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Social locations, spatial locations and voting at the 1997 British general election: evaluating the sources of Conservative support

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Abstract

Most study of British voting behaviour focuses on class and other compositional influences on party choice, paying relatively little attention to contextual influences — spatial variations in patterns of party choice. Recent work stresses the interdependence of social and spatial locations as influences on how people vote, which this paper analyses using the large British Household Panel Study data set. By locating respondents in their local social milieux as well as their class and other contexts, it shows that how people voted at the 1997 British general election reflected just as much on where they lived and who they lived among as to what social categories they belonged to.

Keywords: Voting; Great Britain; Class; Social locations; Spatial locations; Context; Milieux

The study of voting behaviour in Great Britain has expanded recently from a relatively simple procedure in political sociology, linking party choice to a single independent variable — social class — to a more complex exercise involving a range of competing theories. Most of those theories relate party choice to voters' social locations within a compositional structure defined by socio-economic characteristics. Very few include spatial locations — the contextual geographies within which political behaviour is socialised and mobilised. (On composition and context see Thrift,

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1983.) A 'nationalisation' of British politics around the end of the nineteenth century is assumed (Lawrence, 1999). From then on — excepting localised pockets of support for the Liberal party and its successors, plus the spatially-constrained support for the nationally-based parties in Scotland and Wales (Agnew, 1987) — Great Britain was treated as a uniform political plain, with deviations from the general patterns relatively unimportant residuals.

There has been a recent revival of interest in spatial locations as elements in British electoral decision-making, not as replacements for social locations but as significant complementary aspects of decision-making milieux. This covers a range of topics, such as: the particularity of local voting patterns (the Dukeries coalfield in Nottinghamshire: Griffiths & Johnston, 1991; Johnston, 1991); the regional divide which opened-up in the 1980s and has only been partially eliminated since (Johnston, Pattie, & Allsopp, 1988; Fieldhouse, 1995; Johnston & Pattie, 1998); and the importance of local campaigning in mobilising support (Denver & Hands, 1997; Pattie, Johnston, & Fieldhouse, 1995) — not least where tactical voting is promoted (Johnston et al., 1997).

This paper builds on that work, using the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data set to integrate social and spatial locations. We have added small-area information on each respondent's residential milieu, creating original data for exploring social *and* spatial locations to a degree not previously feasible and providing substantial new insights to geographical variations in British voting behaviour.

Social locations

Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) classic paper related voting behaviour in western Europe to interactions among four major cleavages, two representing the 'national revolution' from the 17th century onwards — a cleavage between the dominant and subdominant cultures within a nation-state, and another between secular- and religious-based cultures — and two related to the subsequent 'industrial revolution' — one between urban and rural areas and the other between the two main social classes. The last of these dominated in Britain; Alford (1963) described its political culture as closest to a 'pure class' pattern of voting among the four Anglo-American countries studied (see also Lijphart, 1971), and according to Pulzer (1967, p. 98) "Class is the basis of British party politics: all else is embellishment and detail". Butler and Stokes' (1969, 1974) seminal studies crystallised this view, showing how people were socialised into their class location and its associated political party (Conservative for the middle-class, Labour for the working-class). They also recognised the presence of contextual effects, however, devoting a full chapter to "the geography of party support".

The 1970s initiated a decline in the class cleavage's importance according to some authors: Särlvik and Crewe (1983) designated it a "decade of dealignment". The dealignment process had two components: *class dealignment* involved a weakening of the difference between classes in their distinctive patterns of support for the two main political parties; and *partisan dealignment* involved a reduction in the number

of voters who responded to a standard set of questions by indicating that they strongly identified with a particular party. Reasons for these declines were associated with various factors, including embourgoisement of many sections of the working-class (Crewe & Denver, 1985). Others charted the continuing decline in the class cleavage, with Sanders (1997), perhaps prematurely, pronouncing it dead in 1997. (Key pieces in the debate include Heath, Jowell, & Curtice, 1985; Crewe, 1986; Heath, Jowell, & Curtice, 1987; Weakliem, 1989; Evans, 1993: it continues in Evans, 1999.)[1]

One alternative approach focused on what Dunleavy (1979, 1980a,b: see also Dunleavy, 1980c, and Dunleavy & Husbands, 1985) defined as consumption sectors, social locations based not on occupational class alone (i.e. a classification of voters according to their position in the division of labour) but rather on dependence on the state for either or both of employment and consumption of major items — such as housing, education, health care and transport. Devine (1997, p. 16) terms this work the 'new structuralism' — which she claims "remains theoretically flawed since proponents of the thesis have failed to show that sectoral cleavages are the source of collective identities which have, in turn, been mobilised by political parties". These sectoral cleavages, it was argued, divided the working-class, and enabled Thatcherism's success in the 1980s (Edgell & Duke, 1991; Saunders, 1990). Regarding production sector cleavages, Dunleavy argued that occupational classes, especially the working-class, are divided along two axes — whether their employment is in the private or the public sector, and whether they are strongly unionised. The Labour party became strongly associated with unionised public sector workforces, concerned with job security and wage levels, whereas the Conservatives embraced less-unionised groups more concerned with tax burdens: as the Conservative governments slimmed the state sector through privatisation initiatives and reduced trade union powers, they eroded Labour's electoral bases.

Regarding consumption sectors, it was argued that greater reliance on the state apparatus for major items produced greater support for the party committed to sustain (if not enhance) the state sector. Thus those who used public educational and health services, relied on public transport, and/or lived in government-provided/subsidised homes were most likely to vote Labour: those who relied on the private sector — especially for housing, most families' major single item of consumer expenditure — were more likely to vote Conservative to represent their economic and social interests. But critics are unimpressed with empirical tests of Dunleavy's model. Devine (1997, p. 47) concluded that Saunders' (1990) findings "do not support his central thesis…the effect of tenure on voting behaviour was not well established when controlling for class".

Alongside attempts to understand post-dealignment voting are various types of 'responsive voter' models which focus on 'issue voting', identifying (a) the most salient issues for the electorate at an election contest and (b) their evaluations of parties' positions; rational voters should select the closest party to them on the salient

[1] The issue of whether there has been class dealignment depends to some extent on the statistical methodology employed: see Weakliem, 1989.

issues. A popular subset of those models see government economic performance as the predominant salient issue. Following Key (1966) and Fiorina (1981), they posit that those who think that the recent past has been characterised by economic prosperity are more likely to vote for the governing party than are those who think it has been characterised by recession. Such retrospective evaluations may draw on either or both of the voter's personal financial situation (egocentric voting) and perceptions of the national situation (sociotropic voting) — some add prospective evaluations to the voters' calculus. Work at aggregate and individual scales has identified this 'feel-good factor' (Sanders, Ward, & Marsh, 1987; Price & Sanders, 1995; Johnston & Pattie, 2000), and it has been successfully used to predict recent election results (Sanders 1991, 1999).

