Ireland: Politics with *Some* Social Bases: An Interpretation Based on Survey Data

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Abstract: Following on from the analysis of aggregate data on party choice in Ireland published in the last issue, this paper reports a re-analysis of a ten-year series of commercial opinion polls. The small sample sizes of the commercial polls yield even smaller numbers in social subcategories of the electorate, a problem dealt with by applying mathematical smoothing techniques to the series of polls, in order to remove unwanted sampling "noise". Trends emerge much more clearly as a result of this, and the social bases of support for the parties are easier to discern. In contrast to the results of the aggregate analysis, the Fine Gael vote exhibits clear social patterning. The Labour vote is also patterned, while the Fianna Fail vote is the least obviously affected by the socio-economic variables used in the opinion polls. Comparing the results of the aggregate and survey analyses, it appears that the *scale* of the social patterning of voting behaviour differs between Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, with Fine Gael voting affected by factors that vary *within* local areas and Finna Fail voting affected by factors that vary *between* them.

I INTRODUCTION

In a paper published in the preceding issue of *The Economic and Social Review, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 107-131,* I presented a re-interpretation of the "politics without social bases" view of Irish party politics, in the light of aggregate data on voting behaviour and a wide range of socio-economic variables. Such an analysis shows that *some* clear social patterning is evident in the vote shares of Fianna Fail and Labour although the Fine Gael vote, in line with earlier aggregate analyses, remains uninterpretable. This paper approaches precisely the same problem from the perspective of survey data. Ultimately, of course, good survey data is going to provide the only fully conclusive evidence with which to settle arguments about the social patterning of party choice. Furthermore, John Whyte's original statement of the "politics without social bases" thesis was itself based on survey evidence (Whyte, 1974).

Whyte based his argument on one of the earliest opinion polls to look at party support on a national basis, a Gallup Poll conducted for *Nusight* in April 1969. He concludes that "what is demonstrated most strikingly . . ., however, is the low degree to which Irish electoral behaviour is structured at all" (Whyte, 1974, p. 645). As Gallagher has recently pointed out, this result is in part an artefact of the combination of Fine Gael and Labour, the least and the most working class parties, and the contrasting of these with Fianna Fail in a tree analysis (Gallagher, 1985, pp. 134–135). Most of the tables in Whyte's original piece do show quite clear evidence of *some* social patterning, although it must be said that the figures are sufficiently ambiguous to admit several interpretations.

The 1969 Gallup Poll's most basic results, for example, are reproduced in Table 1. This table shows that those in unskilled or semi skilled occupational categories are *fourteen times* more likely to vote Labour than farmers with more than thirty acres, clear evidence of quite a strong social patterning of voting behaviour. The final column of Table 1 combines the Fine Gael and Labour vote share in each category and shows quite clearly the dramatic loss of information produced by doing this. The *combined* vote shares indeed look almost identical to those of Fianna Fail and Whyte's conclusions are not at all surprising in this light. Table 1 does also illustrate, however, the very stable vote share of Fianna Fail across all occupational categories, a finding that is always the dominant piece of evidence offered in favour of the "politics without social bases" thesis.

Table 1: *Class and party preference 1969 (percentage of occupational categories)*

Class	Fianna Fail	Fine Gael	Labour	Other	Fine Gael and Labour
AB	37	37	10	17	47
C1	48	26	15	11	41
C2	40	21	27	12	48
DE	43	14	28	15	42
Farmers (over 30 acres)	38	46	2	14	48
Farmers (under 30 acres)	53	26	5	16	31
All	43	25	18	14	43

Source: (Whyte (1974), p. 631).

The most recent reiteration of this interpretation can be found in Carty's *Party and Parish Pump*. Carty also relies heavily on data from a single survey and also places heavy emphasis on the apparent stability of the Fianna Fail vote. He

makes probably the most bold and the most sweeping statement of the politics without social bases thesis: "Social characteristics do not structure voting behaviour in Ireland" (Carty, 1981, p. 74).

More recently, however, Sinnott and Gallagher, also using survey data, have each qualified what had more or less become the received wisdom. Sinnott in particular notes a developing middle class character in the Fine Gael support base: "Fine Gael, from being a somewhat middle class party, edged towards becoming the party of the middle class" (Sinnott, forthcoming, p. 18). Gallagher forms the same conclusion from the survey evidence as he does from the ecological data:

> ... the characterisation of Ireland as 'politics without social bases' ... is not entirely accurate. If, as Carty says, all parties really did have 'sociologically heterogeneous bases of electoral support', then presumably a farmer owning a thousand acres would be as likely as one of his employees to vote Labour, a proposition that is not only implausible but which is refuted by the survey evidence ... (Gallagher, 1985, p. 134).

Gallagher also remarks upon the increasingly middle class nature of Fine Gael support (Gallagher, 1985, p. 133–34) and it is this conclusion in particular that distinguishes the survey evidence from the aggregate evidence. It will be remembered that Fine Gael vote is effectively uninterpretable in terms of aggregate data.

A quite different use of survey evidence can be found in McAllister and O'Connell (1984). Though published in 1984, their data relate to a sample taken in 1973 and containing only men. They attempt to solve the problem of multivariate analyses on smallish samples by using multiple regressions in a somewhat unorthodox manner. Each survey respondent is considered as a case and the regressions use several categorical (zero/one) variables for matters such as party choice and religion, together with some continuous variables, mostly based on assigned scores, covering matters such as church attendance. There are, of course, methodological problems that arise when using dichotomous dependent variables in regression analysis, especially in an equation largely filled with other categorical variables. These are at least alluded to by the authors (McAllister and O'Connell, 1984, p. 193). Leaving these on one side, however, the resultant equations are very weak, yielding r^2 values of 0.05 for Fianna Fail, 0.07 for Fine Gael and 0.11 for Labour. (McAllister and O'Connell refer to these, in rather more flattering terms, as 5%, 7% and 11% of variance explained, respectively.) The authors place great stress on the statistical significance of their regression coefficients, However, with a large number of cases (about 2,000) and a small number of variables (about 10) very modest effects indeed will emerge as being significantly greater than zero in *statistical* terms. The *scale* of the effects uncovered by McAllister and O'Connell is extremely small and their whole

analysis could quite easily be used by someone who wished to argue quite the opposite case.

We are still left, therefore, with the need to provide a convincing presentation of the "politics with *some* social bases" thesis in terms of survey data. Given the lack of a full scale academic election study in Ireland, we are still left to rely, as was Whyte, on commercial opinion polls. The problem with such polls is no longer one of scarcity, however, a large number have been conducted, mainly by two reputable polling organisations, since 1974. Rather it is the size of the sample used in each poll. While the survey used by McAllister and O'Connell had over 2,000 male respondents, the more typical commercial poll has a sample size of around 1,000. This size is clearly dictated by cost-benefit calculations on the part of clients, usually national newspapers, who typically want quick and cheap estimates of a few newsworthy characteristics of the population *as a whole*. Obvious examples of such characteristics are the share of the electorate support-ing each party, or the relative esteem in which the party leaders are held. The sample sizes used are adequate for this purpose and Irish polling companies have a good recent track record in forecasting election day vote shares.

