

The Student Vote in 2010

By

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An update on Opinionpanel's Student Vote report 2008

This paper describes the results of sixteen waves of polling student political opinion conducted by Opinionpanel Research between July 2009 and April 2010. The report covers turnout, party support, a comparison with the wider electorate, and the determinants of student voting.

Introduction

The voting behaviour of the million or so full-time undergraduates in universities and colleges in Britain is an important indicator of the state of British democracy. Many of these students will be the doctors, teachers, managers and public or private sector professionals of the future. For this reason, their current voting intentions provide an interesting guide to the future of electoral politics in Britain. For the great majority of students the 2010 election will be the first national contest in which they can vote. In many cases their political views are not yet fully formed and their opinions malleable. But by the time they graduate and enter the world of work in their mid-twenties most will have fairly well formed political views. So their current voting intentions are a good guide to how they are likely to vote in the future, particularly for older students.

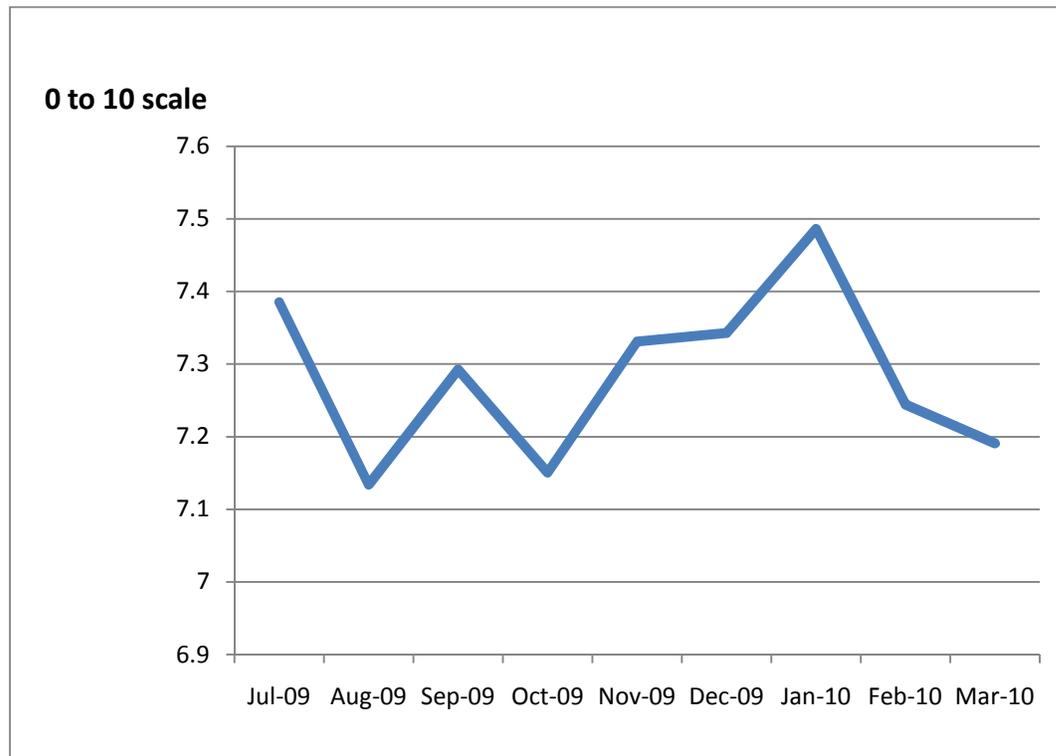
From October 2004 to March 2010 Opinionpanel Research, the student research specialists, have collected data on students' political views. They have conducted many representative sample surveys of the full time undergraduate population in Britain. Each survey provides a snapshot of student vote intentions and this report concentrates on examining changes in student voting intentions over the last 9 months. It will also look at some key political attitudes which influence the voting behaviour of students immediately prior to the general election of 2010. In addition, comparisons will be made between students and the wider electorate in order to give a picture of how representative today's undergraduates are of political opinions in British society today.

Trends in Turnout and Party Support 2009-10.

Each survey carries a measure of the extent to which students are willing to turn out and vote. Turnout is measured using a ten point scale to indicate the likelihood that each student will vote. A score of one on this scale means 'absolutely certain not to vote' and a score of 10 'absolutely certain to vote'. The average likelihood of voting scores for each of the surveys over the period July 2009 to March 2010 appears in Figure 1. This shows that turnout intentions have fluctuated quite a bit over the last nine months. Earlier surveys showed that voting intentions reached a maximum on the ten point scale in May 2005¹, at the time of the last general election, and they declined after that. This is a pattern seen in the wider electorate and reflects the fact that when an election is not in the offing voting is a rather hypothetical activity for most people. This fact serves to depress their voting intentions.

The British Election Study survey conducted in 2005 (see Clarke et al. 2009) showed that 57 per cent of students voted in that election. If we count all students who scored between 8 and 10 as potential voters on the ten point scale then approximately 61 per cent of them are likely voters in the general election, judging by the March 2010 survey. However, Figure 1 is unusual in that it shows no evidence of turnout increasing in the immediate run-up to the 2010 election campaign. Normally we would expect to see this as the election approaches, so students were clearly not being mobilised to vote by the proximity of the general election.