Spatial locations

Social locations have dominated studies of British voting behaviour, therefore. Spatial locations have received little attention, despite work on relevant spatial processes at two separate scales. At the smaller of the two, work has focused on what geographers, following Key (1949), term the neighbourhood effect (the seminal essay was Cox, 1969). This portrays electoral decision-making influenced by the micro-geography of information flows within voters' socio-spatial milieux, such as home neighbourhoods, workplaces, and formal and informal social organisations (many of which are spatially restricted). The implicit process is 'conversion by conversation'; the dominant political opinion in an area becomes accentuated because it wins more 'converts' from minority points of view than vice versa — Miller (1977, p. 65) referred to it as "people who talk together, vote together". The map of voting is thus more polarised than the map of social locations, and Miller (1977, 1978) discovered that the characteristics of one's neighbours are a better predictor of how one votes than are one's own characteristics. (His data were at the constituency scale: Warde, Savage, Longhurst, and Martin (1988) reached a similar conclusion regarding voting in local government elections at the ward scale.)

Although they did not conclude that where people lived was a better predictor of how they voted than what class they were members of, Butler and Stokes (1974) also demonstrated significant geographical components to the pattern of voting in Great Britain in the 1960s. Contrasts of mining and resort areas, and of constituencies with the highest percentages of manual and non-manual workers, plus regressions of constituency class composition against within-class voting, led them to conclude that

> A good deal of empirical support can be found for the principle than once a partisan tendency becomes dominant in a local area processes of opinion formation will draw additional support to the party that is dominant (p. 129).

One difficulty with these studies is the scale of analysis: they are at a larger scale than promoted in Cox's theories. British Parliamentary constituencies average over 60,000 electors each, much larger than the neighbourhood milieux within which

social interaction occurs. Hence Dunleavy's (1979) critique of Miller's work — it identifies patterns but proposes no convincing generating process. There has been little work at such smaller scales — although recent analyses provide clear evidence of the 'conversion by conversation' process, albeit without any spatial referents (Pattie & Johnston 1999, 2000).

At the large spatial scale, there was clear polarisation in support for Conservative and Labour in the 1980s — the so-called north–south and urban–rural divides (Curtice & Steed, 1982; Johnston et al., 1988). Despite some critical appraisal (notably by McAllister & Studlar, 1992: see Johnston & Pattie, 1998), it was generally accepted that these inter-regional differences reflected spatial variations in the 'feel-good factor', and regional dummy variables were incorporated in many studies to encapsulate them (as in Price & Sanders, 1995), but there has been little investigation of the processes involved — and in some cases an erroneous assumption that the patterns are the outcomes of 'unspecified' neighbourhood effects.

Two problems are involved in studies of the neighbourhood effect, therefore: the scale of analysis and the absence of appreciation of the processes involved. On the first, work is substantially impeded by the absence of small-scale data — especially aggregate voting statistics which are only available for constituencies. Recent work using 'bespoke neighbourhoods' defined for each respondent to the British Election Study 1997 survey has provided convincing evidence of substantial variations in voting at the general election then by very small areas, however (Tunstall et al., 2000; MacAllister et al., 2000).

Whatever the circumstantial evidence of spatial variations in voting patterns that are consistent with the hypothesised neighbourhood effect, there is still considerable debate about the processes involved, and of the role of spatial locations as influences on social behaviour. This is the focus of Savage's (1997) essay, consistent with Giddens' (1984) arguments regarding structuration, whereby agents draw on structural resources in determining how to act, and in turn contribute to the reproduction of (and change to) those resources. Structuration occurs in locales, or settings for interaction, relatively elastic spatial locations within which the resources are sited (Thrift, 1983). Most individuals occupy a variety of locales, some much more spatially constrained than others: some networks are relatively large-scale (trades unions, for example, are organised nationally and regionally, as well as at the individual workplace); others are more localised, as with neighbourhood social networks. Information drawn from the two types of network interacts, creating and re-creating local (political) cultures: space is thus implicated in class formation and the consequent decisions how to vote to further class interests, through the interaction of "networks which are dense and those with large ranges" (Savage, 1997, p. 69). The result is a mosaic of places with separate political structures on which members draw and to which they contribute: they are "not just passive backdrops to social process but are actively involved in the constitution and construction of social identities". Because of the class separation that occurs in urban areas, this stimulates local class solidarities in which the political orientations of the majority of a milieu's residents become those of many of its minority(ies) too (see Cannadine, 1982)

Savage's arguments regarding the creation of local identities and the voting behav-

iour that follows, based on the interaction of dense local ties and less intense wider relationships, offers a clear rationale for neighbourhood effects producing polarised voting patterns. It does not suggest that they are independent of class or other social locations, however, rather that in most cases they will interact to produce spatial variations in voting. Social location and spatial location are complementary approaches to the study of electoral behaviour, not alternatives.

Although Savage offers a valuable perspective on those complementary approaches, it is limited to the 'conversion by conversation' process. Not all polarised voting patterns need result from this process. Books and Prysby's (1991) proposed theory of contextual effects identifies four potential processes: (1) *personal observation*, whereby individuals' voting is influenced by their appreciation of events and situations in their milieux — such as interpretations of the state of the local economy (Tunstall et al., 2000); (2) *informal interaction*, with inter-personal communications influencing voting behaviour, as in Cox's (1969) formulation; (3) *organisationally-based interaction*, in workplaces, churches, labour unions and a range of other organisations, many of which are local in their structure and provide milieux for discussing political issues with neighbours; and (4) *mass media*, many of which are locally focused and provide politically-relevant cues about events in voters' neighbourhoods. Their review of the relevant literature concludes that (Books & Prysby, 1991, p. 40):

> Existing work in this field frequently lacks empirical investigation of the above factors. The link between the contextual variables and individual exposure to sources of information often is simply assumed to exist… This lack of empirical investigation into the mechanisms of contextual effects is due in large part to the fact that many studies employ secondary analyses of survey data collected for other purposes… Research designed specifically to examine a particular contextual effect…will be more likely to provide the necessary and appropriate data…[although] secondary analysis of existing data has its place too, especially as a cost-effective method…

This broader perspective provides potential routes for understanding spatial variations in, for example, economic voting which are absent from the more traditional approaches, constrained to an emphasis on informal social interaction.

Testing for social and spatial locational impacts on voting in Great Britain

We have suggested that studies of British voting behaviour should combine compositional and contextual approaches, embracing social and spatial locations. Such studies have been largely prevented by a lack of relevant data. We report here on exploratory analyses of a large data set which offers a wealth of compositional data on voters' social locations, to which we have added spatial location data.