Such samples are far too small, however, if we wish to investigate behaviour within *subsections* of the population, such as the various occupational categories. Estimates, for example, of Fianna Fail support among skilled manual workers are likely to be unreliable, since a sample of 1,200 will yield around 250 skilled manual workers, an insufficient subsample for reliable detailed analysis. Such unreliable estimates are better than nothing, but the problem is clearly com-pounded when *comparisons* between individual polls are made over time. And poll findings based on subsections of the sample clearly do fluctuate quite wildly over time.

This paper offers a solution to this problem, which involves joining the results of cross tabulations from 67 polls taken over 11 years into a single time series, and using a mathematical smoothing operation to remove most of the more exag-gerated fluctuations in the data. The smoothed time series are much more readily interpretable than the rather erratic pictures that usually emerge from poll data of this sort.

Whether the analyses that follow support or undermine the "politics without social bases" argument is a matter of interpretation. There can be no doubt that the social patterning of party preference is not as stark in Ireland as it is in some European systems. There can be no doubt that class conflict in Ireland has only a very pale reflection in the party system. Nevertheless, both the aggregate analyses contained in the previous paper and the survey analyses that follow do show the quite definite effect of certain aspects of the social structure on party choice. Things, in short, are a lot more predictable than they would be if politics in Ireland had no social bases whatsoever.

II SOCIAL PATTERNS OF VOTING CHOICE IN IRISH POLL
DATA 1974-85

From November 1974, opinion polls have been conducted at least quarterly, often monthly, by two reputable commercial market research organisations, Irish Marketing Surveys (IMS) and the Market Research Bureau of Ireland (MRBI).[1] A series of 67 polls, running from November 1974 to May 1985, was used in this study.[2] In each of these polls, the small sample sizes mean that even smaller numbers are represented within each particular social grouping. This

FIGURE 1

RAW FF & FG SHARES OF ABC1 ELECTORATE
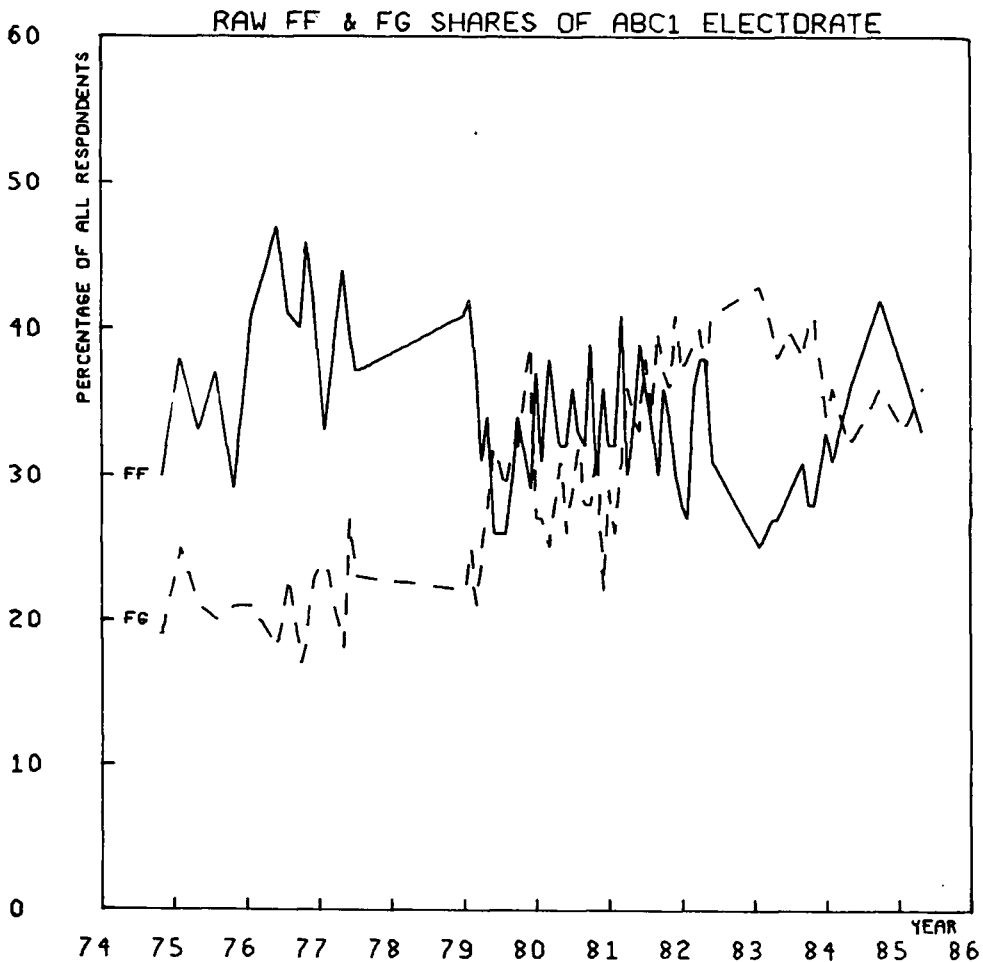
1. See Meagher (1983) for a history of opinion polling in Ireland.
2. The series of polls contains some gaps, for which records do not seem to be available. These arise for a period in 1977/78 and for a few months in late 1982. Interpolations have been used at these points.

makes conclusions on the relationship between the social structure and party preference that are based on opinion poll data necessarily tenuous, a factor that is particularly important in relation to discussions of trends over time. There is considerable month-by-month variation in survey estimates of party support within social groups, a direct product of small sample sizes. To pick two different opinion polls, conducted a year or more apart, and to compare the voting proportions in these as evidence of change over time is a very risky and unreliable exercise. The particular pair of polls that are selected for the comparison effectively determine its result, and even polls conducted in adjacent months can give quite different views of the direction of a ten-year time trend.

A graphic picture of the erratic support *within* social groups that is painted by the original survey data can be found in Figure 1.[3] This shows the "raw" time series of vote shares for Fianna Fail and Fine Gael within the ABC1 (non-manual) social grouping. The poll results obviously show very considerable short-term fluctuation. There seems, indeed, to be a very strong probability that sampling error (and we are here dealing with net sample sizes of about 400 ABC1 voters) is super-imposing a lot of "noise" on the underlying "signal" in the data.

Operating precisely on this analogy, it is possible to use mathematical smoothing techniques to remove the effect of the noise. Figure 2 shows the effect of applying the smoothing routines available in the MLAB modelling package to the raw opinion poll data displayed in Figure 1.[4] There can be no doubt whatsoever both that Figure 2 provides the more useful information and that data taken from a single time point in Figure 1 would not give a reliable view of the position. Figure 1 illustrates quite clearly the way in which it would be possible, inadvertantly, to arrive at diametrically opposed conclusions about the changing fortunes of the parties over the same general time period, depending on the precise polls selected for analysis. Throughout the subsequent discussion, therefore, only the smoothed time series of polls will be used as evidence.

To enable strict comparability over the entire time period, four social groupings are used in this analysis. These are those classified as A, B, or C1 occupational categories (effectively non-manual voters), those in C2 categories (effectively skilled manual), those in D or E (effectively unskilled voters and unemployed and those who are farmers). For some of the period, the polling

3. Thanks are due to MRBI and IMS for making available the unpublished results of their polling.
4. MLAB is an on-line mathematical modelling laboratory developed within the National Institute of Health at Bethesda, Maryland. It provides sophisticated and flexible curve fitting and display facilities. MLAB provides a five point variable-interval hyperbolic smoothing operation that was applied to the poll data. This amounts in the present context, to taking a five-point moving average of the poll findings over time, save that those points further away from the central "stimulus" point receive a lower weighting in the average than those at the centre. This has the advantage of smoothing erratic fluctuations in the data, while remaining sensitive to more sustained fluctuations in them. The resulting output was very stable, changing little when fed through the smoothing operation a second time. The graphics in the figures in this paper were also generated by MLAB.

