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# **What Does It Take to Make it to the Polling Station? The Effects of Campaign Activities on Electoral Participation**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the extent to which campaign visibility facilitates electoral participation, using data from first- and second-order elections in Britain. Our contribution to the existing literature is threefold. First, we assess whether the effects of campaign effort are conditioned by marginality, finding that campaign mobilisation gets out the vote regardless of the competitiveness of the race. Second, we look at the relative ability of different campaign activities to stimulate turnout, detecting significant differences. Third, we show that the effects of campaign effort on electoral participation are rather similar in first- and second-order elections. These findings suggest that a greater level of electoral information provided by campaign activities does reduce the cost of voting. Local campaigns play a key role in bringing voters to the polls in marginal and non-marginal races, and at general elections as much as at second-order elections.

## **Keywords**

Electoral participation; campaign information; competitiveness; Great Britain; devolution

## **Introduction**

Levels of electoral participation function as thermometers of how healthy a democracy is. When large numbers of citizens fail to turn out to vote, not only do they abstain from making a political choice, but they also signal a wider detachment from the democratic system. In recent decades, there has been a marked decline in party membership, ideological attachment, and ‘brand’ loyalty, leaving political parties without a strong core of supporters (e.g., Dalton 2008; McAllister 2004) and the consequent need to make extra efforts to bring voters to the polling station. The mobilising efforts, engineered by parties and their candidates, are therefore particularly significant at this time. In this paper, we evaluate the impact of these efforts and assess their contribution to the levels of voter turnout.

Campaign mobilisation consists of all of the activities aimed at enhancing the salience of an election in the eyes of the voters, with the ultimate goal of getting out the vote. Experimental evidence shows that citizens are more likely to vote when they are stimulated by exposure to campaign information (Green and Gerber 2008), and observational studies have confirmed the idea that campaign effort has a discernible positive effect on turnout (Geys 2006; Karp et al. 2008). We expand this line of research by exploring the link between campaign effort and turnout at first- as well as second-order elections in Britain, deepening our understanding of the similarities and differences between these types of elections. While research on voter turnout is comparative in nature (e.g., Baek 2009; Franklin 1996), previous studies have focused on the same level of election across countries. This study provides a comparison across different levels of elections within the same country. Next to that, we add nuance to the literature on turnout by addressing whether the effects of campaign effort are conditioned by the competitiveness of the race. Rational reasoning and empirical evidence (Blais 2000) suggests that turnout ought to be higher in competitive races, but the extent to which organised mobilisation effort and electoral competitiveness interact with each other remains unclear. Finally, we explore whether different forms of electioneering vary in their capacity to stimulate electoral participation.

Using data from the 2010 British general election and 2011 devolved elections in Scotland and Wales, we find evidence that aggregate constituency-level campaign spending has strong positive effects on turnout at both types of elections. This effect is, however, not conditioned by the competitiveness of the race, suggesting that the effort put forward by parties and their candidates to get out the vote is equally beneficial in safe as well as marginal seats. The

disaggregated analysis of electoral activities offers an additional insight into the effectiveness of electioneering at getting out the vote. We find that different types of campaign effort vary in their capacity to stimulate turnout. Among the various campaign activities that would-be MPs use, providing unsolicited materials to voters emerges as a powerful trigger for electoral mobilisation in first- and second-order elections. In the former, campaign professionalisation also has a positive impact on turnout.

While first- and second-order elections still differ in many aspects, there are also noticeable similarities between the two when looking at how campaign effort can mobilise the electorate. The patterns of how campaign effort promotes electoral mobilisation, albeit with slight tweaks, hold for both the 2010 general election and the 2011 devolved elections.

The article is organised as follows. First, we describe the electoral context in Britain. Second, we survey the existing literature on campaign effort and turnout to specify our contribution. We then outline our theoretical expectations. Following this, we illustrate data and measures, proceed to the analytical findings, and conclude with a discussion on their implications.

### **Studying Constituency-Level Electoral Dynamics in Britain**

We explore the determinants of turnout variance across different constituencies in Britain,<sup>1</sup> observing cases such as East Dunbartonshire where 81.9% of the electorate cast their ballot at the 2015 general election as well as cases like Manchester Central where only 52.7% of the electorate did so. In searching for an explanation of what determines such differences across constituencies, we focus on the potential role of local campaign mobilisation.

This is not uncharted territory. Among the earliest to point at the local level as crucial for understanding British electoral politics were Denver and Hands (1974). They explored the role played by local campaigns in getting out the vote at general elections and suggested that campaign spending (used as a proxy for campaign effort) might actually have a bigger impact on mobilising the electorate than constituency marginality. This conclusion is very much in line with findings from the extensive ‘get out the vote’ literature from the United States (Green et al. 2003; Green and Gerber 2008; Imai 2005; Patterson and Caldeira 1983) and has

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<sup>1</sup> This is often referred to as the local level in the literature on campaign spending, while the literature on turnout generally labels it as the aggregate level in order to distinguish it from studies that address the determinants of individual-level turnout. We adopt the terminology in use in the campaign literature.

recently regained scholarly attention in the field of British electoral politics. A conspicuous body of literature has explored the extent to which local campaign effort has an impact on electoral success (e.g., Clarke et al. 2004, 2009; Cutts 2014; Fisher et al. 2011; Whiteley and Seyd 1994) and the mobilisation of voters (for the effects of campaign effort on turnout, see Benoit and Marsh 2003b; Karp et al. 2008; Karp and Banducci 2007; for Britain-specific studies see, among others, Fisher et al. 2011, 2015; Pattie et al. 2003), leading to substantial agreement on its overall positive effect. Local campaigns have been proven to be significant drivers of electoral participation in UK general elections (Fisher et al. 2015; Fisher and Denver 2009; Johnston and Pattie 1998) where parties have demonstrated their ability to target campaign efforts strategically, in order to make gains (or contain losses) where most needed.

While there is little dispute over the effectiveness of campaigning, there are several elements of the process through which campaigns stimulate turnout that remain unclear. First, evidence is still limited to first-order elections. This study investigates the role of campaign mobilisation effort in the context of a general election and devolved elections in order to extend our understanding of the latter and assess how closely the electoral dynamics associated with first- and second-order elections mirror each other. This remains an open puzzle in the field of electoral studies, particularly in the case of Britain. On the one hand, the diversity in terms of electoral systems – i.e., UK general elections exclusively use First-Past-the-Post, whereas the devolved elections in Scotland and Wales use the Additional Member System – suggests that differences might outweigh similarities. Moreover, elections for the devolved assemblies are characterised by lower turnout levels and different individual-level voting patterns than Westminster elections (Wyn Jones and Scully 2006). These elements indicate that first- and second-order elections are indeed unconnected electoral arenas and that the defining traits of the latter should make them substantially different from general elections. On the other hand, the ‘second-order’ nature of the devolved elections is reduced by the strength of these administrations as they have primary legislative power over a wide range of policy areas, but also by the strength of the sub-state identities in question (Jeffery and Hough 2009). ‘Not all second-order elections are equally unimportant’ (Marsh 2004). Also, for those involved in the mobilisation effort – parties and candidates – there is no difference in the incentives: when running for office, a rational agent should attempt to win, regardless of the type of office in question. As a result, the mobilisation effort should be equally efficacious.

Second, most studies of campaigning in Britain are limited to the main parties: Labour Party, Conservative Party, and Liberal Democrats, effectively excluding from the empirical estimate the effort of the ‘smaller’ contenders. While this used to suffice in uncovering the dynamics of constituency-level turnout variation, a more encompassing approach is now needed. Not only are the ‘smaller’ parties securing parliamentary representation with increasing frequency – e.g., Caroline Lucas was elected in Brighton Pavilion as the first Green Party MP in 2010 and UKIP’s Douglas Carswell secured a seat in 2015 –, but there is also a tangible mobilisation effort associated with those parties – e.g., the Scottish National Party has been successful recently in engaging the electorate, as evident from the record number of its MPs. ‘Smaller’ parties contribute to the political landscape of Britain now more than ever, and their inclusion in the analysis of the constituency-level electoral dynamics leads to a more accurate picture of what voters experience in the lead up to an election. The efforts of these parties are neglected when restricting the analysis to few main players. We conceptualise – and consequently empirically treat – electioneering as the cumulative effort of all parties. By accounting for all the actors in the race – regardless of their electoral prospects – we offer a more complete account of the extent to which voters experience electoral stimuli and with what consequences.