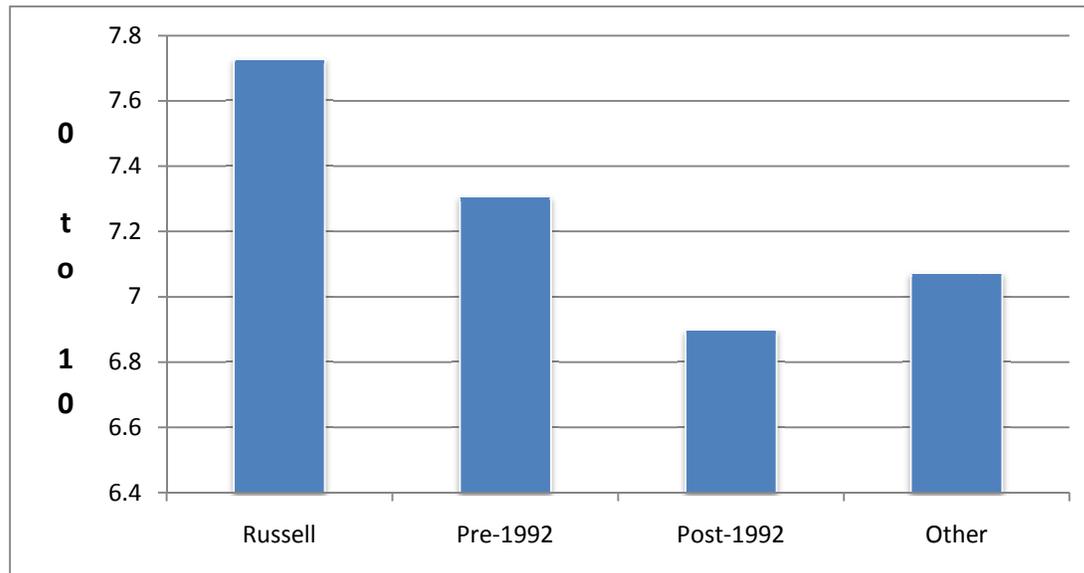
¹ British Election Study

Figure 1 Turnout among Students July 2009 to March 2010

Q1V. How likely would you be to vote in an immediate General Election?

Base: All respondents, Waves 47-62

There are some interesting variations in turnout among the students. Students from Russell Group universities were more likely to vote than students from pre-1992 universities, who in turn were more likely to vote than students from post-1992 universities. This can be seen in Figure 2, so there is a clear institutional hierarchy in turnout, which in part reflects the social class composition of the students in these different types of university. It is well known that middle class professionals are more likely to vote than blue-collar workers, and so the parental backgrounds of the student in these different institutions, in part, accounts for this pattern.

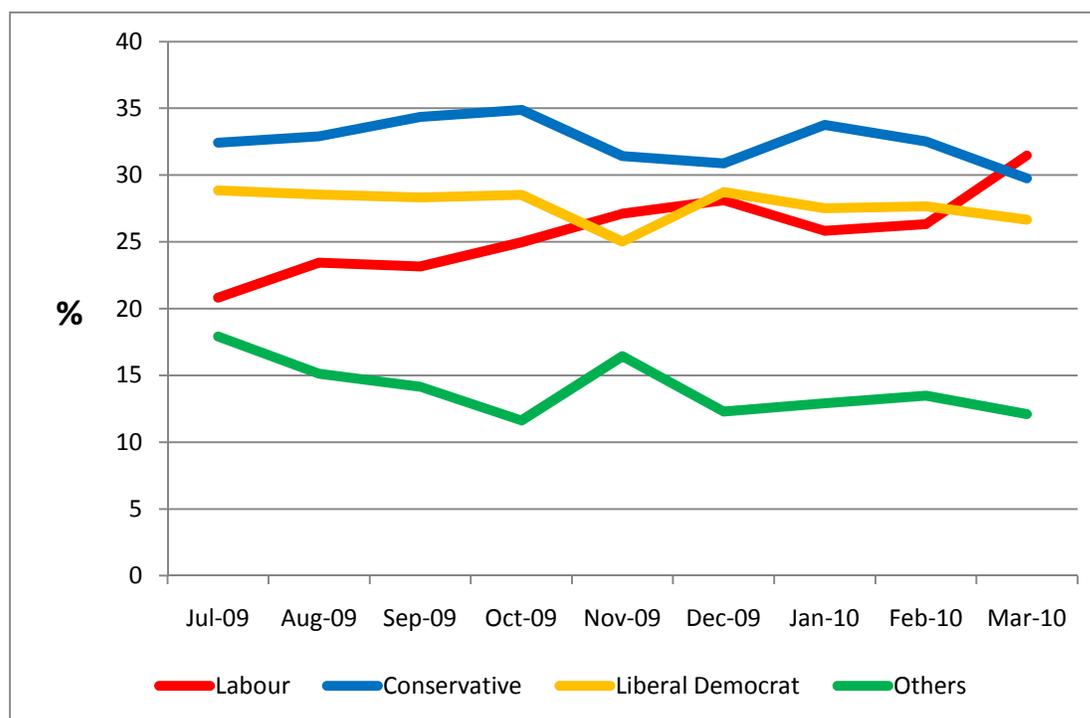
Figure 2 Turnout by Type of Institution in March 2010

Q1V. How likely would you be to vote in an immediate General Election?

Base: All respondents, Wave 62 (1,006)

Figure 3 shows trends in party choice among students, again from July 2009 through to March 2010. There are a couple of interesting features of the figure. Firstly, students are significantly more likely to vote Liberal Democrat than the rest of the population. Student support for the party always exceeded 25 per cent during this period, whereas it generally remained in the high teens for the rest of the population. A second point is that the Conservatives were ahead of their two main rivals for the whole of the period except in the immediate run-up to the election campaign, at which point Labour took the lead position by a small margin. The proximity of the election may not have influenced student turnout, but it looks like it influenced which party they intend to vote for. In common with the rest of the population, students were very pre-occupied with the state of the economy, their financial situation and job prospects for the future in the run-up to the election. It appears that many of them may have decided that Labour is a safer pair of hands on this issue.

Figure 3 Trends in Student Party Choice July 2009 to March 2010



Q2V. How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?