The BHPS is a longitudinal study of individual members of a large sample of British households, inaugurated in 1991 with ca 5000 households in the sample and ca 10,000 individual respondents. We focus on the seventh wave (conducted in late

1997), when respondents were asked which party they voted for in the 1997 general election, if any. We obtained information on how they voted at the previous (1992) general election from wave 2, thus confining our analyses to the 7077 respondents who responded in both waves.

The BHPS provides very little information about respondents' spatial locations, none at the small scale needed for our study. This is partly because of confidentiality agreements with respondents. To avoid potential problems, we collaborated with the BHPS team to add information on the type of neighbourhood in which each respondent lived at each wave without in any way compromising their confidentiality: we have had access to no information that would allow us to link social and spatial locational data in ways that could be used to identify the individual respondents.

The smallest spatial units for which UK census data are available are enumeration districts, areas with populations of ca 500 used in census administration. Although defined for administrative convenience and efficiency, because these areas are small most provide reasonable data on the social profile of individual respondents' local milieux (Morphett, 1993). The wealth of census data for such areas has been used by academics and commercial firms to produce neighbourhood classifications, or 'life-style' areas, for market research and other purposes, by combining census data with large commercially-produced data sets (on, for example, newspaper readership and consumption habits). We have used the 'SuperProfile' classification (see Batey & Brown, 1995) which comprises profiles of the types of people living in each census enumeration district (for a critical analysis, see Longley & Harris, 1999). The districts are grouped into 40 life-style area types, which are further clustered into ten major groups employed here.[2] The producers' brief descriptions of the ten types are in Table 1, plus the estimated median household income for each. There is a sequence from the first to the tenth in estimated income, but other aspects of the socio-economic profiles indicate that further features dominate in some cases — such as the rural characteristics of group 6 and the multiracial nature of group 5.

From the large number of BHPS social location variables we selected the following as best-fits to the categories discussed in the literature reviewed above:

Social class location:
Occupation — four groups derived from the Registrar-General's classification:
Professional/managerial
Skilled non-manual
Skilled manual
Partly/un-skilled manual
Highest educational qualification
Degree
Other post-school
A-level

[2] Use of the finer-grained 40-type classification creates substantial problems of number of respondents in each cell for many of the analyses reported below.

Table 1
Descriptions of the ten lifestyle areas

1	*Affluent achievers* High income families with a lifestyle to match. Detached homes predominate, reflecting the professional status of their owners. Typically living in the stockbroker belts of the major cities, the Affluent Achiever is likely to own two or more cars… *(percentage of all households 9.0: median income £22,900)*
2	*Thriving Greys* Older than Affluent Achievers, possibly taking early retirement, the Thriving Greys still retain a prosperous way of life. Their detached or semi-detached homes have now been purchased and most of their children have left home… *(percentage of all households, 11.2: median income £17,800)*
3	*Settled Suburbans* These families are well settled in their semi-detached suburban homes. The Settled Suburbanites are employed in white collar and middle management positions. The presence of many part-time working wives ensures a fairly affluent lifestyle. *(percentage of all households, 11.3: median income £17,400)*
4	*Nest Builders* 'Thirtysomethings' who have recently started a family, the Nest Builders are middle management, white collar workers. Although there are two incomes, the mortgage on their home accounts for a large slice of income. *(percentage of all households, 14.7: median income £16,400)*
5	*Urban Venturers* This cosmopolitan, multiracial group reside in areas of major cities which are undergoing gentrification but still retain a significant proportion of poorer quality housing. These young adults live in terraced houses or flats and have high levels of disposable income… *(percentage of all households, 10.3: median income £16,400)*
6	*Country Life* Rural in nature, this group lives, works and plays in the countryside. Many live on farms or in tied cottages…. Car ownership is high, given the distance to local facilities… *(percentage of all households, 2.8: median income £15,800)*
7	*Senior Citizens* An elderly group living in small, possibly sheltered accommodation. Many have moved into retirement areas and there is a high proportion of 'little old ladies' — lone single female pensioners. *(percentage of all households, 7.9: median income £15,000)*
8	*Producers* These more affluent blue collar workers live in terraces or semis. Many are middle aged or older and their children have left home. The Producers work in traditional occupations and manufacturing industries, where unemployment levels have risen to a significant degree. Most are well settled in their homes, which are either purchased or still rented from the council. *(percentage of all households, 15.4: median income £13,400)*
9	*Hard-Pressed Families* Living in council estates, in reasonably good accommodation, unemployment is a key issue for these families. Most work is found in unskilled manufacturing jobs, if available, or failing that, on government schemes. *(percentage of all households, 7.2: median income £12,500)*
10	*'Have Nots'* Single parent families, living in cramped, overcrowded flats is the everyday reality for this group which is composed of young adults with large numbers of young children. These are the underprivileged who move frequently in search of a break. However, with two and a half times the national rate of unemployment, and with low qualifications, there seems little hope for the future. *(percentage of all households, 10.1: median income £10,500)*

O-level/CSE
None of the above
Personal annual income (quintiles)
£4000>
£4001–7000
£7001–11,000
£11,001–17,500
£17,501<
Household annual income (quintiles)
£10,000>
£10,001–17000
£17,001–25,000
£25,001–35,000
£35,001<
Production sector location
Union membership
Yes/No
Employment sector
Private/Public
Consumption sector location
Housing tenure
Outright owned
Owned with mortgage
Social housing (incl. rented from local governments)
Privately rented
Personal economic situation
Evaluation of change over last year
Better off
About the same
Worse off

These social and spatial location measures allow explorations of socio-spatial variations in British voting behaviour heretofore not possible.

The patterns of voting

Social class location

Table 2 shows reported vote in 1997 (as a percentage of all respondents, not just those who reported having voted) by social class locations; there is a relatively weak class cleavage, with Labour performing best in every category. (It was a good election for Labour, which was the leading party in nearly every segment of society: only non-unionised, non-manual workers in the private sector of the categories analysed here produced more Conservative than Labour votes: Table 3.) According to

Table 2
Vote in 1997 by social class location (percentages of row totals)[a]

	C	L	LD	O	N
Occupation (Registrar-General Social Class)					
Professional/managerial	28.4	36.5	16.2	5.5	1682
Skilled non-manual	26.2	36.9	12.4	3.5	1013
Skilled manual	17.9	45.8	9.1	3.0	826
Partly/un-skilled manual	16.2	48.6	9.6	3.0	758
Highest educational qualification					
Degree	20.3	36.7	21.8	4.2	934
Post-school	26.8	35.3	17.3	2.8	473
A-level	26.9	37.1	10.9	4.4	1147
O-level/CSE	23.7	37.5	11.2	2.6	2212
None	23.1	47.5	9.7	2.7	2571
Personal income (£ per annum)					
<4000	22.7	43.7	10.7	2.4	1443
4001–7000	21.6	43.5	12.8	2.7	1390
7001–11,000	22.6	42.2	12.1	2.9	1366
11,001–17,500	24.0	41.4	12.2	4.1	1465
17,501<	30.9	35.0	13.8	3.1	1413
Household income (£ per annum)					
<10,000	20.9	44.7	11.2	2.4	1469
10,001–17,000	23.1	42.1	12.6	3.5	1385
17,001–25,000	21.5	42.2	11.6	3.9	1439
25,001–35,000	25.2	40.9	11.8	3.6	1382
35,001<	31.4	35.8	14.5	1.9	1402

[a] C — Conservative; L— Labour; LD — Liberal Democrat; O — other; N — number of respondents.

the occupation of those in work (4279), for example, non-manual classes were more likely to vote both Conservative and Liberal Democrat than were the manual classes, though the difference between the extreme values was less than two-fold in both cases: similarly, manual workers were more likely to vote Labour than their non-manual contemporaries, though the ratio between the largest and smallest percentages was only 1.33. There was a class divide, but it was relatively narrow.