Third, if consensus exists on the effectiveness of the overall electoral effort, only a handful of studies break down the various forms of organised mobilisation. Fisher et al. (2015), using data from a survey of electoral agents, explore the diversity of campaign types and assess the effectiveness of different activities to reiterate that traditional campaign techniques are particularly successful at getting out the vote. Conversely, they find that e-campaigning was ineffective at driving voters to the polling station, outlining the differential effects of various types of mobilisation efforts. Our approach is not too dissimilar but, instead of following a taxonomical approach based on theories of campaign change (e.g., Denver and Hands 2002; Farrell and Webb 2000; Norris 2000), we rely on the classification of campaign expenses as imposed by legislation. This enables us to identify the extent to which different activities stimulate turnout, while bypassing the limitations of survey data such as non-response and missing values.

### **Campaign Mobilisation Effort, Competitiveness, and Electoral Participation**

When parties and candidates actively engage on the ground by intensifying their efforts to win votes, they simultaneously intensify the public debate surrounding the election in its own right, and push competitors to raise their game in response. Studies of negative campaigns show that the more aggressive the campaign effort, the higher the likelihood of voters casting their ballot.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, this likelihood should be particularly high when the election is expected to be a close race, as the perceived utility of voting is greater in a more marginal constituency than in a safer one. Indeed, previous studies find two constituency-level characteristics to be particularly influential in determining how many people cast a ballot: the marginality of the race and campaign effort (Geys 2006). While focusing primarily on the latter, we also explore the interaction between these two elements, on the premise that they might condition each other's effect. When an election is a close contest, the probability that one vote might influence the outcome is seen as higher and it acts as an additional motivation to cast a ballot. Matsusaka and Palda (1993) refer to this mechanism as the Downsian closeness hypothesis. Voters acknowledge that the benefits of casting their ballot are not limited to merely fulfilling their sense of civic duty, which voting in very safe seats is arguably restricted to, but that they may also influence the electoral result. Therefore, more marginal constituencies should experience higher levels of turnout. With regard to campaign effort, the more candidates (cumulatively) spend on their campaigns in a given constituency, the greater their collective capacity to engage with voters and expose them to electorally relevant information. As voters experience more electioneering – defined as the kinds of campaign activities that get people out to vote (Bowler and Farrell 2011: 683) – the amount of information that they have on candidates and their policy positions is subsequently higher. Consequently, voters in constituencies with more intense campaign activity have to bear lower costs of information acquisition (Chapman and Palda 1983; Dawson and Zinser 1976), increasing their likelihood of voting. Therefore, *we expect overall campaign effort, as well as the marginality of the race, to be positively related to constituency-level turnout.* So far, work that assesses the effects of campaign effort on turnout at second-order elections is limited, with the notable exception of Marsh and Benoit's studies of the Irish local elections of 1999 (2003a; 2003b). Nevertheless, there are no strong theoretical reasons to expect that the effects of campaign effort should be any different at second-order elections.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Lau et al. (2007) for a comprehensive review of this literature.

The independent effects of both marginality and campaign effort are well established in the literature. We move forward by exploring the potential moderating role that the closeness of the race may have on the effectiveness of campaign effort at stimulating turnout. There are reasons to expect this to be the case. First, voters in marginal seats are likely to have a greater incentive to pay attention to the electorally relevant information that is made available to them since their vote is seen as more important. Second, marginal constituencies tend to lack strong incumbents; in these circumstances acquiring information on candidates becomes a necessity. This line of reasoning is also supported by Milazzo's (2015) findings that voters in marginal seats have more accurate knowledge of the parties' policy positions than those in safe ones. Therefore, *we expect the positive effect of campaign effort to be conditioned by the marginality of the race. The effect of campaign effort should be amplified in marginal seats and depressed in uncompetitive races.* This mechanism should be no different in the context of second-order elections.

### **From Effort to Efforts**

When it comes to capturing campaign effort, both the literature on campaign effectiveness and the studies of mobilisation effects on turnout use some form of proxy to gauge the concept. Most measures in use are very close to one another (Fieldhouse and Cutts 2009), so that studies based on electoral agent surveys (Denver et al. 2003) can be safely compared to those that are using electoral returns (Johnston and Pattie 1995) or party contact as reported in voter surveys (Clarke et al. 2004; Karp et al. 2008; Whiteley and Seyd 2003). This was very recently echoed by Fisher et al. (2015) who show a high level of robustness across data from an electoral agent survey and electoral returns.

Here, we rely on electoral returns data to assess the effects of campaign effort on turnout. The obvious advantages are the completeness of electoral returns and their availability for general elections as well as devolved elections. Clearly, these data also have limitations: e.g., spending returns are unable to capture the extent to which a campaign relies on free volunteer labour or how campaign stimuli may be internalised by voters and lead to a higher likelihood of voting. The latter can be adequately disentangled only by experimental research, while the former is a limitation of spending data. That said, the benefits of using electoral returns data compiled by the Electoral Commission are substantial. These data benefit from their completeness – all candidates are subject to the same regulatory provisions on reporting – and granularity. This allows us to go beyond interpreting campaign effort as a monolithic



activity. To date, the *corpus* of studies using campaign spending as an indicator of campaign effort, whether addressing its role in increasing turnout or winning votes, tends to rely on aggregate measures of spending. In a comprehensive meta-analysis of the literature, Geys (2006) shows that, while electoral spending is consistently one of the most significant positive predictors of turnout, the distinction between (and comparative impact of) the different types of campaign activities needs further attention. In this respect, electoral returns data, despite certain shortcomings, do a good job of capturing the nuances of electioneering, allowing one to isolate the effects of different campaign activities.

The electoral spending of candidates in Britain is regulated by the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009.<sup>3</sup> While the 1983 Act has undergone a long series of updates,<sup>4</sup> the section relating to campaign spending categorisation (i.e., List of Matters) has remained unchanged. Campaign expenses are still divided into: 1) Advertising, 2) Unsolicited Material, 3) Transport, 4) Public Meetings, 5) Staff, and 6) Accommodation and Administration. This distinction between spending on the different campaign activities is important. While campaigns convey information on candidates and parties, not every campaign activity is equally relevant with regards to mobilising voters. For example, spending money on stationery and transport is important to running electoral campaigns, just like putting posters on billboards or leaflets through letterboxes, but the public are only directly exposed to the latter. Moreover, even across these activities there may be a hierarchy of effectiveness that needs exploring. For example, Sudulich and Wall (2011) find that posters were more effective than other campaign tools at winning votes in the 2007 Irish election.

It is reasonable to expect certain components of the mobilisation effort to have better priming effects than others. Some of these activities translate clearly into electioneering: Advertising, as well as the production and distribution of Unsolicited Materials, serve the clear purpose of putting electorally relevant information in the public domain where it is visible to voters. The costs associated with Staff offer a good indication of the number of paid people working for the campaign, and act as a proxy for campaign professionalisation. More professional campaigns are more likely to be effective at reaching voters and delivering a persuasive message. Therefore, these three types of activities should exert an effect on the mobilisation

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<sup>3</sup> For further detail, see Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> For further detail, see <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/2#Scenario5Help>.

of voters. On the other hand, costs under Accommodation and Administration, as well as Transport, are less likely to translate directly into voter mobilisation. These expenses, while necessary to keep the campaign machine running, do not create additional visibility for the campaign. Finally, Public Meetings allow candidates to get their message directly to voters, but are likely to attract people who are already politically active (even if still undecided). As such, they are unlikely to add significantly to the pool of already existing voters. Given the above, *we expect only Advertising, Unsolicited Material, and Staff to have a positive impact on turnout.*

### **Data and Measures**

We use official electoral expenditure data provided by the Electoral Commission to capture constituency-level campaign effort. These data have several advantages: i) they cover all candidates and parties who stood for election, as declaration of spending is required by law, thus avoiding the problem of missing observations that plagues candidate surveys, ii) they are more accurate than survey-based self-reported measures of campaign spending, iii) data are collected in a compatible manner across the electoral contexts, allowing for comparisons, and iv) they capture campaign effort in a nuanced manner by requiring candidates to indicate how much was spent on all six types of campaign activities listed above. These measures are then integrated with the official election results from the Electoral Commission and constituency-level socio-economic indicators from the most recent 2011 Census.<sup>5</sup>

### Dependent Variable and Core Explanatory Variables

The dependent variable in our study – *turnout* – is operationalised as the per cent of voters in the constituency who cast a valid vote, ranging from 0 to 100.