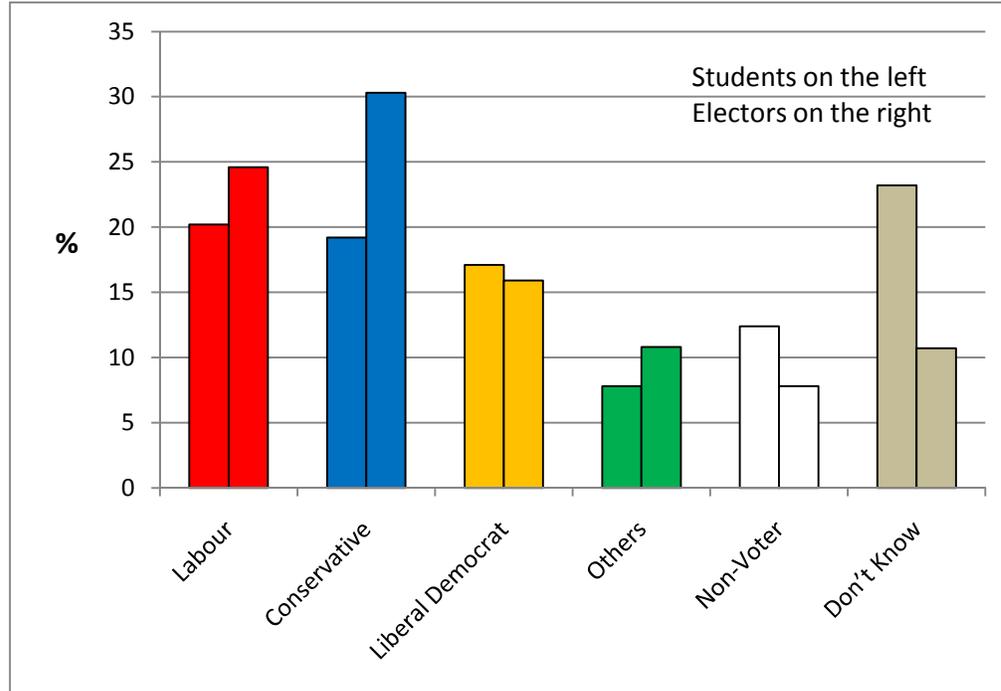
Base: All likely to vote (answering 8-10 at Q1V) at Wave 62, excluding those who would not vote and don't know

Students and the Wider Electorate

In this section we examine the vote intentions of students in comparison with the rest of the electorate, again in the period immediately before the election campaign started in March 2010. We can compare the results of the student survey in that month with those from another national survey conducted by BPIX carried out at approximately the same time². Figure 4 shows the party choices of students and those of voters in general. One feature of most published opinion polls is that they ignore non-voters or the 'don't know's', but it is important to look at these when evaluating student electoral participation. Accordingly Figure 4 retains these categories in order to show exactly how students and the wider electorate differ. The students appear in the left hand column and electors in the right.

² The BPIX survey fieldwork was conducted on March 3rd and the survey had 5,655 respondents in an internet survey.

Figure 4 Party Choices of Students and Voters in March 2010



Q2V. How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?

Base: All respondents, Wave 62 (1,006)

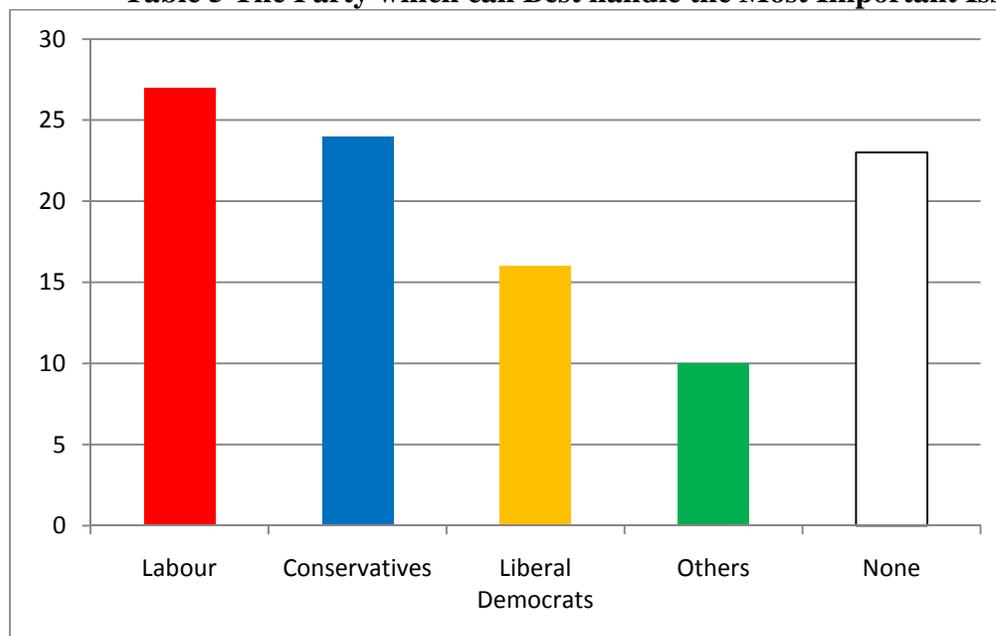
There are several interesting features of Figure 4. Firstly, students were much less certain how they are going to vote than the rest of the electorate. This can be seen in the columns of the Don't Knows and also the Non-Voters. Some of these respondents were determined non-voters who had firmly decided not to participate in the election, but many were simply uncertain about what to do, and so could be persuaded to vote by the election campaign. This uncertainty applies to young people in general and not just to students, and illustrates the fact that they have not generally formed strong party attachments which can persuade them to participate in the election. One source of don't knows in the data could be the presence of overseas students in the sample. They would not be eligible to vote in Britain and would very likely not know much about British politics. However, further analysis shows that there were no significant differences between students from the UK and students from overseas when it comes to not knowing about the vote. So the presence of overseas students does not explain the results.