FIGURE 2

SMOOTHED FF & FG SHARES OF ABC1 ELECTORATE
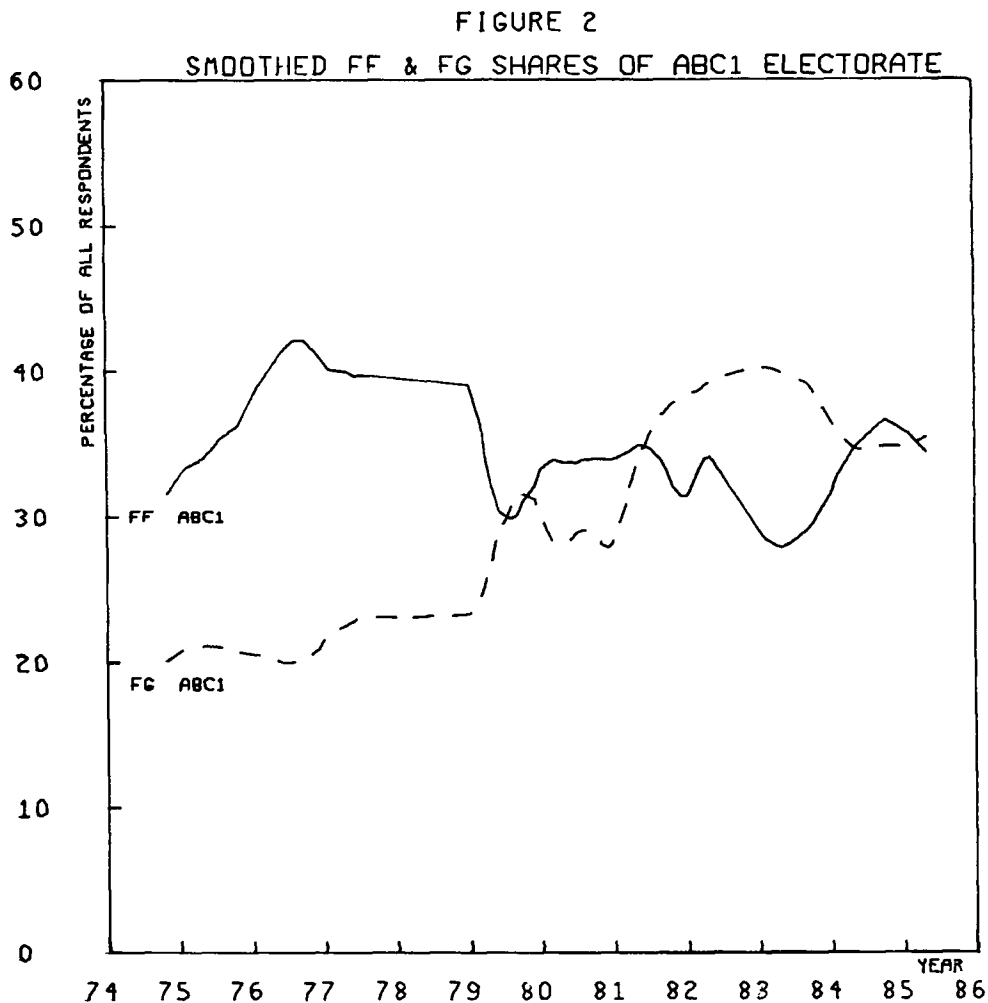
companies generate results for more detailed groupings. The AB grouping was sometimes separated from the C1s, for example, while farmers were often divided into those who farmed more than fifty acres and those who farmed less. These distinctions are significant, and I will return to them below. However, in the interests of using a consistent eleven-year run of poll results, categories that were *always* used have been taken in the first instance.

A further complication arises because, during the period of the 1973–77 Coalition, respondents were allowed "coalition" as an option in the party preference question. (This was also done during the 1981–82 Coalition, but the number using the option was derisory). These respondents could, of course, be allocated proportionately to the coalition parties. However, there is strong evidence, from

responses to questions concerning support for the party leaders and attitudes to-
wards the government, that those citing the "Coalition" were overwhelmingly
Fine Gael in persuasion (See Laver and Higgins (1986) for a discussion of this).
These respondents have been excluded from the analysis. It should therefore be
borne in mind that Fine Gael vote shares in the 1974–77 election are probably
depressed by about 5 per cent as a consequence. This distortion is thus relatively
minor and short-lived and post-1977 figures are not distorted at all in this way.

The proportions of respondents favouring each party within these various
social groupings were extracted from cross tabulations produced for each of the
67 polls in the series. Those who were undecided were *not* redistributed pro-
portionally between parties, as is often the case in the poll results published by
newspapers. The figures used are thus proportions of all respondents, including
"don't knows". Each series of figures was first smoothed in the manner described
above and then charted over time. The results can be found in Figures 3–6.

These figures show quite strong evidence both of the patterning of party sup-
port by occupational category, and of the *changes* in those patterns of support
over time. Figure 3, for example, shows the situation within the non-manual
electorate (occupational categories A, B, and C1). We see a steady decline in the
level of Labour support, a decline apparently unaffected by participation in
government or by any other short or medium-term factor. Over the period, the
level of middle class Labour support halved from about 10 per cent to about 5
per cent. In contrast we can see a considerable, though rather more erratic,
increase in the level of middle class Fine Gael voting. Even after the reverses of
1984 and 1985, the Fine Gael share of the non-manual electorate is still *markedly*
higher that it was in the late 1970s. In contrast the Fine Gael share of the non-
manual vote simply seems to fluctuate.[5] In the mid-1980s, after a series of peaks
and troughs, it is more or less back to where it was in the mid-1970s. There is, of
course, a strong tendency for movements in the Fianna Fail and Fine Gael shares
of the non-manual vote to be mirror-images of one another, with one going up as
the other goes down.