*Marginality* describes the expected openness of the electoral race in a given constituency. It is operationalised as the difference between the vote share of the winner and the runner up at the previous election, with higher values corresponding to a greater margin of victory (i.e., a less competitive constituency).<sup>6</sup> The relevant majority in the constituency is based on the

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<sup>5</sup> Socio-economic indicators are specific to the constituency boundaries used at the given election. For example, Census data is adapted to match the boundaries of the Scottish Westminster constituencies at the 2010 general election for models on the 2010 general election, and the Scottish Holyrood constituencies for models on the 2011 devolved elections.

<sup>6</sup> Estimates from models using dichotomous measure of marginality – i.e., coded as 1 ‘marginal’ if the difference in the vote share of the winner and runner-up was less than 10% at the previous election, and 0 ‘safe’ if it was more than 10% – are robust to the findings presented here and available from the authors.

preceding contest since this represents the *status quo ante* of local electoral dynamics on which voters base their decisions (Johnston and Pattie 2006).<sup>7</sup>

The second core explanatory variable is *total campaign effort* in a given constituency during the short campaign. The short campaign is the time between the dissolution of the legislative body and polling day; campaign expenses during this time must be recorded and reported by local campaign teams in all electoral contexts analysed here.<sup>8</sup> The measure we employ is obtained by dividing candidates' cumulative expenditure at the constituency level (i.e., the overall amount spent in the constituency) by the legal spending limit in the constituency. The legal spending limit is a function of electorate size and constituency type, varying across the constituencies. Thus, a relative measure of campaign effort (i.e., dividing absolute spending by the spending limit) is more appropriate than an absolute one when assessing the effects of campaign effort across multiple constituencies in Britain.<sup>9</sup>

In a similar vein, we develop six disaggregated constituency-level measures of spending for each type of campaign activity highlighted above – i.e., *advertising, unsolicited material, transport, public meetings, staff, accommodation and administration*.<sup>10</sup> As per total campaign effort, the six disaggregated measures are operationalised in relative terms where cumulative spending on a particular campaign activity in a constituency is divided by the legal spending limit in the constituency.<sup>11</sup>

### Other Explanatory Variables and Controls

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<sup>7</sup> Marginality in the 2010 Westminster constituencies is based on the 2005 constituency-level electoral results obtained from Pippa Norris and Alex Singleton (2009). Marginality in the 2011 devolved elections is based on the actual 2007 constituency-level electoral results in Wales (National Assembly for Wales 2010) and notional 2007 constituency-level electoral results in Scotland (Denver 2010).

<sup>8</sup> The periods of 'short campaign' – were 13/04-06/05/2010 for the 2010 general election, 25/03-05/05/2011 for the 2011 devolved election in Wales, and 23/03-05/05/2011 for the 2011 devolved election in Scotland.

<sup>9</sup> Estimates from models that operationalise total campaign effort as an absolute measure – the overall amount spent in the constituency – are robust to the findings presented here and presented in Appendix B.

<sup>10</sup> Empirical tests showed that spending on the different campaign activities is correlated very weakly in the case of the 2010 general election and the 2011 devolved elections. Moreover, the variance inflation scores for the campaign spending categories are low when included in the same OLS model (see Appendix B). Therefore, the inclusion of all six spending categories in Models 3 and 4 does not lead to concerns about multicollinearity.

<sup>11</sup> Estimates from models that measure disaggregated campaign spending in absolute terms – the overall amount spent in the constituency on a particular campaign activity – are robust to the findings presented here and presented in Appendix B. An illustration of the distribution of spending on each campaign activity in the run up to the 2010 general election and the 2011 devolved elections is provided in Appendix D.

We incorporate constituency-specific demographic indicators to capture the socio-economic outlook of the constituency in addition to marginality and campaign effort.<sup>12</sup> These indicators tap into distinct elements of the constituency profile. First, we use *density* to account for the level of population concentration in each constituency. The measure is operationalised as the number of persons per hectare. Although it is sometimes argued that urbanisation should lead to the weakening of inter-personal bonds, a rise in individualism, less personal politics, and less social pressure to cast a vote, empirical evidence remains mixed (Geys 2006). Second, we include a measure for *home ownership* to capture the constituency's socio-economic outlook.<sup>13</sup> It is operationalised as the per cent of residents in the constituency who live in owned residence. It is fair to expect that homeowners reside in their community for longer than those who rent, increasing a sense of identification and group solidarity (Ashworth et al. 2002) and, thereby, adding to the social pressure towards voting (Geys 2006). Therefore, a positive effect should be associated with the variable. Third, voting is also likely to be a function of one's social surroundings. We include a control for *single occupancy households* on the premise that people who do not share their residency are likely to receive fewer social cues associated with voting. For example, they are less likely to talk about the upcoming election at home or be encouraged to go the polling station when their co-habitant does so. The variable is operationalised as the ratio of single-person households in the constituency, and we expect it to have a negative effect on turnout.

Finally, we explore the effect of the size of the *electorate* on turnout, measured as the number of eligible voters in the constituency in thousands. As the size of the electorate increases, the probability that a single vote can influence electoral outcome decreases. Therefore, following Downs' (1957) 'calculus-of-voting' model, we expect a larger electorate to lead to a lower turnout. We also control for the geographical location of the constituency (*nation*) – i.e., we divide constituencies into those that are in England, Scotland, and Wales –, and *constituency type* by making a distinction between boroughs/burghs and counties.

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<sup>12</sup> We also ran models with previous turnout, instead of the socio-economic characteristics, as an additional robustness check. It is noted that previous turnout captures the many demographic factors that may contribute to higher or lower levels of turnout (Fisher et al. 2015). Estimates from these models are robust to the findings presented here (see Appendices B and C).

<sup>13</sup> Empirical tests showed that home ownership is very highly correlated to other widely used socio-economic indicators like car ownership, social grade, social class, with the variance inflation scores for these variables (if added to existing models) being over 5. In order not to introduce multicollinearity to the analysis, we relied on home ownership as the only indicator of the constituency's socio-economic outlook.

### Empirical Strategy

We implement two parallel sets of OLS models – one for the 2010 general election and one for the 2011 devolved elections –, with the per cent turnout for each 2010/2011 constituency as the dependent variable. Both sets of models are specified at constituency level.

The analyses in this paper are based on samples of 615 Westminster constituencies and 111 Holyrood/Welsh constituencies, respectively. The Speaker's constituency is excluded as it is traditionally not contested by major parties, while some constituencies are excluded because the Electoral Commission did not receive a full return from one or more of the major party candidates.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Effects of Total Campaign Effort and Marginality on Political Participation**

We begin by assessing the effects of overall campaign effort on turnout in the context of the 2010 general election (Model 1) and the 2011 devolved elections (Model 2). In line with previous studies, we find that greater mobilisation effort is associated with higher levels of turnout in both electoral contexts. With regard to the competitiveness of the race, our results show that participation is higher in constituencies that are more marginal with regard to the general election of 2010. Such an effect, however, is not detected in the case of the devolved elections. This discrepancy is possibly due to differences in the electoral systems. Regardless of how competitive the first-past-the-post Holyrood/Welsh Assembly constituencies happen to be, all voters in the devolved elections have a competitive regional ballot to cast for multi-member regional lists. This provides an incentive to go to the polling station even for those who are living in non-marginal first-past-the-post Holyrood/Welsh Assembly constituencies.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

Turnout is also clearly not just a function of marginality and campaign effort. Among socio-economic characteristics, higher rates of home ownership correspond with higher turnout. The number of eligible voters, however, does not play a significant role. Where the two types of elections differ are the effects associated with density and single occupancy households. We find significant effects for these two characteristics only in the context of the general election where higher levels of turnout are associated with greater population concentration

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<sup>14</sup> In addition, the analyses in this article exclude the constituencies in Northern Ireland.

and fewer people living as single occupants. Finally, regional differences exist: turnout is consistently lower in Wales (reference region for Models 1 and 2 are England and Scotland, respectively), although the difference is not statistically significant in the context of the general election.

