the constituency, regional or national levels. Compare this with the pool of losers under plurality arrangements: almost 40 per cent of voters after the Westminster election in 1997 and almost 50 per cent of voters after the European Parliament election in 1994.

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<sup>112</sup> The distribution of political support at various times in Britain tends to show more positive attitudes among those whose preferred party holds office, and less positive attitudes among those whose preferred party is outside government (Curtice and Jowell, 1997: 148-9). For cross-national empirical

**TABLE 4.7 Winning and losing under different electoral rules**

	Winners	
	Govnt only (%)	Govnt/ regional/ local (%)
House of Commons, 1997	43	61
Scottish Parliament, 1999	50	96
Scottish Parliament, 2003	45	96
Welsh Assembly, 1999	37	93
(Welsh Assembly, 2000)	(50)	(97)
Welsh Assembly, 2003	38	88
Greater London Assembly, 2000	-	96
Greater London Assembly, 2004	-	77
European Parliament, 1994	-	52
European Parliament, 1999	-	86
European Parliament, 2004	-	83

*Notes:* Winners expressed as proportion of total number of voters.

See Annex Two for assumptions and methodology.

*Sources:* House of Commons data is from Dunleavy and Margetts, 1997: Table 5.

Other data from House of Commons Research Papers and London Elects.

One refinement to measuring the raw distribution of winners and losers would be to gauge the intensity of the win or loss. Might it be, for example, that while proportional electoral rules – unsurprisingly – produce a greater number of winners, the power-sharing nature of the political outcome means the win is less valuable, in turn inducing a lower level of satisfaction among the winners? We can test this possibility by reference to two sets of party supporters in Scotland and Wales. After the first devolved elections in 1999, Labour shared power in Scotland with the Liberal Democrats, while in Wales, initially at least, Labour governed alone as a minority administration. Did Labour supporters in Wales, who enjoyed an unconditional 'win', demonstrate a greater sense of winning than their counterparts in Scotland, for whom the spoils of the 'win' had to be divided with their coalition partners? The only survey question which comes close to measuring a respondent's satisfaction with the electoral outcomes in 1999 was one which asked about levels of trust in the devolved parliament.<sup>113</sup> In fact, levels of trust were higher among both Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters in Scotland than among their brethren in Wales. Clearly, for Labour supporters at least, the 'amount of the win' mattered less for political attitudes than did general

evidence of the positive payoff of winning, see Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Anderson and Tverdova, 2001; Norris, 1999a.

<sup>113</sup> The exact wording on the *Scottish Parliament Election Study* and *Welsh Assembly Election Study* was: "How much would you trust a (Scottish Parliament/Welsh National Assembly) to work in (Scotland/Wales) best interests?"

views on the merits of devolution (on which Scottish voters were more positive than Welsh ones in 1999<sup>114</sup>).

Alongside the performance of electoral systems in producing winners, we must also consider the extent to which they allow voters to control which party (or parties) forms a government. There is something of a trade-off here, since proportional electoral rules are designed to maximise the number of voters who gain representation, while plurality systems attempt to maximise the level of control voters wield over governments (Powell, 2000). In evaluating how voters in Britain reacted to the new electoral rules, we therefore need to consider their response to these competing goals. Fortunately, the surveys conducted around the devolved elections in Scotland and Wales in 1999 and 2003 explicitly tested such views. The results are shown in Tables 4.8a and 4.8b, which explore the role of different electoral systems in providing conditions of representation, on the one hand, and accountability (either via a mandate [Table 4.8a] or via sanctions [Table 4.8b]) on the other.

Solid proportions of voters in Wales and, to a lesser extent, in Scotland favour single party governments on the grounds that they provide the conditions for mandates to be conferred, and sanctions imposed, on governments. True, the Scottish sample prefers representative criteria over accountability (prospective and retrospective) criteria, while the Welsh sample privileges representative criteria over retrospective accountability. But many voters believe elections should provide the means by which governments can be selected and held to account. It is not sufficient simply to focus on the representative outcome of elections; while many voters believe the new proportional systems to be fairer than majoritarian rules, many also remain attached to elections as vehicles for accountability.

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<sup>114</sup> The *SPES* and *WAES* show that 10 per cent of Scots believed Scotland should be governed without its own parliament, while in Wales, almost double that figure (18 per cent) believed Wales should not have its own parliament. In fact, even if we control for attitudes to devolution, there is only a slightly



**TABLE 4.8 Views on the role of elections among Scottish and Welsh voters**

	Scotland		Wales	
	1999	2003	1999	2003
<i>(A)</i>				
It is more important that elections should produce a clear winner so that it is voters who decide who forms the government	41%	40%	51%	49%
It is more important that elections should produce a fair result, even if this means it is not clear who should form the government	43%	41%	36%	35%
Balance in favour of mandate	-2	-1	+15	+14
<i>(B)</i>				
It is better to have just one party in government so that it is very clear who should be blamed if things go wrong	33%	31%	41%	37%
It is better to have two or more parties in government so that more people's views are represented	55%	54%	47%	48%
Balance in favour of sanctions	-22	-23	-6	-11

Sources: *Scottish Parliament Election Survey 1999, Scottish Social Attitudes 2003; Welsh Assembly Election Survey 1999, Welsh Life and Times Survey 2003*

### **Local representation**

I outlined above (pages 96-7) the principal claims about the effects of plurality and proportional electoral systems on local representation. Summarising, the claim that single member districts increase conditions of accountability can be counterpoised against the claim that multi-member districts increase the representation of a range of viewpoints. Voters in Britain now enjoy a variety of forms of local representation, with the single member districts used for Westminster elections supplemented by multi-member lists for the Scottish, Welsh, London and European elections.

Not surprisingly given its electoral history, there has long been a presumption in Britain in favour of single member constituencies. There is considerable evidence that this presumption is shared by the public; surveys have consistently found a strong attachment to single member constituencies even among voters who simultaneously express support for the principle of proportional representation (Crewe, 1985; Young, 1985: 12; Smith, 1991: 435; Dunleavy *et al*, 1997: 30). Qualitative research reinforces this finding, although it also suggests this attachment might result from voters' misapprehension about the role of MPs in

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larger difference in trust between Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters in Wales than between the

multi-member constituencies and their ignorance of the potential benefits of such an arrangement (Farrell and Gallagher, 1999: 312).

Due to limitations on the data available to us, we cannot test directly what impact different forms of local representation have on levels of support for the political system. But we can examine how far voters' experience of different forms of local representation - in particular the use of multi-member districts - has effected any shift in the balance of support for single member constituencies. In particular, we can compare attitudes to local representation among voters in Scotland and Wales in 1999, at the outset of the new devolved assemblies, with those in 2003, when the arrangements were more familiar.

The initial preference of Scottish and Welsh voters was clearly for single member constituencies. Asked in 1999 whether they would rather be represented in a parliament by "one member for the area I live in" or by "several members, possibly from different parties but covering a larger area", just over six in ten respondents in both areas opted for the former, with just under one quarter preferring the latter (the remainder being unable to choose between the options) (Curtice *et al*, 2000: 23). Four years' experience has not shifted attitudes; the figures collected immediately after the second devolution elections in 2003 are very similar to those in 1999.

We can also examine what impact new forms of local representation have had on patterns of citizen behaviour, although the data is rather thin, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn. The 2000 *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey carried two questions asking respondents about which elected representative they would turn to if faced with a problem on child benefit payments and on gaining NHS treatment (the options were: the local MP, MSP or councillor). When it came to child benefit, 19 per cent said they would go to their MSP for help, while 29 per cent said they would go to their MSP for help in gaining NHS treatment. For this analysis, the key question is whether people felt happy about approaching their list MSP, or preferred to contact their constituency MSP? Using the hypothetical scenarios contained in the 2000 survey questions, the clear preference is for constituency members, by a ratio of four or five to one. This measure was followed up in the 2003 *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey, which asked respondents whether they had contacted an MSP within the previous four years. Ten per cent of respondents reported that they had made contact, with three

times as many reporting contact with their constituency MSP as with their list MSP. This finding is corroborated by surveys of MSPs in 2000 and 2002. Each of the three studies conducted found that constituency MSPs reported more contact with local voters – in the form of meetings, constituency surgeries, correspondence and general constituency casework – than did list MSPs (Cowley and Lochore, 2000; Lundberg, 2002; Independent Commission on the Voting System, 2004).

The conclusion is that the way voters are represented locally under the new electoral systems carries some unpopular features. Whether these features are sufficiently important in voters' minds to affect more generalised political attitudes is perhaps doubtful. But in comparing the relative attractions of (single member) plurality arrangements and (multi-member) proportional arrangements, the issue of local representation does appear to register against the new systems.

### **Summary of the 'indirect' evidence**

The preceding sections have reviewed voters' responses to particular features and outcomes of different electoral rules in Britain. The key findings are:

1. Voters (in Scotland) believe the new proportional electoral rules are both fairer and make participation more worthwhile than plurality rules. Probably as a result, they are more likely to register true, or 'sincere' preferences when casting a ballot.
2. The new electoral systems in Scotland, Wales and London allow voters to express more complex preferences than the plurality system used for Westminster. The levels of split ticket voting suggest voters have taken these opportunities; moreover, their behaviour appears largely rational rather than ill informed. However, voters do not support the restrictions on their preferences introduced by 'closed' lists.
3. The new electoral systems have increased the proportion of the electorate gaining representation; there are fewer 'losers' than under plurality rule. But faced with the choice of elections as providing for representative or accountable outcomes, a high proportion of voters prefer to see elections maximise conditions of accountability.
4. Voters prefer the concept of a single constituency representative over multiple representatives. In their behaviour, too, they appear to favour their constituency representative over their list, or regional, representatives.

## Review of the British evidence

When gauging the impact of electoral system reform, the most important evidence is that which directly relates the new rules to the anticipated outcomes; in this case, citizens' political attitudes and levels of electoral participation. As I showed above (pages 107-9), electoral reform (in Scotland) has had only a weak impact on turnout. Across Britain as a whole, there is no clear relationship between support for voting reform and trust in the political system. Moreover, most British voters continue to prefer the electoral status quo over the reform option. On these 'direct' measures, then, the payoff from electoral reform appears rather limited.

On the other hand, casting the evidence net more widely suggests that voters have responded favourably to certain features and outcomes of the new electoral rules. Under proportional arrangements, more voters express their true preferences, rather than compromising these in order to maximise the worth of their ballot. There has also been an increase in the number of voters expressing more complex preferences, by allocating these to different parties. The new arrangements have also increased the proportion of voters gaining representation: the 'winners' from the system. Irrespective of the goals that one sets for an electoral system (recall the distinction between elections as instruments of 'representation' or 'accountability'), all these features must surely be considered benefits, or democratic 'goods'. That is, all other things being equal, they strengthen the links between voters and their political representatives. However, I also found these benefits counter-balanced by drawbacks. First, a substantial proportion of the population prefers to see elections provide for conditions of accountability over conditions of representation. If popular reactions to electoral reform are affected by the goals that people wish the electoral system to serve, this suggests that the payoff from reforming Westminster's electoral system might be limited. Second, not only do people prefer the idea of a single representative at the local level, they also appear to privilege this link in practice.

Earlier, I considered the relationship between support for electoral reform and levels of trust in the political system. But the evidence of 'indirect' effects encourages us to consider the link between political trust and attitudes to various features and outcomes of different electoral rules, and not simply with attitudes to these rules themselves. My final piece of analysis explores this link, by

constructing a model of political support with attitudes to different features and outcomes of electoral systems as the key explanatory variables.

The sample I use is of Scottish voters immediately after the 2003 Scottish Parliament election (the second devolution election was selected over the 1999 contest to gauge more mature judgements among the population). The dependent variable is trust in the Scottish Parliament (all question wordings and codings are given in Annex Three). I run two models, both of which control for a range of demographic (eg. age, education, social class) and attitudinal (eg. support for devolution, party identification, national identity) variables that might affect levels of trust. In the first model, I examine whether support for the proportional electoral system ("How much do you agree that the Scottish Parliament should be elected using proportional representation?") is related to trust. The answer is that it is not, with the coefficient falling just short of statistical significance at the 5 per cent level. In the second model, I introduce variables that gauge attitudes to various features of the new electoral arrangements. Some of these variables are intended to gauge attitudes to supposedly beneficial features of the new rules (that they are fairer and ensure that more votes 'count' towards the outcome). Others tap supposedly negative features of the rules (they lead to unstable government, give too much power to small parties and involve voting for party lists rather than for individual candidates). I also include variables that measure where voters stand on the goals of accountable versus representative government, and on the desirability of different forms of local representation.

As Table 4.9 shows, trust is very little affected by variations in attitudes towards different elements of the new electoral arrangements in Scotland. Only a belief in the fairness of the new rules is associated with (higher) levels of trust in the Scottish Parliament. Other than that, attitudes towards the electoral system do not affect confidence in the political regime.

**TABLE 4.9 The relationship between political trust and attitudes to the electoral system**

	MODEL I		MODEL II	
	B	se	B	se
Supported Scot Parliament in 1997 referendum	-0.79	.21**	-0.79	.29*
Identify with Lab or Lib Dems	-0.24	.16	-0.31	.23
Education (No qualifications)				
Degree	0.15	.32	-0.59	.46
A level/HE below degree	0.54	.25	0.36	.38
O level/CSE	0.25	.23	-0.24	.34
Foreign	1.76	.81*	1.92	.93*
Age (age 65+)				
18-24	0.23	.92	3.12	1.27*
25-44	-0.55	.24	-0.20	.35
45-59	-0.33	.22	0.15	.33
60-64	-0.58	.29*	-0.25	.41
National identity (British)				
Scottish	-0.31	.54	0.02	.77
Scottish more than British	-0.12	.54	0.31	.77
Equally Scottish and British	-0.62	.55	-0.13	.77
British more than Scottish	0.28	.67	0.35	.95
Social class (working class)				
Salaried	0.15	.25	0.21	.33
Non-manual	-0.12	.25	-0.08	.36
Bourgeoisie	0.57	.31	0.52	.43
Manual	0.16	.28	0.04	.39
Scot Parliament should use PR	0.15	.08	-0.02	.12
New voting system is fairer			0.40	.17*
New voting system ensures votes count			0.14	.16
New system produces unstable government			-0.03	.16
New system gives small parties too much power			-0.22	.14
Prefer voting for a candidate not a party list			-0.13	.12
Prefer one MP (prefer several MPs)			-0.53	.30
Prefer clear winner (prefer fair result)			-0.13	.26
Prefer one party in government (prefer two parties)			-0.28	.28
Likelihood ratio $\chi^2$ (df)	50.589(19)**		67.162(27)**	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.09		0.20	
N	899		353	

**Notes:**

Where variables have been entered as categorical terms, the reference categories are given in parentheses.

Ordered logit model, with dependent variable trust in Scottish Parliament (1=Never trust, 4=Always trust)

\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$

Source: *Scottish Social Attitudes 2003*

**Conclusion**

I concluded my review of the international evidence on electoral rules by suggesting that a certain sensitivity would be needed in exploring the British data. So it has proved; there is no evidence that unequivocally points to the benefits of either the proportional or plurality electoral models. What final judgements can we make about the evidence of institutional effects in Britain? I think two conclusions can be reached. First, that where proportional electoral arrangements have been introduced, the evidence from opinion surveys – in

Scotland at least, the focus of this chapter - suggests a broadly positive reaction from voters. People have noticed the different rules in place and, to a certain extent, have modified their behaviour (in relation to preferential voting, for example). Whether this has improved the nature of citizen-government linkages is difficult to say without a far wider set of data and evidence than is available. Perhaps these reactions are the result of people learning about new ways in which elections can be conducted and their preferences translated into social outcomes. If so, it may be that the introduction of similar arrangements for Westminster elections would yield similar positive outcomes. But the second point must be that the distribution of opinion towards electoral reform for national (ie. Westminster) elections points to a less benign payoff. Voters in Britain appear to retain an attachment to various features of the single member plurality system, notably the opportunity it provides them to hold governments to account, and the role of the single constituency representative. These features help define the very function of elections: whether the goal is accountable or representative outcomes. This basic distinction began the discussion, and arguably it shapes the effects that electoral reform has had, or is likely to have, in Britain. Thus, until a clearer majority among the population privileges representative outcomes over accountable ones, I conclude that the payoff from electoral reform across Britain is likely to be limited.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DEVOLUTION**

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In common with electoral reform and the introduction of directly elected local mayors, devolution is a partial reform. One of the first acts of the incoming Labour Government in 1997 was to hold referendums in Scotland and Wales on devolving greater power to those areas. Later, a similar referendum was held in London. A fourth referendum was held in the North East in November 2004.<sup>115</sup> Yet, thus far at least, power has been devolved only to Scotland, Wales and London, covering some 29 per cent of the British population. And, in the cases of Wales and London, the degree of power devolved from central government is limited (there is, for example, no power to raise revenue through direct taxation). But one part of the country, Scotland, does enjoy substantial powers to take decisions independently of Westminster. If devolving power from the centre can serve as a means of re-engaging the public, we would expect to find such an effect there. Devolution to Scotland, then, is the subject of this chapter.

#### **THE POLICY CLAIMS**

Of the four case study reforms considered in this work, changes to the party funding regime is the one most directly concerned to stimulate greater public trust in political authority. Yet devolution to Scotland arguably follows close behind. There is a long history of discontent among Scots at the centralised nature of political authority in Britain. This discontent was magnified in the 1980s and 1990s by the skewed nature of political representation in Scotland, with the Conservatives exerting authority over the country while enjoying little representation within it. But the demand among Scots for the decentralisation of power dates back well before the start of Conservative domination in 1979. Even under more ideologically compatible governments, popular demands for greater voice had risen (see Table 5.1, page 136). Devolution is thus less about avoiding asymmetries of party representation and authority, than about providing the means by which a supposedly distinctive set of political preferences can be expressed and responded to.<sup>116</sup> The final report of the Scottish Constitutional

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<sup>115</sup> Power has also been devolved to Northern Ireland. However, I do not deal with the case of Northern Ireland in this chapter.

<sup>116</sup> There are alternative explanations of the movement towards devolution, such as self-government being equated with higher public spending (McLean and McMillan, 2005).



Convention - the organisation established to press for a Scottish Parliament - sets out two main rationales for the devolution of political power: to provide for popular control over key institutions of civic society, and to provide for policy decisions that reflect the country's own needs and interests (Scottish Constitutional Convention, 1995).

These were the primary goals underpinning devolution.<sup>117</sup> A secondary, though highly important, one flowed from them. This was the securing of greater public confidence in, and engagement with, political authority. It is not difficult to find claims by key policy actors along these lines. Take the following:

"... British public life has been scarred by cynicism, sometimes amounting to contempt in public places for parliamentary democracy. My genuine hope for the new Scottish Parliament is that it can earn the trust of Scotland's people, and it is the people who have played the key role in making change possible".

"... the main case, the drive and thrust [of the Scotland Bill] is the democratic case for change and for trusting the people to take decisions that affect their lives; the attempt to reconnect the individual citizen to the political process"

*Rt Hon Donald Dewar MP, Secretary of State for Scotland, Second reading debate on the Scotland Bill, (HC Debs, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1997, cols 21 and 23).*

"This reform will not in itself solve the problem of resources or banish the dilemmas of government. What it can do is connect and involve people with the decisions that matter to them. It can bring a sense of ownership to political debate and a new confidence to our affairs." *Foreword by the Secretary of State for Scotland to the White Paper on Scottish Devolution, 'Scotland's Parliament', July 1997*

Clearly, no politician as experienced and astute as Donald Dewar seriously expected the Scottish Parliament to single handedly transform the relationship between citizens and political institutions in Scotland. Nonetheless, there was a hope, and even an expectation, that devolution would help stimulate closer linkages between the two. This chapter explores whether linkages have, indeed, been strengthened. The chapter proceeds in similar manner to the other three institutional reforms considered in this work. I begin by considering why, in theoretical terms, the decentralisation of political authority should stimulate more active and positive relations between principals and their agents. Drawing on data from overseas, I then consider what evidence there is to reinforce the theoretical conclusions. In the central section, I consider the evidence from

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<sup>117</sup> There were, of course, less overt and more 'political' goals among actors such as Labour politicians, who saw devolution as a means to counter the rising public popularity of the Scottish National Party (Bogdanor, 2001a: 119-43).

Scotland: has devolution worked in the way many of its framers - such as Donald Dewar - hoped? Finally, I extend the analysis to England, to consider how people respond to the decentralisation of authority, and thus what impact we might expect further devolution to have.

## **WHY SHOULD DEVOLUTION MAKE A DIFFERENCE? THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

The role of devolved, or federal, systems hinges on a question which dates back to the ancient Greek period, namely what is the appropriate size for a political unit? Then, as now, the ideal had to balance considerations of democratic effectiveness with the capacity of the system to resolve issues affecting its citizens. These considerations could fairly easily be reconciled in the Greek and early modern city states, but such accommodation became more awkward with the rise of the nation state. Today, it is common for the capacity of the political system to be equated with large political units, while the vitality of democratic practice is usually equated with small units (Dahl, 1994). However, these twin criteria are not mutually exclusive, since both come into play in predicting how citizens will act under political units of varying size.

Theoretical accounts of the relationship between size and democracy revolve around three sets of considerations. The first consideration is the size of the political unit itself. The second is the nature of the population covered by these units, in particular the degree of homogeneity.<sup>118</sup> The third is the nature and powers of the tiers of government within any one country. As we shall see, the anticipated relationship between size and democracy is significantly affected by which of these considerations is taken into account.

The size variable on its own generates various hypotheses, most of which suggest a positive dividend for small political units. The most basic hypothesis concerns participation rates. This hypothesis anticipates that the smaller the political unit (measured by the size of the electorate), the greater the chances of any one individual making a difference to the collective outcome, the stronger the incentive for each citizen to register their preference, and thus the higher the rate of participation (Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Oliver, 2000; Osterfeld, 1989). In addition, small units (measured this time by territory) facilitate easy citizen

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<sup>118</sup> Homogeneity can be expressed in terms of a variety of variables, in particular social (race, ethnic group) and belief (ideology and policy preferences, national identity, religious beliefs) characteristics. I consider homogeneity in terms of beliefs, notably policy preferences.

access to elected representatives by lowering the costs of such engagement. This direct contact increases citizens' sense of their own political efficacy. It is also held to increase the information citizens have about policies being introduced in their name, allowing for closer monitoring of representatives and thus stimulating greater confidence in their role.<sup>119</sup>

The second set of hypotheses relates to characteristics of the population, and again anticipates conclusions favourable to small over large political units. If a population is marked by significant variations in individuals' demands and preferences, the sub-division of power into smaller units offers an effective means of accommodating such diversity (and of avoiding demands for secession; Goodin, 1996b). Smaller political units are assumed to contain a more homogenous set of preferences than larger ones, allowing for a responsive and efficient allocation of public goods (since the chances will be lower that collective preferences exhibit 'cycling' or disequilibrium; Aranson, 1989).<sup>120</sup> Decentralising authority to smaller units can help develop people's commitment to, and identification with, the political community, although this is more likely in cases where a substantial identification with that community already exists. In such cases, this identification might translate into higher rates of participation and more supportive political attitudes (Oliver, 2000; Rose, 2001).

The third set of hypotheses builds on considerations of governance and political power. The arguments derived from these considerations tend to be more equivocal about the benefits of small units. Granted, it is often argued that, given the division of responsibility between small and large units within the same state, the political issues facing the former are likely to be simpler than those facing the latter. This serves to lower the cost to the individual citizen of gaining information about the activities of their political agents, and thus to improve the monitoring function (Oliver, 2000; Rose and Pettersen, 1999). On the other hand, where power is divided, citizens may find it difficult to identify the responsibility for different policy decisions, blurring accountability and lowering levels of trust and confidence (Brennan and Hamlin, 2000: 252-3).<sup>121</sup> In addition, under a

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<sup>119</sup> Thus, devolution in Scotland and Wales was often justified on the basis that it provided for greater popular control over administrative agencies and networks which wielded substantial powers in the two regions, yet which were publicly accountable only via the Westminster legislature.

<sup>120</sup> While identifying the benefits of a federal division of power to the supply of public goods, public choice theory also identifies several potential drawbacks, such as the sub-optimal levelling of taxation (Brennan and Hamlin, 2000). But these drawbacks tend to concern the way federalism is instituted, rather than the principle itself.

<sup>121</sup> This risk is lower in systems of 'arms length' or 'competitive' federalism, in which the powers of the different tiers are clearly demarcated and operate independently of one another, than in 'collaborative' ones, where responsibilities are shared rather than divided between tiers

federal arrangement, the most important political decisions may be reserved to the higher tier of government. The importance, or 'saliency', of this tier will increase the benefits to citizens of registering their demands in national level elections. By the same process, the central tier will also attract information-imparting groups such as the media, and mobilising agencies such as political parties and lobby groups (Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Newton, 1982; Oliver, 2000; Rose, 2001). Thus, considerations of political authority suggest democratic engagement may be higher at the federal level than at the regional one.

What does this - admittedly brief - review of the theoretical literature suggest about the potential effects of devolution in Britain? I would identify two likely hypotheses. First, that trust in political actors and institutions should increase. The closer a tier of government is to its citizens (in terms of population and territory), the more information people have about its activities, the easier it is for them to gain access to important decision makers, and the easier it is for them to exercise electoral control over these actors. These processes should serve to increase citizens' trust and confidence. The second anticipated effect is less clear cut. In principle, establishing units of government at the sub-national level should increase the marginal utility of voting, since it increases the chances of any one vote proving decisive for the outcome. However, arguably more important for participation rates is not the fact of devolution *per se*, but its nature, in particular the powers that devolved institutions command. The greater the powers attached to a devolved tier of government, the greater the 'saliency' of elections to this tier, and the higher the expected turnout. The notion of saliency encapsulates how far an election result will be conclusive for policy outcomes. It depends on a number of factors (such as the policy differences between the competing parties at an election), but basically concerns how far a government that emerges from a contest holds the authority to take policy decisions that affect citizens' lives. If a sub-national government possesses such authority, citizens will have a strong incentive to register their preferences at election time. Elections on which fewer policy outcomes depend are less salient, and can thus be expected to attract lower turnout.

One final point arising from the theoretical arguments should be noted here. In the empirical analysis that follows, the assumption is that devolution works to enhance the representative process. That is, it provides a more effective means

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(Wachendorfer-Schmidt, 2000: 9-11). The division of power between England and Scotland falls at some point between the 'arms length' model (the exemplar of which is the United States) and the 'collaborative' model (of which the exemplar is Germany).

by which voters can register their demands and convey these to policy makers via competitive elections. The basic data I use to explore the impact of devolution is also oriented towards representative processes, namely rates of electoral turnout, contact with elected politicians and levels of trust collected immediately following Scottish elections. But, as I noted in Chapter Two, the decentralisation of political authority can change the terms of democratic engagement, as well as stimulating closer patterns of engagement within established (ie. representative) processes. The three considerations linking the territorial extent of a political unit with the level of democratic engagement that I have just discussed – namely the unit's size, the homogeneity of its population and the political issues resolved within the unit – all suggest that devolution is capable of facilitating more participatory forms of decision making. Thus, the smaller the territory the easier it is for citizens to physically engage with their political agents. Homogeneity of preferences are also more suited to participatory resolution than are sharply divided opinion sets, for which elite discussion and compromise might be required. The same can be said for the simpler, and more 'immediate', issues that fall within the jurisdiction of devolved political units. For all these reasons, small decentralised political units might be thought better equipped than larger ones to supplement representative processes with participatory ones. It is beyond the scope of this work to consider how far these opportunities have been acted on in Scotland (although there is some evidence of participatory take-up; Civic Forum, 2002) and what their wider effects have been. But since this work is concerned not only to analyse what impact Britain's constitutional reforms have had on citizen engagement, but also to suggest how these reforms might have changed the terms of this engagement, it is important to note that devolution – like elected mayors, discussed in Chapter Six – opens the way for a very different set of citizen-government linkages than those implied by purely representative processes.

### **DOES DEVOLUTION MAKE A DIFFERENCE? EVIDENCE FROM OVERSEAS**

As we have seen, theoretical postulates tend to provide competing hypotheses for the benefits of either unitary or federal systems. What evidence is there from overseas that might shed further light on the issue? Many studies have been conducted on the relationship between the size of a territorial unit and levels of political support and electoral participation. They tend to conclude that size has a negative effect on political participation; thus, the larger the electorate, the lower the turnout, all other things being equal (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998;

Franklin, 2002). However, these analyses focus on national elections, and thus provide few clues about the likely effect of devolving power within a country. Non-electoral participation is similarly found to decline in line with scale. In his study of civic engagement in American towns and cities, Oliver (2000) found that levels of contact with elected officials and attendance at meetings of community groups were higher in small towns than in larger cities. Rose's (2001) study of Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway also suggests that individual and collective forms of participation increase as municipality size declines (see also Dahl and Tufte, 1973: 53-61). Yet these studies tend to focus on municipalities, all far smaller in terms of both population and territory than the devolved units in Britain.

More relevant to my concern are studies that examine political attitudes and behaviour in federal and unitary political systems. Unfortunately, little empirical analysis has been conducted on these issues (Gerring, Thacker and Moreno, 2004: 18). Existing empirical studies tend to focus on federalism's effects on policy outcomes (Wachendorfer-Schmidt, 2000, Tsebelis, 2002) or on such governance issues as corruption (Gerring and Thacker, 2004; Triesman, 2002). Less attention has been paid to the impact on citizen behaviour and attitudes. We know that rates of electoral participation are typically higher for national elections than for regional and local ones (Dahl and Tufte, 1973). This finding holds even in federal systems with powerful sub-national tiers of government (Hough and Jeffery, forthcoming). It is also suggested that turnout at national elections does not differ from unitary to federal countries (Blais and Carty, 1990), although other analysis suggests that federalism serves to depress turnout at national elections (Brockington, 2004). When it comes to political support, the results are more inconsistent. One cross-national study finds that political support is higher in unitary than in federal systems (Norris, 1999a). Unitary systems are similarly found to outperform federal ones in a study that examines the impact of political structures on 'voice and accountability' (Gerring, Thacker and Moreno, 2004).<sup>122</sup> On the other hand, a third study finds that satisfaction with democracy among citizens in west European countries actually increases with fiscal federalism (Strom et al, 2003a).<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> However, the value of this finding is compromised by the wide range of measures (eg. human rights, independence of the media and perceptions of government responsiveness) used to construct the 'voice and accountability' indicator, and the range of developed and developing countries included in the analysis.