The second very striking feature of Figure 4 is that students are very much less likely to be Conservative supporters than the rest of the population. This is despite the fact that the party was in the lead in the student poll up until March 2010 as Figure 3 showed. In the student survey the Labour lead over the Conservatives was 1 per cent; in the electoral survey the Conservative lead over Labour was 6 per cent. So the difference between students and the rest of the population is particularly marked in that respect. This bodes ill for the future of the Conservative party, since it appears that many of tomorrow's

middle class professionals are deserting the party in large numbers. It is also true that Labour gets less support from students than it does from voters in general, but in this case the gap between the two is much narrower than for the Conservatives.

For the Liberal Democrats, the point has already been made that students are more likely to support the party than the population in general, but in this case the gap between students and voters was modest at the start of the 2010 election campaign. The gap between all three parties narrows for students because of their lower levels of support for Labour and the Conservatives. Finally, there is no real evidence to support the argument that students are defecting to other parties such as the Greens or Nationalists. If anything, students were less likely to support these minor parties than voters in general.

Table 5 The Party which can Best handle the Most Important Issue



QV3. Which party is best able to handle this issue?

Base: All respondents excluding don't knows, Wave 62 (609)

Students were asked about the most important issue facing the country at the present time using an open-ended response format which avoids any prompting or pre-defined categories of replies. This measure provided an indicator of the really salient issues which concern them. Answers to this question are quite diverse although the economy tends to dominate the picture. The most important issue question was then followed up by a question about the party most likely to do the best job at handling this issue. Figure 5 shows the responses to the latter question, and Labour was seen as the party most likely to do this among students. This is of course one of the reasons why the party moved ahead of its rivals in the March 2010 voting intentions survey. Again there were many

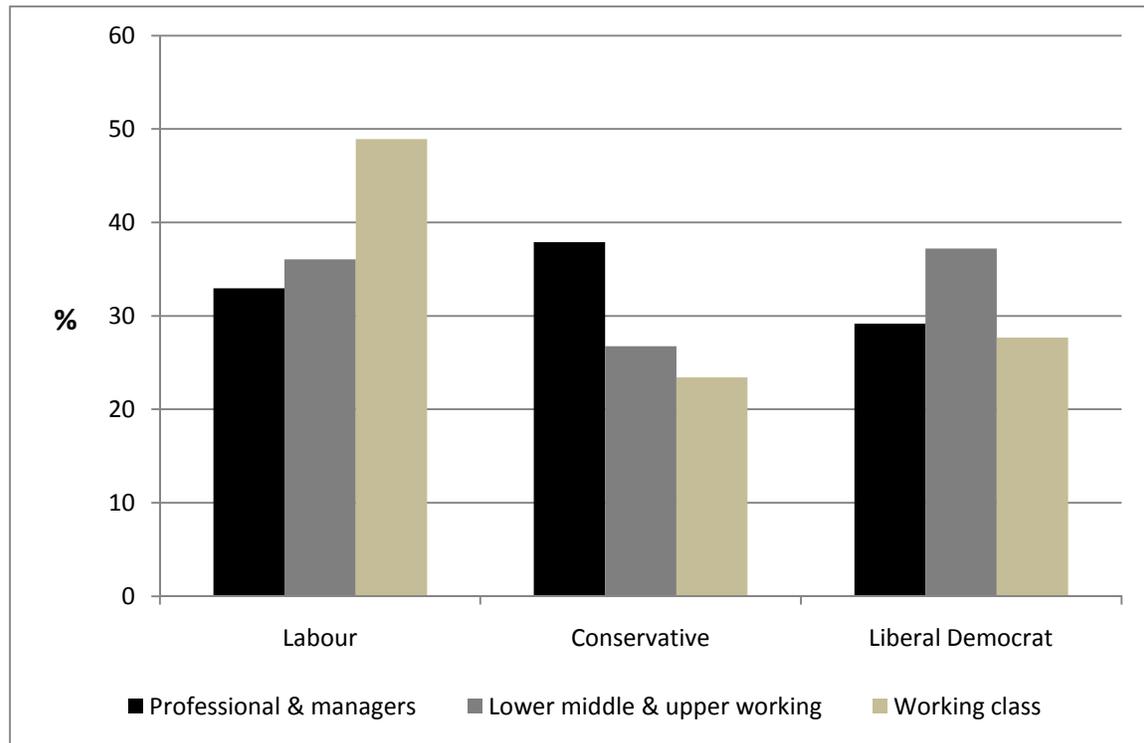
students who thought that no party could address their most important concerns, and there were also many don't knows³.

The Determinants of Student Voting

The literature on the determinants of voting is voluminous, but there are two broad types of theories which seek to explain why individuals vote for one party rather than another. The first type of theory relies on the individual's social characteristics principally their social class and the social environment in which they live as explanations for their electoral choices. The second type looks at their attitudes to political parties, party leaders and to issues as key factors in explaining why they vote. At one time it was thought that social class dominated the picture in Britain (Butler and Stokes, 1969), but it is now recognized that class plays a relatively minor role in determining voting choice. The key attitude measures are really all aspects of voter evaluations of the performance of the parties in delivering the things that they care about. If an issue like the state of the economy is very prominent in the minds of the voters, then they are likely to support a party which they think can best deliver on that issue. A similar point can be made about the party leaders; if voters think that one leader is more competent, honest and likeable than another they are more likely to vote for his party. Thus modern electoral politics is all about performance (Clarke et al. 2009). Students are no different from the wider electorate in this respect. Their social characteristics play a role in influencing their voting behaviour, but the important issues of policy delivery and leadership competence tend to dominate the picture. With this in mind we next examine the relationship between different measures and student voting behaviour with the March 2010 survey.