In Figure 1 below, we plot the effects of electoral effort on getting out the vote. The picture tells a similar story in both electoral contexts: despite the baseline level of turnout being higher at the 2010 general election than the 2011 devolved elections, there are strong positive effects associated with campaign effort in both contexts. The nuance is offered here by the comparison of the two effect sizes. While the minimum-to-maximum shift in total campaign effort in the context of the 2010 general election (from .4 to 4.8 of the legal spending limit) brings about a noteworthy increase of 7.6% (from 62.5% to 70.1%) in predicted turnout, a corresponding shift in the context of the 2011 devolved elections (from .5 to 3.2 of the legal spending limit) is associated with a significantly larger increase of 13.8% (from 40.9% to 54.7%) in predicted turnout. Greater campaign effort clearly corresponds to higher likelihood of casting a vote at Westminster and Holyrood/Welsh Assembly elections, but its mobilising capacity is notably greater in the run up to the latter.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

We turn our focus now to the potential interplay between campaign effort and marginality in order to uncover whether the effect of campaign effort is conditioned by the openness of the race. We explore such a dependency – or lack thereof – in Table 2, where we show the results of the multiplicative models. Model 3 presents the results for the 2010 general election and Model 4 outlines these for the 2011 devolved elections. While all control variables are in line with what was seen in Models 1 and 2, the interactive effects present some unexpected patterns.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

The coefficients for the interaction terms in Model 3 and Model 4 are both insignificant. This indicates that the effectiveness of the mobilisation effort is not conditioned by the openness of the race. Our expectation on the moderating role of marginality is not met: campaign effort is equally beneficial in stimulating voter turnout in higher and lower competition contexts.

The wellbeing of a democracy relies on the levels of electoral participation and our findings show that, no matter how close a race is, citizens tend to participate more when a local, on-the-ground campaign provides information on the election.

### **Campaign Activities Vary in Their Capacity to Mobilise Voters**

Having established that local campaigns do matter, we now assess whether different types of electioneering efforts vary in their ability to get out the vote. Similar to the previous analysis, we run separate models for the 2010 general election (5) and for the 2011 devolved elections (6). Findings are presented in Table 3 below. The concluding message is clear and consistent across both electoral contexts: campaign activities differ notably in their capacity to mobilise the electorate and get out the vote. We do, however, detect some differences in the dynamics of voter mobilisation in the run up to the first- and second-order elections. Starting with a key similarity, the production and distribution of unsolicited materials is a good predictor of turnout in both electoral contexts. Clearly campaign material that reaches voters at their home and directly presents them with electorally relevant information has the capacity to stimulate electoral participation. At least some voters do respond to the stimulus provided by leaflets and campaign material in their letterboxes, indicating that electioneering does provide a meaningful link between politicians and voters. In terms of differences, Table 3 indicates that constituency-level turnout at the 2010 general election (unlike the 2011 devolved elections) is a function of the candidates' cumulative spending on staff as well as the production and distribution of unsolicited materials. The positive coefficient for staff suggests that, in the context of the general elections, more professional campaigns are better at persuading voters to cast their ballot. This is likely to enhance the recent trend of campaign professionalisation in Britain and beyond (Scammell 2014). Overall, it is clear that campaign activities differ significantly in their capacity to mobilise voters both in the general and devolved elections in Britain.

[TABLE 3 HERE]

In Figure 2 below, we show the effects associated with those campaign activities that the empirical analysis proved to be effective in stimulating turnout, by election type. Figure 2.1 presents the predicted turnout at the 2010 general election as levels of spending on unsolicited materials and staff vary, while Figure 2.2 presents predicted turnout at the 2011 devolved elections as the level of spending on unsolicited materials varies. With regard to the

2010 general election, a minimum-to-maximum shift in spending on staff corresponds to an increase of 8.1% (from 63.8% to 71.9%) in predicted turnout, while such a shift for unsolicited materials brings about a notably smaller increase of 3.3% (from 63.8% to 67.1%) in predicted turnout. In the context of the 2011 devolved elections, a minimum-to-maximum shift in spending on the production and distribution of unsolicited materials corresponds to a large 10.1% increase (from 42.8% to 52.9 %) in predicted turnout.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

### **Conclusions**

Our findings have key implications for those concerned with monitoring the status of democratic participation. Electoral participation appears to depend upon the overall campaign effort exerted by parties and their candidates. When this mobilisation effort is substantial, the returns are significant, with a higher proportion of voters choosing to cast their ballot. This applies equally to races of both low and high competitiveness, suggesting that (if not to change the outcome of the election) mobilisation efforts put in place in the run up to the Election Day consistently lead to higher levels of electoral participation.

Our contribution is in three parts. Firstly, we have expanded on the existing literature by accounting for the efforts of all players on the ground. Considering the growing success and the substantial campaign efforts of the ‘smaller’ parties, they should not be excluded from future empirical assessments of the effectiveness of electioneering. The costs associated with the act of voting decrease when electorally relevant information is made available and that is not a prerogative of large parties only. Secondly, we have confirmed – in line with previous research (Fisher et al. 2015) – that not every type of campaign activity has an impact on voter turnout, and we have expanded this line of research to second-order elections. At second-order elections, the only influential form of electioneering seems to be that of unsolicited material sent to voters, while money invested in paid staffers is also a good predictor of turnout at first-order elections (in addition to unsolicited materials) where greater levels of professionalisation within campaigns do help to mobilise the electorate. Thirdly, our empirical analysis has shown that first- and second-order elections in Britain are relatively homogenous when it comes to electoral mobilisation effects. Although baseline levels of turnout are higher at the general elections than the devolved elections, the effect of campaign activities on turnout is, after all, quite similar in the two electoral contexts. While still



different in many respects, first- and second-order elections are not substantially dissimilar when it comes to the effects of local campaign efforts.

Our study has shed new light on the extent to which campaign visibility facilitates electoral participation in first- and second-order elections, but is certainly not without limitations. First and foremost, observational data do not address the mechanisms through which electioneering is internalised by voters and how it drives them to the polling station. Also, electoral returns are not designed by researchers in the same manner as surveys. The former are imperfect as they do not account for the free labour of volunteers, which still constitutes an important part of every campaign. Despite these limits, electoral returns data enable us to expand our understanding of campaign processes and facilitate the comparative assessment of campaign effort.

In summary, as more electorally relevant information is disseminated in a constituency in the run up to the polling day, the costs of voting are reduced and, in turn, a greater proportion of the electorate feels sufficiently motivated to cast their ballot. This suggests that campaign efforts have a positive impact on internal efficacy and electoral participation. Importantly, this is the case in marginal as well as non-marginal constituencies, and at general elections as much as at second-order elections.

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Table 1. The Effects of Total Campaign Effort and Marginality on Turnout

	Turnout 2010 general election (1)	Turnout 2011 devolved elections (2)
Marginality	-.13*** (.02)	-.00 (.04)
Campaign Effort	1.73*** (.30)	5.09*** (.65)
Single Occupancy Household	-.18*** (.05)	.19 (.14)
Population Density	.08*** (.01)	.02 (.05)
Home Ownership	.31*** (.03)	.50*** (.07)
Electorate	-.00 (.02)	-.04 (.05)
Constituency Type <sup>^</sup>		
County	3.46*** (.43)	1.05 (1.16)
Nation <sup>^^</sup>		
Scotland	.19 (.60)	
Wales	-1.37 (.74)	-9.59*** (.78)
Constant	46.52*** (3.82)	3.38 (9.34)
Number of Constituencies	615	111
R-Squared	.56	.78

Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.