<sup>123</sup> Again, however, the robustness of the findings must be open to some doubt. The sample is of only sixteen west European countries, and few control variables are entered into the equation.

Thus, in anticipating the likely impact of devolution in Britain, the overseas evidence is of limited use. What it does suggest is that electoral participation tends to reflect the distribution of political authority, with turnout higher at the national level than at the regional level. But whether this division of power stimulates higher or lower levels of political support remains an open question.

## **THE BACKGROUND TO SCOTTISH DEVOLUTION**

Before coming on to evaluate what impact devolution has had in Scotland since 1999, I briefly consider the background to its introduction. In particular, I consider how favourable the conditions were to its subsequent chances of success. In the short term at least, political institutions rarely gain legitimacy by *creating* supportive attitudes among the public; rather they tend to work best when the baseline conditions are already favourable. In the case of Scottish devolution, and at the level of the public at least, I would suggest three such conditions. The first is that the Scottish people hold policy preferences and demands that differ from those in England. If devolution was introduced in part to meet the supposedly distinctive preferences of Scots, we need to be able to show that these distinctions exist. Second, as noted above, support for political institutions is likely to be greater in systems where these institutions correspond with people's sense of attachment, or political 'community'. So how far do Scottish people identify with the political community to which the devolution of political authority corresponds? Third, and most basic of all, there must be a strong and consistent demand for devolution. Prior to the introduction of devolution in 1999, then, how far were these three conditions met?

First, policy preferences: are Scots different? Comparisons with the rest of Britain suggest that people in Scotland do hold distinctive ideological beliefs (taking more left wing positions on education, economic and employment policies), although the differences are less acute with people in Wales and the northern regions of Britain than with those in the Midlands and south of England (Brown et al, 1999: 75-8, 95-100; Curtice, 1988, 1996). Moreover, these variations in policy preferences are starker between Scotland and the rest of Britain than they are within Scotland itself. If Scots disagreed among themselves more than they did with people in the rest of Britain, this would suggest that a pan-Scotland tier of government would be unresponsive to popular demands. In fact, however, Scotland appears a fairly homogenous political culture (Brown et al,

1999: 76-8).<sup>124</sup> But how far are the issues on which Scots hold distinctive preferences those for which authority has been devolved to the new institutions? If a sub-national population holds distinctive positions on issues classically reserved to the central tier - those where considerations of externalities or economies of scale predominate, such as defence or foreign policy - then devolution will hardly establish more responsive government. As it is, authority for some of the issues on which Scots hold distinct positions has been transferred; education is one example. However, on other issues, for example welfare and taxation issues, responsibility is reserved to Westminster (Brown et al, 1999: 95-100; Curtice, 1996: 11-12). As one study of Scottish attitudes concludes, "... the argument that the [Scottish] Parliament will address just those areas where Scots want to be distinctive is not easily tenable" (Brown et al, 1999: 100).

Second, political community: how far does Scotland constitute the primary attachment for Scottish people? The measure I use to gauge political community is identity, distinguishing between a person's sense of identification with Britain as a whole or with Scotland. It is clear that, since the late-1970s, Scottish identity has increased at the expense of British identity. Thus, in 1979, asked "which one best describes the way you think of yourself", 56 per cent of Scots chose 'Scottish', with 38 per cent choosing 'British'. By 1999, those choosing Scottish identity had increased to 77 per cent, while those thinking of themselves as British had declined to 17 per cent (Paterson et al, 2001: 101-8; Bond and Rosie, 2002). Thus, among Scots, the sense of political community has clearly shifted from the nation state to the sub-national level.

Given the distinctiveness of their policy preferences, and their attachment to a particular political community, we might have expected a concomitant increase in popular support for greater self-government. This is, indeed, what we find. As Table 5.1 shows, the past three decades have seen a clear shift from support for unitary rule to support for the devolution of authority. In 1974, the premium attached to devolution over unitary rule was only ten percentage points; in the last reading before the Scottish Parliament was established, the premium had jumped to 36 points, and by 2003, it had increased yet further to 46 points. Moreover, while between one in five and one in three Scots would prefer Scotland to exert political authority independently of the rest of Britain, this proportion has rarely exceeded one half of those who favour the devolution of authority.

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<sup>124</sup> The only major exception is the presence of more left wing values among people in the West Central region (around Glasgow).



Thus the background against which devolution was introduced to Scotland in 1999 was largely favourable. The Scottish Parliament was introduced to govern a territory with which large numbers of its citizens identified. Devolved authority was introduced with the blessing of a majority of these citizens. And on at least some of the issues on which Scots held distinctive policy preferences, the Parliament was invested with the authority to take primary policy decisions.

**Table 5.1 Constitutional preferences among Scots, 1974-2003**

%	1974	1979	1992	1997	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
No devolution	34	30	25	18	10	12	10	13	13
Devolution	44	62	51	54	62	57	62	55	59
Independence	21	8	24	27	28	31	28	32	27

The three categories form sums of four or five item questions. For question wording, see SurrIDGE et al, 1999: tables 12.1 and 12.2.

Sources: SurrIDGE et al, 1999: table 12.2; *Scottish Parliament Election Study 1999, Scottish Social Attitudes* (2000-2003)

## THE IMPACT OF SCOTTISH DEVOLUTION

I now turn to consider in some detail the impact that devolution to Scotland has had on linkages between citizens and their political rulers. In common with the other reforms considered in this work, I treat linkages in terms of political attitudes (trust) and participation (turnout). I also supplement these basic measures with data that measures patterns of representational and cognitive engagement.

### Political attitudes

As the remarks of Donald Dewar - quoted at the beginning of this chapter - suggest, devolution was expected to improve levels of public trust and confidence in government. Such supportive attitudes might be manifested at two levels: in relation to political authority in London and/or political authority in Scotland. If the theoretical claims about the relationship between size and political attitudes are correct, the principal effect would be a higher level of trust in the devolved tier of government than in the central tier. But we might also anticipate devolution effecting more positive attitudes towards the central tier of government. Thus, Scots might reward the government in London for responding to their demands for greater self-determination. Alternatively, if London was marked down in the public mind prior to devolution for unresponsive policies, then transferring the responsibility for these policies to Scotland might defuse the

criticisms. And if devolution was seen to create a more powerful means of exerting voice at the centre, people in Scotland might also be willing to invest more trust in the UK government. However, these rationales are not particularly convincing. In trying to identify which tier of political authority is likely to reap the benefits of devolution, it is more plausible to anticipate a dividend for the devolved tier of government rather than for the central tier.

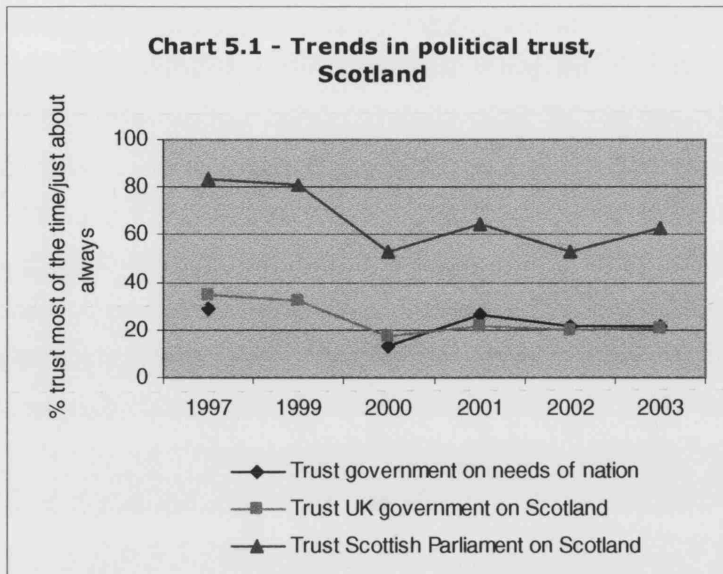
The data I draw on comes from the *Scottish Social Attitudes* surveys and its predecessors, collected in 1997, 1999 and annually thereafter. Comparisons with attitudes among English voters draw on data from the *British Social Attitudes* surveys. As a first step, I examine levels of trust in the devolved and central tiers among Scots, drawing on the following survey measures:

"How much do you trust the Scottish Parliament to work in Scotland's best long term interests?"

" How much do you trust the UK government to work in Scotland's best long term interests?"

"How much do you trust British governments of any party to put the needs of the nation above those of their party?"

The results for the three trust judgements for the 1997-2003 period are shown in Chart 5.1. This shows that confidence in the devolved tier is, indeed, higher than confidence in the central institutions. In 2003, just one in five people in Scotland trusted the UK government to serve Scotland at least most of the time. But three in five trusted the Scottish Parliament in this way. Moreover, in relative terms, the gap has widened over time. In 1997, roughly twice as many people in Scotland trusted the proposed Scottish Parliament as the UK government; by 2003, three times as many people did so. Admittedly, levels of trust in the devolved tier have fallen, although the decline is limited to a single year immediately following the introduction of the Parliament, suggesting a one-off adjustment to - perhaps over-inflated - initial expectations. Since that adjustment, the proportion of the population trusting the Parliament at least "most of the time" has remained above 50 per cent.



Sources: *Scottish Parliament Election Study* (1999), *Scottish Social Attitudes* (all other years)

So trust in the Scottish Parliament appears high, particularly when compared to trust in the British Government. However, the survey questions I draw on specifically invite respondents to judge the two tiers of government in relation to serving Scotland's needs. It may be thought hardly surprising that the devolved tier attracts the higher ratings. But in a second survey that examined political attitudes among Scottish people in a more neutral way, a lower premium was attached to the devolved institutions. The *Citizen Audit* study in 2000 asked people in Scotland how far they trusted a range of political institutions, with no qualifications attached to this evaluation. On a scale running from 0 (low trust) to 10 (high trust), the mean level of trust in the Scottish Parliament (3.82) was only marginally higher than that for the (British) government (3.63), and substantially below the level for local government (4.64).<sup>125</sup>

The *Citizen Audit* survey question is not necessarily more appropriate than the *Scottish Social Attitudes* question to the task of gauging the legitimacy of government in Scotland. Devolution was introduced so that policy making in Scotland would be more responsive to Scottish people's needs. It therefore makes sense to pose trust questions in terms of the ability of different tiers of government to serve these needs. In addition, the *Citizen Audit* also contains data suggesting a more positive dividend from devolution. One question on the survey asks respondents to judge how far voting allows people to influence

<sup>125</sup> Data from the *Citizen Audit* survey, the fieldwork for which was conducted in autumn 2000. The data was kindly made available to the author by Paul Whiteley.

decisions made by various tiers of government. This question measures the degree to which people see the political system as being responsive to their demands, or 'system efficacy'. The results suggest that, even one year into the new regime in 2000, system efficacy is marginally higher in relation to the devolved tier of government than to the central one. Since the sample size for Scotland is only 250, I report mean levels of efficacy, rather than the marginal distributions for each response category. On a scale running from 1 (No influence at all) to 3 (a great deal of influence), mean efficacy for voting for the House of Commons is 1.66, for local government it is 1.73, and for the Scottish Parliament it is 1.74. Moreover, the survey also found that Scots' mean level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in Scotland (3.12) was slightly higher than that for the way democracy works in Britain (3.00).<sup>126</sup>

In terms of the simple distribution of attitudes, then, the bulk of the evidence confirms the initial expectation; that the creation of a devolved tier of government establishes a trust in that tier that outweighs confidence in the central tier (although by what level of magnitude it is difficult to tell).

But does this higher level of trust really reflect a judgement that a devolved Parliament will represent people's interests? Alternatively, are the ratings at least in part artefact, reflecting the way survey questions are worded? There is one piece of evidence that suggests question wording effects might be playing a role. In 2001 and 2003, the *British Social Attitudes* survey carried a question on trust that mirrored the one in Scotland, by asking an English sample how far they trusted the UK Government to act in England's interests. The trust ratings for the UK Government among English voters fall not far short of those recorded for the Scottish Parliament among Scottish voters. In 2001, 66 per cent of Scots said they trusted the Parliament "most of the time" or "just about always"; 59 per cent of English people said the same of the UK Government. Two years later, a similar proportion of Scots (64 per cent) trusted the Scottish Parliament, while the proportion of people in England trusting the UK Government had fallen to 54 per cent. Among both sets of voters, the proportions expressing trust in the two tiers of political authority to work in their respective territory's interests are higher than those expressing trust in the UK Government more generally to place the nation's needs above those of their party. Yet it is difficult to believe that people in England perceive a post-devolution Westminster administration as an

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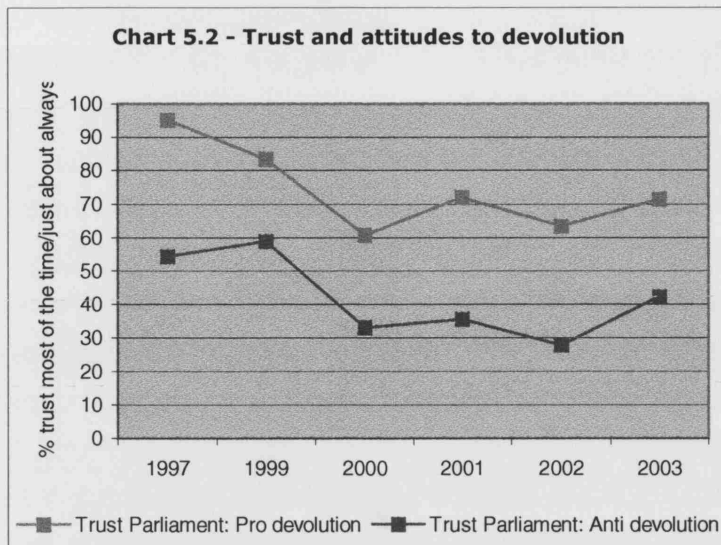
<sup>126</sup> The democracy satisfaction scale runs from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction), and so is not directly comparable with the trust or efficacy scales.

'English government', representing their interests in the way Scots might perceive Holyrood to represent their interests. Alternatively, framing the trust question in a different way to the general formulation ("How much do you trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party?") might itself be stimulating more favourable responses. That we uncover such responses in England as well as in Scotland hints at the possibility that the high ratings for the Scottish Parliament may not be wholly attributable to devolution, but may reflect more mundane question framing effects.

In addition, if greater trust in the Scottish Parliament than in the British Government was really a reflection of the decentralisation of power, we should find that high trust is associated with support for devolution (and low trust with opposition to devolution). Ideally, we should also find that trust among supporters of devolution has increased over time relative to trust among opponents of devolution. The relevant data is shown in Chart 5.2.<sup>127</sup> It shows that trust in the Scottish Parliament is consistently higher among supporters of devolution than among its opponents. This suggests that the higher confidence enjoyed by the Parliament than by the UK Government is rooted in positive attitudes towards devolution, not simply in negative attitudes towards political authority in London. However, looking at the picture before and after the introduction of the Parliament suggests that the payoff from devolution has not been great. The changes in trust among supporters and opponents of devolution have followed very similar patterns over the period.

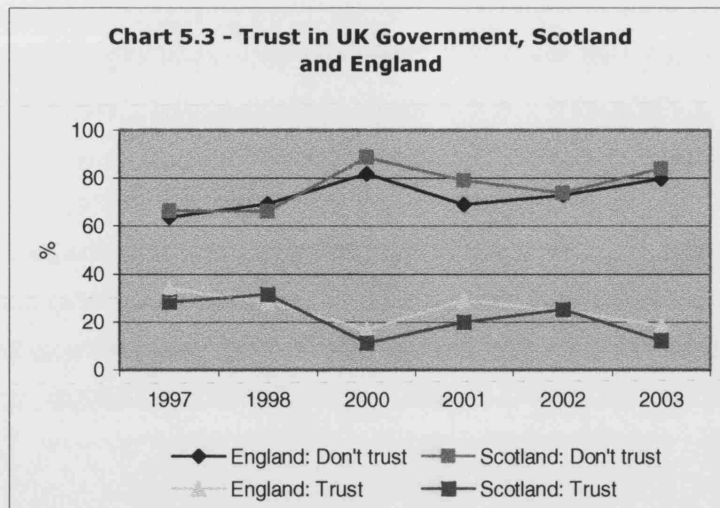
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<sup>127</sup> I measure support for devolution by a survey question that asks respondents for their preferred constitutional position for Scotland. While various response options are given, I report only preferences for an Assembly with tax raising powers (ie. the status of the Scottish Parliament) or for no Assembly at all.



Sources: As Chart 5.1

Comparing levels of trust among Scots who differ on the merits of devolution is one way of bringing more precision to bear on the task of measuring the impact of devolution. A second is to compare levels of trust among a group of citizens that has experienced devolution with one that has not. We can undertake such analysis by comparing attitudes among people in Scotland with those among people in England. If devolution has had a positive effect on trust, we should see a more benign trend among Scottish people than among their English counterparts. Unfortunately, the trust measures available for this analysis are not ideal. One measure asks people in Scotland about their trust in the new devolved tier, and people in England about their trust in Westminster to serve England's interests. These enable more accurate judgements to be made about the impact of devolution. But, as already noted, we only have two timepoints for the English data, both falling after 1999 and thus preventing pre- and post-devolution comparisons. The second question asks about trust in the UK Government to place the needs of the nation above those of their party. As I noted above, we should not expect devolution to Scotland to have much impact on the way Scottish people view government in London. However, this measure is the only indicator we have that spans the period before and after the introduction of the Scottish Parliament, across both Scotland and England. The results are therefore reported in Chart 5.3. The trends in Scotland and England are very similar. Thus, it does not appear that devolving power to one country has made its population any more trusting, relative to the other, of political authority at the centre.



Source: *Scottish Social Attitudes, British Social Attitudes*

To subject this finding to more rigorous scrutiny, I constructed a simple model of trust, in which attitudes to government post-devolution are compared to attitudes pre-devolution in both Scotland and England. The model uses data collected in 1997 and 2001.<sup>128</sup> The dependent variable is trust in the UK Government in 2001 (questions wordings and codings are given in Annex Four(a)). Since the dependent variable uses an ordinal scale (1=low trust, 4=high trust), the model is estimated using ordered logit. The first independent variable is a lagged measure of trust in 1997. The two key explanatory variables included in the model are a respondent's location in Scotland or England, and their attitude towards devolution. No control variables are used, since it is not anticipated that the distribution of relevant demographic characteristics has changed over the period. In effect, the model attempts to identify which factors are responsible for changes in trust between the two dates. In particular, as a result of devolution, has trust increased among Scots relative to people in England?

In the simplest model (Model 1), where trust in 2001 is predicted as a function of lagged trust plus the terms for country and support for devolution, the model shows significant effects for the country and devolution terms (Table 5.2). But the negative coefficients indicate that, when account is taken of levels of trust in 1997, people in Scotland were actually less trusting of government in 2001 than people in England, and that people who supported devolution to Scotland were less trusting than those who opposed it. So it does not appear that devolution

<sup>128</sup> These two were the only points at which a question on trust was fielded on the *British Election Panel Study* which, as its name suggests, records attitudes among a constant panel of respondents. This type of data is well suited for measuring changing attitudes over time. Although levels of trust

has generated a positive effect when it comes to trust in the British Government. To test this more rigorously, I examine relative trust specifically among Scots who support devolution, by introducing an interaction term into the second model.<sup>129</sup> The resulting coefficient is – in line with expectations – positive, but is very weak and not statistically significant. There has, then, been no increase in trust in the British Government since 1998 among Scottish people well disposed to devolution relative to English opponents of devolution.

**Table 5.2 Model of political trust in Scotland and England**

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	se	B	se
Trust in 1997	1.03	.08**	1.03	.08**
Scotland	-0.30	.19*	-0.31	.13*
Support devolution	-0.50	.13**	-0.55	.34
Scotland*Support devolution			0.06	.37
Likelihood ratio $\chi^2$ (df)	188.655 (3)**		188.685(4)**	
Nagelkerke pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.13		0.13	
N	1499		1499	

\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01

Source: *British Election Panel Study 1997-2001*

So not all of the evidence suggests that devolution has stimulated greater trust among people in Scotland. Compared with the situation before 1999, supporters of devolution are now no more trusting than opponents of devolution. There is no clear trust 'premium' among people in Scotland over people in England. Yet, while accepting that attitudinal data collected through mass level surveys must be treated with some caution, it does appear as though devolution has established a tier of political authority in which a majority of the Scottish population places its trust. Moreover, that level of trust has now endured over three years, and thus looks to be fairly robust. Arguably, then, devolution has gone some way to achieving the goal set out by Donald Dewar and the designers of devolution.

Let me go a little further, and examine what lies behind collective evaluations of the devolved institutions. In many ways, the Scottish Parliament appears in robust health, enjoying the trust of a clear majority of its citizens (Chart 5.1). However, as I have just noted, there is a question mark over this result, arising from doubts about potential question framing effects and from additional data that suggests a less benign picture. In addition, levels of trust in the Parliament have declined since its establishment in 1999 (although, again as already noted,

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tend to increase around election time, the fact that both readings were taken at the same point in the electoral cycle maximises the comparability of the results.

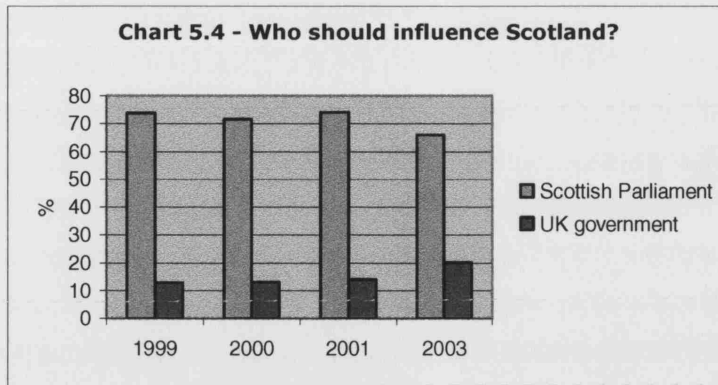


this decline took place in a single year, since when trust has remained constant). We need to take account, then, of the potential that trust may not be as high as some of the data suggests, and that levels have declined since the devolved institutions were introduced. I therefore examine which factors might explain the fall in trust since 1999, and which factors are associated with low trust in the Parliament at any one point in time. The specific question I address is how far low and declining trust can be explained by opposition to the principle of devolution, or by a concern with the lack of capacity or power wielded by the Parliament, or by disappointment at its performance? Clearly, if the cause is found to be an opposition to the principle of devolution, the implications are profound. If the root cause is found to be a perception that the devolved bodies lack sufficient powers to deliver the desired outputs, the implications - that higher trust depends on strengthening the Parliament's capacity - would still be significant. Last, if the cause is found to be a discontent at performance, the implications would be less far reaching, although still challenging. Better performance might require a change of tack among the incumbent actors, or else their replacement by others. Thus, in attempting to identify which factors underpin trust in the Scottish Parliament, the following analysis will also suggest the direction that further reforms might take if confidence in devolution is to be bolstered.

It appears unlikely that the decline in trust in the Scottish Parliament since 1999 reflects opposition to the principle of devolution. As Table 5.1 showed, devolution was, and remains, the 'settled will' of the Scottish people. It is equally implausible to pin the blame on discontent at its capacity. Granted, there has been an increase since 1997 in the proportion of people believing that the UK government, not Holyrood, *does* play the dominant influence over the way Scotland is governed. The proportion believing that Holyrood *should* play this role is also consistently high. But there has been no increase in demands for Holyrood to play a greater influence; in fact, the proportion slipped somewhat between 1999 and 2000 (Chart 5.4).

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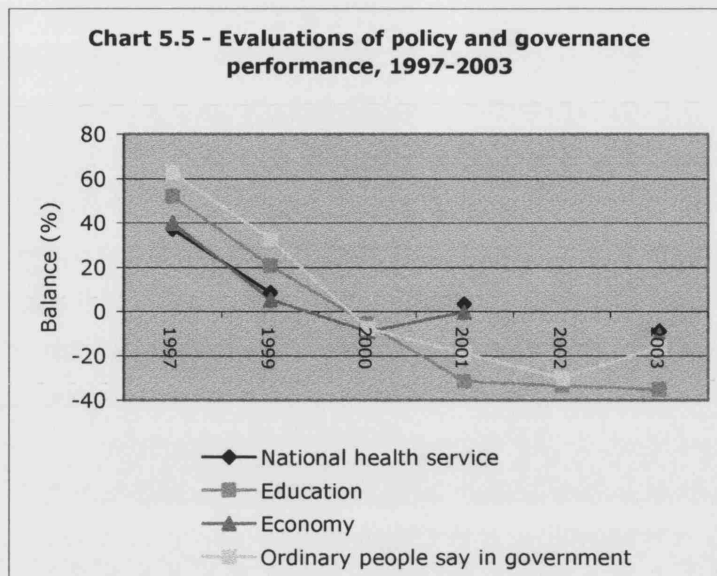
<sup>129</sup> The interaction term is Country(Scotland)\*Attitudes to devolution(support devolution).



Question wording: "Which do you think ought to have the most influence over the way Scotland is run: the Scottish Parliament, the UK government at Westminster, local councils in Scotland, or the European Union"  
 Source: As Chart 5.1

Maybe the problem reflects poor perceived performance on the part of the Parliament. After all, support for devolution in the late 1990s was found to be closely associated with the perceived benefits that a Scottish Parliament would bring (Brown et al, 1999: 113-28; Surridge and McCrone, 1999; Paterson et al, 2001: 92-98). Since 1997, people in Scotland have been asked what impact they thought the Scottish Parliament is having, or will have, on a variety of performance and governance outcomes. The picture across these multiple performance indicators is one of declining evaluations and expectations. Thus, when it comes to outcomes on education, health, the economy and responsiveness to popular demands, fewer people expect the Scottish Parliament to stimulate positive outcomes now than in 1997 and 1999 (Chart 5.5).

The trends in performance evaluations since 1999 correspond closely to those for trust. So maybe this is our explanation for the decline in trust. But if this account is really to stand up, we must find that the decline in trust is particularly pronounced among those who give the Parliament unfavourable performance ratings. If we find that trust has also declined among those who give the Parliament more positive ratings, then it would be unlikely that declining trust reflected lower performance evaluations. In fact, however, this is exactly what we find. Trust has declined by more or less the same amount among those with high performance expectations as among those with lower expectations. I have

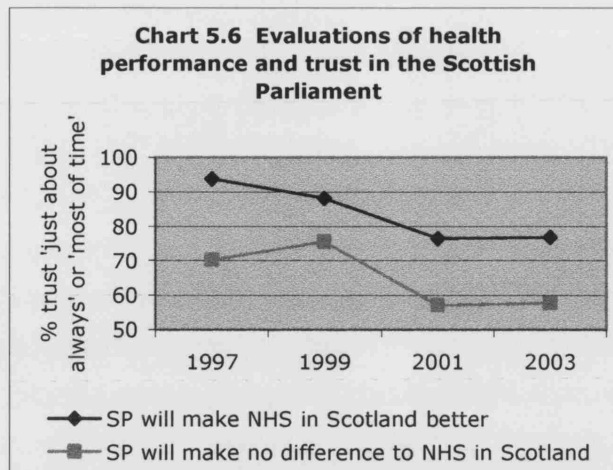


Balance is per cent expecting performance improvements minus per cent expecting no difference in performance.

Sources: *Scottish and Welsh Referendum Study (1997)*, *Scottish Parliament Election Study (1999)*, *Scottish Social Attitudes (other years)*.

examined the relationship over time between performance evaluations and political trust for three areas of performance: the NHS, educational standards and popular say in the way Scotland is governed. The each, the picture is essentially the same. Thus, among those who think that the Parliament will make the NHS in Scotland better, levels of trust are higher than among those who think it will make no difference.<sup>130</sup> But the trends in trust over time between the two groups are very similar; both have declined (Chart 5.6). In sum, it does not appear as though changes in trust over time have been driven by evaluations of the Parliament's performance.

<sup>130</sup> Very few people think the Parliament will actually weaken performance (for example, in 2003, only 10 per cent thought the effect of the Parliament would be to reduce standards in education; 37 per cent said the effect would be to improve standards, while 46 per cent said it would make no difference. The remainder didn't know). Thus, I use the group suggesting the Parliament will make no difference as the comparison with those who think the Parliament will improve things.



Sources: As Chart 5.5

So maybe the decline in trust between 1999 and 2000 simply reflected a reversion to more 'normal' levels from the heightened expectations that accompanied the inauguration of the Scottish Parliament. But we can get additional purchase on what factors shape levels of trust by turning from longitudinal analysis to cross-sectional analysis, for which the range of indicators at our disposal is greater. Admittedly, cross-sectional approaches make it more difficult to establish the causal relationship between variables; we have to infer such causality from patterns of association. But analysis of attitudes in a single year is still helpful in identifying which factors are (and are not) associated with trust, and therefore in which direction further reforms might best be directed. The fullest set of attitudes to devolution is found in the *Scottish Social Attitudes 2003* survey, which therefore provides the data for what follows. My analysis is based on a multivariate regression model of trust for 2003, in which the impact of various potentially causal factors can be simultaneously estimated.