We should, of course, be wary of a version of the ecological fallacy when deal-
ing with a series of poll results based on unconnected, as opposed to panel,
samples. The fact that the Fianna Fail vote share goes up when that of Fine Gael
goes down does not *necessarily* mean that voters have switched from one party to
another. (An equally plausible interpretation is that voters produce the same
effect by moving into and out of the "undecided" group in certain consistent
ways.) Nevertheless, the patterns shown in Figure 3 are clearly consistent with

5. Though Fianna Fail vote share went almost into a free fall in the first half of 1979, as the following figures
show. Overall *raw* vote shares for Fianna Fail for the first six months of 1979 are:

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Jan. 1979	45	Feb. 1979	44
March 1979	40	April 1979	37
May 1979	37	June 1979	33

FIGURE 3

PARTY SHARES OF ABC1 ELECTORATE 1974-85
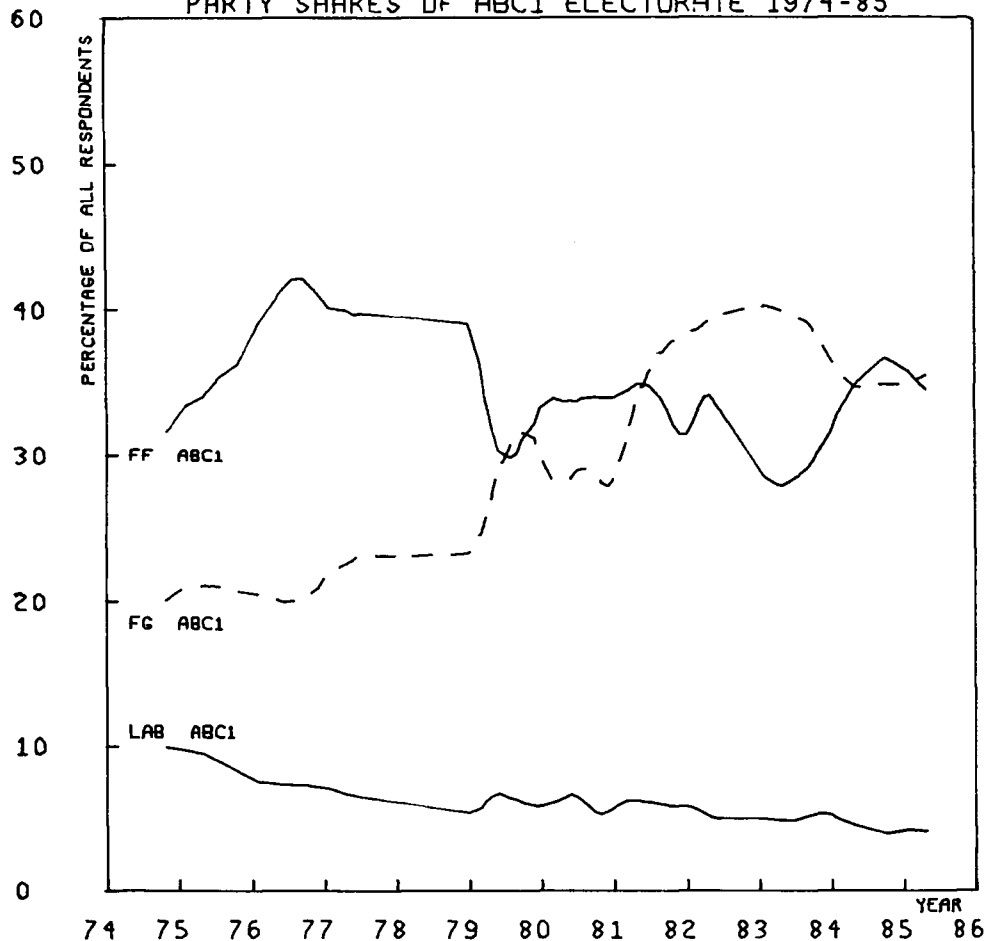
an interpretation based on a competition between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael for the non-manual vote and underlying this, a steady leakage of Labour support within the middle class. We also see that Sinnott's suggestion that Fine Gael was becoming, in the early 1980s, the party of the middle class clearly has some basis in the polling data. Fine Gael overtook and led Fianna Fail in this group for most of the period, a situation that represents a considerable turnabout since the late 1970s.

The situation in the farming electorate is broadly similar, (see Figure 4), though Labour has effectively no support at all among farmers for any part of the period. Fine Gael shows a more modest and more erratic increase in its share of the farming electorate over the twelve years from 1974 to 1985. In contrast the

FIGURE 4

PARTY SHARES OF FARMING ELECTORATE 1974-85
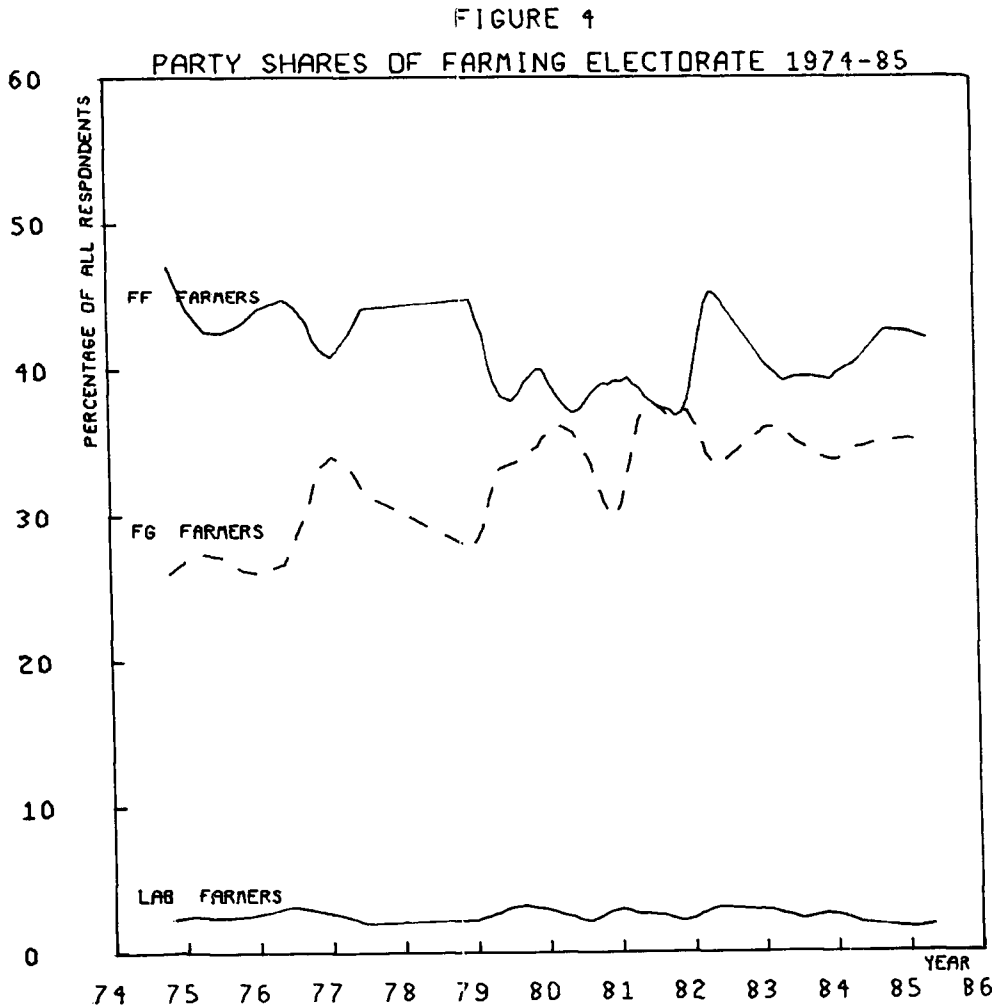
level of Fianna Fail support has fluctuated around a broadly static position. Starting far behind Fianna Fail, and with no Labour support to eat into, Fine Gael has thus been less successful at overtaking Fianna Fail among the farmers. (Patterns *within* the farming electorate, however, are much more significant – see below.) In both the farming and the non-manual electorate, however, there is no doubt that the two big parties are much more evenly-matched in 1985 than they were in 1975.