The divide was even slighter using highest educational qualification to measure social class location, especially for Conservative voting: the gap between the largest and smallest value was 6.3 percentage points. There was a greater divide for the other two main parties: those with no educational qualifications were substantially more likely to vote Labour than were any of the other groups (though the ratio of the largest to the smallest percentage was only 1.35), for example. By far the largest difference was in voting for the Liberal Democrats, which got over twice as much support from those with degree-level qualifications as from those with none.

Differences between income groups were slight: those with the highest (whether personal or household) were most likely to vote Conservative and least likely to vote Labour — but the gap between the highest and lowest quintiles was less than twofold in both cases.

Table 3
Vote in 1997 by production and consumption sector location (percentages of row totals)[a]

	C	L	LD	O	N
Union membership					
No	26.1	38.2	12.2	3.1	5909
Yes	15.5	56.1	13.1	3.3	1161
Employment sector					
Private	25.3	38.6	10.8	2.9	2525
Public	16.2	50.5	16.4	4.0	1133
Non-union members					
Private sector	27.0	35.0	10.7	2.7	
Public sector	19.9	41.9	18.2	4.6	
Union members					
Private sector	17.7	55.0	11.3	2.7	
Public sector	12.0	60.1	14.4	3.2	
Non-manual occupations					
Non-member/private	32.4	31.0	11.0	2.6	
Non-member/public	21.4	37.7	21.4	5.8	
Member/private	21.2	48.1	16.4	3.7	
Member/public	12.7	57.5	16.9	3.2	
Manual occupations					
Non-member/private	17.2	42.1	9.7	3.1	
Non-member/public	16.0	52.7	10.1	1.8	
Member/private	15.1	59.9	7.7	2.3	
Member/public	9.6	68.8	6.4	3.2	
Housing tenure					
Outright owned	35.2	35.7	13.6	3.4	1827
Owned with mortgage	24.7	40.1	13.1	3.0	3446
Social housing	8.8	49.8	6.3	2.5	1451
Privately rented	14.9	28.6	12.9	3.9	770

[a] C — Conservative; L — Labour; LD — Liberal Democrat; O — other; N — number of respondents.

Production and consumption sectors

Production sectors involve the interaction of three variables — employment sector, union membership and occupational class.

Union members were less likely to vote Conservative than non-members (a ratio of 0.59), and much more likely to vote Labour (a ratio of 1.47) — both groups gave Labour at least a plurality of their votes (Table 3). Similarly, those working in the private sector were most likely to vote Conservative. Combining the two indicates no substantial differences, however: those in the public sector were less likely to vote Conservative than those in the private, irrespective of union membership, but the gaps were not very wide. Introducing the third variable — occupational class — generated larger differences, however, notably within the non-manual occupations (sample size did not allow further subdivision of occupational classes), but the largest ratio was only 1.67 (among non-manual trade unionists, according to whether they worked in the public or private sectors).

Differences were much more substantial across the four housing tenure types, our only measure of consumption sectors. People living in homes owned without mortgages were four times more likely to vote Conservative than were those living in social housing (homes rented from either Housing Associations or local authorities). This was by far the clearest cleavage, although much more so in the pattern of Conservative than Labour and Liberal Democrat voting — and even among outright-owners Labour gained more support than the Conservatives.

Economic evaluations

The literature on the economic determinants of voting suggests that the 'feel-good' factor is a significant influence on voting choice. The BHPS respondents do not sustain this argument, however (Table 4), with virtually no differences among the three groups in their propensity to vote for any of the three parties. People who felt that they had become better-off over the previous year were less likely to vote Conservative than those whose perceived the situation had stayed about the same, for example, and less than three percentage points more likely to than those who felt that they had become worse-off.[3]

Table 4
Vote in 1997 by economic evaluation and life-style area (percentages of row totals)[a]

	C	L	LD	O	N
Personal economic situation					
Better off	24.1	39.3	12.6	2.6	2019
About the same	25.9	42.3	12.1	3.0	3479
Worse off	21.3	41.4	12.3	3.6	1562
Life-style area					
1	39.4	24.9	17.1	3.3	706
2	34.2	30.1	17.8	3.4	811
3	29.6	39.3	12.9	2.3	1052
4	23.1	44.2	10.3	2.9	1096
5	15.3	46.2	12.4	3.2	563
6	40.7	18.6	14.0	7.3	221
7	24.4	40.7	11.2	3.7	516
8	17.4	48.7	11.8	2.2	1115
9	9.7	57.0	6.6	1.3	544
10	12.0	51.7	7.0	3.2	441

[a] C — Conservative; L — Labour; LD — Liberal Democrat; O — other; N — number of respondents.

[3] Interestingly, this lack of a relationship was not also characteristic of the 1992 general election; then, those who had become worse-off over the previous 5 years were four times more likely to vote Labour than Conservative.

Life-style areas

The differences among life-style areas are much more substantial than was the case with any of the classifications discussed above, except for voting by housing tenure categories (Table 4).[4] There are much greater variations across spatial than social categories in the propensity to support the various political parties. The ratio between the largest and smallest percentage voting Conservative across the 10 life-style area types is 4.28, for example: for Labour it is slightly less at 3.06, not surprisingly given the party's greater support across the whole country; and for the Liberal Democrats it is 2.70.

The main difference between the Conservatives and Labour are in the areas where blue-collar families dominate and unemployment is high — types 9 and 10, where the ratio of Labour to Conservative support was 5.88 and 4.31 respectively. Labour also got more than three times the Conservative percentage in the cosmopolitan areas where young families are prevalent ('Urban Venturers': type 5) and performed relatively well in the areas where older people dominate (such as type 7).

