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Irish Voter Rationality: The 1987 Irish General Election Revisited*

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Abstract: In their study of Irish voters in 1987 Laver, Marsh and Sinnott concluded that there was little evidence of rational voting. This paper re-examines the question, using the same data, and finds evidence of rationality among those voters who switched their vote between 1982-1987. The results of a LOGIT analysis suggest that there was an issue basis to their decision to switch. Furthermore, there were cross party differences to the issue effects, suggesting some scope for party campaign influence over voters.

I INTRODUCTION

According to the Political Studies Association of Ireland study of the Irish 1987 election, *How Ireland Voted* (Laver *et al.*, 1987), there is considerable scope for irrational or at least non-rational behaviour among Irish voters. In examining the relationship between voters' own attitudes to a range of issues (Northern Ireland, taxation, government spending, and church/state relations) and their attitudes to which parties had the best policies on the issues Laver *et al.* (1987) concluded that the Irish voter did not fit the pattern of the standard Downsian voter. This paper takes another look at the evidence on voter rationality and issue voting in the 1987 election. We argue that the conclusion of Laver and his colleagues is based upon too narrow a conception

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of the Downsian or "rational" voter. We begin, in Section II, by addressing the argument of Laver and his colleagues, namely that the evidence in 1987 was inconsistent with a rational choice approach. Following this we demonstrate that issue voting is widespread among the Irish electorate by directly modelling Irish voter choice at this election.

II THE "RATIONAL VOTER" IN IRELAND

In the 1987 MRBI/*Irish Times* survey – which Laver and his colleagues used – voters were questioned over both their own preferences and the positions of the parties on four issues: church/state relations, the Anglo-Irish Agreement and two economic issues. It was found that the first two of these presented no problems for the rational choice approach to voting behaviour: that the "views on which party had the best policy depended on people's issue positions" (Laver *et al.*, 1987, p. 123). However, these were not issues of much significance in the election (ibid., pp. 116-117). On the two economic issues, taxation and government spending – the issues which mattered most – the respondents' views on which party had the best policies did not depend on issue positions.

Table 1: *A Puzzle for a Rational Choice Account of Voter Behaviour*

Party with Best Policy on	*% Agreeing that Taxation Must be Reduced Even if it Means Drastic Reductions in Government Services*			
	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
I: Taxation				
FF	39	34	32	34
FG	17	18	14	14
II: Government Spending				
FF	31	32	28	31
FG	32	31	27	31

Source: Laver *et al.* (1987) Tables 12 and 13.
Note: Figures are column per cent where the total adds to 100% (i.e., shares to PD, Labour and other parties have been omitted).

Table 1 reproduces these findings. Manifestly the trends are curious. In the case of taxation Fianna Fail has a clear lead over Fine Gael regardless of where voters stood on the question (i.e., whether on the "left" or "right").

On government spending again there is little variation across the left/right spectrum, only this time the two parties are evenly matched. On the basis of these figures Laver *et al.*, draw the following conclusion.

> This can hardly be taken as a piece of evidence in favour of the "rational choice" view that voters pick parties on the basis of the policies on offer. Voters with dramatically opposed views on the same issue often thought that the same party had the best policy on it, while voters with the same views often disagreed on the best party. It is a stronger piece of evidence in favour of party identification theory, suggesting as it does that people feel "their" party has the best policy on the issue regardless, more or less, of what that policy is. (Laver *et al.*, 1987, p. 124)

But such a conclusion seems a little premature and we can amend it in two ways: one empirical and one theoretical.

2.1 *An Empirical Amendment: the "Importance" of Issues*

At least some of the problems for the Downsian approach raised by the figures in Table 1 are relieved if we examine the figures themselves in greater detail. Table 2 breaks down the figures from Table 1 relating to attitudes towards government spending in two ways. It first looks at those voters for whom the issue of taxation is held to be "very important", and then at those for whom the issue of government borrowing is "very important". We expect those voters who think an issue is important to be that bit more attentive to party issue positions and hence to build up a more accurate picture of them. As can be seen these two sub sets of voters do show a small shift. Right wing voters (those who think that reducing taxation is important) are slightly more likely to think that Fianna Fail has the best policy on government spending, whilst left wing voters (those who think maintaining government expenditure is important) are slightly more likely to believe that Fine Gael has the best policy. In the case of those who think government borrowing is very important it is the right who to a certain degree favour Fine Gael and the left who favour Fianna Fail. Such trends are more in line with the basic Downsian approach taken up by Laver *et al.*

> Each citizen in our model votes for the party he believes will provide him with a higher utility income than any other party during the coming election period. (Downs, 1957, pp. 38-39)

This is generally interpreted in terms of voters casting their ballot for the party whose issue positions are closest to the voters' own (as was the case with regard to the issues of Northern Ireland and church/state relations).