Given the total lack of Labour support among the farmers, we can be nearly certain in this context that farmers citing "Coalition" in the 1974-77 period are in fact Fine Gael supporters. This sector comprised about 5-6 per cent of the farming electorate and the depression of the Fine Gael share of the farming vote

in this period can be clearly seen in Figure 4. As a consequence, we can conclude that Fine Gael advances among the farming electorate in general were almost non-existent, and were certainly considerably less marked over the period than its advances among non-manual workers.

The situation in the two sectors of the electorate with manual occupations is quite different, (Figures 5 and 6). There are two basic reasons for this. The first is the much more significant presence of Labour support at the beginning of the time period. The second is the fact that Fianna Fail starts *much* further ahead of the other two parties at the outset. Given these two major differences in the point of departure, *changes* over time in the relationship between the Fine Gael and Fianna Fail vote are similar in some ways to those in the non-manual electorate.

FIGURE 5

PARTY SHARES OF C2 ELECTORATE 1974-85

FIGURE 6
### PARTY SHARES OF DE ELECTORATE 1974-85
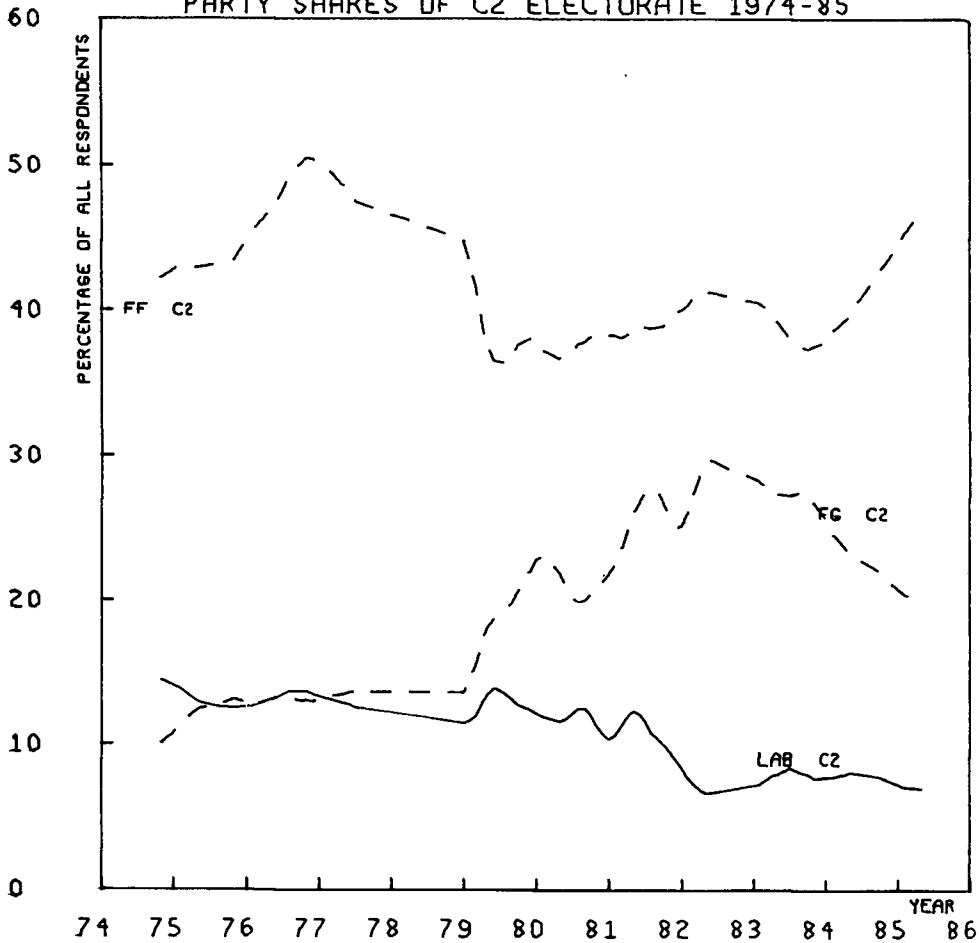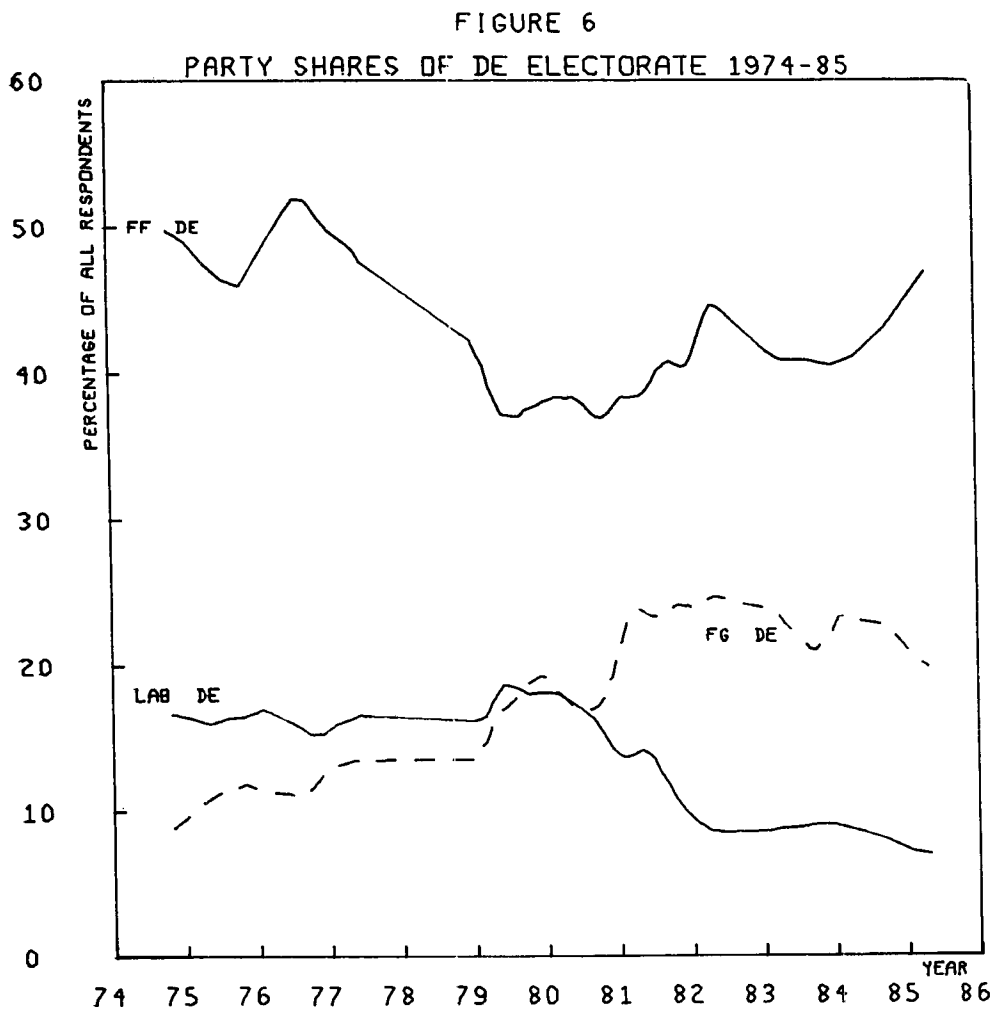
The main difference is that the recent decline in Fine Gael support is more marked, and is accompanied by a more sustained revival of the Fianna Fail vote share among manual workers. Indeed, while the Fine Gael advance within the skilled working class was as marked as that within the middle class, these gains have proved more volatile. In contrast Fine Gael gains within the unskilled working class have been both less spectacular and less volatile. Labour had more to lose in this sector of the electorate and it would appear to have lost it to each of the big parties, which have *both* increased their vote share during periods of Labour decline. Recent Fine Gael losses have been accompanied by Fianna Fail gains, however, so that the net result over the whole period is that the Fine Gael vote share has increased at the expense of that of Labour.