Although the Conservatives were not the largest-supported party in any of the social locations covered in Tables 2 and 3, this is not the case with regard to spatial locations; they were the leading party in three of the ten types (1, 2 and 6). Their best performance was in the rural areas (6), where the ratio of Conservative to Labour votes was 2.19: they also outvoted Labour in the more affluent areas (types 1 and 2), especially among the affluent achievers where they outvoted Labour by a ratio of 1.58.

Social and spatial locations

These findings strongly favour Miller's (1977) argument that there is greater spatial than social polarisation within the British electorate: spatial locations were more important as influences on voting choice than were social locations. With the exception of housing tenure, there was much more variation in party choice among different types of area than there was among different types of people. This may be an artefact of the spatial classification, however: if different types of people congregate into particular areas, then the small differences among those types could be exaggerated when inter-area variations are the focus of attention.[5] To test whether that was

[4] Housing tenure is the only social location variable which has a necessary spatial component, in that most people in social housing live on estates dominated by that tenure form, producing a collinearity problem for analysis. There is no such necessity for spatial segregation with any of the other social locations — though there may well be some as a result of peoples' housing choices.

[5] It may also be the case that a larger number of spatial and social locations makes it slightly easier to 'discover' variations among the former, but increasing the number of the latter would make for considerable problems of sample size in many of the cells especially as many social locations have a clustering of respondents in a portion of the categories only (the central ones in many cases); not many people have degrees, for example.

so, we look at voting across spatial locations by people in particular social locations (i.e. we hold the latter constant), avoiding data overload by focusing on Conservative support — which Tables 2–4 show had the greatest variation across social categories.

Social class location and life-style area

Table 5 shows variations in voting Conservative across the ten life-style areas, by social class location. In addition to the individual percentages for each area, it summarises these with the ratio of the largest to the smallest percentage in each row (L:S). These ratios indicate how substantial differences were across the life-style areas, holding constant social class location: the smallest is 3.08 and the largest 21.27, with an average across all nineteen of 5.71.

Conservative support was highest in every social class location in three types of area — the rural (type 6) and the affluent (types 1 and 2) — and lowest in three others — those with high concentrations of young families (type 5) and of blue-collar workers (types 9 and 10). For example, only 10% of those in professional and managerial occupations living in the least-affluent type 10 areas voted Conservative compared to nearly 40% of their contemporaries in rural areas (type 6) and in low density suburbs (type 1). Similarly, people with degrees were three times more likely to vote Conservative if they lived in type 1 than type 10 areas; people with high personal incomes were four times as likely to vote Conservative in the former than in the latter areas; and whereas just 9% of those with the lowest quintile of household income voted Conservative if they lived in areas dominated by council housing (type 9), 43% of them did so if they lived in rural areas (type 6). Similar people voted differently according to the types of area they lived in — and hence the type of people they lived among.

Production and consumption sectors and life-style areas

The same conclusion can be drawn for production sectors (Table 6: some of the cell sizes are too small for meaningful percentages to be recorded and where the ratio of the largest to the smallest percentage is infinity the ratio involving the smallest percentage greater than 0.0 is also shown). Both union members and public-sector workers were 4.3 times more likely to vote Conservative if they lived in affluent suburbs rather than blue-collar areas, for example. With the two categories cross-classified, inter-area differences are even larger: non-members of trades unions working in the public sector were nearly eight times more likely to vote Conservative in rural areas (type 6) than those living in ‘classic’ blue-collar areas (type 10).

Adding occupation as a further cross-classification creates difficulties because of cells with very few respondents. The recorded differences are large in many cases. Trade unionists in non-manual occupations working in the public sector were 8.61 times more likely to vote Conservative in the affluent low density suburbs (type 1), for example, than were their contemporaries in the higher-density areas with relatively large numbers of older people (type 8).

Turning to consumption sector locations, Table 7 shows four L:S ratios greater

Table 5
Conservative vote in 1997 by social class location and life-style areas (percentages of row totals)

	Life-style area										L:S[a]
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Occupation											
Prof./man.	38.0	31.8	30.0	27.6	10.8	39.6	23.8	22.3	14.9	10.0	3.96
Sk. non-manual	41.9	31.7	31.9	23.8	13.6	38.1	24.6	19.6	17.9	14.9	3.08
Skilled manual	32.6	26.3	24.1	15.9	16.1	36.8	10.9	14.2	7.9	9.5	4.66
Part/unskilled	18.6	27.2	17.1	15.4	13.3	28.1	19.4	9.5	7.6	12.3	3.70
Highest educational qualification											
Degree	30.4	23.5	25.8	19.8	10.7	22.2	15.8	20.4	9.1	10.9	3.34
Post-school	39.2	28.6	36.6	26.5	7.0	31.3	6.9	18.6	25.0	14.3	5.68
A-level	40.8	37.0	31.7	24.7	18.3	34.0	29.1	18.0	13.6	4.5	9.07
O-level/CSE	44.8	32.6	24.5	24.5	11.3	39.2	25.7	16.3	7.6	13.4	5.89
None	38.1	36.7	30.6	20.1	21.2	56.9	25.7	17.4	9.0	12.4	6.32
Personal income (£ per annum)											
<4000	41.0	37.4	30.2	16.9	16.5	41.9	22.2	15.6	8.2	7.8	5.37
4001–7000	30.0	33.3	27.4	23.8	16.2	35.7	28.7	16.0	8.3	13.1	4.30
7001–11,000	37.3	26.7	29.1	24.0	12.8	46.9	186	20.0	8.9	11.8	5.27
11,001–17,500	39.4	30.8	27.0	22.6	11.3	44.1	26.9	15.6	12.2	16.0	3.61
17501<	43.7	41.5	33.1	26.9	18.9	35.6	25.0	23.4	14.3	11.4	3.83
Household income (£ per annum)											
<10000	31.8	28.9	27.9	27.8	17.1	42.9	26.0	16.0	9.0	10.6	4.77
10,001–17,000	39.8	38.8	24.5	14.5	16.7	53.2	26.3	18.5	7.7	15.9	6.91
17,001–25,000	29.6	33.1	29.5	21.0	11.6	33.3	13.1	18.0	14.9	6.3	5.29
25,001–35,000	45.2	29.8	35.2	24.4	12.5	46.8	25.5	13.8	2.2	9.6	21.27
35,001<	42.3	39.2	29.1	27.6	18.0	31.3	30.0	25.5	20.0	26.7	2.35

[a] L:S — ratio of the largest to the smallest percentage in the row.