The dependent variable I use is a question on trust in the Scottish Parliament "to act in Scotland's best long term interests" (with 1=low trust and 4=high trust; all variables and codings are set out in Annex Four(b)). I include one term to gauge views on the principle of devolution, contrasting people who favour either independence or no devolution at all for Scotland with those who favour devolution. There are three variables that tap judgements about the capacity of the devolved institutions: one that asks how far the Scottish Parliament *does* influence how Scotland is governed, a second that asks how far the Parliament *should* influence how Scotland is governed, and a third that asks whether the Parliament should be granted more powers. I use multiple indicators of performance. Judgements about policy outcomes are tapped by questions on

whether devolution will improve or worsen education, the economy and the NHS, and whether it will result in lower or higher levels of tax. Judgements on governance issues are measured by questions on whether devolution will provide Scotland with a stronger voice in the UK and will give people more say in decision making. I employ two questions to gauge judgements on policy actors: one rating for Jack McConnell and one for Tony Blair. If devolution is encouraging Scots to take greater responsibility for policy outcomes that affect them, we should find a more pronounced relationship between trust and the Scottish First Minister's ratings than with the Prime Minister's ratings. I include variables that tap attitudes towards two features of the Parliament. The first is whether, as some commentators allege, the Parliament has an in-built bias towards certain parts of Scotland over others.<sup>131</sup> The second is whether the new Parliament building should have been undertaken or not.<sup>132</sup> Finally, I include a term for contact with a member of the Parliament (MSP), to examine whether such representative linkages stimulate greater confidence in the Parliament.

The model also includes a number of control variables, covering demographic and personal characteristics that might be thought to influence an individual's level of trust. Basic demographics are age, social class, education and national identity. The last is usually found to play a modest role at best in explaining attitudes to devolution (see Paterson et al, 2001: 112-14), although it may be that the magnitude of this relationship has changed since 1999. Whether a respondent supports a party (Labour or the Liberal Democrats) that has 'won' from the electoral process - in the sense of gaining executive office - might also affect their trust in the Parliament. Finally, reflecting the media's often highly critical reporting of the Scottish Parliament, I include a control for newspaper readership. I distinguish between survey respondents who regularly read a newspaper critical of the Parliament and/or the Parliament building, and those who read a less critical newspaper or no newspaper at all.<sup>133</sup>

Since the dependent variable is a four point scale, I therefore estimate the model using ordered logit. The estimations proceed in three stages: the first model includes variables that tap assessments of the principle of devolution and the

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<sup>131</sup> The particular claim, or fear, prior to devolution was that the Parliament would be skewed towards the interests of the central-west area around Glasgow, since the largest group of representatives in the Parliament would be from Labour, whose electoral strength is concentrated in Glasgow.

<sup>132</sup> The new Parliament building, initially costed at £40 million but ending up costing ten times as much, was a subject of intense media and public criticism, eventually leading to a full inquiry which reported in 2004.

<sup>133</sup> Advice on the difficult task of coding newspapers into 'critical' and 'non critical' was provided by John Curtice, to whom I am grateful.

capacity of the devolved institutions, the second model adds in performance and governance evaluations and the third model includes leadership evaluations, judgements about the Parliament and contact with MSPs. I have coded most of the questions so that negative responses (ie. opposition to devolution, low performance evaluations etc) should yield negative coefficients.<sup>134</sup>

The results from the equations (Table 5.3) show that attitudes towards the principle of devolution, and to the powers of the devolved bodies, make only a limited contribution to explaining trust. In the first model, we find that, contrary to expectations, those who prefer a constitutional status for Scotland other than devolution are more trusting than those who prefer the model of the Scottish Parliament. But the parameter for opposition to devolution is significant in the first model only; opposition to devolution does not survive as a predictor of trust once performance evaluations are entered in the second model. Support for independence is, however, a more robust predictor of trust. It may be that supporters of independence have lower expectations of the Parliament than supporters of devolution, which would explain why the parameter for attitudes to independence becomes insignificant once performance evaluations are entered in the equation in model three.<sup>135</sup> When it comes to measures of the capacity of the devolved institutions, we again find a rather unclear picture. Thus, contrary to expectations, we find that people who see power in Scotland exercised primarily by a body other than the Scottish Parliament (Westminster, local government or the European Union) are more trustful than those who see Holyrood as the dominant body. But again, this finding appears to be an artefact, since the parameter loses its significance once a wider range of evaluations are included in model three. What does remain a consistent predictor of trust is a belief that the Parliament should be granted additional powers (a measure that gains the support of around six in ten people among the population, with just one in four - 23 per cent - disagreeing). Note that the relationship between trust in the Parliament and support for extending its powers is positive; thus, the more Scots trust their Parliament, the more likely they are to favour increasing its capacity. I surmised above that low trust might be associated with frustration at the perceived limited powers available to Holyrood; this does not appear to be the case.

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<sup>134</sup> Admittedly, the anticipated direction on some questions is not clear in advance; for example, should trust be higher among those who favour boosting the powers of the Scottish Parliament or among those who think its existing powers suffice? Such cases of ambiguous prior direction are, however, limited to a couple of measures.

<sup>135</sup> Although even then, the parameter measuring support for independence only just fails to achieve significance at the 5 per cent level.

Table 5.3 Model of political trust and evaluations of devolution in Scotland, 2003

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	se	B	se	B	se
<i>Control variables</i>						
Age (65 and over)						
18-24	-0.25	.30	0.05	.33	0.07	.35
25-44	0.50	.20*	0.43	.23	0.34	.23
45-64	0.31	.19	0.29	.22	0.11	.22
Class (working class)						
Manual	0.14	.22	-0.07	.25	-0.26	.26
Petty bourgeoisie	-0.51	.27	-0.24	.30	-0.15	.33
Routine non-manual	0.32	.20	0.34	.23	0.30	.24
Salaried	-0.11	.21	0.00	.23	-0.16	.24
Education (no qualifications)						
Foreign/CSE and above	-0.29	.19	-0.20	.21	-0.12	.22
A level and above	-0.80	.21**	-0.79	.23**	-0.80	.24**
Degree	-0.39	.27	-0.33	.30	-0.29	.31
Identity (British not Scottish)						
More British than Scottish	-1.29	.49**	-1.82	.54**	-1.38	.59*
Equal British and Scottish	0.13	.37	-0.16	.41	0.27	.46
More Scottish than British	-0.26	.37	-0.51	.40	0.05	.45
Scottish not British	-0.09	.37	-0.37	.41	0.07	.45
Reader of newspaper hostile to devolution (reader of non-hostile paper/ non reader)	0.16	.14	-0.12	.16	-0.10	.16
Electoral winner	-0.11	.14	0.06	.16	0.19	.17
<i>Principle and capacity of devolution</i>						
Views on devolution (support SP)						
Oppose devolution	0.65	.23**	0.21	.26	0.27	.28
Support independence	0.43	.17*	0.45	.19*	0.38	.20
Westminster influences Scotland (SP influences)	0.81	.19**	0.50	.21*	0.32	.22
SP should influence Scotland (Westminster should influence)	0.24	.17	0.34	.19	0.29	.20
SP should be given more powers	0.46	.08**	0.26	.09**	0.23	.09*
<i>Policy performance</i>						
SP worsening education standards			-0.11	.16	0.00	.16
SP worsening Scotland's economy			-0.21	.12	-0.17	.13
SP worsening NHS in Scotland			-0.33	.12**	-0.26	.12*
SP will increase taxes in Scotland			0.30	.11**	0.22	.11*
<i>Governance performance</i>						
SP gives Scotland weaker voice in UK			-0.36	.14*	-0.34	.15*
SP gives people less say			-0.49	.16**	-0.42	.16**
<i>Operation of Parliament</i>						
SP is unrepresentative					-0.37	.09**
Opposed to SP building					-0.26	.14
<i>Leadership evaluations</i>						
Rating of Jack McConnell					-0.23	.05**
Rating of Tony Blair					0.06	.04
<i>Contact with Parliament</i>						
Contacted MSP (not contacted MSP)					-0.15	.27
Likelihood ratio $\chi^2$ (df)	130.918 (21)**		209.829 (27)**		254.255 (32)**	
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2$	0.15		0.27		0.33	
N	891		760		725	

Where variables have been entered as categorical terms, the reference categories are given in parentheses.

\* $p \leq .05$  \*\* $p \leq .01$

Source: *Scottish Social Attitudes 2003*

Evaluations of the performance of the Scottish Parliament are more solid predictors of trust, although again not in a straightforward manner. For a start, only some aspects of performance seem to matter; the perceived impact of the Parliament on educational standards and economic performance does not affect trust. The parameter for expectations on tax is positive, suggesting that people who expect the Parliament to increase taxes are more trustful than those who expect taxes to fall. This apparently perplexing finding can perhaps be rationalised on the basis that those who trust the Parliament may wish it to increase personal taxation (to pay for the welfare programmes that Scots favour more than voters elsewhere in Britain; see page 6). In other words, in answering the question about what effect the Parliament will have on taxes, some respondents may be giving a normative, as well as a descriptive, response.

On the other measures of performance, however, the coefficients are, as expected, negatively signed. Thus, poor performance evaluations when it comes to the NHS are associated with low levels of trust.<sup>136</sup> Note that 'governance' or 'democratic' performance is as important for trust as 'policy' performance. Thus, judgements about whether devolution has given Scotland a stronger voice in the UK and people more say in the way decisions are made are both (negatively) associated with trust. Personality also matters. The ratings for the First Minister, Jack McConnell, are significantly associated with trust in the Parliament; low ratings are associated with low levels of trust in the Parliament. The parameter is highly significant even after controlling for performance evaluations, suggesting that, in spite of the attempt towards more collective, and consensual, politics, political authority in Scotland is still heavily evaluated through its political leaders. Of more reassurance to the designers of devolution is the fact that trust in the devolved institution is in no way affected by evaluations of the Prime Minister in London.

Finally, other aspects of the Parliament also affect the extent to which it is trusted by Scots.<sup>137</sup> A perception that the Parliament privileges the interests of certain areas of Scotland is associated with low levels of trust.<sup>138</sup> Interestingly - in the light of the outcry over the cost of its construction - attitudes towards the new

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<sup>136</sup> Recall that relatively few people see the Parliament as having worsened standards; rather, many or most think it has made no difference to outcomes.

<sup>137</sup> There is a further increase in the  $\chi^2$  and  $R^2$  for this model, suggesting that the additional variables make a further contribution to the explanatory power of the model.

<sup>138</sup> Asked about the representativeness of the Scottish Parliament, two thirds (66 per cent) said they thought it looked after the interests of some parts of Scotland more than others, while only one in three (29 per cent) said they thought it looked after all parts equally.



Scottish Parliament building are not significantly related to trust.<sup>139</sup> Finally, trust is not affected by whether a respondent has had contact with an elected representative (MSP).<sup>140</sup>

What do these results tell us about why people do or do not trust the new devolved institutions in Scotland? What do they suggest about the likely future relationship between the Parliament and Scottish citizens? First, trust appears to be little influenced by attitudes to the principle of devolution, or to the capacity of the Holyrood Parliament. To that extent, it is unlikely that major constitutional re-engineering will be required to stimulate further rises in trust. While trust is positively related to support for increasing the Parliament's powers, this most likely means that people who trust Holyrood are more likely to support enhancing its capacity than people whose trust is lower. In other words, extending the capacity of the Parliament is unlikely to boost levels of trust across the population. Second, trust is more closely associated with judgements about its performance. Cross-sectional data cannot tell us whether poor performance leads to low trust, or vice versa. The longitudinal data reviewed above suggested that evaluations of policy performance are not strongly related to trust. The cross-sectional data suggests that only in one area - standards in the NHS - is trust linked to policy performance in the expected direction. But there are other aspects of performance that might matter more for trust. In particular, the Parliament needs to examine its own operation and processes, not so much in relation to high profile matters such as its own facilities, but on more fundamental issues such as the way it represents people across all parts of the country.

## **Voting**

### ***Electoral participation***

Turnout at the first Scottish election in 1999 was 58.1 per cent; four years later it fell to 49.4 per cent. This compares with turnout among Scots at Westminster elections of 71.3 per cent in 1997 and 58.2 per cent in 2001, and with turnout at the most proximate local elections of 44.9 per cent in 1995 and 49.2 per cent in 2003.<sup>141</sup> On the face of it, then, popular engagement with the devolved

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<sup>139</sup> Although the coefficient in model three falls just short of statistical significance at the 5 per cent level.

<sup>140</sup> Not surprisingly since only one in ten people report having contacted an MSP in the last four years.

<sup>141</sup> Source: Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth. Local elections were also held in Scotland in 1999, but these were held at the same time as the Scottish Parliament contest, and thus cannot form a point of reference to the devolution elections. The local elections in 2003

institutions has been limited. But we need to understand why people in Scotland did or did not vote. To what extent does low participation reflect popular discontent with the principle of devolution? Or, is the cause more the perceived relevance or 'salience' of the contest. If Holyrood was seen as having less importance for the lives of Scottish people than Westminster, it would not be surprising if participation rates for Scottish elections fell below those for Westminster contests. In this case, the low relative turnout might be seen as a rational response by voters, although it would still indicate that devolution has not reconnected citizens and government in the way its designers intended. Alternatively, there may be little at fault with the principle or design of the Scottish Parliament; low participation may simply reflect a failure among political actors (ie. the parties) to enthuse and engage the electorate.

These questions are similar to those asked in relation to trust in the previous section. But the answers will not necessarily be the same. Just because performance evaluations, for example, appear to shape levels of trust, it does not follow that they will perform a similar role in relation to turnout. It is therefore worthwhile repeating for turnout some of the analysis conducted in the previous section for trust. The results will be important in gauging the current and likely future success of devolution. For example, if we find that turnout at the Scottish elections is substantially explained by the perceived unimportance of the institution being elected, this would suggest a rather more fundamental challenge than if turnout is primarily explicable in terms of competition between the parties.

In what follows, I try to identify which features of devolution are associated with voters' decision to participate or not in the first two Scottish elections. I also examine whether these features help explain the decline in turnout from 1999 to 2003. In other words, once people became more familiar with devolution, and its early successes and failures, did this experience affect their decision whether or not to vote in 2003? I answer both questions by constructing separate regression models of turnout for 1999 and 2003. The independent variables are the same in both models, allowing us to directly compare their impact across the two elections. The first three sets of explanatory variables also mirror those used in the analysis of trust, above (all variable wordings and codings are set out in Annex Four(c)). In the first set, I include attitudes towards the principle of devolution and the capacity of the devolved institutions. I also include a variable that measures how

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were combined with the European Parliament contest, which may help explain the increase in turnout for this year.

salient respondents think the Scottish elections are. The notion of salience captures the importance of an election for outcomes, although various features may contribute to this evaluation (such as the power of the body being elected and the nature of political competition between the parties). A key indicator of salience is a question that asks how much difference is made by Scottish elections. A point of comparison is offered by an identical question asked of Westminster elections. Since this question is a broad one - that potentially subsumes other indicators of salience - I only introduce the term in a second model. In the first model, I include a variety of other indicators relating to salience, many of which were also included in the cross-sectional model of trust, above, thus allowing us to compare which factors drive trust and turnout. The second set of measures is around performance on policy and governance issues, identical to that used for trust. The third set of measures covers indicators of trust and efficacy - to determine how far the decline in turnout in 2003 might have reflected growing discontent with political institutions - and measures of the distinctiveness of the three main parties, Labour and either the Conservatives or the Scottish National Party.<sup>142</sup>

Since the dependent variable in this analysis is dichotomous (reported vote versus reported non-vote), I use logistic regression to estimate the two models. The data derives from the *Scottish Parliament Election Survey 1999* and *Scottish Social Attitudes 2003*. My sample is of respondents who reported having voted at the previous general elections; thus I confine my analysis to exploring why people who participate at Westminster elections either engage with, or shun, the Scottish contests.<sup>143</sup> I have coded the dependent variable so that a positive coefficient indicates an increased likelihood of not voting in 1999 or 2003.

Across the two models (Tables 5.4 and 5.5), we can see that attitudes to devolution have only a modest impact on the decision to vote, each model only accounting for around 20 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable. This limited explanatory power is of little concern, since it is not my task to explain why people did or did not vote in 1999 and 2003, only to identify how far this decision was affected by reactions to devolution. When we come to investigate these reactions, we can see that attitudes to the principle of devolution played little role in explaining the decision to vote. Compared with those who support

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<sup>142</sup> Analyses of turnout in Britain stress that distinctiveness between the main parties is a key determinant of individual's propensity to participate at elections (see, for example, Heath and Taylor, 1999).

the principle of devolution, there is no statistically significant effect on turnout among those who favour either independence or no devolution at all.<sup>144</sup> Nor is turnout much affected by judgements about the performance of the Scottish Parliament. Only one performance evaluation is significantly associated with turnout; the degree to which people thought the Parliament would offer them more say in how decisions are made (non-voting is positively correlated with believing the Parliament does not extend popular say in government). But in 2003, no aspect of performance significantly colours the decision to vote or not. The blame for the decline in turnout cannot be pinned on rising discontent with the performance of the devolved institutions.

In fact, of all my variables, the only set which plays a consistent role is that on electoral salience. One aspect of salience that appears to matter is party competition. In 1999, the less the perceived difference between Labour and the SNP, the higher the odds that someone would not vote. In 2003, the less the perceived difference between Labour and the Conservatives, the greater the odds of abstaining.<sup>145</sup> In 1999, the importance of party competition for turnout endures even when the portmanteau 'difference' variable is introduced (model two). But in 2003, the perceived difference between Labour and the Conservatives no longer helps explain the turnout decision when the difference variable is introduced.

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<sup>143</sup> Thus, my analysis is of why people participate in elections to certain institutions but not for others, not why some people do not participate at all.

<sup>144</sup> For a similar result from a different regression model, see Boon and Curtice, 2003: 51-52. In Wales, turnout has been found to be associated with attitudes towards the principle of devolution, perhaps reflecting the more equivocal attitudes to devolution among the Welsh population (Scully et al, 2004).

<sup>145</sup> Boon and Curtice (2003: 51-2) suggest that turnout in 2003 was driven more by perceived differences between Labour and the SNP than by differences between Labour and the Conservatives. Why their results should differ substantially from mine is unclear, other than that their model of

Table 5.4 Model of turnout at the 1999 Scottish Parliament election

	Model I		Model II	
	B	se	B	se
Constant	-3.00	.98**	-3.39	1.00**
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age (65 and above)				
18-24	1.23	.51*	1.25	.52*
25-44	1.55	.31**	1.55	.32**
45-64	0.87	.30**	0.86	.30**
Class (salaried)				
Working class	-0.79	.28**	-0.68	.28*
Manual	-0.37	.28	-0.37	.28
Petty bourgeoisie	0.09	.33	0.22	.33
Routine non manual	0.18	.33	0.32	.34
Education (degree)				
No qualifications	0.20	.40	0.15	.40
CSE/foreign and above	0.53	.37	0.50	.37
A level and above	0.67	.34*	0.62	.34
Identity (Scottish not British)				
More Scottish than British	-0.11	.22	-0.11	.23
Equal Scottish and British	-0.01	.27	-0.09	.27
More British than Scottish	0.42	.55	0.35	.56
British not Scottish	0.01	.62	0.02	.63
<i>Principle and capacity of devolution</i>				
Views on devolution (support devolution)				
Support independence	-0.14	.23	-0.12	.23
Oppose devolution	0.21	.36	0.32	.37
Dominant influence in Scotland (SP)				
Westminster/EU/local councils	0.27	.20	0.18	.20
Should influence Scotland (Westminster/EU/local)				
Scottish Parliament	0.20	.24	0.13	.25
SP should be given more powers	0.02	.11	0.07	.11
Scottish election makes no difference	-	-	0.37	.10**
Westminster election makes no difference	-	-	-0.06	.09
<i>Performance</i>				
SP worsening education standards	-0.31	.21	-0.30	.21
SP worsening Scotland's economy	0.10	.13	0.11	.13
SP worsening NHS in Scotland	-0.01	.15	-0.08	.16
SP will increase taxes in Scotland	0.07	.14	0.09	.14
SP gives people less say	0.82	.21**	0.77	.21**
SP gives Scotland weaker voice in UK	-0.23	.18	-0.26	.18
<i>Party competition</i>				
No difference between Lab-Con	0.07	.12	0.00	.12
No difference between Lab-SNP	0.51	.13**	0.39	.13**
<i>General discontent</i>				
Don't trust SP to work in Scotland's interests	0.02	.09	0.01	.09
Parties only interested in votes not opinions	-0.19	.10	-0.14	.11
Nagelkerke pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.19		0.21	
N	903		903	

\* p&lt;0.05, \*\*p&lt;0.01

Source: Scottish Parliament Election Survey 1999

turnout is very different from mine, and that they rely on a different survey, albeit one conducted at the same time as the *Scottish Social Attitudes* immediately after the election in May 2003.

Table 5.5 Model of turnout at the 2003 Scottish Parliament election

	Model I		Model II	
	B	se	B	se
Constant	-2.59	1.08*	-2.56	1.10*
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age (65 and above)				
18-24	1.64	.55**	1.35	.57*
25-44	1.58	.32**	1.51	.33**
45-64	0.54	.31	0.42	.31
Class (salaried)				
Working class	0.73	.32*	0.85	.33**
Manual	1.02	.36**	1.09	.36**
Petty bourgeoisie	-0.10	.46	0.09	.47
Routine non manual	0.43	.31	0.49	.32
Education (degree)				
No qualifications	0.40	.43	0.25	.44
CSE/foreign and above	0.22	.39	0.05	.40
A level and above	0.25	.35	0.07	.36
Identity (Scottish not British)				
More Scottish than British	-0.11	.25	-0.17	.26
Equal Scottish and British	-0.13	.31	-0.21	.32
More British than Scottish	-0.01	.58	-0.08	.59
British not Scottish	0.98	.59	0.88	.60
<i>Principle and capacity of devolution</i>				
Views on devolution (support devolution)				
Support independence	-0.32	.27	-0.33	.27
Oppose devolution	-0.02	.35	0.05	.35
Dominant influence in Scotland (SP)				
Westminster/EU/local councils	0.11	.27	0.13	.28
Should influence Scotland (Westminster/EU/local)				
Scottish Parliament	0.16	.25	0.23	.26
SP should be given more powers	-0.10	.12	-0.07	.12
Scottish election makes no difference	-	-	0.46	.12**
Westminster election makes no difference	-	-	-0.15	.12
<i>Performance</i>				
SP worsening education standards	0.30	.21	0.30	.22
SP worsening Scotland's economy	-0.13	.17	-0.09	.17
SP worsening NHS in Scotland	0.03	.15	-0.03	.16
SP will increase taxes in Scotland	0.02	.14	0.03	.15
SP gives people less say	0.18	.21	0.16	.21
SP gives Scotland weaker voice in UK	-0.11	.20	-0.23	.20
<i>Party competition</i>				
No difference between Lab-Con	0.28	.14*	0.19	.15
No difference between Lab-SNP	0.12	.15	0.06	.15
<i>General discontent</i>				
Don't trust SP to work in Scotland's interests	0.04	.16	-0.04	.16
Parties only interested in votes not opinions	0.02	.11	-0.03	.11
Nagelkerke pseudo R <sup>2</sup>		0.15		0.19
N		638		638

\* p&lt;0.05, \*\*p&lt;0.01

Source: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2003

So participation in Scottish Parliament elections is determined primarily by how important people deem the contest to be. Importance does not appear to be defined in terms of the balance of power between different tiers of government (ie. by who *does* and who *should* determine how Scotland is governed), nor by how much power the Parliament should have. Rather, it appears to be

determined by the nature of the parties competing for office, and by a more general sense of what difference the result will make.<sup>146</sup> But note that the relationship between perceived salience and turnout has not changed much between 1999 and 2003 (the coefficients are of similar magnitude in both years). So turnout has not declined over the period because the effect of perceived salience has grown. Rather, what has grown is the proportion of people who judge the election to make little difference (Table 5.6). In other words, a primary reason behind the fall in turnout at the second Scottish election was that fewer people than four years earlier saw the contest as making much difference to outcomes.<sup>147</sup>

**Table 5.6 Judgements about electoral salience**

"Some people say that it makes no difference which party wins in elections, things go on much the same. How much difference to you think it makes who wins in elections to ..."

%	A great deal/ quite a lot	Some	Not very much/None	Don't know
1999				
... the Scottish Parliament	55.4	17.9	24.1	2.5
... the UK House of Commons	54.1	16.9	27.0	1.9
2003				
... the Scottish Parliament	40.8	19.6	37.2	2.4
... the UK House of Commons	47.6	19.0	31.7	1.8

Sources: *Scottish Parliament Election Survey 1999*, *Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2003*

What are the conclusions from my analyses of the impact of devolution on trust and turnout? First, when it comes to political attitudes, devolution appears to have had beneficial consequences for citizen-government linkages. Certainly, devolution has established a tier of government in which trust - both in absolute and in relative terms - is high. Levels of electoral participation are, however, less healthy, falling some way short of turnout for the national tier of government. Just as the symptoms differ, so do the apparent causes. Trust is primarily shaped - at least within the confines of my models - by perceptions of institutional performance, both in policy and in governance terms. Participation is primarily shaped by perceptions about the significance of the contest. The corollary is that efforts to boost trust and turnout must largely focus on different means and mechanisms; addressing one set of mechanisms may boost turnout, but do little for trust, and vice versa.

<sup>146</sup> For similar results from different regression models, see Paterson et al, 2001: 54-57; Boon and Curtice, 2003: 51-52; Ingram 2003.

<sup>147</sup> For a similar finding, see Boon and Curtice, 2003: 51-2.

### ***Electoral behaviour***

So far, I have discussed citizen-government linkages at the ballot box by reference to turnout. But the quality of these linkages arguably depends as much on what voters do at the ballot box as on whether they cast a ballot at all. In particular, when it comes to elections to the Scottish Parliament, do voters cast their ballot on issues relating to Scotland (ie. on the performance of the Parliament and its main political actors), or are their decisions more concerned with issues and personalities at Westminster?<sup>148</sup> There is evidence that voting behaviour at local elections in Britain is substantially shaped by national level issues, rather than local ones (Miller, 1988; but see Heath et al, 1999 and Rallings and Thrasher, 1997). Might elections to the Scottish Parliament similarly function primarily as "... a large-scale super opinion poll on the general popularity of central government" (Miller, 1988: 242)? If so, it could hardly be argued that devolution had induced greater policy responsiveness and stimulated closer citizen-government linkages.

Analysis undertaken after the first Scottish election suggests that voting decisions did not hinge on responses to the national tier. In particular, Labour's weak performance did not derive from the party's unpopularity at Westminster. But neither was it determined by the party's stance on the key issues facing Scottish voters. Rather, Labour performed poorly in 1999 because it was not seen as capable of representing Scotland's interests within the Union (Paterson et al, 2001: 27-45). Thus, voting behaviour at the first devolution election was not determined by reactions to Westminster or to policy dilemmas facing the new Scottish Parliament, but more by attitudes to Scotland's position within the Union.<sup>149</sup> To that extent, it did allow voters to convey a set of preferences to political actors within Scotland, something that appears to elude many of their counterparts at British local elections.

We should expect similar results for the second devolution election in 2003. Asked in 1999 whether they had cast their vote primarily on issues facing Scotland or issues facing Britain as a whole, 55 per cent chose the former and 32

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<sup>148</sup> This distinction is captured in the notion of 'first order' elections (in which voting behaviour is shaped by the tier of government being chosen) and 'second order elections (in which behaviour is shaped by another, more salient, tier of government). The distinction between first and second order status was originally developed to explain voting behaviour at European Parliament elections, but has also been used to explain behaviour at local and regional elections (see Heath et al, 1999).

<sup>149</sup> For similar conclusions in relation to the first devolution election in Wales, see Trystan et al, 2003.



per cent the latter (the remainder selecting issues affecting both tiers equally). In spite of a decline in the perceived importance of the Scottish Parliament and elections to it (Table 5.6), a slightly higher proportion of voters in 2003 indicated that the primary influence on their vote was Scottish issues (57 per cent), and a slightly lower proportion selected British issues (28 per cent).

### **Other indicators: Representational linkages**

I have discussed the impact of devolution on citizen-government linkages by reference to political attitudes and electoral behaviour. But we can also gauge the health of these linkages by reference to levels of direct engagement with the devolved institutions. The responsiveness of representative institutions depends not only on periodic elections, but also on day to day contact between individual citizens and their elected representatives.<sup>150</sup>

Only one survey of citizens has attempted to measure levels of contact between people in Scotland and representatives of different tiers of government. The *Scottish Social Attitudes* survey in 2003 asked respondents whether, in the preceding four years, they had ever contacted the MP, MSP or local councillor for their area. The results show that levels of contact are lowest for MPs (8 per cent indicated they had made contact), marginally higher for MSPs (10 per cent) and highest of all for local councillors (20 per cent).

This data may even underestimate the extent to which MSPs are superseding MPs as the main representational linkage above the local level. Given that the Parliament had only been in operation for four years at the time the survey was conducted, the figures on actual contact with MSPs might have been expected to have been low. In surveys conducted in 2000 and 2003 that asked about hypothetical contact, MSPs outperform MPs by rather more. The question asked in 2000 was:

"Say that you or someone in your family had a serious personal problem about the payment of their child benefit/getting treatment on the National Health Service and you decide you need to go to a politician for help. Who do you think you would be most likely to turn to [in 2003 "... better able to help you]: a local Westminster MP, a local Holyrood MSP or a local councillor?"

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<sup>150</sup> Of course, high rates of citizen contact with elected representatives might indicate citizen discontent with the performance of an institution or representative. Even so, the fact that forums exist for the airing of such grievances is an important part of the representative function, and thus itself an indication of healthy citizen-government linkages.