<sup>^</sup> Reference group is Borough/Burgh.

<sup>^^</sup> Reference group is England for 2010 election, Scotland for 2011 elections.

Table 2. The Effects of Campaign Effort Conditional on the Marginality of the Race

	Turnout 2010 general election (3)	Turnout 2011 devolved elections (4)
Marginality	-.11** (.04)	-.11 (.11)
Campaign Effort	1.92*** (.47)	4.28*** (1.02)
Campaign Effort*Marginality	-.01 (.02)	.07 (.06)
Single Occupancy Household	-.19*** (.05)	.18 (.14)
Population Density	.08*** (.01)	.02 (.05)
Home Ownership	.30*** (.03)	.48*** (.07)
Electorate	-.00 (.02)	-.04 (.05)
Constituency Type <sup>^</sup>		
County	3.46*** (.44)	1.09 (1.16)
Nation <sup>^^</sup>		
Scotland	.20 (.60)	
Wales	-1.39 (.74)	-9.60*** (.78)
Constant	46.36*** (3.83)	6.22 (9.74)
Number of Constituencies	615	111
R-Squared	.56	127 / 165

Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.

<sup>^</sup> Reference group is Borough/Burgh.

<sup>^^</sup> Reference group is England for 2010 election, Scotland for 2011 elections.

Table 3. The Effects of Different Campaign Activities on Turnout

	Turnout 2010 general election (5)	Turnout 2011 devolved elections (6)
Marginality	-.12*** (.01)	-.02 (.04)
Advertising	.75 (.78)	4.05 (2.08)
Unsolicited Material	1.04** (.37)	4.58*** (1.02)
Transport	2.62 (3.79)	16.17 (8.46)
Public Meetings	-11.51 (7.04)	-13.17 (28.24)
Staff	13.56*** (1.74)	14.24 (7.59)
Accommodation	1.84 (1.54)	4.55 (3.30)
Single Occupancy Household	-.19*** (.05)	.18 (.15)
Population Density	.08*** (.03)	.04 (.05)
Home Ownership	.30*** (.03)	.50*** (.07)
Electorate	-.01 (.02)	-.04 (.06)
Constituency Type <sup>^</sup>		
County	2.83*** (.44)	1.08 (1.20)
Nation <sup>^^</sup>		
Scotland	.73 (.58)	
Wales	-1.01 (.73)	-9.19*** (.83)
Constant	47.89*** (3.69)	4.28 (10.07)
Number of Constituencies	615	111
R-Squared	.59	.79

Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.

<sup>^</sup> Reference group is Borough/Burgh.

<sup>^^</sup> Reference group is England for 2010 election, Scotland for 2011 elections.



Figure 1. The Effect of Total Campaign Effort on Turnout

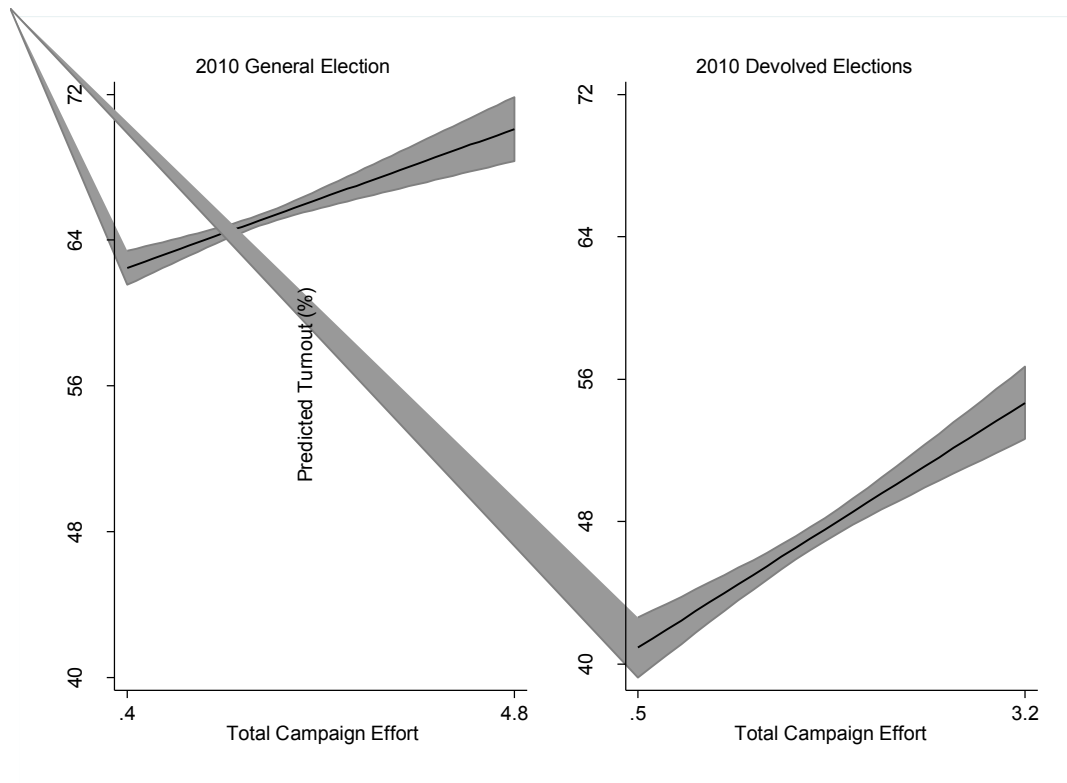


Figure 2. The Effects of Different Campaign Activities on Turnout

Figure 2.1. The Effects of Unsolicited Material and Staff on Turnout in the 2010 General Election