The decline of the Labour vote share in all occupational categories, almost certainly the most consistent trend in the time series of voting patterns, is summarised in Figure 7. This shows that Labour's decline has been most marked among manual workers, particularly during late 1980 and early 1981. Figure 7 also throws considerable light upon the impact on Labour fortunes of Coalition with Fine Gael. It shows that most of the damage to Labour support was done before the short-lived 1981 Coalition and was certainly virtually complete by the start of the November 1982 Coalition with Fine Gael. In terms of opinion poll ratings, at least, the collapse in Labour support preceded Coalition.

Fianna Fail support is consistently 10-15 per cent higher among unskilled manual workers, than among non-manual workers. Fine Gael is consistently 10-20 per cent higher among non-manual workers than among manual

FIGURE 7

LABOUR SHARES OF SOCIAL CATEGORIES 1974-85
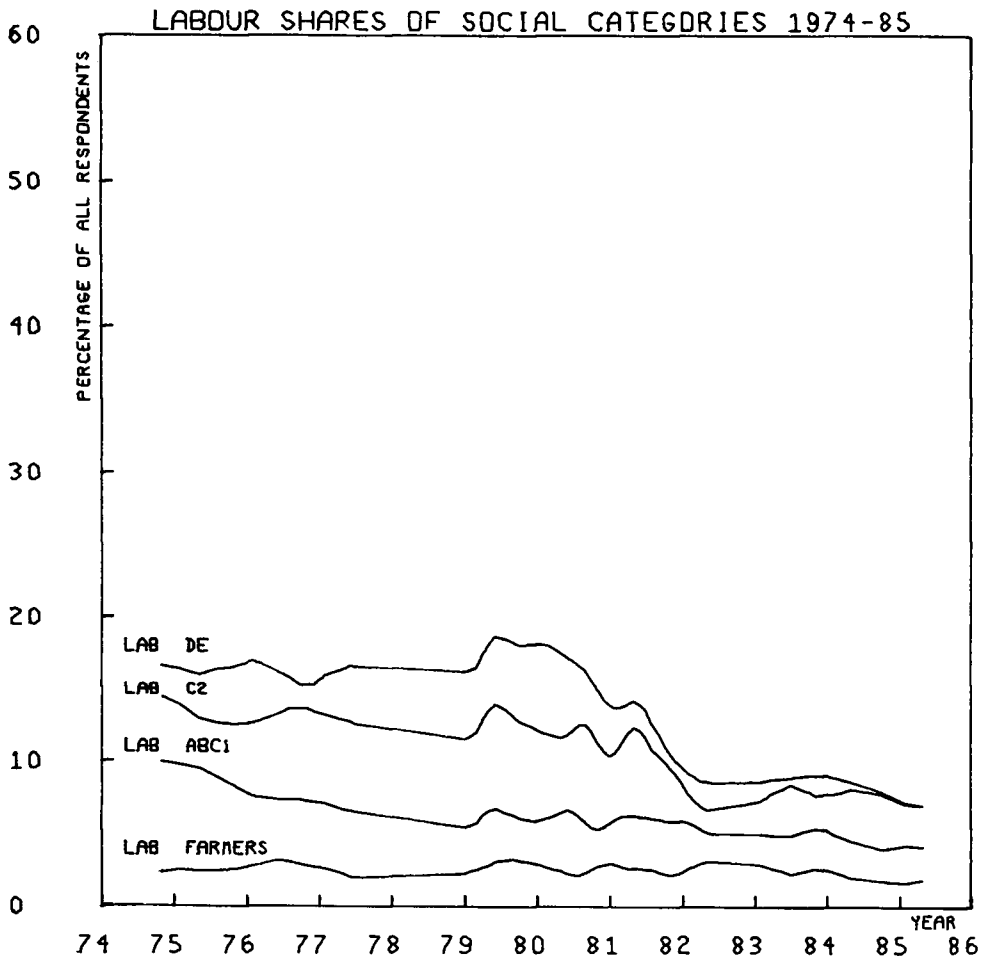
workers. Among the occupational categories, the manual vote probably provides the clearest evidence of social patterning. There is clearly a real sense in which the party of the working class is Fianna Fail, while the middle class vote splits evenly between the two main parties. Thus Figure 6 probably provides the clearest image of the social bases of Irish politics. Once we consider the evidence of *all* of the polls over a twelve year period, Carty's statement that "social characteristics do not structure voting behaviour in Ireland" seems almost impossible to sustain.

III VOTING PATTERNS WITHIN SOCIAL GROUPS

While the need for comparability over the whole time period forces the use of combined categories of "farmers" and of "non-manual workers", more detailed information is available, especially for the later part of the time period. In particular, the distinction between those farming more, and those farming less than fifty acres is important both because of traditional views relating to patterns of party allegiance among farmers and because of the importance of the factor based on the agricultural structure in the aggregate data analysis reported earlier. We found that the main predictor, in aggregate terms, of a high Fianna Fail vote share was a high proportion of the population involved in livestock farming and with a farm size under 50 acres.

Figure 8 shows the smoothed proportion of those farming less than 50 acres (in broken lines), and of those farming over 50 acres (in solid lines), supporting the two main parties. No information is available at this level of detail between mid-1977 and mid-1981, and a straight line interpolation is used, as can be clearly seen in the figure. The results provide strong support for the view that Fianna Fail does much better than Fine Gael among small farmers, and much better among small farmers than it does among big farmers. In contrast, by the early 1980s, Fine Gael had convincingly overtaken Fianna Fail among the big farming electorate, despite having made no significant headway at all among small farmers. By the early 1980s, there was a yawning gap between the voting preferences of small and big farmers, a gap much wider than that which existed in the 1970s.