Unfortunately, the question was not asked in identical form, or with the same response categories, in 2003, which limits our ability to compare changes over time. Nonetheless, the results show that representational linkages with the Scottish Parliament are strong. From the 2001 data, it is clear that local councillors are the main port of call, despite the fact that both policy problems raised in the survey question do not fall within the competence of local government (Table 5.7). But the second most favoured representative is the Holyrood MSP, not the Westminster MP, again irrespective of the fact that child benefit is a 'reserved' issue and thus a matter for representatives at Westminster not Holyrood. Thus, while Westminster might be a more powerful tier of government in people's minds (see Table 5.6), the relative proximity of the devolved tier - along, perhaps, with the higher ratio of representatives to population and the range of parties represented - appears to play an important role in stimulating closer linkages between citizens and their elected representatives.

**Table 5.7 Representative contacts for two policy issues, 2001 and 2003**

%	Child benefit		NHS treatment	
	1999	2003	1999	2003
Westminster MP	15.0	24.1	19.9	20.6
Holyrood MSP	17.4	33.4	27.7	37.5
Both	-	37.1	-	36.8
Local councillor	61.5	-	47.1	-
Don't know	6.0	5.4	5.3	5.2

Source: *Scottish Social Attitudes surveys 2001 and 2003*

## EXTENDING DEVOLUTION IN BRITAIN

As I noted in the opening section of this chapter, devolution is an incomplete reform, having been extended thus far only to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London. I should perhaps have described devolution as an ongoing reform, since there is provision to extend limited self-government to various regions in England. In this final section, I consider the evidence about how, in general terms, people in Britain - and particularly in England - assess the merits of devolution.

One way of assessing the likely legitimacy of such a reform is to examine what support exists for any proposed devolved agencies, just as I did for Scotland in Table 5.1. In fact, most studies show rather lukewarm support for a regional tier

of government in England (Heath et al, 2003).<sup>151</sup> But this is to focus narrowly on an institution, when arguably the focus should be on a broader range of issues associated with the decentralisation of political authority. The virtues and vices of transferring powers from a large, central political unit to one or more smaller units are the subject of vigorous theoretical debate, reviewed in an early section of this chapter. But where do people in England stand in relation to this debate? Do people have more trust and confidence in political institutions and actors located closer to them than in those more distant? Are political communities similarly conceived, with identities declining in strength as the size of the political unit increases? Does cognitive engagement - for example, levels of political interest - also decline as a function of size? Arguably, it is people's responses to these issues that shape their views on the appropriate territorial location of political power, and thus their reactions to specific proposals for devolved government.

Let me start with the individual's most basic orientation to different territorial units: his or her sense of attachment or identity. Feelings of attachment or identity represent a generalised orientation to a citizen's *milieu*; 'system affect', in Almond and Verba's (1963: ch4) phrase, as opposed to 'input' or 'output affect', which tap more specific orientations towards the political system. The implication of system affect for political attitudes is simple, since people are more likely to support political institutions that correspond with their sense of attachment and identity than with ones that do not. How far, then, are attachments and identities among people in England expressed in terms of national or sub-national communities?

There is some evidence that small units - neighbourhood, village, town - attract stronger feelings of attachment than larger units, such as the district or county (Rallings et al, 1994). Other recent surveys suggest that feelings of attachment to region are as strong as those to neighbourhood, village or town. But attachment to country is even stronger.<sup>152</sup> The *British Social Attitudes 2003* survey suggests that identity with the region is less strong than identity with the respondent's locality and country. Among people in England, the survey found that 28 per cent of respondents were "very closely" attached to their region, a

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<sup>151</sup> Seemingly confirmed by the overwhelming rejection of the Government's devolution proposal by voters in the North East in November 2004.

<sup>152</sup> I base this on data collected from the following surveys: the *British Political Participation Study* (1984-85), the *Public Opinion and Local Citizenship Study* (1994-95) and the *Citizen Audit* survey (2000). Data for first two studies was accessed via the Data Archive at the University of Essex. The *Citizen Audit* data was kindly made available to the author by Paul Whiteley.

lower level of identity than with the local area (39 per cent attached) and with England (38 per cent).<sup>153</sup> There is little to suggest here, then, that a centralised system of political authority violates people's sense of political community.

If the nation state retains strong affective attachments for many people in Britain, does it continue to attract their cognitive engagement? We can gauge this by measuring levels of political interest in local, regional and national issues. Across various surveys on this topic, the conclusion is that citizens tend to be more interested in national issues than in local matters. Surveys conducted in 1970 (Kilbrandon), 1986 (Miller, 1988: 15-18) and 1998 (Rao and Young, 1999: 47) concur on this point.<sup>154</sup> The picture appears to hold true for regional issues, too. The *Citizen Audit* survey conducted in 2000 found that around one quarter (26 per cent) of respondents across Britain said they were 'very' or 'fairly' interested in European politics, one third in regional (33 per cent) and local (36 per cent) politics, and one half (49 per cent) in national politics (Pattie et al, 2004: 154-5). So patterns of cognitive engagement mirror patterns of affective attachment, in being directed at the national level.

However, the theoretical claims in favour of decentralised government - on the basis of their supposed greater responsiveness to citizen demands - find stronger support when we consider attitudes to specific institutions and actors. For example, perceptions of being able to influence policy makers diminish as the scale of government increases. The *Civic Culture* study in the early 1960s found, for example, that the proportions of Britons saying they could do something about an unjust policy action was higher in relation to local government (where 78 per cent believed they could do something) than for central government (where the figure was 62 per cent) (Almond and Verba, 1963: 184-5). Twenty five years on, a survey similarly found that more people had taken action on an issue of concern to them in relation to local government than in relation to national government. Moreover, local government appears to have been more responsive to the demands made on it than central government (Parry et al, 1992: 268-70).

Perhaps as a result of this greater perceived responsiveness, local government institutions and actors tend to be trusted more than their national equivalents.

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<sup>153</sup> Data accessed from the Data Archive at the University of Essex.

<sup>154</sup> Although some surveys (eg. the *Public Opinion and Local Citizenship Study*) suggest that people are equally interested in local and national politics.

This is a consistent picture, found in surveys from the late 1970s<sup>155</sup>, the *British Social Attitudes* surveys, the *Public Opinion and Local Citizenship* study, and recent surveys such as the *Citizen Audit*. Thus, the *Citizen Audit* survey of over 3,000 people found that, on a 0 (low trust) to 10 (high trust) scale, mean trust in central government was 3.90, below the level for local government (4.92). Again, perhaps, as a result of greater perceived responsiveness, levels of satisfaction with government performance are higher for local councils than for central government. Thus, Miller (1988: 31-4) showed that, while under half (44 per cent) of respondents judged central government to run the country 'very' or 'fairly' well, this figure jumped to 75 per cent in relation to local government. Managing the country is, of course, a far more onerous task, and one fraught with more pitfalls, than overseeing a locality. Yet it is as plausible to argue that the ratings enjoyed by local government derive from a perception that it is more responsive, and more accountable, than the national tier.

So political interest and identity is strongest in relation to the national tier, while attitudes towards responsiveness and accountability tend to favour a lower level tier. But if the devolution of political authority is really going to command legitimacy among people in England, there surely must be a demand for planning and delivering services at the regional level. But little such demand exists. I have identified three surveys that ask respondents at which tier they believe a range of public services should operate. The *Public Opinion and Local Citizenship Survey* (1994) asked respondents whether they would wish services to be provided by a body the size of a council, a region or Britain-wide. Some services (notably leisure and refuse and, to a lesser extent, education) were seen as best delivered at the local level. The others (economic development, environment, health, police and roads) were all seen as best delivered at the national level. None was seen as best delivered at the regional level.<sup>156</sup> The *British Social Attitudes* survey for 2001 showed similar results. Asked which body ought to make most of the important decisions for England about various policy issues, the UK government was the clear nominee (by 60 per cent or more of respondents) on welfare benefits and food safety. On business start-up grants, the UK government and local councils were nominated equally, by one third of the

<sup>155</sup> *Attitudes to Government* survey (1978). Accessed via the Data Archive at the University of Essex.

<sup>156</sup> This may reflect the fact that, at the time, few if any services were provided at the regional level. In addition, on each of the issues that a plurality of respondents judged best decided at the national level, at least one fifth nominated the region as the most appropriate tier.

sample, with English regional chambers or assemblies being nominated by only 18 per cent of respondents.<sup>157</sup>

A more explicit attempt to discern how far people supported the devolution of policy responsibility from the national to the regional level was undertaken by the Kilbrandon Commission in 1970. As part of the population survey conducted on behalf of the Commission, people were asked what changes they would like to see in the way the road programme, the health service and schools were run. Having had it explained to them that on each, the policy responsibility lay with the central government with implementation down to local councils and regional boards, respondents were then asked to select one of the following options:

1. Leave things as they are at present
2. Keep things much the same as they are now but make sure that the needs of the region are better understood by the government
3. Keep the present system but allow more decisions to be made in the region
4. Have a new system of governing the region so that as many decisions as possible are made in the area
5. Let the region take over complete responsibility for running things in the region.

Options 1 and 2 may be regarded as the 'centralist' *status quo*, while options 4 and 5 measure support for greater devolution. The devolution options fell short of a majority in each policy case, attracting the support of minorities on health (25 per cent), schools (33 per cent) and road building (41 per cent). If option 3 is added to the devolution category, the proportions supporting a change in the rules form a majority, although on schools and road building only.

So while sub-national institutions and actors may be seen as more responsive and accountable, this does not equate to a public demand for political authority to be decentralised. In Scotland, such a demand clearly did exist; in England, apart from in certain regions some of the time, there is no clear demand for an end to centralised political decision making. This is presumably why the demands for regional self-government remain limited. Until people in England become more supportive towards the decentralisation of political authority and representation, it is unlikely that devolution to the English regions will have a positive impact on citizen-government linkages.

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<sup>157</sup> Data obtained from the Data Archive at the University of Essex.

**Chapter 6**  
**THE REFORM OF LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY:**  
**THE ROLE OF DIRECTLY ELECTED MAYORS**

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This chapter turns to the final institutional reform considered in this work. It also shifts the tier of government once more. The chapter on party funding focused squarely on the national level, the chapter on electoral reform covered both national and regional levels, while the chapter on devolution considered the regional picture. This chapter moves down a further tier, to the local level. It focuses on one aspect of the Labour Government's reforms of local government: the introduction of directly elected mayors.

It may seem strange that my analysis of institutional reform and democracy in Britain includes a discussion of elected mayors. After all, elected mayors are currently limited to just eleven towns and boroughs across England; only if London is included does the proportion of citizens in England covered by the new arrangements rise above 5 per cent.<sup>158</sup> However, elected mayors are important beyond their simple numbers, since they represent a potential shift in the terms of representative democracy at the local level. As I argue more fully below, the direct election of a single person to a local executive role carries with it the potential for weakening the role of local political parties. In particular, armed with a personal electoral mandate, mayors may wish - and be able - to shift decision making authority outside the confines of the local parties. In short, elected mayors provide the conditions in which a form of 'executive' democracy may come to supplement - and even to supplant - the more traditional 'representative' model (the term 'executive democracy' is taken from Svava, 1990: 77-78).

This chapter considers the extent to which elected mayors have effected such a shift in the terms of local democracy. It also considers the impact of the mayoral model on citizens' engagement with local government. As with the other institutional reforms I have considered, mayors were intended to help rejuvenate (local) democracy, by improving turnout and citizens' attitudes to political institutions and actors. The analysis in this chapter assesses whether mayors have, in fact, achieved these ends. But the analysis also extends to consider how

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<sup>158</sup> The inclusion of London increases the proportion of the English population covered by mayors to 19 per cent (the reforms do not extend to Scotland).

far elected mayors may have changed the terms of the relationship between citizens and their political agents. Thus, to a greater extent than in previous chapters, the discussion here focuses on the potential for an institutional reform to effect a move away from the representative model, rather than merely stimulating improvements within it.

### **THE EMERGENCE OF THE MAYORAL MODEL**

It is widely accepted that local democracy in Britain is in a parlous condition. A thorough inventory of shortcomings was provided by the Commission for Local Democracy, a bipartisan body which issued a wide ranging call for reform of local government in 1995 (Commission for Local Democracy, 1995). The Commission argued that local government suffered from over-centralisation of funding, the removal of many of its functions to other local and national agencies, the imposition of national standards covering service delivery, the unrepresentative nature of local councillors, low electoral turnout, limited citizen awareness of the membership and functions of councils and domination by the political parties. In response to such criticisms, the Labour Government and its Conservative predecessor have introduced a number of initiatives to improve the effectiveness of local decision making and councils' engagement with local citizens. These initiatives are wide ranging, covering such issues as service delivery, public participation and community leadership, as well as new forms of political management (Pratchett, 2000).

Directly elected mayors are thus only one among a range of recent measures intended to rejuvenate local democracy. Many of these reforms may have significant effects on the indicators of citizen-government linkages that I have been considering, namely electoral turnout and political attitudes. Thus, for example, improvements in service delivery may well generate more supportive political attitudes towards local authorities. However, my focus in this chapter is limited to elected mayors, which are the most obviously *constitutional* part of the local reform programme.

Elected mayors arose from a concern that local government was insufficiently open and accountable, and lacked the capacity for strong leadership. Decision making was seen to centre on committees and disciplined party groups, with councillors focusing more on the needs of their party than on the needs of local people. Moreover, since party groups usually met in private, decision making was



perceived to be opaque, hindering voters' ability to hold policy actors to account (DETR, 1998; also Copus, 2000a). According to the Government, these shortcomings helped drive voters' indifference to local government, manifested in low electoral turnout. Finally, the committee system was seen as failing to provide the conditions for strong leadership, something ministers believed lay behind council's patchy performance in service delivery (Blair, 1998; DETR, 1998).

Against this sorry backdrop, mayors were believed to bring improvements in three key areas. Each benefit followed the election of a single individual with the authority generated by securing a direct personal mandate at the polls. First, mayors would strengthen the leadership role of councils, helping in particular to develop networks with, and partnerships among, key local service providers and interest groups. Second, mayors would provide a powerful counterweight to central government, helping to reverse the centralisation of policy and finance. Third, mayors would increase citizens' awareness of key local issues and personalities, thereby reducing the emphasis on national politics in local elections, and increasing levels of popular interest and turnout (Blair, 1998; Commission for Local Democracy, 1995; Hodge *et al*, 1997; Stoker, 1996).

The reforms to local councils' internal management were contained in the *Local Government Act 2000*, which introduced a clearer distinction between councils' executive and legislative roles. The Act provided for three new models for political management: a cabinet headed by a leader chosen by the council (cabinet-leader), an elected mayor accompanied by a council manager (mayor-manager) and an elected mayor overseeing a cabinet (mayor-cabinet).<sup>159</sup> The two mayoral options represented the strongest division between councils' executive and legislative functions, since the executive figure would be chosen by voters separately from councillors. Under these two models, the mayor assumes the decision making functions hitherto held by the council as a whole. The council adopts a more legislative role, through scrutiny of the mayor's policies and approval of their budget and policy proposals. Under the mayor-cabinet model, the mayor selects a cabinet to advise on policy and its implementation, potentially delegating authority to its members. The mayoral model thus represented a marked shift in executive responsibility, with the council only able to overturn a mayor's proposals via a two thirds majority in favour of an alternative.

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<sup>159</sup> Very small councils (with populations below 85,000) were allowed to retain the existing committee system.

Recognising that the elected mayor model would be unpopular among councillors, the Government provided for local referendums to be held on the three models. Such referendums could either be triggered by councils themselves, or by citizens if 5 per cent of a local population so petitioned the council. The Government hoped that citizens' initiated referendums would force local authorities to adopt the elected mayor option. In fact, of the 29 referendums held so far, just five have followed a local petition, the remaining 24 following councils' own initiative. Overall, the elected mayor model has fared poorly, adopted by just 3 per cent of councils. Among the eleven mayoral authorities, ten have chosen the mayor-cabinet form, with one the mayor-manager form (the twelfth mayoral authority is London, whose arrangements were prescribed by the Government, subject to a referendum in 1998). The vast majority (83 per cent) of councils in England have chosen the cabinet-leader model (Stoker, 2004).<sup>160</sup>

This is not to say the mayoral model has had its day. For a start, should one of the existing mayors perform strongly in office, and be seen to have brought significant economic benefits to their area, other towns and cities may follow suit. Second, the more popular cabinet-leader model might itself encourage stronger leadership capacity in local government, weakening the resistance of many councillors to what they see as an undue emphasis on leadership in the mayoral model (John, 2004). Nonetheless, in numerical terms, and for the time being at least, the mayoral model has not proved a successful innovation.

## **MAYORS AND POLITICAL PARTIES**

The primary rationale for the mayoral model was to deliver a more dynamic and effective system of local government. But the model's proponents (and opponents) noted another important implication of mayors, even if this rarely formed as explicit a part of their arguments. The implication was that mayors would weaken the dominance of local political parties over policy making. The hold exerted by the parties on local government has been well documented. Thus, for example, in 1955, just four in ten councils in England and Wales could be described as 'partisan', in which more than half the council seats were held by self-proclaimed members of a political party. Following local government reorganisation in the early-1970s, party domination increased, so that by 1986,

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<sup>160</sup> The remaining 14 per cent are small councils, most of which retained the existing committee system.

virtually eight in ten councils in England and Wales were partisan. Alongside the numerical increase in partisanship came equally important behavioural changes, with party groups becoming subject to tighter internal discipline. As a result, there was a decline in rates of cross-party cooperation and voting (Game and Leach, 1995). Today, important decisions are often taken within party groups, which tend to meet in private. Critics charge that this obscures the policy making progress, impeding openness and accountability (Copus, 2000a,b; Stoker, 1996).

Elected mayors were seen by some as weakening this (strangle) hold of the parties. As Stoker (1996: 14) argues, elected mayors "... imply a down-grading of party politics and a challenge to the process of 'politicisation' in local politics". This effect was seen as arising in one of two ways. First, the election of a single person, and the attendant focus on the personalities of the various candidates, might encourage non-party figures to stand for election, and for voters to reward such figures. In fact, of the eleven mayoral elections held so far outside London, almost half (five) were won by non-party candidates.<sup>161</sup> Second, party weakening could occur even if - as was anticipated (Hodge *et al*, 1997) - most successful mayoral candidates stood on a party label. Even in these cases, direct election would confer a personal legitimacy on the victorious candidate, who could thus pursue their own agenda beyond the confines of their party. As a more identifiable, and thus accountable, political agent than the local parties, mayors would have an incentive to forge alliances with external bodies (eg. service providers) in order to meet their policy commitments. Thus, mayors would 'look out' towards the local community, rather than 'looking in' towards their party group (Hodge *et al*, 1997).<sup>162</sup> In fact, two commentators on local politics argue that it was precisely the threat to the primacy of the party group that led so many councils to reject the mayoral option. As Leach and Wilson (2000: 199) point out, "While it is highly likely a cabinet (and leader) who are internally elected will have to regularly take account of the views of the party group, an elected mayor need not do so except on occasions where there is a need to steer a proposal through the assembly" (see also Leach and Wilson, 2004).<sup>163</sup>

<sup>161</sup> Although it is unclear whether this reflects voters' antipathy to parties, or simply the very strong appeal made by the particular candidates in question.

<sup>162</sup> While most commentators agree that direct election of the mayor increases the chances of the executive operating outside the confines of the party, this effect cannot simply be explained by the mayoral reform. As Stewart (2000: 152) notes, local authorities have already adopted a 'community governance' role alongside other service providers and interest groups, bringing with it demands on the leader of the largest party group (the *de facto* executive under the previous system) that differed from those of his or her party. However, under the new arrangements, the fact that the mayor has a direct electoral mandate provides the office-holder with greater leeway to respond to these demands.

<sup>163</sup> One indicator of the way that mayors have weakened the grip of local parties on the executive is that, previously, the council leader was elected annually by his or her party group. Directly elected

The weakening effect of mayors on local parties might well be exacerbated by the electoral system used to select the executive. The Supplementary Vote system allows for first and second preferences to be registered, and thus for some vote-sharing across candidates. Unless a candidate wins outright by gaining a majority of first preference votes, second preferences come into play. Under this scenario, mayoral candidates have an incentive to attract preferences from outside their party. These incentives are particularly acute if the mayoral election is likely to be close. Among the eleven mayoral elections in 2002, only two (Middlesbrough and Newham) were won on first preference votes only. In a further three (Hackney, Lewisham and Watford), the top candidate after the first round had more than 40 per cent of the vote, effectively requiring few additional preferences to gain a majority. Yet in the remaining six contests, no candidate received an overwhelming endorsement of first preference votes. Thus, in more than half the first mayoral elections, the leading candidates would have faced strong incentives to mount broad appeals to attract support from outside their own party (although four of the six 'tight' contests were won by independent candidates).<sup>164</sup>

Many reformers hoped the independence of mayors from parties would be bolstered by a new electoral system for councils, too. Thus, the Commission for Local Democracy recommended a system of proportional representation, to reduce the number of single party dominated councils (see also Hodge *et al*, 1997). Under 'hung' arrangements, the mayor would be forced to negotiate policy and budgetary proposals across party lines, inducing compromise over policies and weaker internal party discipline. Unfortunately for reformers, while the Government accepted the Supplementary Vote for mayoral elections, it retained single member plurality for council elections.<sup>165</sup> As a result, five of the six 'partisan' mayors (ie. those drawn from a party) face a council where their party enjoys an overall majority.<sup>166</sup> This situation is no doubt desirable for a

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mayors, on the other hand, face no such sanction from their party, whose only hold arises when candidacy for the next mayoral election must be decided (Leach and Wilson, 2000: 37).

<sup>164</sup> I assume here that mayoral candidates would have had a reasonable idea of their likely support prior to the election. Assuming that these pre-election predictions broadly matched the actual outcome, the election results provide us with some indication of the likely incentives facing the mayoral candidates to mount cross-party vote appeals in 2002. The results of the first elections will, of course, provide a much clearer set of incentives for the second elections, in 2006.

<sup>165</sup> With the exception of the Greater London Assembly, whose members were elected by the Additional Member system. A form of PR was chosen in London to ensure the mayor's party did not command a majority in the Assembly, which would thus act as a check on his or her power (Pimlott and Rao, 2002: 89).

<sup>166</sup> In the sixth - North Tyneside - a Conservative mayor faces a Labour dominated council. Note also that in Watford, the council was 'hung' at the time the mayor was elected in May 2002. But in council

mayor who is closely aligned to his or her party, and wishes little more than to introduce policies consistent with the priorities of the party group. But for mayors who may wish to introduce proposals that do not fall squarely within their party's priorities, majority status may hinder such a non-partisan approach.

A number of additional factors might also mitigate the extent to which elected mayors are able to operate independently of their party. For a start, political parties are generally very strong in local government, especially in urban areas, and are certainly as strong, if not more so, than in many other countries where elected mayors have been introduced (see section below on 'The Overseas Evidence'). Where the role of the party group is thus engrained, it is difficult for mayors to adopt a highly personal approach to leadership (Clarke *et al*, 1996; Copus, 2000a,b). More specifically, the mayors need to gain the support of the council for their policies and budgetary proposals. As I have just noted, in the cases where the mayor's party controls a majority of council seats, he or she will look to the party for that approval. The mayor will also have to pursue policies compatible with their party if they wish to gain re-selection as a party candidate in future mayoral elections (Copus, 2000b; Hodge *et al*, 1997).

The degree to which party strength limits mayoral independence is not generic across councils, but varies between them. One distinguishing factor is the internal practices of the main political parties, in particular the degree of internal discipline they impose on councillors and their attitude towards leadership. These variables affect how far elected members feel able to take distinctive policy positions, and how far such behaviour by the leader is tolerated. Studies have shown that Labour imposes the tightest discipline at the local level, with the Conservatives taking an increasingly disciplined approach and the Liberal Democrats taking a more relaxed line (Game and Leach, 1995: 31-2; Copus, 2000a).<sup>167</sup> When it comes to the role of the leader, the Conservatives are the most predisposed to strong individual leadership, with Labour and the Liberal Democrats more concerned to ensure collective leadership, via the party group and/or local party (Game and Leach, 1995: 32-3; Leach and Wilson, 2000: 198-201).

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elections a year later, the mayor's party - the Liberal Democrats - gained sufficient seats to secure an overall majority.

<sup>167</sup> Game and Leach (1995: 32) also cite evidence showing intra-party discipline is higher in urban than rural areas. Since elected mayors are thus far concentrated in urban areas, they are likely again to face strong constraints from within their own party.

The hypothesis we can draw from these various considerations is that, while elected mayors will potentially weaken the control of the parties over executive policy making, this change is likely to be one of degree, not kind. One of the first elected mayors - Labour's Steve Bullock in Lewisham - has recognised the competing pressures arising from his new post. On the one hand, he suggests his electoral mandate will preclude the Labour group from compelling him to take a particular decision against his will. On the other, as a Labour politician and having stood on the party label, there is an incentive - as well as a wish - to govern as a Labour mayor and to work closely with his party's councillors (Bullock, 2002).

Thus, the first partisan mayors in England are unlikely to adopt an approach strongly at variance with their party. Such behaviour may become more common over time, if mayors see an electoral payoff from non-partisan activities. But the mayoral model is still in its infancy in Britain, and any changes in behaviour are likely to be minor. I come on shortly to examine whether any nascent effects are evident. But given these caveats, we can inform our hypotheses by drawing on evidence from overseas. Several countries have long provided for the direct election of local leaders, with others having introduced such reforms in the last decade or so. Do these examples provide any indication about the impact we should expect to see mayors have on local parties in Britain?

### **THE OVERSEAS EVIDENCE**

A number of western countries have experience of directly elected mayors, many having introduced them in the last decade. The list includes: Austria (since the 1990s), Australia (in two states), Canada, France, Germany (widespread since the 1990s), Ireland (since 2001), Israel (since 1975), Italy (since 1993), Norway (twenty among 435 municipalities since 1999), Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, Switzerland and the United States (Clarke et al, 1996; Hambleton, 1998; Scarrow, 1997, 2001; Larsen, 2003; Kersting and Vetter, 2003).

This list potentially provides a useful set of case studies from which lessons can be drawn. However, many of the mayoral models in these countries are not similar to the model in Britain, which limits their relevance. Thus, in some countries, mayoral candidates stand as part of their party's list, which limits the

personalisation of the election.<sup>168</sup> In other countries, mayors have little control over the initiation of policy, and are thus not as strong as mayors in Britain.<sup>169</sup> In yet other countries, local political parties exert far less of a hold on decision making than in Britain.<sup>170</sup> For an overseas case study to be a useful source of information for Britain, I suggest the following minimum characteristics need to be met: mayors should be elected separately from other candidates from their party, they should have power over policy initiation, and local parties should be influential and organisationally strong. Among the countries just listed - and where elected mayors are widespread, and not limited to a small number of municipalities or states - those that fulfill these minimal criteria are Germany, Italy and Israel.<sup>171</sup> I therefore examine briefly the impact of elected mayors on local political parties in these three jurisdictions.

In Germany, directly elected mayors were introduced into two southern states in the 1940s and 1950s, but spread to all other states in the 1990s. The take up of the directly elected mayoral model was partly designed to induce greater dynamism into local decision making (Kersting, 2001; Wollmann, 2003), but also to address public discontent with the political system (Stoker, 1996; Scarrow, 1997). One impact of the reform has been to reduce the role of parties. While usually endorsed by a party, mayoral candidates often eschew party labels and either distance themselves from their party, or even campaign as independents. This weakening of partisanship is exacerbated when a preferential voting system is used, since this encourages party candidates to adopt more personal appeals, likely to attract the votes of other party supporters (Stoker, 1996; Scarrow, 1997; Wollmann, 2002). Once in office, and buoyed by a personal electoral mandate, mayors often build cross-party coalitions to introduce measures that may be opposed by their own party (Bullmann and Page, 1994).

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<sup>168</sup> This is the situation in France and Spain, where mayoral candidates appear alongside other party candidates as head of the party list. Their list position may provide the mayor with a personal legitimacy (for France, see Cole and John, 2001), but arguably not to the extent provided by a separate mayoral ballot. Similarly, in Portugal and Switzerland, the mayor is elected alongside the executive board (what we would term the cabinet), again reducing the personalisation of the election.

<sup>169</sup> This is the situation in Austria and New Zealand, where elected mayors have few executive powers (Pleschberger, 2003; Hambleton, 1998).

<sup>170</sup> This is the case in Australia, Canada and the United States (John and Saiz, 1999), which rules out this case study as an object of comparison for Britain. The exclusion of the US is a drawback, since the relevant literature is dominated by studies of mayors in the US, where the model dates back over a century. However, elections in around three quarters of US towns and cities are 'non partisan', in listing no party labels on the ballot paper (Welch and Bledsoe, 1988: 8-9). One indication of the weakness of local parties is highlighted in research that shows that local politicians - including mayors - in the US have low levels of contact with local party organisations compared with their counterparts in the Netherlands and Sweden (Eldersveld et al, 1995: 165-7).

<sup>171</sup> In Israel, mayoral candidates appear at the head of their party's list. However, if no party attains a threshold of 40 per cent of the vote, a second round run-off election between mayoral candidates is held.

The relationship between elected mayors and local parties is not uniform across the *länder*, but depends on the prior strength and legitimacy of partisan politics at the local level. Thus, elected mayors often operate independently of their party in the southern states (eg. Baden Wurttemberg), but are more closely bound to their party - for example through attendance at caucus meetings - in northern states, where party groups have retained considerable strength (*ibid*; Wollmann, 2004).<sup>172</sup> In other words, the mayoral model in Germany tends to suggest that, while mayors may weaken parties' hold on local decision making, their independence remains circumscribed where parties are strong.