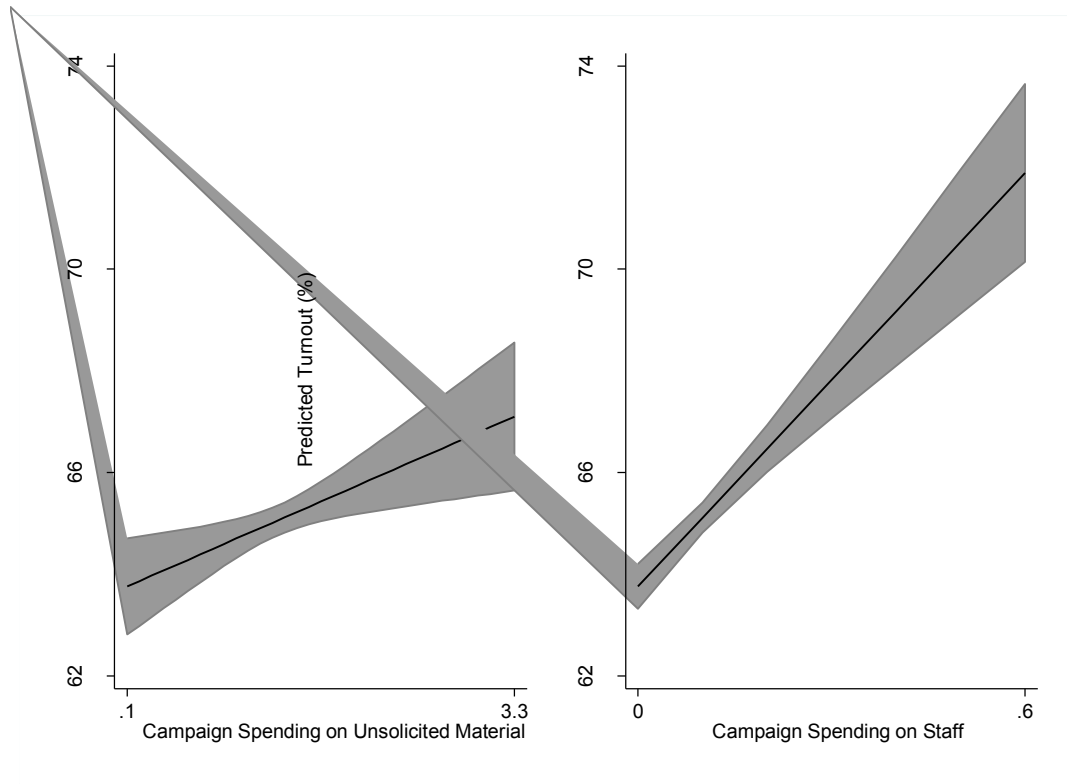
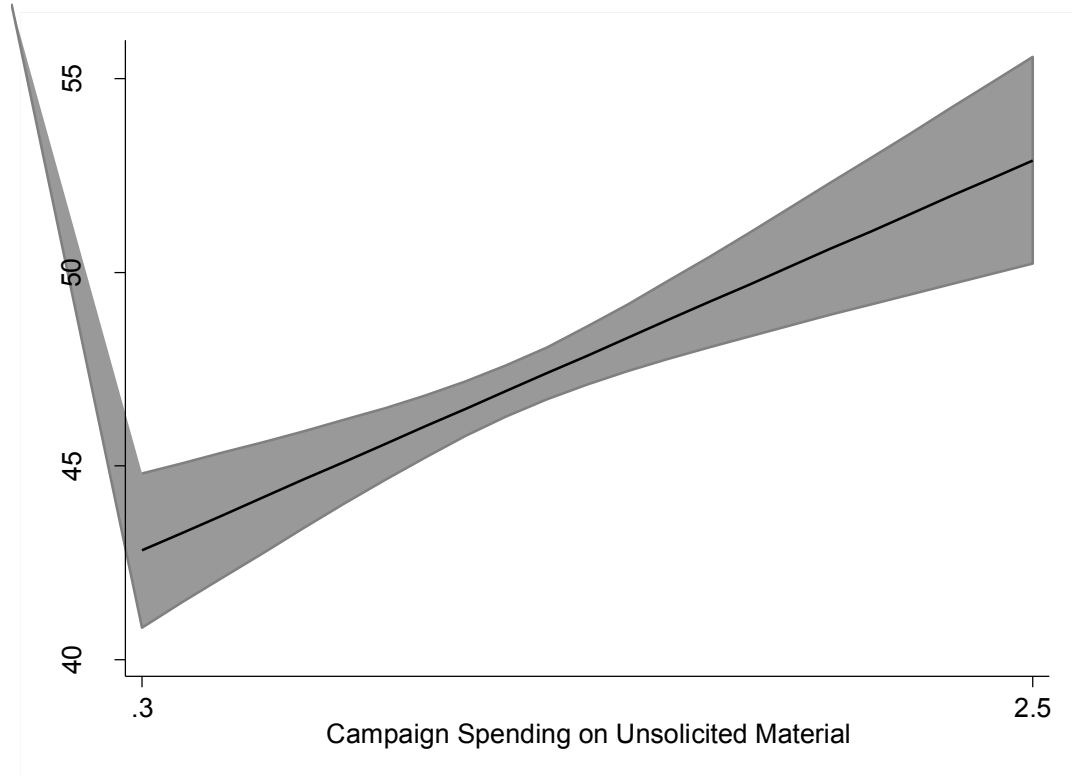


Figure 2.2. The Effect of Unsolicited Material on Turnout in 2011 Devolved Elections



## ***Appendix A. Relevant Rules and Regulations***

### Representation of the People Act 1983

#### List of Matters

1. Advertising of any nature (whatever the medium used). Expenses in respect of such advertising include agency fees, design costs and other costs in connection with preparing, producing, distributing or otherwise disseminating such advertising or anything incorporating such advertising and intended to be distributed for the purpose of disseminating it.
2. Unsolicited material addressed to electors (whether addressed to them by name or intended for delivery to households within any particular area). Expenses in respect of such material include design costs and other costs in connection with preparing, producing or distributing such material (including the cost of postage).
3. Transport (by any means) of persons to any place. Expenses in respect of the transport of such persons include the costs of hiring a means of transport for a particular period.
4. Public meetings (of any kind). Expenses in respect of such meetings include costs incurred in connection with the attendance of persons at such meetings, the hire of premises for the purposes of such meetings or the provision of goods, services or facilities at them.
5. The services of an election agent or any other person whose services are engaged in connection with the candidate's election.
6. Accommodation and administrative costs.

### Political Parties and Elections Act 2009

Between 1/1/2010 and 12/4/2010 (dissolution of Parliament), the spending limit for a candidate was £25,000 plus:

- 7p for every elector on the register if in a county constituency; or
- 5p for every elector on the register if in a burgh constituency.

Between 12/4/2010 (dissolution of Parliament) and 6/5/2010 (day of poll), the spending limit for a candidate was £7,150 plus:

- 7p for every elector on the register if in a county constituency; or
- 5p for every elector on the register if in a burgh constituency.

General spending by parties and non-party campaigners (third parties) was controlled by separate national spending limits.

## *Appendix B. Robustness Checks*

Table B1 displays findings from models where previous turnout in the constituency is used to control for the constituency profile instead of marginality and socio-economic characteristics. The previous turnout variable is operationalised as per cent of voters in the constituency who cast a valid vote at the 2005 general election or the 2007 devolved elections. Actual turnout is used if no boundary changes occurred between the 2005/2007 elections and the 2010/2011 elections, while notional turnout is used if boundary changes did take place.

Table B1. Previous Turnout as Control

	Turnout 2010 general election	Turnout 2011 devolved elections	Turnout 2010 general election	Turnout 2011 devolved elections
	(B1.1)	(B1.2)	(B1.3)	(B1.4)
Previous Turnout	.77*** (.02)	.91*** (.03)	.75*** (.02)	.93*** (.04)
Campaign Effort	.91*** (.18)	1.69*** (.42)		
Advertising			-.39 (.60)	.60 (1.26)
Unsolicited Material			.67** (.25)	2.48*** (.58)
Transport			2.83 (2.89)	1.67 (5.67)
Public Meetings			-4.48 (5.46)	-8.59 (18.20)
Staff			5.34*** (1.34)	-3.25 (4.89)
Accommodation			1.92 (1.17)	.28 (2.08)
Constant	16.65*** (1.16)	-.06 (1.58)	17.60*** (1.21)	-1.40 (1.76)
Number of Constituencies	615	111	615	111
R-Squared	.74	.89	.75	.90

Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.

Table B2 displays findings from models where campaign effort is operationalised in absolute terms – i.e., overall amount spent in the constituency in thousands of pounds. This measure does not account for the legal spending limit in the constituency.

Table B2. Campaign Effort in Absolute Amounts (£)

	Turnout 2010 general election (B2.1)	Turnout 2011 devolved elections (B2.2)	Turnout 2010 general election (B2.3)	Turnout 2011 devolved elections (B2.4)	Turnout 2010 general election (B2.5)	Turnout 2011 devolved elections (B2.6)
Marginality	-.14*** (.02)	-.01 (.04)	-.12*** (.04)	-.12 (.11)	-.13*** (.02)	-.02 (.04)
Campaign Effort	.13*** (.03)	.47*** (.06)	.15*** (.04)	.39*** (.09)		
Campaign Effort*Marginality			-.00 (.00)	.01 (.01)		
Advertising					.02 (.07)	.38 (.20)
Unsolicited Material					.08* (.03)	.42** (.10)
Transport					.27 (.34)	1.46 (.79)
Public Meetings					-.82 (.62)	-1.23 (2.62)
Staff					1.04*** 9.15)	1.33 (.70)
Accommodation					.14 (.14)	.42 (.30)
Single Occupancy Household	-.19*** (.05)	.20 (.14)	-.19*** (.05)	.18 (.14)	-.19*** (.05)	.19 (.15)
Population Density	.08*** (.01)	.03 (.05)	.08*** (.01)	.03 (.05)	.08*** (.01)	.05 (.05)
Home Ownership	.30*** (.03)	.50*** (.07)	.30*** (.03)	.49*** (.07)	.30*** (.03)	.50*** (.07)
Electorate	-.02 (.02)	-.09 (.05)	-.02 (.02)	-.10 (.05)	-.03 (.02)	-.09 (.06)
Constituency Type <sup>^</sup>						
County	3.11*** (.44)	.26 (1.19)	3.11*** (.44)	.30 (1.19)	2.61*** (.44)	.33 (1.23)
Nation <sup>^^</sup>						
Scotland	.26 (.60)		.27 (.60)		.77 (.59)	
Wales	-1.27 (.75)	-9.48*** (.79)	-1.29 (.75)	-9.50*** (.79)	-.91 (.73)	-9.08*** (.84)
Constant	48.68*** (3.78)	6.26 (9.48)	48.49*** (3.80)	9.98 (10.01)	49.48*** (3.69)	7.16 (10.16)
Number of Constituencies	615	111	615	111	615	111
R-Squared	.56	.78	.56	.78	.58	.78

Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.