Table 2: *The Puzzle Revisited*

Party with Best Policy on	*% Agreeing that Taxation Must be Reduced Even if it Means Drastic Reductions in Government Services*			
Government Spending	*Strongly Agree*	*Agree*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*
I: Taxation "Very Important"				
FF	31	34	26	30
FG	30	26	26	33
(N=758)				
II: Government Borrowing "Very Important"				
FF	29	28	24	29
FG	32	35	29	25
(N=688)				

Source: MRBI/*Irish Times* survey.

To some extent, then, a closer examination of the data does reveal voter behaviour more in line with the standard Downsian approach. But the shifts in attitudes involved on this issue, though present, are quite small. The results of Table 2 (which are not statistically significant), while more in line with a standard rational choice conception, hardly present all that much evidence in its favour; they demonstrate, rather, that this issue needs further consideration. Moreover, how can we account for the fact that here – just as over the issue of taxation in Table 1 – we see that one party is seen as the best party on a given issue by a substantial grouping of voters, i.e., among those who believe that taxation should be reduced even if it means reducing government services (loosely speaking the right) and those who favour government spending (the left)? Some consideration needs to be given to the role of perceptions in the rational choice approach.

2.2 *Voter Confusion*

Voters may well have opinions concerning the standpoints of their favoured (and disliked) parties and this in turn may generate opinions over which party has the "best" policy: but should we expect these attitudes to be accurate?

Within the Michigan framework it is argued that substantial "projection" effects are present in which voters perceive favoured parties to be closer to their own individual ideal points. Disliked politicians are "projected" as further away from an individual's ideal point (Markus and Converse, 1979). On the one hand projection effects would suggest an argument along the lines

"I dislike Mrs Thatcher and so I believe she is far to the right". On the other it would suggest the argument that "I dislike Mrs Thatcher because she is right wing". Preliminary examination of this using German data bears out the latter point of view (Bowler, 1988).

Aside from the empirical validity (or otherwise) of this Michigan interpretation of the results of Table 1 a far simpler and more compelling explanation can be advanced from within the rational choice framework. This explanation focuses in greater detail on the term "believes" in the statement from Downs quoted above and questions how voters arrive at the assessment of which party has the best policies on a given issue. Obviously individual voter attributes such as interest in political events, education and exposure to media coverage will play a role in how voters assess party policy stances. A major influence in helping voters form assessments of the parties are also the parties themselves; and it is possible to see the impact of parties themselves in shaping voter perceptions in a variety of ways.

While it may be true that on highly salient issues parties are easily distinguishable (Budge and Farlie, 1983); where parties are close together, it may well be the case that voters are confused even over where "their" party actually stands in relation to others (Bartolini and Mair, 1988). Thus, when parties are saying much the same thing, even on salient issues, it is not unreasonable to expect voters to become confused over which party has the "best policy" (Alt, 1980). Indeed, party campaigns may well be aimed at "spoiling" the image of other parties. A party's campaign, then, can quite easily be seen as involving elements where party X tries to represent itself as being close to party Y on a popular issue and can do this either by misrepresenting its own position, that of party Y, or both. That is, campaigns are aimed both at establishing an image of the campaigning party and at misrepresenting or blurring the images of other parties (see Farrell and Bowler, 1990). In this respect voter confusion over party positions is a deliberate consequence of electioneering over and above any individual voter traits. While in the long run voters may be able to sort out which party stands where on a given issue it is not clear that in the short run voters should have an accurate picture of where a party stands. Such amendments can easily be built into the basic Downsian model by considering voter uncertainty over party positions.[1]

1. At this point we should note that Downs explicitly excludes falsehoods (Downs, 1957, p. 46). This would seem to form part of his general argument over "reliable and responsible" parties for which the Downsian model as stated does not have a satisfactory explanation. Such issues and the long-run credibility of party promises are dealt with at some length in Bowler (forthcoming). Even without such complexities our main point is that it is still possible to consider voters being rational so long as they act according to their (possibly mistaken) belief over which party has the "best" policy. An argument developed below.