³ Some 40 per cent of students responded don't know to this question which reinforces the findings in Figure 4.

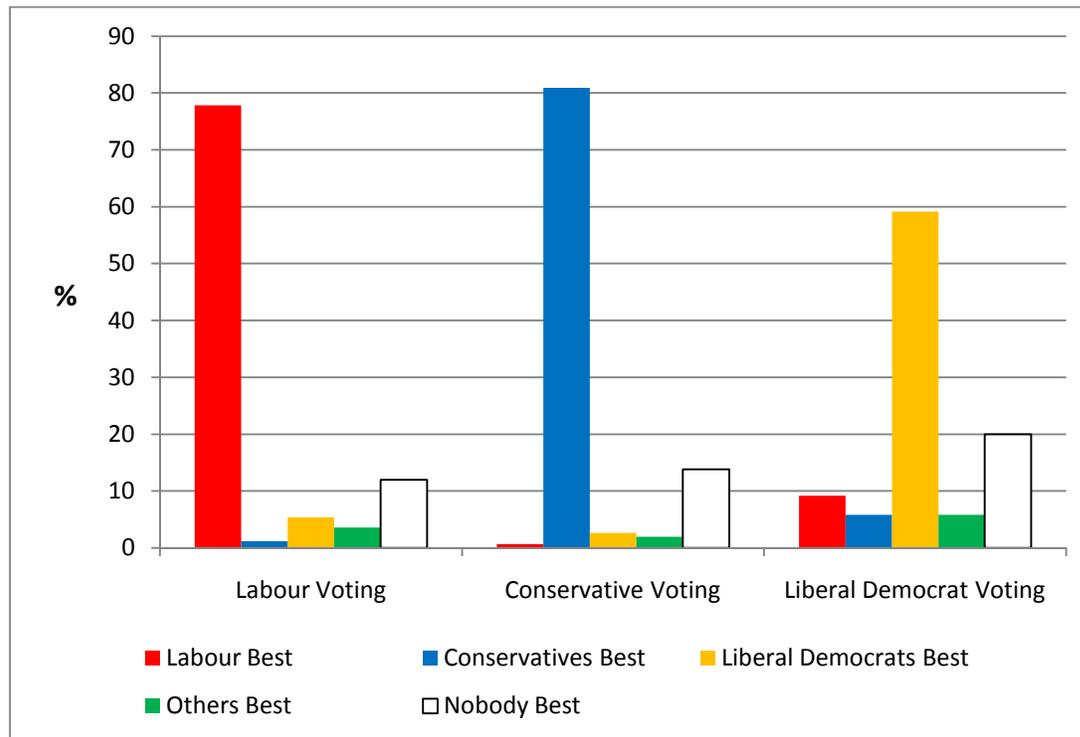
Figure 6 The Class Composition of Student Voting

**Q2V. How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?**

Base: All respondents intending to vote for one of the three main parties, Wave 62

Figure 6 shows the relationship between parental social class and student voting. Social class is measured by the occupational status of parents in the sample. It can be seen that in the case of students with parents in white collar professional occupations Labour captured about a third of their votes according to the March 2010 survey. In contrast the party captured nearly half of the students whose parents were in working class or blue collar occupations. Thus there was a clear class profile to the Labour student vote, which resembles a staircase moving down the parental occupational status scale. Conservative vote intentions also resembles a staircase, but with the opposite slope; in this case the party captured just short of forty per cent of the vote of students with parents in professional occupations, and under a quarter of those with parents in working class occupations. In contrast, the Liberal Democrat class profile was not a staircase, since the party does equally well among students with parents in blue collar and in professional occupations. The difference is that the Liberal Democrats did well among students with lower middle class or upper working class parents. It is easy to see from Figure 6 that class plays an important role in explaining the student vote, but there are also clear exceptions to the relationship between class and voting.

Figure 7 Perceptions of Which Party Can Handle the Most Important Issue Best and the Voting Intentions of Students in March 2010



QV3. Which party is best able to handle this issue? Q2V. How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?

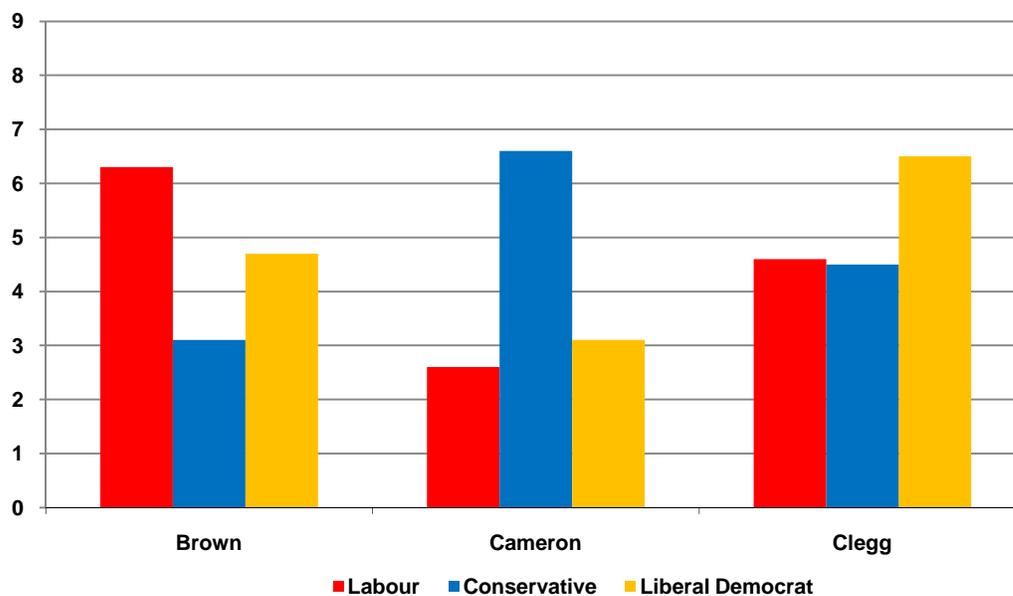
Base: Labour voters excluding don't knows at V3, Wave 62, Conservative voters excluding don't knows at QV3, Wave 62, Liberal Democrat voters excluding don't knows at QV3, Wave 62