Table 6
Conservative vote in 1997 by production sector location and life-style area (percentages of row totals)

	Life-style area										L:S[a]
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Union membership											
No	41.6	37.1	31.3	26.4	16.4	43.4	26.3	18.2	10.4	11.3	4.00
Yes	25.8	20.5	21.4	9.8	10.7	25.0	13.5	12.2	6.0	16.1	4.30
Employment sector											
Private	41.3	36.6	28.2	24.7	16.4	34.1	23.1	18.8	11.3	12.8	3.65
Public	25.0	16.9	25.1	14.7	6.7	29.4	15.6	7.9	9.6	8.3	4.39
Union membership and employment sector											
Non/private	42.5	39.2	28.8	27.9	16.5	36.8	25.0	19.2	12.9	12.9	3.29
Non/public	27.1	22.6	30.9	21.0	6.7	38.9	19.6	9.8	10.3	4.9	7.94
Member/private	30.8	26.8	25.7	12.2	16.0	*[b]	14.3	17.1	6.4	12.5	4.81
Member/public	22.2	11.8	18.0	8.2	6.7	18.8	9.7	6.2	8.7	12.9	3.58
Union membership, employment sector and occupation											
Non-member/private/non-manual	45.5	41.8	33.8	33.7	18.1	40.8	36.6	24.4	17.8	14.0	3.25
Non-member/public/non-manual	42.5	39.2	28.8	27.9	16.5	36.8	25.0	19.2	12.9	12.9	3.29
Member/private/non-manual	37.5	33.3	30.0	10.0	0.0	*	10.0	21.1	*	*	∞ (3.75)
Member/public/non-manual	22.4	13.3	19.2	8.5	6.1	21.4	77.0	2.6	7.1	*	8.61
Non-member/private/manual	28.9	32.8	18.0	18.5	12.2	29.6	10.5	12.3	8.5	11.6	3.86
Non-member/public/manual	*	25.0	26.7	11.1	16.7	*	26.7	0.0	6.7	0.0	∞ (3.99)
Member/private/manual	20.0	17.4	20.6	12.3	28.6	*	16.7	15.8	7.7	11.8	3.71
Member/public/manual	*	*	12.5	7.7	9.1	*	*	11.5	11.1	5.9	2.11

[a] L:S — ratio of the largest to the smallest percentage in the row.
[b] Asterisks denote that there were less than ten respondents.

Table 7
Conservative vote in 1997 by consumption sector location, economic evaluation and life-style area (percentages of row totals)

	Life-style area										L:S[a]
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Housing tenure											
Outright owned	48.6	39.7	35.4	34.7	25.6	53.3	37.7	29.7	12.6	22.5	4.23
Owned-mortgage	38.7	33.7	29.2	21.2	14.1	35.2	23.0	16.4	12.1	15.0	3.20
Social housing	6.1	16.9	12.7	6.7	11.0	8.3	12.8	8.5	5.0	8.1	3.38
Privately rented	16.0	21.7	13.3	29.4	9.8	33.3	16.0	6.7	15.4	7.0	4.76
Economic situation											
Better off	36.5	37.3	27.6	22.5	13.4	34.3	24.4	16.9	13.9	8.8	4.24
About the same	41.8	35.4	32.4	23.0	19.5	46.1	25.2	17.5	10.5	15.8	4.39
Worse off	38.0	26.9	25.1	24.1	9.2	38.5	21.2	17.9	3.7	7.6	10.41

[a] L:S — ratio of the largest to the smallest percentage in the row.

than 3.00 for the housing tenure categories. Even among those living in social housing, who provided the lowest support for the Conservatives (Table 3), there was a 3.38 ratio: council housing tenants were three times more likely to vote Conservative if they lived in areas where there was a majority of affluent households, most of whose members voted Conservative, than they were if they lived in areas where members of the 'traditional working class' predominated. To a considerable extent, housing tenure is a spatial as well as a social location: much 'council housing' is on estates (i.e. in life-style areas 8 and 9) and much owner-occupied housing is spatially segregated from that in the rented categories (notably in life-style areas 1 and 2). But Conservative voting by people in a particular housing tenure living in areas where other tenures dominate differed substantially from the situation where their own tenure type forms a majority in their local area.

Economic evaluation and life-style areas

Table 7 also shows the differences in Conservative voting across the ten life-style areas according to economic evaluations, on which there was least variation in aggregate (Table 3). Variations between areas were substantial, however. Among those feeling better-off over the preceding year, for example, only 8.8% of those living in type 10 areas voted Conservative; the comparable figures for the most affluent areas (types 1 and 2) were 36.5 and 37.3 respectively. People feeling better-off were much more likely to vote for the incumbent government's return to power if they lived in affluent areas (where most of their neighbours also felt better-off) than if they lived in relatively deprived areas. Similarly among those feeling worse-off, just 3.7% voted Conservative if they lived in the relatively deprived areas of type 9 compared to 38.0% living in the affluent (type 1) and rural (type 6) areas. Neighbours' economic situations were apparently more influential on how you voted than were your own.

Statistical analyses

The descriptive material in Tables 5–7 strongly suggests that where people lived was a very important influence on how they voted in 1997. To provide a more rigorous evaluation, we conducted analyses of variance (ANOVA) with probability of voting Conservative as the dependent variable and the various social and spatial location measures as independent variables: we focus here on the relative measure of significance for each variable — the *F*-values (Table 8).

Three models were fitted in the first analyses, of social class and spatial locations. Model I investigated the impact of social locations only, relating the probability of voting Conservative to educational qualifications, personal income and household income. Model II added life-style area, evaluating whether this had an impact independent of the social location variables. Model III further incorporated occupational class: this was introduced last because it reduced the number of observations (a substantial number of respondents were unclassified because they were not in the labour force; Table 2). All *F*-values were statistically significant at the 0.01 level or better: in Model II, life-style area was by far the most significant, though in the reduced Model III it was slightly less important than household income. The *F*-values

Table 8
Analyses of variance of the relationship between various locations and probability of voting Conservative in 1997 — *F*-values

	Model			
	I	II	III	IV
Social class location				
Highest educational qualification	4.72	4.86	2.50	3.72
Personal income	4.99	5.15	3.69	5.48
Household income	14.64	15.40	18.68	27.75
Life-style area		33.44	14.49	21.53
Occupation			8.19	12.17
Conservative vote 1992				2050.79
Production sector location				
Trade union membership	50.27	52.03		76.12
Employment sector	18.32	18.06		26.43
Occupation	13.49	13.83		20.23
Life-style area		21.15		17.78
Conservative vote, 1992				1682.53
Consumption sector location				
Housing tenure	47.14	48.67		76.08
Life-style area		24.92		38.95
Conservative vote, 1992				3948.94
Economic evaluation				
Evaluation	6.38	6.65		10.51
Life-style area		38.46		60.81
Conservative vote, 1992				4090.46

for the three social location variables in Model I were not substantially reduced by the addition of the spatial locations variable in Model II, clearly indicating that each group had independent effects on the dependent variable. The relative importance of occupational class in Model III, and the declining *F*-values for education and personal income compared to Models I and II, suggest the continued importance of the class cleavage, and the reduced *F*-value for life-style area between Models II and III further suggests that spatial location is complementary to, rather than a replacement for, that crucial social location.