<sup>^</sup> Reference group is Borough/Burgh.

<sup>^^</sup> Reference group is England for 2010 election, Scotland for 2011 elections.

Table B3 displays the variance inflation factor scores for all independent variables included in Models 1 and 2 (Table 1) and in Models 5 and 6 (Table 3).

Table B3. Variance Inflation Factor Scores for Models in Table 1 and Table 3

	Table 1: Model 1	Table 1: Model 2	Table 3: Model 5	Table 3: Model 6
Marginality	1.53	1.46	1.55	1.70
Campaign Effort	1.60	1.25		
Advertising			1.09	1.48
Unsolicited Material			1.63	1.68
Transport			1.10	1.10
Public Meetings			1.08	1.15
Staff			1.22	1.45
Accommodation			1.23	1.34
Single Occupancy Household	1.92	4.22	1.92	4.78
Population Density	4.03	4.25	4.06	4.59
Home Ownership	3.94	3.05	3.98	3.35
Electorate	1.50	1.59	1.53	1.71
Constituency Type: County	1.99	2.69	2.17	2.75
Nation: Scotland	1.32		1.36	
Nation: Wales	1.42	1.35	1.47	1.47

## Appendix C. Campaign Effort Effects from Models with Socio-Demographic Characteristics versus Previous Turnout

Figures C1 and C2 compare the effect sizes associated with total campaign effort in the run up to the 2010 general election and 2011 devolved elections, when derived from models with socio-economic characteristics (Models 1 and 2 in Table 1) or previous turnout (Models B1.1 and B1.2 in Table B1).

Figure C1. The Effects of Total Campaign Effort on Turnout in the 2010 General Election

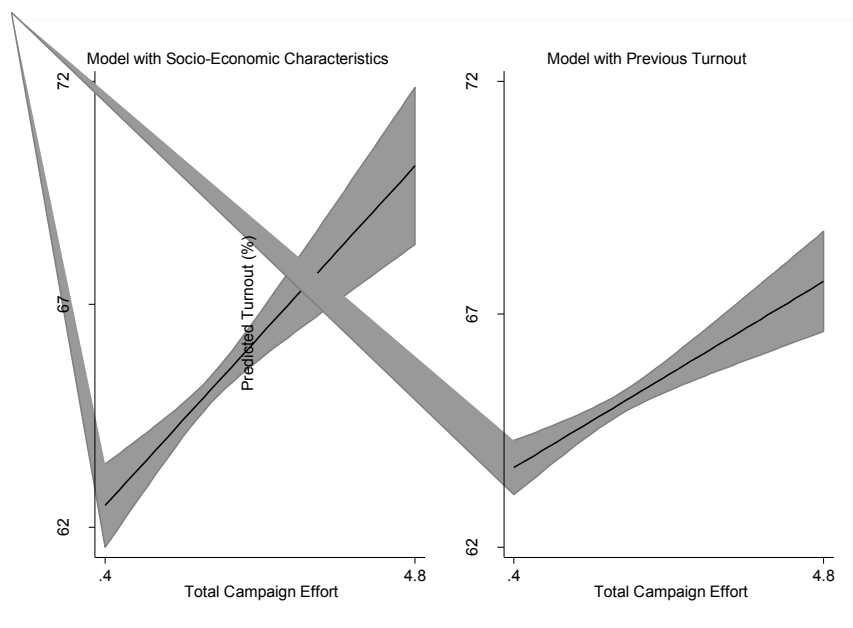
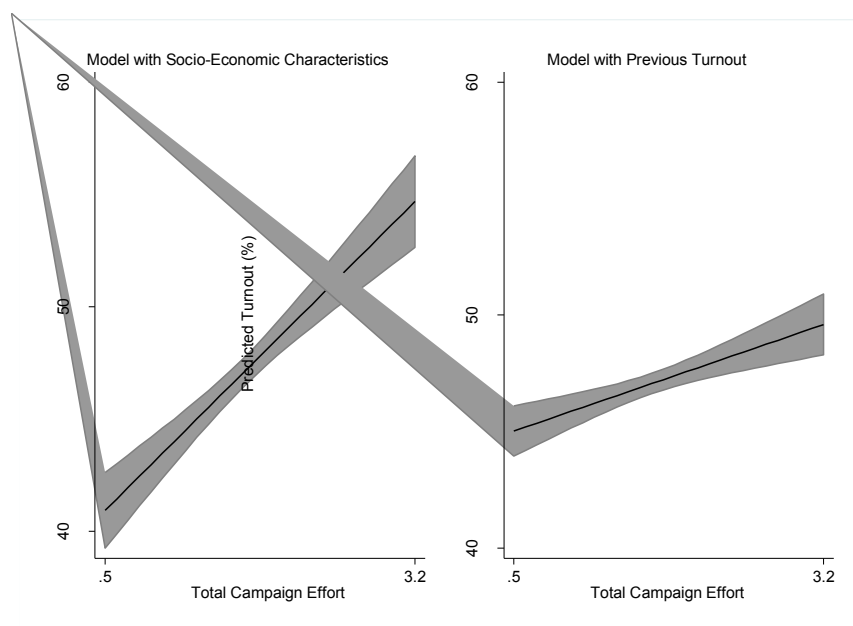


Figure C2. The Effects of Total Campaign Effort on Turnout in the 2011 Devolved Elections



Figures C3, C4, and C5 compare the effect sizes associated with those campaign activities that significantly affected voter turnout in the run up to the 2010 general election and 2011 devolved elections, when derived from models with socio-economic characteristics (Models 5 and 6 in Table 3) or previous turnout (Models B1.3 and B1.4 in Table B1).

Figure C3. The Effects of Unsolicited Material on Turnout in the 2010 General Election