Directly elected mayors were introduced in Italy in 1993, as part of a desire to improve the effectiveness of local decision making, and to weaken the dominance of political parties (Magnier, 2003, 2004). Mayoral candidates are elected separately from their party, although party lists attached to each mayoral candidate appear alongside them on the ballot paper. The electoral arrangements are designed to reduce the checks on the mayor, by often awarding his or her party 60 per cent of council seats.<sup>173</sup> In spite of the fact that the mayor's party will often enjoy a clear majority of council seats, the introduction of a directly elected executive appears to have weakened local parties. The 1993 reform has increased the number of independent (non-party) mayors. Even where a successful mayoral candidate does stand on a party ticket, the reform appears to have increased the proportion of new party entrants, as against those with a long background in party politics. Mayors elected after 1993 were also less likely than those elected prior to the reform to hold a position within their local party (Magnier, 2004). Direct election has also increased the personalisation of local elections. This is manifested in the high incumbency re-election rates for mayors, who tend to outperform their parties, and the success of some mayoral candidates in attracting votes from outside their own party (Baldini and Legnante, 1998). Armed with a personal mandate, mayors in office are then often involved in policy struggles with their own party, for example over the use of non-elected figures as cabinet members (*assessori*) (Fabbrini, 2001).

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<sup>172</sup> Thus, in Baden-Wurttemberg, just 50 per cent of mayors are members of a political party, while in the more party-dominated northern states, non-partisanship among mayors is lower (in North Rhine Westphalia, 85 per cent of mayoral candidates in the first mayoral contests in 1994 were party members). Another institutional manifestation is that, in states where the local parties are weak (eg. Bavaria, Baden-Wurttemberg), the mayor's term of office is longer than that of the council. In some states where parties are stronger (eg. North Rhine Westphalia), mayors have been introduced with terms coterminous with those of the council, to try and minimise the independence of the mayor from the parties (Wollmann, 2004).

<sup>173</sup> This seat bonus occurs if, in the first round of elections, a mayoral candidate and their party both win a majority of the vote. If a second round ballot is required (with no mayoral candidate having won an outright majority on the first ballot), the winning candidate's party gains the seat bonus allocation (Baldini and Legnante, 1998).



As two Italian commentators note: "In many towns, one cannot speak of a party mayor. More often, the mayors governs *with*, and occasionally *against*, the parties" (Baldini and Legnante, 1998; emphasis in the original).

In Israel, directly elected mayors were introduced in 1975 in large part to strengthen the policy capacity, and governability, of local councils. The new mayors were given additional powers, and were also expected to use the mandate received via their direct election. There is some suggestion that the reform has helped boost the profile of local issues, and reduced the role of national party platforms in local elections (Brichta, 2001: 99-105). Mayors also appear to have weakened the role of local parties. Mayoral elections are characterised by the candidates issuing personal appeals rather than collective appeals via their parties, and by higher levels of personalised voting (Elazar, 1988; Kalchheim and Rosevitch, 1992). Unfortunately, we lack much additional information about the effects of the reforms in Israel which, since they have had almost thirty years to embed themselves, might have been expected to have yielded more mature, and thus firmer, conclusions than those in Germany and Italy, where the reforms are more recent.

Overall, in the three countries where the mayoral model exhibits the greatest similarity to that in Britain, the evidence does suggest that direct election of the mayor tends to personalise local elections. As a result of the distinct appeal of the mayoral candidates, and the electoral legitimacy enjoyed by the winner, mayors in office appear to pursue policies and appointments that sometimes run counter to the wishes of their party. Thus, far from providing another electoral arena for them to 'capture', directly elected mayors represent something of a challenge to the role of the political parties.

## **THE DOMESTIC EVIDENCE**

Britain's first directly elected mayor - Ken Livingstone in London - took office in May 2000. A further eleven mayors were elected in May and October 2002. Very little time has thus elapsed for the mayoral model to develop and for its effects to become apparent. Within such a short timescale, we cannot hope to reach any firm judgements about the impact of mayors on citizens and political parties. The most we can do is to test for any nascent effects, recognising that these might be supplemented, or even superseded, by other effects as the mayoral reform matures. The following sections examine the initial impact of mayors on two

aspects of the citizen-government relationship. First, I explore mayors' impact on electoral participation and citizen attitudes. Have the hopes of the reformers - that mayors would stimulate people to vote and to adopt more positive attitudes towards local government - been realised? Second, how far have elected mayors eroded the control of political parties over local decision making? Is there any evidence of a shift from a party-oriented 'representative' democracy at the local level, to a personality-oriented 'executive' one?

The evidence base I set out in the following sections draws on multiple sources. In many cases, the evidence base is not as extensive as one might wish. For example, we lack much individual level data by which to evaluate the impact of mayors on local populations. Thus, only in London was the mayoral election the subject of a population survey, and only two additional surveys of attitudes to mayors have been conducted. However, the various pieces of data I marshal do enable me to draw at least tentative conclusions about the impact of the mayoral model thus far.

### **Attitudes to mayors and their impact on turnout**

There is little doubt that many of the links between local government and citizens are poor. In terms of political interest, the *British Social Attitudes* survey in 1998 found far lower levels of interest in local politics than in politics generally (Rao and Young, 1999; also Miller, 1988: 15-18).<sup>174</sup> Levels of knowledge about local government were also found to be poor, with just 5 per cent of those surveyed able to correctly name the leader of their council (Rao and Young, 1999). Turnout at local elections is low. In a ranking of average turnout rates for sub-national elections in eleven other EU countries, voting rates in Britain are the worst (Rallings and Thrasher, 1997: 47). Even when people do go to the polls to select local councillors, many cast their ballot on national, not local, issues (Miller, 1988: ch11; although see Rallings and Thrasher, 1997: ch10). And elections are not seen as decisive events for the way local politics is conducted. Thus, while in 1965, almost three quarters of people believed that voting in local elections "is the main thing that decides how things are run in this [the respondent's] area", this proportion had fallen to just over one half (54 per cent) by 1994 (Young and

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<sup>174</sup> Although Miller et al (2000: 51) find virtually equal levels of public interest in national political issues and in local ones.

Rao, 1995). To this extent, there is a 'problem' with the health of local democracy.<sup>175</sup>

On the other hand, there is less evidence that the public views the role of political parties as a weakness of the current arrangements. The 1994 *British Social Attitudes* survey asked respondents whether they preferred local councils to comprise councillors drawn from parties or independent figures. One third backed the partisan option, one third the independent option, and one third could not choose between the two.<sup>176</sup> Reinforcing the point that political parties play a useful role in elections, the same survey found that far more people (52 per cent) claimed to vote on party lines than did so according to the qualities of the particular candidates (34 per cent) (Young and Rao, 1995). When it came to the personal qualities of their local representatives, only slightly more (39 per cent) thought it important for councillors to be independent minded than to be loyal to their party (31 per cent). Voters do not appear to view non-partisan behaviour as a requirement of local politicians in particular. In response to the same question about personal qualities, but this time for MPs, the proportion wishing to see independent minded representatives was higher, at 47 per cent.<sup>177</sup>

Thus, while there is little doubt that initiatives are needed to improve local government's standing with the public, it is less apparent that such initiatives should entail a reduced role for the political parties. But how does the public react to the specific reform being considered in this chapter, directly elected mayors? Is there sufficient support for mayors to suggest the reforms might have a positive impact on citizens' attitudes and behaviour? In particular, is there any evidence that those with low regard for local political institutions are significantly more likely to favour the mayoral model than those better disposed to the institutional *status quo*?

There is some evidence that, prior to the first mayoral elections, people were supportive of the mayoral model. A survey commissioned by the Government in 2001 found a clear majority for the principle that the leader of the council (ie. the equivalent of the mayor) should be elected by the people rather than by

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<sup>175</sup> Although we should also note that levels of trust and efficacy in local government and local councillors is often no lower – and is indeed often higher – than that for national government and politicians (Curtice, 1999; Pattie et al, 2004).

<sup>176</sup> Asked the same question a decade earlier, the proportion favouring party councillors was the same, at one third, but that favouring independent councillors was higher, at one half. In other words, support for non-partisan representatives appears to have declined somewhat. In addition, support for partisan representation is found to be highest in areas where party politics is most entrenched, namely in urban localities (Young and Rao, 1995).

councillors.<sup>178</sup> In addition, more people agreed than disagreed that a mayor would "make it easier to get things done", "mean there was someone who could speak up for the area" and would "make it clear who is responsible when things go wrong" (DTLR, 2001). In London, a survey undertaken immediately after the first London elections in 2000 found that almost eight in ten people (78 per cent) were "very much" or "a bit" in favour of the mayor. However, almost as many people (72 per cent) were also in favour of the London Assembly. When pressed, 8 per cent would have preferred just the Assembly, while not that many more - 15 per cent - would have preferred just the mayor. Six in ten (59 per cent) professed content with a combination of the two (Curtice et al, 2001).

So people appear to believe that mayors possess beneficial features. But this may not elevate mayors above traditional collective arrangements (ie. councils/assemblies) in the public mind. This suspicion is reinforced by the government sponsored survey in 2001, which asked respondents whether they would be more likely to vote in a contest for a mayor than for a council. Three in ten (31 per cent) thought they would be more likely to participate in the mayoral election, just over one in ten (13 per cent) indicated a higher chance of voting in the council election, but a majority (54 per cent) said the type of contest would make no difference (DTLR, 2001).

When it comes to the actual introduction of mayors, public reticence appears to increase. This was first made apparent at the time of the mayoral referendums. As I noted above, just five of the 29 mayoral referendums held thus far have been triggered by public petitions, the rest being the result of council initiatives. Even when referendums were held, eighteen of the 29 contests yielded a 'No' vote, while only in eleven did local voters support the new institution. The lack of public enthusiasm can also be gauged from the turnout, which was generally low. In the 23 referendums for which comparisons can be made with local election turnout, participation was higher for the referendum in only eight cases, while it was lower in a further 15 (Rallings, Thrasher and Cowling, 2002).

So mayors appear to be more popular in the abstract than in reality. Let me take the analysis of attitudes one step further. Is there any evidence that mayors are more popular among those with low confidence in existing political institutions

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<sup>177</sup> Data taken directly from the 1994 *British Social Attitudes* survey.

<sup>178</sup> This support appears consistent over time. A survey conducted in 1994-95 also found a clear majority for the proposition that the council leader be directly, rather than indirectly, elected (Miller et al, 2000: 111-12).

than among those with higher confidence? If so, we might speculate that, although mayors may have struggled thus far to attract the support of many people, they might have strengthened local representative democracy in the eyes of its detractors. However, this hypothesis is difficult to substantiate. Among those responding to the government commissioned poll in 2001, support for elected mayors is largely unrelated to attitudes towards local councils. Thus, among those who believed that "councillors lose touch with people pretty quickly", almost eight in ten (79 per cent) supported the mayoral model. But among those who took a more positive view of councillors' responsiveness, support for the mayoral model was only marginally lower, at 68 per cent. Similarly, those who believed councillors "don't care what people like me think" were little more likely to favour an elected mayor than those more supportive of councillors (DTLR, 2001).

In short, a person's faith in their local political institutions appears to have little impact on their support for radical reform of those institutions. I have explored these findings further in an examination of data from the 2000 *British Social Attitudes* survey, which carried several questions probing attitudes to elected mayors. I found that support for mayors was not related to respondents' attitudes towards the political system, measured by various indicators of trust and efficacy. In fact, those who distrusted local councillors were slightly less likely to favour the mayoral model than those whose confidence in councillors was higher.

Going beyond public attitudes, I now turn to another measure of public engagement, namely electoral turnout. Among the hopes of the mayoral advocates was that the reform would help boost electoral turnout.<sup>179</sup> I examine how far mayors have fulfilled this hope, initially drawing on aggregate level data, before turning to the limited individual level data available to us.

How far did the first mayoral elections in 2002 stimulate people to participate? In Table 6.1, I show various turnout data for the eleven mayoral elections in 2002. The turnout for the mayoral election itself is in column 2. In the next column, I show turnout for the May 2002 council elections. In six authorities, the mayoral and council elections were held at the same time, while in three others, the

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<sup>179</sup> Reformers were cautious enough to claim only that mayors *might* improve turnout at local elections (see Hodge et al, 1997: 3). However, accompanying claims that mayoral elections would induce fun and excitement (Stoker, 1996: 12) and be focused on local, not national, issues (Hodge et al, 1997: 3)

mayoral election followed in October. For all the mayoral areas, I also show turnout at the most proximate council election outside 2002: in 2003 (eight mayoral areas) and 1998 (the three London boroughs). We would expect turnout at the simultaneous council elections in 2002 to be very close to the mayoral turnout. But, if the mayoral contests did generate the publicity and focus on local issues claimed for them, their turnout rates should if anything be marginally higher than those for the council contests. In fact, the reverse is true. In the six areas holding simultaneous mayor/council elections in May 2002 - Doncaster, Hartlepool, Lewisham, Newham, North Tyneside and Watford - turnout was lower in the mayoral contest than in the council contest (by between 0.8 and 1.6 percentage points). In the three areas - Bedford, Hackney and Stoke - where the mayoral election followed five months after the May 2002 council contest, turnout dropped by even more (by between four and ten percentage points). When compared with proximate council elections in either 1998 or 2003, we can see that in seven cases, mayoral turnout was lower and in four cases it was higher. Overall, mean turnout for the eleven mayoral contests (29.1 per cent) was just below mean turnout for the proximate council elections (30.8 per cent).<sup>180</sup> Finally, turnout at the mayoral election in London in 2000 was 27.9 per cent, below the figure for the previous borough elections in 1998 (34.6 per cent) and the subsequent borough elections in 2002 (31.6 per cent).

The aggregate data suggests, then, that mayors did little to boost turnout at their first elections. However, the use of aggregate data limits our ability to draw conclusions about the impact of institutional reform on participation. The fact that turnout for a mayoral election at one point in time falls below that for a council election at another may reflect particular conditions at the two timepoints, rather than the nature of the body being elected. In order to generate more rigorous conclusions about the impact of mayors, we must turn to individual level data. Unfortunately, we are limited to one such data source, since London was the only contest among the first wave of mayoral elections covered by a population survey.<sup>181</sup> I draw on this survey to explore how far the new mayoral model might have encouraged people to vote. The sample of Londoners I use is

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clearly reveal an expectation that turnout at mayoral contests would be higher than at council elections.

<sup>180</sup> The high turnout in two mayoral contests in 2002 - in Middlesborough and North Tyneside - is partly attributable to the use of postal ballots in these areas. Removing these two cases reduces mean turnout across the mayoral elections to 26 per cent.

<sup>181</sup> The *London Mayoral Election Study*, conducted by the National Centre for Social Research. The survey was conducted immediately after the London elections in May 2000, with a sample size of 1,548. There are well known problems with using survey data to analyse turnout, since respondents' self-reported turnout rates are known to exceed actual rates (Heath and Taylor, 1999). However, as I

limited to those who reported having voted in the 1997 general election. This way, I can analyse the relationship between the mayoral model and turnout in 2000, controlling for people's general tendency to participate at elections (measured by whether or not they voted in 1997).

**TABLE 6.1 Turnout at mayoral elections**

	Mayoral turnout %	Council turnout (2002) %	Council turnout (nearest) %	Turnout differential*
Bedford	25.3	35.2	34.1 (2003)	-8.8
Doncaster	27.1	28.5	46.8 (2003)	-18.4
Hackney	26.3	32.0	34.3 (1998)	-8.0
Hartlepool	28.8	30.4	22.3 (2003)	+7.7
Lewisham	24.8	25.6	29.8 (1998)	-5.0
Mansfield	18.5	-	26.8 (2003)	-8.3
Middlesboro <sup>1</sup>	41.6	-	24.9 (2003)	+16.6
Newham	25.5	26.9	28.7 (1998)	-3.2
N Tyneside <sup>1</sup>	42.3	43.1	33.8 (2003)	+8.7
	31.0			
Stoke	24.0	28.2	25.8 (2003)	-1.8
Watford	36.1	37.6	32.1 (2003)	+4.0
Mean	29.1	31.9	30.8	-1.5

\* Differential between mayoral turnout (second column) and council turnout in nearest non-2002 election (fourth column).

<sup>1</sup> Postal votes used (not all postal ballots).

Note: There are two figures for North Tyneside, since a further election was held there in 2003 following the resignation of the first mayor. The figure for mean mayoral turnout only includes the 2002 contest.

Sources: (a) Mayoral turnout: Rallings and Thrasher, *Local Elections Handbook 2002*; New Local Government Network; (b) Council turnout: Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth.

At a simple level, attitudes towards the London mayor do appear to have affected the propensity to participate. Among those who strongly favoured the mayor, 69 per cent reported voting in the mayoral election. Among those strongly opposed to the mayor, turnout was only 54 per cent. However, given that the survey was conducted immediately after the poll, it may be that attitudes towards the mayoral model are merely an *ex post facto* rationalisation by respondents of their electoral behaviour. We cannot fully control for the possibility that attitudes to an institution are only spuriously related to participation. However, by introducing some controls in a multivariate model, we can at least subject any relationship to more rigorous testing. For example, is the apparent relationship between support for the mayoral model and participation in the first London election due to party preference, with supporters of some parties more inclined to think their candidate would win and thus more likely to vote? Or, does it simply reflect a person's level

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am principally interested in reported turnout among sub-samples of the population - namely those supportive of, or opposed to, the mayoral model - this bias is not a significant problem.

of identification with a party (partisanship), with strong partisans more likely to vote than weak partisans?

In Table 6.2, I construct two models of turnout at the first London mayoral election. The models are estimated using binary logit, since the dependent variable is dichotomous (reported having voted=1, reported having abstained=0). Both models include basic demographic and attitudinal control variables. The results show that, for example, the young are far less likely to have voted than older people (those aged 65 and over). Turnout is also higher among Labour supporters than among non-Labour supporters. I also include variables measuring people's attitudes towards the new institutions, specifically whether they are strongly in favour of the mayor and assembly (as opposed to being slightly in favour or opposed). In the first model, we find that strongly favouring the mayor is a significant predictor of voting in the mayoral election. But we need to control further for the possibility that this association is simply an artefact of a broader response to the candidates and/or parties standing in the election. In other words, is turnout primarily driven by the stimuli provided by the candidates and parties? To test for this, I include in a second model evaluations of the candidates and parties standing in the London elections. These evaluations measure whether someone is very much in favour or very much against a candidate or party (coded 1), compared with being more neutral towards the candidate or party (coded 0). In fact, only for one candidate – the Conservative Steve Norris – were evaluations significantly related to turnout. Controlling for a range of other factors meant that evaluations of other candidates and their parties were not significant predictors of participating at the election. However, the effect of these evaluations is to weaken the effect of attitudes towards the new institutions. In the second model, support for the mayoral model is no longer a significant predictor of turnout. Even then, attitudes to the mayoral office only just fail to attain significance at the 5 per cent level, and remain significant at the 10 per cent level.



**TABLE 6.2 Model of turnout at the London election, 2000**

	Model I		Model II	
	B	se	B	se
Constant	-2.59	(.53)*	-2.82	(.61)*
Race (non white)				
White	1.06	(.37)*	1.06	(.41)*
Age (65 and over)				
18-24	-3.21	(1.06)*	-3.15	(1.14)*
25-34	-1.75	(.49)*	-1.79	(.56)*
34-44	-1.30	(.46)*	-1.51	(.53)*
45-54	-0.86	(.47)	-0.86	(.53)
55-59	0.07	(.76)	0.59	(.92)
60-64	-1.19	(.82)	-1.10	(.93)
Tenure (non home owner)				
Home owner	0.82	(.31)*	0.85	(.33)*
Social class (working class)				
Manual	-0.40	(.56)	-0.48	(.57)
Bourgeoisie	-0.32	(.98)	-0.09	(1.00)
Non manual	0.80	(.43)	1.09	(.48)*
Salaried	1.05	(.41)*	1.23	(.47)*
Education (no qualifications)				
O levels/CSE	0.37	(.39)	0.56	(.45)
A levels/higher education below degree	0.69	(.43)	0.72	(.48)
Degree	0.16	(.42)	0.32	(.46)
Party identification (no party identification)				
Not very strong	-0.47	(.78)	-0.37	(.90)
Fairly strong	0.02	(.79)	0.03	(.93)
Very strong	0.82	(.85)	0.69	(1.00)
Partisanship (non Labour supporter)				
Labour supporter	0.85	(.31)*	0.90	(.35)*
Attitudes to new institutions (a bit in favour or against)				
Strongly in favour of mayor	0.95	(.36)*	0.76	(.41)
Strongly in favour of assembly	0.52	(.37)	0.62	(.41)
Strongly in favour of/against Dobson			0.23	(.32)
Norris			0.93	(.38)*
Kramer			-0.01	(.51)
Livingstone			0.47	(.32)
Labour			-0.04	(.35)
Conservatives			-0.66	(.38)
Liberal Democrats			-0.22	(.52)
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.38		0.41	
N	347		311	

\* p&lt;.05

Reference categories are in brackets.

Source: London Mayoral Election Study 2000

The key finding from this analysis of turnout in London is that attitudes to the new institution of mayor were associated with turnout, and may indeed have impelled some people to vote. This may reflect the particular nature of the London contest, with the high profile candidates on offer and the media coverage of the contest. In the first mayoral elections in other towns across England, the

aggregate data I have reviewed suggests a more negative dividend. Even in these cases, however, there is evidence that mayors have begun to register with local citizens. Thus, a recent survey has shown that public awareness of the leading executive figure on the local council (the council leader in non-mayoral authorities, the mayor in mayoral authorities) is far higher in mayoral authorities than in non-mayoral ones. In the former, almost six in ten people (57 per cent) could correctly name their mayor, against just one in four (25 per cent) recognising the council leader in non-mayoral authorities (Randle, 2004). If critics of the 'traditional' governing arrangements in local authorities are correct - that decision making within party groups hinders identifiability and accountability, thus reducing turnout - this finding suggests mayors may have a positive impact on electoral turnout further down the line.

### **The impact of mayors on local parties**

The primary aim throughout this work is to evaluate the impact of institutional change in quantitative terms, that is to identify what effect new institutions have had on citizens' attitudes and behaviour. But there is a secondary, more qualitative, objective: to delineate the ways in which the new institutions have changed the nature of representative democracy in Britain. I argued in Chapter Two that the regulation of party funding does the least of the four reforms I consider to change the 'rules of the game'. These rules shifted further with electoral reform, and further still with devolution. But arguably the most marked shift in the rules - in theory at least<sup>182</sup> - arises from directly elected mayors, who potentially weaken the dominant role of the main collective actors (local political parties) in favour of the personal qualities and appeals of mayoral candidates and officeholders. In short, elected mayors contain the potential to shift local democracy away from a 'representative' model, towards an 'executive' one.

In the sections that follow, I examine the evidence for such a qualitative shift. There are three ways in which we can test for such an effect, two arising at election time, and one arising subsequently once the mayor has taken office. The first test is to examine the appeals made to voters at election time. If the hypothesis - that mayors weaken party dominance - is correct, we should see mayoral candidates offering rather different messages to voters than those offered by their parties. The second test explores how voters react to these

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<sup>182</sup> A real shift in the rules of the game would require mayors to become more widespread than at present. It is difficult to argue that mayors have any great effect on local democracy in Britain when they represent so few citizens.

appeals. Do they vote for a mayoral candidate on the basis of party labels or on the basis of personal qualities? The final test is to analyse the mayors' conduct in office, in particular how far they operate within the confines of their party group.

Before turning to these issues, there is one obvious piece of evidence about the effect of mayors on political parties that should be considered. At the eleven mayoral elections held in 2002, more than one third of all candidates were independent of party affiliation, a far higher number than usually the case for local elections (Rallings, Thrasher and Cowling, 2002: 89). Not only did the mayoral elections attract independent candidates, but they also picked up significant electoral support. Across the eleven contests, independents gained almost one quarter (23 per cent) of the total vote.<sup>183</sup> At the local council elections held in the same year, independent candidates gained just 3 per cent of the vote.<sup>184</sup> The electoral support given to independents resulted in triumphs for five Independent candidates out of the eleven initial mayoral elections. Clearly, then, the direct election of a single person executive appears to have strengthened the appeal of independent actors at the expense of collective partisan bodies.

### ***Mayors and elections: Candidate appeals and voter responses***

I begin by gauging how far the appeals made to voters by mayoral candidates differ from those of their parties. We can only make direct comparisons between the two sets of appeals if they are made at the same time; appeals made at different points in time cannot be directly compared. Fortunately for this analysis, several mayoral elections were held at the same time as elections to local councils. Thus, in May 2000, Londoners had the opportunity to elect both a mayor and members of the London Assembly. In May 2002, elections were held in six boroughs - Doncaster, Hartlepool, Lewisham, Newham, North Tyneside and Watford - for both the mayor and the local council. The analysis that follows explores the appeals made by the parties and their mayoral candidates at these elections.

The best way of analysing the messages issued by the parties and their mayoral candidates is by examining their respective election manifestos. Using techniques specifically developed for manifesto analysis, we can test for any differences or

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<sup>183</sup> Figure calculated from election results provided by the New Local Government Network. The independent proportion of the total vote ranged from 63 per cent in Middlesborough to less than 1 per cent in Lewisham and Watford.

<sup>184</sup> Figure obtained from the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth.

similarities in the appeals made by the parties and their mayoral candidates. Unfortunately, at the seven council/mayor elections in 2000 and 2002, most parties and mayoral candidates did not stand on separate platforms, but on joint ones.<sup>185</sup> The high incidence of joint party/mayor manifestos is one piece of evidence that, at the inaugural mayoral elections at least, there was little distinction between the individual candidates and their parties.<sup>186</sup> In fact, across the seven elections, we have just two cases where the mayoral candidate issued a separate manifesto from that of their party: Steve Bullock/Labour in Lewisham, and Sir Robin Wales/Labour in Newham. Unfortunately, the manifesto issued by Robin Wales for his mayoral candidacy is simply too brief, at just over 200 words, for detailed content analysis. A simple comparison of the manifesto commitments made by Robin Wales and the Labour party in Newham shows a high commonality between the two. Indeed, one commitment made by Wales is to ensure that "the [Labour] Party is closely tied to the developing community leadership", hardly the promise of someone who wished to develop a distinct appeal to that of his party.

The case of Lewisham is more interesting. Here, although Labour's manifesto was formally offered for both the mayoral and council elections, its mayoral candidate, Steve Bullock, also issued a detailed personal manifesto. In this case, we can conduct a content analysis of the two manifestos to see whether there were any substantial variations in the messages put out by the party and its candidate. To do this, I adopt the methods used by the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) for the analysis of party manifestos (Budge *et al*, 2001). These involve coding each idea or commitment in a manifesto - using 'quasi-sentences' as the unit of reference - against a range of policy categories. The relative importance of these policy categories, or 'domains', can then be used as an indicator to compare different manifestos. The manifestos analysed by the MRG relate to national elections, with the categories referring to such issues as foreign policy, the welfare state and economic productivity. These categories are clearly unsuitable to the task of analysing manifestos at local elections. I have thus devised a set of policy categories more relevant to local politics in Britain, and used this coding frame to analyse the manifestos in Lewisham (see Annex Five for details).

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<sup>185</sup> At the second London mayoral election in 2004, too, the three main candidates (Livingstone, Norris and Hughes) and their parties offered joint manifestos.

<sup>186</sup> In some contests, the manifesto was issued by the party's mayoral candidate, with the party signing up to this personal statement; in others, the manifesto was issued by the party, with the mayoral candidate signing up to this collective appeal. Thus, in some areas, the mayoral contest dominated, while in others, the council elections were seen as more important.

The results show substantial overlap between the manifestos of the Lewisham Labour party and its mayoral candidate, Steve Bullock (Chart 6.1). For example, both emphasise the importance of improving local service provision and education. But there are also differences in their respective commitments.<sup>187</sup> The party manifesto makes many references to transport issues, regeneration and the development of leisure facilities, issues to which the mayoral manifesto makes no reference. On the other hand, Bullock's manifesto makes far more of health and environmental issues, on which his party's manifesto is more limited. The mayoral manifesto is also full of references to a partnership approach to policy making and service delivery, while the party manifesto has no references to such approaches (these categories are not included in Chart 6.1). This is relevant, since it reinforces the arguments of mayoral advocates that a directly elected executive figure would have to work via coalitions with a range of other local bodies. Finally, while the party manifesto makes many references to the importance, or achievements, of the Labour party (6.8 per cent of the total number of quasi-sentences), the mayoral manifesto makes rather fewer such references (4.3 per cent of the total).

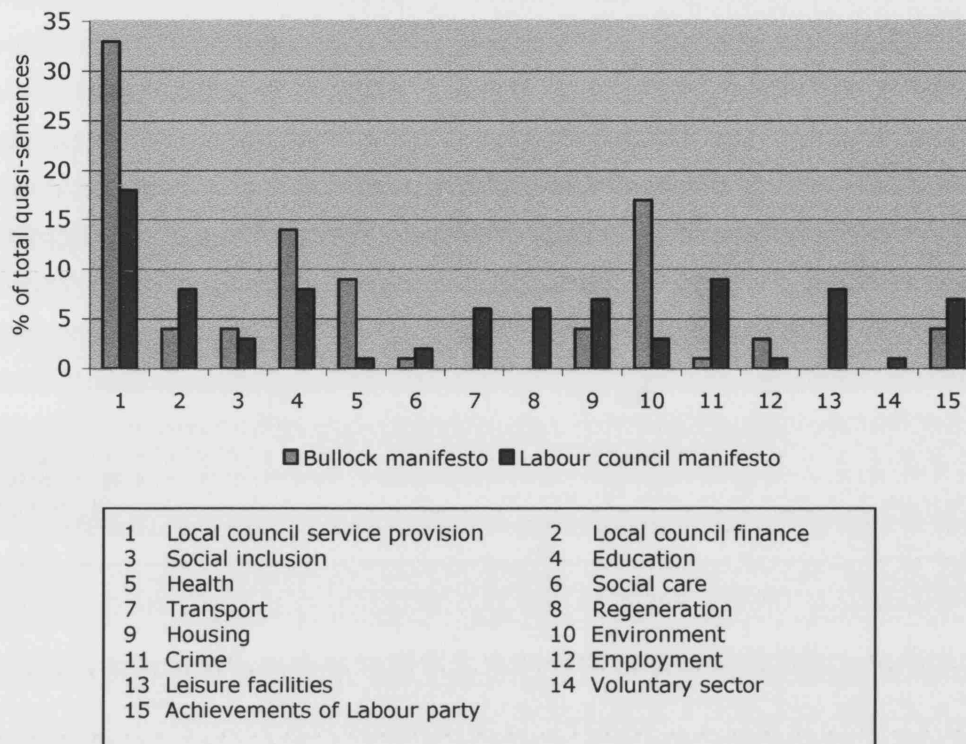
We thus have evidence from one contest of a mayoral candidate making a slightly different pitch to the electorate than that of his party. Overall, though, the first round of mayoral elections did not see mayoral candidates differentiating themselves from their parties.