Only two models were fitted in each of the other three analyses, with life-style area introduced at the second stage: all *F*-values were significant. In the production-sector models, trade union membership dominated, but life-style area made a more substantial contribution to accounting for propensity to vote Conservative than either employment sector or occupational class. In the consumption sector models, housing tenure was a much more important influence than life-style area. Finally, life-style area was substantially more important than economic expectations.

These ANOVAs confirm the interpretations of Tables 5–7. Holding constant various individual characteristics does not remove the relationships between voting Conservative and the sorts of areas people live in. Indeed, as a general conclusion it seems not unreasonable to argue that spatial location was at least as important as social location in accounting for party choice at the 1997 British general election.

Changes over time

There is very strong evidence of spatial variations in voting behaviour at the 1997 British general election which were independent of, and in some cases more substantial than, social variations, therefore: places were significant influences on electoral decision-making. All of those data are cross-sectional, however; the observed spatial patterns may reflect long-term processes — decisions regarding which areas to live in, for example — rather than immediate influences on how people vote. The spatial variations may result from decisions by people who support a particular party to live in areas which reflect their partisan orientations, rather than any influence of their current areal context on their latest voting decision. To evaluate this argument, that the spatial variations are artefacts of other processes, we look at changes in voting between the 1992 and 1997 general elections, again focusing on support for the Conservative party.

The 1997 general election saw a major shift in party support from the previous four: in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992 the Conservative party won the support of ca 42% of those who voted, whereas Labour's support varied between 28 and 37 (the latter in 1979). Labour's vote share increased from 34 in 1992 to 43 in 1997; the Conservatives' fell from 42 to 31. Labour's gain resulted from winning over substantial numbers of former Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters, as well as from among those who did not vote in 1992. Table 9 shows the flow-of-the-votes for those in the BHPS survey who responded to the relevant waves: the Conservatives retained the support of only 60.6% of their 1992 voters, for example, with a further

Table 9
Flow-of-the-vote 1992–1997 (percentages of row totals)

	1997 vote				
1992 vote	C	L	LD	O	DNV
Conservative	60.6	15.2	9.1	2.3	12.8
Labour	1.0	85.5	2.6	1.3	9.6
Liberal Democrat	5.1	32.6	48.2	2.8	11.3
DNV	9.4	27.3	7.7	3.0	52.6

15.2% switching to Labour — which retained the support of 85.5% of its 1992 supporters. The Liberal Democrats also lost substantial support to Labour — in part because of tactical voting in constituencies where the Labour candidate had the best opportunity of unseating an incumbent Conservative (Johnston et al., 1997).

We concentrate on those who voted Conservative in 1992. Because the main focus is the independent effect of spatial locations, the data presented look only at the joint effects of social and spatial locations. In all cases where sufficient observations are available, they sustain our earlier findings.

Table 10 shows percentages of those who voted Conservative in both 1992 and 1997 (i.e. 'Conservative loyalists') by the four social location measures and life-style areas. The Conservatives retained more support in certain life-style areas — notably those with the more affluent, older residents (types 1, 2 and to a lesser extent 3) plus the rural areas (type 6) — than others, such as those where blue-collar workers and young families dominated (types 9 and 10 in the former category; type 5 in the latter). Among those with the highest personal incomes, for example, around 75% of 1992 Conservative voters were loyal in type 1 and 2 areas, compared to 40% in types 9 and 10. The ratios of the largest to the smallest percentages in each row average 2.32, and although this is less than half the comparable mean for the 'static ratios' reported in Table 5, nevertheless it indicates substantial spatial polarisation in the changing pattern of support for the Conservative party over the 1992–1997 inter-election period. Whatever their social location, residents of more affluent areas were more likely to be Conservative loyalists than were those in other life-style areas.

Table 11 contains similar results for the production and consumption sector locations and for economic evaluations. (Because of small cell-sizes in many cases, it was not possible to reproduce the cross-classifications for production sector locations included in Table 6. In addition, there were very few privately-rented dwellings in some of the life-style areas or of social housing in the rural areas.) The average ratio between the largest and smallest percentage in each row is 2.17 and Conservative loyalists were generally more prevalent in the type 1, 2 and 6 than type 5, 9 and 10 areas. Among those who voted Conservative in 1992 but were feeling worse-off in 1997, for example, 71% nevertheless voted Conservative again if they lived in type 1 areas (the low density, affluent suburbs) compared to only 17% of those living in type 9 areas (blue-collar, high density areas).

Table 10
Percentage of 1992 Conservative voters who voted Conservative in 1997, by social class locations and life-style areas

	Life-style area										L:S[a]
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Occupation											
Prof./man.	73.8	63.9	63.4	63.0	48.6	61.7	60.6	58.3	40.0	50.0	1.85
Sk. non-manual	75.0	58.3	63.5	43.9	44.0	57.1	62.5	44.7	52.6	54.5	1.71
Skilled manual	55.6	57.1	54.9	46.0	50.0	66.7	30.0	39.5	27.3	*[b]	2.44
Part/unskilled	46.7	64.0	51.9	45.8	38.9	66.7	47.6	40.0	33.3	47.1	2.00
Highest educational qualification											
Degree	65.8	65.0	59.0	63.0	42.1	*	57.1	40.0	*	*	1.65
Post-school	70.0	60.6	67.4	60.0	25.0	55.6	20.0	*	*	*	3.50
A-level	74.5	69.4	67.1	57.1	64.0	60.0	67.9	43.1	35.7	*	2.09
O-level/CSE	68.5	50.0	41.5	39.7	21.1	54.9	39.3	28.5	14.1	25.9	4.86
None	72.4	69.5	60.9	57.8	59.6	76.3	70.8	58.6	46.8	49.0	1.63
Personal income (£ per annum)											
<4000	75.9	67.8	59.1	64.9	50.0	56.2	66.7	53.3	42.1	37.5	2.02
4001–7000	63.4	61.0	65.2	57.5	65.2	66.7	68.9	57.3	42.3	55.6	1.63
7001–11,000	62.1	62.3	64.9	59.0	39.4	78.9	55.2	53.0	37.5	50.0	2.10
11,001–17,500	80.0	59.1	61.3	51.1	44.0	71.9	61.5	50.9	38.1	63.2	2.10
17,501<	75.8	73.9	60.5	60.4	57.5	62.5	56.4	53.2	41.2	37.5	2.02
Household income (£ per annum)											
<10,000	60.0	70.4	66.1	75.5	56.0	61.5	70.6	60.2	44.0	50.0	1.72
10,001–17,000	75.4	68.8	60.9	48.9	56.7	73.3	65.0	50.7	34.6	50.0	2.18
17,001–25,000	65.8	62.7	60.2	53.1	36.4	66.7	47.4	57.1	50.0	42.9	1.83
25,001–35,000	89.5	58.8	61.3	57.1	42.9	73.1	60.5	42.2	16.7	*	5.36
35,001<	70.7	68.4	62.0	58.1	62.5	57.6	55.9	56.4	50.0	*	1.41

[a] L:S — ratio of the largest to the smallest percentage in the row.
[b] Asterisks denote that there were less than ten respondents.