In response to the figures of Table 1 and the assessment of the applicability of the rational choice perspective made by Laver *et al.*, cited above we may, then, argue that voters were simply mistaken over which party had the best policy and such mistakes were a consequence, at least in part, of the party campaigns themselves. But is such an account a sensible one to pursue when considering party strategies in the 1987 election? On the face of it the answer would seem to be yes for when we look at campaign messages in 1987 there is plenty of reason for expecting some voter confusion. The parties' campaign strategies have been dealt with elsewhere (Farrell, 1987). Here we may itemise the principal points of that study:

1. Fianna Fail's strategy was basically positive and presidential; being as vague and as positive as possible on all the issues; seeking to present the party as all things to all people, as the natural party of government with Charles Haughey as the best candidate for Taoiseach.

2. Fine Gael deliberately called a long (four week) campaign to give the party time to sell itself to a disillusioned electorate. The bulk of the campaign was focused on the party's economic policies (especially the need to cut government spending and taxation). Towards the end of the campaign, the strategists focused on leader image, stressing the stronger points about FitzGerald's leadership. In the last week of the campaign a gaffe by Haughey resulted in greater attention being given to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and Fine Gael pushed its achievements in this area for all its worth.

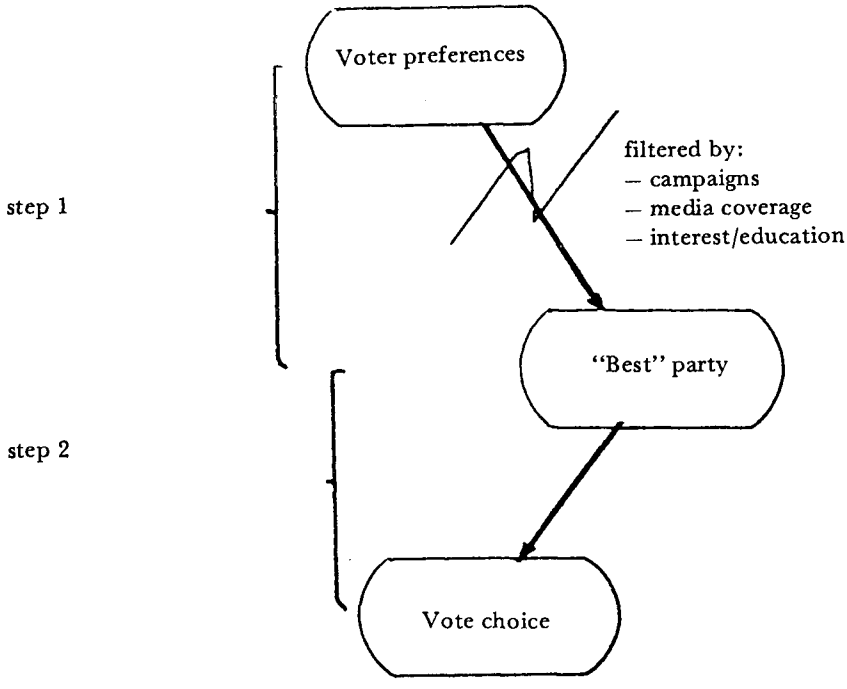
3. The Progressive Democrat's focus was principally on leader image. In terms of specific policies the party's main concern was to establish itself as "the main New Right organization in Ireland" (Girvin, 1987, p. 20) focusing on taxation and government spending cuts.

4. In relation to the four policy areas under scrutiny in this paper the three parties were farthest apart on Northern Ireland and church/state relations. Fianna Fail was distinct from the other two parties on both issues. Where it was impossible to separate the parties it was on the two economic issues of government spending and taxation. All three parties were in favour of tax cuts and all stressed the need to reduce the burgeoning national debt, though of the three Fianna Fail placed least emphasis on spending cuts as a means of doing so.