Turning next to the role of issues in explaining voting behaviour, Figure 7 looks at the relationship between voting intentions and student perceptions of the most important issue facing the country. It is apparent that there is a very strong relationship between voting intentions and the perception that a party is best at handling the respondent's most important issue. Thus Figure 7 shows that nearly 80 per cent of students who intend to vote Labour thought that the party was best at handling their most important issue. The figure for the Conservatives is similar at just over 80 per cent, and although in the case of the Liberal Democrats the figure is just under 60 per cent, the relationship is nonetheless very strong. Highly salient issues, most commonly the state of the economy, play a very important role in explaining why students vote the way that they do.

Another important factor which influences voting intentions appears in Figure 8. This is student evaluations of political leaders, which is captured by a 'thermometer' score evaluating these leaders. Respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they like or dislike a political leader on a scale varying from zero to ten, with a high score indicating that they liked that leader. Research shows that this measure provides a good overall evaluation of political leaders; if individuals believe that a leader is competent, honest, trustworthy and is concerned with their welfare they are likely to like that leader. Figure 8 shows that in each case party supporters rated their party leader much higher

than his rivals. Thus student Labour voters rated Gordon Brown at just over six on the scale while at the same time rating David Cameron under three. Conservatives were similar in their ratings of the party leaders, with an average score of 6.6 for David Cameron and 3.1 for Gordon Brown. Nick Clegg provides a slightly different case. Students who were Liberal Democrat voters liked him more than his rivals, but in this case the distances between him and the other party leaders were not that great. Thus Conservative and Labour voting polarizes opinions among students more than Liberal Democrat voting when it comes to evaluating the party leaders. Overall, though liking a party leader is strongly related to voting for a party.

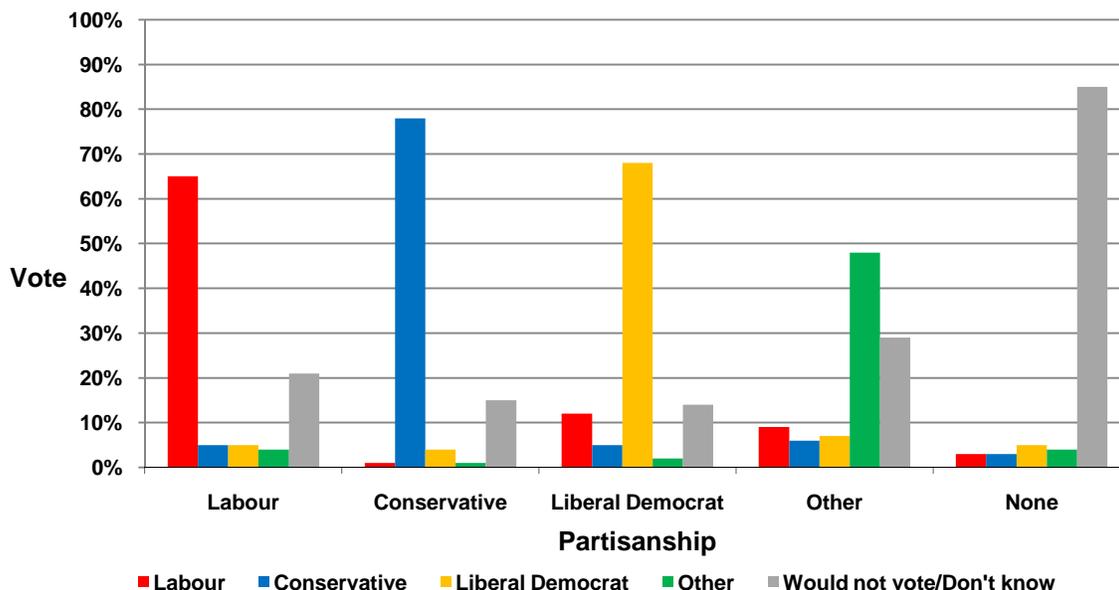
Figure 8 Student Evaluations of the Party Leaders By Voting Intentions



QV11. Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how to you feel about Gordon Brown? QV12. ... David Cameron QV13.... Nick Clegg
Base: All Labour voters at wave 62 (204), All Conservative voters at wave 62 (193), All Liberal Democrat voters at wave 62 (174)

The third important factor which explains voting behaviour is partisanship or the extent to which voters identify with or have a long term attachment to one or other of the political parties. This is highlighted in Figure 9 and is a type of ‘brand loyalty’ which has an important influence on consumer behaviour in the wider world as well as in politics. Of course some students do not identify with any political party, but if they do identify this plays an important role in explaining why they vote for that party. The Figure shows, for example, that about 65 per cent of students who identify with Labour intended to vote for the party. Similar relationships apply to the other parties.

Figure 9 Party Identification and Voting



QV4. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or what? QV6. Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others? Q2V. How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?

Base: All respondents at Wave 62 .

To summarize, student voting behaviour can be explained by similar factors at work in the wider population. It is influenced by issue perceptions, evaluations of party leaders, partisanship as well as by the social characteristics of the students and their parents. Parents often play an important role in socialising students to support a given party, if they are themselves supporters of that party. So social characteristics and attitudes combine together to explain voting behaviour.