All of this provides a solid foundation, based on survey data, to the central conclusion of the earlier aggregate analysis. The aggregate results suggested that the main determinant of the Fianna Fail voting was the position of the voter in the agricultural structure. The survey findings show this to be no *aggregate* level data fallacy. There is, by the early 1980s to which the aggregate findings refer, a very clear difference between farming groups in *individual* level data from the survey cross tabulations. Put bluntly, by 1983 Fianna Fail was still the party of the small farmer, but Fine Gael was on the way to becoming the party of the big farmer.
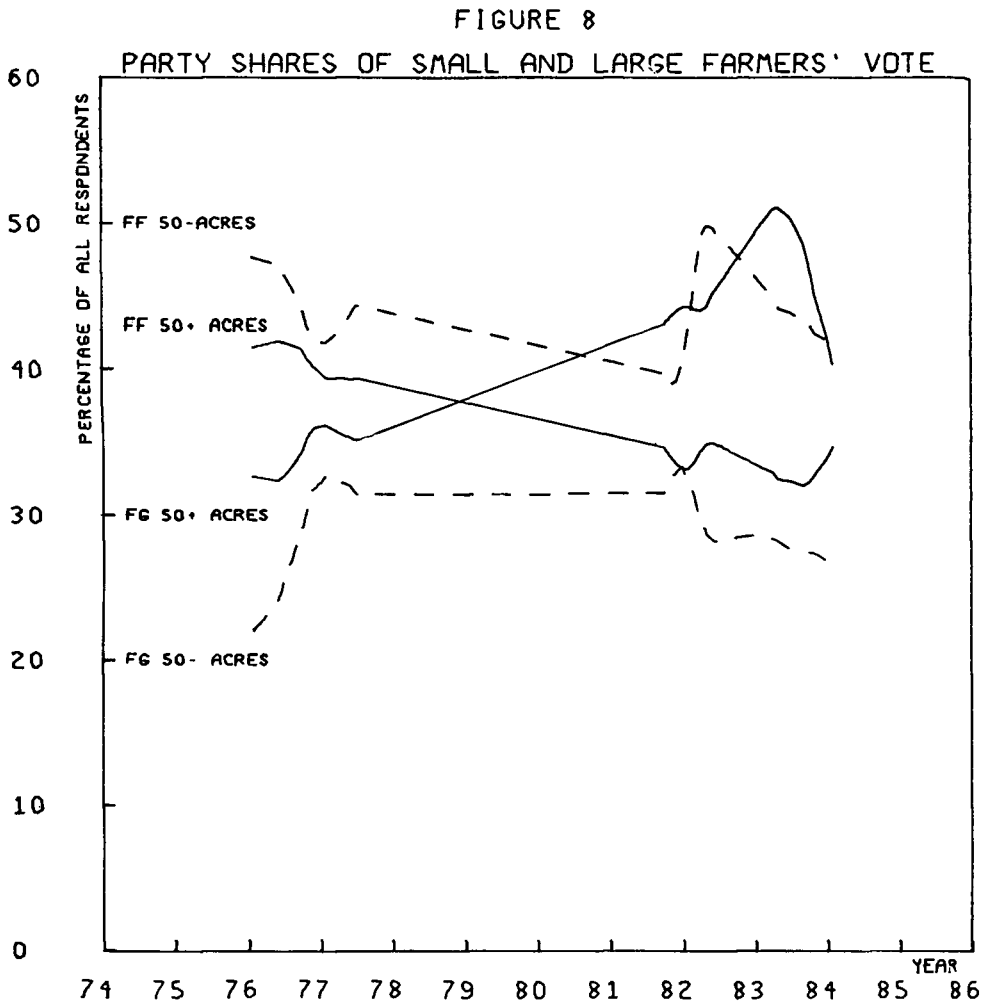
FIGURE 8

A rather similar situation can be observed when the two sectors of the non-manual electorate are disaggregated. This can be seen in Figure 9. From this it is clear that the emerging Fine Gael lead in the non-manual electorate is much stronger among the A and B social categories (essentially professional, manager-ial and supervisory) than it is among the C1 (clerical) group. The reversal of the two-party fortunes in the AB group is quite striking. In the mid-1970s, Fianna Fail held a 20 point lead. In the early 1980s the position was almost exactly reversed.

Overall, the more detailed findings are entirely consistent with the earlier findings. Moving from occupational category A to E at any one point in time, the Fine Gael vote share decreases, and the Fianna Fail and Labour vote shares

FIGURE 9

PARTY SHARES OF AB AND C1 ELECTORATE
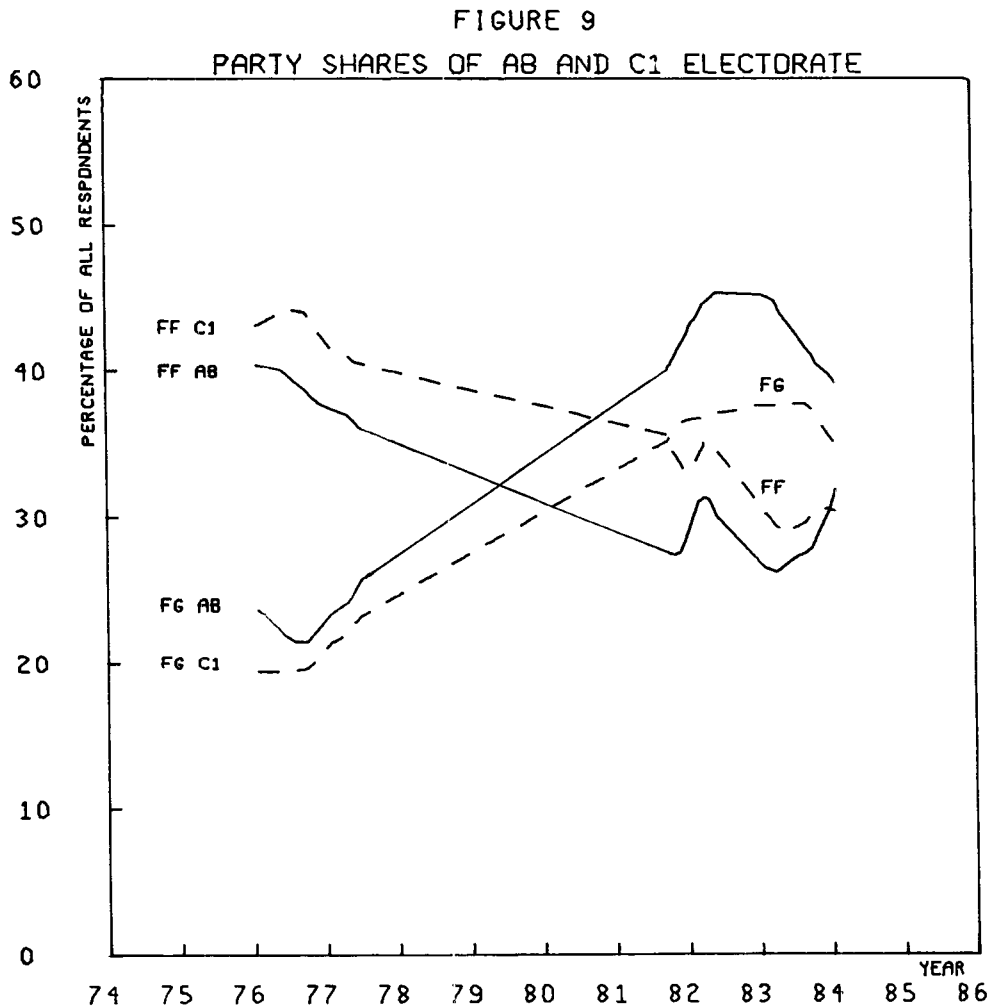
increase. Looking at changes over time, Fine Gael advances in the past twelve years have been made across the social board, but the result was the emergence of a Fine Gael lead among professional, managerial and large farming groups by the early 1980s. Fianna Fail retains its lead elsewhere, except in the more closely-contested clerical sector.

IV CONCLUSION: THE COMBINED IMPLICATIONS OF SURVEY AND AGGREGATE DATA FOR SOCIAL INTERPRETATIONS OF IRISH VOTING PATTERNS

Great care should be taken in contrasting the conclusions found in analyses of aggregate and of survey data. Aggregate data have the advantage that they are,

in a sense, "what actually happened". Party preference figures reflect votes actually cast while social characteristics are measured for the entire population. What goes on *within* the units to which data are aggregated, however, can only be surmised.