There is scope, therefore, for arguing that Irish voters in 1987 were receiving confused messages from the parties' campaigns and that, to some extent, this may have contributed to overall confusion as to where the parties stood especially on the two economic issues of taxation and spending cuts. In developing

such a point we also have to move away from the interpretation of Table 1 cited above. There it was argued if voters of both left and right believed the same party had the best policy on a given issue then the rational choice perspective could hardly apply. Voters who personally wanted to cut taxes even if it meant reducing government spending should also favour a party that wanted the same thing. This is indeed an account of a Downsian type voter. But it is an account of a Downsian voter under conditions of complete information. Where there is uncertainty we can expect different conditions to prevail.

Figure 1: *A Schematic Representation*



This leads us to an alternative conception of what we might reasonably expect of "rational" voters. Voters will be "rational" if they pick parties on the basis of *perceived* policies on offer, even though those perceptions may be quite mistaken. Figure 1 summarises this point. If we believe that rational voters are those who accurately perceive party positions then the results of Table 1, which address the first step in Figure 1, do indeed suggest some degree of irrationality or non-rationality on the part of voters in 1987. On the other hand, if rationality is defined in terms of the extent to which those voters voted for the party they perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be "best" on a given issue – the second step in Figure 1 – then we can interpret the results

of Table 1 as evidence of the prior process concerning how individuals form perceptions of the parties. While the 1987 data set does not allow us to explore in any great detail the formation of party images at the level of the electorate we can examine whether or not voters did vote for those parties which they believed had the best policies.

III EVIDENCE OF RATIONALITY

Using the 1987 MRBI/*Irish Times* polls of the General Election we have developed a fairly standard model of vote choice in order to address the second step of Figure 1 which we believe is a more plausible expression of rationality. Our hypotheses may be simply stated as being of the form

$$Y_i = f(\text{Policy, Personalities, Socio-Economic Characteristics}) \qquad (1)$$

That is, an individual's vote choice will be determined by the perceived qualities of a party (policy position or leader attributes) and by a set of other attributes (cf Repass, 1971; Carmines and Stimson, 1980). If we are correct in arguing that voters respond to perceived qualities then, a voter believing a given party has the best policy on an important issue and/or an attractive leader should be more likely to vote for that party than for another party.

We cannot directly address the supposition by Laver *et al.*, that there is evidence of party identification (PID) influencing the vote since the data set does not include any such measure. We can, however, include at least some factors which build towards standard PID frameworks, namely a set of socio-economic characteristics. This latter set of variables – listed in greater detail in Appendix A – include gender, age, home ownership, region, occupation and vote last time.[2]

Several factors which may be thought of as important in specifying the model are noticeably absent from the specification. To the extent that we are correct in assuming such factors as education and media usage are most important in shaping the "objective accuracy" of which party stands for which policy, and hence which is "best", this is not a problem.[3]

2. At this juncture we should note that the readiness to ascribe the patterns of Table 1 to party identification may be a little hasty. It is by no means clear what party identifications should look like and what their effects should be in a multi-party setting. For a more detailed examination of the nature of party loyalties within the Irish electorate see Bowler and Farrell (1990).

3. Given our earlier discussion the absence of such factors does not mean we have estimated mis-specified models. Above we suggested that individual voter attributes such as education or exposure to media coverage may well affect the perception of which party is best. In short, we see them as important in the context of a system of equations in which the choice of a given party as "best" is itself a dependent variable. We have *a priori* theoretical grounds, then, for not having to include at least some factors whose absence might call for comment.

The dependent variable is vote choice, expressed as the voter's first preference in terms of party. We have estimated three separate equations, one for each of the three main parties (Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the PDs). In each, the dependent variable takes the value 1 if the respondent intended to vote for the (named) party and 0 if otherwise. For the independent variables attitudes towards party leaders were measured by a 3-point scale (-1=dislike, 0=indifferent, 1=like). Responses to questions on the parties and on the four named policy areas were represented as dummies. For instance, in the equation modelling Fine Gael vote choice, the variable measuring which party has the best policy on Northern Ireland took the value 1 if Fine Gael was the response and 0 if otherwise. Similarly, in the questions for Fianna Fail, if that party was named "best" on a policy variable the variable was coded 1 and 0 if another party (or no party at all) was the response.[4]

Given the nature of the dependent variable LOGIT was the technique employed, the results from which are presented in Table 3.[5] As can be seen we find statistically significant policy and personality effects for all the parties. In short we do find that voters are responding to the perceived "best" qualities of the parties. Moreover, these equations have highly satisfactory success rates in terms of prediction. For Fianna Fail and Fine Gael they correctly predict just over 86 per cent of the cases, and for the PDs 89 per cent.