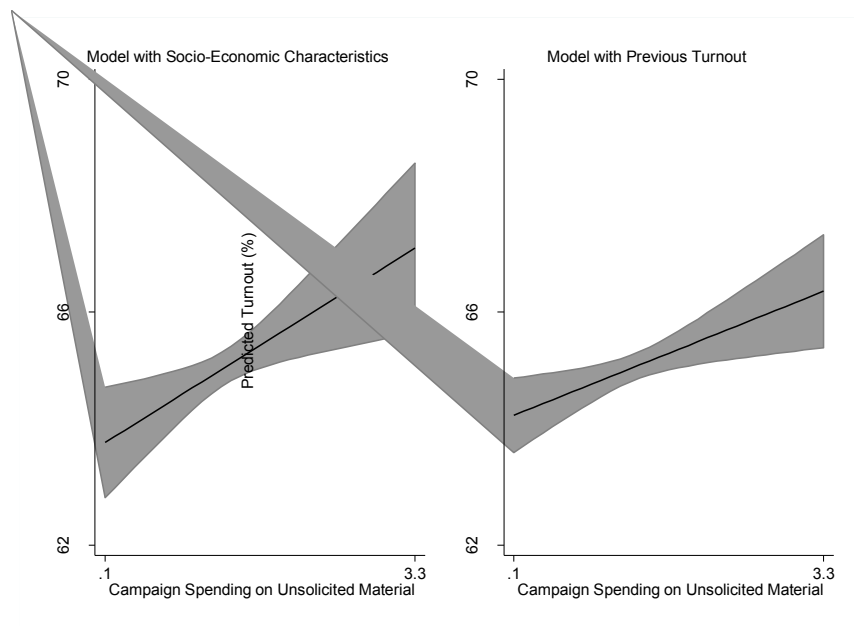


Figure C4. The Effects of Staff on Turnout in the 2010 General Election

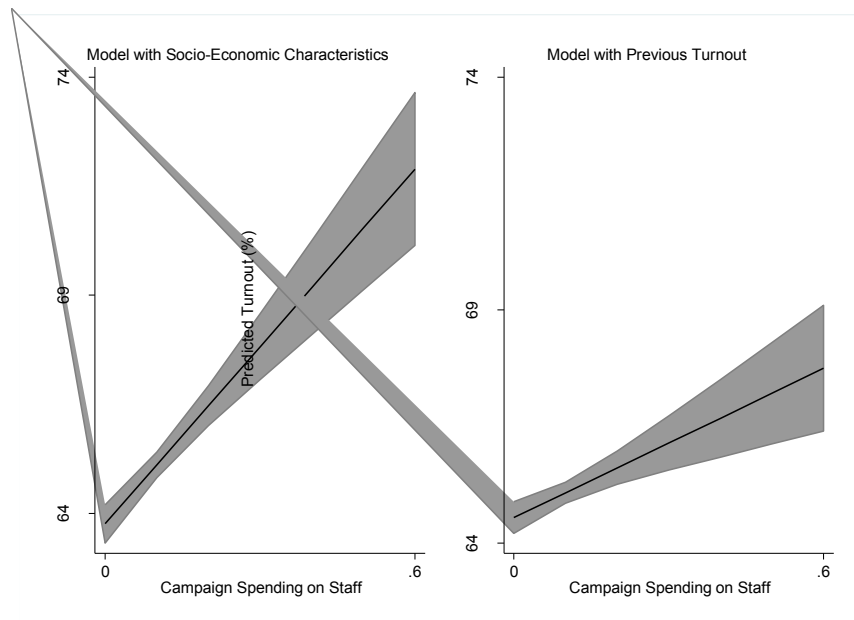
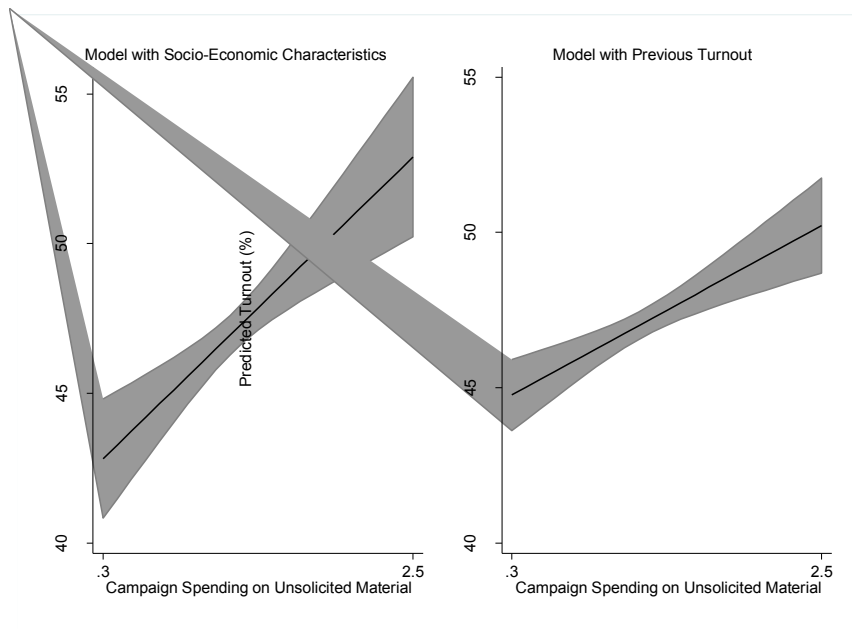




Figure C5. The Effects of Unsolicited Material on Turnout in the 2011 Devolved Elections



## Appendix D. Campaign Activities in Comparison

Figure D1 illustrates the overall distribution of spending on each campaign activity in the run up to the 2010 general election and 2011 devolved elections. The information depicted by the box plots is clear: candidates spent most on the production and distribution of unsolicited materials in both electoral contexts. In an average Westminster constituency in 2010, around £15,200 was spent (cumulatively by all candidates) on unsolicited materials. The respective sum for the 2011 devolved elections was £13,100. The second highest campaign spending category is advertising, but the overall amounts are smaller. The average per-constituency spend on it was £3,200 in the run up to the 2010 general election and £2,700 leading up to the 2011 devolved elections. The four remaining campaign activities were implemented with even lower financial investments.

Figure D1. Constituency-Level Spending on Different Campaign Activities (£)

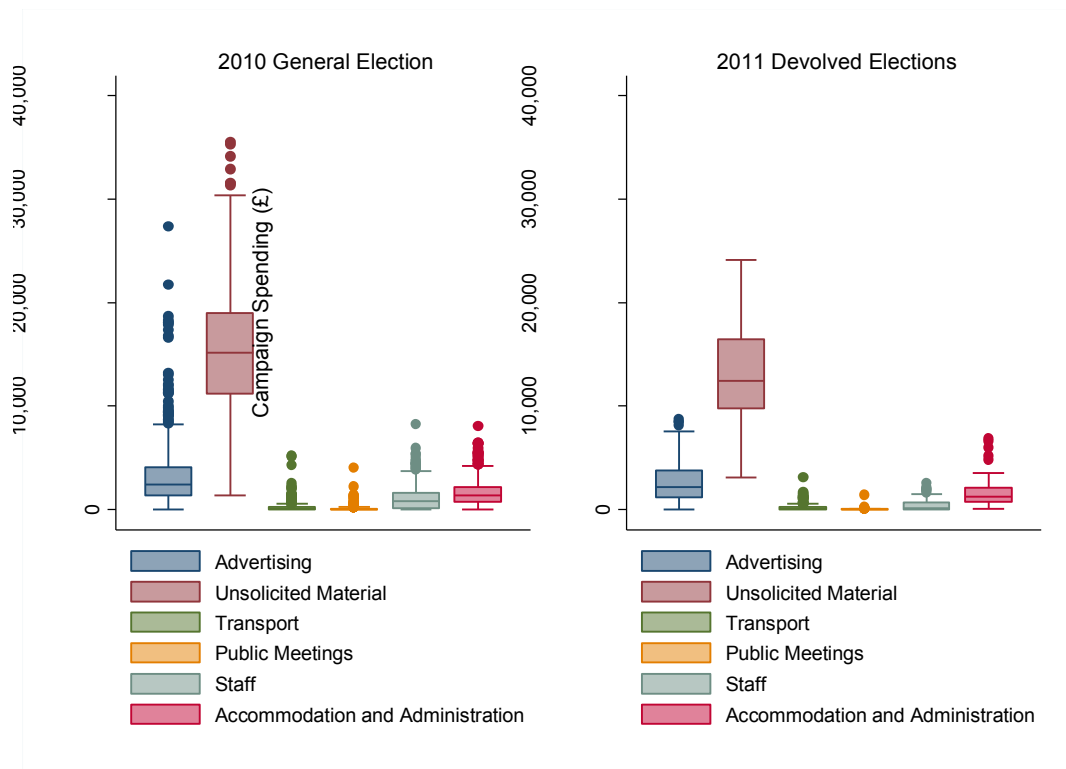


Figure D2 displays the distribution of an additional measure – proportion of the constituency-level campaign spending that is allocated to unsolicited materials – across the three different elections. It provides a further indication of the level of money being spent on unsolicited materials by candidates, but also illustrates that notable variation exists across constituencies in terms of how much of the campaign budgets are allocated to unsolicited materials versus other campaign activities.

Figure D2. Proportion of Constituency-Level Campaign Spending on Unsolicited Materials