Conclusions

The key finding of this report is that student voters differ from those in the wider population, although student voting behaviour is driven by similar factors. Not surprisingly, many students have not made up their minds about which party to support and so they are less likely to know what they want and more likely to be non-voters, than the population in general. So it is possible that students will vote in fewer numbers in 2010 than other groups in the population, just as they did in 2005. Having said that, when they have made up their minds their pattern of party support differs quite a lot from voters in general, since they are much less likely to be Conservative and to a lesser extent Labour supporters, and more likely to be Liberal Democrats. There is not much evidence that students are defecting to minor parties such as the Nationalists and Greens however, so student voting behaviour does not presage a long term boost for these parties. But it does suggest declining support for the two major parties in the future, particularly for the Conservatives who traditionally received strong support from middle-class professionals and managers in the electorate. As regards the determinants of student voting, they are rather similar to the factors influencing voting in wider population, except there are fewer

partisans among students and more don't know in relation to issues. Again, this is to be expected, given that student political attitudes and beliefs are still in the process of formation. Despite the point about lower turnouts, the evidence suggests that students will make an important contribution to the outcome of the 2010 general election, since they are more likely to vote than the non-student population of a similar age.

References

Butler, David and Donald Stokes. 1969. *Political Change in Britain*. London: Macmillan.

Clarke, Harold D., David Sanders, Marianne Stewart, and Paul Whiteley. 2009. *Performance Politics and the British Voter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Methodology

Study design

All fieldwork was conducted via Opinionpanel's Student Omnibus Survey. In most cases the sample size was between 1,000 and 1,100 respondents. On average, students from around 125 higher education institutions took part in each wave of research with typically the highest number of respondents from any one university being around 25 and the mean average around 8 respondents per university. Timings of the omnibus studies included have been appended (Appendix A).

Sample

The respondents questioned in the fieldwork for this report were members of The Student Panel. Nearly all had been recruited to the panel via invitations from UCAS. All respondents had their academic email address (ending 'ac.uk') verified by Opinionpanel. All respondents were credited with £1 in Amazon Gift Certificates for completing each questionnaire. After completing a Student Omnibus Survey, respondents are excluded from at least the next 3 omnibus studies.

Quotas and weights

In each Omnibus, quotas were used to make the sample representative of the national student population in terms of gender, course year (1, 2 and 3+) and university type (with aggregations made for Russell Group universities, other Old universities, New (post 1992) institutions and small and specialist institutions). The voting dataset has been weighted to ensure the each omnibus is representative by gender and university type. Quotas and weights were set based on population returns supplied by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The quotas per 1000 responses can be found in Appendix B while the weighting matrix is included in the multi-wave table set released simultaneous with this report.

Questionnaire

Three key questions were asked at each wave – concerning likelihood to vote, voting preference, and which party respondents thought was most likely to win the election (Appendix D). At the most recent wave conducted in April 2010, a number of extra questions were asked to gain a more detailed picture of student voting (Appendix E).

Analysis

Data tables were produced in-house by Opinionpanel, analysis conducted and report written by Professor Paul Whitely of the University of Essex.

Appendix A - Timings

Timings for the different waves of omnibus research were as follows:

Wave number*	Date (month/year)
47	07/09
48	07/09
49	07/09
50	08/09
51	09/09
52	09/09
53	09/09
54	10/09
55	11/09
56	11/09
57	12/09
58	01/10
59	01/10
60	02/10
61	02/10
62	04/10

*The Opinionpanel Student Voting study began in July 2004 (Wave 1). This report is based upon data from the nine months leading up to April 2010.

Appendix B - Quotas per 1000 responses

TOTAL	1000
1st year 18 years old Male Group 1 Russell Group	20
1st year 18 years old Male Group 2 Pre 1992	20
1st year 18 years old Male Group 3 Post 1992	27
1st year 18 years old Male Group 4 Other institutions	4
1st year 18 years old Female Group 1 Russell Group	22
1st year 18 years old Female Group 2 Pre 1992	23
1st year 18 years old Female Group 3 Post 1992	35
1st year 18 years old Female Group 4 Other institutions	7
1st year 19+ years old Male Group 1 Russell Group	14
1st year 19+ years old Male Group 2 Pre 1992	20
1st year 19+ years old Male Group 3 Post 1992	50
1st year 19+ years old Male Group 4 Other institutions	6
1st year 19+ years old Female Group 1 Russell Group	16
1st year 19+ years old Female Group 2 Pre 1992	22
1st year 19+ years old Female Group 3 Post 1992	61
1st year 19+ years old Female Group 4 Other institutions	10
2nd year 18 19 years old Male Group 1 Russell Group	18
2nd year 18 19 years old Male Group 2 Pre 1992	17
2nd year 18 19 years old Male Group 3 Post 1992	22
2nd year 18 19 years old Male Group 4 Other institutions	4
2nd year 18 19 years old Female Group 1 Russell Group	20
2nd year 18 19 years old Female Group 2 Pre 1992	20
2nd year 18 19 years old Female Group 3 Post 1992	29
2nd year 18 19 years old Female Group 4 Other institutions	6
2nd year 20+ years old Male Group 1 Russell Group	13
2nd year 20+ years old Male Group 2 Pre 1992	16
2nd year 20+ years old Male Group 3 Post 1992	38
2nd year 20+ years old Male Group 4 Other institutions	5
2nd year 20+ years old Female Group 1 Russell Group	16
2nd year 20+ years old Female Group 2 Pre 1992	19
2nd year 20+ years old Female Group 3 Post 1992	51
2nd year 20+ years old Female Group 4 Other institutions	8
3rd year + 18 20 years old Male Group 1 Russell Group	24
3rd year + 18 20 years old Male Group 2 Pre 1992	21
3rd year + 18 20 years old Male Group 3 Post 1992	20
3rd year + 18 20 years old Male Group 4 Other institutions	4
3rd year + 18 20 years old Female Group 1 Russell Group	28
3rd year + 18 20 years old Female Group 2 Pre 1992	24
3rd year + 18 20 years old Female Group 3 Post 1992	28