One major reason for not placing too much emphasis upon these results is that we may not be adequately controlling for the effects of party identification. As Laver *et al.*, quite rightly note, many voters will simply claim that "their" party has the best policy regardless of the actual issue position and so the significance of the policy and personality variables will be highly inflated by such voters. Moreover, to the extent that the results do reflect the impact of such voters, then the equations at present may be said to be confusing cause and effect. Rather than implying, as Equation (1) does, that issue preferences inform vote choice, the presence of such voters implies that it is in fact prior vote choice which dictates issue preferences.

Data set limitations mean we cannot adequately control for these effects within this sample, although the inclusion of some socio-economic characteristics do go some way towards alleviating this problem. One way of getting

4. More usual "policy distance" variables were not present in the data set.

5. OLS is not appropriate in such a case since the dependent variables is [0, 1]. The error term (a vector of 0s and 1s) will not therefore be normally distributed. Secondly, it is possible for predicted values produced by OLS to exceed 1. OLS is not, then, appropriate. LOGIT is a maximum likelihood technique where the function maximised is the log of the odds of achieving a 1 as opposed to 0. We can interpret the sign and significance of LOGITs just as in OLS. Unlike OLS, however, the relationship between X and Y is not linear but S-shaped. Thus the effect of X upon Y depends upon the size of X. Under OLS the relationship between X and Y is linear and hence the same whatever X's value. For further information see Wonnacott and Wonnacott (1979).

around this problem is to remove from the sample those voters who are likely to see "their" party as best regardless of the circumstances. The problem, however, is how to identify such voters since we cannot do so directly.

Table 3: *Determinants of Vote Choice by Party (All Voters): LOGIT Analysis*

	FF	*FG*	*PD*
Intercept	-2.86**	-2.65**	-3.00**
	(0.72)	(0.78)	(0.86)
Spending	0.54**	1.05**	1.18**
	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.33)
Taxation	1.12**	1.33**	1.51**
	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.27)
Northern Ireland	1.33**	0.11	0.55
	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.54)
Church/State	0.78**	0.48**	0.21
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.49)
Haughey	1.10**	-0.26	-0.47**
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
FitzGerald	-0.75**	1.17**	0.09
	(0.17)	(0.20)	(0.20)
O'Malley	0.13	0.26**	0.60**
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.16)
Vote 1982	1.89**	1.40**	n.a.
	(0.21)	(0.22)	
Age	-0.09	0.03	0.02
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Sex	-0.27	0.32	0.05
	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.22)
Owner	0.57**	0.37	0.15
	(0.26)	(0.32)	(0.32)
Urban/Rural	0.64**	-0.44	-0.08
	(0.25)	(0.28)	(0.29)
Dublin	0.53**	-0.45	0.06
	(0.26)	(0.29)	(0.29)
Occupation	-0.84**	0.04	0.94**
	(0.36)	(0.32)	(0.30)
Farmer	-0.42	0.32	0.13
	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.40)
-2LL =	692	594	546
N =	997	997	997

Source: MBBI/*Irish Times* survey.
Note: Figures in parentheses are standard errors. **=Significant at .05 level or better.

One piece of information we can use is that of recalled vote last time. In practice we may regard those voters who made the same vote choice in both 1987 and 1982 as the ones most likely to regard their party as best irrespective of the party's true stance. In removing these voters from the sample we present a much tougher test for our hypothesis of policy oriented voters since we can be said to have removed from the data set that sub-group of voters who may be responsible for artificially inflating the importance of issues. In short, by looking only at "switchers" we can claim to have controlled for a large part of the influence of party identification and to be able to argue much more plausibly that issue effects are indeed prior to a new vote choice. This would seem to be especially relevant in the case of the brand new party, the Progressive Democrats.