One reason why mayoral candidates might be encouraged to issue more personalised appeals to voters is if they anticipate a favourable public response. This raises the issue of how people voted in the first mayoral elections in Britain. Did they choose their candidates simply on their party labels? Or did they also consider the qualities and messages of the candidates themselves? We can begin to answer this question by reference to aggregate data. But for a fuller picture, we require access to individual level data. The analysis that follows thus begins with the election results themselves, before turning to survey data gathered for the London elections in 2000 and 2004.

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<sup>187</sup> Note that my point of comparison between the Lewisham manifestos is not whether Steve Bullock and the Labour party pledge to do different things on each issue, but simply whether there are differences in the relative importance they attach to these issues (issue 'salience').

**Chart 6.1: The manifesto appeals of the mayor and political party in Lewisham, May 2002**



The election results provide one indicator of how far voters responded to the personal qualities of the mayoral candidates. If voting was shaped by such personal factors, we might expect that, in contests where ballots were held simultaneously for council seats, there would be differences in the vote shares of mayoral candidates and their parties across the two ballots. In the context of US elections, the rise in candidate centred voting - at the presidential level - has been associated with a decline in 'party line' voting over the last century (Wattenberg, 1991: 20-39). We can test - albeit more modestly - for a similar effect arising from the introduction of elected mayors in Britain.

The cases I use to examine levels of 'split ticket' voting are those areas holding simultaneous mayoral-council elections in May 2002, and where the winning mayoral candidate was not an Independent (since, in these cases, the level of split ticket voting will be artificially high, driven by the non-party appeal of that independent). The five cases I use are: Doncaster, Lewisham, Newham, North Tyneside and Watford. As can be seen in Table 6.3, the average level of split ticket voting across the five contests was 6.5 per cent. However, the final column - which gives the proportion of the vote won by independent candidates - suggests that the level of split ticket voting in Doncaster may have been

artificially high (since an independent candidate won 39 per cent of the first preference mayoral vote<sup>188</sup>). If Doncaster is removed, the average difference between the mayoral and council elections falls to 5 per cent. That is, one in twenty people appears to have voted for different party candidates in the mayoral and council elections.<sup>189</sup> This figure does not suggest that the mayoral contest encouraged many voters to choose a candidate based on personal appeal and qualities rather than on the voter's partisan preference. The 5-6 per cent figure is little different from the 'index of dissimilarity' recorded after the first devolution elections in Scotland (index=8.5 per cent) and Wales (index=3.2 per cent) (Johnston and Pattie, 2002).

**TABLE 6.3 Mayoral-council voting comparison**

% Doncaster	Con		Lab		Lib Dem		Differences		Ind**
	1	2	1	2	1	2	Sum	/2*	
Doncaster	25.1	15.4	47.2	36.8	12.3	8.8	23.4	11.7	39.0
Lewisham	16.8	18.0	39.8	45.0	19.0	16.3	9.1	4.5	0.0
Newham	20.3	11.6	50.3	50.8	-	-	9.2	4.6	14.7
North Tyneside	36.1	35.9	38.1	32.2	25.3	20.3	11.1	5.5	8.2
Watford	25.6	21.4	24.2	22.1	43.9	49.4	11.8	5.9	0.0
Mean								6.5	
Mean (minus Doncaster)								5.1	

1 Council election

2 Mayoral election (first preferences)

\* Total is divided by two to achieve comparability with the results in Johnston and Pattie (2002).

\*\* Independent candidates' share of the first preference mayoral vote

A more accurate assessment of the impact of mayoral candidates on voting behaviour can be made by drawing on individual level data (and hence the analysis that follows is limited to London<sup>190</sup>). I begin by considering the incidence of split ticket voting. Unlike the previous cases where aggregate data was used, I measure party preference in the London case through a survey question about how a respondent would have voted had a general election been held on the same day as the London contest.<sup>191</sup> At the first London elections in 2000, we find that 61 per cent of voters supported a mayoral candidate representing a party other than their preferred party. This figure ranges from a low of 30 per cent among Conservative voters to a high of 75 per cent among Labour voters. However, the reason for this high level of split ticket behaviour at the first London

<sup>188</sup> Doncaster had been the subject of high profile political scandal, which explains the high proportion of votes going to independent candidates (Rallings, Thrasher and Cowling, 2002).

<sup>189</sup> I say 'appear', since aggregate data cannot tell us exactly how people voted across two ballots.

<sup>190</sup> The 2000 election was covered by the *London Mayoral Election Survey* (see footnote 181). The 2004 election was covered by the *Greater London Assembly Election Study*, which achieved a total sample of 1,474.

<sup>191</sup> The use of an alternative measure of party preference (such as a respondent's party identification or voting behaviour on the list part of the Assembly ballot) does not substantially alter the results.

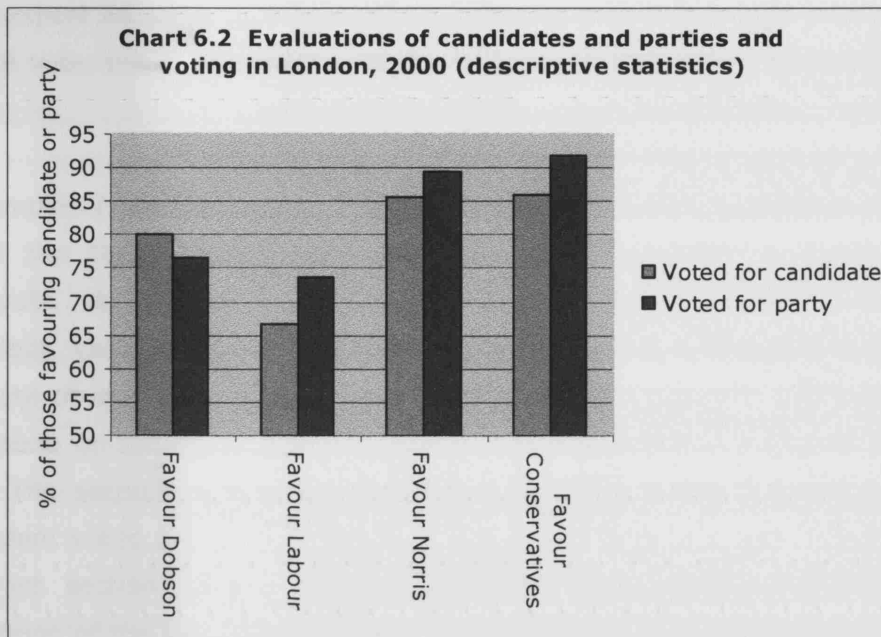
election was, of course, the presence on the ballot of a highly popular independent candidate, Ken Livingstone (who attracted the support of six in ten Labour voters and five in ten Liberal Democrats). At the second London election, in 2004 – which Livingstone contested as a party candidate – the level of split ticket voting fell to just 24 per cent. In other words, partisan voting was a far stronger feature of the second London election than of the first, although even in 2004, one quarter of voters deserted their preferred party when it came to their mayoral choice.

We can further examine the impact of the mayoral post by examining in more detail people's voting behaviour. In particular, how far did people vote for a mayoral candidate on the basis of their personal qualities or because of their party label? In what follows, I confine the analysis to voters who supported the mayoral candidate of one of the three main parties: Labour (Frank Dobson in 2000 and Ken Livingstone in 2004), the Conservatives (Steve Norris in both elections) and the Liberal Democrats (Susan Kramer in 2000 and Simon Hughes in 2004). My strategy is to match voting behaviour in the mayoral and assembly elections against evaluations of the mayoral candidate and their party. Thus, does favouring the candidate produce a strong vote for the candidate, but not necessarily for their party? And does favouring a party yield a vote for that party, but not necessarily for its mayoral candidate?

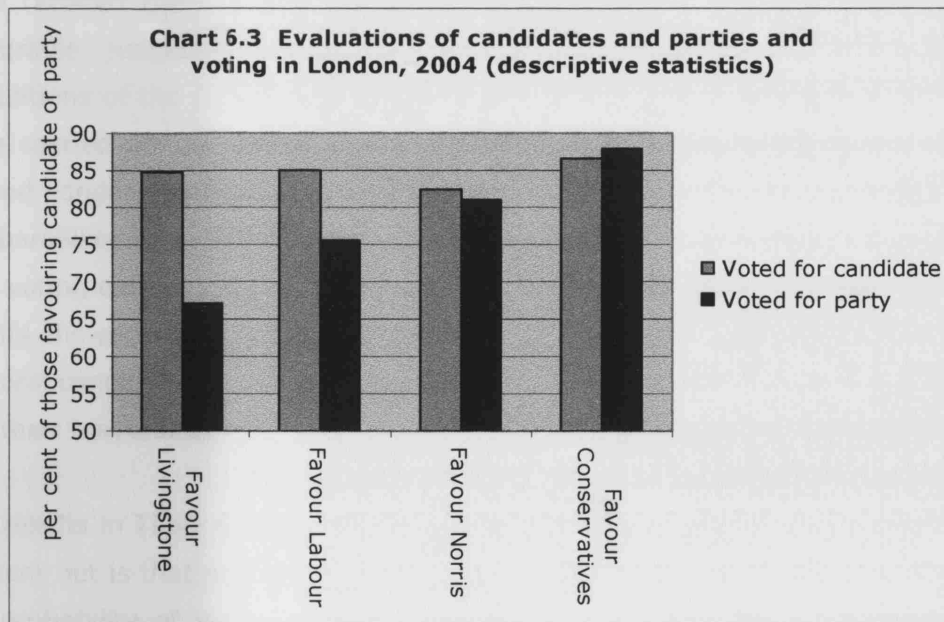
Simple descriptive statistics from the two London surveys provide some support for these effects. In Charts 6.2 and 6.3, I show propensity to vote for the two main parties and their mayoral candidates broken down by evaluations of the parties and candidates. The results for 2000 are shown in Chart 6.2. It shows that slightly more people who favoured Frank Dobson voted for the candidate than for his party in the Assembly vote. But among those who favoured the Labour party, rather more went on to support the party than to support its mayoral candidate (no doubt because many party supporters voted for a different candidate, namely Ken Livingstone). When it comes to the Conservatives and their candidate, Steve Norris, however, any candidate effect disappears, with positive evaluations of the candidate stimulating an even higher party vote than a candidate vote. In 2004, however, the Conservative/Norris picture reverts to the hypothesised effect, with candidate evaluations stimulating a higher personal than partisan vote, and party evaluations stimulating a higher partisan vote (although the differences in voting behaviour are marginal) (Chart 6.3). In the case of Labour/Livingstone, the candidate reaped the rewards of both candidate



and party evaluations. However, the effect was particularly pronounced among those who favoured Livingstone. Among this group, voting for the candidate was almost twenty percentage points higher than voting for the Labour party, while among those favouring the Labour party, the Livingstone vote outweighed the party vote by just ten points.



Source: *London Mayoral Election Study 2000*



Source: *Greater London Assembly Election Study 2004*

So, on the surface, personal qualities and appeals seem to have played some role in shaping vote choice in the mayoral sections of the ballot in 2000 and 2004.

We can test this more rigorously by modelling vote choice against people's evaluations of the mayoral candidates and of their parties. Specifically, we can examine how far voting for a mayoral candidate was associated with judgements about that candidate as opposed to judgements about their party (and, vice versa, how far a party vote was associated with judgements about the party rather than about their mayoral candidate). If mayors do encourage personalised voting, we would expect to see more substantive effects for candidate evaluations in the mayoral vote, but more substantive effects for party evaluations in the Assembly vote.

The samples I use are again of those who supported the mayoral candidate of one of the three main parties: Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. My analysis is based on two models of voting. The first takes as its dependent variable whether or not the respondent voted for the mayoral candidate of one of the three main parties (Stephen Norris, Frank Dobson/Ken Livingstone or Susan Kramer/Simon Hughes) on their first preference mayoral vote. The second model takes as its dependent variable whether or not the respondent voted for the Conservatives, Labour or the Liberal Democrats on the party list section of the Assembly vote. The independent variables are evaluations of the candidates and parties, using identical favourability scales for each (thus allowing for direct comparison between the two sets of evaluations). I have recoded the evaluation scales into simple dummy variables, contrasting favourable judgements with unfavourable or neutral judgements.<sup>192</sup> No evaluations of the Liberal Democrats or their mayoral candidate (Simon Hughes) were carried on the 2004 survey; I therefore cannot report this data for the second London election, and I also omit it from the 2000 results to maximise the comparability with the 2004 data. Since the two models are based on a three way voting choice, I estimate the parameters using multinomial logit. I limit the results shown to voting for the Conservatives and Labour and for their respective mayoral candidates; the reference categories are voting for the Liberal Democrats and their mayoral candidate.

The results in Table 6.4 provide some support for the hypothesis. The first thing to point out is that attitudes to a candidate or party are generally only related to the probability of voting for that candidate or party, not to the probability of voting for another candidate or party. The exception is evaluations of Labour,

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<sup>192</sup> I also ran the models retaining the original five point (2000) and seven point (2004) candidate and party evaluation scales. The results are not substantially different, although the odds ratios are less stark.

which come into play in shaping the probability of voting for Steve Norris and the Conservatives in both 2000 and 2004. Other than that, the key associations are between evaluations of a candidate and their party and voting for that candidate and their party; these results are shown in the shaded blocks.

**TABLE 6.4 - Evaluations of candidates and parties and voting in London, 2000 and 2004**

	Voted Norris	Voted Conservative	Voted Dobson /Livingstone	Voted Labour
<b>2000</b>				
Favour Norris	3.02** (.56) 20.516	2.98** (.70) 19.642	-0.93 (.92) 0.396	-0.24* (.88) 0.784
Favour Con	1.31* (.55) 3.699	2.03* (.68) 7.626	0.21 (.82) 1.232	-1.54* (1.13) 0.227
Favour Dobson	0.36 (.94) 1.434	-0.27 (.91) 0.766	4.06** (.78) 57.668	2.31* (.70) 10.065
Favour Labour	-1.22* (.60) 0.294	-1.48* (.73) 0.227	1.46* (.68) 4.228	2.27* (.70) 9.696
<b>2004</b>				
Favour Norris	2.48** (.42) 11.951	1.32* (.44) 3.7340	-0.05 (.38) 0.950	0.07 (.38) 1.073
Favour Con	2.41** (.41) 11.100	2.94** (.44) 18.910	0.31 (.44) 1.360	-0.13 (.49) 0.879
Favour Liv'ston	-0.04 (.48) 0.960	0.15 (.47) 1.158	2.25** (.34) 9.491	1.40* (.41) 4.048
Favour Labour	-0.95^ (.53) 0.386	-1.69* (.57) 0.184	0.95* (.33) 2.587	1.73** (.35) 5.657

Sources: *London Mayoral Election Study 2000* and *Greater London Assembly Election Study 2004*

The results show parameter estimates with standard errors in parentheses. Odds ratios are shown in the row beneath.

The results were produced from two models, one of voting in the mayoral election (first preference vote), the other of voting in the Assembly election (party list vote). The mayoral voting model in 2000 had a sample of 218, with a likelihood ratio test ( $\chi^2$ ) of 252.129 with 8df, significant at the 0.001 level. The mayoral voting model in 2004 had a sample of 483, with a likelihood ratio test ( $\chi^2$ ) of 471.853 with 8df, significant at the 0.001 level. The Assembly voting model in 2000 had a sample of 180, with a likelihood ratio test ( $\chi^2$ ) of 205.479 with 8df, significant at the 0.001 level. The Assembly voting model in 2004 had a sample of 381, with a likelihood ratio test ( $\chi^2$ ) of 364.368 with 8df, significant at the 0.001 level

\*\*p<0.01 \*p<0.05 ^p<0.10

In the case of voting for Steve Norris in the mayoral election in 2000, the probabilities are significantly associated with evaluations of both the candidate and his party. The same is true when the dependent variable becomes voting for the Conservatives in the Assembly election. Notice, however, that when it comes to voting for Norris (column 2), the coefficient attached to evaluations of the candidate (3.02) is stronger than that attached to the party evaluation (1.31). In addition, the odds ratio is higher (20.52 to 3.67). The odds ratio expresses the odds of the dependent variable equalling 1 for the dummy variable relative to the

reference category. The odds ratio (or exponentiated coefficient) represents a good means of comparing the relative impact of change in the independent variable on the outcome under review (Pampel, 2000). Thus, when it comes to the probability of voting for Norris, attitudes to the candidate are five times as important as attitudes to his party. However, when it comes to voting Conservative in 2000, candidate evaluations still predominate, with the odds ratio for favouring Norris (19.64) higher than that for favouring his party (7.63). The contrast between candidate and party evaluations can also be seen when we come to Labour and its mayoral candidates, and to Norris and the Conservatives in 2004. In the case of voting for Frank Dobson in 2000, evaluations of the candidate exert a far greater effect than evaluations of the party. But when it comes to the Assembly vote, the odds ratios associated with candidate and party evaluations are almost the same. We get a similar picture when it comes to voting for Norris and the Conservatives and Livingstone and Labour in 2004. In both cases, the odds of voting for the mayoral candidate are more strongly affected by evaluations of the candidate than of their party (albeit only marginally so in the case of Norris), while the probability of a party vote is more dependent on party evaluations than on views of the mayoral candidate (albeit only marginally so in the case of Labour).<sup>193</sup>

In other words, the fact of directly electing an individual to executive office in London does appear to have focused voters' minds on the qualities of the various candidates. Voting patterns in the mayoral election are closely associated with voters' judgements about the candidates, but more weakly associated with evaluations of their party. Party evaluations do matter, but more so in the Assembly contest. Mayoral candidates looking ahead to future elections, and wondering how far to focus their appeal on a personal, not party, message, may wish to note these findings.

### ***Mayors in office***

Beyond the election itself, we can also explore the effects of mayors on local parties by considering their behaviour in office. It is widely recognised that

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<sup>193</sup> The relative importance of candidate and party evaluations is further confirmed when evaluations of the Liberal Democrats and their mayoral candidate are entered into the equation for the 2000 voting model (data not shown in Table 6.4). Thus, the probability of voting for the Labour mayoral candidate, Frank Dobson, is significantly associated with feelings about the Liberal Democrat's mayoral candidate, Susan Kramer (coefficient of -1.70,  $p < 0.10$ ), but not with feelings about the party. However, the probability of voting for the Conservatives on the Assembly ballot is significantly associated with feelings about the Liberal Democrats (coefficient of -2.30,  $p < 0.05$ ), but not with feelings about Susan Kramer.

directly elected mayors have the potential to significantly change the dynamics of party politics within local councils. Thus, as noted above, mayors may command a personal legitimacy to pursue policy objectives other than those supported by their party. They may loosen their ties with their party group, for example by not consulting with the caucus prior to major policy decisions. In turn, the party might adopt a more critical perspective towards the mayor through the scrutiny function (Leach and Game, 2000). Even so short a time into the life of the new mayoral model, can we glean any evidence about such effects?

One indicator of the 'party weakening' effect is the extent to which the six 'partisan' mayors (ie. those drawn from a party, as opposed to Independent mayors) have engaged with the opposition parties or, alternatively, have retained power within their own parties. On the surface, there is little evidence of partisan weakening. In four of the six mayoral areas - Doncaster, Hackney, Lewisham and Newham - one party (Labour) enjoys an electoral dominance, resulting in few council seats for the opposition parties. Not surprisingly, in these areas, the mayor's cabinet is drawn solely from Labour councillors. There is also little need for the mayor to compromise with the opposition parties in order to win their support when it comes to council votes on the mayor's plans and annual budget.

In a fifth council - North Tyneside - there was an attempt by the first Conservative mayor to bring opposition councillors into his cabinet, although this move reflected the Labour dominated nature of the council. This overture was rejected, one result being the overturn of the mayor's budget in March 2003 on a two thirds majority. In the sixth council - Watford - a power sharing cabinet was again sought (successfully this time) as a response to a hung council. The consensus approach also reflects a tradition in Watford of power sharing between the parties, with the mayor believing a cross-party cabinet would be more attractive to local voters. When it came to the council budget, the mayor again compromised with the opposition parties who, moreover, judged that vetoing the proposals would antagonise voters. The budget was thus passed with no significant disagreement.<sup>194</sup>

But even in the four localities dominated by one party, there are some indications that mayors are using their electoral mandates to pursue slightly different trajectories from those of their party. For example, at least one mayor has

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with official in mayor's office, January 2004. Following elections in May 2003, the Liberal Democrats now enjoy a majority on Watford council. However, the cabinet still includes two members of the opposition parties, and the opposition parties did not oppose the mayor's budget in 2004.

pursued policy initiatives that are not a priority for his party.<sup>195</sup> Mayors have responded to the demands of those outside the council as well as to their parties within the council; for some partisan mayors, this has led to early conflicts with their party group.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, in some localities, mayors may seek to include opposition councillors in their cabinet alongside those from their own party after the second elections in 2006.<sup>197</sup>

Whether such 'non-partisan' initiatives have been recognised by the public is more open to doubt. A survey conducted in November 2003 by NOP found that respondents in areas covered by elected mayors were marginally more likely to agree with the statement "There is less party politics locally nowadays" than respondents in non-mayoral areas (Table 6.5). However, there were also more in the first group who disagreed with the proposition, suggesting that mayors may polarise opinions rather than leading them in one direction or another. This will certainly be an indicator to be followed up as the mayoral model matures.

**TABLE 6.5 Public evaluations of party politics in mayoral v non-mayoral areas**

	Mayoral areas (n=11)	Non-mayoral areas (n=4)
"There is less party politics locally, nowadays"		
Agree strongly	17%	15%
Agree slightly	27%	26%
Disagree slightly	21%	19%
Disagree strongly	21%	17%
Don't know	14%	24%
Balance (agree - disagree)	+2	+5

Source: Randle, 2004

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has assessed the impact of directly elected mayors in two ways: how far has the reform improved citizen-government linkages, and how far has it changed the nature of these linkages? In particular, have mayors weakened the role of the main mediating institutions of local democracy, the political parties?

The argument that elected mayors will stimulate higher electoral turnout and more supportive political attitudes has not, initially at least, received much

<sup>195</sup> Interview with a mayor, conducted by the author on a non-attributable basis, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2004.

<sup>196</sup> See Randle (2004: 15); also the comments made by two mayors at the launch of Randle's report in February 2004.

<sup>197</sup> Source: as footnote 195.

backing. True, while public attitudes appear supportive of the mayoral model in the abstract, and in London at least, support for the mayoral model does appear to have encouraged some people to vote in 2000. Overall, however, the mayoral referendums and first elections were marked by relatively low participation levels. Nor do mayors seem to appeal particularly to those with low levels of trust in the existing political system. But there are signs that mayors may have a more beneficial effect further down the line, with levels of name recognition far higher for the first eleven mayors than for council leaders in non-mayoral authorities.

Might mayors have rather more of an impact in shifting the terms of the citizen-government relationship than in improving these terms? The evidence here is equivocal. On the one hand, levels of 'split ticket' voting in simultaneous mayor-council elections in 2000 were not that high. On the other hand, voting in the London mayoral elections of 2000 and 2004 does appear to have responded to evaluations of the main candidates, and not just to voters' general partisan inclinations.

It may be that voters are rather more attuned to the potential for candidate voting than the mayoral candidates themselves. Certainly, the first mayoral election showed little evidence of the candidates adopting distinct policy positions to those of their parties. Nor is there much evidence thus far of mayors in office adopting a personal policy course that cuts across their party's programme. But even this early into the life of the new model, there are hints of such 'non-partisan' behaviour; hints, moreover, that the overseas evidence suggests will become more significant over time.

**Chapter 7**  
**CONCLUSION: THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL  
REFORM IN BRITAIN**

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It is difficult to underestimate the importance of the constitutional reforms introduced in Britain since 1997, reforms that have fundamentally changed the way that political power is exercised and controlled. The reforms are arguably the defining act of Tony Blair's Government, certainly of its first term in office between 1997 and 2001. They also have a significance beyond Britain. In recent years, many countries have undertaken reform of their core political institutions, driven in large part by a growing citizen discontent with, and disengagement from, these institutions (Cain, Dalton and Scarrow, 2003). As I noted in Chapter One, similar rationales were professed by many of the key policy actors in explaining the domestic reforms. The reforms in Britain should be seen, then, as part of a broader, cross-national, attempt by political elites to devise more responsive and accountable political processes, and thus to generate more engaged and supportive citizens. But the British reforms also go beyond those introduced in other advanced democracies. No other country has introduced such a wide ranging programme, in such a short space of time. Granted, the domestic reforms can be seen as bringing Britain's political arrangements closer into line with those in many other advanced democracies, rather than necessarily as going beyond them. Nonetheless, the 'big bang' domestic approach presents a stark contrast to the more cautious reforms being pursued elsewhere. Thus, to the extent that institutional reforms are motivated - in part at least - by a desire to 'reconnect' disaffected citizenries, one might anticipate a more noticeable dividend in Britain than elsewhere. It has been the task of this work to explore such a dividend; the results are important both as a commentary on a domestic reform and within a wider international context.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on the evidence presented in Chapters Three to Six. I examine how far the reforms assessed in these chapters can be said to have stimulated a positive effect among citizens in Britain, in particular how far they have generated higher levels of electoral participation and political trust. Alongside these empirical conclusions, I also reflect on a second objective running through the preceding chapters, namely the elucidation of various abstract accounts of why particular institutional configurations should systematically affect citizen-government linkages. I have argued (particularly in Chapters One and



Two) that the constitutional reforms work within a particular model of democracy, namely the representative one. However, the four reforms I consider also vary in important respects, for example in the degree of citizen participation and partisan mediation they provide. A second point of reflection is thus to consider how far these variations might affect the way citizens perceive, and engage with, their political agents. If we find that the reforms have not yielded clearly discernible outcomes, it will be important to probe the likely reasons for this. How far might any shortcomings in the performance of the existing reform programme be explained by the inadequate changes they have effected to the basic representative processes? Alternatively, might any shortcomings reflect a failure to introduce a more radical departure from the existing rules of the game, by introducing more direct participation in collective decisions? The two tasks of this concluding chapter are thus to review and summarise the empirical evidence of the British reforms to date, and then to explore what potential lies in a further, and possibly a bolder, set of reforms.

## **THE BRITISH REFORMS EVALUATED**

The task of identifying and measuring outcomes is a difficult one. For a start, the constitutional reforms I have considered are still relatively new. Devolution to Scotland and Wales was only introduced in 1999 – as were new methods of voting – the new rules governing party funding only became law in 2001, and most of the new elected mayors only took office in 2002. At the time of writing, then, the most mature of the constitutional reforms is barely six years old. I suggested in Chapter Two that the limited longevity of the reforms was no reason for not evaluating their impact on citizen attitudes and behaviour. Nonetheless, this impact might take some time to be manifested, as citizens – accustomed to one set of incentives, constraints and behavioural norms – grow to understand and work within new 'rules of the game'. I should emphasise, then, that my conclusions are highly provisional, subject as they are to the limited timeframe within which any effects might have become apparent.

This does not exhaust the practical difficulties in identifying institutional effects. Throughout this work, I have focused on two key indicators of the linkages between citizens and their governments: levels of electoral turnout and political trust. One can undertake a certain degree of analysis using aggregate data for these two variables. Thus, one can note levels of turnout for the new devolved tiers of government, or for contests using new electoral rules. One can monitor

the simple stock of political trust among the population before and after a reform has been introduced. But such aggregate measures are difficult to interpret. Thus, one might identify a particular level of turnout for a devolved tier of government. But against which other tier of government should this turnout rate be set in order to assess its significance? For example, is the turnout rate for the first Scottish Parliament election (58 per cent) best set against the preceding contests for local councils (which attracted a lower turnout) or Westminster (which attracted a higher turnout)? When it comes to political trust, is the relevant measure trust in the government at Westminster, or do we also need to take account of trust in other tiers of government, notably the new devolved administrations?

But the main drawback of aggregate data is simply its crudeness. Levels of electoral participation and political trust fluctuate over time, and between tiers of political authority, for all sorts of reasons other than the nature of political institutions. Although media pundits may resort to simple aggregate data as the ultimate measure of whether the constitutional reforms have 'reconnected' citizens and government, a serious analysis of these reforms demands more refined measures. Thus, in this work, I have tried to supplement aggregate data with data that more precisely links levels of turnout and trust with institutional design. Such a strategy calls for individual level data - gathered through mass level sample surveys - that allows behavioural and attitudinal patterns to be linked to levels of support for institutional reform. This places some obvious restrictions on the scope of the investigation since, while some of the institutional reforms since 1997 have been covered by population surveys (notably devolution and reform of the electoral system in Scotland and Wales), the coverage of other reforms (notably elected mayors outside London and, to a lesser degree, party funding) is more limited. Thus, for some of the reforms considered here, the data is insufficient to allow anything other than cautious conclusions to be drawn. And even in the case of those reforms for which good quality survey data does exist, the fact that their introduction was often simultaneous makes identifying the effects of particular reforms difficult. Thus, how much of any effect on trust and turnout in Scotland in 1999 was due to the establishment of a new tier of government, and how much due to the new voting rules used to select its members? It is difficult to disentangle the discrete effects among a package of reforms, although I attempted to do so in Chapter Four when considering the impact of electoral reform.