As Miller argues in his exhaustive ecological analysis of the social bases of British Politics in the period 1918-74, there is a wide variety of different types of relationship between class and voting at individual level that produce subtly different patterns in the aggregate data (Miller, 1977, especially pps. 36-65). Two general elements of Miller's discussion are of relevance in this context. The first is that:

> The only possible cause of a less than perfect fit between aggregate partisanship and aggregate social characteristics is that partisan rates in social groups may vary from constituency to constituency. It has been shown that if such variations are random in the sense that rate variations are not systematically related to concentrations of the social groups themselves, a regression through the aggregate data would give the same slopes as found in the survey data; but the fit would, of course, be less than perfect (Miller, 1977, p. 40).

In other words, when the party shares of the electorate within particular social groups vary from constituency to constituency we do not get a perfect fit for the model. When this variation is random, we get a scatter of points around the same basic model. When this variation is not random, of course, we have systematic variation still to explain and the model itself is "distorted". *Random* variations between constituencies in the party shares of the electorate may indicate a weak overall social patterning of partisanship, or may indicate the *relative* importance of other unpredictable superimposed influences, such as candidate effects, local issues, and so on. The greater the relative effect of other factors, of course, the less *effective* social patterning is in evidence.

Non-random variations in the partisanship rates of social groups between constituencies may either imply the existence of other, undiscovered social determinants or they may relate to *environmental effects* of existing variables. Environmental effects are the second major factor in the distinction between individual and aggregate level data on voting choice. A strong environmental effect has been noted, for example, in Britain. One impact of this is that both middle and working class voters become more likely to vote Labour if they live in a more working class environment, while both become less likely to vote Labour in a more middle class environment. Thus, more working class constituencies are more Labour for two reasons. In the first place there are more working class voters, and these voters are the most likely to vote Labour. In the second place each of these working class voters becomes *even more likely* to vote Labour the more of them there are concentrated in a single area and interacting socially

with one another, reinforcing existing partisan tendencies. (See also Taylor and Johnson (1979) for an extended discussion of environmental effects.)

The precise geographical extent of a social environment capable of reinforcing partisanship is clearly an important factor, and one that would need resolution before the Miller Z-models could be applied in an Irish context. (Miller, 1977, pp. 43–44). Given the relatively large scale, and the socially heterogeneous nature, of multi-member STV constituencies, it might well be that these are too big for any meaningful environmental effect to be measured. Nevertheless, the importance of the agricultural structure factor that emerged in the previous paper may well owe something to the regional effect of different agricultural environments. With this catalogue of *caveats* borne firmly in mind, we can clearly see *some* social patterning in party choice in Ireland.

While both aggregate and survey data show evidence of the social bases of voting behaviour in Ireland, each highlights different aspects of this. The patterning of Fianna Fail voting is most evident in the aggregate data. The view of Fianna Fail as a "catch-all" party is most effectively supported by the survey data. It is interesting that the ecological variables most closely related to Fianna Fail voting relate to the agricultural structure and to land-use patterns at county level, rather than to simply-aggregated totals of individuals in various social categories. In other words, the combined evidence of survey and aggregate data suggests that broad *environmental* effects provide the main social structure in Fianna Fail voting patterns. The most salient feature of the social environment outside Dublin is the agricultural structure, though superimposed upon this is a clearly enhanced appeal of Fianna Fail to working class voters.

In contrast Fine Gael seems the catch-all party in terms of the aggregate data, yet survey data demonstrates a very clear social appeal to middle class voters and large farmers. This suggests an absence of environmental effects, at least at the level of the Dail constituency. In other words, the social patterning of Fine Gael voting seems to be effective *within* rather than *between*, constituencies. The social categories most drawn to Fine Gael, large farmers and the upper middle class, do not, of course, congregate in large geographical areas likely to generate measurable environmental effects.

As far as Labour is concerned, the steady decline of the party's popularity in *all* social categories means that a key element in the sociology of Irish voting behaviour is also declining. At the beginning of the period under study, and indeed in Whyte's earlier analysis, the fact that Labour did much better among manual than among non-manual workers was the most evident social pattern. With the decline of Labour support in its traditional strongholds, the situation is much less clear. This is mirrored in the aggregate data from which it is now very difficult, as we saw earlier, to predict where Labour wins seats.

Whether the combined evidence of the survey and the aggregate data support a "politics with some social bases" thesis depends upon the strength of the

relationship that we are looking for. Tables 2 and 3 set this in context, contrast-
ing the strength of the class influence on voting in Britain with that in Ireland.
Table 2 shows that class differences in Ireland, especially in the 1970s, are over-
shadowed by the dominance of Fianna Fail. Nevertheless, there *are* differences in
the social patterning of party support, and these are captured by the Alford
index, the conventional measure of class voting. (This measures the difference

Table 2:   *Class voting in Ireland*

Year	% Manual workers supporting:		% Non-manual workers supporting:		Alford index (% Manual–non-manual Fianna Fail)
	FG	FF	FG	FF	
1974	8	50	20	31	19
1975	10	45	21	32	13
1976	12	50	20	37	13
1977	13	50	21	37	13
1978	13	45	23	39	6
1979	13	42	23	39	3
1980	20	39	31	32	7
1981	22	37	27	34	3
1982	24	38	38	31	7
1983	24	42	40	29	13
1984	21	41	36	31	10
1985	21	44	35	33	11

Source: Smoothed poll figures forming the basis of Figures 2–6.

Table 3:   *Class voting in Britain*

Year	% Manual workers supporting:		% Non-manual workers supporting:		Alford index (% Manual– non-manual Labour)
	Conservative	Labour	Conservative	Labour	
1959	34	62	69	22	40
1964	28	64	62	22	42
1966	25	69	60	26	43
1970	33	58	64	25	33
1974 (Feb.)	24	57	53	22	35
1974 (Oct.)	24	57	51	25	32
1979	35	50	60	23	27

Source: British election studies 1964–79. Reported in Sarlvik and Crewe (1983).

between the working class vote share of the "working class party" and the middle class vote share of the same party, (see Alford, 1964).) The scale of the class effect, however, is clearly much smaller than that in Britain, for many the epitome of class politics (Table 3). While crude class voting in Britain has been on the decline since the 1960s, due largely to an increasing vote share for centre parties, it has still a much stronger effect than that which can be found in Ireland.

The Alford index, of course, is a very blunt instrument with which to assess the effect of class voting in Ireland. As the analysis of voting patterns within broad social categories shows, many of the most significant effects are masked by the very general manual/non-manual dichotomy. Such crude distinction shows class differences in voting behaviour in their most shallow relief. Quite clearly, for example, differences *within* the farming electorate in Ireland are as great as those between any of the social categories under consideration.

In conclusion, we clearly have a picture of a system of politics with *some* social bases. These are not the same bases as those to be found in many European systems and in particular are not necessarily the basic occupational categories that people are used to linking with patterns of partisanship in Britain. Even using these categories, some patterning is evident, but the clearest indications of social bases of voting behaviour to emerge both from survey and from aggregate data relate to differences within the agricultural structure.

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