One other reason why it is worthwhile looking at switchers is that in 1987 they constituted a strikingly large proportion of the electorate. Voter volatility finally arrived to Irish politics in this election.[6] The Pedersen Index of aggregate volatility was 16.1 per cent, the highest recorded since 1943 (Gallagher, 1987, pp. 64-66; Marsh, 1985). The individual level of vote change underlying these aggregate figures was even more dramatic. Voter recall data suggests a level of some 50 per cent of voters who switched their vote between November 1982 and 1987 (cf. Laver *et al.*, 1987, pp. 109-111). Given such figures it would seem important to examine these voters in their own right over and above the reasons already advanced.

In short, we have re-estimated Equation (1) using as a sample only those voters who changed their voting behaviour between 1982 and 1987. The three dependent variables now become 1 = a switch to the (named) party while 0 = a switch to another party or to abstention. Again the estimation procedure is LOGIT. The independent variables remain the same, except that for obvious reasons we drop the variable for 1982 vote.

Table 4 lists the results from this estimation. As can be seen, the general impact of issues is somewhat reduced from the case of Table 3. For example, for all of the sample Fianna Fail registers strong issue effects for its policy position on government spending (Table 3), but this is not the case when we consider just those who switched. Nevertheless there are still statistically significant issue and personality effects present in this sub-sample of voters. In short we see strong evidence of voter rationality: i.e., in this set of equations perceiving a party to have the best policy on a given issue increases the probability of voting for that party.

6. There is evidence which suggests that the potential for considerable voter volatility has been present since the mid-1970s (Mair, 1987, pp. 78ff).

Table 4: *Determinants of Vote Choice by Party (Switchers): LOGIT Analysis*

	FF	*FG*	*PD*
Intercept	-2.05**	-1.64**	-4.00**
	(0.75)	(0.93)	(0.80)
Spending	0.41	1.41**	1.19**
	(0.31)	(0.39)	(0.39)
Taxation	0.92**	0.95**	1.18**
	(0.29)	(0.40)	(0.31)
Northern Ireland	1.27**	0.19	0.62
	(0.28)	(0.39)	(0.67)
Church/State	0.74**	0.47	0.91
	(0.28)	(0.36)	(0.64)
Haughey	0.66**	-0.07	-0.31**
	(0.13)	(0.19)	(0.14)
FitzGerald	-0.30**	0.60**	0.003
	(0.15)	(0.20)	(0.14)
O'Malley	-0.26**	-0.64**	1.06**
	(0.16)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Vote 1982	—	—	—
Age	-0.28**	-0.19	0.20**
	(0.10)	(0.14)	(0.10)
Sex	-0.30	0.19	0.19
	(0.25)	(0.35)	(0.26)
Owner	0.14	0.83	0.26
	(0.33)	(0.53)	(0.36)
Urban/Rural	0.66**	-1.41**	0.13
	(0.33)	(0.45)	(0.33)
Dublin	0.50	-1.47**	0.49
	(0.35)	(0.48)	(0.35)
Occupation	-0.31	-0.26	0.46
	(0.37)	(0.47)	(0.34)
Farmer	-0.44	0.56	0.21
	(0.47)	(0.63)	(0.45)
-2LL =	411	238	396
N =	519	519	519

Source: MRBI/*Irish Times* survey.

The socio-economic variables are less interesting both from the point of view of our theoretical concerns, as much as in their statistical impact. The main effects are centred on the age and location variables. In short, the switch to the Progressive Democrats was in part associated with older voters, while the switch to Fianna Fail was significantly associated with urban and younger

voters. By contrast, the appeal of Fine Gael was in rural areas, with some additional support from home owners. Such effects do not alter our conclusion that there are substantial personality and issue effects.

IV POLITICAL COGNITIONS IN IRELAND: SOME INTRIGUING POSSIBILITIES

We can highlight the effects of policy and image by considering the changes in probability in switching to a named party which are implied by the coefficients of Table 4 (and the actual values for the variables seen in Appendix B). Unlike regression coefficients which represent a linear relationship, LOGIT models a non-linear relationship. The effects of X upon Y thus depend upon the current value for X and not just the reported coefficient. In principle we could calculate the change in probability of achieving Y for every value of X. Such an approach is clearly unmanageable. A much simpler way of proceeding is to calculate the probability of achieving Y for the mean values of the independent variable and then to look at the effects of changes in the impact of one or two variables upon this probability. In this way it is possible to see the maximum possible effects of a change in one of the independent variables in relation to a baseline model. In order to do this we do not have to bombard the reader with several hundred tables. The crux of the results can be presented much more clearly.