Finally, while it is surely analytically correct to gauge institutional effects through precise measurements that draw on individual level data, the results in the preceding chapters are often rather unimpressive. That is, the relationship between a particular institutional reform and the resulting behavioural and attitudinal patterns is often small. This tells us that institutional redesign has - perhaps *is capable of* - only limited effects; reforming core political institutions is not in itself a panacea to any shortcomings in the way citizens engage with their political agents. But institutional design may have a role, and it is this role that I have tried to identify in this work. In reviewing the evidence from the various empirical chapters, therefore, the task is not to search for any startling evidence of change, but to assess how far any small relationships collectively add up to a picture of institutional effect. I begin by recapitulating the evidence for each of the four reforms. Since my task was to explore the impact of the constitutional reform programme, I start with those reforms (devolution and electoral reform) for which the strongest conclusions about outcomes can be reached. I then consider the evidence about local mayors, before finishing with the reform whose outcomes are currently the most obscure, party funding. Having reviewed the findings by reform, I then attempt to draw some more general conclusions.

The reform that appears to have done the most to reconnect citizens and governments is devolution to Scotland.<sup>198</sup> As Chapter Five showed, the creation of the Scottish Parliament has established a tier of political authority in which a majority of the population invests its trust. This is not true of the Westminster government, in which levels of trust among Scots are far lower. Thus, in spite of concerted media criticism of its policy record and issues such as the new Holyrood building, the Scottish Parliament enjoys a high popular legitimacy, even if this has declined somewhat since 1999 (Chart 5.1). When it comes to turnout, devolution appears to have had a rather less positive impact. At the first Scottish Parliament elections in 1999, almost six in ten of the electorate participated, a fairly impressive proportion given that turnout for the preceding local elections was thirteen points lower. But turnout for the Parliament fell back in 2004 to just below five in ten of the electorate. Moreover, modelling of individual level data suggests that attitudes to devolution were not associated at either election with the decision to vote. However, in spite of rather low levels of electoral participation, popular engagement with the Scottish Parliament via its representatives appears to be quite healthy. Measured in terms of actual and

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<sup>198</sup> Devolution to Wales and London enjoyed less popular support, measured in terms of the results of, and participation in, the respective referendums in 1999 and 2000.

hypothetical contact, levels of engagement with members of the Parliament (MSPs) are higher than those with Westminster MPs.

These outcomes suggest that devolution to Scotland has yielded some broadly benign dividends for the relations between citizens and governments. When it comes to electoral reform, the conclusions appear to be slightly less positive. However, this is partly because it is more difficult to reach judgements about levels of aggregate trust in the case of electoral reform than it is for devolution. Devolution involves the establishment of a new tier of political authority, trust in which can be compared to that in the reserved tier of government. It is less easy to do this for reform of the electoral rules.<sup>199</sup> Instead, we must rely on breaking down marginal distributions, to explore the relationship between support for the new rules, on the one hand, and turnout and trust, on the other. Having done so, we find that while attitudes to electoral reform are mildly correlated with the propensity to participate, there is no relationship with trust. That is, those who take a positive line on the new electoral rules show no significantly higher level of trust than those whose line is more negative, *ceteris paribus*. Faced with the difficulties in gauging the outcomes of new electoral rules, the analysis in Chapter Four extends the key variables to additional behavioural and attitudinal characteristics. The results do not point to a clear dividend. On the one hand, the use of a proportional electoral system has allowed voters to convey more genuine and complex preferences to policy makers, opportunities they appear to have taken up (measured by levels of 'sincere' and 'split ticket' voting). But on the other, voters appear to be concerned - manifested in both attitudes and behaviour - about the new forms of representation introduced by the proportional rules, as well as by the potential for weakened processes of accountability under multi-party arrangements.

These findings from the analyses of devolution and electoral reform highlight an important point, namely that citizens may respond not simply to the mere existence of a new institution, but to its particular features. Thus, in relation to electoral reform, I noted in Chapter Four that people in Scotland were critical of the restrictions on intra-party preference voting introduced by the 'closed' list electoral system, a feature that has implications for levels of political trust. Similarly, in my analysis of devolution in Chapter Five, I noted that the 'salience'

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<sup>199</sup> It could be, of course, that one reason why the devolved tier of government is more trusted among Scots than the Westminster tier is that the former is selected under proportional electoral arrangements, whereas the latter is selected under plurality arrangements. People in Scotland may

of the Scottish Parliament elections had declined from 1999 to 2004, a factor that appears to have contributed to the fall in turnout between the two contests. In other words, determinate effects on citizens' attitudes and behaviour appear to arise from the nature of electoral choice and the significance of the new bodies being elected, not simply from the mere existence of new electoral rules and devolved legislatures. Thus, in thinking through which institutions might have systematic effects on the relations between citizens and governments, attention should be paid to the specific nature of the institutions and to the context in which they are introduced, features which may well affect citizen attitudes and behaviour.

The conclusions arising from the chapters on directly elected mayors and party regulation were less definitive than those for devolution and electoral reform. This reflects the limited time that has elapsed since the reforms were introduced - and thus the limited opportunities for assessing outcomes - and the relative lack of survey data by which to identify citizens' responses. For these two reforms, then, the conclusions were forced to draw as much on *input* measures (in other words, the distribution of attitudes and behaviour prior to the reforms) as on *outcomes*.

In the case of party regulation, we have almost no means of gauging how voters have responded to the new rules, although Chapter Three did note that the reforms had not had any immediate effect in reducing perceptions of political misconduct. Instead, the analysis explored attitudes prior to the introduction of the reforms in 2001. While there appeared to be public support for some restrictions on the way the parties raised and spent their funds, there was no clear support for eliminating the potential for agency loss by substituting collective (state) funding for individual funding. While there seems to be reasonable public support for the 'midi' option represented by the Government's reforms, this has only a limited relationship with trust. Thus, those with little trust in existing political institutions are only marginally more likely to favour reform than those whose trust is greater. Measured in terms of inputs, therefore, it is difficult to predict a substantial payoff for trust from the tighter regulation of party funding.

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thus be expressing trust in the Parliament on the basis that they believe it to be more representative - by virtue of its electoral system - than Westminster.

When it comes to directly elected mayors, we at least have some indicators by which to gauge the outcome of the reforms. However, this data is difficult to interpret. Using aggregate level data, I suggested that the introduction of directly elected mayors had done nothing to boost levels of electoral participation. Yet in the one contest for which survey data was available - London - I found that attitudes towards the mayoral model were a modest predictor of electoral turnout. This apparent discrepancy may reflect the different contexts of the contests in London and elsewhere, or it may arise from the different type of data being used. In fact, levels of support for the mayoral model do appear to be quite high, even outside London. However, the likely payoff for trust is open to doubt, since there is no relationship between support for mayors and trust in local councillors.

What general conclusions can be drawn from the evidence amassed across the four reforms considered in this work? The main lesson I would draw is not that these four reforms have succeeded or failed wholesale to stimulate greater turnout and trust, but that the effects are small, particular and highly contingent. Thus, the establishment of the Scottish Parliament created an institution that many Scots clearly felt would be broadly responsive to their demands. This is reflected in the high levels of trust invested in the Parliament to serve Scotland's needs. But there is no more general payoff from Scottish devolution to trust in the British Government. When it comes to patterns of behaviour, take the case of the new elected mayors in twelve English towns and cities. The relatively low rates of turnout for the first elections to these posts were not a reflection of public antipathy towards the reform (attitudes were, in fact, broadly positive), but almost certainly of apathy. After all, while the mayor might occupy a powerful position within the local government of their area, their absolute powers - certainly as compared to their counterparts in some other west European countries and the United States - were low. Thus we should not be surprised if the public greeted the reform with a shrug of indifference. A different set of contingent factors were identified in the discussion of electoral reform. While it is difficult to accurately discern the impact of electoral reform on levels of trust in Britain, the data suggests that any stimulus to trust might be compromised by such features as the degree of intra-party preference voting, the nature of local representation and the level of electoral accountability.

The indeterminacy of the results, and the contingencies I suggest they hint at, should come as little surprise to anyone who has read the sections in Chapters Three to Six on the theoretical rationale for institutional effects, and the empirical

evidence from overseas. For, in the main, the theoretical and overseas accounts themselves lead to ambiguous conclusions. Thus, on theoretical arguments, it is not wholly clear whether a centralised or decentralised distribution of political power (or a plurality or proportional electoral system, or a loosely or highly regulated system of party finance) should yield the most beneficial results in terms of a participatory and trustful citizenry. Nor does the empirical evidence from overseas lend much additional clarity. Even when cross-national studies point to a fairly clear empirical finding – for instance the evidence that proportional electoral rules stimulate higher rates of electoral turnout than plurality and majoritarian rules – additional studies that adopt a different methodology suggest that this finding might in fact be an artefact of the research design (see Chapter Four).

So political institutions may not have systematic effects on the way citizens behave and on the attitudes they hold. Instead, their effects might be highly contingent, often of limited magnitude and frequently pulling in different directions (some leading to greater trust and/or turnout, others having no such effect). It may well be that such contingent and partial effects are universal; that political institutions in general simply do not stimulate the kind of systematic outcomes that their proponents often claim for them. But let us assume for the time being that such outcomes are, in principle, possible, and that the British reforms have simply failed to generate these benefits.<sup>200</sup> What might explain this failure? In what follows, I review some of the possible reasons.<sup>201</sup>

## **EXTENDING OR BEYOND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM?**

These reasons can be grouped into four broad camps. The first argues that the reforms introduced since 1997 were, in theory, both necessary and sufficient to

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<sup>200</sup> A contrary view would be that low trust and participation arise from conditions which the constitutional reforms fail to address. Thus, for example, the new regimes covering the way parties are funded and the conduct of elected representatives are predicated on the notion that the public perceives shortcomings in the behaviour of these bodies, and that these perceptions lead to lower levels of confidence in the political process. Yet, as a recent survey for the Committee on Standards in Public Life (2004) found, the key shortcoming among MPs and ministers identified by members of the public concerned not misconduct, but openness and truthfulness. However, no amount of regulatory regimes will impel political actors to behave in a manner that the public deems to be truthful, and thus such regimes might be anticipated to have relatively little effect on citizens' confidence.

<sup>201</sup> One reason for the rather low key nature of many of my findings might be that I have failed to select the most appropriate reforms against which to measure the impact on trust and turnout. For example, a reform such as the freedom of information regime might be likely to do more for the perceived trustworthiness of government than, say, stricter controls on party funding. I justified my selection of case studies in Chapter One, partly on the basis that for some potentially important reforms – such as freedom of information – we lack the data to make informed judgements about outcomes. I return to the potential role for these reforms below, although only on the basis of 'input' measures (data collected prior to the introduction of the reform).

re-engage a disaffected public, but that, in practice, they have not worked in the way their designers - or indeed citizens themselves - had hoped. Thus, critics would point to such factors as the weak initial policy performance of the Scottish Executive and the furore over the cost of the new Holyrood building, and the continued allegations of 'sleaze' under the new party funding rules. I provided some evidence in the preceding chapters to substantiate such arguments. Thus, Chapter Five (Chart 5.5) mapped the decline in public evaluations of policy and governance performance by the Scottish Parliament, and showed that these were linked to levels of trust in the devolved institutions (Table 5.3). In Chapter Three, I recorded the limited public evaluations of efforts to combat sleaze (Table 3.3). The corollary is that improved performance on the part of policy actors - in terms of policy and/or conduct - might be sufficient to stimulate greater confidence among the public.

The second camp suggests that the constitutional reforms were necessary, but not sufficient, to re-engage citizens. There are two strands of argument within this camp. The first points to the gap between the long list of constitutional reforms promised by the Labour Party in opposition, and the rather shorter - although still substantial - list of reforms it actually introduced once in office. Critics who adopt this argument often question the real commitment of key Labour figures - in particular Tony Blair - to the reform programme, citing as evidence the party's unwillingness to deliver all that it promised to voters, let alone to go beyond these initial commitments. The net result, critics suggest, of this failure to adequately reform Britain's political system is continued discontent and lack of engagement among citizens. Take as a statement of this position the contention of two prominent Liberal Democrats that:

"... the ... failure to deliver the radical [constitutional] reform trumpeted [by Tony Blair] as so "essential" in 1996 has been a major factor in creating an atmosphere of alienation between government and governed." (Goodhart and Tyler, 2003: 10)

Part of this argument relates simply to broken promises, which Goodhart and Tyler allege have arisen in many policy areas besides constitutional reform. But another part suggests that residual citizen disengagement arises from a political system that retains too many of the old deficiencies, and has not been reformed in line with popular expectations and demands. Among the measures that critics allege Labour has reneged on are: stronger provisions for public access to official information, a referendum on electoral reform, an elected tier of government for



the English regions, and an elected second chamber (Holden, 2001; Goodhart and Tyler, 2003).

The second strand of the 'necessary but not sufficient' camp suggests that the failure of the constitutional reforms to re-engage Britain's citizens arises not simply because some of the promised reforms have gone undelivered, but because the reform programme was insufficient in the first place. In fact, the two strands of this camp are easier to distinguish in theory than in practice; most of those who complain about the Labour Government's failure to deliver what it was held to have promised also commend a further programme of reform. These reforms would typically extend popular voice (through a more vibrant system of local government and democratic control over government agencies and executive bodies), provide for greater diffusion of power (both territorially via an extension of the devolution programme, and in terms of party representation via a proportional electoral system) and introduce clear checks and balances on the executive (via a directly elected second chamber) (*ibid*; Marquand, 2000, 2004). These proposals are seen, as just noted, as an extension of the reforms already introduced since 1997, rather than as taking them in a new direction. David Marquand commends what he terms the 'republican model' of democracy on the basis that "It would mean following through the logic of the constitutional changes which the government has already made" (Marquand, 2000: 275).

What the two camps have in common is their prognostication that defects in Britain's system of representative democracy can essentially be remedied by reforms to this system, rather than by reforms that move outside the system. In other words, while political agency might be sub-divided among more bodies, with citizens accorded greater control and rights over executive authority, the distribution of political power would remain primarily determined by competitive elections between political parties (albeit with a greater role for independent bodies such as the judiciary). The underlying logic of these arguments thus has much in common with the 'dispersed' account of constitutional design presented in Chapter Two. In other words, what is sought are more diffuse forms of political agency, with decision making partitioned between multiple principals, and checked via the establishment of multiple agents, or 'veto players'. In a nutshell, reformers commend the type of arrangements that Lijphart labels as 'consensual', as opposed to the 'majoritarian' arrangements that Britain arguably still enjoys.

There is thus a strong body of opinion - among both theorists and British commentators - suggesting that only more extensive constitutional reforms will secure the goals of a participatory and trustful citizenry. Can these accounts help explain the arguably limited contribution of the constitutional reforms that I have mapped in preceding chapters?

Since the introduction of additional institutional reforms is a hypothetical scenario, the answer to this question can be no more than suggestive. We lack the outcome measures employed in the preceding chapters to evaluate how various constitutional innovations have worked in practice. Instead, judgements about the contribution of additional innovations must rely on input measures, namely the degree of public support for such measures, and the relationship between such attitudes and levels of trust and turnout. The results may be no more than provisional, but at least they provide some indication of the likely validity of the arguments surrounding the extension of the constitutional reforms.

As I discussed at various points in the preceding chapters (see in particular Chapter Three), there are two key conditions that must be met *ex ante* before we can realistically anticipate institutional reform yielding a payoff for trust and turnout. The first is a high aggregate level of public support for reform. The second is, at a disaggregated level, a strong relationship between support for institutional reform and low levels of political trust and/or electoral turnout. Thus, institutional reform can hardly be expected to stimulate closer linkages between citizens and governments if the reform is unpopular, or if its popularity is concentrated among those already trustful of their political institutions.<sup>202</sup> So what is the distribution and breakdown of attitudes towards some of main extensions of the constitutional reform programme?

Let me take first of all two pieces of survey evidence that tap rather neatly the principal arguments made in favour of the 'concentrated' and 'dispersed' forms of political authority outlined in Chapter Two. The former suggests that unifying political authority serves to minimise agency loss and thus to ensure government responsiveness; the latter suggests that discretionary authority can only be made responsive via extensive constraints. Survey questions included in two 'State of

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<sup>202</sup> This does not necessarily mean that, for a reform to stand an *a priori* chance of success, those with low trust and low levels of engagement must be much more supportive of its introduction than those with high trust and engagement. Reforms that draw support from across the population may do as much to boost turnout and engagement as those whose support derives disproportionately from the discontented and disengaged. However, if a reform's popularity is higher among those already

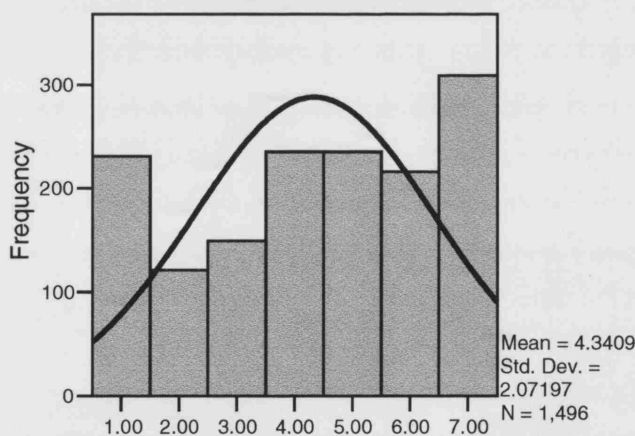
the Nation' polls in 1991 and 1995 tap this distinction. Granted, the trade-off raised by the first set of questions hinges on the policy capacity of the concentrated forms of political power, rather than on its ability to minimise agency loss. Nonetheless, the questions do measure attitudes towards the two distinct forms of institutional arrangements.

"It is important for a government to be able to take decisive action without looking over its shoulder all the time.

Constitutional checks and balances are important to make sure that a government doesn't overdo it."

The distribution of answers to these two statements was measured on a seven point scale (where one equates to strong support for decisive government, while seven equates to strong support for checks and balances). The results for 1991 are reported in Chart 7.1. We can see that, while opinion is mildly skewed in favour of constraining government, there is strong residual support for decisive government. In fact 23 per cent of respondents preferred decisive government (options one or two) against 34 per cent who strongly favoured checks and balances (options six and seven).<sup>203</sup> In this case, then, while many 'principals' appear to favour imposing checks on their 'agents', by no means all place a premium on such constraints.

**Chart 7.1 Distribution of opinion towards constraints on government, 1991**



1=Decisive government; 7=Checks and balances  
Source: MORI/State of the Nations, 1991

trustful and engaged, then we might reasonably doubt whether its introduction would do much to boost citizen-government linkages at the aggregate level.

<sup>203</sup> I cannot report the results for 1995, since the raw data is not publicly available.

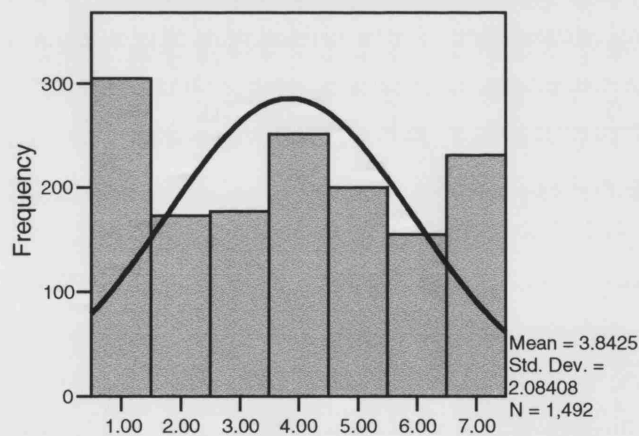
The second question neatly captures the distinction made by Arend Lijphart between majoritarian and consensus democracy. It asked respondents to select between these two statements:

“It is important for a government to be strong and stable, even if it occasionally goes too far.

Achieving agreement is important for a government, even if it means more elections”.

Those who strongly preferred strong government were asked to select option one, those who preferred consensual government were asked to select option seven; option four was the mid-point. As we can see from Chart 7.2, attitudes were normally distributed, with only a very slight skew towards strong government. In other words, a sizeable proportion of the population seems to favour a relatively powerful and autonomous executive over a consensual and constrained one. Admittedly we cannot conclude much from an abstract set of questions derived from single survey, especially one as dated as this. But if attitudes today are anything like those recorded in the early 1990s (and, unfortunately, we have no more contemporary measures), this would hardly constitute a presumption in favour of constraining and consensual political institutions.

**Chart 7.2 Distribution of opinion towards consensual government, 1991**



1=Strong government; 7=Consensual government  
Source: *MORI/State of the Nation*, 1991

Let me now turn to some specific institutions, in particular those advocated by supporters of an extension of Britain's constitutional reform programme. I consider here six reforms: the move to a proportional electoral system for the House of Commons, a directly elected second chamber, devolution to the English regions, a stronger freedom of information regime, a written constitution and new rules for the funding of political parties. All were commended by groups such as

Charter88 and the Liberal Democrats (see above), and all, though to varying degrees, are covered by data on public attitudes.

In terms of aggregate support, it is arguably only the measures that provide for stronger individual rights against the state (*ex post* constraints) that command clear public support. Unfortunately, we lack extensive measures of public attitudes to liberal information regimes and a written constitution, so will have to make do with limited data. I believe the best two survey questions on the topic were those asked by the *British Social Attitudes* studies, although neither referred to the reform by name. The survey asked two questions, in 2000, to identify attitudes towards official information, using information on defence and economic policy as its focus:

"Do you think the government should have the right to keep its defence [economic] plans secret, or should the public normally have the right to know what they are?"

On defence, a clear majority favoured official secrecy, with 58 per cent supporting a government's right to keep its defence plans to itself (38 per cent supported openness, with 3 per cent unsure). However, when it came to economic policy, fully nine in ten (89 per cent) favoured openness, against just 8 per cent who supported government secrecy. Thus, on issues that do not involve national security, there appears to be a strong public presumption in favour of official disclosure of information. When it comes to public attitudes towards a written constitution, the best survey evidence dates back to 1996, when the *British Social Attitudes* survey asked about attitudes to judicial versus parliamentary power.<sup>204</sup>

The question asked respondents to select between two statements:

"British courts should be able to overrule Parliament on any law which denies people their basic rights.

Britain's democratically elected parliament should always have the final say on what the law should be"

A majority of respondents - six in ten (60 per cent) - believed that courts should enjoy veto powers, while just two in ten (22 per cent) believed that Parliament should retain ultimate power (18 per cent were unable to choose).

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<sup>204</sup> Although the case for a written constitution can be, and often is, advanced for a number of reasons, the crux is that it provides individuals and organisations with certain explicit rights, reviewable by judicial authorities. Hence the appropriateness of the *British Social Attitudes* survey question. I suggest that the survey question is the best, since it poses both sides of the argument, and thus encourages more reflective - and thus arguably more accurate - responses from the survey sample.

In contrast to this support for the strengthening of individual rights, proposals for extending or modifying the electoral principle receive less public endorsement. I have already noted (Chart 4.1) that no majority exists for changing the electoral system for Westminster. Over the past two decades, opinion has been fairly consistently split 6:4 in favour of retaining the existing system over changing to a system that gives small parties a more equitable share of rewards. When it comes to an elected second chamber, public opinion is more favourable, although no clear majority exists for the reform. The *British Social Attitudes* survey in 2002 tapped the policy debate over the future composition of the second chamber by asking respondents to choose between one of the following membership principles: All or primarily appointed; All or primarily elected; Equal appointed/elected; Outright abolition. Very few (5 per cent) favoured a wholly appointed second chamber, although only one in three (30 per cent) favoured an elected membership. The plurality option (34 per cent) was for a mixed appointed/elected membership (18 per cent supported outright abolition and 11 per cent were unsure between the options).<sup>205</sup>

When it comes to English devolution, it is clear from various opinion surveys that no majority exists in favour of an elected tier of regional government (reinforced by the decisive 'No' vote in the referendum in North East England in November 2004). Again, the *British Social Attitudes* survey provides a good test of public attitudes, asking its sample in 2002:

"With all the changes going on in the way the different parts of Great Britain are run, which of the following do you think would be best for England:

- For England to be governed as it is now, with laws made by the UK parliament
- For each region of England to have its own elected assembly, that makes decisions about the region's economy, planning and housing
- Or for England as a whole to have its own new parliament with law making powers?"

While support for the regional option has increased since 1999 - from 15 per cent of respondents then to 24 per cent in 2003 - the favoured option remains the *status quo*, with 55 per cent of respondents in 2003 preferring England to be governed "as it is now". Moreover, in no individual region does support for the regional option extend beyond one third of the population (Curtice and Sandford, 2004). Finally, and as pointed out in Chapter Three, there is no evidence that a majority of the population supports reducing parties' financial reliance on wealthy

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<sup>205</sup> For fairly similar results, see the *State of the Nation 2004* poll, conducted by ICM for the Joseph

individuals or organisations by moving to a system of wholesale state funding. In fact, as Table 3.2 suggested, over one half of the samples surveyed over the last decade or so believe that the current voluntary system of party funding is preferable to a new collective basis for its provision.

**TABLE 7.1 Attitudes to institutional reform, by trust**

Reform	Level of trust <sup>o</sup> (%)			Correlation support-trust
	High	Medium	Low	
<i>Freedom of information</i>				
Government to disclose defence policy	33	39	45	0.08*
Government to disclose economic policy	88	92	92	0.05*
<i>Written constitution/judicial oversight</i>				
Courts able to overrule Parliament	68	74	76	0.07
<i>Electoral system</i>				
Change voting system for House of Commons	33	36	47	0.11*
<i>House of Lords</i>				
Elected composition	45	42	42	0.05
Elected/appointed composition	46	51	50	
<i>English devolution</i>				
Regional assemblies	65	60	51	0.11*
<i>Party funding</i>				
State funding of parties	35	39	38	0.01

<sup>o</sup> Trust government to place the needs of the nation above those of their party  
 'High' = Just about always/most of the time; 'Medium' = Only some of the time; 'Low' = Almost never

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (Coefficients are either Cramer's V in the case of nominal variables, or Spearman's rho in the case of ordinal variables).

Sources: Freedom of information: *British Social Attitudes 2000*; Written constitution/party funding: *British Social Attitudes 1996*; Electoral system/English regions: *British Social Attitudes 2003*; House of Lords: *British Social Attitudes 2002*

This brief review of recent survey data casts some doubts, then, on how far additional institutional reforms might stimulate a beneficial response among the British population. While measures that boost individual's rights and access to official information appear to command widespread support, those that extend electoral voice are less popular. Moreover, in our second test – the relationship between support for a particular reform and levels of trust – we find that several of the additional measures fail to perform well. In Table 7.1, I break down attitudes towards my key reforms by levels of trust. I suggested above that, for a reform to be judged a likely stimulant to trust, support for its introduction should be particularly pronounced among those with low confidence in the existing rules of the game. In fact, this is only really true of three of the reforms. Both freedom of information and a written constitution enjoy higher levels of support among the discontented than among the contented; so does electoral

reform.<sup>206</sup> But reform of the House of Lords and changing the way the parties are funded are no more popular among those with low trust than among those with high trust. And when it comes to devolution to the English regions, levels of enthusiasm are actually higher among those who profess to trust government than among those who do not.

I am interested not only in the impact of institutional reform on levels of trust, but also on levels of electoral participation. However, only one of the six reforms might reasonably be held to affect turnout, namely changing the electoral rules for Westminster elections. I suggested in Chapter Four that the new voting arrangements had made at most a limited impact on turnout in the Scottish Parliament elections. When it comes to the voting arrangements for the House of Commons, support for changing the electoral rules is higher among those who failed to vote in the 2001 general election than among those who did participate (44 per cent to 36 per cent).<sup>207</sup> But the relationship between support for reform and participation is not strong: the correlation between the two is statistically, but not substantively, significant at 0.07.

Overall, then, very simple evidence using 'input' measures (ie. indicators taken prior to the introduction of any reform) casts some doubt on the argument that further institutional reform will boost levels of trust and participation among Britain's citizens. Granted, further extensions of the regimes covering freedom of information and individual rights might convince the less trustful of the merits of Britain's political arrangements. And electoral reform might similarly boost trust and turnout among the currently discontented and disengaged. But it might also alienate those who currently exhibit some faith in these arrangements, for reform in this area remains a minority concern. As for the other reforms commended by many policy actors and commentators, whatever their other merits, they do not appear to command sufficient support among discontented citizens to suggest a benign overall effect on levels of trust.

The third and fourth set of arguments about the effects of Britain's constitutional reform programme suggest, to greater or lesser degrees, that the reforms are not

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<sup>206</sup> Data gathered in 2004 by the Office for National Statistics also shows that public confidence in official statistics varies greatly by levels of trust in government. People with high levels of trust are far more likely to express confidence in official statistics than those with low levels of trust. Unfortunately, the survey contains no measure of public support for the most obvious institutional remedy, namely an independent statistics agency. Nonetheless, the figures at least suggest that such a reform might generate a payoff for levels of citizen trust. (See [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/public\\_confidence.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/public_confidence.asp).)

<sup>207</sup> Source: *British Social Attitudes 2003* survey.



merely insufficient, but may even be unnecessary. The most radical critique of the constitutional innovations since 1997 is that, by operating squarely within the representative model, they fail to respond to citizens' demands for greater direct 'voice', thereby potentially fuelling, rather than limiting, public disaffection and disengagement. On this account, the constitutional reforms are insufficient to the task of re-engaging citizens, since they don't address the key requirement of increasing the opportunities for direct citizen participation. Before coming onto this radical argument, I want to touch on a third account, which is slightly less critical than the participatory one. This account is the 'non-partisan' one, outlined in Chapter Two. As I noted there, the account hardly constitutes a well developed theory, but rather a set of observations. But since it has a resonance among some recent commentaries on the British political system, and since it helps our understanding of one of my four case study reforms - namely elected mayors - I have discussed it in this work.