Table 11
Percentage of 1992 Conservative voters who voted Conservative in 1997, by production and consumption sector locations, economic evaluations and life-style areas

	Life-style area										L:S[a]
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Union membership											
No	73.3	67.0	63.1	61.6	52.5	67.0	63.6	53.7	41.9	49.3	1.75
Yes	70.0	56.5	54.0	34.5	42.9	63.6	47.1	50.0	30.8	*[b]	2.27
Employment sector											
Private	71.8	68.1	61.9	56.3	52.8	56.8	60.4	49.1	42.9	52.0	1.67
Public	65.1	47.6	54.2	45.6	31.8	60.0	47.8	34.8	33.3	*	1.95
Housing tenure											
Outright owned	78.7	70.1	66.3	70.5	64.4	76.0	83.9	66.7	52.0	50.0	1.68
Owned-mortgage	70.9	63.5	60.9	53.9	50.0	54.0	52.9	41.7	36.0	46.9	1.97
Social housing	*	73.3	47.1	29.2	36.8	*	39.1	54.2	34.8	55.3	2.51
Privately rented	70.0	65.2	41.7	78.6	30.0	*	50.0	*	*	*	2.62
Economic situation											
Better off	69.7	65.5	59.4	55.4	43.2	61.8	55.8	45.8	40.7	46.7	1.71
About the same	75.1	68.5	64.0	58.3	59.2	67.7	62.4	57.6	52.1	56.4	1.44
Worse off	71.1	59.5	59.7	59.8	38.1	70.4	70.4	51.9	16.7	38.9	4.26

[a] L:S — ratio of the largest to the smallest percentage in the row.
[b] Asterisks denote that there were less than ten respondents.

These descriptive data demonstrate that loyalty to the Conservative party was much greater in certain types of areas (those where the more affluent live, and where Conservative support is traditionally high) than others. During a period of substantial haemorrhaging of party support, continuing support was greatest in the party's geographical heartlands — holding constant the voters' social locations. This conclusion is sustained by formal statistical analysis. The ANOVA models were re-run, as Model IV, with an additional variable — whether or not the respondent voted Conservative in 1992. The results, in the final column of Table 8, show that those who voted Conservative in 1992 were very much more likely to vote Conservative again in 1997 compared to those who didn't vote Conservative in 1992: the *F*-values are extremely large. But all of the other *F*-values are also statistically significant at the 0.01 level or better — including life-style area (which again performs best in the models relating to economic evaluations). Place matters.

Discussion

These data consistently demonstrate very substantial, statistically significant, spatial variations in both Conservative voting in 1997 and changing support between 1992 and 1997, irrespective of social location. The latter remained important influences on voter choice — there is a social class cleavage, a production sector cleavage, a consumption sector cleavage, and a feel-good factor cleavage — but spatial location was both significant and substantial when these were held constant.

These findings are consistent with general hypotheses about the role of place as a socialisation milieu. In terms of Savage's division of networks, the social locations are the large-scale, extended ones, operating at regional and national scales and feeding information and attitudes into local areas through a variety of media and communication channels. As throughout much of the twentieth century, these were important conduits for political socialisation and mobilisation, producing the national patterns depicted in Tables 2–4. The spatial locations, on the other hand, defined here as small areas averaging no more than 500 residents, are milieux characterised by dense, localised networks, within which information imported through the wider networks are interpreted, manipulated and disseminated. They, according to our data, are crucial components in the decision-making process, with people apparently influenced at least as much by the nature of the places in which they live as by their positions within society.

Unfortunately, appreciation of the processes involved is precluded by an absence of data needed to evaluate hypotheses regarding the role of spatially-constrained social interaction on information flows and decision-making. The patterns described and analysed here provide only circumstantial evidence: their strength makes it difficult to believe that the processes do not operate, but only in-depth studies — of who people talk to, what about and how this influences their behaviour (as undertaken by Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995, in the USA) — can uncover exactly how. Furthermore, as Books and Prysby's (1991, 1999) arguments show, undoubtedly more than one process operates and they may vary in their relative importance from place to

place (and possibly from time to time too). Informal interaction among members of different social classes may be the dominant process (producing 'people who talk together vote together'), but personal observation and the mass media may be more important with regard to relationships between economic evaluations and how people vote: awareness of factory closures and high unemployment locally may convince those who themselves feel better-off to vote against the government because many of their neighbours are clearly worse-off.

Conclusions

Giddens' structuration concept has attracted considerable scholarly attention — more so, unfortunately, than the accompanying notion of locale as an interaction setting within which structuration occurs. Many critiques focus on operationalisation, how the ideas can structure empirical investigations to produce crucial tests of the concept's validity. But the real importance of his ideas is the conceptual framework they provide for thinking about interactions among the social and the spatial. Savage's more detailed theoretical apparatus provides the context for investigating voting behaviour. Giddens led social theorists in seeking to integrate not only the social and the spatial but also the socio-spatial and the temporal, producing a template within which empirical studies can be set.

Our analyses of Conservative voting at the 1997 British general election provide telling evidence of the importance of spatial as well as social locations as influences on behaviour: even in a globalising world, local places matter. According to Savage (1997, pp. 68–69):

> Class formation has a dual dynamic. First it involves the construction of social networks of wide range, linking members of that class across different local sites — workplaces, residential neighbourhoods, leisure venues, and so forth. In these situations, information can be passed on, organisations built, ideas pooled, mobilisation co-ordinated…. Secondly, class formation also involves the construction of dense ties which allows the forging of solidaristic and communal identities over time and in the absence of formal organisation. Here, classes can draw upon 'community', face-to-face relationships which are conducive to social solidarity…the two networks [may] reinforce each other [but] it is equally possible for them to pull against each other. The existence of dense ties of localism may work against the construction of wider ranging ties, while an individual's involvement in wide-ranging networks may preclude them from the dense local world of the neighbourhood.

The voting patterns analysed here are extremely suggestive of such reinforcement and counteracting ties. Occupants of particular social locations who live among similar people have values and attitudes derived from wider ties reinforced locally, and this is reflected in their voting habits. Those living among people from different social locations are in cross-pressured situations, however, and are more influenced

by their dense local ties than their wider and weaker ones: their voting behaviour is likely to be unrepresentative of their social location, and more representative of their spatial location. How Britons voted in 1997 reflected just as much on where they lived and who they lived among as on what social categories they belonged to.

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