Table 5 reports the changes for those coefficients found to be statistically significant in Table 4. For example, evaluated at the mean values for all the independent variables there was a 0.142 probability of switching to the PDs (see Appendix B for means and standard deviations of all variables which allow calculation of the probabilities). If a voter really liked Desmond O'Malley the value for that variable increases to its maximum of 1 (quite a bit different from the population mean value of 0.30 for this variable) and the probability of switching to the PDs jumps to 0.259, an increase of 0.117. In liking O'Malley a voter increased his or her chance of switching to the PDs from around 1 in 7 to 1 in 5. Similarly, at the mean values for all variables there is a 0.038 probability of switching to Fine Gael. For those who believe that Fine Gael had the best policy on taxation this probability increases to 0.093.

The results of Table 5 not only indicate the strength of issue effects, they also lend some credence to the argument that campaigns may have some effect on voters. The pattern of coefficients is not, as one might reasonably expect, the same across all three parties. On the basis of the discussion of vote choice so far we have no reason to suspect that the pattern of coefficients for Fianna Fail should be any different to that of Fine Gael. The fact that this is not the case suggests the presence of an intervening variable we have not yet tapped

but which produces cross-party differences. One possible explanation for cross-party difference is that Fine Gael was the incumbent party while Fianna Fail and the PDs were challengers. Yet the pattern of coefficients for the PDs is much more similar to that of Fine Gael than to its fellow challenger. It does not seem likely, then, that incumbent/challenger differences are an intervening variable here.

Table 5: *Changing Probabilities for Switching*

Switch to	*FF*	*FG*	*PD*
Prob at means	.238	.038	.142
O'Malley	-.056	-.01	.117
Haughey	.155	—	-.037
FitzGerald	-.059	.047	—
Northern Ireland	.222	—	—
Taxation	.11	.055	.162
Spending	—	.069	.183
Church/State relationship	.179	—	—

Source: Table 4 and Appendix B.

A potentially more promising source of cross-party differences is that of the campaign activities themselves. Viewed from this perspective the different patterns become somewhat more sensible. One striking pattern is that, even though the PDs or Fine Gael may have been thought to have the best policy on Northern Ireland or church/state relations this had no significant impact on vote choice. The two policy areas of most impact were the ones on which both Fine Gael and the PDs campaigned hardest. This would seem to be especially important when it comes to the issue of government spending which had no positive impact for Fianna Fail.

The impact of taxation policy is the only one common to all three parties and the issue upon which these parties were most similar. Interestingly the effect of this issue within each party is the weakest of the issue effects. Taking this as evidence of party campaigns cancelling each other out would clearly be going beyond the results. Nevertheless the pattern of coefficients across the different parties does suggest a need for closer attention to campaign information in voter studies.

One unanswered question here is whether or not these trends simply represent pre-existing features of the electorate upon which the parties capitalised.

A prominent example of such was where the Progressive Democrat's decision to stress leader image was based on private poll evidence which showed O'Malley's popularity (Farrell, 1987). Clearly a panel study would help sort out cause and effect here, but what we can say is that these results are from surveys taken AFTER the campaign strategies were decided upon, and so for the most part would seem to be in line with the idea of being an effect, and not a cause, of party campaigns. At the very least these voter responses are consistent with the parties' campaigns.

Turning to the effects of personality and recalling the decision by Fine Gael not to stress leader image to the same extent as the other two parties the relatively weak impact of FitzGerald's personality and the much stronger impact of both Haughey and O'Malley is particularly noteworthy. Having said that, these measures of personality effects are somewhat crude.[7]

In any event our main conclusion is that Irish voters will vote for a party which they perceive, rightly or wrongly, to have the "best" policies on a given issue. This, we argue, is a proper demonstration of a rational choice approach under conditions of uncertainty. More tentatively the results of Table 5 suggest that party campaigns do have an effect upon vote choice within such a framework and this is the case whether we examine all voters or those who changed their minds between 1982 and 1987.