The essence of the non-partisan model is that the main collective actors within the political system - the parties - are increasingly failing to provide for effective representation of citizens' views and demands. Those who take this line believe that a key factor behind declining citizen confidence in, and engagement with, the political system is frustration at the distorting role played by the party system. As parties have become less responsive to the demands of citizens, the result is argued to be "... the growth of that most dangerous of all political cleavages: that between the political class and the people" (Bogdanor, 1997: 20). Given this, reforms to political institutions are only likely to work if they encourage the establishment of more responsive political parties, or if they divert power outside the confines of the parties altogether.<sup>208</sup> One suggested means of stimulating a more responsive party system is shifting from a plurality to a proportional electoral system (Bogdanor, 1981: Part 4). Alternatively, one might attempt to move outside the confines of the representative model of democracy to a more direct model, in which policies can be introduced by citizens' initiatives, deliberated by citizens' juries and vetoed by referendums (Bogdanor, 1997). (Another possibility, not explicitly discussed in Bogdanor's accounts, is to weaken partisan electoral dominance by shifting the focus of electoral competition to individuals, as in the model of 'executive' democracy exemplified by directly electoral mayors.)

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<sup>208</sup> Since the new political institutions introduced in Britain since 1997 do not fundamentally achieve these ends, Bogdanor (1997: 198) suggests that "... the constitutional reform agenda is probably insufficient fully to satisfy popular aspirations. It is unlikely of itself to overcome the considerable popular disenchantment with politics".

The potential role of these institutions is best considered in the context of the fourth set of arguments - the 'participatory' model - to which I turn shortly. But I also want to consider what evidence can be brought to bear on the crux of the non-partisan model, that political parties inhibit electoral choice and weaken the legitimacy of the political system. The evidence reviewed in Chapter Six about voting behaviour in mayoral contests - namely those in which electoral competition is for an individual, rather than a collective, executive - suggests that electoral choice is significantly different in situations where partisan cues are weaker. However, this is a descriptive point; it is not to suggest in normative terms that parties constrain electoral choice or that non-partisan electoral behaviour is necessarily more appealing to voters (both arguments being exceptionally difficult to settle empirically). The parties' contribution to the legitimacy - or lack thereof - of the political system, is also a difficult issue to resolve by reference to empirical data, since there are few survey based measures of popular attitudes to the role and legitimacy of the party system. One that does fulfill this role is the question asked on the *British Election Study* in 1997:

"Some people say that political parties are necessary to make our political system work in Britain. Others say that political parties are not needed in Britain. Where would you place yourself?"

In response, three quarters of the sample believed parties to be necessary (options one and two on a five point scale, where 1=necessary and 5=not needed), while just over 4 per cent believed they were not needed (options four and five on the scale). Admittedly, the survey question may measure judgements about the *actual* role of parties as much as those about their *desirable* role. But the question is probably the best we have that gauges attitudes towards the general role of parties within the political system. And, on this measure, it is far from clear that citizens view parties as an undesirable element of the representative process.

But how far are attitudes towards parties associated with levels of confidence in the political system? Are parties part of the core problem - of citizen discontent with representative institutions - as critics of their role allege? Clearly, such a wide ranging argument cannot be resolved by reference to a single survey question, taken at a single point in time. Nonetheless, the results are suggestive. Among respondents who indicated that political parties are necessary (option one

on the five point scale), 41 per cent professed to trusting government 'almost always' or 'most of the time', while just 23 per cent of those who thought parties are not needed (options four and five on the scale) took such a benign view. Similarly, those believing that parties are necessary were far more likely to be 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with the way democracy works in Britain than those who thought parties were not needed (82 per cent to 45 per cent). The correlation coefficient between a belief that political parties are necessary and trust in government is 0.17, while with satisfaction with democracy it is 0.26 (both significant at the 1 per cent level). In other words, while only a snapshot, there is some evidence that negative attitudes towards political parties are associated with negative attitudes towards the political system as a whole. It is, of course, difficult to identify the likely direction of causation (does frustration with the party system beget discontent with the political system, or *vice versa*?), and indeed to discern how distinctive (ie. non-overlapping) are attitudes to the government and to political parties. But if we assume that negative attitudes towards the political system arise – at least in part – *from* attitudes towards political parties (rather than flowing *to* them), then this – admittedly limited – evidence does hint at a potential payoff for trust and satisfaction from a change, or even limitation, on the parties' role.

The fourth account of why Britain's constitutional reforms may have had a muted effect on citizens' attitudes and behaviour is, as just noted, the most critical. On this account, there is a clear disjuncture between citizens' demands for more say in collective decisions, on the one hand, and the opportunities for such participation afforded by reforms to core representative institutions, on the other. Recall the two arguments quoted in Chapter One - the first by two commentators, the second by a key Labour minister - that stressed the need to go beyond formal constitutional constraints and rights:

"These additional constraints might improve the quality of governance in Britain. But their limitation is that they would do little to answer the basic deficiency of modern democracy. They would, in short, do nothing to reduce the dominance of politicians. Instead, they would simply shuffle power from one group of politicians to another, with the addition of a few judges" (Adonis and Mulgan, 1997: 228)

"Tackling voter disengagement will ... require more than simply creating formal constitutional rights, important as these are. The central challenge is whether we can develop a genuinely participative democracy, sustained by a robust, vibrant political culture which meets the conditions of contemporary Britain" (Blunkett, 2001: 133)

Arguments like these treat the representative institutions and checks and balances contained in the Principal-Agent and Lijphart models essentially as a sideshow. The main task of institutional designers is to provide the conditions whereby citizens can directly participate in decisions that affect them. Only such direct control, it is argued, will encourage sustained popular engagement and trust in the decision making process.

In a two dimensional chart in Chapter Two (Chart 2.1), I suggested that my four case study reforms sit squarely within the representative model, albeit varying in the degree to which they afforded partisan control and opportunities for citizen participation.<sup>209</sup> But this is not the whole story of the way in which recent institutional reform in Britain has shifted the balance between representative and participatory processes. Thus, while my four reforms cluster fairly closely on the participatory (horizontal) axis, other initiatives are located further towards the right hand end of the axis (ie. extensive participation). At the local level in particular, recent years have seen political authorities making far more regular use of direct forms of citizen engagement. A Government report shows that the proportion of local councils using participatory initiatives – such as citizens’ panels, focus groups and visioning exercises – has broadly doubled since the mid-1990s (ODPM, 2002: Charts 5 and 6; see also Lowndes et al, 2001). While it is difficult to judge how many people are included in such initiatives, the report suggests that, in the case of citizens’ panels for example, coverage extended to around one million people in 2001 (*ibid*: 20-23). Clearly, then, at certain tiers of government in particular, traditional representative processes are increasingly being supplemented by new participatory methods.

But while such participatory initiatives have mushroomed recently, they have not impinged greatly on the dominant source of political authority, government at Westminster. Core political authority thus remains firmly oriented around representative assumptions, institutions and processes. What evidence is there that a shift in these terms - towards more participatory institutions and processes - might yield dividends in terms of citizen engagement? Unfortunately, in Britain, we lack much good data with which to evaluate the nature of popular support for direct democracy. Few questions on the issue have been asked in large scale sample surveys; and there is no longitudinal data by which to gauge changes in

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<sup>209</sup> As I noted in Chapter Four, however, the decentralisation of authority to smaller territorial tiers does facilitate more participatory forms of democracy to be grafted onto representative processes.

support over time. The best we can do is to amass the limited cross-sectional data that exists and explore how far it paints a consistent picture.

In general, there is some evidence that citizens wish to exert greater direct control over the decision making process. However, we should note that the relevant data is very skimpy, and also that public demand for greater voice is maybe not quite as sizable and robust as critics of the representative process sometimes make out. Using survey data gathered in 1994, 1996 and 2000, researchers found a substantial gap between the power people believed they did hold in between elections (generally deemed to be low) and the power they thought they should hold (generally high) (Dunleavy et al, 2001; Table 4). In similar vein, a *British Social Attitudes* survey question in 2000 found a clear majority (54 per cent) rejecting the view that "Even if I had the chance, I would not be interested in having more say in government decisions" (21 per cent agreed with the statement). However, another statement on the same survey – "Between elections, the government should get on with running the country rather than bothering about public opinion" – found less support for participation, with rather more (44 per cent) agreeing with the statement than disagreeing with it (39 per cent). And, in a fascinating question asked by MORI in 1994 and 1995, asking about which things are judged most important about democracy, the option of 'popular control over government decisions' was nominated only by one fifth of respondents, below the proportions nominating the option of 'voting for a government in elections' (31 per cent in 1994 and 27 per cent in 1995), and the option of 'strong and effective government' (27 per cent in both years) (Dunleavy et al, 2001: Table 3).

When it comes to specific institutions of direct democracy, the picture suggests considerable popular support (only "suggests" since the data is similarly thin). Asked in 1995 whether all important issues should be decided by the government, or whether certain decisions should be subject to a referendum and put to the people to decide by popular vote, respondents overwhelmingly favoured the referendum (77 per cent) over the government (19 per cent) (Dunleavy et al, 2001: Table 46). However, when we compare the responses with those to the same question asked almost thirty years ago, it is clear that support for greater direct democracy is not a recent phenomenon. Back in 1968, support for the referendum ran at 69 per cent, against just 21 per cent for the government (Gallup, 1976).

In an attempt to confront voters with a realistic decision making scenario under representative and direct systems of democracy - and thus to glean a more accurate set of attitudes - the *British Social Attitudes* survey in 2000 asked its sample to imagine a proposal for a major new building development in their neighbourhood. They were then asked to say how much they would entrust the decision to their local councillors or to a jury of twelve randomly selected ordinary local people. Over twice as many respondents said they would trust the citizens' jury (65 per cent) as said they would trust councillors (31 per cent).<sup>210</sup>

Even if such support might not have increased much over three decades, these high levels of support suggest some potential for institutional reform. But how far might support for direct democracy be shaped by trust? Are levels of support for referendums and the like greater among those discontented with the existing, representative, rules? In the case of the hypothetical building development, support for the direct democracy option (the citizens' jury) was found to be actually higher among those content with existing representative processes than among its discontents. Thus, while support for the citizens' jury runs at 72 per cent among those who trust government 'most of the time' or 'almost always', it runs slightly lower - at 61 per cent - among those who 'almost never' trust government. In contrast, while almost half (49 per cent) of those who trust government would also place their confidence in local councillors to take the development decision, only 20 per cent of those who distrust government would do likewise.<sup>211</sup>

A further piece of evidence comes from a question asked on the *Eurobarometer* poll in 1997. This asked for responses to the following statement: "The Swiss system of direct democracy, that is to say frequent votes and referenda, works well and should be considered as a model". The statement is badly worded (attracting a high proportion - 47 per cent - of 'don't know' responses) and a poor indicator of support for direct democracy. But it is also one of the few survey measures of popular support for direct democracy among Britons - one moreover for which the raw data is publicly available - and is thus drawn on here. Among the British respondents with determinate answers, 38 per cent agreed

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<sup>210</sup> A rather different form of popular engagement is the random selection of members of the public to serve on the boards of important policy making bodies, an initiative commended by commentators such as Tony Wright (1994: 98). This measure appears to command some support. In the *State of the Nations 2004* poll, exactly two thirds of respondents favoured the random selection of citizens to serve on the boards of NHS Foundation Hospitals and police boards (although rather fewer, 56 per cent, would be willing to serve themselves if asked). See <http://www.jrrt.org.uk>.

<sup>211</sup> The correlation between trust in government and confidence in the citizens' jury is 0.08, while in the case of confidence in local councillors it is higher, at 0.24 (both significant at the 1 per cent level).

with the proposition, while 15 per cent disagreed. However, breakdowns of these marginal distributions shows support for referendums to be only marginally related to political confidence. Thus, among those who reported themselves 'not at all' satisfied with the way democracy works in Britain, 77 per cent favoured the Swiss system, while among those who were very satisfied, this figure was only marginally lower, at 69 per cent. The correlation between support for referendums and satisfaction with democracy is only 0.04, and not significant at the conventional level.<sup>212</sup>

So it appears that, while judgements about the trustworthiness of government might colour attitudes towards existing representative processes, they largely fail to delineate attitudes towards participatory forms of engagement. This is not to say that such direct mechanisms will necessarily fail to engage those frustrated with the current institutional arrangements. But it does suggest that the impact may not be as great as is sometimes assumed.

## CONCLUSION

To the *ingénue*, the constitutional reform programme introduced in Britain since 1997 might appear to have failed in its goal of stimulating closer linkages between citizens and government. Between 1997 and 2000, ten Acts of Parliament provided for devolution, human rights and freedom of information regimes, reform of the second chamber, the regulation of party funding, proportional electoral systems and new structures for local government. Yet turnout at the 2001 general election was the lowest since the extension of the franchise in 1918, while in 2000 trust in government fell to its lowest levels for thirty years. On the face of it, then, the most concerted programme of institutional reform for perhaps three centuries has coincided with a nadir in Britons' engagement with their political system. Few suggest that the reforms have caused the decline. A sceptic might instead counsel the *ingénue* to discount any claims that the reforms might effect a positive outcome. He or she would point as evidence to the aggregate trends in trust and turnout in Britain. They might also make the plausible point that, since similar declines are occurring

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<sup>212</sup> Over thirteen European countries covered by the *Eurobarometer* survey, Dalton et al (2001) note a clearer relationship between discontent with representative institutions and support for direct democracy. This is further supported by Dalton's analysis of various country and cross-national data, which he suggests shows that support for direct democracy is motivated by discontent with representative institutions (Dalton, 2004: 181-84). However, another cross-national survey suggests

across advanced countries with very different political systems, the chances of institutional reform alleviating the decline must be remote. Surely institutional design can only have discernible effects on public attitudes and behaviour in developing democracies, in the context of a transition from authoritarian to democratic rule?

The sceptic is probably right to be cautious of bold claims for institutional reform, but not to the extent of dismissing these claims altogether. In fact, as I have tried to show in this work, institutional reform can be shown to have an effect on the way citizens view, and engage with, their political institutions. Granted, we cannot always be very precise about these effects, and when we can, they often turn out to be of limited magnitude. But reforms in Britain - such as the decentralisation of political authority, the move to proportional electoral arrangements and the creation of executive mayors at the local level - have stimulated changes in attitudes and behaviour among citizens, even if their cumulative impact has not been discernible in headline figures on trust and turnout (which are unfortunately the only data some commentators and pundits refer to).

It is of course possible that rather more marked effects might arise if institutional reform was extended in one of the ways suggested above. Thus, additional legislative tiers and constraints might be grafted onto the representative process or new institutions introduced that either weaken the mediating role of partisan actors or, most radical of all, bypass representative institutions via direct citizen participation. However, the limited data I have reviewed in this chapter suggests attaching a certain caution to these claims. Many of the commended institutional reforms are simply not that popular, or lack support among those most disaffected with existing political institutions.

I have presented the best evidence I can about the impact of the constitutional reform programme, and about the potential impact of additional institutional changes. Ultimately, if there remains an indeterminacy in my conclusions it is because we lack adequate data and measures (certainly in Britain) to be able to fully understand how citizens relate to political institutions and processes, and thus what kind of reforms might stimulate more benign attitudes and patterns of behaviour. For example, throughout this work, my principal indicator of citizens'

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that support for direct democracy is not motivated by discontent with representative processes (Bowler et al, 2003).



response to different political arrangements has been their support for one institution over another. Yet this is far too crude a measure on which to base precise conclusions about the role of institutional design. For this, we would need to know less whether institution *x* was preferred to institution *y*, but about what features of institution *x* were deemed particularly appealing. That is, do citizens respond - in terms of their attitudes and behaviour - to arrangements that offer more or less accountability, electoral choice, responsiveness or representativeness? As we have seen in the theoretical discussions in Chapter Two, and then again in Chapters Three to Six, different institutional configurations frequently introduce trade-offs between these desiderata. Yet until we know more about the values citizens place on these virtues, and the way that different institutions are seen as embodying them, we will hardly be in a position to reach anything other than crude judgements about the merits of one set of arrangements over another. Indeed, as I pointed out above, we even lack much data by which to gauge how citizens stand on an even more fundamental distinction, that between voice through representation, and voice through direct participation. Again, then, our conclusions about the likely effects of representative versus participatory arrangements must, for the time being at least, remain highly tentative.

Underlying the difficulties we face in reaching informed and determinate conclusions about the effects of different political institutions is our limited understanding about what makes citizens trust and/or engage with political actors in the first place. Granted, much research has been undertaken on what motivates people to engage in that most fundamental of political acts, voting. We now know a good deal about how and why turnout is higher in certain institutional conditions than in others. But our knowledge is not sufficiently detailed to understand how turnout will respond to changes in these conditions. And, when it comes to the way citizens view their political institutions, our knowledge is still more primitive. Take the most obvious trend among Britons, the decline in political trust since the mid to late 1980s (Chart 1.4). As I have shown throughout this work, the decline in trust is identified by a myriad of political actors and commentators as the rationale for institutional reform of one kind or another. Yet we know very little about what caused this trend; about *why* Britons today appear to be less trustful of their political agents than they did two decades or so ago.<sup>213</sup> One reason for this is simply that we lack a sufficiently long

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<sup>213</sup> Multiple reasons have been put forward in academic and non-academic works, though none, I have to say, with much empirical rigour. The analysis of similar trends among Americans is rather more

and detailed set of data to measure the vicissitudes in trust and other key attitudinal indicators. We thus have a relatively poor evidence base on which to construct detailed and accurate explanatory accounts.

Such historical shortcomings cannot be remedied now. However, if we are to really understand the role that institutional design plays in linking citizens to their political agents, we need new and more detailed information and data sources than those currently available. I believe the analysis I have presented here provides a solid basis on which judgements about institutional effects can be made. But I don't pretend that my conclusions are anything other than a start. At a time when citizens do appear to be disengaging from some aspects of the representative system, and taking more critical views of others, institutional reform offers one potential response. I have tried to show what impact one set of reforms - those in Britain since 1997 - have had. But we need to extend our knowledge and our evidence base if we are to really understand how institutional design can shape citizens' relations with government.

## ANNEX ONE

### 1a: Question wording for efficacy scale

All the following are contained on the *British Social Attitudes 1996* survey.

"Please say how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

- (1) Generally speaking, those we elect as MPs lose touch with people pretty quickly
- (2) Parties are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions
- (3) MPs don't care much about what people like me think
- (4) It doesn't really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same"

Agree strongly / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Disagree strongly

### 1b: Details of the media coverage survey

The media coverage survey was conducted using the LexisNexis media database. The sample was 19 national newspapers. (One newspaper, the Sunday Business, ceased publication during the timescale of the survey. However, it is unlikely that this change in the sample had much impact on the overall results.) The timescale was the start of July 1998 to the end of December 2004. This provided two periods each either side of the introduction of the new party funding rules (introduced in February 2001).

The keywords used were 'sleaze' and 'government'. Using 'sleaze' on its own yielded a large number of non-politics related stories, potentially contaminating the results. The addition of 'government' narrowed down the search to stories relating to political misconduct. A further narrowing would have resulted from the substitution of 'political parties' for 'government'. But this simply served to reduce the total number of stories, rather than allowing for a tighter focus on issue relating to party funding. Thus, the combination of 'sleaze' and 'government' seems the optimal search strategy.

## **ANNEX TWO: Methodology for calculating electoral 'winners' and 'losers'**

Unlike accounts that treat winners simply as those voters whose party holds office at the national level (eg. Anderson and Tverdova, 2002), I follow Dunleavy and Margetts (1994) in defining electoral 'winners' more broadly as those gaining political representation at one at least of the following levels:

- ◇ *National:* A winner is a voter whose preferred party gains representation in government. In the case of elections in Scotland, Wales and London - where a two ballot constituency/list system was used - I have simply aggregated the constituency and list votes of any party represented in government and divided this by two to give the party vote. (Similarly, the total electoral vote is the sum of the constituency and list votes divided by two.) Thus, in the example of the Scottish Parliament elections in 1999, given below, the total number of government 'winners' are those voters who supported either Labour or the Liberal Democrats (1,159,498). Expressed as a proportion of the total electoral vote (2,333,877), the total of government winners is 49.7%.
- ◇ *Regional:* Winning is equated with securing at least one list seat in an electoral region. In cases where a party fulfills this criterion, I count as winners those who supported that party on the list vote, not those who supported it on the constituency vote. In the case of the Scottish Parliament election in 1999, the Conservatives won no constituency seats, but at least one list seat in each of the top up areas. The number of Conservative winners is thus the total Conservative list vote (359,109; 15.4 per cent). The SNP did win some constituency seats, but also won list seats in each of the top up areas. For ease of calculation, I similarly treat as SNP winners those who supported it on the list vote (638,644; 27.4 per cent). The Scottish Socialist Party and the Greens also won list seats. Since my source does not provide a detailed breakdown of these two parties' votes at each of the constituency and list parts of the ballot, I have no means of accurately identifying those voters who were regional winners. Since the numbers are small, and will not affect the overall results, I have taken a crude shortcut, by taking each party's total vote over the two parts of the ballot and dividing this sum by two. The totals are thus: Scottish Socialists (12,619; 0.5 per cent) and Greens (42,011; 1.8 per cent). When it comes to the undifferentiated category 'Other parties', clearly not all voters in this category will support the particular parties that gain representation. Thus, counting as a winner all those voting for a party labelled 'Other' in my source would over-state the number of winners. To compensate, I take a similar shortcut, by dividing the total 'Other' vote by two.

In addition to those contests for which list seats are allocated at the regional level - Scotland, Wales, London and the European Parliament in 1999 and 2004 - I also record regional 'wins' for contests using the single member plurality system, namely the House of Commons in 1997 and the European Parliament in 1994. The logic follows Dunleavy and Margetts (1994) in equating winning to gaining control of 70 per cent or more of the total seats in the region. The regional units used by Dunleavy and Margetts (1997) for the House of Commons election in 1997 are the standard regions plus conurbations (n=15); for the European Parliament elections in 1994, I have used the standard regions that were used in 1999 as the basis for seat allocation (n=11).

- ◊ *Constituency*: Winning is equated with securing the constituency seat. In the case of the Scottish Parliament election in 1999, there was just one organisation that won a constituency seat but no regional seat or share in government, an independent candidate (18,511; 0.8 per cent).

Thus, in my example of the 1999 Scottish Parliament election, the total proportion of winners is the sum of winners at the national level (49.7 per cent), the regional level (45.1 per cent) and the local level (0.8 per cent) = 95.6 per cent.

**Example: Scottish Parliament elections, 1999**

	Constituency ballot		Regional ballot		Total vote
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	
Labour	908 250	53	786 818	3	1 695 068
Conservative	364 505		359 109	18	
Liberal Democrat	333 169	12	290 760	5	623 929
Scottish National	672 768	7	638 644	28	
Scottish Socialist	24 718		521	1	
Socialist Labour	4 204		2 607		
Green	N/a		84 023	1	
Independent	18 511	1	N/a		
Other	16 337		162 811		
Absolute totals	2 342 462	73	2 325 293	56	2 318 997
Real totals (/2)					
Votes		2 333 877			
Government winners					1 159 498

Source: House of Commons Library Research Paper 99/50

### ANNEX THREE: Question wording and coding for regression model

#### *Dependent variable:*

How much do you trust the Scottish Parliament to work in Scotland's best interests?

1=Almost never, 2=Only some of the time, 3=Most of the time, 4=Just about always

#### *Independent variables:*

How much do you agree or disagree that the Scottish Parliament should be elected using proportional representation?

The voting system used in elections to the Scottish Parliament is much fairer than the one usually used at elections.

There is more point voting under the system used in Scottish Parliament elections because every vote counts.

The voting system used in Scottish Parliament elections will lead to unstable Government

The voting system used in Scottish Parliament elections gives too much power to small parties

I would prefer to have been able to vote for individual candidates on the regional vote rather than for a party list.

Five point scale, running from 1=Strongly disagree, to 5=Strongly agree

People have different views about how their area should best be represented in a parliament. Which of these statements comes closest to your views?

I would rather have one member of parliament for the area I live in; Or I would rather have several members of parliament, possibly from different parties, but covering a larger area (Several MPs=0, One MP=1)

It is more important that elections should produce a clear winner so that it is voters who decide who forms the government; Or It is more important that elections should produce a fair result, even if this it means it is not clear who should form the government (Fair result=0, Clear winner=1)

It is better to have just one party in government so that it is very clear who should be blamed if things go wrong; Or It is better to have two or more parties in the government so that more people's views are represented (Two parties=0, One party=1)

## **ANNEX FOUR: Question wording and coding for regression models**

### **4a: Changes in trust, 1997-2001: Scotland and England**

#### *Dependent variable:*

"How much do you trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party?" (2001). Four point scale: Almost never=1, Only some of the time=2, Most of the time=3, Just about always=4.

#### *Independent variables:*

Trust in 1997: Same question and coding as for 2001.

Country: England=0, Scotland=1.

Support for devolution: Derived from the following question, "Which of these statements comes closest to your view? (a) Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK and the EU; (b) Scotland should become independent, separate from the UK but part of the EU; (c) Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has some tax raising powers; (d) Scotland should remain part of the UK, with its own elected parliament which has no tax raising powers; (e) Scotland should remain part of the UK without an elected parliament. Scotland part of UK without Scottish Parliament=0, Scotland part of UK, with Scottish Parliament with tax raising powers=1.

### **4b: Model of trust in the Scottish Parliament, 2003**

#### *Dependent variable:*

Trust Scottish Parliament to work in Scotland's best interests. Four point scale: Just about always=1, Most of the time=2, Only some of the time=3, Almost never=4.

#### *Independent variables:*

##### *(a) Controls*

Newspaper readership: Regular reader of a newspaper critical of devolution and/or the Parliament building (Scotsman, Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail, Daily Record)=0, Regular reader of other newspaper/non newspaper reader=1

##### *(b) Principle and capacity of devolution*

Constitutional preferences: Reject devolution=0, Support independence=1, Support Scottish Parliament with/without taxation powers=2

Which has most influence over the way Scotland is governed? Westminster/local councils/EU=0, Scottish Parliament=1

Which should have most influence over the way Scotland is governed? Scottish Parliament=0, Westminster/local councils/EU=1

The Scottish Parliament should be given more powers: Strongly agree=1, Agree=2, Neither=3, Disagree=4, Strongly disagree=5

##### *(c) Policy/governance performance*

Having a Scottish Parliament:

Has reduced education standards=0, Made no difference=1, Increased standards=2

Will make Scotland's economy a lot worse=1, Worse=2, No difference=3,

Better=4, A lot better=5  
 Will make the NHS in Scotland a lot worse=1, Worse=2, No difference=3,  
 Better=4, A lot better=5  
 Will make tax in Scotland a lot higher=1, Higher=2, No difference=3,  
 Lower=4, A lot lower=5  
 Is giving Scotland a stronger voice in the UK=0, No difference=1, A weaker voice  
 in the UK=2  
 Is giving ordinary people less say in how Scotland is governed=0, No  
 difference=1, More say=2

*(d) Operation of Parliament*

The Scottish Parliament looks after the interests of some parts of Scotland  
 more than others=0, Neither or both=1, Looks after all parts equally=2  
 The Scottish Parliament building should never have been built=0, Needed to be  
 built but should not have cost so much=1, Will be worth it in the end=2

*(e) Leadership evaluations*

How good a job do you think Tony Blair/Jack McConnell has done as Prime/First  
 Minister? Eleven point scale, 0=Very bad, 10=Very good

*(f) Contact with Scottish Parliament*

Over the last four years, have you ever contacted an MSP for your area?  
 Yes=1, No=2

**4c: Turnout at Scottish Parliament elections, 1999 and 2003**

*Dependent variable:* Reported voting=0 Reported not voting=1.

*Independent variables:*

As for the previous model, with the following additional variables:

How much difference do you think it makes who wins in elections to the Scottish  
 Parliament/in general elections to the House of Commons? Great deal of  
 difference=1, Quite a lot=2, Some=3, Not very much=4, None at all=5 (don't  
 knows coded to 3)

Considering all the Conservative/SNP and Labour parties stand for, would you say  
 there is a great difference between them=1, Some difference=2, Not much  
 difference=3

How much do you trust the Scottish Parliament to work in Scotland's best  
 interests. Just about always=1, Most of the time=2, Only some of the time=3,  
 Almost never=4.

Parties are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions. Disagree  
 strongly=1, Disagree=2, Neither=3, Agree=4, Agree strongly=5



## **ANNEX FIVE: Coding frame for manifesto content analysis**

The 'policy domains' I used to analyse the local manifestos were:

1. Provision of local services
2. Local government finance and spending
3. Social inclusion
4. Education
5. Health
6. Social care
7. Transport
8. Regeneration
9. Housing
10. Environment
11. Crime
12. Employment
13. Leisure
14. Voluntary sector
15. Achievements of Labour Party

Within each of these domains, I included a number of sub-categories (seventy in all and not listed here. Examples would be 'Responsiveness to local people' under Domain 1, and 'Standards in schools' under Domain 4). By allocating each idea or commitment in the manifestos (the 'quasi-sentence') to one, and only one, of these sub-categories, I could achieve a reasonably high level of specificity when it came to distinguishing the messages of the party and its mayoral candidate. Although the length of the manifestos differs considerably - the Labour Party's manifesto in Lewisham was longer than that of its mayoral candidate, Steve Bullock - by totalling up the quasi-sentences in each sub-category and then in each domain, and by expressing these as a proportion of the total number of quasi-sentences, we can generate some means of comparing the party and mayoral manifestos.

The methodology I drew on in undertaking the manifesto content analysis is set out in 'Appendix II: Manifesto Coding Instructions', on the CD-ROM accompanying Budge *et al*, 2001.

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