3rd year + 18 20 years old Female Group 4 Other institutions	7
3rd year + 21+ years old Male Group 1 Russell Group	17
3rd year + 21+ years old Male Group 2 Pre 1992	19
3rd year + 21+ years old Male Group 3 Post 1992	39
3rd year + 21+ years old Male Group 4 Other institutions	6
3rd year + 21+ years old Female Group 1 Russell Group	22
3rd year + 21+ years old Female Group 2 Pre 1992	22
3rd year + 21+ years old Female Group 3 Post 1992	51
3rd year + 21+ years old Female Group 4 Other institutions	9

Appendix C - Questionnaire for all waves

Q1V How likely would you be to vote in an immediate General Election?

- 1 - Absolutely certain NOT to vote
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 - Absolutely certain to vote

Q2V How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?

- Liberal Democrat
- Conservative
- Labour
- Some other party
- Scottish National Party / Plaid Cymru
- Would not vote
- Don't know

Base: All who are likely to vote, this is defined as scoring 8 to 10 (absolutely certain to vote)

Q3V Regardless of which party you happen to support, who do you think will win the next UK General Election?

- Labour
- Conservative
- Liberal Democrat
- Some other party
- Scottish National Party / Plaid Cymru
- Would not vote
- Don't know

Appendix D - Additional questions for Wave 62/April 2010

QV2. As far as you're concerned, what is the single most important issue facing the country at the present time?

Open response

QV3. Which party is best able to handle this issue?

There are no important problems

None - No Party

Labour

Conservatives

Liberal Democrats

Scottish National Party (SNP)

Plaid Cymru

Green Party

United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

British National Party (BNP)

Other

Don't know

QV4. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or what?

Labour

Conservative

Liberal Democrat

Scottish National Party (SNP)

Plaid Cymru

Green Party

United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

British National Party (BNP)

Other

No – None

Don't know

Ask: ALL THOSE WHO ANSWERED OTHER AT QV4

QV5. You said you generally think of yourself as an 'other' party. Please say here what this is:

Open response

Ask: ALL THOSE WHO FAILED TO NAME A PARTY (SELECTING NO-NONE OR DON'T KNOW AT V4)

QV6. Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others? If yes, please tell me which party?

Labour

Conservative

Liberal Democrat

Scottish National Party (SNP)

Plaid Cymru
Green Party
United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)
British National Party (BNP)
Other
No – None
Don't know

Ask: ALL THOSE WHO ANSWERED OTHER AT V6

QV7. You said you generally think of yourself as a little closer to an 'other' party. Please say here which party this is.

Open response

QV11. Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how to you feel about Gordon Brown?

0 – Strongly dislike

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Strongly like

Don't know

QV12. Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how to you feel about David Cameron?

0 – Strongly dislike

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Strongly like

Don't know

QV13. Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about Nick Clegg?

Single response

0 – Strongly dislike

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Strongly like

Don't know

About the author

Paul Whiteley is Professor of Government at the University of Essex and co-director of the British Election Study. He is the author or co-author of some fifteen books and more than 50 academic articles on electoral behaviour, public opinion, political parties, political methodology and political economy. These include *Labour's Grassroots: the Politics of Party Membership* (OUP, 1992), *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (OUP, 1994), *Political Choice in Britain* (OUP, 2004), *Citizenship in Britain, Values, Participation and Democracy* (CUP, 2004), *Third Force Politics: Liberal Democrats at the Grassroots* (OUP, 2006), and *Performance Politics and the British Voter* (CUP, 2009). He has held appointments at the Universities of Bristol, Sheffield, Arizona, and the College of William and Mary in Virginia. He is married with three children and lives in Suffolk.

About Opinionpanel Research

Opinionpanel is the fully independent market research company that owns and operates *The Applicant Panel*, *The Student Panel* and *The Graduate Panel*; with over 70,000 members Opinionpanel covers those critical, transformative years before, during and after life as a student. Opinionpanel provides clients with genuinely valid and representative samples. Research is anonymous, confidential and in line with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct. Opinionpanel is an MRS Company Partner, offering clients a choice of full-service research, field-and-tabs, or sample-only services. For the last three years panellists have been recruited by email invitation sent by UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service). UCAS is the UK's central body for handling undergraduate applications and is therefore able to invite almost the whole of each starting cohort. This means there is very little systematic bias in the panel. All respondents have verified *ac.uk* academic email addresses which means only bona fide students take part, almost eliminating the problem of participants with multiple identities – something that plagues many of the online consumer panels available.

Student and Graduate panellists get a minimum of £1 credit in Amazon Gift Certificates for completing each questionnaire. Panellists get £10 in credits for joining. Amazon gift certificates are redeemed at £25. Panellists also get periodic feedback on the social and topical issues we cover in our questionnaires. Panellists must always be invited to take part in surveys which means client quotas or Opinionpanel rules such as 'least recent participation' are the basis for sample selection.

Over the past few years Opinionpanel has worked with many of the leading brands and agencies involved in student market plus much of the UK's Higher Education establishment. Clients include brands such as NatWest and Red Bull; market research agencies such as TNS, ICM and Ipsos MORI and Higher Education organizations such as the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), the Student Loans Company. Opinionpanel supplies around 40 UK universities with market research services.