7. Indeed evidence from another wave of the 1987 survey suggests that voters build up quite complex images of party leaders. We can see this by noting that the survey asked voters to assess the leaders on five different points. Voters were asked which party leader was best to

1. "get the various interest groups in the country working together"
2. "get things done"
3. "improve Ireland's standing abroad"
4. "get the most out of a team of Cabinet ministers"
5. "know and understand ordinary people's problems"

One might reasonably expect, in the absence of any other expectations, that if a leader was liked that leader would be liked across all or most of these dimensions. This would be particularly so if we were to base our expectations in the kinds of "projection" effects of the party identification approach. The following simple table suggests that voter assessments of politicians are, in fact, quite rich in their capacity to draw distinctions about different abilities and qualities.

named on ... characteristics	*O'Malley*		*Haughey*		*FitzGerald*	
	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*
0	63	682	45	482	60	636
1	13	141	13	142	17	186
2	9	100	8	89	10	102
3	6	60	8	84	6	63
4	3	32	7	80	3	30
5	6	59	18	197	5	57

V CONCLUSION

In contrast to the argument in *How Ireland Voted* this paper has set out the argument that the puzzling patterns we began with in Table 1 can be explained from within the rational choice framework and without recourse to accounts grounded in party identification. Moreover, the results of Table 4 suggest that volatility among the Irish electorate has an issue basis. Obviously much work needs to be done with regard to refining the individual level specification of these equations in order to more fully examine such processes.

Perhaps just as important as these arguments concerning voter behaviour this paper also points the way to further research on the purpose and impact of party campaigns upon voter behaviour. Indeed, the whole subject of campaigns is, as Harrop and Miller have it, a "major gap" in the literature (1987, p. 240).[8] Here we have sought to highlight the importance of campaigns somewhat indirectly since the kinds of panel data which would help us pinpoint effects more directly are unavailable.

The fundamental requirement is for more data. While we have come reasonably far using the MRBI/*Irish Times* data set much more can be done to elaborate upon the system of relationships sketched in Figure 1. With better information at the level of the individual we can move towards establishing the sources of party images among the electorate.

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8. On the importance of election campaigning in a comparative perspective see Farrell (1989), and Farrell and Bowler (1990).

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APPENDIX A

THE VARIABLES AND THEIR CODING

Dependent variables

Table 3 1=vote intention for named party, 0=vote for other parties or abstention.

Table 4 1=vote intention for named party (different from 1982 recalled behaviour) 0=vote intention for other party or abstention (different from 1982 recalled behaviour.

Independent variables

O'Malley/Haughey/FitzGerald	1=like; 0=indifferent, -1=dislike
North/Tax/Spend/Church-state	1=named party best on that policy, 0=otherwise (i.e., in the equations for Fianna Fail 1=FF thought best, 0=other. In the equation for the PDs 1=PDs thought to be best, 0=other)
vote 1982	1=vote for named party, 0=other vote
owner	1=house owner, 0=otherwise
urbanrur	1=rural area, 2=urban
Dublin	1=Dublin, 0=otherwise
age	1=youngest (18-25), 4=oldest
sex	1=male, 2=female
occupation	1=self-employed, 0=other
farmer	1=farmer 50+ acres, 0=other occupation

APPENDIX B

MEANS, MINIMA, MAXIMA AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES FOR SWITCHERS ONLY

Variable	*Mean*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*S.D.*
FFNorth	0.211946	0	1	0.409081
FFTax	0.246628	0	1	0.431464
FFSpen	0.219653	0	1	0.414411
FFMoral	0.240848	0	1	0.428011
FGNorth	0.447013	0	1	0.497664
FGTax	0.140655	0	1	0.348001
FGSpen	0.317919	0	1	0.466117
FGMoral	0.402697	0	1	0.490914
PDNorth	0.0423892	0	1	0.20167
PDTax	0.186898	0	1	0.390206
PDSpen	0.119461	0	1	0.324643
PDMoral	0.050963	0	1	0.218354
OMalley	0.304432	-1	1	0.783394
FitzGer	-0.204239	-1	1	0.952897
Haughey	-0.11368	-1	1	0.93649
Age	2.57611	1	5	1.24176
Urbanrur	1.42582	1	2	0.494944
Dublin	0.277457	0	1	0.448176
Owner	0.797688	0	1	0.402111
Farmer	0.0924855	0	1	0.28999
Sex	1.50482	1	2	0.500459
Self Empl.	0.169557	0	1	0.375605